

Sourcework: Academic Writing from Sources

Dollahite, Nancy E. and Haun, Julie (2006). *Sourcework: Academic Writing from Sources*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

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A guide for advanced ESL students writing research papers, *Sourcework: Academic Writing from Sources* is divided into two parts. The first takes students step-by-step through the technical process of writing their paper: analyzing source material, writing a thesis statement, forming coherent paragraphs, creating an introduction and conclusion, and composing a bibliography. This section contains extensive practice on such tricky issues as paraphrasing, summarizing and using citations. It also has helpful advice about how to avoid plagiarism, give effective feedback to peers, make sense of an instructor's writing assignment, and even overcome writer's block.

What truly distinguishes this book from others on composing papers from sources is that it includes the sources themselves. Part Two of *Sourcework* contains original texts on four timely themes: heroes, globalization, non-violence and bioethics. Each theme begins with an introductory activity for students, presents 5-7 interesting articles with various perspectives and concludes with questions which students can use as inspiration for finding a research focus.

The authors recommend that teachers using *Sourcework* as a classroom text begin by choosing a theme, reading and discussing the provided sources collectively, then working through Part One to compose a paper based on this theme. Their first paper completed, students can compose others on the same theme, a different theme, or on a theme of their choosing based on independent research. The final chapter of Part One provides guidance for this process, including selecting and narrowing an appropriate topic, searching for information and even evaluating the reliability of websites.

Like many modern textbooks, *Sourcebook* also has its own internet resources, which provide additional materials on writing an argumentation essay, using grammar transformations in paraphrasing and grids and checklists for peer reviews. The second section of the textbook is expanded with discussion/comprehension questions for each article, an annotated bibliography of other possible sources on each topic and five additional themes to write about and discuss. A password-protected instructor's site contains assessment tools, additional assignments and possible syllabi for the course.

Despite the fact that *Sourcework* contains real articles on exciting themes and is peppered with quotes from other interesting sources such as Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, it lacks some pizzazz. Part of this is due to its paucity of illustration, consisting solely of the black-and-white photograph of a nautilus shell which opens each chapter. Certainly, more imagination would also have been welcome in the example paragraphs and essays contained in the text. One "model" conclusion, for instance, opens with the less-than-stellar lines: "What do we do when we have a problem? Leave it alone? Or try to solve it?" (p. 101). Granted, research papers are different than more creative forms, but they still need to engage the reader. In "A Guide for Students," a helpful page which provides an alternative table of contents, one finds a heading on making papers "sound good." Looking up the listed pages, however, leads only to a section on using linking words and other marks of cohesion.

This evident lack of attention to style and originality is perhaps connected to a larger issue. Students using *Sourcework* and other writing guides like it are often encouraged to follow a very strict structure for their papers, including a thesis statement with supporting points and clear topic sentences for each paragraph. Needless to say, these elements are often missing from native speakers' papers. Indeed, I could find no example of a source in Part Two which followed this form. Are such detailed guidelines helpful for students tentatively beginning the daunting task of writing a research paper, or do they stifle creativity? Perhaps there are other more subtle criteria readers use to judge the quality and organization of texts which can in turn be taught to students.

This difficulty aside, the most interesting and controversial aspect of *Sourcework* is the fact that themes and even sources are prescribed for the student. The authors defend this decision by noting that having students work on the same topic creates a sense of community in the classroom. Of course, it also might inhibit motivation. This concern should not, however, keep one from looking into this excellent manual. Instructors, after all, are not obliged to follow every indication in the text. *Sourcework* is clear, user-friendly and extremely thorough, which makes it suitable for any learning environment, including self-study. Despite the reservations noted above, I would highly recommend it for students and instructors alike.

Reviewer

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