



# Adding Friction

## How to Design Deliberate Thinking into the Research Process

### *A Librarian Asks, "How Can I Assess Student Curation?"*

By Debbie Abilock

You've asked students to curate a set of sources – but what are you asking them to do?

Student curators collect, evaluate, and organize sources they anticipate will be essential for their specific argument, hypothesis, or question. Student curation is more thoughtful than bookmarking which tends to be on-the-fly identification of what might be relevant sources. Curation is not a pathfinder whose purpose is to teach the entire class in a systematic or step-by-step manner<sup>1</sup> about quality resources that could be of benefit to a research unit. And, of course, it's unlike a works cited list because it's not a list of sources that have been used. Curation is an educated guess about future value.

### Criteria for Assessment

#### Authenticity

In our profession, curation initiatives are shaped by the goals of preserving and enhancing access to resources: "Digital curation, broadly interpreted, is about **maintaining** and **adding value** to, a trusted body of digital information for **current** and **future use**."<sup>2</sup> If a curated list is to be a student's end product, then an authentic curation assignment reflects those criteria. A curator is a wise and trusted mentor who can guide others in reading, evaluating, and synthesizing material that is relevant and authoritative. The phrase "adding value" suggests that editorial analysis and judgment are involved.<sup>3</sup>

Consider how you want students to add value: Are they organizing sources systematically rather than listing them alphabetically? How selective do you want them to be? Are they annotating sources to describe the content? To facilitate access and engagement with sources? To compare and judge value about sources on the list?

Additionally, since there is an expectation of future use among librarian curators, consider how to publicly archive student curation products. If your curation assignment mirrors authentic practices and anticipates a real audience, then students' view of their task shifts from "doing school"<sup>4</sup> to a problem-based learning assignment.<sup>5</sup>

#### Findability

All curation is grounded in re-finding. Therefore, if students treat a pdf as if it were a print source, they will omit online access elements, making finding the source again much harder. For example, try finding the source from the first version of two Chicago-style entries:

*Los Angeles Herald*. "Census Changes House Formation." September 20, 1910, morning edition, sec. 1, 3.

*Los Angeles Herald*. "Census Changes House Formation." September 20, 1910, morning edition, sec. 1, 3.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042462/1910-09-20/ed-1/seq-3/>.

Findability is style-specific. MLA finds value in using both the URL and a permanent link you create, while other styles recommend using either a URL or a permanent link. MLA's reasoning is that giving both increases the likelihood of re-finding the source. Indeed the URL adds information about the source's past location even when it no longer points to the source,<sup>6,7</sup> All styles prefer DOIs to URLs when they're available because they're an investment by the original publisher to guarantee permanent and unique access to the source:

Drew, L. (2019). The case for mandatory vaccination. *Nature*, 575(7784), 558-560. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03642-w> (APA style)

Drew, Liam. "The Case for Mandatory Vaccination." *Nature* 575, no. 7784 (November 27, 2019): 558-60. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03642-w>. (Chicago style)

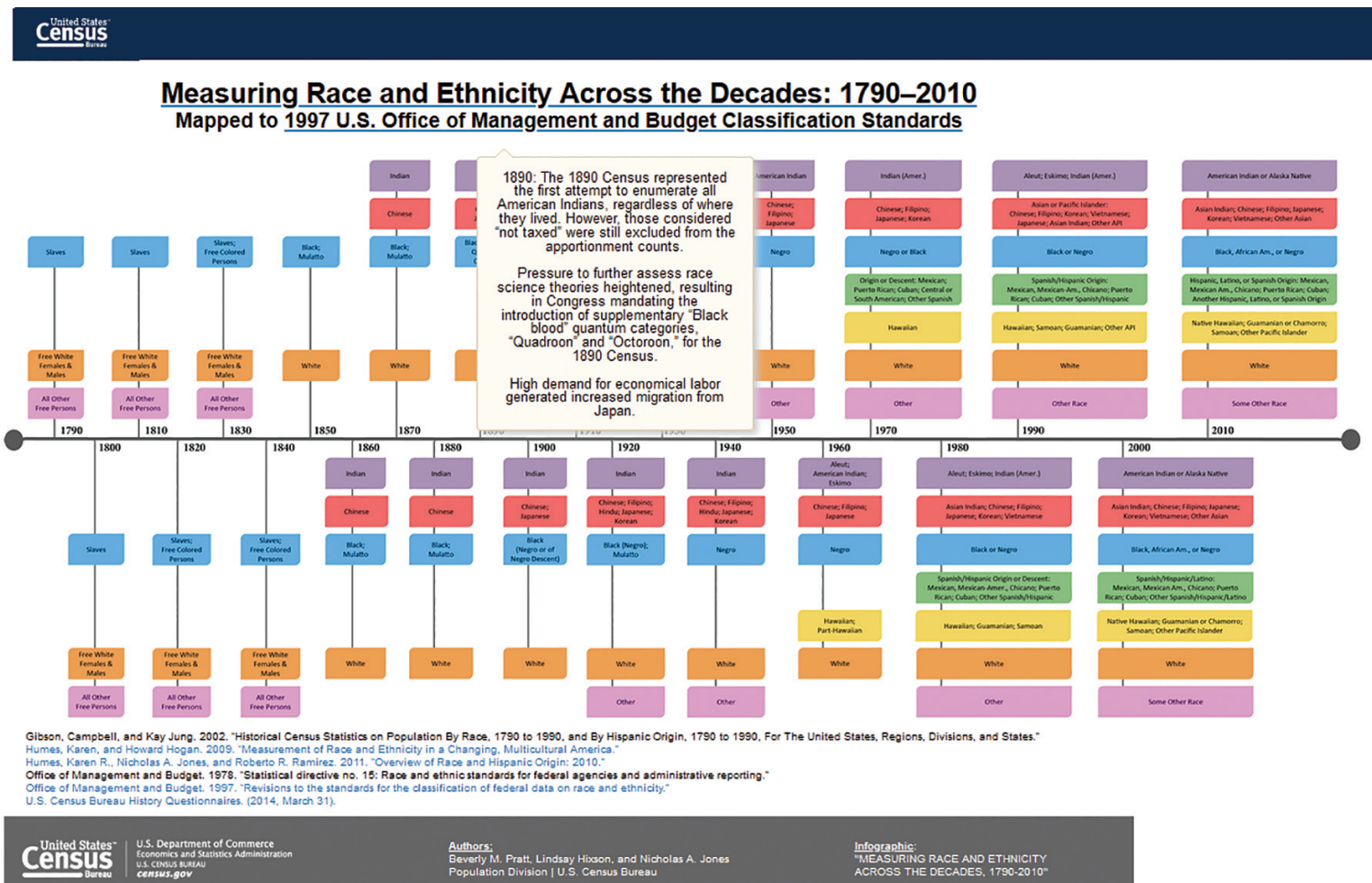
Drew, Liam. "The Case for Mandatory Vaccination." *Nature*, vol. 575, no. 7784, 27 Nov. 2019, pp. 558-60, DOI:10.1038/d41586-019-03642-w. (MLA style)

#### Specificity

Student curation should be targeted. Of course, with an explanation, a student could make a case for including an entire collection, such as the Library of Congress' set of 1887-1914 baseball cards (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/baseball-cards/>) for a project which, for example, studies the growth of commercial advertising in sports. More often, a student curator is pointing to sources that fit a precise research need within their inquiry. Therefore, rather than linking to a landing page for the Census Bureau's Data Visualizations (<https://www.census.gov/dataviz/>), students should identify the appropriate visualization and explain their reasoning.

Let's look at this example of an infographic from the U.S. Census Bureau. Four student curators might use identical language to describe characteristics of the source:

- Publisher: U.S. Census
- Content: Racial and ethnic data
- Format: Interactive timeline visualization



Pratt, Beverly M., et al. "Measuring Race and Ethnicity across the Decades, 1790-2010." US Census Bureau, 31 Mar. 2014, [www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/race/MREAD\\_1790\\_2010.html](http://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/race/MREAD_1790_2010.html). Infographic.

However, since they have different research needs, each curator's reasoned explanation for choosing the source is unique:

- To provide background: An overview of race and ethnicity concepts and definitions in the census.
- To make a point about data accuracy: Changes in terminology in "hard to count" populations affect the accuracy of census data.
- To assess redistricting: Refer to the U.S. Census's racial and ethnic categories to evaluate fairness in redistricting.
- To discuss a visual literacy element: An interactive timeline shows terminology changes stacked vertically into categories.

**Audience**

In curation, a future audience is assumed and so the list is designed to save the researcher's time. Curators don't "pad" their lists; they remove redundant items and organize the essential ones to facilitate effective research.

Therefore a curator may include productive search terms or an explanation of how to narrow a search within an appropriate database. For the Census source above, a curator might provide tips about effectively navigating interactive content:

- Mouse over a category to read why the term was changed.
- Click on a category to see how this was presented in an actual census.
- Click on "U.S. Census Bureau History Questionnaires" to see the actual forms from 1790-2010.

**Your Instructional Goals**

Findability, specificity, and audience are examples of generic curation criteria that can be assessed. However a generic checklist or rubric will miss the mark because it doesn't reflect your instructional goals—and students need clarity. Do you want to assess students' ability to recognize the difference between essential and additional information? To have students understand why their choice of formats should relate to their curation goal? To recognize the value of choosing the types of sources that are appropriate to the discipline? Do you want them to weigh relative value or the strength of evidence among the sources they've selected? Of course, any of these goals could be turned into either a checklist or a rubric. The key element is that students need to co-create the assessment tool with you.

## Friction

By asking students to create the checklist and/or basic rubric to assess their curation, you are clarifying what you want them to do and why. Both forms of assessment act as targets, strengthening the curation process and encouraging students toward deeper reasoning.

A checklist evaluates whether something is present [yes/no].

CURATION CHECKLIST	
•	Sources are re-findable
•	No more than # sources are curated
•	The access elements reflect [MLA/APA/Chicago] style conventions
•	Annotation includes identification of source type

A rubric describes a set of criteria by which students' performance is assessed during complex and subjective tasks. Grant Wiggins describes rubrics as answering the following questions:

- By what criteria should performance be judged?
- Where should we look and what should we look for to judge performance success?
- What does the range in the quality of performance look like?
- How do we determine validly, reliably, and fairly what score should be given and what that score means?
- How should the different levels of quality be described and distinguished from one another?

As I discuss creating a rubric with students, I am aiming for both a cognitive and affective outcome: I want them to be clear about the measures on which they'll be judged and capable of independently doing a self-evaluation.

First we identify appropriate criteria. For each criterion in turn, we brainstorm a description of a proficient student's performance, then look at the other extreme—a beginner's performance. Lastly, we describe the middle level—a learner developing competence.

While many rubrics are read from left to right (low to high performance), I like rubrics to show them in reverse—from high to low—so that students reread the proficient characteristics every time they refer to the rubric to assess their work. We add two blank columns so that students can individualize their attainments when their performance straddles two levels.

## Added Benefit to Collection Development

Your collection development process is a professional set of activities related to building and managing a library's offerings in all formats and genres. You spend significant time and energy in gathering resources so that you can support the school's mission and values, teachers' goals and students' needs, interests and abilities. Often, you are monitoring and filling gaps that emerge during teaching and learning. You have a built-in, authentic ally when you ask students to become curators. While learning to research resources for their own topic or information need, they are also learning how to make good use of your curations or pathfinders and—if their work is incorporated into the library's

CURATION RUBRIC LEVELS OF ATTAINMENT					
Criteria	Proficient		Developing		Beginning
Organization <sup>9</sup>	Subtopics define the research scope and are grouped to organize one's understanding of their relationship and relative value in supporting the information needs of the researcher.		The range of subtopics doesn't support the scope of the topic or the information needs of the researcher. There are gaps, redundancies and ambiguous or unconnected groups.		Some sources are relevant but they are not grouped to meet the needs of the research or scope of the topic.
Audience					

permanent help screens—these curations are augmenting your collection's value-added for next year's students.



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## Endnotes (Chicago style)

<sup>1</sup>Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science, s.v. "Pathfinder," by Joan M. Reitz, last modified 2014, [https://products.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis\\_p.aspx](https://products.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_p.aspx)

<sup>2</sup>Digital Curation Centre, "DCC Approach to Digital Curation," DDC, last modified October 13, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061013022310/http://dev.dcc.ac.uk/twiki/bin/view/Main/DCCApproachToCuration>.

<sup>3</sup>Neil Beagrie, "Digital Curation for Science, Digital Libraries, and Individuals," *The International Journal of Digital Curation* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2006), <https://doi.org/10.2218/ijdc.v1i1.2>.

<sup>4</sup>Denise Clark Pope, *Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed-Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup>University of Illinois, "Problem-Based Learning (PBL)," Illinois CITL, accessed January 18, 2020, [https://citl.illinois.edu/citl-101/teaching-learning/resources/teaching-strategies/problem-based-learning-\(pbl\)](https://citl.illinois.edu/citl-101/teaching-learning/resources/teaching-strategies/problem-based-learning-(pbl)).

<sup>6</sup>*MLA Handbook*, 8th ed. (New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America, 2016), 48.

<sup>7</sup>Modern Language Association of America, "Is It Permissible to Include in a Works-cited-list Entry a Permalink I Created for a Source?," The MLA Style Center, last modified February 1, 2019, <https://style.mla.org/self-created-permalinks/>.

<sup>8</sup>Grant P. Wiggins, *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 154.

<sup>9</sup>While this article does not suggest how to teach this criterion, Project Zero's thinking routine describes a process for teaching students to organize their ideas about a topic: Harvard Graduate School of Education, "Generate, Sort, Connect, Elaborate: Concept Maps," Project Zero, <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/generate-sort-connect-elaborate-concept-maps>.

<sup>10</sup>For ideas on how to improve your own curation skills, see Debbie Abilock, "Curriculum Curation," OER Commons, last modified October 11, 2016, <https://www.oercommons.org/courseware/lesson/11007>