

STLHE

June 18, 2014

Teaching with



Sophie Bury

Peter F. Bronfman Business Library
sbury@yorku.ca

Ron Sheese

Writing Department, LA&PS
Department of Psychology, Health
rsheese@yorku.ca



Agenda

- What is SPARK?
- Theoretical background for use of SPARK
- Using specific SPARK modules
- SPARK resources and a few principles of assignment design
- Using specific resources from the SPARK modules



SPARK Student Papers & Academic Research Kit

- What is SPARK?
 - SPARK is an online tool that helps students to identify and develop the skills required to write academic essays.
 - SPARK is divided into thirteen modules, each taking 8-10 minutes to complete.
 - SPARK describes strategies for such skills as time management, library research, academic reading, and revising essay drafts.
- <http://www.yorku.ca/spark>
 - Student's view
 - Instructor's guide



Why use SPARK?

- Entering the academic culture
 - Academic reading
 - Information literacy
 - Academic writing



Theoretical background for use of SPARK

- Sociocultural ideas of learning
 - Discourse communities
 - Apprenticeship
- Developmental and systemic processes
 - Metacognition
 - Reflection
 - Scaffolding
- Academic literacy *embedded* within
 - Curriculum
 - Disciplinary contexts



Making the implicit explicit

- Many students are strangers to the expectations and conventions of the academic community.
- **Understanding an assignment** is itself a complex skill involving many components that instructors might well take for granted as known by all students, for example:
 - recognizing that assignments have pedagogical purposes and that addressing these purposes is important
 - distinguishing between instructions that call for description and those that call for analysis, similarly for explanation and argument
 - recognizing the components of an assignment and planning an appropriate schedule to complete them



Making the implicit explicit

- Academics regard **library research** as a non-linear process with a large degree of ambiguity and serendipity. They are familiar with the areas in which they search, easily follow citation trails and “fully expect that they may have to make several passes through the literature as their ideas firm up” (Leckie, 1996).
- Beginning students follow a linear process of stating a topic, entering search terms in a database, and assuming there is nothing available on the topic if the first results are not relevant to their interests.



Making the implicit explicit

- Academics know that **reading** is strategic, assess the material in terms of arguments, and have the confidence “to skim over large chunks of irrelevant material” (Haggis, 2006).
- Beginning students are more likely to see **reading** as a linear search for factual information, all of more or less equal importance, for later recall.



Making the implicit explicit

- Academics conceptualize **writing** as a recursive process of formulating and refining an argument. It is based in claims, evidence, counterclaims, and rebuttals. Drafting is a part of the learning process.
- Beginning students are more likely to see **writing** as a linear reporting of factual information. Arguments belong to others, and they are reported as pieces of information. Drafting is seen as adding/deleting information and fixing errors.



Using specific SPARK modules

- Each SPARK module addresses a specific topic and includes a number of resources that can be used either in tandem with the module or independently.
- Assess what skills are most central to successful completion of your course and match these against the content of the SPARK modules.
- Some courses will benefit from attention to all the modules, while others might focus on a smaller selection of the modules.



Using specific SPARK modules

- Books, Journals and More
 - This module will help your students to understand the characteristic features of different types of information sources including books, journals, newspapers, government information, free web resources and more.
 - The module provides guidance on choosing appropriate resources for particular tasks, including tips on when and why to use scholarly versus popular information sources.



Using specific SPARK modules

- Gathering and Noting Ideas
 - This SPARK module will help your students develop the fundamental art of good note-taking, including drawing connections among the resources they consider.
 - In addition to strategies for gathering and noting ideas, the module includes tips on organizing the ideas noted, creating graphic representations of them, and using them to develop a structure and argument for one's essay.



Using specific SPARK modules

- Writing Strategies

The screenshot shows the SPARK (Student Papers & Academic Research Kit) website. The main header includes 'Faculty: Teaching with SPARK' and the SPARK logo. A navigation breadcrumb trail reads '» SPARK Home » Faculty » Teaching with SPARK'. The page title is '"Pulling It Together" Modules'. A list of modules is visible, with 'Writing Strategies' selected. A pop-up window titled 'SPARK York University' displays the following content:

Writing Strategies

What can this module teach your students?

This module helps students understand the thinking processes and strategies involved in writing an essay. In particular, students will learn strategies for getting started with their writing, for developing and refining a working thesis, and for drafting multiple versions of an essay. Students will also learn to gradually shift their attention to the needs of their potential readers and to address those needs.

Tips on using this module in the context of your course

Several ideas about the writing process introduced in this module are likely to be unfamiliar to your students. Many students conceptualize writing as simply putting down on paper ideas that one already has clearly in mind. Discussing the ideas in this module in your lecture or tutorial can help students see that it is normal to learn about and reconceptualise a topic as one writes. They can see that writing multiple drafts is a way to facilitate that process rather than simply being a matter of fixing a few surface features of their work. The notion of a "working thesis" is particularly valuable to emphasize. Asking students to read this module at the same time that you are asking them in class to do some informal writing or speaking about their topics can help the students see the benefits associated with drafting.

The background page also features a 'Resources' sidebar with 'Instructor's Guides' and 'Student Help', and buttons for 'Writing Strategies', 'Essay Editing', 'Back', 'Next', 'Objectives', and 'Site Map'.

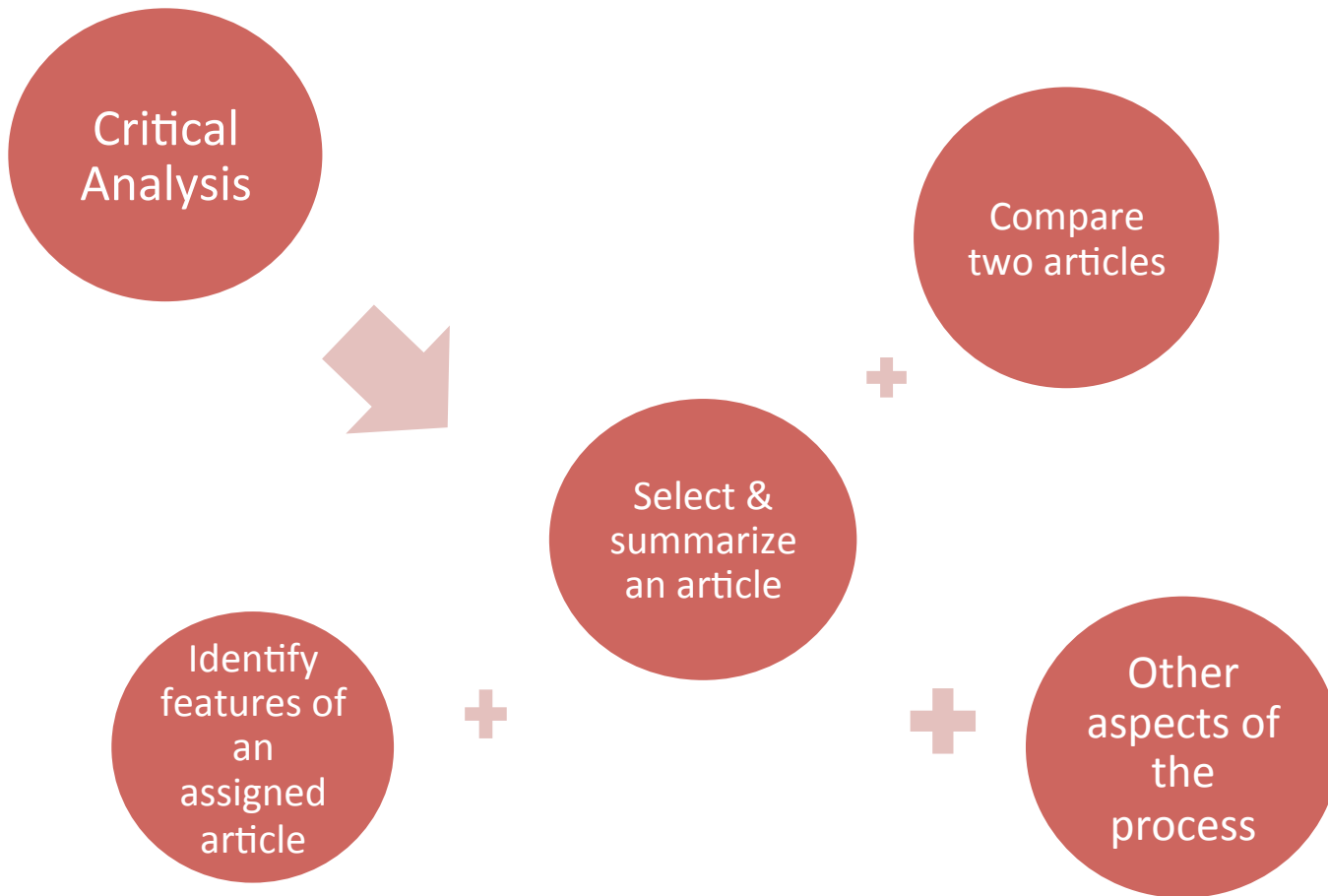


Assignment design principles: Constructive alignment

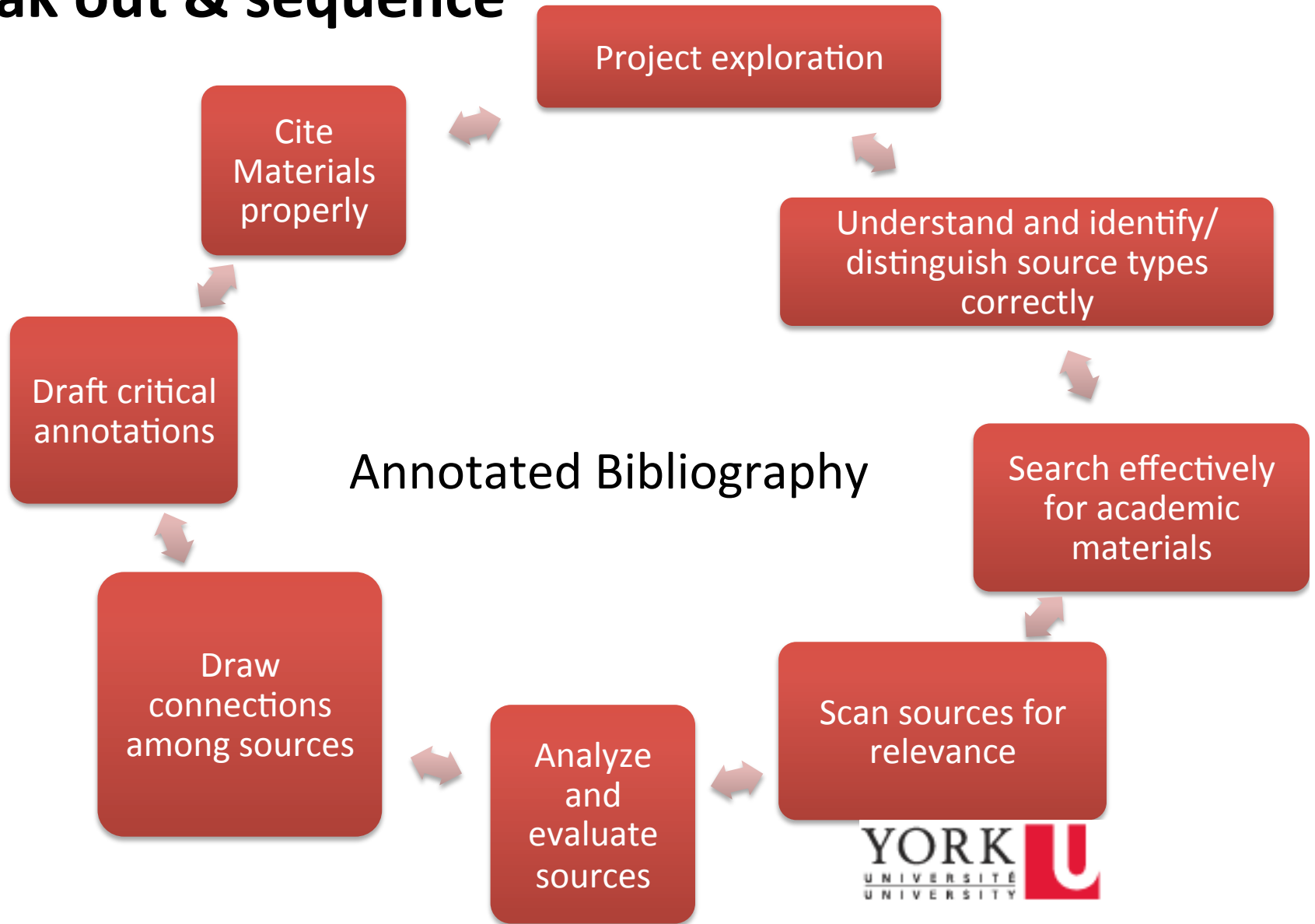
Goal	Activity	Evaluation Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Literacy goals• Content goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completion of a task based on a SPARK resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Process criteria• Content criteria



Assignment design principles: Break out and sequence



Assignment design principles: Break out & sequence



Using specific SPARK resources

PARCA

Learning Goal: Practice evaluating potential resources for an essay.

Activity: Using PARCA worksheet, take 10 minutes to assess a potential source. Discuss results and strategies adopted with a peer.

Assessment: Peer assess in pairs in relation to a list of relevant points provided by instructor.



Reminder: Making the implicit explicit

- Leckie (1996) says instructors often operate in “expert researcher” mode when designing assignments, giving instructions, and setting expectations – leaving implicit much that is unfamiliar to the novice.
- Head & Eisenberg (2010) collected numerous samples of assignment handouts and found that “Few of the handouts in our sample peeled back the layers of the knowledge production process and what it meant in the academic environment ...” (p26).



Making the implicit explicit: A caution

- Much of what is implicit in academic work is process
- As Haggis says, “Process can not be ‘delivered’, it can only be described, discussed, compared, modelled and practised” (p532)
- SPARK provides numerous resources suited to these activities



Using specific SPARK resources

- The SPARK resources are excellent for activities designed
 - to make the implicit explicit
 - to promote awareness of and reflection on the processes involved in academic work
 - to develop skill with respect to those processes
- The SPARK resources can be modified to suit your course
- Additional examples of resources



Using specific SPARK resources

- [SQ4R](#)
 - [Instructor's Guide](#)
- [Peer Feedback Worksheet](#)
 - [Instructor's Guide](#)
- [A sample of one person's writing process](#)
 - [Instructor's Guide](#)



References

- Haggis, T. (2006). Pedagogies for diversity: Retaining critical challenge amidst fears of 'dumbing down'. *Studies in Higher Education, 31*(5), 521-535.
- Head, A. J., & Eisenberg, M. B. (2010). *Assigning inquiry: How handouts for research assignments guide today's college students*. Project Information Literacy. Retrieved from http://projectinfolit.org/pdfs/PIL_Handout_Study_finalvJuly_2010.pdf
- Leckie, G. J. (1996). Desperately seeking citations: Uncovering faculty assumptions about the undergraduate research process. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 22*(3), 201-208.

