Definition of genre

Making use of more than one text, compared, for example, to the genre of summary or book review where we typically make use of a single document.

Questions to ask

- Can you identify an issue, or question, or controversy to which all of the texts respond?

- What do the texts share in common: terms, definitions, perspectives, values, and/or emphases?

- How do the texts differ from one another?

    o term swapping (X and Y use different terms to refer to the same thing),

    o dueling definitions (X and Y use the same term but define it differently),

    o contrasting assumptions (Different assumptions guide X and Y's thinking.),

    o context (You can account for the differences in X and Y because they come from different places or cultures and/or operate in different historical eras etc.)

- What difference do these differences make? For example, "Although X and Y are similar in _____ and _____ respects, they differ in several important ways: _____, _____, and _____."

- What are the limitations of each text? In other words, what do the texts not include? What does one text emphasize that the other tends to de-emphasize? Does one text include a key element that the other text neglects?

Actions to take

- Read the prompt carefully and determine whether or not to emphasize all texts equally. Is the assignment, for example, asking you to use one text (source) to interpret or put pressure on another (target)? If you are asked to use more than two texts, what emphasis should you give to each?

- Demonstrate the significance of the connections and/or contradictions between the texts.

- Identify the possible limits of the texts. Identify the possible strengths and limits of each text, evaluations that you are able to make by comparing the texts (and would likely be more difficult to make if you had only one text in view).

- Consider the differences between the original purpose of the article and the ways you are putting the article to use.

- Refer to the texts carefully - summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting fairly and accurately. Framing any quoted material by first introducing or setting up the quotation and then including a follow-up comment of your own.

Helpful links

http://www.larc.uci.edu/lewc/assn4.html
An explanatory prompt from the Learning and Academic Resource Center at The University of California-Irvine.

http://www.ncrel.org/litweb/texts/why.php
Wondering what the point of this sort of assignment is? Read "Using Multiple Texts to Teach Content," from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Prompt Example: "Examining Classification Schemes"

(From the Spring 2005 Writing 20 assessment project)

In the first chapter of *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*, Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, both Professors of Communications Studies at the University of California, San Diego, offer an analysis of how classification schemes are invented and revised in order to serve social, political, and informational interests. They remind us that classifications—the formal ways in which we categorize worldly phenomena—aren't either *natural* or *inevitable* orderings of things. Rather, they are provisional—better structured to serve certain interests rather than others, responsive to historical change, and serviceable only to the extent that a user finds them to be so.

The second article you will read is Hugh Klein's examination of the history of classifications for life stages. Klein, a Professor of Sociology at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University, is interested in exploring how life stage categories shift and change across American history, reminding us of the fact that concepts such as "childhood," "adolescence," and "youth" have carried different meanings through time, and are best understood not as stable categories, but rather as classifications responsive to particular social and economic understandings.

We would like you to write an essay (about three double-spaced pages, or 750 words) in which you use each article to comment upon the other *and* develop your own position on the nature and uses of classification.

We offer the following as examples of questions that might help you to begin thinking about the two articles. (This is not an exhaustive list):

- In what ways do Bowker and Star's observations about the nature of classification schemes help you to explain or otherwise make sense of Klein's work on life stages?
- In what ways does Klein's examination lead you to reconsider or reassess Bowker's and Star's work?
- Are there ways in which one or both of these articles overemphasize or downplay some element of classification?

- ▪ Are there elements of classification that neither article explores, but which you feel are necessary for a fuller understanding of the issue?
- ▪ Might you turn to your knowledge, or to your own experience, or the experiences of others, in order to respond to these articles?

In composing your essay, you will want to make sure that you show clearly when and how you are drawing on Bowker's and Star's ideas and phrasings in order to comment on Klein's work, and when you use his findings to question or to offer a new perspective on Bowker and Star. As you may recall, one of the instructional goals for Writing 20 is to give you practice in "responding to and making use of the work of others." The aim of this assignment is to give us a sense of your abilities in that regard, as you work to interrelate Bowker's and Star's text with Klein's text.