

Building Text Sets

**(excerpted and developed by Shirlee Dufort, from
Gail Buffalo's ALST Presentation March 26, 2015, at
Elmira College)**

How to build your own text set

- A text set can be based on the genre or a theme, but it includes a variety of different kinds of texts, so it's basically a ready-made research package.
- This is a set of sources that students can use to write on a topic.

- Text sets are a logical and efficient way to help students to be able to write to a topic and have a variety of sources to choose from, without having to use their time to do original research and find the materials themselves.

- The real labor is in finding usable, robust texts that mimic what students are going to see on the test. Building a text set will allow you to scaffold student writing and make it easier to produce prompts

- When you're building a text set for test prep, **focus on enduring issues.**

For ideas, you can go to:

- The *EngageNY* website
- procon.org
- PBS's *Frontline*.

The previously mentioned sources are all good sources for enduring issues like:

- Poverty welfare reform
- Environmental issues
- Issues of scale, such as corporate agriculture versus local agriculture
- Minimum wage issues

- In creating a text set, you can shop from a variety of sources that include op-eds and blogs.
- To alleviate printing costs and consider copyright constraints, you can put links on a Blackboard site and keep the materials online.
- Institutions often have subscriptions to the *New York Times* or the *Congressional Digest*, and both can be useful.

- You can also look at sources that are cited on the practice tests
- Once you've decided on an enduring issue, you can use it as a keyword and search Google, which will also often provide images and graphs.

- You can look for:
 - 5-6 passages and 2-3 graphics.
 - 400-600 words pro & 400-600 words con

Both passages should be more argumentative than persuasive, so you're looking for logic, numbers, and reasoning.

- Google the readability score as a diagnostic, gradually increasing the level of challenge.
- Delete any non-essential words or vocabulary, so the reading passages stay at 400-600 words each.
- Ask a student to read the two passages and ask for feedback about the readability.

- When students take the practice test, suggest that they not submit their writing, since they receive no feedback.
- Instead, they could submit their writing to a professor or a Writing Center tutor to get feedback.
- Students should time themselves in accordance with the ALST recommendations.
- Some educators have found that if students are writing at a 3 level in practice, they're likely to write well enough to pass the test.

Another tool to use with students who will take the ALST is a readiness survey, asking them, on a scale of 1-5:

- *How comfortable are you with the typing demands of the test?*
- *Can you comfortably answer at least 50% of the multiple choice questions correctly?*
- *How comfortable are you with responding to the essays within the time constraints?*

That way, students focus on their readiness rather than the teacher being the authority over their readiness.

- Gail Buffalo created a text set, for an imaginary Master's degree seminar class, about the new proposed regulations in teacher education, the pros and cons and the arguments.
- An example of a text set that addresses this issue is in the Dropbox on the clcu website. There is the kind of high-level text complexity that will provide an opportunity for students to engage in writing sources competencies.

- Gail said that she Googled a variety of terms, like:
“federal regulations for teacher education” and
“public comment period for regulations on teacher education.”
- She has found that “pro-con” and “source + criticism” are good ways to search.

- Combing sites for outside links is useful
- If you find biased texts, that are more opinion and persuasion, you can use them as examples for how they differ from argumentation.