

Designing a good task is the key to a successful information search and assignment. Teachers who design meaningful and developmentally appropriate tasks will motivate their students to engage in the content. Designing a good task is a multi-step process for the teacher and students:

Identify the content objectives in which students will engage.

These will be closely aligned to the state or school's curriculum standards. As students work through the Big6™ process, interacting with the content, they learn and practice information and technology skills.

Example: Texas Government (from "Chapter 113. *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills* for Social Studies." 1998. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Texas Education Agency. 05 Jun 2004 <www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/ch113b.html#113.23>

The student understands the basic principles reflected in the Texas Constitution. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify how the Texas Constitution reflects the principles of limited government, checks and balances, federalism, separation of powers, popular sovereignty, and individual rights; and
- (B) identify the influence of ideas from the U.S. Constitution on the Texas Constitution.

The student understands the structure and functions of government created by the Texas Constitution. The student is expected to:

- (A) describe the structure and functions of government at municipal, county, and state levels;
- (B) identify major sources of revenue for state and local governments; and

- (C) describe the structure and governance of Texas public education.



By Barbara A. Jansen

Create an interesting information problem based on the content objectives.

Teachers should seek to design an information problem assignment that will interest students and motivate them to engage in the content to solve the problem. This also sets the stage for using the Big6 process. The information problem must be cognitively appropriate, as well as appealing for the learner. One very successful strategy is to set up an authentic problem—one students may actually encounter now or in the future—to make the content meaningful for the students. Any grade level's content curriculum can be turned into an information problem.

Example: Authentic Information Problem

You work for the (imaginary) Office for Immigrant Education, whose purpose is to teach immigrants about Texas state, county, and city government. This informs immigrants about their state and local governments so they have the option to participate and make informed decisions for themselves and their families. Immigrants will attend several classes to learn about government. Your classmates will field-test the lessons and activities your group develops. What is your task?

Decide what information the students need to have to do the task.

Many assignments, such as the one above, lend themselves to having students work in groups. A valuable task definition technique is to develop questions that students in each group will need to answer to successfully complete the task. The questions should require higher-order thinking; they should be thoughtful and more than a copy-and-paste activity. For a set of manageable questioning strategies, see <www.standrews.austin.tx.us/library/Questioning.htm>.

Example: Possible Questions for a Group Studying the Texas Constitution

1. How does the Texas Constitution reflect the principles of limited government?

2. How does the Texas Constitution limit government power through checks and balances?
3. What is federalism? What does it have to do with the Texas Constitution?
4. What is "separation of powers"? Is it important—why or why not?
5. What is "popular sovereignty"? Is it important—why or why not?
6. What are some individual rights that the people of Texas have?
7. What rights do immigrants have? Why are these rights important to immigrants?
8. How might immigrants use information about the Texas Constitution?
9. What is your opinion about the constitution using "Almighty God" in the Bill of Rights? Do you think this means all deities or just the Christian God? Do you think the wording should be changed?

Present the information problem assignment to the students.

Provide instruction about the information problem in different formats. For example, supply a written explanation, but also give class time to verbalize the content and context of the information-problem assignment. Also, consider how much information you need to give the students. The goal is to engage the students and have them actively own the assignment—themselves! Finding the right balance is a challenge. When teachers provide too much explanation and structure, students can become passive and simply go through the motions. Alternatively, too little information can leave students frustrated and confused. One approach is to provide more detail early in the school year and gradually back off. Another is to allow students to guide the process by providing less detail but ample time for questions.

Instruct the students to brainstorm the task.

In small groups, have students discuss the nature of their specific task. Call on each group to present its ideas in the brainstorming session as you list each one. After recording all ideas, you will summarize, "So in other

words, what we need to do is *learn about the Texas Constitution and forms of state and local government, and then present each concept in some way so that the immigrants in our class can understand it.* We can use the Big6 to do this. We have already accomplished Big6 1.1: Define the task.”

Have students generate a list of information questions they will need to know for their subtopic to accomplish the task and solve the information problem.

Once the class is divided into groups, have each group brainstorm a list of questions they will need to answer to complete the task. This gives the students ownership in content and motivates them to want to locate and

use the information. After all groups have listed all their questions, provide them with your list and ask them to compare—combining and adding any they missed to the end of their questions. Explain that they may not find specific text that “answers” some of the questions—the higher-order ones. They will need to search for information about the items in the questions to give more thoughtful responses.

Highlight the questions and the items in the questions for the students to find. Divide these questions and items so that each student has a subset for which he or she is responsible. Have each student write his or her questions on a note-taking organizer. Two types of note-taking organizers to consider are available at <www.standrews.austin.tx.us/library/Data_chart.doc> and <www.standrews.austin.tx.us/library/NoteTakingForm.doc>.

Stage #1 Task Definition is now completed. Students are now ready to venture on to Big6 #2: Information Seeking Strategies and the rest of the Big6 process. ■

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Copyright ? of the Month

By Carol Simpson

- Taping Off Cable
- Video Licensing
- Web Pictures

? What are the guidelines for the A&E® channel? A teacher wants to use some of its *Biography* programs to support her drama class—biographies of actors and actresses. Can she do this? How long can she keep the tapes? On the Web site, I didn't find any fair use guidelines for television programs or where to purchase these biographies to add to our instructional video collection.

© A&E is a cable/satellite-only channel. That means that the off-air exemptions do not apply. There is no fair use to copy anything from a cable/satellite-only channel. However, there may be another way. Many of the cable/satellite channels give permission on a program-by-program basis to copy certain programs and retain them for varying amounts of time. You can find this information in Access Learning or Satlink magazines. Access Learning has an online site, <www.ciconline.com>, which lists many of the *Biography* specials. It tells you what programs can be taped, and what retention rights are available. Some programs also provide supplementary teaching materials.

? We would like to buy the video version of a television program to use in a health class. The ordering information included two different options: one for home use, and one for public performance. The company told us that we had to buy the public performance version even though the video will be used in conjunction with curriculum units. Is this enforceable by the company? There was a difference of \$120 between the two different versions. My understanding of public performance is that it's for use as entertainment, rewards, fill time, babysitting, and outside of the school day usage. Am I correct?

© You are not off base in your understanding of public performance rights, but beware of signing a license or contract that limits your fair use options. If the company doesn't sell, but instead licenses, videos you are at its mercy. By signing or agreeing to a license that limits your fair use options, you only have the rights you agree to. You may not realize that you don't have to buy the video for the school. A personal video can be used as well. You might have someone buy the video personally, then reimburse that person. But watch out for that licensing issue!

? A teacher wants to use a few Web pictures of the Mayan civilization in a paper for her graduate class. Is citing the source enough? This paper will not be published and will be returned to her.

© Citation is probably sufficient in this case, as long as not more than a few images come from a single source. Under the print guidelines a teacher or student can make a single copy of a graphic for personal use, including teaching. The copies may be retained. Further use of the images (Web publication) would require additional permission. While Web sites aren't technically “print,” the images will be printed for use in the paper. Even going back to the baseline fair use guidelines will provide a positive outcome for this question because the use is non-profit and transformative.

Every effort is made to provide accurate, up-to-date information in response to copyright questions. However, this column is not intended to take the place of legal advice. For more information, consult your school district's attorney.

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