Using Writing Tasks to Elicit Adolescents’ Historical Reasoning

Chauncey Monte-Sano¹ and Susan De La Paz²

Abstract

One path to improving adolescents’ literacy skills is to integrate reading and writing into the content areas in which such work occurs. Although argumentative writing has been found to help students understand historical content and transform information, scholars do not know the influence of specific task structures on students’ writing or historical reasoning. To learn more, the authors administered four document-based writing tasks on the origins of the Cold War to 101 students from 10th or 11th grade. Using multiple regression, the authors found that writing tasks explained 31% of the variance in the quality of students’ overall historical reasoning after accounting for differences in students’ background. A closer analysis of different aspects of historical reasoning using a different rubric (and as analyzed using MANOVA) indicated that students’ skill in recognizing and reconciling historical perspectives significantly improved with writing tasks that asked them to engage in sourcing, corroboration, and causal analysis. The task that asked students to imagine themselves as historical agents and write in the first person was significantly different and resulted in the lowest mean essay scores.

Keywords

ages 14-18, writing, composition, quantitative (general), content area reading, assessment, diagnosis

Academic literacy is critical to success in secondary schools and professional life. As adolescents prepare for the demands of college and beyond, they must learn to read

¹University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA
²University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA

Corresponding Author:
Chauncey Monte-Sano, School of Education, University of Michigan, 610 E. University Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA
Email: cmontesa@umich.edu
and write increasingly complex and specialized forms of text. When writing, in particular, students must go beyond telling what they know with text, to engaging in knowledge construction, reasoning, and discourse with text (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). In history, this written work requires disciplinary thinking such as taking an investigative stance toward the past and an understanding of the norms of knowledge construction and communication in the discipline (cf. Bain, 2006). As students make the transition from basic to academic literacy, adolescent writers must adapt to a variety of tasks, rhetorical structures, and standards that vary from one discipline to the next (Ackerman, 1991; Beaufort, 2004; Coffin, 2004; Geisler, 1994; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; R. Stevens, Wineburg, Herrenkohl, & Bell, 2005). Unfortunately, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) suggest that most adolescent writers are not prepared to make this transition. A recent NAEP report found that fewer than 35% of eighth graders wrote essays at or above the proficient level—a standard defined as “solid academic work for the grade level” (Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008). The data suggest that there is a large population of students who struggle with the demands of academic literacy in writing. In response, recent reports such as Writing Next (Graham & Perin, 2007) and the National Commission on Writing (Magrath & Ackerman, 2003) and reviews such as those found in this journal (Faggella-Luby, Ware, & Cappozoli, 2009) have called for increased attention to adolescent writing instruction that is embedded in content courses.

Disciplinary literacy has emerged as a pathway to advance students’ literacy skills and necessitates the integration of literacy and subject matter (cf. Moje, 2008). Such an emphasis highlights the ways of thinking and knowing in a discipline as key to learning how to reason, read, write, and discuss. As Moje and her colleagues (2004) argue, an integral part of learning a discipline involves learning the oral and written language of the discipline. By adolescence, students confront subject-specific texts and tasks that require specialized forms of knowledge. Ways of thinking and reasoning associated with a particular discipline are embedded in subject-specific texts and tasks and must be attended to if we are to help adolescents become proficient readers and writers (Coffin, 2004; Moje, 2008; Monte-Sano, 2010; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Any focus on writing, therefore, implicates ways of thinking in the content area in which the writing occurs. We know from prior work that writing essays in history can improve students’ mastery and understanding of the content (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004; De La Paz, 2005; Smith & Niemi, 2001), enhance their ability to integrate content from sources with their own thinking (Wiley & Voss, 1999; Young & Leinhardt, 1998), and promote historical thinking (Monte-Sano, 2010). Although this research on writing correlates general tasks with disciplinary outcomes, it does not address the potential impact of the structure of the task. Do all argumentative writing tasks provide students with the same opportunity to exhibit or develop their historical thinking or writing? Or might some ways of framing questions and/or combinations of materials with questions promote historical thinking and writing better than others? In this study, we set out to understand whether the structure of a writing task—in particular, the structure of an argumentative writing task—could influence students’ historical thinking and writing.
Reform-oriented history instruction emphasizes reading and writing from historical documents and places high demands on struggling writers. Students must analyze firsthand and secondhand accounts of events in history and then write an essay that either advances an interpretation of events or advocates for a position based on information available to decision makers at the time. To date, much of the research on history writing has focused on how students draw on multiple sources in constructing argumentative essays (De La Paz, 2005; De La Paz & Felton, 2010; Monte-Sano, 2010; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Some attention has been granted to how students represent and construct historical arguments (Britt, Rouet, Georgi, & Perfetti, 1994; Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish, & Bosquet, 1996; Wiley & Voss, 1999) in comparison with other genres of writing such as narratives, summaries, and explanations. But within the genre of argument, the structure of particular tasks and their influence on students’ performance remain unexamined. Although research has examined what students do when asked to write history essays, little research has been conducted on what we ask students to write and how that affects their disciplinary thinking and writing.

Conceptual Framework

Embedding adolescent writing instruction in history courses requires connecting disciplinary reasoning with writing. To do so is not a stretch, for making the case for a particular interpretation in writing is the keystone of history qua discipline (Mink, 1987). Toulmin’s (1958) argumentation framework lays out such key aspects of writing as claim, data, warrant, and counterargument, components that can apply to most disciplines, including history. Historical writing shares an argumentation stance with other forms of writing, but the nature of the data and warrants (the evidence and connection between evidence and claim) seem to be discipline specific (Bruner, 1960; Hexter, 1971; Monte-Sano, 2010; Schwab, 1978). In constructing historical arguments, writing is often inextricable from a disciplinary way of thinking and working with evidence. According to history experts, the use and framing of evidence in historical writing indicate key aspects of disciplinary reasoning including recognizing biases in sources, comparing evidence, situating evidence in its context, and taking into account different perspectives and multiple causes (Carr, 1961; Coffin, 2004; Collingwood, 1943; Hexter, 1971; Mink, 1987).

Historical interpretations rely on the public display of evidence to substantiate claims: that is, a claim cannot stand without evidence to support it (Collingwood, 1943; Hexter, 1971). The inclusion of examples, details, footnotes, and quotations from primary and secondary sources exemplifies this aspect of reasoning. Stating where evidence comes from (i.e., sources of quotations and information) allows others to understand and evaluate the basis for one’s claim. Furthermore, historical interpretations must account for the available evidence (Hexter, 1971). This may involve altering interpretations to accommodate contradictory evidence. Comparing different and contrasting documents is a visible form of this type of reasoning.

Because the goal of historical interpretation is to understand the past, historical reasoning involves reading and writing about sources from the perspectives of those
who created it and placing sources into their historical context. Such contextualization is central to history, in that historians may only interrogate artifacts from the past. The events under study cannot be repeated: Historians have usually not witnessed the events about which they write, and the authors of documents used to analyze the past are inaccessible (cf. Hexter, 1971). To write an interpretation that argues why something happened in the past, or what compelled someone to write a particular text, historians must situate authors and events in the context of contemporary events, peers, and ideas; such writing highlights the relationships between contiguous events (cf. Mink, 1987). Historians do not look for generalizable rules that can be applied to future situations but, rather, seek specialized understanding of the particular circumstances of past events. Absent context, historical understanding is at risk.

Key aspects of historical writing cited by philosophers of history and historians are consistent with research identifying the nature of disciplinary thinking in history. Wineburg’s (1991) seminal study identified three heuristics that historians use when approaching texts. He found that historians interrogated historical documents by looking at authors and their biases (sourcing), situating documents in the time and place of their creation (contextualization), and comparing documents (corroboration) to find points of agreement and contradiction. In defining expert approaches to historical texts, Wineburg identified discipline-specific ways of reading and thinking. For these historians, primary documents were regarded as excerpts of social interactions that had to be reconstructed to render the documents comprehensible. Recent research confirms that these ways of thinking are apparent in the argumentative, document-based history essays of students whose teachers emphasize historical thinking and argumentative writing (Monte-Sano, 2010). In particular, researchers have identified attention to evidence, historical context, perspective, author point of view, accuracy, comparison of sources, and causality in students’ writing (Coffin, 2004; De La Paz & Felton, 2010; Monte-Sano, 2010; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). These forms of reasoning can theoretically be expressed in different forms of writing, including narrative, argumentative, or descriptive writing. However, one study of novice teachers showed that summary writing can coincide with an emphasis on reporting information in history classes, rather than disciplinary thinking (Monte-Sano & Cochran, 2009). In the research reported here, we focus on argumentative writing and whether framing the writing task can promote such historical thinking.

Writing arguments has been compared with other writing genres (e.g., narration and description) and found to promote greater audience awareness and syntactic complexity in high school students (Crowhurst & Piche, 1979). Writing arguments, in particular, may actually help students integrate historical content into their essays because students must interpret and organize information from historical documents in a new way (Newmann, 1990). Results from one study with high school students provide support for this idea. Stahl and his colleagues (1996) found that writing arguments helped 10th grade students become better at historical reasoning about controversial topics. Asking students to write opinions resulted in their ability to
produce more global statements integrating more than one source as compared to their descriptions, in which they tended to stay closer to the readings, with most of their statements coming from a single source. Similarly, Wiley and Voss (1999) found that, more so than with other genres, writing arguments with multiple documents improved students’ content understanding and skill in transforming information into an integrated essay.

However, writing argumentative essays, in itself, does not always promote disciplinary thinking (Grant, Gradwell, & Cimbricz, 2004; Young & Leinhardt, 1998). Greene (1994) found that historians consistently approach writing as argument, whereas students may perceive the same tasks as demanding summary of information. In other words, students do not understand writing tasks in the same way as experts—students’ task representations for writing history do not tend to include argument or interpretation. If students do recognize that a task demands argument, they may read the prompt, figure out what they want to say, and then use the documents to support their argument (Young & Leinhardt, 1998). From a disciplinary standpoint, this is problematic since the historical evidence is never fully considered in forming the argument. The role for instruction, then, is to help students understand historical writing as a form of argument that involves constructing an interpretation that reflects the available evidence.

Monte-Sano’s (2011) work suggests that providing writing prompts that require close reading of texts or consideration of authors’ perspectives in constructing an argument support historical thinking and understanding of content. However, no study has tested this theory. Brooks (2008) found that prompts asking students to write in the first person as though they were living at the time they write about can both improve and weaken students’ historical empathy as compared to prompts that direct students to write in the third person about the perspectives of historical agents. Although small-scale studies give hints about the impact of different writing tasks, it remains an open question whether a focus on the nature of a writing prompt can help teachers consistently elicit their students’ disciplinary thinking.

**Method**

Given this background, we ask the following questions: Do the structure and focus of the writing prompt affect the quality of students’ historical reasoning? If so, how? With this purpose in mind, we designed assessment tasks to determine how the type of writing prompt affects the quality of students’ written arguments. We constructed four reading and writing tasks using the same historical documents and randomly assigned one task to each student within 11 classes. We spent 3 days in students’ social studies classes—one day to administer a subtest from a published, standardized writing test; a second day to observe classroom sessions focused on learning background knowledge and analyzing historical documents in preparation for writing; and a third day to observe teachers’ administration and assignment of the writing tasks. More detail about each component of our study follows.
We randomly assigned students within each class to complete one of the four assessment tasks (Table 1 shows the outcome of this assignment). Each assessment task presented the same background information adapted from students’ social studies textbook:

The United States and the Soviet Union emerged from World War II as the two strongest powers in the world. Each had different political and economic systems—totalitarian government and communism in the Soviet Union; democracy and capitalism in the United States. Both countries wanted their own political and economic systems to spread to other countries. The different goals of the U.S. and the Soviet Union led to the Cold War, a conflict in which neither country directly confronted the other on a battlefield. The following documents focus on the concerns of the US and its ally, Great Britain, regarding the Soviet Union at the outset of the Cold War.

**Table 1. Summary of Student Characteristics by Condition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Situated</th>
<th>Sourcing</th>
<th>Document analysis</th>
<th>Causal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applebee</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogilvy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recent grades*</th>
<th>Situated</th>
<th>Sourcing</th>
<th>Document analysis</th>
<th>Causal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIAT</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizb</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Grades converted to 4.0. WIAT = Written Expression subtest of the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, 2nd edition; Quiz = percentage correct on 10-item multiple-choice understanding of background information related to the Cold War topic.

* Grades were available for 99 of 101 students.

b Quizzes were completed by 91 of 101 students.

**Writing Tasks**

We randomly assigned students within each class to complete one of the four assessment tasks (Table 1 shows the outcome of this assignment). Each assessment task presented the same background information adapted from students’ social studies textbook:
An assessment task prompt was given to students after they read the background information (see Table 2). Each writing prompt focused on understanding Western views about the origins of the Cold War conflict and why Western leaders might speak out against the Soviet Union. However, we worded each prompt differently to frame the issue of Cold War causes from a variety of historical angles. The first prompt (situated) encouraged students to imagine they heard these speeches and write as though they were living in 1947. We developed this prompt based on Brooks’s (2008) finding that first person prompts that solicited a first person stance as though students were a historical agent led to more inferential thinking for middle school students. The intent of the second prompt (sourcing) was to encourage students to focus on the motivations of Churchill and Truman in giving these speeches. The third prompt (document analysis) asked students to compare two documents and discuss the similarities and differences in the reasons Churchill and Truman give for being worried about the Soviet Union and Communism in 1946 and 1947. The fourth prompt (causal) asked students to explain why Churchill and Truman spoke out against the Soviet Union and Communism in 1946 and 1947.

### Table 2. Cold War Writing Tasks for 10th to 12th Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task name</th>
<th>Main focus</th>
<th>Task prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situated prompt</td>
<td>Imagining yourself as a historical</td>
<td>Imagine that you are an advisor to the Secretary-General (leader) of the United Nations in 1947 who has heard the speeches of Churchill and Truman. Write a letter to the Secretary-General that includes two M.E.A.L. paragraphs. In your letter, make an argument about what is wrong with the Soviet Union and Communism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sourcing prompt</td>
<td>Considering authors’ motivations or</td>
<td>Churchill and Truman both describe major changes in the world around them. What experiences, observations, or concerns led Churchill and Truman to give these speeches against the Soviet Union and Communism? In other words, what was happening in the world that motivated them to give these speeches? Write an argument that includes two M.E.A.L. paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>Corroboration</td>
<td>Compare these two documents. What are the similarities and differences in the reasons Churchill and Truman give for being worried about the Soviet Union and Communism in 1946 and 1947? Write one M.E.A.L. paragraph to discuss the similarities and one M.E.A.L. paragraph to discuss the differences between the documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal prompt</td>
<td>Causation</td>
<td>Why did Churchill and Truman speak out against the Soviet Union and Communism in 1946 and 1947? Answer this question in an argument that includes two M.E.A.L. paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
each author in making their respective speeches. We designed this prompt in part from a belief that encouraging students to attend to the author’s perspective would elicit more sophisticated historical thinking in students’ writing. This was from our study of Monte-Sano’s (2011) work in which students’ historical thinking improved when faced with repeated prompts that focused students on the perspectives of the authors of historical documents. Prompt 3 (document analysis) encouraged students to identify the similarities and differences in the two documents. Analysis of text is a common form of writing in history (e.g., Benjamin, 2004; Marius & Page, 2005). This prompt is similar to those found on the International Baccalaureate history exam (Paper 1) in which students analyze historical documents in writing. It also builds off of Monte-Sano’s (2011) work in the same classroom in which students were directed to read carefully and corroborate sources as they wrote. Writers in this classroom showed marked improvement in historical thinking over time. The final prompt (causal) asked students why Churchill and Truman spoke out against the Soviet Union and communism directly. This prompt is typical in historical writing in its focus on how and why something happened as well as the significance of events (e.g., Coffin, 2004; Marius & Page, 2005; Rampolla, 2010). Each prompt uses a different method of historical analysis—imagining the setting, sourcing, document analysis, and causal reasoning—to understand a major event in history (e.g., Holt, 1990; Wineburg, 1991).

At the end of each prompt, we asked students to write two “M.E.A.L. paragraphs” in their response. M.E.A.L. stands for main idea, evidence, analysis, and link to thesis. The teachers at the participating high school had taught students this mnemonic in an effort to improve their argumentative writing. The teachers believed this mnemonic would help students understand what they were being asked to do; in addition, it was regularly provided on nearly all extended writing assignments.

Participants and Setting

Martin Luther King, Jr. High School is a public charter school in the inner city of a major urban area in the mid-Atlantic region. In the 2007-2008 academic year, the school reported that of the 427 students, 73% were African American and 26% were Latino. Of the students, 71% were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and 15% of the student body qualified for special education services. In addition, 6% were English language learners. In the academic year in which this study took place, 41% of 10th grade students scored below grade level on the district-administered high-stakes reading assessment (other grade levels do no participate in this assessment). The school had struggled to meet adequate yearly progress for both reading and math over the past 3 years.

Two U.S. and two Modern World History teachers and their students participated in the study (see Table 1 for descriptive information). The Modern World History course was primarily intended for 10th graders, and the U.S. History course was primarily intended for 11th graders. As shown in Table 1, older students occasionally participated in these classes because they had yet to pass them. A total of 101 student
participants completed the pretest, experimental task, and assented to our review of academic records. These students were included in the analyses of student performance on the different writing tasks. We had additional data on the majority of the participants: 91 of these students also completed a quiz to determine their general understanding of the topic and 99 students had previous English and social studies grades recorded. The 101 students participated in one of 11 class sections (68 students from 8 Modern World History classes and 33 students from 3 U.S. History classes). Three of the four teachers reported regular use of primary sources and an emphasis on historical thinking in their classrooms. All identified improving students’ writing as a central goal for the year. The teachers identified the Cold War as a topic that could be used for both courses and as a topic that students in both grade levels would learn about, so we used this topic to include students from more than one grade. Of the 101 participants, 25% spoke English as their second language and 10% had previously received special education services or participated in a remedial reading program in middle school.

Students’ scores on the Written Expression subtest of the revised Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-2), administered before the study began, were compared to determine whether students who completed the four assessment prompts differed significantly in initial writing ability. A one-way analysis of variance test evaluated the relationship between the four groups and performance. Students performed at virtually the same levels, $F(3, 93) = 0.512, MSE = 176.93, p = .73$. See Table 1 for descriptive information regarding students.

In addition, grades from the previous semester were available for 99 students in English and 99 students in social studies. There were significant differences for grades earned in English, $F(3, 98) = 3.40, MSE = 1.37, p = .021$, and grades earned in social studies, $F(3, 98) = 4.89, MSE = 1.12, p = .003$. Bonferroni tests were conducted to determine the source of these differences. Students’ English grades were significantly different between individuals who wrote on the sourcing prompt and those who wrote on the document analysis prompt. Students’ social studies grades were significantly different between individuals who wrote on the document analysis prompt and those who wrote on the causal and the sourcing prompts. See Table 1 for descriptive information regarding students.

**General Procedures**

All classes had covered the Cold War before we administered the writing task. As part of that exposure, all students had read the same background reading in their course textbook. All of our raters also read these pages of the textbook so that they knew what students had been exposed to before participating in any of the research tasks.

As an indicator of students’ general understanding of the topic, they completed a 10-question multiple-choice quiz on the Cold War that had been jointly constructed by teachers from both the Modern and U.S. History courses. This quiz included five questions from each course. A sample item is as follows:
The Iron Curtain was:

a. A physical barrier between the USSR and the rest of the world
b. A symbolic barrier separating capitalism and communism in Europe
c. A wall in China
d. The border between the US and Mexico

The day before completing the essay, teachers gave students an overview of the topic and introduced students to two primary sources (see Appendix A). Students then read and analyzed the primary sources using a worksheet designed to help students both comprehend and think historically about the documents. Students had used this worksheet before, titled “SOAPSTone” (see Appendix B). Using this mnemonic and two guiding questions per letter, students considered the speaker (e.g., Who made this?), occasion (e.g., What else was going on?), audience (e.g., Who was this document made for?), purpose (e.g., What did the author want?), subject (e.g., What is it about?), and tone (e.g., How does the author feel?). Students completed one worksheet per document and included the title and date of each document. Students were allowed to work individually or in small groups, and we asked teachers to debrief students’ responses at the end of the class.

We selected two primary sources that emphasized different viewpoints on the Cold War by Western leaders: Winston Churchill’s Iron Curtain Speech from March 1946 and Harry Truman’s Speech to Congress from March 1947. Together these documents focus on causes and origins of conflict with the Soviet Union, given the views of leaders in the United States and Great Britain. We made several adaptations to these documents to facilitate reading comprehension and minimize the influence of weak reading skills on the writing task. Adapting sources is a common approach in history education designed to give all students access to complex, subject-specific texts (cf. Wineburg & Martin, 2009). We shortened documents to one page (Churchill’s speech was originally three pages and Truman’s was seven pages). We substituted simpler vocabulary terms for more complicated words. For example, in the first paragraph of Churchill’s adapted speech we substituted peak for pinnacle, serious for solemn, blame for reproaches, and responsibility for accountability. Finally, we eliminated punctuation and markers of these adaptations (e.g., ellipses or brackets around a substituted word) that can be distracting for struggling readers. We took care to preserve the intended meaning and author’s perspective represented in the texts and consulted with participating teachers throughout this process to ensure readability for their students.

The day after students analyzed the Churchill and Truman sources, they wrote in response to one of four writing tasks using those historical documents and their document analysis worksheets. In administering the assessment tasks, teachers were directed to give students their historical documents and SOAPSTone worksheets, to go over the background information, and to distribute the writing tasks in the previously determined random order. Teachers were told not to read each task aloud so that
students could focus only on the task given to them. Teachers were allowed to answer students’ questions on an individual basis to clarify the tasks. Students were then given 40 minutes (a full class period) to write. Teachers gave students the quiz on the background information as students turned in their essays; some students finished these quizzes during the same class period, whereas other students completed them the next day.

Data Analysis

Students’ topic knowledge and work with primary sources. Students earned 10 points for each question they answered correctly on the Cold War knowledge quiz. We used scores from this quiz to infer what students had learned from reading their textbook and participating in classroom activities on the topic of the Cold War. Students’ scores on this measure were compared to determine whether the four groups differed significantly in general understanding of the topic. A one-way ANOVA evaluated the relationship between the four groups and performance for the 91 students who completed this task. Students performed at virtually the same levels, \( F(3, 93) = 0.747, \text{MSE} = 338.87, p = .73 \). See Table 1 for descriptive information regarding students.

Students received two scores for their work with each document on the SOAPSTone worksheet. One score, Source Use, focused on whether students had annotated the document or generated any written notes in the margins of the text (1 point for each for a total of 2 points). The second score, SOAPSTone, focused on whether students answered both questions for each letter of the mnemonic correctly (1 point per question for a total of 12 points). After initial training, two raters gave two scores to the document analysis worksheet for each document (\( r = .88 \) for the Source Use score; \( r = .89 \) for the SOAPSTone score).

Students’ Cold War essays. Two variables were developed to analyze students’ writing. The first was a holistic, global measure of students’ writing (overall quality) and was measured with a 0 to 6 rubric (see Table 3). We adapted this rubric from Monte-Sano’s (2008) prior work on students’ historical writing, De La Paz and Felton’s (2010) prior work with argumentative writing in history, and qualitative analyses of patterns in the strengths and weaknesses of this particular set of essays. As a whole, this rubric measured the extent to which students synthesized ideas from documents into an argument, or interpretation, provided supporting evidence, contextualized their argument, and recognized the perspectives of historical actors in their written work (see Table 4 for excerpts from essays with different scores).

We trained two raters in two sessions lasting 2 hours each. During this time, we reviewed the historical background (textbook excerpts) and primary source documents, shared benchmark essays for each level on the rubric, and explained distinctions between each level on the rubric. Then, the raters learned to use the scoring rubric with 19 sample papers from students who had initially been included in the study but were subsequently determined to be nonparticipants because they had not
Table 3. Holistic Scoring Rubric of Overall Historical Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Indicators of historical quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6     | • Makes an overarching interpretation that synthesizes the ideas in both documents.  
      | • Supports the interpretation with specific, relevant evidence that includes multiple quotations and facts.  
      | • Evidence and interpretation are historically accurate.  
      | • Integrates specific contextual, background information to situate, explain and support the interpretation.  
      | • Recognizes authors’ names and fully explains the point of view or perspectives presented in the documents and relevant to the topic (e.g., purposes, interests, world views, biases, reasons for historical actors’ words and actions). |
| 5     | • Makes an overarching interpretation that makes sense for both documents/takes the ideas in both documents into account.  
      | • Supports the interpretation with specific, relevant evidence that includes multiple quotations or facts.  
      | • Evidence and interpretation are historically accurate.  
      | • Integrates some contextual, background information to situate, explain, and support the interpretation.  
      | • Recognizes authors’ names and partially explains the point of view or perspectives presented in the documents and relevant to the topic. |
| 4     | • Interprets one document at a time with some comparison of the ideas in the documents.  
      | • Supports the interpretation with relevant evidence that includes multiple quotations or facts.  
      | • Evidence and interpretation may have inconsequential errors that do not detract from the overall meaning.  
      | • Integrates some contextual, background information to situate, explain, and support the interpretation.  
      | • Recognizes authors’ names and their general points of view, but offers a limited explanation of their perspectives. |
| 3     | • Interprets one document at a time or only one document. May not compare ideas across documents. May include literal interpretations (e.g., the main idea) or broad, general statements.  
      | • Supports the interpretation with relevant evidence that includes at least one quotation or fact.  
      | • Evidence and interpretation may have minor errors, which detract from the overall meaning.  
      | • Makes some reference to the particular historical context.  
      | • Recognizes authors’ names, but may not explain their points of view or perspectives. |
| 2     | • Limited interpretation of one or both documents. May include literal, broad, or generalized statements.  
      | • May not include quotations or facts to support interpretation.  
      | • Evidence and interpretation or information may have major errors or may be irrelevant.  
      | • Little or no reference to the particular historical context.  
      | • May recognize authors’ names but does not explain their historical perspectives.  
      | • May focus on the writer’s point of view more than the historical perspectives or context. |
| 1     | • Reports or summarizes the ideas in one or both documents, or shares the writer’s personal views or judgment.  
      | • Lacks accurate, specific facts or quotations.  
      | • May not recognize the authors of documents or their historical perspectives.  
      | • May not refer to the historical context. |
| 0     | • Completely ignores the question. OR  
      | • Includes so many indecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response. OR  
      | • Lacks any organization; little attempt made; blank paper.  
      | • The essay is in Spanish. |
Table 4. Excerpts From Students’ Essays Using the Holistic Historical Quality Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Example of students’ essays (first body paragraph)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>In 1946, Winston Churchill made a speech about the Iron Curtain in Europe speaking about working together with the United States. Churchill argued that “The people of Great Britain and the United States must work together in the air. . . . Then, there will be no shaky balance of power that could tempt the Soviets to expand their control.” This proves that countries like Great Britain and the U.S.A. weren’t alone to stop communism. Therefore, Churchill wanted to convince the Soviets not to try to do anything that would make them look like a must destroy country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Winston Churchill spoke out against the Soviet Union because he feared that the Soviet Union would influence bordering countries to turn to communism. Churchill stated, “[A]ll these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow (the capital of the Soviet Union).” This shows that Churchill feared that Europe would turn communist because of the Soviet Union. Churchill wasn’t the only one who feared communist expansion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Truman made these speeches to make everyone capitalist. In the text it states that he will endanger peace of the world. This means that by the end of the world everyone will be capitalist. Therefore Truman is try to make everyone capitalist b/c he thinks that communism is bad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

completed all tasks. Once they achieved an acceptable reliability rate, they scored all 101 essays in the data set (Pearson $r = .82$).

The second dependent variable, historical reasoning, served as a measure of specific aspects of historical thinking that allowed us to analyze multiple dimensions of historical reasoning so that we could detect the influence of writing task on such reasoning with greater sensitivity. Scoring this dependent variable relied on an analytic trait rubric that focused on three specific aspects of historical reasoning—substantiation, perspective recognition, and contextualization—and resulted in a separate score for each (see Table 5). Substantiation emphasized the extent to which students provided evidence and explanation in support of a claim. Perspective recognition focused on students’ skills in presenting the texts as authors’ viewpoints that could be evaluated rather than as authoritative words to be accepted. Contextualization highlighted the extent to which students identified and situated their argument in the appropriate time, place, and setting, thus linking related events (see Table 6 for excerpts from essays with different scores). These are all aspects of historical reasoning that Monte-Sano (2010) has found in adolescents’ history essays.

We trained two different raters to use the analytic trait rubric in a manner similar to the holistic rubric training. The only difference was that we focused on one trait at a
Table 5. Pretest–Posttest Analytic Rubric of Specific Aspects of Historical Reasoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substantiation</th>
<th>Perspective recognition</th>
<th>Contextualization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 (a) Facts/quotes are explained AND linked explicitly to a conclusion AND explanations are consistently accurate.</td>
<td>(a) Evaluates the authors’ perspectives (e.g., discusses reliability/trustworthiness) OR (b) Reconciles multiple authors’ perspectives (e.g., compares the ideas in the documents)</td>
<td>(a) Integrates context and evidence in an explanation or conclusion. OR (b) Uses context and evidence together to draw a conclusion or make an inference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (a) Facts/quotes are presented without explanation, but are explicitly linked to a conclusion. OR (b) Facts/quotes are explained but not explicitly linked to a conclusion. AND At least one explanation is accurate.</td>
<td>(a) Describes author’s perspective in a way that recognizes text as the author’s point of view Note: The author’s name does not have to be mentioned</td>
<td>(a) Describes contextual details alongside the evidence without explicitly connecting them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (a) Facts/quotes presented without explanation (may implicitly support a conclusion that is stated). OR (b) Facts/quotes are presented with inaccurate explanations throughout.</td>
<td>(a) Mentions the author(s) (e.g., “According to Lynch . . .” “The author says . . .”)</td>
<td>(a) Mentions the time, place, or audience in the documents (e.g., “In document 2, a letter to the commander in the 3rd district . . .” “After the Civil War . . .”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 (a) No evidence OR (b) Irrelevant evidence OR (c) Transcription of document (and nothing else) Note: There may be a claim</td>
<td>(a) Presents evidence from documents as student’s own perspective OR (b) Treats documents as authoritative (e.g., “Document 1 says . . .” “It says in the document . . .”)</td>
<td>(a) No context mentioned OR (b) Student uses anachronisms (e.g., makes a chronological mistake or uses information from another time period w/o noting the different era)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Overall Quality

We performed a block-entry hierarchical regression to examine the effect of demographic information about students, information about their reading and background
### Table 6. Students’ Essay Excerpts Using the Historical Reasoning Analytic Trait Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific historical reasoning trait: Perspective</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Example of students’ essays (first body paragraph)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Churchill and Truman speak out against the Soviet Union and Communism in 1946 and 1947 because both Churchill and Truman did not want that communism spread in the world because they fear that it will affect the United States and England. Churchill who was the prime minister of England and Truman who was the president of the United States did not feel agree with the ideas that communism involve and that is why they did not want that other countries follow these ideas. According to the Winston Churchill’s Iron Curtain Speech, in March 5, 1946 “In a great number of countries throughout the world secret communist rebel groups are set up. They work in agreement with and follow the directions they recive from the communist center.” It clearly shows that around the world exist many rebel groups that bring the idea to another countries to try to make whatever country communism. That is why Churchill and Truman wanted to stop it communism as quickly as possible to do not be affected by this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>One reason why both Truman spoke out against the Soviet Union is different beliefs, different views, and different goals to achieve (whether positive or negative). It states that “each had different political and economic systems—totalitarian gov’t communisim in the Soviet Union.” This means that the Soviet Union believed in totalitarian—control of Gov’t and different ways the economy should be in control—or control which basically means Truman believe in control of freedom. This is why Truman spoke out against the Soviet Union.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific historical reasoning trait: Substantiation</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Example of students’ essays (first body paragraph)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Churchill and Truman spoke out against the Soviet Union and Communism in both 1946 and 1947 to help stop the spread of communism into US territories and allies. Truman spoke to congress and explained that both Greece and Turkey needed the aid of the U.S in order to sustain as a capitalist country. In the speech to congress Truman states “Greece must have help if it is to become an independent and confident democracy . . . I believe that the United States must support free people who fight against the overthrow of their government by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” This shows, if Greece has aid by the US they will be able to stop communist from overthrowing their government, potentially halting the spread of communism.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Winston Churchill decided to speak out against the Soviet Union and communism because of the way they compete for other countries. In the speech he gave in 1946 he states “consider here today while time remains, is how to prevent war and how to establish the conditions of freedom.” This means that their economic system is the best system and will fight to show.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific historical reasoning trait: Contextualization</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Example of students’ essays (first body paragraph)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Churchill spoke out against the Soviet Union and communism because he wanted Europe to reunite. Europe was divided into two parts by an iron curtain as a result of the Soviet influence. He was for Europe reuniting which is why he was against communism. Churchill argued that the safety of the world is based upon the unity of Europe. This indicates that war can be prevented if Europe was reunited and not under the Soviet influence. Communism was the reason why Europe became divided.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The motivation of Winston Churchill that led him to giving the Iron Curtain Speech on March 4, 1946 was the Cold war. The Cold War began shortly after World War 2 ended in 1945. His speech was given to inform fellow capitalist and the people of both Great Britain and the United States what their positions were in Europe while Communist were trying to take over. I believe Churchill gave the speech because he was proud and somewhat looking to the future knowing it would be a good one. He knew what his position was, what it needed to be, and what it would be.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
knowledge about the topic, and the four assessment prompts on predictions of overall writing quality. Theoretical predictions led us to expect that demographic and background information would be useful but not as important as the type of writing prompt in determining students’ overall writing quality. Therefore, blocks were entered in the following order:

1. Demographic information (including the students’ first language, prior grades in English and social studies, prior special education services, score on the WIAT-2 Written Expression subtest, and the student’s current social studies teacher)
2. Background information on the topic (score on the 10-item quiz, his or her annotations and overall scores on the SOAPSTone worksheets), which we used as a proxy for reading comprehension
3. The prompt or actual writing task

The results indicate that at Step 1, the demographic predictors included in the regression equation, $R^2 = .14$, $F(6, 73), p = .09$, indicated the students’ prior learning profiles and writing ability did not reliably affect the overall historical quality of their essays. Moreover, after Step 2, the background predictors included in the regression equation, $R^2 = .23$, $F(5, 68), p = .17$, indicated the students’ knowledge of the topic and reading comprehension of the primary sources did not reliably affect the overall historical quality of their essays. In Step 3, the writing prompt was added to the regression equation, and the $R^2$ increased to .31, $F(1, 67), p = .006$, indicating that the assessment task that students responded to was predictive of a fair degree of the students’ overall historical quality in their writing. In other words, when considering students’ knowledge of the topic, their reading comprehension of the primary sources, and the different types of writing prompts, only the writing prompt significantly influenced student performance.

**Historical Reasoning**

Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations for the elements of historical reasoning (substantiation, perspective, and context) by writing prompt. We computed a $4 \times 3$ multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to examine the effects of assessment prompt on the above-mentioned measures. We tested the assumptions of univariate (Levene’s test) and multivariate (Box’s $M$) homogeneity, and the latter was violated. Results of MANOVA are robust in the face of this violation when group sizes are at least 20 and fairly equal (see J. P. Stevens, 2002), as was the case in this study. Nevertheless, to be conservative, we used Pillai’s trace to test the multivariate significance of the independent variables because Monte Carlo studies demonstrate that it is robust to violations of the multivariate assumptions of homogeneous variance–covariance matrices (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Using
Pillai’s trace, we found that the MANOVA revealed significant multivariate effects for assessment prompt, $F(9, 291) = 4.68, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$.

We then computed univariate ANOVAs to examine the effects of writing prompt on historical analysis using Bonferroni corrections in follow-up tests. Univariate analyses indicated the perspective variable was significantly different with different writing prompts only, $F(3, 100) = 10.352, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .24$. Substantiation, $F(3, 100) = 1.655, p = .182$, partial $\eta^2 = .049$, and contextualization were not significantly different given different writing prompts, $F(3, 100) = .929, p = .43$, partial $\eta^2 = .028$. Bonferroni tests indicated that with respect to the dependent variable of perspective, the situated writing prompt was significantly different from the three other writing prompts (sourcing, document analysis, and causal). This result was highly significant ($p = .000$). Students in the situated writing prompt condition demonstrated significantly weaker attention to or reconciliation of historical perspectives in their essays. In contrast, students in the sourcing, document analysis, and causal conditions demonstrated significantly stronger attention to or reconciliation of historical perspectives in their essays.

In sum, the regression analyses indicated that 31% of the variance in the overall historical quality of students’ writing can be explained by the writing task, in combination with other background factors. In looking more closely at particular aspects of historical reasoning through the use of a second rubric, the MANOVA analyses indicate that Tasks 2, 3, and 4 (the sourcing, document analysis, and causal prompts) are associated with significantly higher student scores for perspective recognition. Task 1 (the situated prompt) was significantly different than the other tasks for the perspective score and had the lowest mean score of all the tasks.

Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for Historical Reasoning Element by Writing Prompt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing prompt</th>
<th>Situated</th>
<th>Sourcing</th>
<th>Document analysis</th>
<th>Causal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

These results indicate that writing prompts focused on sourcing, corroboration of documents, and causation are more likely to elicit adolescents’ attention to historical perspectives than prompts that ask students to imagine themselves as historical agents. When sourcing (Wineburg, 1991), students consider the authors of documents, their motivations and intentions, and their reliability. When corroborating (Wineburg, 1991), students compare and contrast documents, noting where documents agree and disagree with one another. In analyzing causation, students ideally consider the context of historical events and the relationships between them as well as the influence of historical agents (cf. Lee, 2005). Inherent in each of these forms of historical reasoning is some attention to the viewpoints of historical actors in their role as authors of historical documents.

Recognizing authorship of historical documents is a key step in advancing students’ historical reasoning. For when students identify and reconcile multiple perspectives, they can begin to see history as an interpretive enterprise based on the deliberation of varying accounts of the past (cf. Monte-Sano, 2011). Sourcing and corroboration can help students see the subtext inherent in any historical document (Wineburg, 1991). Each document is shaped by the author who produced it and his or her circumstances. Likewise, comparing documents brings differences of opinion into relief and can highlight the factors that shaped the differing accounts. The particular causal prompt in this study emphasizes why these authors (Churchill and Truman) spoke out against the Soviet Union, highlighting the circumstances and views of the authors.

In contrast, the situated task in this study encouraged students to imagine themselves as historical actors and authors in devising a written response to the words of other historical actors. Initially, we hoped this prompt might help students make inferences, as Brooks (2008) found. However, our data indicate that students appeared to have responded to this task by using their own personal views and transposing them on the particular historical situation in the prompt. There is less in this prompt that directs students to consider the historical documents in constructing their answer than in the other prompts. We suspect that this prompt promoted students’ tendency toward “presentism” (Seixas, 1993)—that is, to see the past through their own lens rather than from the point of view of historical actors. Although we had hoped this kind of first person task might encourage students to empathize with people in the past, it appears to have led students to consider their own views first and foremost, rather than to carefully consider the evidence presented and recognize the historical perspectives present in that evidence.

Because so much of history relies on evidence-based thinking to construct interpretations of past events, prompts that focus students more directly on sources of evidence (e.g., documents) may be more likely to promote historical reasoning. Historical reasoning begins with questioning records of the past (cf. Collingwood, 1943). Any question put to evidence is directed toward trying to understand the
meaning of the evidence as it relates to the historical inquiry. The iterative process of moving between questions and evidence eventually leads historians to make a case for a particular interpretation of the past. Historical reasoning includes analyzing evidence, understanding the meaning of evidence, and using evidence to construct and explain historically plausible accounts of the past. Historians typically express these accounts as written arguments. Not only does work with evidence lead to conclusions, but evidence is also publicly conveyed in writing to justify and substantiate these conclusions. Therefore, prompts that direct students’ attention to historical evidence would be more likely to produce essays with grounded interpretations—essays that recognize and reconcile the perspectives present in the evidence. This is consistent with Monte-Sano’s (2011) findings that a teacher who focused on careful, close analysis of text as well as authors’ perspectives helped his students’ historical writing improve.

Although consideration and citation of evidence is paramount in history, there are multiple ways of thinking associated with evidence analysis. As work in Britain and Canada highlights, historical reasoning is not monolithic (Lee, 2005; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Seixas, 2006; Shemilt, 1983). This study is consistent with this conception of historical reasoning in that the rubric that broke historical reasoning into three traits produced more nuanced results. Indeed, there are multiple facets to historical reasoning, and each facet does not necessarily grow in concert with others or in a linear fashion (Lee & Ashby, 2000). As the work of history education scholars points out, there are additional aspects of historical reasoning that go beyond the three traits we looked for in our results. Based on the work of the Schools Council History Project in the United Kingdom, Lee (2005) identifies second-order concepts that apply to any field of history, including time, change, empathy, cause, evidence, and accounts. The current Historical Thinking Project in Canada defines six concepts that are essential to understanding history: establish historical significance, use primary document evidence, identify continuity and change, analyze cause and consequence, take historical perspectives, and understand moral dimensions of history (Seixas, 2006). These concepts define major components of historical thinking, identify what adolescents should learn in history class, and provide the basis for learning tasks and assessments. The field would be well served by developing rubrics that define hierarchies of thinking for different aspects of historical reasoning and then identifying the kinds of tasks that promote each kind of reasoning—historical reasoning as a whole is likely advanced by multiple kinds of tasks.

But the results of this study suggest that the writing process itself is a key factor in facilitating students’ reasoning, conceptual change, and content area learning. Langer and Applebee (1987) frame writing as a learning activity that allows students to recognize their knowledge of the topic and organize the ideas they will write about. Mason and Boscolo’s (2000) work supports this conception of writing to learn. In their study, students whose learning of photosynthesis included regular writing opportunities demonstrated a better understanding of the topic than their
peers who had no writing opportunities. In addition, a review of writing-to-learn interventions by Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004) indicated that writing interventions had positive effects on school achievement and content learning, although the effects were relatively small. One factor limiting our results may have been the use of conventional academic measures for content learning as opposed to more nuanced instruments that measure reasoning or concept development. It is likely that the experience of writing facilitated the reasoning we detected in this study.

Rivard (1994) has pointed out not only that writing has an impact but also that the type of task influences students’ conceptual frameworks differently. History education research that precedes this study supports this idea. De La Paz and Felton (2010) found that both poor and advanced writers developed conceptual understandings and demonstrated disciplinary reasoning through a historical document-based writing task at the 8th and 11th grades. Wiley and Voss (1999) found that college students who wrote historical arguments (as opposed to narratives, summaries, or explanations) demonstrated a better understanding of the content and essays with more transformed content. Young and Leinhardt (1998) also found that high school students who wrote historical-document-based questions learned to transform the content into their own argument over time. Argumentative writing certainly appears to have a positive impact on students’ understanding of history and conception of the topic. In this study, all four writing tasks called for argument, and we sought nuance within the genre. Given our results, the sourcing, document analysis, and causal writing tasks may have not only provided students with a better opportunity to express their reasoning but also altered and enhanced their reasoning altogether. Likewise, these tasks may have given students a better opportunity to develop their understanding of the Cold War.

**Limitations**

The findings herein are certainly modest but indicate that there is some promise in investigating the nuances of what we ask students to write when we analyze the results of their writing. The scope of these findings is limited by the instructional context in which the study took place. The M.E.A.L. and SOAPSTone frameworks may have resulted in less differentiation among students and among tasks since these frameworks directed students to focus on certain aspects of historical reasoning that we measured. Offering writing prompts and readings with fewer guidelines to a wider range of students (e.g., students from different schools who have learned how to approach writing in different ways) might have resulted in greater distinctions in students’ essays. Our data indicated students followed these guidelines, so the fact that evidence and analysis were parts of each writing prompt may have confounded our attempt to study four assessment prompts. A follow-up study in contexts where students have not learned the M.E.A.L. and SOAPSTone approaches to historical writing and reading would address this limitation.
Although we believe there are important links between students’ reasoning and writing, we do not know the extent to which the process of writing facilitated students’ reasoning or content-area learning. Certainly the writing prompts directed students to consider evidence and construct an argument, in addition to the specific foci of each prompt. But did the process of writing help students attend to these details or enhance their reasoning? We gained some insight into the products of students’ work, but we did not investigate students’ thought processes as they completed the writing tasks or how the process of writing influenced and represented their reasoning. Including interviews with students as they complete these tasks would lend insight into how students interact with and make sense of the various tasks and whether students are able to express the full extent of their reasoning in writing. Another approach would be to measure students’ content learning, conceptual development, and reasoning about the topic before and after writing tasks. Comparing outcomes on these measures to students in classes without writing (similar to Mason & Boscolo, 2000) would help identify the impact of writing as a feature in and expression of their reasoning processes. This is a promising area for further study that would extend the work in history begun by Greene (1994) and help us identify more closely the intersections and distinctions between disciplinary reasoning and writing.

**Conclusion**

Of 12th grade teachers, 41% state that their students “write reports” in social studies classes a minimum of one to two times per month (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). A more recent survey lends some insight into the nature of writing in many classes. Kiuhrara, Graham, and Hawken (2009) found that when teachers assign writing in history classrooms, the focus typically involves summary of information. Yet a focus on summary writing in history inhibits students’ historical reasoning because history is interpretive and relies on the reconciliation of multiple sources of evidence. This study uses argumentative writing as a foundation for developing students’ disciplinary thinking and writing and tests the relative impact of four different prompts on students’ performance. Prompts that emphasize corroboration, sourcing, and causal analysis hold promise for eliciting adolescents’ historical reasoning—particularly their ability to recognize and reconcile historical perspectives—in their writing.

Cultivating students’ historical reasoning and writing skills in the classroom is difficult work. Writing demands that students read and analyze texts, organize their thoughts, and compose essays, keeping their reading and analysis in mind. Examining not only the nature of instruction but also the nature of the tasks we ask students to complete can give educators a greater range of tools from which to draw as we work to develop adolescents’ disciplinary literacy.
Appendix A

Cold War Primary Sources

The United States stands at this time at the peak of world power. It is a serious moment for the American democracy. For with this supremacy is also joined a great responsibility to the future. Opportunity is here now, clear and shining, for both our countries. To reject it or ignore it will bring blame upon us in the future.

It is my duty to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe. From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow (the capital of the Soviet Union). The Communist parties in all these Eastern States of Europe have come to dominate and are seeking everywhere to get total control. The safety of the world, ladies and gentlemen, requires a unity in Europe, from which no nation should be left out.

In a great number of countries throughout the world secret Communist rebel groups are set up. They work in agreement with and follow the directions they receive from the Communist center. The Communist parties and groups are a growing challenge and danger to Christian civilization.

I reject the idea that a new war is bound to happen—still more that it is about to happen. I do not believe that Soviet Russia wants war. What they want is the fruits of war and the unlimited expansion of their power and beliefs. But what we have to consider here today while time remains, is how to prevent war and how to establish the conditions of freedom and democracy as quickly as possible in all countries.

The people of Great Britain and the United States must work together in the air, on the sea, all over the globe, and in science and in industry, and in moral force. Then, there will be no shaky balance of power that could tempt the Soviets to expand their control. Instead, there will be an overwhelming assurance of security.

Document 2: President Truman’s Speech to Congress. March 12, 1947.
The seriousness of the situation in the world today requires me to appear before a joint session of the Congress. The foreign policy and the national security of this country are involved. One aspect of the present situation, which I wish to present to you, concerns Greece and Turkey.

The very survival of Greece is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government’s authority. The Greek Government is unable to cope with the situation. The Greek army is small and poorly equipped. It needs supplies and equipment if it is to restore the authority of the government throughout Greek territory. Greece must have help if it is to become an independent and confident democracy. The United States must give that help. There is no other country to which democratic Greece can turn.

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, and guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority imposed by force upon the majority. It depends on terror and domination, a controlled press and radio; unfair elections, and limited personal freedoms.

I believe that the United States must support free peoples who fight against the overthrow of their government by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we must help free peoples to work out their own future in their own way. I believe that our help should be mainly through economic and financial aid, which is essential to economic stability and organized political processes. Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this critical hour, the effect will be far reaching.

The seeds of totalitarian governments grow because of misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and conflict. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the wellbeing of our own nation. Great responsibilities have been placed upon us. I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities squarely.
Appendix B

SOAPSTone Document Analysis Worksheet for Document 1

Title: Date:
S Speaker Who made this? What do you know about him or her?
O Occasion What else was going on? What time period is it from?
A Audience Who was the document made for? Who was supposed to look at it?
P Purpose What did the author want? Why did he or she create this document?
S Subject What is it about? What is the big picture?
T Tone What is the tone? How does the author feel?

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the College of Education at the University of Maryland for the SPARC grant that supported this project. The authors would also like to thank the incredible teachers at Martin Luther King, Jr., who worked with them on this project and made it possible. The opinions herein are solely those of the authors.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article: The College of Education at the University of Maryland provided the SPARC grant.

Note

1. Although International Baccalaureate (http://www.ibo.org) does not share many free examples of the different types of papers for the history exam, Pearson offers an online guide to the Source Paper, also known as History Paper 1. See http://www.pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk/Secondary/BusinessAndEconomics/IBResources/PearsonBaccalaureate/Samples/SampleMaterialHistory/HistoryPaperOneChapter1.pdf

References


**Bios**

Chauncey Monte-Sano is associate professor at University of Michigan’s School of Education. A former high school history teacher and National Board Certified teacher, she currently prepares novice teachers for the history classroom and works with veteran history teachers through a variety of professional development programs. She has won research grants from the Institute of Education Sciences and the Spencer Foundation. Her dissertation won the 2007 Larry Metcalf Award from the National Council of the Social Studies, and she recently won the 2011 Early Career Award from Division K of the American Educational Research Association. Her scholarship has appeared in the *Journal of the Learning Sciences, Curriculum Inquiry*, the *Journal of Teacher Education*, the *American Educational Research Journal*, and *Theory and..."
Research in Social Education. Her current research examines how history students learn to reason with evidence in writing and how their teachers learn to teach such historical literacy.

Susan De La Paz is associate professor of special education at the University of Maryland. Her work has appeared in a variety of journals including the Journal of Educational Psychology, Contemporary Educational Psychology, Exceptional Children, Journal of Learning Disabilities, Theory and Research in Social Education, and Journal of Research on Technology in Education. Her research focuses on disciplinary literacy, with particular emphasis on teaching and learning in social studies and history classrooms and differentiated approaches to instruction that are designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities in secondary classrooms.