



Area Study Organizer

Integrate Four Disciplinary Perspectives

We designed the *Area Study Organizer* to help students integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines when studying a geographical or cultural area. This strategy was inspired by how people examine issues in academic subjects such as Middle Eastern and European Studies.

Area studies

Area studies, such as Middle Eastern Studies or European Studies, draw on multiple disciplinary traditions. This interdisciplinarity presents challenges and opportunities. The challenge is that each discipline has its own "habits of mind" (Galloway, Lawrence, & Moje, 2013). It can be quite challenging for students to keep track of the methods used in each discipline to investigate and analyze the world. If we can help them to track and reflect on these methods, however, students can develop a deeper understanding of a topic by approaching it from different angles. Furthermore, reflecting on interdisciplinary work provides a great opportunity to reflect on the nature of knowledge generation in different traditions.

We have curated essential questions and reflection items in cultural/social studies, geography, economics, and political studies, which we present on the first page of the Area Study Organizer. These questions are organized by the disciplinary-lenses through which students can look. As always, we encourage you to **adapt** the strategy. Maybe, given your students' needs, it makes sense to start with a shorter description of the four dimensions or focus only on one at a time.

CULTURAL/SOCIAL	GEOGRAPHIC
<p><i>What are the beliefs and customs of the people in this area? How does people behave, interact and organize their lives?</i></p> <p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What guides the behavior of the people in the area? Beliefs, norms, stigmas, values, and ideology • Religion: Rites and rituals, Holy Books, sin/salvation, views on life after death, etc. • Customs, traditions, and rituals • Language and symbols • Artifacts (e.g. Material objects, architecture, and artistic creations) • Technology: Knowledge/techniques used to create goods/services such as clothing, shelter, weapons, and medicine. • Art, music, dance, literature and cuisine <p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality: How are various segments of the population (e.g. ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups.) treated? Are they guaranteed equal rights and protection? • Health: Access to health care (availability and cost), life expectancy, common illnesses and conditions, etc. • Education: Cost of schooling, years of schooling, literacy rates, etc. • Security: Crime, violent conflicts, civil war, etc. 	<p><i>What are the physical features of the area? How does the physical features of the area impact the lives of the people living there?</i></p> <p>Physical environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Climate, seasons and natural disasters • Natural resources • Oceans and rivers • Mountains • Soil and vegetation <p>Human environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increases and decreases ▪ Distribution and density ▪ Migration • Urban areas vs. rural areas • Epidemics, famines, and draught • Pollution

Figure 1: Central questions in cultural/social studies and geography.

How to Use the Area Study Organizer

This strategy template is similar to the mnemonic organizers, Grapes and PERSIA. It aims to help students organize information about an area into four conceptual categories.

1. The teacher and students define or select the area and time period.
2. The class reads the first page of the organizer and discusses the questions and disciplinary perspectives.
3. Students or student groups read one or more texts about the area. While reading, they use the four boxes to note down relevant information (see Figure 2).

CULTURAL/SOCIAL	GEOGRAPHIC
POLITICAL	ECONOMIC

Figure 2: Four boxes to write notes in for each discipline.

Exploring Multiple Perspective and Texts

Studying a cultural area is complicated and usually part of a weeklong unit that requires students to integrate information across texts, maps, videos, and other information sources.

This strategy can sensitize students to how our perspective may influence how we approach a topic and sometimes explain conflicting information or perspectives. For instance, you might ask students to use this organizer to take notes on texts related to a region from an economic and cultural perspective. The evaluation of the region may vary according to the lens one uses. So, for example, you might use this strategy to:

- Help students explore one question, but with texts that push them to integrate knowledge across two or more disciplines.
- Help students develop expertise. For instance, you can assign a role to each student in a group (i.e., the cultural/social scientist, the geographers, the political scientists, and the economists). Then, have them take turns presenting information from their perspectives. Alternate roles next time.

What do students need to become critical consumers and producers of knowledge within a discipline? And how can teachers support them in achieving this?

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We have made an editable version of the graphic organizer available for free (**click the download link to the Word version below**). We believe that a strategy without a purpose is no strategy at all. Think carefully about how you want to use this strategy to help students become critical consumers and producers of knowledge in your discipline. After reflecting on these questions, consider if there are parts of the strategy template that you would like to change.

References

Galloway, E. P., Lawrence, J. L. and Moje, E. B. Research in Disciplinary Literacy: Challenges and Instructional Opportunities in Teaching Disciplinary Texts. in *Adolescent Literacy in the Era of the Common Core: From Research into Practice* (eds. Ippolito, J., Lawrence, J. L. & Zaller, C.) (Harvard Educational Press, 2013).

<https://readingways.org/adolescent-literacy-in-the-era-of-the-common-core-2/>