

CATUM: A Story of Trajectory

Kristen R. Strom

Kristen R. Strom researches the trajectory of CATUM, a writing research tool she taught to her high school students. Through first-person point-of-view, CATUM narrates Strom's writing research as they explore the writing tool's trajectory through classroom spaces and students' transfer of research and writing skills beyond high school.

Hi, I'm CATUM! And I'm a tool. Yep, you read that correctly: I'm a tool—a writing research tool, that is. You may have never heard of me before, but hundreds of students have. Actually, I've become buddies with so many students in so many classrooms over the years, I've lost count. I'm also friends with teachers, and I reside in their toolboxes. Throughout the school year, they pull me out and introduce me to students. In fact, I've been a tool in Kristen Strom's teaching toolbox for ten years (and I'm not rusty yet). Because of all my friends—students and teachers alike—I continue to live on as a writing research tool that is carried through time and space. Thankfully, Kristen, other teachers, and students have helped me figure out where I came from and where I'm going. I'm excited for you to meet them as you read how they have helped me on my journey. This is my story of how I'm used, where I came from, and where I'm going.

So, What Am I?

I am an acronym. I stand for C: Content, A: Authority, T: Timeliness, U: Usefulness, M: MLA, and I help students evaluate their sources. For each

source they find during the research process, high school students complete my acronym and, in so doing, students look critically at who wrote the information (Authority), when it was published (Timeliness), and how they plan to use the information (Usefulness). In addition, while completing me, students pick out the most important “content” that they might use in their paper and either type direct quotes from the source or paraphrase ideas. The MLA citation comes in handy for students as they compile their sources and can easily list them on a Works Cited page. All of the pieces that make me CATUM ask students to think critically about what they are researching and how the information will be used in the future. Here is a selfie of what I look like before students fill me out (Figure 1). In my 12-point Times New Roman outfit, I feel sleek and classy.

_____ 1

Mrs. Strom

American Literature and Language II

CATUM #__

Content

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Authority

Timeliness

Usefulness

MLA

Figure 1: My template selfie.

The Circumstances of My Birth

I'm adopted, and I've continued to be adopted by teachers for over ten years, but I've never really known who created me. Since Kristen and I have such a close working relationship, she offered to help me figure out where I came from.

During her first year teaching high school English, Kristen was introduced to me by two other teachers, Kate and Monica (Figure 2). All three of them were going to be teaching a Rhetoric class, and they decided that I would be one of the writing research tools their students would use during their research paper unit. I still remember the day like it was yesterday: the three of them were sitting around a table, and Kate and Monica introduced me to Kristen since their students had success using me in the past. It was friendship at first sight! That was the beginning of my trajectory with Kristen. But that isn't the beginning of my trajectory.

Trajectory is defined as “the ways that texts move, i.e. how a text might move through a process of production or how texts move through institutions and spaces and in relationships to different people” (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost). In order to see the way the text (in this case, myself) moved, I needed to see what it was like before me. Why did I need to be created? What were they missing? Only then could I see the impact I have had.

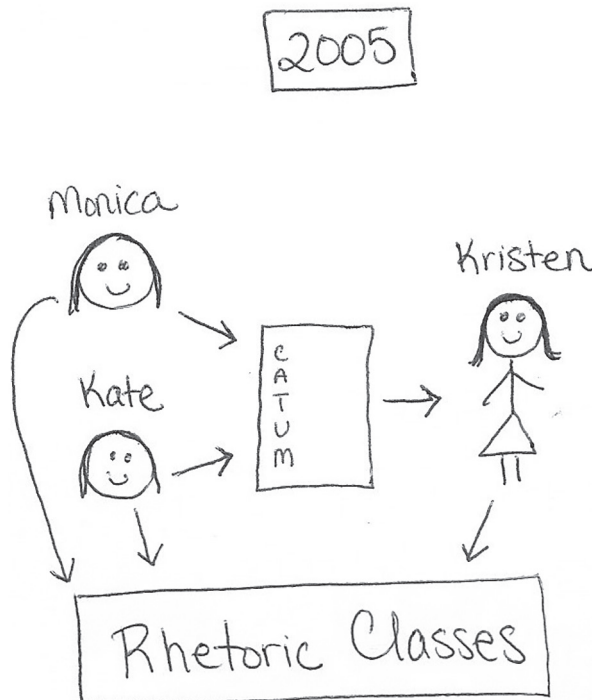


Figure 2: This is how Kristen and I first met.

Since Kristen and I remember that first meeting fondly, Kristen reached out to Kate and Monica to see if they knew where they had first met me. Kristen's attempts at contacting the women through Facebook, e-mail, and text messages resulted in both women telling her that they didn't know where I came from. Kate didn't even remember using me! I was hurt! However, Monica remembered me and suggested Kristen contact two past colleagues, Sarah and Chris H., who might know the circumstances of my birth. In addition to offering more people to contact, Monica texted Kristen a link to a wiki that belonged to Kristen's current colleague, Chris F., who uses me in his English classes. While they were texting, Monica had googled "CATUM" and only found Chris F.'s website. Her quick search of me led to someone that Kristen introduced me to and who currently uses me as a writing research tool for his students.

Our next step in the research process was for Kristen to follow Monica's lead and contact Sarah and Chris H. Kristen used Facebook to reach out to Sarah. Sarah's response is shown in Figure 3.

Kristen,
I have no idea where the curriculum came from. Have you searched more scholarly databases at the university? I'm sure you have, but I thought I'd ask. So great to hear from you. I hope you're enjoying your new professional life.
Sarah

Figure 3: Sarah's Facebook response to Kristen.

Sarah had no idea where I came from either, but she did remind Kristen of something we should have started with when we first decided to research where I came from. We never thought to look through databases! Last year, when Kristen became curious about how I was created, she used Google and typed in my name, "CATUM," but nothing came up other than Chris F.'s wiki that Monica also found. So, Kristen figured that the deep web may not be any help. But since we weren't having luck with the personal sources, we thought we'd give the library databases at Illinois State University a try. Kristen opened up Milner Library's website, logged in from her home laptop, and typed in "CATUM". The search results were not what we were looking for: CATUM insurance, a birth announcement for a girl named Catum, and multiple results for articles written in a different language. We also tried searching "CATUM research paper," and again, there was no reference to me being a writing research tool. Before giving up, we tried searching "CATUM and research paper," but we had no luck. Our search on the deep web failed.

We then decided to move on to e-mailing Chris H., the other colleague Monica suggested Kristen contact, who was still teaching at the same high school where Kristen and I met. In the e-mail to Chris H., Kristen requested any information she might have about where I came from. Kristen also asked Chris H. what she thought about her next step of e-mailing the department chair. By adding that into the e-mail, we thought Chris H. would have suggestions about the next step in our research process, since she was the only person we had contacted who still worked at that school. The next day, Kristen received an e-mail back from Chris H.: “Hi, Kristen! I’m so sorry I don’t have good news for you—I don’t recall using it at all. Good idea to talk to David—he might be able to help.”

Big sigh . . . this writing research thing was hard work. And we didn’t seem any closer to figuring out where I came from because my past trajectories were still unknown. I started to doubt that we’d find out where I was born. By this point, we had contacted the two people who we thought would have known about my birth. We followed up on a suggestion to contact two more people, but had no luck. From here, we decided the next step was to e-mail David, the department chair. Kristen asked him to forward a request for information about myself—CATUM—to all English department teachers. The following day, Kristen was included on an e-mail sent out by David to thirty-five English teachers in their department. Soon after, Kristen received a response from Myles, who wrote, “I think I ‘created’ CATUM years ago when I added Usefulness and MLA citation to the standard Content, Authority, Timeliness check sheet for Expos, English 3 and/or AP Literature and Composition. I was really just tagging on two more things I wanted kids to provide.” Myles, you are my, UM . . . father! Kristen and I were beyond excited to find out where I had come from. To gather more details about my creation, Kristen e-mailed Myles a list of questions. Below you will find the questions, along with Myles’s responses:

1. How did creating the CATUM come about? Why did you create it?

CATUM came about simply because we had been using a standard source evaluation sheet for Content, Authority, and Timeliness of articles. CATUM came about because we wanted to have students demonstrate they had actually READ the article by commenting on how Useful it was for their purpose. And the MI just stuck on to have them create an MLA citation for the article to get them started on building a Works Cited for later.

2. What purpose did it serve?

It served the purpose of having students consider each source more thoughtfully (at least in theory) and of giving the teacher a more detailed at-a-glance of each source the student was using.

3. Was the CATUM replacing anything? Or was it adding to anything you were already using?

It was just adding to that standard format of CAT, probably introduced by one of the librarians we were working with at the time.

4. What type of unit was it used with (research paper, etc.)?

It was used with junior and senior research papers.

5. Is there anything you can remember about creating the CATUM itself/how you intended your students to use it/how it actually was used/etc. that you didn't mention above?

As I've said, I really didn't create CATUM, just made the acronym after adding the content of the U and M.

So they took CAT, a research tool students were already using, and changed it to CATUM. This means I wasn't actually "born"; I was an expansion of a previously used tool as the users' needs had evolved over time. I was disappointed to find out that I didn't have a mother or father. But that's when I realized everything is just an expansion on a previous idea. Kristen and I could have dug into CAT further if we wanted to see what the origin was for that part (finding my CAT mom). Or we could have followed up with Myles to see what experiences he had as a teacher, or even to go back further, as a student, that made him think of adding my UM. We felt, though, that this could have gone on forever (as trajectory-searching is apt to do). So we set this as my point of origin.

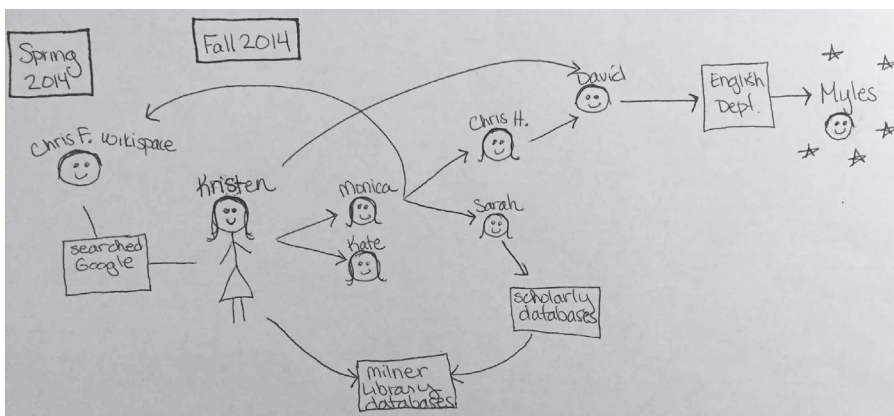


Figure 4: A map of our research to figure out where I came from.

My Trajectory: Moving Through Spaces

Trajectory is a funny thing when you look at it. You can study it going backwards or forwards in time. Up to this point, Kristen and I had used

trajectory to look backwards, to find my origins. Now, we wanted to look at it in a forward motion, starting with the point Kristen and I met to see not why it happened, but what impact our friendship had on how far I could travel.

Because of the success her students had using me as a writing research tool, Kristen moved me through space to an entirely new school. While preparing to teach a research paper unit at her new school, Kristen was speaking with a new colleague, Chris F., about the American Literature class they both taught. Chris F. had mentioned that during the research paper unit he had students use notecards to organize their information. Upon hearing this, Kristen introduced us. I had a new friend! During the conversation, Kristen told Chris F. that by using me as a writing research tool, students would have a more organized way to document their research and it would be easier for him to grade. From then on, Chris F. wanted to learn more about me and use me in his classes as well. I moved from Kristen's classroom space to another classroom space. Soon after, more teachers started to hear about me, and before I knew it, I had five new teacher-friends and had hundreds of new students as friends. I became popular! Cue song, "Popular, I know about popular . . . la la, la la."

Two years after I was introduced into Kristen's new school, I became so popular that I was adopted as a common assessment (or genre) that would be used throughout the sophomore American Literature curriculum. All sophomore students, no matter the teacher, would get to know me and use me to organize their research for the large research paper. I was honored! In addition, teachers would instruct students on the steps to using me from the start of the year, so that the students would be prepared to work with me for each source they planned to use on their research paper. My adoption as a common assessment further expanded my trajectory, leading me into multiple teachers' classrooms and toolboxes and into even more students' repertoire of writing research tools.

A year after I was adopted into the sophomore curriculum, the teachers of freshmen students realized that they could start to introduce me to their students for various writing assignments. Then, the English teachers who taught junior and senior elective courses wanted to meet me so they could introduce me to their students for research projects. Soon after, seventh and eighth grade Language Arts teachers were introduced to me, and they considered using parts of me to discuss the reliability and credibility of sources with their younger students. My trajectory continued to move throughout the school district as I permeated more classroom spaces. Teachers and students used me as a writing research tool for a variety of purposes when research was involved.

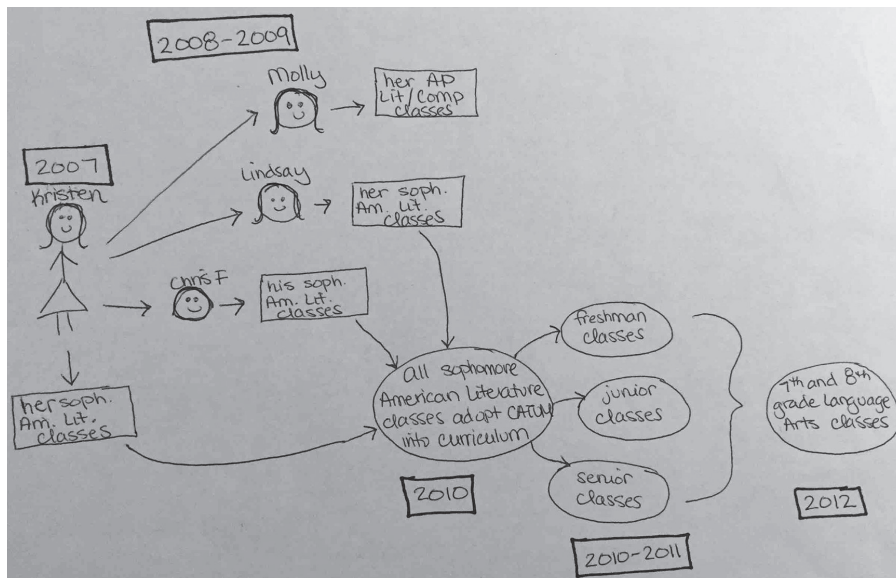


Figure 5: A map of my trajectory through classroom and school district spaces.

So, Why All This Trajectory?

For Myles and the teachers he was working with, along with Kristen and her new colleagues, I was useful for two main purposes: 1) for teachers to use as an assessment, and 2) for students to use as an organized and effective writing research tool. *But why?* CAT was already a research tool for Myles and his colleagues, but it wasn't entirely serving the purposes they needed it to. Therefore, they expanded it. However, when Kristen moved me to her new school, I was an entirely new tool for teachers and students to use. In many classrooms prior to introducing me, students documented their research using notecards, and teachers would have to read each one of them. I am like notecards on steroids, without the mess (or anger/frustration issues!). Plus, I'm friendly and good-looking! With notecards, there are piles of small cards with pieces of information written on them from various sources. The process can be messy and unorganized: the information is handwritten, notecards can be lost easily, and a piece of information the researcher wants to find requires sifting through numerous notecards. However, I, the CATUM, am completed on one source of information. All the information from one source can be found on one to two pages of documentation. I am also usually completed using a word processor and saved on a flash-drive to easily transport from home to school. There is no mess. In fact, I'm an organized, easy tool for students to document the Content of the source and its Authority and Usefulness (which notecards don't even do). And my Content section can be copied and pasted into students' research paper outlines and rough drafts. I'm also an effective and efficient text for teachers to grade. Teachers can grade a word-processed, organized assessment that documents students'

research rather than piles of notecards. If I had a slogan, I would sing: “Less mess, more efficient!” Because of this, I have a trajectory that moves through classroom and school spaces, and I continue to do so to this day.

My Trajectory Beyond High School Spaces

Now, we know where I came from (more or less), and how I spread, but how far does my friendship go for my individual friends? Since I remain in my teacher-friends’ toolboxes, I know they value our friendship. But as for the hundreds, maybe even thousands, of students I have met throughout the years, am I still their friend beyond the classroom spaces we met in? Do the skills students learn from using me as a writing research tool have a trajectory of their own? Do they transfer to new writing situations? And do students have a hand in moving me as a text through space?

When I asked Kristen about **transfer**, she mentioned that Perkins and Salomon name two types of transfer: “low-road” and “high-road” transfer. Low-road transfer happens automatically when “well-practiced routines” are transferred to new writing situations (it is not something someone actually consciously thinks about), while high-road transfer is a “deliberate, mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application to another” (Bawarshi and Reiff 315). So, if students use skills they learned by completing and using me in high school in their future spaces automatically, then low-road transfer happens. However, if students reflect upon the research tools they’ve used in the past (me and/or parts of me) and the processes they went through to compile me in order to complete a new research task, then they’d be making a connection of using skills from “one context for application to another.” In that case, high-road transfer happens. Furthermore, if students use the skills they’ve learned by completing me in order to organize research in whatever space they find themselves in, either through low-road or high-road transfer, then my trajectory has again taken me into new spaces.

Since Kristen and I wanted to figure out if the transfer of skills has indeed happened, Kristen contacted four of her past students who are now in their first or second year of college. They all knew me in high school during their sophomore year and may have also used me their junior and/or senior years in English elective courses. Kristen e-mailed them asking if they remembered using me, CATUM, in high school and then sent a list of three questions asking them to reflect upon the skills they learned using me and how/if the skills had transferred to college research situations.

In response to the first question Kristen asked (“Has your experience using CATUM as a research tool affected how you complete research now that you are in college?”), all four students said that, yes, CATUM has helped them realize not

only the necessity for finding credible and relevant research, but how to go about finding credible sources. They take into consideration the Authority, Timeliness, and Usefulness of the source when they begin to search for information.

Kristen's next question asked students if they use any of my components when they are documenting current research they complete. All of them stated that they do use parts, or all, of me, but three of the four say that they don't actually go through in the order of C-A-T-U-M when looking at a source. However, one student responded, "I do find myself going down the list in order when looking through sources. I read the content first (the C) then move down the list making sure that each piece of [sic] criteria is met before I use that source in my research, and I tend to go in order C-A-T-U-M." For this student, he is actually using me, CATUM, as a research tool just as he learned it in high school: hence, low-road transfer is happening. The other three students responded that they always look for the Authority, Timeliness, and Usefulness of the source in addition to the Content to make sure it fits their needs for research. Even though they now all use APA to cite their sources and not MLA, they make sure to document the information they need. In the words of one of the students, she "still cite[s] sources consistently within a set of recognized standards" that she learned by using MLA citations on the CATUM. These three students demonstrate high-road transfer because they have taken the skills they learned from using me in high school and applied them to the context of what their new research requires of them.

All four students responded to Kristen's last question ("Have any of the skills from learning to use CATUM in high school transferred into college?") with a yes. They all agreed that the knowledge they learned from completing a CATUM helps them find credible and reliable sources. Although only one of them uses my actual format as he learned it in high school, all of them use parts of me to organize their research. They are all using the skills they learned from using me, CATUM, in new spaces that require research; the skills have indeed transferred, and I, CATUM, have a trajectory that moves me into college spaces.

A Story of Trajectory

The process of going through my acronym helps to demonstrate skills that are important when doing any type of research. Teachers and students alike have continued to use me in various spaces because of my effectiveness as a writing research tool. While students may not use my exact text to organize their information when they are in college, the skills and knowledge they've learned transfer to the future spaces they find themselves in. I move with them through their lives, continuing my trajectory to wherever those students take me. The friendships I form with teachers and students in high school are very far-reaching indeed.

Student Last Name...1

Student's Name
Teacher's Name
Course Name
Date

CATUM #1

Content

- CATUM is a writing research tool (Strom 89).
- CATUM stands for C: Content, A: Authority, T: Timeliness, U: Usefulness, M: MLA (Strom 89).
- Students complete one CATUM over each source while they are researching (Strom 90).
- Sharp-Hoskins and Frost define trajectory as “the ways that texts move, i.e. how a text might move through a process of production or how texts move through institutions and spaces and in relationships to different people” (qtd. in Strom 91).
- To learn about CATUM’s trajectory, Strom contacts past colleagues (Strom 92).
- One colleague, Myles provides her with information of how CATUM came from CAT (Strom 93).
- Strom brought CATUM to her new school space because her past students had success using it (Strom 95).
- CATUM was used in Strom’s classroom and then more teachers learned about it and started to use it in their classrooms (Strom 95).
- CATUM was adopted as a common assessment (or genre) for the sophomore American Literature curriculum (Strom 95).
- Not only were American Literature classes using CATUM as a research tool, but freshman, junior, and senior English classes started to use it along with some middle school Language Arts classrooms (Strom 95).
- “CATUM was useful for two main purposes: 1) for teachers to use as an assessment, and 2) for students to use as an organized and effective writing research tool” (Strom 96).
- For Myles and his colleagues, CATUM was an expansion of a previous tool; for Strom and her colleagues, CATUM replaced the use of notecards as a research tool (Strom 96).
- Strom cites Perkins and Salomon’s findings of “low road” and “high road” transfer (Strom 97).
- Strom interviews four past students to see if transfer and the trajectory of the CATUM takes place beyond high school spaces (Strom 97).
- All four students said, “yes, CATUM has helped them realize not only the necessity for finding credible and relevant research, but how to go about finding credible sources” (Strom 97-98).

Student Last Name...2

- All four students use the skills they learned from using a CATUM in new spaces that require research; “the skills have indeed transferred,” and the CATUM has had a trajectory into college spaces (Strom 98).
- CATUM narrates, “While students may not use my *exact* text to organize their information when they are in college, the skills and knowledge they’ve learned transfer to the future spaces they find themselves in” (Strom 98).
- CATUM has a “far-reaching” trajectory with teachers and students in high school (Strom 98).

Authority

The author of this piece is Kristen Strom, who has been a high school English teacher and is currently a graduate student in the PhD English Studies Program at ISU. Her experience having her students use the CATUM as a research tool shows her authority on the subject. Through CATUM’s first-person narration, Kristen is a writing researcher as she researchers were CATUM came from and how it has moved through space. This article is found in the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* used by the ISU Writing Program, which supports writing instruction and writing research.

Timeliness

The article was in Issue 6.2 of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* published and used by the ISU Writing Program, which supports writing instruction and writing research. Because the article was recently published, the information is timely and relevant to information on the CATUM as a writing research tool, its trajectory through high school and college spaces, and how Strom takes on the role of a writing researcher as she researches the CATUM’s trajectory.

Usefulness

This article is an example of writing research because the author, Kristen Strom, writes about the writing research she did to figure out how CATUM was developed. I plan to use the information in this article to support ways that writers can research genres of writing, trajectory, and transfer, and also how they write about their research.

MLA

Strom, Kristen R. “CATUM: A Story of Trajectory.” *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*. 6.2 (Spring 2016): 89-101.

Figure 6: A CATUM completed over this *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* article.

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Kristen Strom is an English Studies PhD student at Illinois State University focusing on English Education. She is passionate about teaching and loves to read, travel, and spend time with family and friends. When she is not at ISU, she is busy spending time at home with her two little kids and visiting her farmer-husband at their family farm.

