

## Social Studies Learning Activity Types<sup>1,2</sup>

Of the forty-four social studies learning activity types that have been identified to date, seventeen are focused upon helping students build their knowledge of social studies content, concepts, and processes. Twenty-seven provide students with opportunities to express their understanding in a variety of ways. Six of these knowledge expression activity types emphasize *convergent* learning and twenty-one of these activity types offer students opportunities to express their understanding in *divergent* ways. The three sets of activity types (knowledge building, convergent knowledge expression, and divergent knowledge expression) are presented in the tables that follow, including compatible technologies that may be used to support each type of learning activity. Specific software titles and Web sites listed in the Possible Technologies column are meant to be illustrative, and are not necessarily endorsed by the taxonomy authors.

### Knowledge Building Activity Types

As the table of activity types below shows, teachers have a variety of options available to assist students in building social studies content and process knowledge.

**Table 1:** Knowledge Building Activity Types

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Read Text	Students extract information from textbooks, historical documents, census data, etc.; both print-based and digital formats	Digital archives, Web sites, electronic books, audiobooks
Read Maps, Charts and Tables	Students extract and/or synthesize information from maps, charts and/or tables	Textbook supplements, Web-based datasets (e.g., CIA World Factbook)
View Presentation	Students gain information from teachers, guest speakers, and peers; synchronous/asynchronous, oral or multimedia	Presentation software, videoconferencing, video creation software (e.g. Movie Maker, iMovie), concept mapping software
View Images	Students examine both still and moving (video, animations) images; print-based or digital format	Presentation software, word processor, video creation software (e.g. Movie Maker, iMovie), image sharing sites (e.g. Flickr.com)

<sup>1</sup> Suggested citation (APA format, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.):  
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<http://activitytypes.wm.edu/SocialStudiesLearningATs-Feb2011.pdf>

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Listen to Audio	Students listen to audiorecordings of speeches, music, radio broadcasts, oral histories, and lectures; digital or non-digital	Digital audio archives, podcasts (e.g., “Great Speeches in History,” etc.), audiobooks
Take Notes	Students record information from lecture, presentation, and/or group work	Word processor, wiki, concept mapping software
Discuss	In small to large groups, students engage in dialogue with their peers; synchronous/asynchronous, structured or unstructured	Discussion fora, discussion in wikis and blogs
Debate	Students discuss opposing viewpoints; formal/informal; structured/unstructured; synchronous/asynchronous	Discussion fora, discussion or commenting in blogs and wikis
Experience a Field Trip	Students travel to physical or virtual sites; synchronous/asynchronous	Virtual fieldtrips, presentation, video creation software and/or Google Earth to develop their own virtual tours
Sequence Information	Students sequence information, data and/or documents in chronological order	Timeline creation software, video creation software (e.g. Movie Maker, iMovie)
Consider Evidence	Students explore a variety of types of evidence (e.g., historical documents, photographs, data) related to a topic or question	Digital archives, extant data sets (e.g., U.S. Census data), Historical Scene Investigation (HSI)
Compare/Contrast	Students interrogate information to understand multiple characteristics, evidence, and/or perspectives on a topic	Concept mapping software, word processor, spreadsheet, digital archives
Engage in a Simulation	Students engage in paper-based or digital experiences focused on a content topic which mirror the complexity of the real world	Content-specific simulation (e.g. Fantasy Congress, Stock Market Game)
Conduct an Interview	Face to face, via audio/videoconference, or via email students question someone on a chosen topic; may be digitally recorded and shared	Video creation software (e.g. Movie Maker, iMovie), audiorecorder, digital camera
Research	Students gather, analyze, and synthesize information using print-based and/or digital sources	Digital archives, word processor, concept mapping software to structure
Engage in Artifact-Based Inquiry	Students explore a topic using physical or virtual artifacts, including data, text, images, etc.	Digital archives
Engage in Data-Based Inquiry	Using student-generated data or print-based and digital data available online, students pursue original lines of inquiry	Digital archives, extant data sets (e.g., C.I.A. World Factbook, U.S. Census data, Thomas), student-collected data, spreadsheet

### ***Knowledge Expression Activity Types***

Teachers are able to determine what students have learned by reviewing their “performances of understanding” (Wiske, 1998) -- students’ expressions of knowledge related to the learning goals targeted. Opportunities for students to express their knowledge can be incorporated during a unit of study (as part of formative assessment) or at the conclusion of a unit (as a summative assessment). At times, social studies teachers deem it appropriate for all students to come to a similar understanding of a course topic. This kind of understanding is expressed by engaging in *convergent knowledge expression activities*, as detailed in the table below.

**Table 2:** Convergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Possible Technologies</b>
Answer Questions	Students respond to questions using traditional question sets or worksheets, or through the use of an electronic discussion board, email or chat	Word processor, concept mapping software, discussion fora, student response systems (SRS)
Create a Timeline	Students sequence events on a printed or electronic timeline or through a Web page or multimedia presentation	Timeline creation software, presentation software, concept mapping software, word processor
Create a Map	Students label existing maps or produce their own; print-based materials or digitally	Scanner, outline maps available online, Google Earth, presentation software
Complete Charts/Tables	Students fill in teacher-created charts and tables or create their own in traditional ways or using digital tools	Word processor, concept mapping software
Complete a Review Activity	Students engage in some form of question and answer to review content; paper-based to game-show format using multimedia presentation tools	Student response systems (SRS), interactive whiteboard review games (e.g., Jeopardy), survey tools
Take a Quiz/Test	Students demonstrate their knowledge through paper-based, traditional format to computer-generated and scored assessments	Online quizzes

While in many cases teachers may want their students to express similar understandings of course content, at other times they will want to encourage students to develop and express their own understandings of a given topic. The following 21 *divergent knowledge expression activity types* afford students opportunities to each share their unique understanding of a topic or concept. They are subdivided into learning activities that are written, visual, conceptual, product-oriented, and participatory.

**Table 3:** Written Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Write an Essay	Students compose a structured written response to a prompt; paper and pencil or word processed; text-based or multimedia	Word, concept mapping software, wiki (to track contributions from multiple authors)
Write a Report	Students author a report on a topic in traditional or more creative format using text or multimedia elements	Word processor, presentation software, Web authoring software, wikis
Generate a Narrative	Using primary documents and secondary source information, students develop their own story of the past	Word processor, wiki or collaborative word processor (to track contributions from multiple authors), blog
Craft a Poem	Students create poetry; paper and pencil or word processed, text-based or multimedia	Video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie), presentation software
Create a Diary	Students write from a first-hand perspective about an event from the past; paper and pencil or digital format	Blog, word processor

**Table 4:** Visual Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Create an Illustrated Map	Students use pictures, symbols, and/or graphics to highlight key features to creating an illustrated map	Outline maps available online, Google Earth, presentation software, scanner
Create a Picture/Mural	Students create a physical or virtual image or mural	Drawing software, scanner
Draw a Cartoon	Students create a drawing or caricature using a paper and pencil or digital format	Comic creation software, drawing software, scanner

**Table 5:** Conceptual Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Develop a Knowledge Web	Using teacher or student created webs, students organize information in a visual/spatial manner; written or digital format	Concept mapping software, presentation software, word processor
Generate Questions	Students develop questions related to course material/concepts	Word processor, wiki
Develop a Metaphor	Students devise a metaphorical representation of a course topic/idea	Word processor, concept mapping software, drawing software

**Table 6:** Product-Oriented Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Possible Technologies</b>
Produce an Artifact	Students create a 3-D or virtual artifact	Imaging tools, drawing software
Build a Model	Students develop a written or digital mental model of a course concept/process	Concept mapping software, presentation software, spreadsheets
Design an Exhibit	Students synthesize key elements of a topic in a physical or virtual exhibit	Wikis, presentation software, video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie)
Create a Newspaper/News Magazine	Students synthesize course information in the form of a periodical; print-based or electronic	Word processor, wiki, Web authoring software
Create a Game	Students develop a game, in paper or digital form, to help other students learn content	Puzzlemaker, interactive presentation software, imaging tools, Web authoring software
Create a Film	Using some combination of still images, motion video, music and narration students produce their own movies	Video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie), digital video camera

**Table 7:** Participatory Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Possible Technologies</b>
Present	Students share their understanding with others; oral or multimedia approach, synchronous or asynchronous	Presentation software, video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie), digital video camera
Roleplay	Students take on a character, role, or persona to experience or experiment with a concept or event, live, video-taped, or recorded	Video creation software (Movie Maker, iMovie), digital video camera
Perform	Students develop a live or recorded performance (oral, music, drama, etc.)	Video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie), digital video camera
Engage in Civic Action	Students write government representatives or engage in some other form of civic action	Blog, email, videoconferencing, ThinkQuest