The Conversational Nature of Sources: Analyzing Sources & Rhetorical Context

**Introduction:** When we examine one information source, we often find that it mentions many other sources. Similarly, when we do research, we are listening in on many different “conversations.” As researchers, part of our challenging (and fun) work is to piece together those different conversational strands, to think about how they fit together, and to consider how we will enter into and add to the discussion.

**Activity 1: Analyze a Publication’s Use of Sources**

Examine how the author of one of your course readings uses an outside source to help accomplish her/his purpose. Identify one source that is incorporated into the reading. Using the below questions, describe how the integrated source is used.

What overall purpose does the source serve?  
(For example: provides background information, provides evidence, presents an argument or perspective on an issue, refers to methods or theories the author uses).  
(See [http://www.flickr.com/photos/stephenfrancoeur/5218109718/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/stephenfrancoeur/5218109718/) for more on uses of sources).*

Does the author’s use of the source help her/him accomplish the purpose you identified above? If not, why not?

How does the author “signal” that she/he is referring to an outside source?  
(For example: “signal” word like “according to;” in-text citation; explicit mention of the source or author; direct quote)

After the author mentions the source, does she/he provide further discussion of it?  
(For example: discussion of the source’s importance, an explanation of how the source relates to her/his own ideas)

Overall, does the author use this source effectively? Why (not)?

* Bizup’s BEAM model for rhetorical source use make help you think further about these types of source use: see [http://www.flickr.com/photos/stephenfrancoeur/5218109718/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/stephenfrancoeur/5218109718/).
Activity 2:
Students read two brief articles (or article excerpts) that reflect varying viewpoints on a course-related topic. To emphasize the conversational nature of sources, the instructor might choose one article that explicitly references the other (or two sources that allude to each other).

Part 1:
Read two brief articles (or article excerpts) that reflect varying viewpoints on a course-related topic. (Your instructor may have assigned specific readings for this activity.) For each source identify:
   a) the publication title
   b) the source’s general purpose (For example: to inform, to make an argument)*
   c) the source’s central message or argument
   d) 1-2 pieces of supporting evidence used to convey the central message or argument

Part 2: In light of your responses in Part 1, consider ways in which the two authors might agree and disagree. Identify a connection between the two sources that can be used to bring them “into dialogue” with one another. (INSTRUCTOR MAY WISH TO PROVIDE A CONCRETE EXAMPLE FROM THE GIVEN READINGS.)

In 2-3 sentences state how the authors’ views on a common topic compare. As you develop your statement you may wish to consider not only how the authors’ main arguments compare, but also how they make their arguments with supporting evidence and argumentation.

Bring your completed activity to class for in-class discussion. This activity will also help you develop your writing assignment X.

POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES FOR ACTIVITY 2:

- In-class discussion in both small and large groups about students’ completed exercises.
- Students articulate (in writing or during discussion) how their own views relate to those of the authors.
- Students peer review one another’s papers and identify how fellow students draw connections between the sources in their papers.


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