

The Writing Mentor
Session 4:
Joining Academic Conversations:
Rhetorical Reading and Writing



Welcome!

- Sign in.
- Collect handouts.
- Create a name tent.

Agenda

- Academic Writing Defined
- Academic Conversations
- Learning To Participate
- Revising Academic Writing

Academic Writing Defined

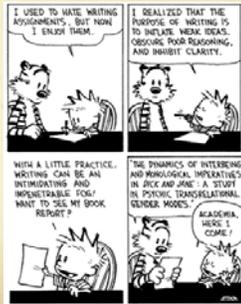
What IS “Academic Writing” ?

- Who writes it?
- Who reads it?
- What is its purpose?





What IS “academic writing?”

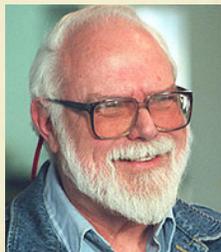


Academic Writing Is the Flip Side of Academic Reading

- Use your reading to teach yourself HOW to write in this discipline.
- Learn to notice:
 - Author's purposes and methods;
 - Ways that claims are typically asserted;
 - Types of evidence that are valued; and
 - How sources are presented and documented.

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Learn to “read like a writer.”
(Donald Murray)



Mentor Texts

- Reading like a writer:
 - How is this piece structured?
 - How does the writer handle secondary sources?
 - What kinds of evidence does he or she use to support claims?
- Use your reading to learn how to write in your discipline.

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Academic Conversations

Academic Conversations

A Key Question to Ask:

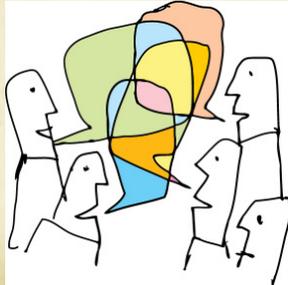
What CONVERSATION is this text joining?

Human utterances—spoken or written—are always within a context of what has gone before and what will come afterwards.



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Academic “Conversations”: A KEY Concept



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Kenneth Burke

- Describes an apocryphal encapsulation of academic argument and academic conversations.



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Kenneth Burke

“Imagine you enter a parlor. You come in late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about.



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Kenneth Burke

“In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar.



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Kenneth Burke

“Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance.



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Kenneth Burke

“However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.”

The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973), 110-11.



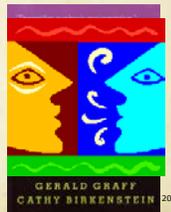
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What Conversation Are You Reading?

- **To Prepare:** Bring an article that you have read recently for a class or a research project that has at least five sources in the Reference List.
- Survey your reference list...title and authors. What do you learn about the "conversation" the article is participating in?
 - Topics?
 - Key authors?
- Have you read other articles participating in the same conversation?

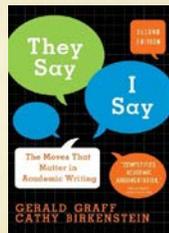
Academic Writing: A Key Pattern

- "Academic writing in particular calls upon writers not simply to express their own ideas but to do so as a response to what others have said" (ix).
- That is...to enter an ongoing conversation...



Academic Writing: A Key Structure

- They Say...
 - What is the historical consensus on this topic?
 - What are the key positions about this issue?
- I Say...
 - How does my thinking on this subject agree, modify, or disagree with what others have said?
 - What is the rationale for my position?



How To Examine Text Structures

1. Read the article. Identify the chunk that expresses the "they say" part of the discussion—the section that provides background and context.
2. Then mark the chunk of the essay that expresses the author's claim ("I say..."). Now, reread, trying to identify the ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE of the various "chunks" of text (note: a "chunk" may be a single paragraph or several paragraphs or pages).
3. Ask yourself about each chunk, "What does it DO?" (Narrate an event? Describe? Analyze something? Define something? Make a claim? Etc.)

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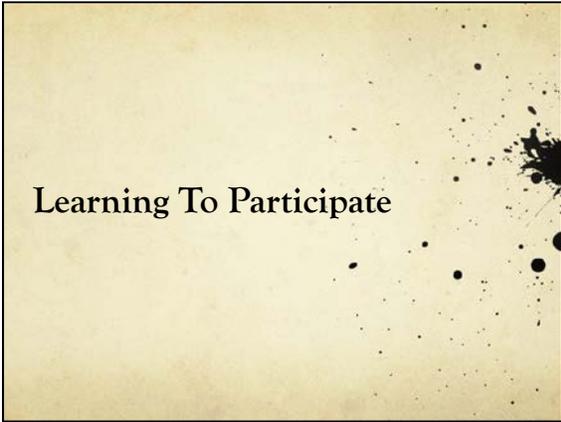
Another Way to Think about Academic Text Structures

- Problem statement
- Literature review (a summary of what has been said and by whom up to now).
- Methodology
- Results
- Analysis and conclusions

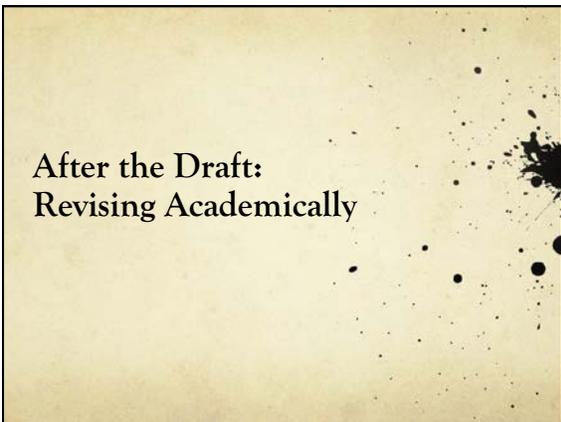
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What Is the Structure of YOUR Article?

- **To Prepare:** Bring an article that you have read recently for a class or a research project that has at least five sources in the Reference List.
- Identify the different chunks of your article and draw lines separating the chunks.
- Next to each chunk write one or two words that describe what the chunk DOES rhetorically.
- What did you learn as a reader and a writer?





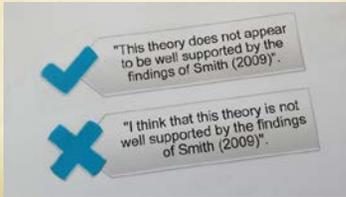


Academic Style

- **Academic style:** a formal, objective style of writing with arguments based on research rather than personal experience
- Academic writers use complete sentences, avoid slang and contractions such as *can't* and *won't*, and (depending on the discipline) often write in the third person instead of using first- or second-person pronouns (*I*, *we*, *our*, and *you* and *your*).

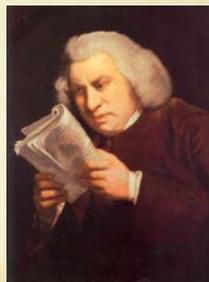
Academic Style

- One of the best ways to develop a sense of academic style is to read papers by well-respected authors in the field.



What is written without effort is, in general, read without pleasure.

~Samuel Johnson



Academic Writing Demonstrates....

- Logical presentation of ideas
- Clear, precise use of language

**LOGIC AND
PRECISION**

Logic: Use APA Levels of Headers

- Thoughtful organizational structure is key to clear, precise, logical communication.
- Headers
 - Organize ideas
 - Seriation to highlight key ideas within a section

Using Levels of Headers

- Heading Levels = use formatting to communicate a hierarchy of ideas for readers
- Topics of equal importance should have same heading level throughout a MS.
- Avoid only one subsection in a section. Two...or none!

Using Levels of Headers

- APA heading style has 5 formatting styles
 - Based on level of subordination
 - Page 62
- **BUT...NO BOLD within the MS!!!** (This is a requirement of Graduate Studies, not APA.)
- So...for your dissertation, use **modified APA!**

Use Paragraph Summaries to Check Your Logic

- Write a 1 sentence summary of each paragraph.
- Read your summary sentences (or give them to a colleague to read).
- Do the ideas move logically, one to the next?
- KEY QUESTION: What ELSE does a reader need to know?

Make Your Logic Clear to Readers

- Transitions: the oil that makes parts work smoothly
 - At the end of a paragraph or segment
 - At the beginning of a paragraph or segment



Revision Strategies

- Addition
 - What else does a reader need to know?
 - Should I provide a concrete example or fact?
- Subtraction
 - Have I already said this?
 - Does this sentence/ paragraph/ section move the discussion forward?

Revision Strategies

- Reordering (work big to small)
 - Are these sections/ paragraphs/ sentences in a logical order?
 - Are these items sequential?
 - Have I gone from least important to most important?
 - Have I gone from oldest to newest?

Revision Strategies

- Substitution
 - Is this the best quotation to advance my discussion?
 - Is there a clearer example I might use?
 - Does this data really demonstrate what I say it does?

Editing for Power: Verbs

- Active voice
- Avoid “to be” verbs (is, am, was, were, be, been, being)
- “Says” is dead!
 - Asserts, claims, declares, explains, wonders, suggests, concurs, argues, questions...etc!

Editing for Power: Prepositional Phrases

- Prepositions are modifiers—adverbs and adjectives
- Often you can substitute an adverb or adjective for a prepositional phrase for tighter prose.
- “The problems **in many community colleges...**” becomes “Most community colleges’ problems...”
- “Presenting his data **with great precision...**” becomes “Presenting his data precisely...”

Editing for Power: Empty Qualifiers

- Very, sort of, too, a little, kind of, seems...
- Waffle Words! Avoid them! (Use search and replace!)

Edit for Proper Placement

- She told me that she loves me.
- Add “only.”
- How does the meaning change?

Edit for Proper Placement

- She told me that she loves me.
- Only she told me that she loved me.
- She only told me that she loved me.
- She told only me that she loved me.
- She told me only that she loved me.
- She told me that only she loved me.
- She told me that she only loved me.
- She told me that she loved only me.
- She told me that she loved me only.

Editing for Power: Parallel Structure

- Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance.
- This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level.
- The usual way to join parallel structures is with the use of coordinating conjunctions such as “and” or “or.”
- Use your EARS!



Editing for Power: Parallel Structure

Editing for Power: Parallel Structure

- With the -ing form (gerund) of words:
- Parallel: Mary likes hiking, swimming, and bicycling.

Editing for Power: Parallel Structure

- With infinitive phrases:
- Mary likes to hike, to swim, and to ride a bicycle.
- OR
- Mary likes to hike, swim, and ride a bicycle.

Common Problems

- Order of Sentences;
- Unclear antecedent for “this”;
- Introducing a topic and then not discussing it;
- Quotations without introduction or explanation;
- Lack of clear exemplification;
- Failure to define terminology; and
- Over use of acronyms.

Remember!
AFTER the Draft!



