

Placing Our Sources (Literally) in Dialogue

Embodying the Annotated Bibliography



Recommended Courses: Research Writing, Professional Writing, Any Theory Course, Any Capstone Course

Goals and Objectives:

At the conclusion of this activity, students should have had practical experience with:

- ✓ Critiquing Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts
- ✓ Interpreting Communication scholarship
- ✓ Evaluating Communication scholarship
- ✓ Differentiating between various approaches to the study of Communication

Rationale: An annotated bibliography is an important step in the research process, but students do not always appreciate its importance. Scholars often speak of the research that they publish as being part of a conversation, but it can be difficult for students to gain an understanding that the research that they read is *literally* part of an extended conversation, and that the content of their textbooks ideally represents the emergent consensus of this conversation. This assignment and activity encourages students to see researchers and research teams not as disembodied names on a paper, but as dynamic participants in an extended conversation about a topic of interest. Additionally, it encourages students to see how the bodies of knowledge within our field are built upon these conversations.

How to Conduct the Activity

Overview. The activity is conducted over two days and works particularly well over a weekend. Students work in groups to identify important sources relevant to a topic of their choosing based on the content of the course. Each student chooses one of these sources and conducts additional research on the author(s) and perspective it uses. Each student then turns their chosen piece of research into a character that becomes part of a short group sketch. The goal of the activity is for students to put into practice what we often say we are doing with an annotated bibliography: putting the sources into dialogue with one another.

Day 1:

1. Introduce key concepts and assign work teams.
Students will need to understand the purpose of annotated bibliographies and the expectations of assignment.
2. Place students in groups.
Arrange students in groups of 5-7. Larger groups tend to work better for this activity because each student represents only one distinctive voice in the literature.
3. Assign groups a general topic.
Students choose a general topic of research that is relevant to the content of the course. One effective way to accomplish this is for students to pick a section out of the textbook for the class. Depending on the organization of the class, you may wish to limit the topics that are available to those covered in a particular unit.
4. Groups select the author or research team each group member will embody.

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If students select a section of the textbook as their topic, they can pull the sources that they choose to include in their embodied annotated bibliography from the publications referenced in that section.

Between Classes:

5. Students research their author or research team.

Students read through their individual sources and meet as a group to decide how to enact their sources in a unified skit. Although you may require a script, this activity usually works best when student skits *are not* scripted *but are* based on a thorough understanding of the authors and their perspectives (as in improv theatre).

Students should be encouraged to try to locate videos of these scholars discussing their research as well, if those are available. Videos can be located by looking for recordings of class lectures or presentations by the scholar at TED events.

Day 2:

6. Groups present 5-7 minute skits.

7. Group members should present an animated discussion that reveals how these scholars would agree and disagree on their topic. Students should focus on how the different research perspectives and philosophies of these scholars would contribute to this discussion. Students should be encouraged to speak passionately about the subject, as if they were a person so interested in the topic that they would dedicate their career to researching it.

Example: "The Dinner Party Sketch." The writer/author is the host of a dinner party. The writer's invited guests are the sources. The guests get into arguments, they agree, they disagree, but the host is responsible for keeping the peace (so as the party doesn't end in a food fight). Basically, the host/author of the paper is the mediator, the person who connects the guests/sources, presents their disagreements in an objective, fair way. The sources are imagined as dinner party guests (i.e. a source proposing a radical idea may be a punk rocker; a source offering the physiological response to a drug may be a physician; a primary source that's a recipe written during the Civil War may be an elderly, grandmother-y type). This type of specific example (the dinner party) shows that students are being asked to identify "personalities" of their sources. A successful host (writer) must work to connect all the differing "personalities" at the table.

Debriefing: Students typically enjoy this different approach to engaging with the course material. Students report that engaging with the course material this way helps them to realize that the researchers and research teams involved are real people, not just names on a page somewhere. Students also describe realizing how the scholarly works that they read do not stand on their own, but are part of an extended (and occasionally contentious) conversation between researchers and research teams who are engaged in working to improve the state of knowledge in a field.

Limitations: This assignment and activity requires students to act out a role in public discussion in front of an audience. Care is needed with some students, who can become distracted by not "being good actors" instead of focusing on the learning objectives. Institutions with limited library resources may need to encourage students to be proactive in requesting copies of original documents.

Variations:

- ✓ Assign specific topics to groups rather than allowing to pick topics of interest from the textbook.
- ✓ Include additional days between Day 1 and Day 2 if your library has limited resources and students will need to request several sources through interlibrary loan.
- ✓ Offer extra credit to students who are able to locate videos of researchers presenting and discussing their own work.