Joining the Scholarly Conversation

Hello, I’m Kelsey O’Brien. I’m an information literacy librarian at the University Libraries and today I’m going to talk to you about joining the scholarly conversation. This exercise is meant to guide you as you are getting started with your research, both by helping you understand the research process and also by providing you with some strategies that you can use to gather resources. This is a self-paced exercise. You can click on the arrows on the side of the page and there are links you can click on with additional resources. This activity is accompanied by the Scholarly Party Worksheet. If you’d like to download that, you can work on it while you’re watching this video, or you can just watch this on its own.

# The Scholarly Conversation

What do I mean by “the scholarly conversation”? When you hear the word “scholarly” you might think of scholarly articles. If this isn’t a term you know yet, it’s one that you will definitely become familiar with, because your instructors are often going to ask you to use these articles for your research. These articles are the product of research that has been conducted by experts in a particular field of study. But this research does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, it is part of a larger conversation happening amongst communities of scholars who are continually responding to and building on each other’s work over time. By providing their unique perspectives, discoveries, and insights, scholars grapple with the big issues in their field and collectively contribute to the body of knowledge on a topic. So, when you read a scholarly article, you are essentially hearing just one piece of a much larger ongoing conversation, and as a researcher, you are preparing to join that conversation. The short video in the next slide expands on this idea.

# Research is a Conversation

Pay attention to the three stages of research mentioned in the video.

Video Link: [Research is a Conversation](https://vimeo.com/175421812)

When you walk up to a conversation that is already in progress, what is the first thing you do?

1. Interject with a funny story
2. Ask a question
3. Listen

# Listen

Your first task when you are joining this conversation that is already happening around your topic is to listen and inform yourself before jumping into the conversation. This can be really challenging when you are first starting your research project. You might be really excited about your topic and have a lot of things to say, but you want to be careful not to let your feelings cloud your judgement. The feelings you have about a topic based on your background, personal experiences, and values are called biases, and we all have them. You might be familiar with bias as something that you think about when you are evaluating a piece of writing and you want to make sure the writer isn’t leaving out important information. This is a great practice, but you also want to think about your own bias and make sure it isn’t interfering with your judgement. Your task at the beginning of a research project is just to listen and keep an open mind.

After you’ve listened to the conversation, what do you do next?

1. Ask clarifying questions
2. Change the topic
3. Offer your opinion

# Ask Clarifying Questions

When you think about a good conversation, there is a lot of back and forth. Rather than a group of people taking turns presenting their distinct ideas, each person takes the time to ask questions in order to make sure they understand the other person before responding and building on that conversation. Research involves this same kind of back and forth. Throughout the research process you will need to continually ask questions as you learn more about your topic and start to identify gaps in your own understanding. Asking these questions will also help you situate your topic in the larger conversation as you think about its importance and relevance for broader audiences. If you want some ideas for questions to ask as you are refining your topic and throughout the research process, you can review the 4 W’s worksheet.

Worksheet Link: [The 4 W’s Worksheet](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BjCP_mwSX4fWuJByX6BETkckoihgjrjTdOzWHv0dUF4/edit)

Once you have listened to the conversation and asked clarifying questions, what is the final thing you do?

1. Leave the conversation
2. Argue with the speaker
3. Join the conversation

Once you have listened to the conversations happening around your topic and you’ve asked clarifying questions to deepen your understanding, you are ready to join the conversation with your own research. It’s helpful to think about your research as part of a larger ongoing conversation, rather than simply picking one side of an argument. In research, as in any conversation, there are bound to be disagreements. But these disagreements are complex and nuanced and are not usually as simple as a binary argument. Researchers may approach the problem differently and offer different solutions, but generally they are working together with the common goal of solving the big issues in their field. They are having these complex conversations to enhance the general knowledge and understanding of the topic. As a researcher, the more perspectives you can pull into your research, the more comprehensive your understanding will be. You have the potential to continue the conversation by adding your own perspective and sharing what you’ve learned with your own academic audiences.

# Anatomy of a Scholarly Article

As you begin your research and become more familiar with scholarly articles, you’ll notice that they tend to follow a particular format, and if you look closely at the common components you can follow the thread of the larger conversation. The initial information that you’ll see, including the **title**, **author(s)**, and **journal publication information**, gives you an idea of the research that is being presented, who is presenting it, and the disciplinary context or subject area of the research. The **abstract** provides a summary of the article and its findings.

The i**ntroduction**, which may include headings labeled **literature review** or **background**, provides an overview of the existing research, or the conversations that are already happening around this topic, and often concludes with a statement about how the author is bringing something new to the conversation with their own research.

In the **body** of the article, the author joins the ongoing conversation by presenting their original research and insights. You may see evidence of this research in the form of **graphs**, **figures or tables**, and in headings such as **methods** and **discussion**.

In the **conclusion** of the article, the author sums up the outcomes and findings of the research, and often mentions limitations of the study or questions that still need to be answered, ending with a call to other researchers to continue the conversation.

Finally, the list of **references**, which usually appears at the end of the article, provides more details about the resources that were referenced in the article. So, the scholarly article pulls in research from prior conversations, adds to the conversation with original research, and invites scholars who are reading the article to continue the conversation.

Resource Link: [Anatomy of a Scholarly Article](https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/scholarly-articles/). Click on the components of the article to follow the thread of the conversation.

# Activity: Time to Plan your Scholarly Party!

Now that you’ve learned about the scholarly conversation, it’s time to apply this understanding to your own research by planning a scholarly party. If you haven’t done so already, you can download the Scholarly Party worksheet. You will also need to start with a scholarly article that is relevant to your research. For this activity, you’re going to put together a guest list to organize a party around a particular theme. You will want to invite scholars who have interesting things to say to each other about this topic. Your guests should have some common expertise on this topic, but you also want some variety to make the conversation interesting. I’ll walk you through the steps in the following slides.

# What Makes Someone an Authority?

As you are putting your guest list together, you will want to think about what makes someone an authority on your topic. There are some questions you can ask as you investigate: What makes this person an expert? First, you can look for credentials: Do they have any markers that indicate that they are an authority on this topic? These might include relevant degrees or their affiliated institution. Often you will see this within the paper, or you may need to conduct a Google search.

You can also consider their experience. Does the author have experience publishing? Have they published other papers on this topic? Have these papers been cited by other researchers? You will be investigating this for your worksheet.

Finally, you can consider their perspective. Does the author have a unique experience or background that would lend a valuable perspective? For example, if you are doing a paper about the student experience with online learning, you may want the input of teachers who are providing effective online lessons; you may also want to get the perspective of the students themselves. You will be thinking about this toward the end of the worksheet.

Resource link: [Authority: Questions to Consider](https://library.albany.edu/infolit/resource/authority)

# Step 1: Invite the Guest of Honor

For the first step of this worksheet, you are going to be inviting the Guest of Honor. This is the author of your starting scholarly article. You will want to make sure that this person is an expert on your topic and that this article is relevant to your research because you’re going to be using this particular scholar to make connections to other scholars in this field. This is going to help you populate your guest list. You will start by investigating the expertise of this scholar. You want to look for things like their credentials, such as their degree and the institution that they are affiliated with, which may be listed with the author’s name in the paper. You may also need to conduct a Google search and look for the profile of the author, which you can usually find on their institution’s website. Then you want to consider what this person has to say about your topic. What are they contributing to the conversation? This person is going to be kicking off your scholarly party, so you want to make sure that they have some interesting and intriguing things to say to spark the conversation.

# Step 2: Choose Your Theme

Your second step is to identify the theme of your party. What are people having conversations about at this party? This is your research topic. It may be in the form of a question or it may be more vague at this point. If you need help refining your topic you can watch the Topic Monster video linked below. You will want your topic to be something that is interesting and important to talk about, and you also want it to be the right scope. It should not be so specific that it isn’t relevant to a wide audience, but you also don’t want it to be so broad that you could write an entire book about it.

Video link: [Topic Monster video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDuqfJQhFeM)

# Step 3: Invite Old Friends

Now that you have your Guest of Honor and theme picked out, it’s time to invite some old and new friends. In step 3 you’re going to be inviting your old friends by referring to the articles’ references. These are the articles that the Guest of Honor has pulled into their own research. Typically, these references are listed at the end of the article, but you may also find them at the end of each page. Remember that the scholar has referred to these articles throughout the body of the paper, so to identify an article that looks relevant you may want to read through appropriate sections of the paper, such as the Literature Review. You can also take a look at the titles of the articles and journals in the references to get a sense of whether this article might be useful for your research. Then you will think about how this article contributes to the larger conversation. While it is not required for the worksheet, you may want to search for the article at some point in order to use it as a resource for your research. You can do this by using the Libraries’ search tool, linked below.

Resource Link: [Search for articles using the library’s Search tool](https://search.library.albany.edu/discovery/search?vid=01SUNY_ALB:01SUNY_ALB&lang=en)

# Step 4: Invite New Friends

Now it’s time to invite some new friends. These are scholars who have cited the work of the Guest of Honor in their own research, so they are continuing the conversation. You can identify these new friends by conducting a search in Google Scholar. Make sure you access Google Scholar from the Library’s Database Finder page. This way, if you find an article that you want to take a closer look at, it will tie into our Libraries’ subscription databases and let you know if the article is available, so it is a good practice to get into. Go to Google Scholar and type in the title of your article. Under the title is a link labeled “Cited By.” When you click on this link it will show the articles that have cited this particular article in their research. If you don’t see any articles listed, think about why that may be the case. In some cases, it may just be a very recent article, and not enough time has passed for the article to be cited in new research. In other cases, maybe there is a reason that others haven’t picked up the conversation. If you are seeing a lot of articles listed, that is a good indicator that this is important research and that this scholar is saying something really relevant that other scholars find important as well. Again, you will need to think about what these scholars can bring to the conversation and who you want to invite to your party.

Resource Link: [Database Finder: Google Scholar](https://apps.library.albany.edu/dbfinder/results.php?q=google)

# Step 5-6: Who is Missing from the Conversation?

In the last two steps of the worksheet, you will think about who is still missing from the conversation. In the strategy I showed you, you were able to see the conversations that are already happening amongst scholars who have cited each other in their work. You have the ability as a researcher to pull in different voices to this conversation. The more diverse these voices are, the richer this conversation will be, and it will add to the understanding about this topic. You can do this by exploring databases based on the subject area; you may want to think about other lenses through which you might explore this topic. You may also want to think about alternative resources that are not published in scholarly journals, which can be a barrier for people who may have a very valuable perspective but may not have the ability to publish in a scholarly journal. Think about other ways that you might gather information that would bring a valuable voice to this conversation. The next slide includes examples of the different types of resources that you might pull in based on an example topic.

# Example Topic: How can educators engage distance learners?

## Example Sources:

* @avantgame. [“10 years from now, what do you think will be the biggest positive change we will have made as a result of the pandemic?](https://twitter.com/avantgame/status/1259908625264373760?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1259908625264373760%7Ctwgr%5Eshare_3&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fview.genial.ly%2FPreview%2FIndex%2F5f4520a0b434c00d7b974269%3FidSlide%3Df56fe267-8a61-4871-a526-5d03fefd6f85fullscreen%3Dfalsepreview%3Dtruesocial%3Dfalse).” *Twitter*, 11 May 2020, 2:09 p.m.
* Blau, Ina, and Tamar Shamir-Inbal. [“Digital Technologies for Promoting ‘student Voice’ and Co-Creating Learning Experience in an Academic Course.”](https://search.library.albany.edu/permalink/01SUNY_ALB/1gnucdc/cdi_proquest_journals_1966294207)*Instructional Science*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2017.
* Mintz, Veronique. “[Why I’m Learning More with Distance Learning Than I Do in School](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/05/opinion/coronavirus-pandemic-distance-learning.html).” *New York Times*, 5 May 2020.
* Fresen, Jill W. [“Embracing Distance Education in a Blended Learning Model: Challenges and Prospects.”](https://search.library.albany.edu/permalink/01SUNY_ALB/1gnucdc/cdi_crossref_primary_10_1080_01587919_2018_1457949) Distance Education, vol. 39, no. 2, 2018.
* Budhai, Stephanie Smith, and Ke’Anna Brown Skipwith. [*Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies*](https://search.library.albany.edu/permalink/01SUNY_ALB/1c53jur/alma990027756030204808). New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.
* Brown, Jennifer. [“How Educators are Keeping Students Engaged Remotely.”](https://edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2020/05/how-educators-are-keeping-students-engaged-remotely) *EdTech Magazine*, 4 May 2020.

# Need More Help?

Thank you for watching this video on the scholarly conversation. Remember that the librarians are here to help you 24/7. I’ve also listed some resources that may be particularly useful. Good luck! Please reach out to us if you have any questions.

* [Exploring Scholarly Research](https://sites.google.com/view/metaliteracy/wci-badges/exploring-scholarly-research)
* [Finding and Identifying Scholarly Articles](https://library.albany.edu/infolit/resource/scholarly3)
* [Chat with a Librarian 24/7](https://albany.libanswers.com/)