

up disagreeing with an author, you first have to show that you have really listened to what he or she is saying, have fully grasped his or her arguments, and can accurately summarize those arguments. Without such deep, attentive listening, any critique you make will be superficial and decidedly uncritical. It will be a critique that says more about you than about the writer or idea you're supposedly responding to.

In this chapter we have tried to show that reading for the conversation means looking not just for the thesis of a text in isolation but for the view or views that motivate that thesis—the “they say.” We have also tried to show that reading for the conversation means being alert for the different strategies writers use to engage the view(s) that are motivating them, since not all writers engage other perspectives in the same way. Some writers explicitly identify and summarize a view they are responding to at the outset of their text and then return to it frequently as their text unfolds. Some refer only obliquely to a view that is motivating them, assuming that readers will be able to reconstruct that view on their own. Other writers may not explicitly distinguish their own view from the views they are questioning in ways that all of us find clear, leaving some readers to wonder whether a given view is the writer's own or one that he or she is challenging. And some writers push off against the “they say” that is motivating them in a challenging academic language that requires readers to translate what they are saying into more accessible, everyday terms. In sum, they are saying into more accessible, everyday terms. In sum, then, though most persuasive writers do follow a conversational “they say / I say” pattern, they do so in a great variety of ways. What this means for readers is that they need to be armed with various strategies for detecting the conversations in what they read, even when those conversations are not self-evident.

“ANALYZE THIS”

Writing in the Social Sciences

ERIN ACKERMAN



SOCIAL SCIENCE is the study of people—how they behave and relate to one another, and the organizations and institutions that facilitate these interactions. People are complicated, so any study of human behavior is at best partial, taking into account some elements of what people do and why, but not always explaining those actions definitively. As a result, it is the subject of constant conversation and argument.

Consider some of the topics studied in the social sciences: minimum wage laws, immigration policy, health care, what causes aggressive behavior, employment discrimination. Got an opinion on any of these topics? You aren't alone. But in the writing you do as a student of the social sciences, you need to write about more

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than just your opinions. Good writing in the social sciences, as in other academic disciplines, requires that you demonstrate that you have examined what you think and why. The best way to do that is to bring your views into conversation with those expressed by others and to test what you and others think against a review of evidence. In other words, you'll need to start with what others say and then present what you say as a response.

Consider the following example from an op-ed in the *New York Times* by two psychology professors:

Is video game addiction a real thing?

It's certainly common to hear parents complain that their children are "addicted" to video games. Some researchers even claim that these games are comparable to illegal drugs in terms of their influence on the brain—that they are "digital heroin" (the neuroscientist Peter C. Whybrow) or "digital pharmakeia" (the neuroscientist Andrew Doan). The American Psychiatric Association has identified internet gaming disorder as a possible psychiatric illness, and the World Health Organization has proposed including "gaming disorder" in its catalog of mental diseases, along with drug and alcohol addiction.

This is all terribly misguided. Playing video games is not addictive in any meaningful sense. It is normal behavior that, while perhaps in many cases a waste of time, is not damaging or disruptive of lives in the way drug or alcohol use can be.

CHRISTOPHER J. FERGUSON AND PATRICK MARKEY,
"Video Games Aren't Addictive"

In other words, "they" (parents, other researchers, health organizations) say that the video games are addictive, whereas Ferguson and Markey disagree. In the rest of the op-ed, they argue that video game critics have misinterpreted the evidence and are not being very precise with what counts as "addiction."

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This chapter explores some of the basic moves social science writers make. Writing in the social sciences often takes the form of a research paper that generally includes several core components: a strong introduction and thesis, a literature review, and the writer's own analysis, including presentation of evidence/data and consideration of implications. The introduction sets out the thesis, or point, of the paper, briefly explaining the topic or question you are investigating and, previewing what you will say in your paper and how it fits into the preexisting conversation. The literature review summarizes what has already been said on your topic. Your analysis allows you to present evidence (the information, or data, about human behavior that you are measuring or testing against what other people have said), to explain the conclusions you have drawn based on your investigation, and to discuss the implications of your research. Do you agree, disagree, or some combination of both, with what has been said by others? What reasons can you give for why you feel that way? And so what? Who should be interested in what you have to say, and why?

You may get other types of writing assignments in the social sciences, such as preparing a policy memo, writing a legal brief, or designing a grant or research proposal. While there may be differences from the research papers in terms of the format and audience for these assignments, the purposes of sections of the research paper and the moves discussed here will help you with those assignments as well.

THE INTRODUCTION AND THESIS: "THIS PAPER CHALLENGES . . ."

Your introduction sets forth what you plan to say in your essay. You might evaluate the work of earlier scholars or certain widely

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held assumptions and find them incorrect when measured against new events or data. Alternatively, you might point out that an author's work is largely correct, but that it could use some qualifications or be extended in some way. Or you might identify a gap in our knowledge—we know a great deal about topic X but almost nothing about some other closely related topic. In each of these instances, your introduction needs to cover both "they say" and "I say" perspectives. If you stop after the "they say," your readers won't know what you are bringing to the conversation. Similarly, if you were to jump right to the "I say" portion of your argument, readers might wonder why you need to say anything at all.

Sometimes you join the conversation at a point where the discussion seems settled. One or more views about a topic have become so widely accepted among a group of scholars or society at large that these views are essentially the conventional way of thinking about the topic. You may wish to offer new reasons to support this interpretation, or you may wish to call these standard views into question. To do so, you must first introduce and identify these widely held beliefs and then present your own view. In fact, much of the writing in the social sciences takes the form of calling into question that which we think we already know. Consider the following example from an article in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*:

Fifteen years ago, Milton Friedman's 1957 treatise *A Theory of the Consumption Function* seemed badly dated. Dynamic optimization theory had not been employed much in economics when Friedman wrote, and utility theory was still comparatively primitive, so his statement of the "permanent income hypothesis" never actually specified a formal mathematical model of behavior derived explicitly from utility maximization . . . [W]hen other economists subsequently

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found multiperiod maximizing models that could be solved explicitly, the implications of those models differed sharply from Friedman's intuitive description of his "model." Furthermore, empirical tests in the 1970s and 1980s often rejected these rigorous versions of the permanent income hypothesis in favor of an alternative hypothesis that many households simply spent all of their current income.

Today, with the benefit of a further round of mathematical (and computational) advances, Friedman's (1957) original analysis looks more prescient than primitive . . .

CHRISTOPHER D. CARROLL, "A Theory of Consumption Function, With and Without Liquidity Constraints," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*

This introduction makes clear that Carroll will defend Milton Friedman against some major criticisms of his work. Carroll mentions what has been said about Friedman's work and then goes on to say that the critiques turn out to be wrong and to suggest that Friedman's work reemerges as persuasive. A template of Carroll's introduction might look something like this: Economics research in the last fifteen years suggested Friedman's 1957 treatise was _____ because _____. In other words, they say that Friedman's work is not accurate because of _____, _____, and _____. Recent research convinces me, however, that Friedman's work makes sense.

In some cases, however, there may not be a strong consensus among experts on a topic. You might enter the ongoing debate by casting your vote with one side or another or by offering an alternative view. In the following example, Shari Berman identifies two competing accounts of how to explain world events in the twentieth century and then puts forth a third view.

Conventional wisdom about twentieth-century ideologies rests on two simple narratives. One focuses on the struggle for dominance

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between democracy and its alternatives. . . . The other narrative focuses on the competition between free-market capitalism and its rivals. . . . Both of these narratives obviously contain some truth. . . . Yet both only tell part of the story, which is why their common conclusion—neoliberalism as the "end of History"—is unsatisfying and misleading.

What the two conventional narratives fail to mention is that a third struggle was also going on: between those ideologies that believed in the primacy of economics and those that believed in the primacy of politics.

SHARI BERMAN, "The Primacy of Economics versus the Primacy of Politics: Understanding the Ideological Dynamics of the Twentieth Century," *Perspectives on Politics*

After identifying the two competing narratives, Berman suggests a third view—and later goes on to argue that this third view explains current debates over globalization. A template for this type of introduction might look something like this: In recent discussions of _____, a controversial aspect has been _____. On the one hand, some argue that _____. On the other hand, others argue that _____. Neither of these arguments, however, considers the alternative view that _____.

Given the complexity of many of the issues studied in the social sciences, however, you may sometimes agree *and* disagree with existing views—pointing out things that you believe are correct or have merit, while disagreeing with or refining other points. In the example below, anthropologist Sally Engle Merry agrees with another scholar about something that is a key trait of modern society but argues that this trait has a different origin than the other author identifies.

Although I agree with Rose that an increasing emphasis on governing the soul is characteristic of modern society, I see the transformation not as evolutionary but as the product of social mobilization and political struggle.

SALLY ENGLE MERRY, "Rights, Religion, and Community: Approaches to Violence against Women in the Context of Globalization," *Law and Society Review*

Here are some templates for agreeing and disagreeing:

- ▶ Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that _____.
- ▶ Although I disagree with X on _____ and _____, I agree with her conclusion that _____.
- ▶ Political scientists studying _____ have argued that it is caused by _____. While _____ contributes to the problem, _____ is also an important factor.
- ▶ While noting _____, I contend _____.

In the process of examining people from different angles, social scientists sometimes identify gaps—areas that have not been explored in previous research.

In the following example, several sociologists identify such a gap.

Family scholars have long argued that the study of dating deserves more attention (Klemet, 1971), as dating is an important part of the life course at any age and often a precursor to marriage (Levesque & Caron, 2004), . . .

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The central research questions we seek to answer with this study are whether and how the significance of particular dating rituals are patterned by gender and race simultaneously. We use a racially diverse data set of traditional-aged college students from a variety of college contexts. Understanding gender and racial differences in the assessment of dating rituals helps us explore the extent to which relationship activities are given similar importance across institutional and cultural lines. Most of the studies that inform our knowledge of dating and relationships are unable to draw conclusions regarding racial differences because the sample is Caucasian (e.g., Bogle, 2008), or primarily so (e.g., Manning & Smock, 2005). Race has been recently argued to be an often-overlooked variable in studies examining social psychological processes because of the prevalence of sample limitations as well as habitual oversight in the literature (Hunt, Jackson, Powell, & Steelman, 2000). Additionally, a failure to examine both gender and race prevents assessment of whether gendered beliefs are shared across groups. Gauging the extent of differences in beliefs among different population subgroups is critical to advancing the study of relationship dynamics (see Weaver & Ganong, 2004).

PAMELA BRABOV JACKSON, SIBYL KLEINER,
CLAUDIA GEIST, AND KARA CEBULKO, "Conventions of Courtship:
Gender and Race Differences in the Significance of Dating Rituals,"
Journal of Family Issues

Jackson and her coauthors note that, while other scholars have said that studying dating is important and have examined some aspects of dating, we have little information about whether attitudes about dating activities (such as sexual intimacy, gift exchange, and meeting the family) vary across groups by gender and race. Their study aims to fill this gap in our understanding of relationships.

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Here are some templates for introducing gaps in the existing research:

- ▶ Studies of X have indicated _____. It is not clear, however, that this conclusion applies to _____.
- ▶ _____ often take for granted that _____. Few have investigated this assumption, however.
- ▶ X's work tells us a great deal about _____. Can this work be generalized to _____?
- ▶ Our understanding of _____ remains incomplete because previous work has not examined _____.

Again, a good introduction indicates what you have to say in the larger context of what others have said. Throughout the rest of your paper, you will move back and forth between the "they say" and the "I say," adding more details.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW:
"PRIOR RESEARCH INDICATES"

The point of a literature review is to establish the state of knowledge on your topic. Before you (and your reader) can properly consider an issue, you need to understand the conversation about your topic that has already taken place (and is likely still in progress). In the literature review, you explain what "they say" in more detail, summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting the viewpoints to which you are responding. But you need to balance what they are saying with your own focus. You need to characterize someone else's work fairly and accurately

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but set up the points you yourself want to make by selecting the details that are relevant to your own perspective and observations.

It is common in the social sciences to summarize several arguments in a single paragraph or even a single sentence, grouping several sources together by their important ideas or other attributes. The example below cites some key findings and conclusions of psychological research that should be of interest to motivated college students looking to improve their academic performance.

Some people may associate sacrificing hours of sleep with being studious, but the reality is that sleep deprivation can hurt your cognitive functioning without your being aware of it (e.g., becoming worse at paying attention and remembering things; Goel, Rao, Durmer, & Dinges, 2009; Pilcher & Walters, 1997)... Sleep affects learning and memory by organizing and consolidating memories from the day (Diekelmann & Born, 2010; Rasch & Born, 2013), which can lead to better problem-solving ability and creativity (Verteiger, Rose, Wagner, Yordanova, & Kolev, 2013).

ADAM L. PUTNAM, VICTOR W. SUNGKHASETTEE, AND
HENRY L. ROEDIGER, III, "Optimizing Learning in College:
Tips from Cognitive Psychology," *Perspectives on
Psychological Science*

A template for this paragraph might look like this: Students believe _____, but researchers disagree because _____. According to researchers, negative consequences of sleep deprivation include _____. The research shows that a positive effect of sleep is _____, which improves _____. Such summaries are brief, bringing together relevant arguments by several scholars to provide an overview of

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scholarly work on a particular topic. In writing such a summary, you need to ask yourself how the authors themselves might describe their positions and also consider what in their work is relevant for the point you wish to make. This kind of summary is especially appropriate when you have a large amount of research material on a topic and want to identify the major strands of a debate or to show how the work of one author builds on that of another. Here are some templates for overview summaries:

- ▶ In addressing the question of _____, researchers have considered several explanations for _____. X argues that _____. According to Y and Z, another plausible explanation is _____.
- ▶ What is the effect of _____ on _____? Previous work on _____ by X and by Y and Z supports _____.
- ▶ Scholars point to the role of _____ in _____.
- ▶ Existing research on _____ presents convincing evidence of _____.

Sometimes you may need to say more about the works you cite. On a midterm or final exam, for example, you may need to demonstrate that you have a deep familiarity with a particular work. And in some disciplines of the social sciences, longer, more detailed literature reviews are the standard. Your instructor and the articles he or she has assigned are your best guides for the length and level of detail of your literature review. Other times, the work of certain authors is especially important for your argument, and therefore you need to provide more details to explain what these authors have said. See how political scientists Hahrie Han and Lisa Argyle, in a report for the Ford

Foundation, summarize an argument that is central to their investigation of improving democratic participation.

[A]t the root of declining rates of participation is the sense that people do not feel like their participation matters. People do not feel like they have any real reason or opportunity to exercise voice in the political process. People's sense of agency is in decline, especially given negative or incomplete experiences of government in their lives.

This lack of caring comes as no surprise when we examine research showing that most people have negative or, at best, incomplete experiences of the role of government in their lives. Suzanne Mettler, for instance, finds that many middle-class people who benefit from different government programs—ranging from education savings accounts to welfare to tax credits—believe that they “have not used a government social program.” In addition, other scholars find a trend towards increasing privatization of public goods and political processes in the twenty-first century. As a result, government is what Mettler calls a “submerged state,” since the role of government in people’s lives is effectively submerged from view.

HARRIE HAN AND LISA ARGYLE, “A Program Review of the Promoting Electoral Reform and Democratic Participation (PERDP) Initiative,” *Ford Foundation*

Note that Han and Argyle start by identifying the broad problem of lack of participation and then explain how Mettler’s work describes how middle-class people may be unaware of the role of government in their lives, leading Mettler to argue for the idea of the “submerged state.”

You may want to include direct quotations of what others have said, as Han and Argyle do. Using an author’s exact words

helps you demonstrate that you are representing him or her fairly. But you cannot simply insert a quotation; you need to explain to your readers what it means for your point. Consider the following example drawn from a political science book on the debate over tort reform.

The essence of *agenda setting* was well enunciated by E. E. Schattschneider: “In politics as in everything else, it makes a great difference whose game we play” (1960, 47). In short, the ability to define or control the rules, terms, or perceived options in a contest over policy greatly affects the prospects for winning.

WILLIAM HALTOM AND MICHAEL McCANN, *Distorting the Law: Politics, Media, and the Litigation Crisis*

Notice how Haltom and McCann first quote Schattschneider and then explain in their own words how political agenda setting can be thought of as a game, with winners and losers.

Remember that whenever you summarize, quote, or paraphrase the work of others, credit must be given in the form of a citation to the original work. The words may be your own, but if the idea comes from someone else you must give credit to the original work. There are several formats for documenting sources. Consult your instructor for help choosing which citation style to use.

THE ANALYSIS

The literature review covers what others have said on your topic. The analysis allows you to present and support your own response. In the introduction you indicate whether you agree, disagree, or some combination of both with what others have said. You will want to expand on how you have formed your opinion and why others should care about your topic.

“The Data Indicate”

The social sciences use evidence to develop and test explanations. This evidence is often referred to as data. Data can be quantitative or qualitative and can come from a number of sources. You might use statistics related to GDP growth, unemployment, voting rates, or demographics. You might report results from an experiment or simulation. Or you could use surveys, interviews, or other first-person accounts.

Regardless of the type of data used, it is important to do three things: define your data, indicate where you got the data, and then say what you have done with your data. For a chapter in their book assessing media coverage of female candidates, political scientists Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless explain how they assembled a data set.

From the perspective of campaign professionals and voters, local newspaper coverage remains the most important news source during House campaigns

We began by selecting the appropriate newspaper for each House race in 2010 and 2014 [W]e identified every news story during the thirty days leading up to the election that mentioned at least one of the two major-party candidates

Our data collection efforts produced 10,375 stories about 1,550 candidates who received at least some local news coverage in either the 2010 or 2014 midterms

Coders read the full text of each article and recorded several pieces of information. First, they tracked the number of times a candidate’s sex or gender was mentioned Second, we recorded the number of explicit references to candidate traits, both positive and negative (e.g., “capable” and “ineffective”)

Third, we tracked every time an issue was mentioned in connection with a candidate We then classified issues in two ways:

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- (1) We assigned each issue to one of the eight broad categories . . . and
- (2) we classified a subset of the topics as “women’s” or “men’s” issues.

DANNY HAYES AND JENNIFER L. LAWLESS, *Women on the Run: Gender, Media, and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era*

Hayes and Lawless explain how they collected their data—local newspaper coverage of congressional candidates—and explain how they coded and classified the coverage to allow them to perform statistical analysis of the news pieces. While you probably won’t collect 10,000+ news items for a class project, you could collect information (such as media coverage, interview responses, or legal briefs) and analyze and sort them to identify patterns such as repeated words and ideas.

If your data are quantitative, you also need to explain them. Sociologist Jonahan Horowitz’s research concludes that job quality influences personal assessments of well-being by “improving social life, altering class identification, affecting physical health, and increasing amounts of leisure time.” See how he introduces the data he analyzes:

In this study, I use data from the General Social Survey (GSS) and structural equation modeling to test relationships between job quality and subjective wellbeing. The GSS is a nationally representative sample of adults in the United States that asks a large number of questions about experiences at work (Smith et al. 2010). In particular, the GSS introduced a new battery of questions titled “Quality of Working Life” in 2002 (and repeated in 2006 and 2010) which includes multiple questions about several job quality dimensions.

JONATHAN HOROWITZ, “Dimensions of Job Quality, Mechanisms, and Subjective Well-Being in the United States,” *Sociological Forum*

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Here are some templates for discussing data:

- ▶ In order to test the hypothesis that _____, we assessed _____ . Our calculations suggest _____ .
- ▶ I used _____ to investigate _____. The results of this investigation indicate _____ .

“But Others May Object . . .”

No matter how strongly your data support your argument, there are almost surely other perspectives (and thus other data) that you need to acknowledge. By considering possible objections to your argument and taking them seriously, you demonstrate that you’ve done your work and that you’re aware of other perspectives—and most important, you present your own argument as part of an ongoing conversation.

See how law professor Michelle Alexander acknowledges that there may be objections to her argument describing trends in mass incarceration as “the new Jim Crow.”

Some might argue that as disturbing as this system appears to be, there is nothing particularly new about mass incarceration; it is merely a continuation of past drug wars and biased law enforcement practices. Racial bias in our criminal justice system is simply an old problem that has gotten worse, and the social excommunication of “criminals” has a long history; it is not a recent invention. There is some merit to this argument.

MICHELLE ALEXANDER, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

Alexander imagines a conversation with people who might be skeptical about her argument, particularly her claim that this represents a “new” development. And she responds that they

are correct, to a point. After acknowledging her agreement with the assessment of historical racial bias in the criminal justice system, she goes on in the rest of her chapter to explain that the expanded scope and consequences of contemporary mass incarceration have caused dramatic differences in society.

Someone may object because there are related phenomena that your analysis does not explain or because you do not have the right data to investigate a particular question. Or perhaps someone may object to assumptions underlying your argument or how you handled your data. Here are some templates for considering naysayers:

- ▶ _____ might object that _____ .
- ▶ Is my claim realistic? I have argued _____, but readers may question _____ .
- ▶ My explanation accounts for _____ but does not explain _____ . This is because _____ .

“Why Should We Care?”

Who should care about your research, and why? Since the social sciences attempt to explain human behavior, it is important to consider how your research affects the assumptions we make about human behavior. In addition, you might offer recommendations for how other social scientists might continue to explore an issue, or what actions policymakers should take.

In the following example, sociologist Devah Pager identifies the implications of her study of the way having a criminal record affects a person applying for jobs.

[I]n terms of policy implications, this research has troubling conclusions. In our frenzy of locking people up, our “crime control”

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policies may in fact exacerbate the very conditions that lead to crime in the first place. Research consistently shows that finding quality steady employment is one of the strongest predictors of desistance from crime (Shover 1996; Sampson and Laub 1993; Uggen 2000). The fact that a criminal record severely limits employment opportunities—particularly among blacks—suggests that these individuals are left with few viable alternatives.

DEVAN PAGER, "The Mark of a Criminal Record,"
The American Journal of Sociology

Pager's conclusion that a criminal record negatively affects employment chances creates a vicious circle, she says: steady employment discourages recidivism, but a criminal record makes it harder to get a job.

In answering the "so what?" question, you need to explain why your readers should care. Although sometimes the implications of your work may be so broad that they would be of interest to almost anyone, it's never a bad idea to identify explicitly any groups of people who will find your work important.

Templates for establishing why your claims matter:

- ▶ X is important because _____.
- ▶ Ultimately, what is at stake here is _____.
- ▶ The finding that _____ should be of interest to _____ because _____.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the complexity of people allows us to look at their behavior from many different viewpoints. Much has been, and will be, said about how and why people do the things they do. As a result, we can look

at writing in the social sciences as an ongoing conversation. When you join this conversation, the "they say / I say" framework will help you figure out what has already been said (they say) and what you can add (I say). The components of social science writing presented in this chapter are tools to help you join that conversation.