**How to enter a research conversation**

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Gonna conduct research? Good news. Research doesn't take place in a vacuum. Whatever your topic, you'll find that others are thinking about it too. These other people, your sources, are asking questions, debating evidence, and agreeing and disagreeing about key points.

You're not alone. You're in the middle of a loud debate. Think about this debate as a research conversation. In this conversation, one expert will present evidence to support a position. Another might question the evidence and offer a counter position, and a third might argue that there is a middle ground to consider. It helps to listen and understand the arguments before you hop into the written conversation yourself.

How do you start? Start by writing questions you have about your topic. Read and view sources on the web and in databases. Focus your search by adding words, such as debate or controversy, to lead you into the conversation on the topic.

Here are two tips to help you step into a research conversation. The more you read about your topic, the more you'll learn who the experts are, whose work is cited most and considered influential, whose work is viewed as most controversial, and whose conclusions are considered credible. You'll learn, too, why and how the experts are agreeing and disagreeing with one another, and it will start to sound like a noisy conversation of voices. Find out what has been written, but also what's missing from the conversation, what conclusions need to be questioned, what evidence hasn't been examined sufficiently, what counterargument do you want to propose.

Sketch out the positions and ask yourself, what's missing here? Look for your entry point. An annotated bibliography helps you map and then enter a research debate. As a college researcher, you're being invited to participate in a world of ideas. Learn from the experts in your conversation, stake your position, and move the conversation forward with your own entry in the debate.

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