STEP 3

How do you have a conversation with an academic article?

This is a mini lesson that teaches students to have a conversation with an academic article. Also, included find an example of a student's written record of what she learned from her conversation with an article. As with the other resources, we hope you will selectively borrow, revise and edit the lesson so that it will work for your needs and circumstances.

"Okay, you found an article, now what?"

Here are some questions students might "ask" an article so that it can help them with the next research phase:

a. **Does the article provide critical background information?** For example, a class considering the advantages of lowering the voting age for local elections, would be interested to know if any towns have already lowered the voting age for local elections.

b. **Does the article suggest you should tweak your research question?** Do you and your students need to refine your (classes) research question? For example, are your fellow researchers (the authors of the research articles you have seen) using a different word for the issue you are interested in—employment instead of jobs? If yes, do you want to change the wording of your question slightly so that you can more easily build on existing work and contribute to future researchers.

c. **Can the article help you design your own original research?** In the next few weeks, you and your students will design your own research. The class is going to choose a method to collect your data—interviews, focus groups, surveys etc.—

and decide what population you should interview or survey. You can learn a lot from the research design choices previous researchers have made. If a particular method worked well, you might try that method AND ensure that your research is distinctive by asking different questions or looking at a different population—young people instead of adults. Alternatively, if most researchers are using surveys and interviews you might try focus groups to get a different perspective on the issue.

d. **Does the article alert you to possible or surprising findings you should be on the lookout for when you analyze your data?** What did previous researchers who looked at questions like yours find? You should keep these findings in mind when you complete your research so that you can compare your findings to theirs. Will your findings support previous research, or will they be surprising—that, different from or opposed to previous research.

Keep a record of citation information.

For the purpose of correctly citing your sources record the following information: authors, title, journal, pages, and year of publication. Students should note two things they learned from the article that can help them with their research. Those two things might be a sentence or two about the perspectives shared in the article and a direct quote. They may also want to note whether the article helped them with background information, the wording of their research question, research design or possible findings. All this information should be on an index card or its' electronic equivalent. There are plenty of software programs that are designed to track American Psychological Association (APA) citations. These are all good ways to keep track of what your students have found in the process of conducting a literature review.

Here is an example of what an experienced student recorded on her index card:

Smith, Joe. (2015). *Civic Engagement in Suburban America*. The Journal of Civil Discourse. Anytown Publishing Company. Chicago, Illinois. Volume 3. Pages 17-23.

Our research is: "What is the Relationship between Civic Engagement and Social Media in Rye Town, New York."

This article is an analysis of government efforts to utilize social media and networking sources to engage younger generations and increase their political participation. The study used a specific layout that measured how people who wanted to be politically active searched and found information involving their governments through social media and social networking. Different technologies were incorporated to see the impact of all different forms of media. I wonder if we could design something like this for our research. The study had two major results. The first was that searching via social media and networking is affected by the searcher, their interests, and their politics.

We might use this article to create a survey questions that asks about what is the motivating issue for people in our community to look at social media. Secondly, the research proved that social networking is underused by political participants even when they want to utilize such tools. We might want to find out why social networking is underutilized, even by people who are interested in social media.