

Living Burkean Parlor Activity for Social Sciences Writing Unit (Fieldwork Lab Report)

Materials: Printed conversation starters

Tech: None

Time: 15 minutes

Objectives:

- Students will **identify** challenges of entering the “unending” scholarly conversation
- Students will **relate** their experiences in this activity to their upcoming assignment

Directions:

Divide students into groups of 4-5. Ask one student from each group to volunteer to step out into the hallway. Give the remaining students in each group a conversation starter. Explain that their peer will come in from the hallway and attempt to join the conversation at the table. Tell them that they should not explicitly tell their peer what the topic of conversation is, or directly address the peer. Instruct them to begin discussing the topic energetically.

After the conversations are underway, invite the students back in from the hallway and tell them to rejoin their group and enter the conversation as best they can. After about 2-3 minutes, ask the students to return to the hallway and let conversation continue for another minute.

Talking points:

For those who entered the conversation late, what were some challenges you faced? What strategies did you use to enter the conversation? How successful were you in integrating yourself into the conversation?

For those who knew the topic, what were some challenges you faced? What did you observe about your peer’s ability to participate in the conversation? What did you talk about after they left again? Did your conversation change from the beginning topic at any point?

Explain Kenneth Burke’s parlor metaphor—scholarly writing is an “unending conversation.” Every time someone creates new scholarly research or writing it is like “showing up late to a party” and trying to find a place to fit in. After your writing is turned in and you “leave the party,” the conversation does not end. People will still be talking about what you wrote or said and you might respond to them at a different party in the future.

How does this activity foreshadow what you will be doing when you collect your own fieldwork data based on current research in the social sciences?

Printable Sample Conversation Starters

Should college athletes be paid salaries like professionals? Why or why not?

If you could commit any crime and get away with it, what would you do? What moral/ethical criteria would you use?

What is the best show on TV right now and why should others watch it?

What do you think the greatest technological advancement of the 21st century will be?

If you could invent something that would change society, what would you create?