

Scholarship: The Paradoxes of the 14 C's

Peggy L. Chinn, RN, PhD, FAAN

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Conflict

Present a complete diversity of points of view on your topic, summarizing the major perspectives you have found and explaining in your own words how each point of view is plausible. Keep coming back to the question: "so what?" in order to lead the reader through the maze of differences of opinion.

Commonalities

Summarize in your own words the common elements in the existing literature. Highlight what is important about the commonalities for your work. Show the reader any traceable influence from one author to another. Integrate your own ideas as you develop the common "picture."

Content

Substantive content is fundamental. Focus on a main message and show how it is important to the discipline. Open and close with a clear statement of your message, and make sure that everything in between builds toward that message.

Context

Scholarly ideas do not occur in a vacuum. Provide a sense of the context in which your ideas have emerged. If you are taking issue with the ideas of others, explain the context in which the others' ideas emerged, showing respect for the importance of diversity in the development of the discipline.

Credited

Use the literature in your area to show influences on your own ideas. Give credit to the works that you are drawing on as predecessors to yours. Always use primary sources unless your purpose is to show the influence of one author on another. Show the reader how your perspective differs from what precedes you.

Creative

Your voice must be present. Focus on how your voice differs from other authors in the field. Begin by having a clear, single statement of your own main message, and keep coming back to that idea as you build your text. Make sure the reader gets the point you are making.

Credible

Factual and interpretive content must be accurate, plausible, and well founded. Have informed reviewers check your work for accuracy of facts, distortions of original meanings or inadvertent misrepresentations of other authors' works, especially if your content is largely interpretive.

Critical

Scholarly writing takes nothing as given, not even the author's own ideas. Maintain an open, searching posture, seeking new possibilities and understandings. If you think that your idea is "better" than the ideas of other scholars, state your perspective along with an explicit or implied invitation to the reader for ongoing critical dialogue.

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Current

Always include the most current sources that address the topic in your field. If you have looked for current literature and are absolutely sure that none exists, include text that assesses the "state of the art" in your field, and explain why you are taking up this topic in the absence of any current interest in it.

Classic

Classic sources are those that have been around for a while, and that continue to be consistently cited in your field. Find classic literature by noticing that it is frequently cited in the current literature, and by noticing that the more experience scholars in your discipline know and talk about a particular source or author.

Comprehensive

Take every step possible to cover the breadth of ideas related to the topic you are developing. Ask colleagues who know the field to critique your early drafts to help you identify any oversights you have made in terms of major ideas, or important literature that needs to be acknowledge.

Concise

Keep re-writing your drafts to make sure you are getting to the point, and that you eliminate repetitive ideas and phrases. Beware of entire sections that wander away from the main purpose of your paper. Maintain a focus on your main idea as you weave subtopics, background and context together. Keep asking yourself: "Is this necessary to include?"

Clear

As you near a final draft, be sure you have used the simplest words possible to convey your meaning. If you must retain (keep) a technical or professional word, make sure this word is essential to convey your meaning. Edit for long sentences that obscure your flow of thought, or that confuse your meaning. Have reviewers point out any passages where your meaning is not clear.

Complex

Use transitions to weave a tapestry of many meanings together to form a whole. As you re-write, trace the flow of ideas to make sure that you have covered all the essential material needed to address your topic to its fullest, and that you have not robbed your presentation of the richness it requires. Lead the reader from one point to another with explanatory passages and bridges that keep focusing on, and building, your main point.
