

Joining the Dialogue: Practices for Ethical Research Writing. Bettina Stumm. Broadview Press, 2021

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Book Review

Stumm, B. *Joining the dialogue: Practices for ethical research writing*. Broadview Press.

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Bettina Stumm's *Joining the Dialogue: Practices for Ethical Research Writing* is a composition textbook in the tradition of Janet Giltrow's *Academic Writing: An Introduction* and Gerald Graff's and Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say* in the way that it views research writing as a dialogue. The book focuses on writing as a process and the ethical aspects of composition and is divided into four main parts, (a) "Approaching Academic Dialogue", (b) "Developing Skills of Reception", (c) "Developing Skills of Response", and (d) "Participating in Academic Dialogue". The first part deals with the rhetorical situation of research writing, the second addresses writing as a conversation, the third focuses on stance and perspective, and the final part describes the writing process itself. While Stumm's book is similar to Giltrow's and Graff and Birkenstein's, there are notable differences. While Giltrow's book is often used as a textbook for upper division composition classes because of its advanced-level readings, *They Say / I Say* emphasizes templates and helps students to find their voice, making it a popular textbook for first-year English and writing courses. Stumm's book is a mix of these two books and is marketed as a central textbook for a composition course.

Part 1, "Approaching Academic Dialogue", provides a theoretical foundation for the other three parts of the book. In chapter 1, to explain the concept of audience, Stumm draws on current examples of literature by using Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*, which is often assigned in first-year composition classes. The passage selected is a brief history of Iran that establishes the tone of the graphic novel. With this example, students are exposed to an analysis of a non-traditional text genre. Graphic novels are increasingly used in academic settings.

To define genre in chapter 2, Stumm uses Giltrow et al.'s definition of the term (from *Academic Writing: An Introduction*, 2009), which is a genre is a situation plus a form of communication (Stumm 2021, p. 37). Defining genre has become increasingly important in professional writing,

where genres such as cover letters, resumes, instruction manuals, and formal complaint letters all have unique characteristics. To further describe genre, Stumm reminds the reader that writing has form and style, with form referring to the formal organization of a piece of writing and style referring to the individual expression in writing. The strength of the first two chapters is the lively and humorous way in which important concepts are introduced (e.g. with stick figure cartoons as illustrations).

In part 2, “Developing Skills of Reception”, Stumm starts chapter 3 with a discussion of summary writing. She uses expressions from everyday language (e.g. informal reported speech) before addressing academic types of summaries (e. g. the summary process is split into attentive listening, interpretation, synthesis, representation, and acknowledgment). The chapter also includes an overview of signal words that can be used in a summary on page 63 (e.g. argue, assess, assume, claim, etc.). In chapter 4, Stumm describes how the different ways of interpretation (e. g. which parts of the text will be emphasized) can influence a summary. Both chapters are concise, but very efficient in addressing the topic.

In chapter 5, Stumm explores the notion of “writing as conversation”. This part of the book is similar to Graff and Birkenstein’s (2021) description of academic writing as a dialogical action. Stumm’s two options for writing as conversation are “orchestrating connection and agreement” and “orchestrating contrast or difference” (p. 107). Her description makes sense—in that academic writing either agrees or disagrees with previous arguments, sometimes with limitations. Agreeing and disagreeing are aspects that are frequently used in textbooks with a dialogical approach to research writing, so Stumm brings up ethical citation in chapter 6, moving to the integration of outside sources into students’ own writing. Acknowledging others is an important part of ethical research writing. Stumm states that citations can serve four different purposes: introducing, representing, documenting, and explaining. The section on ethical citations makes use of templates and examples for citation to illustrate the concept for the readers. Overall, in this chapter students are reminded that citation is a means of acknowledging others, not just a formality.

In part 3, “Developing skills of Response”, Stumm focuses on rhetorical stance and its implications in claims and responses in chapter 7. A writer can either assert or hypothesize, and there are different types of reasoning behind either stance. The chapter on critical engagement (chapter 8) introduces critical thinking and critical response. Like *They Say / I Say*, Stumm uses examples from Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” to define a critical response (p. 176). Possible responses are classified as agreeing and adding, honing, questioning, solving, and

disagreeing (see chapter 9). This makes sense in that research either adds to an existing topic, refines it, questions it, solves a problem, or disagrees with it. Stumm also gives suggestions for how to engage in debate and discussion. She notes, for example, that writers could start with a problem or issue, provide a validation, present a compelling claim, and offer reasons for supporting the claim. This model is also suitable for speech classes or composition classes that include speech components. Part 3 is highly efficient in describing the different types of response and debate.

In part 4, “Participating in Academic Dialogue”, Stumm describes research topics and proposals (see chapter 10). This section is intended for writers of academic research papers. Stumm suggests that the choice of a research topic can start with self-reflection and then move to analytical and specific questions. Like many other scholars, she points out that the journalist questions of what, where, when, who, why, and how can be used to establish an overview of the research topic. Stumm also gives directions about where to look for information and materials to get started with research. Criteria to assess the quality of the materials are listed as well.

Chapter 11 teaches the reader how to write effective introductions. Stumm assigns five different elements to the introduction of an academic piece of writing: introducing the topic, establishing the research context, pointing out a gap, taking a stance, and providing a trajectory. Stumm’s approach to introduction writing is far more detailed than in many other writing handbooks, which often limit the introduction to “why does it matter” and “why should we care”. Stumm notes that the introduction should not only grab the reader’s attention but should also situate the paper within the context of other research and describe the trajectory of its research goals. This outline of tasks to be accomplished by the opening part of a paper certainly creates a more serious scaffolding for an introduction.

In chapter 12, Stumm describes the organization of body paragraphs. Again, she references the dialogical structure of academic writing, where the research writer is engaged in a conversation with both expert researchers on one side and interested readers on the other side. Templates, signal words, and sample outlines are provided. Similar to other writing handbooks, the strategies of development that are mentioned include description, narration, example, definition, process analysis, comparison and contrast, classification and division, and cause and effect. There is significant value in this chapter; most students only use one or two of these techniques and will get to know a wider variety of options to develop a research topic.

Chapter 13 talks about the final part of an academic research paper - conclusions. Stumm mainly aims at teaching students to invite a response, another nod to the idea of research as a dialogue.

The final chapter of the book (chapter 14) examines drafts and revisions, and the author revisits grammatical terms such as passive voice, adverbs and adjectives, and editing for content vs. editing for organization. Many books on academic writing lack a dedicated chapter about revision, and the ones that address the topic often do not go into as much detail as Stumm does here. The chapter provides a complete overview of the different aspects of editing, from editing grammar and content all the way to editing formatting and references. Part 4's particular strength is the balanced treatment of the individual parts of the writing process, all of them being equally important to the product as a whole.

Overall, the book does an excellent job in providing examples for the terms that are being introduced and defined. Unlike some other writing handbooks, the templates do not just provide students with simple formulaic expressions, they express significantly different approaches to the development of a research angle. Furthermore, the writing samples cover a wide variety of topics. The one problem some instructors could have with this book is the absence of longer readings. If this book is used as the only textbook in a composition class, it will need additional readings that are selected by the instructor, such as newspaper articles or material from academic journals, so students can practice close reading and summary with complete texts and not just excerpts. This is an excellent book for a general composition class without a specific theme because it encourages students to both find their own voice and "join the dialogue" of academic discourse. In a class where students can choose their own topic for a research paper, the book is a perfect fit.

References

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