

Scholarly Moves with Sources

Forwarding

In his book, *Rewriting*, writing theorist Joseph Harris introduces a term called “forwarding” saying, “a writer forwards a text by taking words, images, or ideas from it and putting them to use in new contexts” (37).

In *forwarding* a text, you extend its uses and then shape it for your own purposes in writing. Such scholarly moves with sources put agency back on you, the writer. Sources are used in order for you to do something with them, not in place of analysis, development, or explanation (which is how beginning college writers may use sources).



Some forwarding “moves” that writers make:

ILLUSTRATING: When you use scenes, incidents, stories, or images from another text to illustrate a point you want to make.

You might use some part of a text as a representative example of a larger idea you are exploring and examining. In this sense, the other writer’s text is not the focus of your analysis, but a tool for your own thinking and a way to illustrate your ideas/discussion for readers.

AUTHORIZING: When you invoke the expertise or status of another writer to support your thinking.

A traditional form of authorizing is noting what others have already said on the subject before beginning to talk about your own project. Another form of authorizing is when you turn to another text for a key word or concept to help make your point. Sometimes you need a quick nod to an expert to help establish credibility or to offer background information/support.

BORROWING: When you draw on terms or concepts from other authors to use in thinking through your own subject.

In this instance, you are not using these authors to support your work, but to help advance it. You are not changing the author’s concept, but “borrowing” it and re-using it for your own purposes. When you borrow a term or key idea, you often say things like “As Author X suggests. . .”

EXTENDING: When you put your own spin on the term or concept that you take from another text.

Here, you are doing more than borrowing - you are commenting on or extending the meaning of the concept. You don’t just re-state it, but “re-write” or “revise” it. You are not criticizing the author’s meaning of the concept as much as you are bringing it forward and adding to its meaning or use. Extending another person’s ideas can be risky. You have to be careful that you don’t misappropriate their ideas. Think of it like a sample that a DJ might use. That prior text (the sample) is adapted/revised to create new meanings and new texts.



Countering

Another term Harris uses is “countering.” This move describes the work writers do to illuminate limitations or blindnesses in a text. He writes, “[a]s I use the term, to *counter* is not to nullify but to suggest a different way of thinking. It’s defining phrases are ‘on the other hand’ and ‘yes, but...’” (56).



He goes on to make a crucial point:

Countering looks at other views and texts not as wrong but as *partial* - in the sense of being both interested and incomplete... Your aim is not to refute what has been said before, to bring the discussion to an end, but to respond to prior views in ways that move the conversation in new directions. (Harris 56)

Notice that Harris is careful to point writers away from a negative critique that signals opinion or simply disagrees with a source. Instead, to counter is to remain respectful of the original text you are responding to and to see your contribution as a new line of inquiry or a new contribution (to improve knowledge and discussion).

Some countering “moves” that writers make:

ARGUING THE OTHER SIDE: Showing the usefulness of a term or idea that a writer has criticized or noting problems with one that she or he has argued for.

UNCOVERING VALUES: Analyzing a word or concept that a text has left undefined or unexamined.

For example, you might discover a question that has been left unasked or a term that another writer has taken for granted without examining it. You might highlight something inconsistent in another writer’s thinking. You might notice how another writer’s values seem to be unconsciously shaping his or her perspective. Or you might look for those aspects of the argument that another writer does not appear to find interesting and ask “why not?”

DISSENTING: Identifying a shared line of thought on an issue in order to note its limits. Sometimes writers counter a line of thought shared by several other writers and thinkers.

In this situation, you would show that a consensus exists between several writers before you define your alternative view. One template that writers use in this situation goes something like this, “Up until now, most writers have disagreed about points a, b, and c, but they all tend to agree on point d. I think they are mistaken about point d.”

As you work with sources in your own writing projects, you likely find these scholarly moves overlapping in certain ways. For example, borrowing and extending often go together. Or you may find sources that illustrate and authorize at the same time. In any case, evolving beyond just seeing sources as “support” is more empowering for you as a writer. See yourself entering a metaphorical conversation with the sources you integrate. You can use sources to raise ideas, prompt analysis, develop your ideas/arguments, evolve your thesis, etc. in ways that are much more interesting than just dropping in quotes and moving on. Scholarly moves with sources help your writing become more interesting and exciting - for both you and your readers.

Works Cited

Harris, Joseph. *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*. Utah State UP, 2006.

