

Conducting the Conversation

In order to effectively present your research in a paper, you must guide readers through a sort of conversation between others' ideas and your own. It can be tricky to navigate this back-and-forth between different types of content—a style of writing that must be learned and takes practice.

This handout is intended to model the integration and citation of source material. It provides three excerpts from a sample paper on art activism: an early paragraph that introduces core ideas, a paragraph detailing one of several case studies, and a later paragraph that draws us toward a conclusion. The paragraphs are color-coded based on different types of content:

Fact: data, established information, etc. **(do cite)**

Common Knowledge: information widely known to an educated, sympathetic reader **(don't cite)**

Writer's Voice/Opinion: your own knowledge, ideas, analysis **(don't cite)**

Other's Voice/Opinion: the exact words of a source text, enclosed in quote marks; quotes should be concise and in specific/powerful language; if not, paraphrase instead **(do cite)**

Quote: the exact words of a source text, in quotation marks **(do cite)**

Paraphrase: restating a specific idea in your own words, accurately **(do cite)**

Summary: distilling a whole source or argument to its main point; make it accurate, concise, in your own words **(do cite)**

Signal Phrase/Sentence: indicates who is speaking, in what context, and gives the reader a preview of the source's idea and your view on it **(don't cite)**

We hope this handout helps you understand and distinguish different types of content in your own writing and in others' texts. It could even be used as a template to get you started. Just remember to structure your writing around your specific content and draw from your own voice. For more advice, see our online video tutorial on research papers at risdwritingcenter.com.

Example: Art and Global Warming: Seeing Past Denial (excerpts, draft)

The term "global warming" was coined in 1975.¹ Almost four decades later, there is little disagreement among scientists that global warming is happening; it has been widely reported that 2012 was the warmest year on record in the United States. Hurricane Sandy, wildfires, and drought have made the devastating effects of extreme weather immediately apparent. In "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math," pioneer environmentalist Bill McKibben argues that it's almost too late to reverse the global warming trend. "I can say with confidence," he writes, "that we're losing the fight, badly and quickly — losing it because, most of all, we remain in denial about the peril that human civilization is in."² If scientists, fires, and floods can't shake us out of climate-change denial, can artists? Certainly some have tried.

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¹Wallace Broecker, "Climatic Change: Are We on the Brink of a Pronounced Global Warming?" *Science* (August 8, 1975), 460–463. First usage, as cited at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_warming. **(source cited on website)**

²Bill McKibben, "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math," *Rolling Stone*, July 19, 2012, accessed January 22, 2013, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>. **(periodical article, accessed online)**

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Newton Harrison and Helen Mayer Harrison have been creating environmental and ecological art since 1970. They collaborate with experts from biologists to diplomats to create public art and dialogue.³ A typical approach in their work is to picture what the future will look like given the effects of climate change. For example, in *Peninsula Europe Part II: The Rising of Waters The Warming of Lands*, 2007, the Harrisons created a research-based map of a future Europe. The accompanying text suggests that drought, floods, and mono-cultural farming will endanger 20-30 percent of the continent's farmland.⁴ In this way, the Harrisons place facts in an accessible and comprehensive narrative, persuasively addressing the public audience. Accompanied by their plan of action, the Harrisons' work seems to be motivated by the need for active change. However, while their website states that their "work involves proposing solutions," in a recent interview, the Harrisons all but admit that their efficacy is questionable. "We're most interested in bringing forth a new state of mind, first in ourselves, then hopefully in others," Helen Mayer Harrison notes. To which Newton Harrison adds, "[W]e can never really tell when and how we may have succeeded. In fact, we may not even know what success is."⁵ This contradiction calls into question the impact of the Harrisons' work on both the environment and the values of its inhabitants. If global warming art affects the artists first, and perhaps them alone, we must wonder if that art is indeed activism.

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As this survey of art addressing climate change demonstrates, artists use a variety of methods and have a variety of intentions in making their work. Some explicitly work to influence social or political change through art and advocacy; others seek only to provoke "a new state of mind." Many artists remain silent as to their intentions, perhaps seeking to avoid the criticism that activist art, driven by an agenda, is not art at all.⁶ This split reminds us that climate change artworks are ultimately art—something aesthetic and expressive of the zeitgeist. Their authors, if forced to choose, might not categorize their passion and purpose as making change as much as making visible. In her catalogue essay for the exhibition *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change*, curator, author, and activist Lucy Lippard, who brought together 51 artists working on the subject, acknowledges the limits of artistic political agency. "There is no reason to exaggerate the elusive power of art. Artists cannot change the world ... alone. ... At best they can make the hot breath of climate change both vivid and immediate to this visually oriented society, and ... help open our eyes to what we must do to resist and survive."⁷ Whatever their methods and stance, artists making work about climate change, by making us look, encourage us to see, and thus at least begin to chip away at our terribly perilous tendency for denial.

³ The Harrisons' website, <http://theharrisonstudio.net>, includes a brief background, philosophy, project descriptions, and publications. **(website + discursive note summary)**

⁴ Ibid. **(indicates "same as above")**

⁵ Quoted in Jane Ingram Allen, "How Big Is Here: A Conversation with Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison," *Sculpture* (December 2007): 52. **(article in journal)**

⁶ See Nina Felshin, ed., *But Is It Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995), especially the Introduction, in which Felshin describes a history of critical dismissal and institutional exclusion among activist artists. **(edited book + discursive note paraphrase)**

⁷ Lucy R. Lippard, "Weather Report: Expecting the Unexpected," in *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change* (Boulder, CO: Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 6. **(essay within a book)**