

The City of Academic Discourse

This chapter presents six concepts for an *academic* paper:



- **Discourse Communities**
- **Gatekeepers who regulate knowledge for the Discourse Community**
- **Tools and Credentials for regulating academic discourse**
- **The credible and the true**
- **Ethics**

WHAT'S A DISCOURSE COMMUNITY, AND HOW IS IT LIKE A WALLED CITY?

You probably have listened to two doctors talking about a patient or perhaps you've heard two mathematics professors discussing a problem. Or perhaps you sat in on a city council meeting



about changes in the zoning that will affect where businesses are placed in your neighborhood. In such cases, you hear a lot that doesn't make sense to you. There are technical terms, names of seemingly authoritative people, references to specialized education, legal precedents, new techniques, professional journals, institutions, etc.

These conversations between professionals don't mean much to an outsider. Yet, it doesn't seem to bother these doctors, mathematicians, or any other group of specialists that people on the "outside" can't enter their world. It's almost as if they live inside a walled city whose gate is sealed against us. We haven't a clue about how to pass through the city gate, and we don't really know much about life inside the city walls. We want you to know how to pass through the city gates to a fuller understanding of research and scholarship. Learning how these work can make you a "citizen" of a discourse.

We're often left to wonder how such cities are created. We need to know how they decide what's acceptable "in" the world of their knowledge and what's not. We wonder what kinds of institutions organize their thinking. And we wonder if our own ideas have much value. Even more troubling is our lurking fear that all claims to knowledge are equal. We fear that all claims are equal, and thus, that nothing — or everything — is true.

One way that discourse communities regulate knowledge is by emphasizing specific types of evidence. Academic discourse works hard to control subjective beliefs. A discourse community excludes claims that use the writer's personal beliefs as evidence. For example, the question, "is red prettier than blue?" isn't an answerable question. You might re-ask it to make it less subjective: "Of a randomly selected group of 1,000 adults between the ages of 18 and 29, what proportion of that group will judge a red cube as 'prettier' than a blue cube when presented with a pair of these objects?" Note that the question now asks about human responses, not the intrinsic "prettiness" of a color." The second version does a better job of controlling the subjectivity that is part of the term "prettier."

Discussion: is the following questions answerable? 1) Does pineapple belong on pizza? Why / why not? Revise the question so that it avoids subjectivity.

Read Stokes' "No, you're not entitled to your opinion"; how does he understand the role of opinion in making legitimate arguments?

One way to strengthen your understanding how these cities create knowledge is to describe how they work. In this book, we call specialized knowledge a “discourse.” And we call the institutions, methods, accepted questions, and assessments by a name: “discourse communities.” There are many discourses — math, political science, chemistry, biology, psychology, etc. — and each has its own *community* of experts. Like any community, each is complex. Understanding how knowledge is created gives you power, and that’s the ultimate goal of this book.

Thus, you have three jobs:

1. mastering technical skills such as research, citation, and source assessment, so that you can ask *academic questions*
2. knowing how to respond to academic questions in ways that make your ideas part of the discourse community
3. understanding how academic knowledge is created, regulated, and how it changes.

GATEKEEPERS REGULATE WHAT GETS THROUGH THE GATE & INTO THE CITY

If we want our writing to enter the “city” of Academic Discourse — the goal of this course —



we can start by mapping out what’s going on behind its walls. So, we go up to the locked city gate, peer through its bars, and then we see something odd: there are no people walking around. Instead, there are all sorts of documents strolling about and talking to each other.

The documents are mostly dressed alike, almost as if wearing uniforms. Most have elegant footnotes, references to other documents embroidered in their words, and stylish headings. Of course, each document has a long train of footnotes at the bottom edge of its academic outfit. Stranger still is that they are talking to each other . . . and these conversations seem to be taking on a life of their own, complete with further footnotes, references, headings, etc.

So our question shifts from how a *person* enters the city. It becomes a set of overlapping questions about the kind of *writing* allowed into the city. These are anxieties about the quality of its questions, the power of its evidence, and its originality. How did these documents pass through the gate? Who guards the gate? Are these gatekeepers using specific tools? If you know how these tools work, will you know how to write the kinds of papers that unlock the door to real world opportunities?

Your Writing is Credible (or not) to a specific Audience

The gatekeepers are specialists. They write for other specialists in the same field. Biologists write for biologists. Mathematicians write for mathematicians, etc. Each group has specialized language (terminology). These terms mean exactly the same thing to all members of the group. For example, to mathematicians, “irrational” is the name of a specific type of number, e.g. π . However, “irrational” means something entirely different to economists. Not everyone is welcomed into their world. Each discipline has its own walled city. Thus, scholarship and research are not democratic, and they aren’t individual. Instead, they’re a mix of individual insights and established knowledge shared by everyone in the walled city of their discourse.

Discussion Question: students often say something is “so random.” What does the term mean in everyday speech? What does it mean in a technical, statistical sense? Should one be considered correct and the other wrong? Does the meaning depend on the audience? For an interesting overview of how vague terminology leads to flawed science, go to <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01100/full> and scroll down to the heading “Inaccurate or Misleading Terms.”

Credible Writing Connects to Knowledge that Has Already Passed Through the Gate

You probably know that teachers and professors require a “works cited” page and the use of sources within the paper. Why would they be so obsessed with using other documents? The answer is simple: knowledge isn’t an individual achievement. Knowledge is a network. Just as the knots in a net require threads that tie them to other knots, so also does your document require “threads” that tie it to the discoveries of others. When one “knot” changes, all the other “knots” also shift. The net remains *almost* unchanged, but it is slightly different. Thus, scholars and scientists don’t claim that their work is “true” or “factual.” Instead, they show that it contributes to a network that will change.

What Are the Four Walls of the Discourse Community?

A gate has to fill the gap between walls. The “walls” of each Academic City have a unique shape. These walls create the space where knowledge can live . . . and change. These walls serve four specific purposes:

1. *Building a social fabric for knowledge:* Knowledge is created by individuals whose work has a supporting network. Sometimes, the network includes a university’s laboratories, libraries, and professors. Sometimes the network includes the peer reviewed journals. Sometimes the problem of identifying experts is solved by the “credentialing” of different degrees. Professional societies provide conferences where new insights can be shared, corrected, and developed. Governments, foundations, and corporations provide funding for academic research. The Discourse Community is a vast and complicated social network. The network is crucial to building knowledge.
2. *Providing continuity across time:* New knowledge is credible when it “talks to” existing knowledge. Sometimes new knowledge corrects existing knowledge, improves it, provides new evidence, etc. But what’s crucial is that this previous knowledge creates a shared history for everyone in the discourse. Credible knowledge is always historical. It’s no surprise that researchers and scholars know the past of the problem they’re working on,

and they know the past of the discourse. They have a shared recognition of key scholars; a shared interest in key concepts; a shared notion of what makes an acceptable question; and shared notions of legitimate methods for studying a topic.

3. *Establishing and preserving standards for communication, methods, and standards:* Because knowledge is a social activity, it avoids confusion by developing standard terminology and methods. These help determine if evidence is acceptable, and if the evidence connects to claims.
4. *Developing Theories:* Theories provide a meaning to description. Each era has characteristic ways of making sense out of their observations. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is a brief, fascinating look at the role of assumptions, evidence, and theory in the sciences.

Discussion: Why would the following writing strategies be rejected by an academic discourse?

Hint: think in terms of the four issues above.

Pro/Con Questions; True/False Answers; Personal Rants; Five-Paragraph Papers; Summaries
Begin by reading Patrick Stokes' "[No, You're Not Entitled to Your Opinion.](#)"

Discussion: Alchemists worked to turn regular metals into gold. In 1300, an intelligent, well-educated person (almost always male), might become an alchemist. Why has that profession disappeared? How is it different from modern chemistry? What does modern chemistry say about the possibility of such a transformation? But now, what do nuclear scientists say about such transformations? Are each of these equally "true," or is the idea of "credible" more useful? Why? Why not?

Are the methods of the alchemists, chemists, and nuclear scientists the same? How are they different? Think not only in terms of tools, but also in terms of how they think of matter. See <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fact-or-fiction-lead-can-be-turned-into-gold/> for a more complicated view of the question. Use a TEQ Sheet (described in the next chapter) to explore the article.

TOOLS AND CREDENTIALS FOR REGULATING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Gatekeepers for discourse communities don't act as individuals. They are



representatives of the community. They speak on behalf of its values and beliefs. To assume they are speaking personally is a mistake. They base their decisions on the discourse community's values, beliefs, history, standards, and methods. Often, they say, "While the document is not what I would argue, its connection to established knowledge, its careful evidence, and its original insights are within the discourse; so, let the document enter." They serve the community's discourse.

What do the Gatekeepers Look for?

The education of the gatekeepers is specialized, and it's the kind of education your professors experienced. Your instructors see your papers as small imitations of the research and scholarship done by members of their discourse. They expect your work to imitate the work of real scholars, even when they know that your work will be much simpler than that done by someone who has been in college for 9-12 years. No matter what their speciality, they look for three things in an academic document before they allow it through the gate:

1. use of existing knowledge already accepted by the discourse; it looks backward in time.
2. use of specific evidence that connects to the new insight the paper offers.
3. offer of a new insight that is both original and important to the discourse; it looks forward in time.

The gatekeepers examine a new document and judge whether it meets these standards. Thus, they work on behalf of the discourse, not on behalf of their personal beliefs. The reviewers step into their role much as actors “become” the characters they play. These “actors” have highly specialized training.

How are the Gatekeepers educated?

Gatekeepers are specific to each academic discourse, and they have years of specialized education beyond their four-year degree. For example, a mathematics document will be reviewed by mathematicians with doctorates (Ph.D). A mathematics doctorate frequently requires five years to complete after four years of undergraduate study. Most reviewers have doctorates in the topic of the paper they review. A “doctorate” is the shorthand term for a “Doctor of Philosophy,” and is abbreviated many ways: “Ph.D.”; “PhD.”; “PhD.” There are a number of other types of doctorates. For example, a Psychology Doctorate (PsyD) is different from a Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology (PhD). The differences are small, but produce different types of professionals. Usually, those differences mean little outside of academic discourses:

Question: Both psychology degrees require years of study, clinical work, and scientific thinking. What is the most important difference separating them? To whom would that difference likely matter the most? Which degree would best prepare someone to act as a peer reviewer? What kinds of documents would be best judged by a gatekeeper with each degree?

The example of psychology doctorates shows that graduate education isn’t standardized. However, there’s a general pattern to such highly specialized education. We can see it summarized on the home page for graduate study at Duke University’s Mathematics Department. It describes the graduate student’s “oral qualifying exam,” “oral preliminary exam,” “thesis and final defense,” as well as all the courses required. These are the usual steps for almost any field, but each field fills in the content of its own discipline.

Types of Expertise in the Same Discourse		
Type of Degree	Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology	Doctor of Psychology
4 year Bachelor's Degree required for application to graduate school	y	y
Length of Graduate Study	5-7 years	4-6
Clinical internship	sometimes	y
Dissertation (book of original, important research)	almost always	usually
Focus of Degree	PhD students receive training in research methods in order to independently produce new scientific knowledge. PhD programs may also focus on professional careers in applied work — such as health services and counseling in addition to research and academic work. https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psn/2016/01/doctoral-degrees	PsyD programs train students for careers that <i>apply</i> scientific knowledge of psychology and deliver empirically based service to individuals, groups and organizations. Most programs require students to write a thesis or dissertation. https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psn/2016/01/doctoral-degrees

Here is Duke University's thumbnail sketch of their PhD program in mathematics:

Our doctoral program offers student tremendous flexibility to pursue their research interests. Our goal is for all students to finish in 5 years [after the undergraduate degree] and get a good job.

Requirements

- Six semesters (Fall/Spring) full-time enrollment; cf. [The Graduate School Bulletin](#)
- [Oral Qualifying Exam](#) to be completed before the end of the third semester.
- [Oral Preliminary Exam](#) to be taken before the end of the third year
- [Thesis & Final Defense](#)
- [Responsible Conduct of Research](#) training

How to finish in five years

- **Take your oral qualifying exam at the end of the Spring semester of your first year.** This will allow you to devote your summer to reading papers and thinking about research. (This exam will test you only on two subjects so it is possible to take it as early as January.)
- **Find an Advisor early in your second year.** This will allow to choose your course work wisely and to have weekly meetings with your adviser in order to find a thesis topic and to prepare for your preliminary exam.
- **Take your preliminary exam before the end of the Fall Semester of your third year.** Even with this early completion of the exam you will have only about two years to complete enough of your thesis research to apply for jobs. If you wait until the end of the Spring semester and do no research before your exam, then staying for a sixth year is almost guaranteed.
- **Time management is essential. Graduate students have a variety of responsibilities beyond research.** Teaching a section of calculus, for example, can be time consuming but it is also something that you will have to do from time to time to support yourself. Good teaching skills (as reflected in student class evaluations and letters of evaluation) are important for landing an academic job.

How Do Gatekeepers Assess a Document that Wants to Pass Through the Gate?

Most first-year students think that “peer review” means that students exchange papers and mark them up. Students see it as a fix-up tool. That’s one meaning of “peer review,” but “academic peer review” is a different matter. It is the tool that determines if a document enters the city of Academic Discourse.

It’s crucial for you to understand *academic peer review*. Let’s use an example. Suppose that you’re following a scholar who has just finished two years of work on a manuscript that explains how an artist uses mathematics in his novels. The scholar knows all the journals interested in the topic, has read and used dozens and dozens of scholarly books and articles, attended many conferences, and generally proven herself an expert in the field. After several years of work on

the topic, she has created a document that she hopes will become part of the discourse. Her expert knowledge leads her to submit her document to a highly respected journal.

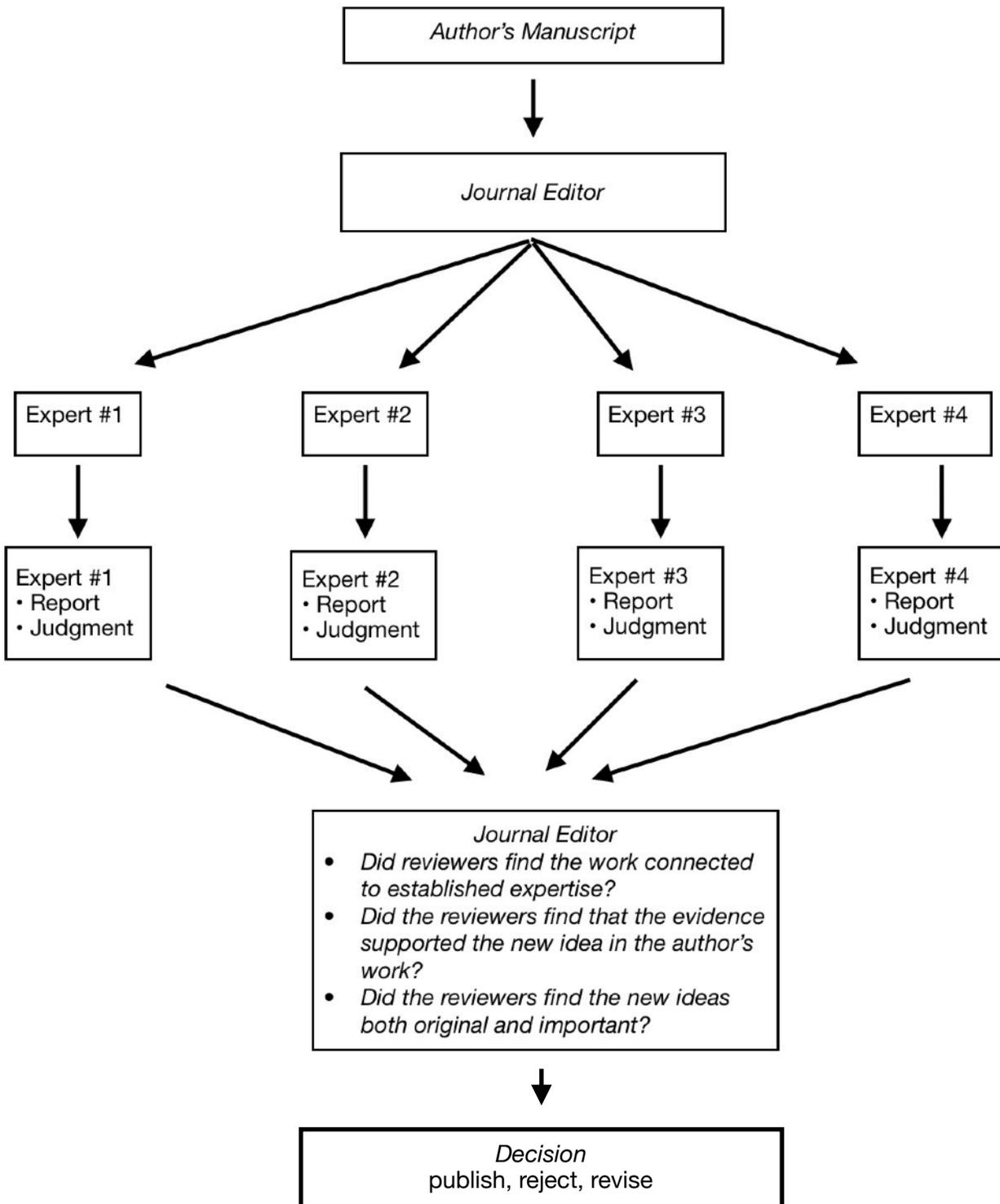
She sends her document to the head of the journal, its “editor.” The editor’s expertise is reflected in the many books, articles, editions, and professional organizations who have accepted his careful use of evidence, and his use of important theories to make new insights. Our would-be member of the discourse community knows she has entered the world of *academic peer review*. She sends the manuscript to the editor.

The editor reads the manuscript, but does not decide whether it passes through the gate. An editor’s job is to find a *community* of experts in the subject the scholar has written about. Because the editor is so widely recognized as one of the great scholars, it’s not a problem to ask for judgments from experts who are already part of the discourse. Let’s assume the editor uses four outside readers who are “peers” of our author in the sense that they share her interests in literature and mathematics.

These expert readers study the document carefully. They assess the way the document connects to other expert publications. They evaluate the evidence to see if it justifies the insight the paper makes. And they make a judgment about the originality and importance of the document. Then, each produces a report that goes to the editor. Each report recommends one of three options: accept for publication, reject, or revise. Sometimes, these reports are sent to the author. The process is summarized in the following diagram:

Discussion Question: The summary diagram simplifies the peer review process. However, in reality, there are many different kinds of academic peer review, and each can be complicated. You can read about the development of peer review in Drummond Rennie’s [Editorial Peer Review: its development and rationale](#).

Read Patricia Cohen’s “[Scholars Test Web Alternative To Peer Review](#)” for an explanation of how peer review is changing.



Discussion Question:

1. What is “crowd sourcing” and how might it be used as part of an academic review process?
2. If you were to set up an online peer review process for an academic journal (choose your topic), how would you do it? Who would you allow to participate as reviewers; everyone? Experts? What criteria would you expect reviewers to use?

Question: Like any encyclopedia, *Wikipedia* summarizes established knowledge. The head of Oxford University Press — one of the largest and greatest scholarly presses in the world — calls the online encyclopedia the greatest publishing achievement of the past century. The encyclopedia has a rigorous review process, and its accuracy is comparable to a respected general encyclopedia like *Britannica*. Nonetheless, many teachers and instructors denounce the publication. They make wildly inaccurate statements about what it publishes, and often forbid students to use it.

After reading *Wikipedia's* description of its editorial process, and explain what it does that is so upsetting to traditionalists. Do the objections reveal anything about the nature of credibility? You may wish to reread Patricia Cohen's essay on alternate forms of peer review.

THE CREDIBLE AND THE TRUE

Credible . . . to a specific audience

Let's review: academic writing doesn't claim to make “true” statements. Instead, it sees itself as making “credible” statements. Such writing assumes that knowledge will change. The change can be an improvement on what's known. Other times, it will have such powerful evidence and interpretation that previous knowledge is replaced. As explained earlier, a credible document:

1. uses existing knowledge and methods already accepted by the discourse; it looks backward in time
2. uses specific evidence that connects to the new insight the paper offers
3. offers a new insight that is both original and important to the discourse; it looks forward in time.

These judgments sometimes shift. They shift according to the type of publication that puts them in front of a specific audience. For example, a statement on a blog that claims vaccinations cause autism might be credible to an audience with no scientific training. But to an audience of experts, it is not credible at all. Genres tend to have specific types of readers, so the credibility of the genre probably reflects the readers' ability to read critically. We can say that statements are credible to a specific audience, but we cannot say that they are intrinsically credible . . . because that is the equivalent of saying they are "true," and we know that knowledge changes.

The following chart describes publications and their audiences. As you read the chart, imagine how each type of publication speaks to a different audience.

	Example	Author Expertise	Audience	Sources	Editing/ Selection	Aim
Scholarly	<i>Journal of Humanistic Mathematics</i> <i>British Medical Journal</i>	Expert: scholars and researchers in the field	Expert: other scholars and researchers in the field	Cites other peer-reviewed and/or professional sources. Has clear evidence and an original discovery.	Peer review	to increase knowledge in the discourse
Public Scholarship	Special Reports in <i>The Guardian</i> <i>The Atlantic</i> <i>Hack Education</i> (a blog).	Expert: prior scholarly publication; often PhD; contributor to scholarly forums; often cited by scholarly writers. Work is often invited.	Expert: professors, researchers, scholars, policy experts, detail-oriented individuals	Often scholarly sources, but also interviews, occasional primary sources	Not standard peer review, but undergoes scrutiny by both in-house and outside reviewers.	To bring scholarly insight to larger public audiences interested in a specific topics.
Blogs: personal	Audrey Watters' <i>Hack Education</i>	Depending on the sophistication of the author, blogs range from the appallingly ignorant to the splendidly insightful	Variable: ranges from general, public audience, to narrowly focused topics	Variable: range from scholarly to the subjective beliefs of the writer	Author	Variable: some provide information, others provide a focus for scholarship by others
Blogs: organizational	<u>Common Sense Media</u> ; <u>Cato Institute</u> Heritage	Selected for knowledge about topic. Often aligns with ideology of publication	Variable: Some are interested in a blog's ideology; others are more focused on content	Variable: range from scholarly to the subjective beliefs of the writer for the organization	In-house editing	To make the goals, values, and beliefs of the organization available to the public
Popular Magazines	<i>Popular Science</i> <i>Scientific American</i>	Usually non-expert. Selects and assembles information from sources, but some do so from expert backgrounds.	Accessible to a general audience	Sources range from scholarly to personal blogs. Source may be technical but articles are not	Undergoes scrutiny from in-house reviewers/ editors. Some consult with experts	To democratize knowledge
Bulletins	<u>Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists</u>	Variable: some are expert; others range from ideological to technical	Readers have a focused interest in the topic but want a curated/ edited publication	Variable: includes public scholarship and scholarship; opinion pieces; policy.	Variable: often represent a focused position on a topic and/or news about a profession	Informative Persuasive
Social Media	Twitter Github Slack see HERE for a list of academic social media	Variable. Often used as a tool for sharing topics and resources among experts	Variable	Variable	None other than legal limitations on threats, child pornography, malware, etc.	Variable

Each of these genres is credible according to when and how and by whom they're read. Readers find a document credible partly on the basis of their context, and genres *are* the context for any reading.

A document appeals to readers in three ways:

1. *Logos*: documents can be credible on the basis of their logic, evidence, and use of established knowledge. This is called a document's "logos." It is the Greek word for "reason." The logos of a work is how it connects itself to the discourse, uses appropriate evidence, and integrates evidence and existing knowledge to produce a new and important claim. Related terms are "logic," "logistics."
2. *Ethos*: documents can be credible on the basis of the writer's authority, reputation, institutional connections, and use of recognized expertise. This is called "ethos." It is the measure of how the document connects to the discourse community. A related term is "ethics."
3. *Pathos*: documents can be credible on the basis of the emotions they produce in the reader. This is called "pathos." It is a measure of the emotional power of the document. A related term is "pathetic."

Discussion: review the chart on the previous page, and select one of the publication types. Which appeal — Logos, Ethos, or Pathos — do you think is dominant? Why or why not?

THE CREDIBLE AND THE TRUE: ETHICAL ISSUES

Do Arguments Disprove Other Viewpoints?

Academic writers know that their work is going to be used and changed by others. Every discovery, conclusion, and insight is temporary. But, often, a new discovery corrects, improves, disproves, or otherwise changes what has already made its way through the gate and into the city. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is a brief, fascinating look at how the sciences change. We recommend it twice in this chapter!

Discourses don't see themselves as saying "true" things. For example, in the 1600s, Isaac Newton created a new type of mathematics (calculus) and physics that are keys to modern science. His questions were specific, and he created a new way of thinking. Some 300 years later, Albert Einstein asked slightly different questions and answered them with a new explanation. This new material didn't "disprove" Newton's work. Instead, it enlarged the ways we can ask about the world around us. Now, 100 years later, physicists are developing yet another enlargement of physics: quantum physics. Each of these operate inside the same Academic City, and each has passed through the gate of professional review. And each knows that the discourse of which they are a part will change.

These researchers assume that there are a number of better explanations and treatments that will be more effective. Their current work is *the best argument available right now, but it will change*. Their work is credible because it connects to a network of other discoveries. Again, in-text citations, notes, and a set of works cited show how your work is connected to existing knowledge. Thus, academic writers often expose errors, correct oversimplifications, add evidence, and mess with what's already in place.

Skepticism is good. Critical thinking produces change and growth. Because academic discourses expect change, there's always a place for new insights . . . perhaps your insights.

Are All Statements Equally True?

A worthwhile topic can have a history with many viewpoints, but the writer's job is to analyze their value. Good argumentative writing often says that an existing viewpoint is helpful, but it needs to be modified. Sometimes a good argumentative paper says an existing viewpoint is not valuable, but the error is about something that matters. There is no real point in rejecting or "disproving" a viewpoint. Even a flawed idea points us toward a better insight. Along the way, errors in the existing map need to be identified, but those errors are part of the boundary of what needs to be explored.

Does the Statement Use the Discourse?

On the other hand, you'll sometimes see documents with original and surprising claims, but their evidence is vague or they use methods that are not part of the discourse. In short, they lack the full range of features that make something able to pass through the gate:

1. a use of existing knowledge already accepted by the discourse
2. a use of specific evidence that connects to the new insight the paper offers
3. an offer of a new insight that is both original and important to the discourse

Sometimes, such research has gone to the wrong place to have its credibility judged. It is standing outside the wrong gate of the wrong city. Their work might say something important in another discourse, but it tries to speak to a different type of expertise.

Consider the case of those who believe vaccinations cause autism. Their claim is a scientific one, but there is no evidence that connects to what they see as an original and important insight. Their central claim collapses when the discourse of scientific medicine examines it. There is [no connection](#) between vaccinations and autism. The discourse community rightly rejects the claim. However, these parents are asking a deeply moving question that seeks to explain the suffering of their children. They have become a sub-culture that has helped build awareness of

[autism spectrum disorders](#). The result has been better diagnoses, a refinement of definitions, and a social movement that insists on protecting children.

As critical thinkers, we need to recognize that some of the responses to this movement have been seriously flawed. For example, Jenny McCarthy serves as a spokesperson for the movement. Whatever the defects in the argument made by anti-vaxers, her previous career in entertainment cannot be used as evidence that the claim is erroneous. Rejecting her claims on the basis of evidence is absolutely fair. This is a question of logos. However, rejecting those claims because she once appeared in *Playboy*, is a sort of intellectual slut-shaming. Such misogynistic tactics say much more about the “accuser,” than about McCarthy. Such writing substitutes a vicious sort of pathos for careful assessment of the logos. Further, it draws attention away from the ethos of the claim. McCarthy’s lack of a medical, epidemiological, or other scientific education matters, but instead of thinking about the need for — and the limits of — ethos, readers stumble against a counterproductive *argumentum ad feminam* (cf. *argumentum ad hominem*).

So: we can go beyond saying that “anything is true.” We can say that there are many discourses, each with its own history, methods, etc. And we can say that rejection by one discourse offers an opportunity to re-ask the question so that it might be welcomed at the gate of a different city . . . if it engages that discourse’s methods, history, etc.

ASSESSING A PUBLICATION’S CREDIBILITY

Assessing credibility is the first and most difficult task you face as a writer. Your paper succeeds by connecting its insights to established expertise. You have to look at the credibility of not only the item you want to cite, but also at the place where it was published. The strict standards that discourse communities apply to individual manuscripts also apply to the journals and presses that publish them. Thus, you have to make an informed judgment about the credibility of the journal or press that publishes the source you think is important. One of the great advantages of

library databases is that this work is already done; your job becomes a bit more simple: assess the credibility of the individual item you want to use in your document.

Remember, the credibility of a journal is earned by publishing material through the scholarly process of peer review, engagement in institutions such as universities, and reliance on expert reviewers and editors. These combine to lead to a judgment about the credibility of a source.

Journals sometimes make a “Call for Papers,” (CFP) to interest scholars and researchers in a special topic. These CFPs are announced on various sites, often according to subject area. For example, English scholars often rely on call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu . View the link to get an idea of how these provide a glimpse into the current interests of the discipline. Another large listing of CFPs is *ManuscriptLink*'s web site: <https://www.call4paper.com/> .

Question: Because there are so many journals, publishers, and CFPs, writers need to assess the credibility of publishers just as they assess the credibility of an individual article or chapter. Using what you've learned in this chapter, assess the credibility of the following CFP. Would you use an article published in it? Why or why not?

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RECENT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL

INVITED FOR RESEARCH AND REVIEW ARTICLES

Journal website: www.recentscientific.com

Volume 10, Issue1, April 2019

Impact Factor: 2017- 7.383

INDEX COPERNICUS VALUE: 2016-81.25

IJRSR WILL COVER ALL AREAS OF

- **Physical sciences and engineering**
- **Life sciences**
- **Health sciences**
- **Social sciences and humanities**
- **Business-and-Economics**
- **Agricultural Sciences**
-

ARTICLE TYPE

- **Original articles**
- **Short Communication**
- **Critical reviews, surveys, opinions, commentaries and essays**

We invite you to submit your manuscript(s) to recentscientific2017@gmail.com or recentscientific@gmail.com for publication. Our objective is to inform authors of the decision

on their manuscript(s) within 24h of submission. Following acceptance, a paper will be published in the Current issue.

Submit your article (Click) <http://recentscientific.com/submit-your-article>

Journal website home page: www.recentscientific.com

With regards

Editorial Office

International Journal of Recent Scientific Research

www.recentscientific.com

Key terms: discourse, discourse community, expertise, peer review, scholarship, research, social construction, gatekeeper; valid, reliable, credentialing, and credible-vs-true, genre, logos, ethos, pathos.

ASSESSING A PUBLICATION'S ETHICS

Sometimes, a publication is fraudulent. A writer makes up data, intentionally uses the wrong statistical tests, invents quotations, etc. Such behavior poisons the discourse community, and it is punished. For example, in 1998, Andrew Wakefield published a set of case studies that claimed a link between vaccination and autism. The work was published in *The Lancet*, a highly respected medical journal. The article was almost immediately withdrawn when it was revealed that Wakefield's work was funded by lawyers who sued vaccine-producing companies.

Wakefield had a conflict of interest. The paper was then revealed to have misrepresented the "they say" of previous research, and to have misrepresented how it had studied the question. Wakefield's work was then exposed as massively flawed by another journal, *The British Medical Journal*. Wakefield eventually lost his medical license. For a detailed summary of this case, see "[The MMR vaccine and autism: Sensation, refutation, retraction, and fraud](#)" in the *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*.

One of the ethical charges against Wakefield was that they had failed to get the required ethical clearance for doing the study. The rights of the children and their guardians were violated.

Now, let's think about ethical considerations in our own papers. Here is a real case:

A composition course much like the one you're taking, was asking questions about ethics and writing. As an example of deeply flawed ethics, they read a technical report on how to reinforce the suspension system of trucks, improve drainage, and prevent load shifts (see pages 255-256 of "[The Ethic of Expediency](#)"). Tiny hints reveal what these trucks were used for: suffocating Nazi prisoners. The "load shifts" were the desperate struggle of people to escape. The "drains" were for draining blood. As you might imagine, students were horrified. They clearly recognized that contributing to such a project could never be "neutral." They clearly understood that effective writing and ethical writing could be two very different things. All of them voiced a belief in following ethical beliefs. This was reinforced by reading documents from the Geneva Convention, U.S. ethical standards for government employees, and various ethical and religious views.

Next, the class worked on technical manuals. These required a detailed knowledge of technical processes, their use in specific settings, and the need for instructions that a non-expert could follow. Their audience was specified as non-expert government employees tasked with waterboarding political prisoners. The assignment was handed out, and the 21 students began work on their manuals. Waterboarding has been judged a form of torture and a violation of many legal, ethical, and moral standards. Nonetheless, all the students completed the assignment. The manuals were precise, accurate, user-friendly, and deeply flawed just as the engineering report on beefing up the trucks was flawed. As you might imagine, subsequent discussions were an odd mixture of embarrassment, shame, anger, and self-justification. At a faculty forum, this experience formed the basis for a presentation and discussion. Several faculty condemned the assignment for its own ethical failure: the failure to obtain informed consent from the students. These faculty felt that the assignments had been an experiment.

Discussion:

1. Were the assignments an "experience" or an "experiment"? What's the difference?
2. Would a decision to publish a scholarly article about the assignments change whether it was an experiment or an experience?
3. Does the nature of an issue (torture) change what's acceptable in publishing?

4. What should a scholar do when how they discover something important is in conflict with the rules of their institution?
5. If the purpose of writing is to make new discoveries, what kinds of discoveries should be forbidden?