

The BEAM of Research

The distinction between "primary" and "secondary" sources, as useful as it may be in some fields, does not help us very much as writers. For us, the key is not what our sources *are* (inherently), but what we are *doing* with them in our writing. After all, our uses of even a single source can change over the course of an essay! In other words, we need a vocabulary that allows us to discuss sources not in terms of essence, but in terms of *function*. Here, then, is a new vocabulary for discussing sources, drawing on the work of Joseph Bizup:

Background

definition: when the writer uses a source to establish common ground with readers, creating or implying membership in a community based on shared references.

commonly appears as: a list of important figures working on a problem; an argument that the author doesn't engage with; a casual reference to a cultural phenomenon; etc.

where we've seen it: when Bartholomae cites Rodriguez and Said on p. 630, he does so quickly, assuming readers will know what he's talking about. cf. also his assumption of familiarity with *Seventeen* on the next page.

Exhibit (related to Evidence, Example)

definition: when the writer renders up source material for direct examination or analysis; could be the origin of a motivating problem, or (also) where to go to find evidence.

commonly appears as: in a literature paper, a block quotation from a poem you are discussing; in an art history paper, an image; in a political science paper, survey data; etc.

where we've seen it: when Bartholomae brings in all those student essays in section 3, then examines them in detail to highlight particular features.

Argument (related to Authority, Ancestor, Antagonist)

definition: when the writer affirms, refutes, appeals to, refines, qualifies, or uses in some way the ideas/claims of a source; when the writer is "in conversation"; a They-Say.

commonly appears as: a statement about the exhibit (or a related one) by an outside critic or scholar; very often, an essay in the same genre as the one in which it appears.

where we've seen it: when Bartholomae invokes and summarizes ideas from Linda Flower (this happens several times) in order to then disagree with her (627, 630-31).

Method (related to Model)

definition: when the writer takes a set of approaches or (often) questions from a source

commonly appears as: a statement or question asked about an unrelated exhibit, reapplied in the context of the present exhibit; disciplinary key terms like *id*, *capital*, etc.

where we've seen it: templatizing is a kind of method; also, look at how Bartholomae uses Barthes (631) or Olsen (643): he takes their questions and analyses from one set of exhibits, applying them to another. See also Marxism, feminism, and other -isms.

Works Cited:

Bizup, Joseph. "BEAM: A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing." *Rhetoric Review* 27.1 (2008): 72-86.

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *When Writers Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Compulsive Business Problems*. Ed. Mike Bunn. 1995. 124-165. Print.

Using BEAM as a Reading Tool

As you're reading, BEAM can improve your confidence about what the author's up to in referring to sources: even if you don't recognize the source, you might be able to recognize how the author is using it – and, thus, how much it matters.

- When a source enters as a name-drop, it's probably **background**; if you don't get it, you may miss a local point, but probably not the Main Claim. If it's a reference you keep seeing in a number of places, you might be on the verge of joining that scholarly community, and hence want to look it up, but if not, don't sweat it too much.
- When a source enters as a block quote that gets examined closely, that's probably an **exhibit**. For understanding what the author is saying right now, you don't need to look it up; the analysis should follow the quote pretty quickly. On the other hand, if you want to argue against the author, you may benefit from learning the specific context of this quoted text.
- When a source enters as a line or two that gets parsed for ideas, that's probably an **argument**. As with exhibits, everything you need for surface understanding should be there... but take the summary with a grain of salt, especially if the author is disagreeing with the source. Again, if you want to join this conversation, it's probably a good idea to rewind it and hear what the antagonists were really saying.
- **Methods** are subtle, so you might not notice them entering. But thinking about method might help you see similarities and differences across several different texts and arguments. (If you're interested in learning more about method, you might want to look up the *topoi* – rhetoricians' word for *commonplaces of method*.)

Using BEAM as Writers who Read

When you mark up the source-use across a whole text, you can start to notice patterns of development, patterns you might use in constructing your own essays. Consider: What effect does it produce on readers to begin with an exhibit? a specific argument? a series of background references? How might you follow up on any of these openings? What would you expect next?

Using BEAM in Your Own Writing

When starting a project, especially (but not only) a research project, aiming for a mix of sources you could use for background, exhibits, arguments, and methods will go a long way toward ensuring that you have the material – and the variety of moves – to build something more than just a data dump. (That other common way to “mix” your sources, i.e. with books and articles, doesn't give you nearly as much of a guarantee.)

Try it now! Brainstorm exhibits or arguments that you could build your essay around; then think of other sources, arguments and exhibits or models you could imitate. (Background I'm not worried about; those will fall in more or less naturally.)

Exhibits

Arguments

Models