

8 Strategies for Critically Engaging Secondary Sources Adapted from Mark Gaipa

The strategies below are adapted, and the figures reproduced, from Mark Gaipa's "Breaking into the Conversation: How Students Can Acquire Authority in Their Writing," *Pedagogy* 4.3 (2004): 419-37. Note that these strategies may be used globally, as a way of framing an argument, or locally, as a way of engaging sources at a particular stage in an argument.

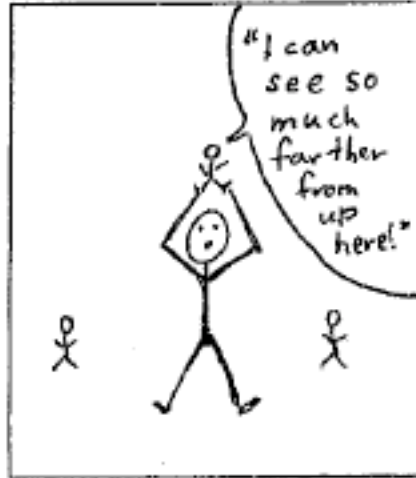
Strategy 1: Picking a Fight – Knock down a scholar's argument and, in the best version of this strategy, replace it with one's own.



Strategy 2: Ass Kissing, or Riding a Scholar's Coattails – Agree with a scholar to gain evidence and authority. Possibly go on to defend the scholar from attack by another scholar, thus resolving a larger controversy.



Strategy 3: Piggybacking, or Standing on the Shoulders of a Giant – Agree with a scholar (i.e., kiss ass), but then complete or extend the scholar’s work, usually by borrowing an idea or concept from the scholar and developing it through application to a new subject or new part of the conversation.



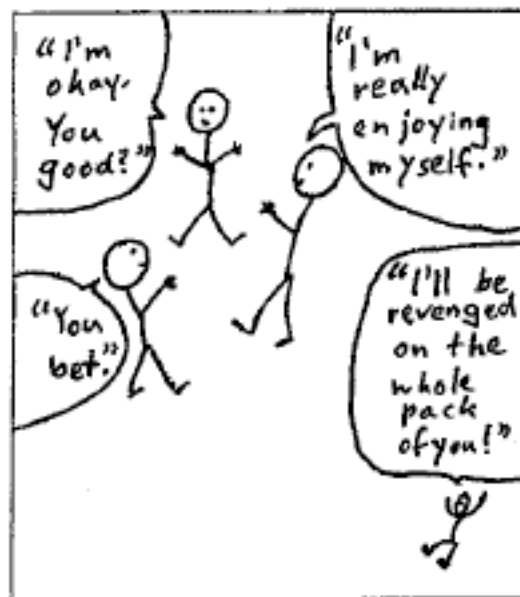
Strategy 4: Leapfrogging, or Biting the Hand That Feeds You – Agree with a scholar (i.e., kiss ass), then identify and solve a problem in the scholar’s work—for example, an oversight, inconsistency, or contradiction.



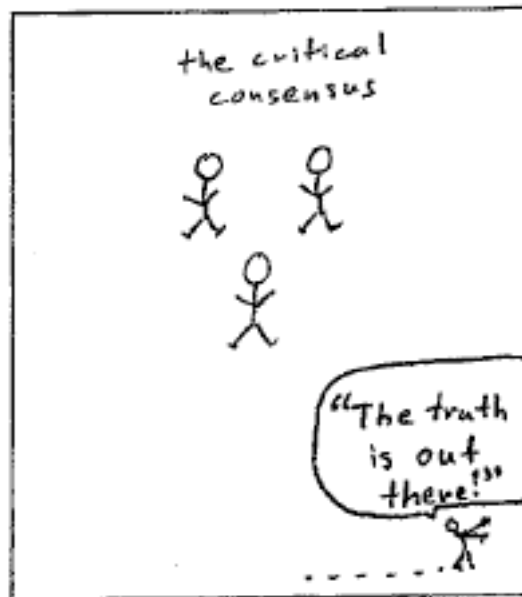
Strategy 5: Playing Peacemaker – Identify a conflict or dispute between two or more scholars, then resolve it using a new or more encompassing perspective.



Strategy 6: Taking on the Establishment, or Acting Paranoid – Pick a fight with everyone in a critical conversation—for example, by showing how the status quo is wrong, a critical consensus is actually unfounded, or a dispute is based on a faulty assumption.



Strategy 7: Dropping Out, or Finding Room on the Margins – Focus on an issue in the margins of the critical conversation, illuminating that issue and (in the best version of this strategy) ultimately redefining the conversation itself.



Strategy 8: Crossbreeding with Something New – Inject really new material into the critical conversation to produce a new argument. For example, bring in a theory from another discipline to reinterpret the evidence, bring in new evidence to upset an old theory or interpretation, or establish an original framework (a combination of theories, a historical understanding) to reinterpret the evidence.

