Hi there. I’m Michele and I am an English Composition instructor. And I am Olga and I am an instruction librarian.

This is a brief instructional video that will review the goals of the COMPARING MULTIPLE DISCOURSES assignment in English 2089 and give you some important guidance for researching and collecting useful sources for this project.

Let’s start by reviewing the purpose or goal of a DISCOURSE COMPARISON. While this project might start with an issue or topic, your purpose is NOT to just inform your reader about your topic or argue a position on this issue.

Instead, this project requires you to ANALYZE how different discourses (texts) and the communities that produce those discourses shape the current public conversation about that issue. To analyze these discourses, you will break down what communities are actively creating texts that address this issue, what genres or forms these texts take, and how these discourses shape our understanding of the issue. You will draw some conclusions about the similarities and differences you see between various discourses involved in this larger conversation about your issue.

When thinking about possible issues or topics for this project, you may be inclined to choose a broad issue so that you will ensure a wide variety of discourses to analyze – for example – vaccinations.

However, broad issues like this are often made up of smaller more focused sub-topics. For example, the discourses and communities that talk about the connection between infant vaccinations and autism may be significantly different from those focused on the issue of the flu vaccines.

Even the issue of flu vaccines is made up of distinct conversations. Debates include what makes the most effective medium for creating the flu vaccine, should we get flu vaccines every year, or whether or not employers have the right to mandate that employees get vaccinated for the flu.
You are better off narrowing to a more focused issue and analyzing the discourses in that smaller - but still vibrant and diverse – public conversation.

Remember, researching rarely makes a topic simpler. It will grow in complexity. Keep this in mind as you think about possible issues to analyze and don’t be afraid of a smaller, even local, topic.

Once you have chosen your topic, you will start to collect various discourses or texts that discuss your issue. But remember, you are ANALYZING these discourses, not just summarizing texts or arguing a position on the issue. SO how do you do that?

Some questions you might seek to answer include:

- Which discourse communities are active in the public conversation about your issue?
- What genres and texts do these communities create? How are they different from each other?
- What audiences are targeted by different discourses? Do these audiences get the same kind of information?
- To what degree are these discourses mainstream and accessible to the general public or more specialized, even avant garde?
- What influence or impact do you see these discourse communities having on the issue as a whole?

These questions are just a starting point. Your instructor will help you develop other questions that will give you a more robust understanding of how your discourse community functions.

Now, with these questions in mind, you are ready to research!

Once you have determined the issue that you would like to explore, then you should start by brainstorming genres, textual forms, communication methods, and individual or specific groups associated with public conversation surrounding that issue.

OK, let’s say we are going to look into the practice of some employers requiring flu vaccines for their employees. If we decide along the way that the topic is too broad, we can later narrow it down to employees in a certain industry or field, such as education of health care, or to a certain location, for example, the state of Ohio.
There are two possible approaches to starting your research. I prefer to start with thinking: who would be talking about this issue? Where will they share their thoughts? I am going to start brainstorming and capturing my ideas on a simple concept map.

Here are some discourse communities that come to mind: lawyers, legislators, government bodies, such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), unions, employees in industries, such as health care or education, doctors, religious groups, and so on.

As far as the text and media, I can think of court cases, bills and laws, government documents, websites, social media, TV, radio, journals, and magazines.

After we determined what we want to find, we can refer to the English 2089 online guide. If we click on “Types of discourse/Genres” in the left-hand menu we can see a table that contains links to tools for finding various genres and search tips.

Of course you can just start with a Google search. The results may yield some useful texts and give you ideas for subsequent research.

I would like to mention specifically news articles, because on many topics you will see a lot of news articles among your results. You can always filter your search results to this category by clicking on “News.” News articles can educate you on what discourse communities are active in the public conversation.

For example, the news coverage on our topic points us to lawmakers, business professionals, city officials, and other groups.

Some of these news reports reference important texts, such as bills or lawsuits, or point to experts on the topic. You can use the news articles as a way to track down certain discourses or individual contributions. This of news reports are used as a pathway to other discourses.

As we said earlier, the focus of discourse analysis is on the contributors and the texts they produce. Therefore we are interested mainly in primary sources, those produced BY the community. As we just said, news sources are just a pathway to the texts that form a conversation.

On the other hand, news organizations also form a discourse community in itself. You can compare how different news organizations address your issue to see if
there are differences or similarities in their coverage. This kind of analysis would require you to collect many examples of a news organizations discourses on this topic and look for patterns among the texts.

With an Internet search you may have trouble finding the voices of some discourse communities or accessing full text of some types of documents.

I recommend using Summon, the library metasearch engine.

The search box is right on the library home page. Let’s enter our search topic.

I am going to type employer* with and asterisk to find both “employer” and “employers,” AND (we need to capitalize our operator such as “AND” and “OR” in this database) require* (again with an asterisk to find different forms of this word) AND "flu vaccine*" (I am enclosing this in quotation marks to keep these two words together).

OK, here are the results. I want to look specifically at some government documents and articles published in professional press. To do this, I am going to click on “Content type.” You can select one or more of the content types you need. I select two and click “Apply.” Here are my results.

I like using library databases, because they help me cite my sources. I am going to click on the “Cite” icon next to the article I am going to use and select MLA. Please make sure that check the database-generated citations against the style guide you normally use.

Another way to get documents produced by various discourse communities is to go to specialized databases. I will use a link to Academic Search Complete, but I am only using it as a shortcut now. I am going to click on “choose databases, ” deselect Academic Search Complete and select CINAHL, a nursing database, Health source/Nursing Academic Edition and MEDLINE with Full text. I am going to type the same search terms and submit my search. What happened? Why are we not finding any results? When searching a specialized database, we need to think of the language that is used in the discipline. “Flu” is to colloquial for a professional health publication. Let’s substitute “influenza” for flu. I am also going to put a wildcard symbol after “n” to get “vaccination” in addition to “vaccine” and “vaccines. “ I am also going to add “mandatory” or rather part of this word with a wildcard, because this word is likely to be used. Well, this made a difference! So in order to
find professional text use the language the professionals in the discipline are likely to use.

Now I am going to submit the same search to a business education databases to see how the same topic is covered in a different discipline. Let’s now deselect the medical databases and select “Business Source Complete.”

When you find a primary source, it is important to keep in mind that you are looking not only at the content of the source - what the text says about your issue - but also at WHO produced it, what genre and form the text takes, to what AUDIENCE the text is targeted, how that text is circulated and how the creator of that text frames the issue at hand.

Ask these questions for every discourse/text that you find so that when it comes to analyzing them as a group, you will have many ways to trace similarities and differences.

So now that you have collected a variety of primary sources from multiple discourse communities, what do you do with them? Remember that analysis is more than simply just summarizing all of the texts that you found. Also, your goal is not to argue for or against your sources and the positions they offer on your issue.

Instead, your job is to ask yourself:

- What is INTERESTING about the way in which some of the discourse communities approach the topic?
- what is SURPRISING about the kinds of genres that some communities are producing?
- do you see a CONFLICT or TENSION between certain discourse communities?
- is there something TROUBLING about the dynamics among these discourses in the public conversation?
- What is SIGNIFICANT about the similarities and differences in the way these discourses address your issue?

Answering these questions is how you develop a thesis that reflects YOUR original thinking. Then, you can use this thesis to guide to organizing and drafting your essay.
So as you embark on your research projects, keep the following information in mind:

- Narrow the scope of your topic.
- Focus on HOW different discourses shape and interact in a public conversation – you are analyzing texts and not just talking about the issue in general.
- Collect examples of texts produced by the various communities (Primary Sources).
- Consider formal and informal methods of communication.
- Ask yourself -- What is INTERESTING about what you have found in your research?

You are not alone during this research project. If you are confused or run into problems finding sources or analyzing those sources, there are many ways to get assistance.

- Reach out to your Instructor, either in person or virtually.
  - They are here to help you through this process. The sooner they know you are having difficulty, the sooner they can help get you back on track. Don’t wait until after you turn the project in to ask questions.

- Review assignment materials on your Blackboard course site
  - Blackboard is open 24/7. Reread your assignment sheet, look at your instructor’s feedback on work that you have turned it, look over any other instructional materials or helpful links your teacher has posted. Don’t overlook this valuable resource.

- Review the 2089 Library Guide.
- Contact a UC instruction librarian. Now that you know me feel free to email me!