

## A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing, from Joseph Bizup

This handout presents Joseph Bizup’s (Boston University) rhetorical schema for categorizing sources—background, exhibit, argument, and method (or theory). In addition to introducing this vocabulary and briefly making the case for why it is worthwhile to discuss source-use with students in rhetorical terms, this handout offers a guide for teaching with this vocabulary, with suggested writing assignments and in-class activities.

*Why rock the boat and expand upon the standard nomenclature for sources (primary, secondary, tertiary)?*

- **The standard nomenclature conflates *genre* and *function*.** These terms are usually presented to students as if they were describing a *genre*—“primary sources *are* diaries, novels, newspapers...”; “secondary sources *consist of* journal articles...” —when, in fact, whether or not a source is primary or secondary is contingent on rhetorical context, depending on how a writer *uses* a source. Such a conflation runs the risk of confusing students. Think of how perplexing it would be, after being told that the distinction “secondary” or “primary” is inherent and absolute, to learn that a secondary source in one discipline can be a primary source in another. For example, in a philosophy course, a student might engage with the arguments of William James’s *Pragmatism* (1907), taking it up as a “secondary” source; that same student taking an American Studies course on the Progressive Era might encounter James’s *Pragmatism* as a “primary” source.
- **While this distinction is helpful in some disciplines, it makes less sense in others.**
- **The secondary/primary distinction reduces the complexity of citational practices in academic writing,** obscuring from students how scholars actually *use* and engage sources in their own work and how they, too, are expected to use them. The standard nomenclature implies that sources might be used in one of two ways: as objects of interpretation or analysis, or as reservoirs from which to extract sanctioned “support” for the writer’s claims. Much is lost—including the quality of your students’ writing—when merely the term “secondary” is used to introduce students to the richness of academic conversation and argumentation.

“BEAM’s primary advantage over the standard nomenclature is that **it allows us to describe writers’ materials straightforwardly in terms of what writers do with them**: writers *rely* on background sources, *interpret* or *analyze* exhibits, *engage* arguments, and *follow* or *invoke* method/ theory sources” (Bizup 2008, p. 76).

Background or Context	Sources whose claims a writer uses as grounding facts; these sources provide frames or orienting information so that the writer’s argument makes sense to her audience.
Exhibit, Evidence, or Example	Sources that a writer holds up for explication, analysis, or interpretation; a writer’s “raw material” or data.
Argument, Analysis, or Assessment	Sources whose ideas the writer is using for support, refuting, affirming, appealing to, refining, or qualifying in some way—a scholarly source with whom the writer is “in conversation.”
Method or Theory	Sources (or schools of thought, e.g., Marxism, feminism) from which the writer takes a method of thought, a particular procedure, an organizing theory or perspective, or key terms; frequently uncited or indicated by name-dropping.

## Suggestions for Teaching with BEAM

### In-class exercises

- **Use BEAM as a framework for reading.** Have students annotate an article for class, labeling each source use as B, E, A, M/T. If there are borderline cases, discuss.

### Writing Assignments

- **Framework for planning students' research.** Have students use BEAM to plan their research. In what ways will they need to use sources/data in their papers? List these and discuss how students can find materials that fulfill these roles. Here is a **Rule of Thumb**: if the starting-point is an exhibit, find arguments to engage; if the starting-point is an argument, find exhibits to analyze.
- **Annotated bibliography.** In preparation for a Hausarbeit/ term paper, students write an annotated bibliography in which they anticipate, using BEAM vocabulary, how they will use the sources in their paper.
- **Argument or lens papers.** Have students affirm, refute, qualify, extend, or refine the argument from a class reading in a short paper. In a more complex variation, you can have students take up a source's argument as a "lens" for analyzing an exhibit (text, cultural object, piece or set of data); students must respond to/take into account the source's argument(s) in their own analysis.

### Works Cited:

Bizup, Joseph: "A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing." *Rhetoric Review* vol. 27, no. 1 (2008), pp. 72-86.



*Concept for the handout: Goethe University Schreibzentrum, Frankfurt a. M., 2020.*

