

Best Practices for Writing Online Comments

Commenting on academic blogs can be a great way to begin to assert your voice in the field, make connections, and draw attention to your own research. However, maintaining the appropriate tone and knowing who you are responding to is of utmost importance. Read the following quotes between commenters and blog writers. What tone does each strike? How do the commenters use their comments to attack certain parts of the bloggers argument, tone, evidence, etc.? Click on the links following each example for our own comments on its strengths and weaknesses.¹

EXCHANGE 1:

(from *In Media Res*, <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2009/11/29/how-do-you-hide-behind-kindle-using-books-screens-screen>, November 29, 2009)

Comment 1 (Tenured Professor):

“Your last point is particularly intriguing, Elizabeth, especially in light of the growing prevalence of recommendation features such as those you find on Amazon.com. One thing that occurred to me in rereading your post was the Kindle artifact itself, and how much that \$259+ piece of equipment conveys about the cultural and economic positionality of its bearer. Perhaps what’s at stake value-wise is not just the content of reading anymore, but also the forms in which one does so.”

Response 1 (Graduate Student and Author of Blog Post):

“Quickly: Ted, I 100% agree that form matters greatly in the ways that readers derive value from texts as well as signal that value to others (I’m actually writing my dissertation on how book collectors value material books, which is an arena where form trumps content more often than not). However, in part because of my research subjects, I’m constantly forced to confront how form has always been important to the reading experience. Peter Sallibrass is particularly good at historicizing this point, reminding of us of the residual use of scrolls and manuscripts long after print proliferated.”

EXCHANGE 2:

(from *Duck of Minerva*, <http://www.whiteoliphant.com/duckofminerva/2012/04/historical-institutionalism-and.html>, April 15, 2012)

Commenter 2 (Graduate Student):

“I also agree that your response could be developed into a standalone piece (although it could have been interesting to see your response together with Fioretos’ reply in IO). On Fioretos, I remember thinking there wasn’t a lot separating rational from historical institutionalism (HI) by

¹ Developed by Michael Martocchio for the Graduate Writing Workshop: New Media Writing Tips.

focusing on microfoundations.... Anyway Fioretos organized an APSA panel on historical institutionalism which I'm on if you're interested."

Response 2 (Tenured Professor and Author of Blog Post):

"[I] won't be at APSA, but you should send me your paper....I sent Orfeo [Fioretos] a 'heads up' (seemed like the decent thing to do) about the piece and its reproduction in e-international relations. He's hasn't replied, let alone tell me if he wants to post a reply. I'm hoping he does."

COMMENTARY ON EXCHANGES

Comments on Exchange 1: This exchange is meant to highlight the importance of tone between a PhD Candidate and a tenured professor. The graduate student first agrees with the tenured professor on his criticism before adding in the second sentence a response that attempts to clarify and substantiate her earlier comment. Later, the graduate student adds the name of an (even more) senior scholar to reinforce her argument and highlight her own understanding of the historiography of the issue to which she responds. This both substantiates her point and takes advantage of the hyperlink feature of blogs to seamlessly integrate others into conversations. Finally, the student uses the exchange as an opportunity to highlight her own dissertation work in progress.

Comments on Exchange 2: Here a graduate student parlays a simple blog comment into a building a network with the tenured professor by mentioning his/her work. Though this attempt doesn't flesh out in the way the graduate student intends (the tenured professor explains he will not be at the conference the student alludes to and is, therefore, unable to attend his conference presentation), the professor does encourage the student to send him his paper—a welcome alternative for a graduate student in this position. However, during the same thread, the tenured professor makes a slightly negative remark about another academic, Orfeo Fioretos. The student in question never responds to either portion of the comment online. Presumably, he took this as an opportunity to contact the tenured professor privately (over email). When doing so, we would advise he continue to not respond to the negative commentary the tenured professor offered on the other academic. Committing such commentary to print (private or public) is a risk for a graduate student. Nonetheless, the exchange highlights how graduate students can effectively turn blog comments into opportunities for exchanging work and networking.