Staging a Critical Conversation as a Counterargument

1. **Stage critical conversations**, discussions in which your sources interact with you and each other. They may be supportive, oppositional, or simply have different points of view. This is a proactive way to integrate sources.

2. **Stay in charge**—don’t let the sources take over! This is your paper, and your ideas must never go silent.
   a. **Write claim sentences** in your own voice, even if the rest of the paragraph is all about other people’s ideas.
   b. **Paraphrase more than quote**, so you are putting your sources’ ideas in your own words.
   c. **Always introduce and comment** when you bring paraphrases and quotations into your paper. Show how they relate to your point.

3. **Know your sources’ POSITIONS!** If you don’t know what they are arguing, what they think, then you can’t have a conversation with them.

4. **Example:** Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*, pp. 106-108: John Berger stages a conversation about *Gainsborough’s Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* (c1750) with Sir Kenneth Clark and Lawrence Gowing, two art historians whose positions he knows well—and opposes. When you stage a conversation as a counterargument, give yourself worthy foes, not straw men.

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Gowing’s idea that the couple “were engaged in philosophic enjoyment of … uncorrupted and unperverted Nature” (107) fits with Clarke’s claim that Gainsborough not only wanted to paint more from nature, but that this was part of a deeper Rousseauian philosophy (106-7). Perhaps so, Berger responds, but it doesn’t preclude the couple from glorying in their ownership of a magnificent estate (108).

**Note that he concedes a point in the counterargument**—“Of course it is very possible that …” (208)—and then explains why they are otherwise wrong and he is right. As the convener of the conversation, Berger gets the last word.