Weber State’s own Dr. John Schwiebert coined the phrase conversation model to describe the process that occurs when we read a text. Other scholars and writers call the process “intertextuality” or “dialogics.” Regardless of the label we give it, this theory argues that when we as readers look at a text, we never look at it in a purely neutral way. Whether we consciously know it or not, our understanding of the piece we are reading is influenced by our life experience, our gender, our age, our nationality, and everything that we have ever read. Scholars call this our “episteme.” You might want to think of it as all the emotional and intellectual stuff that you carry with you from day to day. The cognitive equivalent of what is in your pockets, or your glove box, or your purse.

What does this have to do with writing? Well, in every step of the writing process, from invention to revision, the decisions we make about topic and form, tone and audience will be influenced by our episteme. As we read texts to give us ideas or look for more information about a topic, the information we read is filed and processed by our brains based on what we already know or have experienced.

In a sense, these experiences and memories and previously read texts start to “talk” to one another as we try to sort out what we think about a topic and why we think and feel the way we do. While this may sound complicated, recognizing these “conversations” going on in your head is a definite advantage. Especially when doing invention.

I will show you different strategies such as mapping, clustering, and freewriting to uncover attitudes, information, and expertise that you may not have realized were there all the time. Think of the conversation model as a way to plug rich and detailed floppy disks of information and experience into the hard drive of your brain to make your writing vivid, well-informed, and interesting.