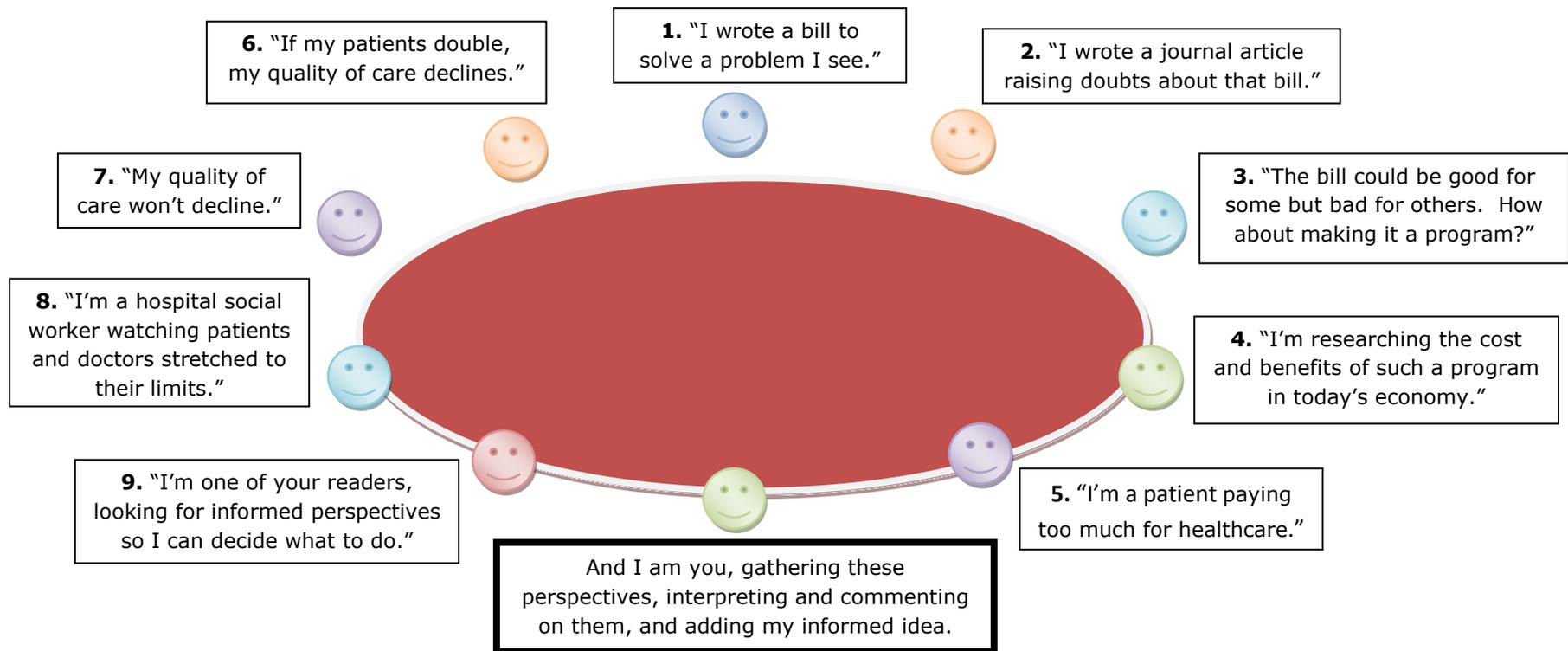


Who Is Around Your Table?

The Research Essay as Conversation

Writing a research paper is like joining a conversation on your topic. You listen at first to learn what's being said, and then you contribute. In a research project, you are looking for what has been said and done on your topic, uncovering as many pertinent perspectives as you can, and then putting forth your own idea. As the writer, you moderate the discussion with your words, introducing each author and interpreting and commenting on his or her contribution as they relate to your discussion. Picture a roundtable conversation with your sources—the people who might be involved in your topic's conversation.



For example, if you are researching questions you have about healthcare laws, you'll find that other writers have asked similar questions. One law-maker might be writing a bill that would require citizens to buy insurance. In response, a journal article raises doubts about the idea. Answering the two writings, another person writes that the policy could be good for certain citizens but bad for others, and it might therefore be more effective as a program that addresses different people's needs. Another writer could inquire into the cost and benefits of such a program to learn whether it's feasible in today's economy. Think also of others who might contribute to the discussion—patients, doctors, healthcare administrators, etc. What about your readers? Who are they, and what about them should you consider? How might it change the conversation if you see your sources as potential readers as well? As you research and write, acknowledging the perspectives you find, you provide the context for your work, gaining your reader's trust, and ultimately helping them understand your point of view.