Discourse community is a very broad concept to define. John Swales and James E. Porter attempt to define by their own means the concept of discourse community. Swales claims that a discourse community must possess six basic characteristics in order to be identified as a discourse community (220). Porter illustrates the importance of recognizing the characteristics of a text in order to be an “acceptable” one within a community. Porter also places an emphasis on the importance to understand that “every discourse is composed of ‘traces’” (397) from other texts and the accommodations that must be made to transmit the same message to a different audience. The importance of defining a discourse community can be better understood by comparing the articles “Perimortem Trauma in King Richard III: A Skeletal Analysis,” written by a group of scientist, and “King Richard III’s Final Moments Were Quick & Brutal,” written by journalist Stephanie Pappas. These two articles describe the same event or findings related to the death of King Richard III, a king who died in battle; however, they both have a totally different approach or a way of stating the findings. “Perimortem Trauma” is a scientific report that describes, by using a technical report structure, the findings on the skeleton of King Richard III as well as the last moments of the king’s life. On the other hand, the article “King Richard” emphasizes the main idea, the last moments of the king, leaving out the specific details of the findings. By analyzing these two articles, the reader can better understand the importance of recognizing the characteristics an article must have to be accepted in a discourse community, the accommodating
process that a text must suffer in order to transmit the same message to a different discourse community, and the reasons why the accommodating process must be made to a text.

It is crucial to identify the characteristics that an article must possess to be accepted in a discourse community. One of Swales’ characteristics states that: “in addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis” (222). In other words, the authors of the articles assume that the terminology used in the texts is appropriate and fully understood by its members. For example, the “King Richard” article is appropriate for the mass media community because the non-scientific language is more understandable. Also, the length of the article is short, and the topic goes straight to the main point, which is adequate for an audience who is only reading for curiosity. On the other hand, this article would be inappropriate for a scientific community because it is based on many assumptions. Consequently, it would raise many questions, and more research would be necessary to be accepted. Furthermore, the article deficiency of medical terminology and details would not be substantial for that community. By the same token, the article “Perimortem Trauma” possesses everything that a scientific community demands: details of findings (i.e. pictures), medical terminology, and analysis. This article would not be appropriate for the mass media because the language used is suitable for them, and in order for them to fully comprehend the text, it would require many months or even years of study on the subjects of anatomy, medical technology, and history of fossils. According to Porter’s definition of a discourse community, an article can be either accepted or rejected by a particular group of individuals if the article meets or not the standards of the community (401).

The process of accommodating an article must be made by its author before trying to attempt a different audience. Porter states that “every discourse is composed of ‘traces,’ pieces of other texts” (397). Accommodations, however, must be made so that the message is transmitted
clearly to its intended audience. Pappas’ information is mostly based on the text of “Perimortem Trauma.” First of all, both articles contain two exact figures with two different purposes. The scientific report uses the figures to provide details of the findings on the skeleton, but Pappas’ report uses the images to grab reader’s attention. Secondly, one can say that “King Richard” represents a summary of the scientific report. The summary text transmits the same main idea of the scientific report. Nevertheless, the “King Richard” text omits the specific “traces” or details of the findings because they are considered irrelevant and even inappropriate for the mass media audience. Pappas’ modifications of the scientific report include, but are not limited to: language change, tone change, placement of information, and removal of details. For instance, in Pappas’ report the injuries that might have caused the king’s death are stated in the first few lines; in contrast, this information is found near the end of the scientific report.

The accommodation of the text for its audience is significant to effectively transmit the message; and therefore, the authors achieve their goals: to transmit knowledge, to entertain, and/or to inform their audiences. In these two articles, accommodation starts from the beginning as in the titles. The word perimortem is not widely known in the media community, but the phrase “final moments” can be understood easily. Using the same scenario, “Perimortem Trauma” provides the scientific community a better picture of what the report is about even before they read it. “Perimortem Trauma” is a scientific report which consists of the following writing structure: enumerated figures with captions, subtitles, and in-depth paragraphs. This structure is widely used in the scientific community because it is easier for them to locate information since scientific reports are usually very long. For instance, in some paragraphs the readers can see that the authors refer to a specific figure using numbers, and that way the readers can locate the figure faster. In contrast, the article “King Richard III’s” has an easier to digest structure. The structure consists of
a short length text, fewer fancy words, and fewer figures to keep readers’ attention on the overall message. In this article, the figures in the text are used to sensationalize the audience and not to provide specific detail of the findings. This proves that accommodation of a text is essential for each discourse community in order for a text to be approved by its members.

Ultimately, it is essential for writers to comprehend the definition of discourse community because it is part of their scholarly journal. In every class, they are going to encounter texts that suit their present or near-future knowledge, and the reality is that professors pick those articles because they (scholars) belong to a specific discourse community a scholar community. In this case, two texts convey the same message; however, they point to two different audiences. The scientific report provides essential information to the scientific community because of its lexis. On the other hand, the mass media text captures the attention of more readers because of its easy to follow structure. For me, the concept of discourse community is critical to understand in order to better communicate my ideas with others. By definition, a discourse community entitles the idea that some particular texts are designed to appeal the interest of a particular audience.
Works Cited


