# Pre-Reading: The Believing and Doubting Game, Dweck Criticism

In the **Believing Game**, you try to see an argument from the author’s perspective, and believe everything about the argument. This does not mean that you really have to agree with the author, or commit to any actions advocated by the author. However, it does mean suspending doubting for a moment and just believing. Elbow writes[[1]](#footnote-1):

It’s the disciplined practice of trying to be as welcoming as possible to every idea we encounter: not just listening to views different from our own and holding back from arguing with them, but actually trying to believethem. We can use the tool of believing to scrutinize not for flaws but to find hidden virtuesin ideas that are unfashionable or repellent. Often we cannot see what’s good in someone else’s idea (or in our own!) till we work at believing it. When an idea goes against current assumptions and beliefs---or seems alien, weird, dangerous---or if it’s poorly formulated---we often cannot see any merit in it. (Elbow 16)

The Believing Game can help us see the value in new ideas, in thoughts we have never considered. That does not mean we should *really* just believe everything, but that we should practice believing once in a while so that we do not automatically reject ideas that seem different.

Elbow also advocates that writers couple the Believing Game with the Doubting Game. Perhaps we are more familiar with the **Doubting Game**, as it is more often practiced in academic culture. Elbow writes:

The doubting game represents the kind of thinking most widely honored and taught. It’s the disciplined practice of trying to be as skeptical and analytic as possible with every idea we encounter. By doubting well, we can discover hidden contradictions, bad reasoning, or other weaknesses in ideas that look true or attractive. We scrutinize with the tool of doubt. (Elbow 15)

The Doubting Game helps us develop the disciplined thinking necessary to identify invalid and untrustworthy ideas. It can help us discover previous assumptions that have proved harmful or manipulative ideas designed to push particular agendas. The Doubting Game is an important last-step in our thinking process.

Taken together, the Believing and Doubting Game can help us understand a topic more completely. As Elbow writes, “The doubting and believing games have symmetrical weaknesses: the doubting game is poor at helping us find hidden virtues; the believing game is poor at helping us find hidden flaws. But many people don’t realize that the doubting game is also poor at reaching one of its main goals: helping us find hidden flaws in our own thinking” (17). These thinking processes help up examine our own assumptions and those of others so that we can clearly understand all of the implications of arguments.

## Activity

Step 1: Spend five minutes writing as if you **believe** everything in the article “Brainology.” What is good about the argument? What is worth believing?

Step 2: Spend five minutes writing as if you **doubt** everything in the article “Brainology.” What is questionable about the argument? What is faulty? What did she leave out? What perspectives did she not see? What did she fail to consider?

1. From: Elbow, Peter. "The Believing Game and How to Make Conflicting Opinions More Fruitful" From the book entitled: Nurturing the Peacemakers in Our Students: A Guide to Teaching Peace, Empathy, and Understanding / edited by Chris Weber. (2006)   
   Available at: http://works.bepress.com/peter\_elbow/10/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)