1.2 SameDiff

Purpose

The *SameDiff* tool is a variation of the *WordCounter* tool, but a little more complex. It allows participants to compare word counts from two different documents/sources. It helps participants see differences and similarities in the words used in two sources and quantify (as well as pictorially visualize) differences.

The activity introduces the concept of *point of view* and allows for discussion of *spin, slant,* or *bias*. Participants are encouraged to get in the habit of evaluating media products for point of view. They also practice creating word patterns of their own to reflect a point of view.

Learning Goals

Participants will:

- Compare word use and word frequency in specific media products
- Evaluate media products for *point of view*
- Characterize the difference between *point of view* and *degrees of spin* or *bias*
- Create a media product with a point of view
- Understand and appreciate that many media products are based on *some point of view*

Time

30 to 45 Minutes

Supplies

- Computers *(1 for every 3 participants)*
- Projector and access to the Internet for all computers
- Large pieces of paper *(roughly 2 feet x 3 feet)*
- Thick crayons or markers
- Several large tables or floor space or tape to stick paper to walls so participants can draw

Facilitator Preparation

SameDiff, like WordCounter, includes some "ready made" media texts for participants to analyze and compare. Once again, however, this activity will be more meaningful if you upload materials ahead of time that will be especially interesting to your group.

Look for pairs of documents. For example, find two articles that cover the same story. Or, find speeches by two different government figures. Longer advertisements about various topics, as well as song lyrics, can be fun.

Go to https://civicidea.databasic.io/en/samediff/ and look in the dropdowns to see what is already there. Then find additional content to copy and upload that will interest your group. Practice analyzing a few pairs of media products yourself and thinking about what the results say about the different *points of view* taken by the products. Decide which examples you will use to demonstrate the tool to participants. Plan on at least a couple of hours preparation for this activity.

Introduce the Activity to Participants

Begin with several open-ended questions to get learners thinking about *point of view* and how words can be analyzed to understand point of view.

- In our last activity we used a tool to help analyze word choice and frequency in a media product. Can someone give us an example of how word choice can indicate a *point of view*? *(Give participants time to come up with several examples. Offer a couple yourself if they have trouble.)*

- How common is it for a media product to be written from a particular point of view? In your experience, do a few, or most media products, seem to represent a point of view? *(Participants may disagree about whether certain media have a specific/consistent point of view. They may also disagree about whether taking a point of view is good or bad.)*

- Do you think there is a difference between point of view and bias?

Introduce and Demonstrate the Tool

Tell participants that in this activity they will be able to experiment with a new tool that compares word choices in different media products. They can decide if the tool is helpful in analyzing the point of view of texts. Demonstrate the tool. Open up *SameDiff* (https://civicidea.databasic.io/en/samediff/). Select a media product from dropdowns in both the left and the right columns. Click on **Compare** at the bottom of the box. Note that the results that appear first are just the word counts for the two documents. The three columns below that show how the products are both similar and different: The right and left columns show words unique to each article. Those columns represent their differences. The middle column shows the words they have in common. (There also may be a similarity score at the top of the screen. *SameDiff* uses an algorithm called "cosine similarity" to produce this score. This function counts how often each term appears in each document and then compares how closely the numbers match. Some more advanced learners may be interested in this detail.)

Launch the Activity

Part 1:

1. Participants break into groups of three with a computer for each group.

2. Each team signs on to *SameDiff* https://civicidea.databasic.io/en/samediff/

3. First, each group should pick two documents to compare from the parallel dropdown menus. (If they have time, they can experiment with several pairs of documents and see which produce the most interesting results.) *NOTE: Advance learners may wish to upload their own documents or links from the web if there is time.*

4. Remind learners that to "activate" the tool, they should click on the green **COMPARE** button at the bottom of the box.

5. Give the groups about 10 minutes to experiment with the tool.

Part 2:

1. When they have completed their comparison, explain that they must then take one of the large sheets of paper and write their own, third version of the story/subject/advertisement. (It doesn't have to be as long. Just a few sentences is fine.) Tell them to use their own words that allow them to take a *point of view*.

2. Emphasize that there is no right or wrong story in this case. This is just an exercise and they can even take a point of view that is not really their own.

3. Tell participants they have 10 minutes to write their new story together.

SameDiff, *continued*

Part 3:

1. Ask each team to share their comparison documents so the other teams can follow along and see their *SameDiff* results.

2. After a team shares the documents and the *SameDiff* results, give them a few minutes to read their own story out loud.

3. After a team makes its presentation, ask the whole group whether it communicated a *point of view*, and which words in their story hinted at or "gave away" that point of view.

Debrief and Reflect

End the activity with several open-ended questions to encourage sharing and reflection, such as:

- Did you find the tool helpful in evaluating points of view and spotting bias?

- Do you think you were already pretty good at spotting *point of view*, or do you think you will reflect more on *word choice and frequency* in the future?

- Do you think the media products you read now all have the same point of view? Or, are you exposed to different points of view?

- In your opinion, is it better to find media products that express a point of view you feel is most like your own, or to compare media products from different sources?

Note that some of these questions may be very sensitive in certain political and legal contexts. Participant responses may vary a great deal.