

THIRTEEN

Analyzing Arguments

Those You Read, and Those You Write



THE CLOTHES YOU choose to wear argue for your own sense of style; the courses your college requires argue for what educators consider important; the kind of transportation you take, the food you eat (or don't eat)—almost everything represents some kind of argument.

So it is important to understand all these arguments, including the arguments you yourself make. Consider a couple of everyday examples:

What's in an (email) address? You may not have thought much about the argument that your email address makes, but it certainly does make a statement about who you are. One student we know chose the email address maximman123@yahoo.com, an allusion to the British “lad” magazine. But when it came time to look for meaningful employment, he began to think about what that address said about him. As a result, he chose an address he felt was more appropriate to the image he wanted to convey: whmiller@gmail.com.

If you need to think about what arguments you may be making yourself, it's even more important to understand the arguments that come from others. Take a look, for example, at these two images, both of which appeared in summer 2011 after NATO began bombing Libya in support of the forces there rebelling against the regime of Moammar Gaddafi. The first image clearly shows demonstrators against Gaddafi,



Libyan university student protests against Gaddafi outside the prefecture building in Milan, Thursday, Aug. 25, 2011 (left). Demonstrators in front of the White House, Saturday, July 9, 2011, call for a stop to the NATO bombing of Libya (right).

accusing him of murder; the second takes a very different approach, condemning the bombing.

These two images make radically different arguments about the uprising in Libya, arguments that call on us to think very carefully before we respond. Should we accept one over the other—or reject both of them? On what basis should we make such a decision?

These examples suggest that it's worth your time to think carefully about the arguments you encounter, whether they are embedded in an email address or in an image you see in the news. They also demonstrate that arguments always exist in a larger context, that they always involve more than just the one making the argument. Arguments, in short, don't appear out of thin air: Every argument begins as a response to some other argument—a statement, an event, an image, and so on. That goes for arguments you read, and the ones you yourself write. Either way, all arguments are part of a larger conversation. Whether you're responding to something you've read, discussing a film you've seen, or writing an essay that argues a position, you enter a dialogue with the arguments of others.

This chapter provides guidance to help you analyze an argument—those you encounter, and those you yourself make.

WHO'S ARGUING—AND WHERE ARE THEY COMING FROM?

Pay special attention to the source of an argument—literally to where it is coming from. It makes a difference, in short, whether an argument appears in the *New York Times* or a school newspaper, in *Physics Review* or on the blog of someone you know nothing about, in an impromptu speech by a candidate seeking your vote or in an analysis of that speech done by the nonpartisan website *FactCheck.org*. And even when you know the basic fact of who's putting forward the argument, you may well need to dig deeper to find out where—what view of the world—that source itself is “coming from.”



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Citizens United anniversary highlights need for amendment

Public Citizen and MoveOn.org have submitted to the White House more than 100,000 signatures calling for disclosure of political spending by government contractors. This comes just days after the second anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's damaging *Citizens United* ruling, when thousands of people across the country took to the streets to call for the decision to be overturned.

Get more information about the petitions. Learn more here about the week of actions. Get involved.

For example, here's the homepage of the website of Public Citizen, a nonprofit organization founded in 1971 by consumer advocate and social critic Ralph Nader. So what can we tell about where this argument is coming from? We might start with the image in the upper-left corner of Lady Liberty holding up her torch right next to the headline “PUBLIC CITIZEN Celebrating 40 Years of Progress.” Below that we see a series of rotating images and a sketch of the group's goals:

Defending democracy. Resisting corporate power. Public Citizen advocates for a healthier and more equitable world by making government work for the people and by defending democracy from corporate greed. You can help.

We can surmise, then, that Public Citizen is coming from a viewpoint that supports the rights of ordinary citizens and liberal democratic values and that opposes the influence of corporations on government. Indeed, if we look a bit further, to the “About Public Citizen” page, we will read:

For four decades, we have proudly championed citizen interests before Congress, the executive branch agencies and the courts. We have successfully challenged the abusive practices of the pharmaceutical, nuclear and automobile industries, and many others. We are leading the charge against undemocratic trade agreements that advance the interests of mega-corporations at the expense of citizens worldwide.

Together, these images and statements tell us a lot about Public Citizen’s **STANCE**, where the organization is coming from. As savvy readers, we then have to assess the claims it makes on its homepage (and elsewhere) in light of this knowledge: Where it’s coming from affects how willing we are to accept what it says.

Or consider a more lighthearted example, this time from a column in the *New York Times* written by political pundit David Brooks:

We now have to work under the assumption that every American has a tattoo. Whether we are at a formal dinner, at a professional luncheon, at a sales conference or arguing before the Supreme Court, we have to assume that everyone in the room is fully tatted up—that under each suit, dress or blouse, there is at least a set of angel wings, a barbed wire armband, a Chinese character or maybe even a fully inked body suit. We have to assume that any casual anti-tattoo remark will cause offense, even to those we least suspect of self-marking.

—DAVID BROOKS, “*Nonconformity Is Skin Deep*”

What can we know about where Brooks is coming from? For starters, it’s easy to find out that he is a conservative journalist whose work appears in many publications across the political spectrum and who also frequently appears as a television commentator on the *PBS NewsHour*. We also know that this

passage comes from one of Brooks' regular columns for the *New York Times* and that the readers of that newspaper are often characterized as liberals.

What more can we tell about where he's coming from in the passage itself? Probably first is that Brooks is representing himself here as somewhat old-fashioned, as someone who's clearly an adult and a member of what might be called "the establishment" in the United States (note his off-handed assumption that "we" might be "at a formal dinner" or "arguing before the Supreme Court"). He's someone likely to look on the latest fad with skepticism—and someone who almost certainly does not have a tattoo himself. He's also comfortable using a little sarcasm ("everyone in the room is fully tatted up") and exaggeration ("every American has a tattoo") to make a humorous point. Finally, we can tell that he is an experienced and self-confident—and persuasive—author who can paint a vivid picture ("under each suit, dress or blouse, there is at least a set of angel wings") and that we'll need to be on our toes to understand the argument that he's actually making.

As an author, you should always think hard about where *you* are coming from in the arguments you make. What's your stance, and why? How do you want your audience to perceive you? As reasonable? knowledgeable? opinionated? something else? How can you convey your stance?

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Figuring out the answer to this question takes you to the heart of the argument. Rhetoricians in ancient Rome developed what they called **STASIS THEORY**, a simple system for identifying the crux of an argument—what's at stake in it—by asking four questions in sequence:

1. What are the facts?
2. How can the issue be defined?
3. How much does it matter, and why?
4. What actions should be taken as a result?

Together these questions help determine the basic issues at stake in an argument. A look at the arguments swirling around Hurricane Katrina and its effects can illustrate how these questions work.

What are the facts? Certainly the hurricane hit the Gulf coast squarely, resulting in almost unimaginable damage and loss of life, especially in New Orleans, where levees failed along with the city's evacuation plan. Many arguments about the disaster had their crux (or stasis) here, claiming that the most important aspect of "what happened" was not the hurricane itself but the lack of preparation for it and the response to it.

How can it be defined? In the case of Katrina, the question of definition turned out to be crucial for many arguments about the event: It was easy enough to define the storm itself as a "category 4 hurricane" but much more difficult to classify the disaster beyond that simple scientific tag. To what extent was it a national disaster and to what extent a local one? To what extent was it a natural disaster and to what extent a man-made one? Was it proof of corruption and incompetence on the part of local and state officials? Of FEMA and the Bush administration? Something else?

How much does it matter? In addition to questions of fact and definition, ones about how serious it was also produced many arguments in the wake of Katrina. In the first week or so after the storm hit, the mayor of New Orleans argued that it was the most serious disaster ever to strike that city and that up to 10,000 lives would be lost. Others argued that while the storm represented a huge setback to the people of the region, they could and would overcome their losses and rebuild their cities and towns.

What actions should be taken as a result? Of all the stasis questions, this one was the basis for the greatest number of arguments about Katrina. From those arguing that the federal government should be responsible for fully funding reconstruction, to those arguing that the government should work in concert with insurance agencies and local and state officials, to those arguing that the most damaged neighborhoods should not be rebuilt at all—literally thousands of proposals were offered and debated.

• • •

Such questions can help you understand what's at stake in an argument—to help you figure out and assess the arguments put forth by others, to identify which stasis question lies at the heart of an argument—and then to decide whether or not the argument answers the question satisfactorily. In addition, they help you as an author to identify the crux or main point you want to make in an argument of your own. In the Katrina example, for instance,

working through the four stasis questions would help you see the disaster from a number of different perspectives and then to develop a cogent argument related to them.

WHAT'S THE CLAIM?

You probably run into dozens of claims every day. Your brother says the latest Spiderman film is the best one ever; your news feed says that Michigan State will be in the Final Four; a friend's *Facebook* update says it's a waste of time and money to eat at Power Pizza. Each of these statements makes a claim and argues implicitly for you to agree. The arguments you read and write in college often begin with a claim, an arguable statement that must then be supported with good reasons and evidence.

The sign in this photo of a Shell station certainly makes a clear claim: the cost of gasoline is causing great pain to consumers. The station owner, wanting to acknowledge both the fact of high gas prices and how it's affecting customers, has found a concise, amusing way to do it. But note that the claim is made indirectly rather than stated explicitly—and the indirectness is an essential part of its effectiveness as humor, and as advertising.

The easiest claims to identify are those that are stated directly as an explicit **THESIS**. Look, for instance, at the following paragraph, written by scholar and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois in 1922. As you read each sentence, ask yourself what Du Bois' claim is.

Abraham Lincoln was a Southern poor white, of illegitimate birth, poorly educated and unusually ugly, awkward, ill-dressed. He liked smutty stories and was a politician down to his toes. Aristocrats—Jeff Davis, Seward and their ilk—despised him, and indeed he had little outwardly that compelled respect. But in that curious human way he was big inside. He had reserves and depths and when habit and convention were torn away there was something left to Lincoln—nothing to most of his contemners. There was something left, so that at the crisis he was big enough to be inconsistent—cruel, merciful; peace-loving, a fighter; despising Negroes and letting them fight and vote; protecting slavery and freeing slaves. He was a man—a big, inconsistent, brave man.

—W. E. B. DU BOIS, *The Crisis*

We think you'll find that the claim is difficult to make out until the last sentence, which lets us know in an explicit thesis that the contradictions Du



Bois has been detailing are part of Lincoln’s greatness, part of what made him “big” and “brave.”

Take note as well of where the thesis appears in the text. Du Bois holds his claim for the very end. Here is a very different example, from journalist Maria Hinojosa’s 2011 syndicated newspaper column about legendary dancer Judith Jamison. Note that it begins with an explicit thesis stating a claim that the rest of the passage expands on—and supports:

[[Fig. 13.5 (Judith Jamison) in margin near Hinojosa extract; size to 5p6 wide; caption below]]



Judith Jamison

Judith Jamison is my kind of American cultural icon. . . . She has many accolades and awards—among them the National Medal of Arts, the Kennedy Center Honors and an Emmy. . . .

But when I met her . . . she said with a huge smile, “Yes, honey, but you know I still have to do the laundry myself, and no one in New York parts the sidewalk ‘cause I am comin’ through!”

I like icons who are authentic and accessible. I think our country benefits from that. It can only serve to inspire others to believe that they can try to do the same thing.

—MARIA HINOJOSA, “*Dancing Past the Boundaries*”

Notice that although Hinojosa’s claim is related to her own personal taste in American cultural icons, it is not actually about her taste itself. Her argument is not about her preference for cultural icons to be “authentic and accessible.” Instead, she’s arguing that given this criterion, Judith Jamison is a perfect example.

When you’re making an argument of your own, remember that a claim shouldn’t simply express a personal taste: If you say that you feel lousy or that you hate *Twitter*, no one could reasonably argue that you *don’t* feel that way. For a claim to be *arguable*—worth arguing—it has to take a position that others can logically have different perspectives on. Likewise, an arguable claim can’t simply be a statement of fact that no one would disagree with (“Violent video games earn millions of dollars every year”). And remember that in most academic contexts claims based on religious faith alone often cannot be argued since there are no agreed-upon standards of proof or evidence.

. . .

In most academic writing, you’ll be expected to state your claim explicitly as a thesis and to position the thesis near the beginning of your text, often at

the end of the introduction or the first paragraph. In most academic contexts in the United States, authors are expected to make their claims directly and get to the point fairly quickly.

When your claim is likely to challenge or surprise your audience, though, you may want to build support for it more gradually and hold off stating it explicitly until later in your argument, as Du Bois does. The same is true in many speeches and narratives, where a speaker or writer deliberately creates suspense or stimulates curiosity by withholding the thesis until a dramatic point in the text. In other situations, including some narratives and reports, you may not need to make a direct statement of your claim at all. But always make sure in such cases that your audience has a clear understanding of what the claim is.

EMOTIONAL, ETHICAL, AND LOGICAL APPEALS

While every argument appeals to audiences in a wide variety of ways, it's often convenient to lump such appeals into three basic kinds: emotional appeals (to the heart), ethical appeals (about credibility or character), and logical appeals (to the mind).

Emotional Appeals

Emotional appeals stir feelings and often invoke values that the audience is assumed to hold. The paragraph on Lincoln on p. 000, for example, offers a strong appeal to readers' emotions at the end when it represents Lincoln as "big" and "brave," invoking two qualities Americans traditionally value. Images can make especially powerful appeals to our hearts, such as these images about the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown that devastated Japan in 2011. The first image captures the staggering destruction unleashed on Japan by forces of nature, and the second argues that the world must now provide hope, help, and healing to the stricken country. As the first example suggests, images can appeal very strongly to emotions: In this sense, a picture truly is worth a thousand words. But words too can make a powerful emotional appeal, as the second example shows.

As a reader, you'll want to consider how any such emotional appeals support the author's claim. And as an author yourself, you should consider how you can appeal to your audience's emotions and whether such appeals



An image of submerged cars taken from Japanese TV coverage of the earthquake that jolted off the east coast of Honshu, Japan's main island, on March 11, 2011 (*left*). Many groups responded to the situation and offered aid—from governments and international nonprofit organizations to small local groups that banded under the slogan “Hope Help Heal Japan” (*right*).

are appropriate to your claim, your purpose, and your audience. And be careful not to overdo emotional appeals, pulling at the heartstrings so hard that your audience feels manipulated.

Ethical Appeals

Ethical appeals evoke the credibility and good character of whoever is making the argument. See how the blog kept by Lawrence Lessig, an advocate for reform of copyright laws and a critic of institutional corruption, includes information intended to establish his credibility and integrity. Here is part of his “bio” page:

Lawrence Lessig is the Director of the Edmond J. Safra Foundation Center for Ethics at Harvard University, and a Professor of Law at Harvard Law School. . . .

For much of his academic career, Lessig has focused on law and technology, especially as it affects copyright. He is the author of five books on the subject—*Remix* (2008), *Code v2* (2007), *Free Culture* (2004), *The Future of Ideas* (2001) and *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (1999)—and has served as lead counsel in a number of important cases marking the boundaries of copyright law in a digital age, including *Eldred v. Ashcroft*, a

challenge to the 1998 Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, and *Golan v. Holder*. . . .

Lessig has won numerous awards, including the Free Software Foundation's Freedom Award, and was named one of *Scientific American's Top 50 Visionaries*. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Philosophical Society.

—LESSIG 2.0

All of this information, including his position as director of a prestigious center at Harvard and his numerous awards, helps establish Lessig's credibility and helps readers decide how much stock they can put in his blog entries.

Citing scholarly positions and awards is only one way of establishing credibility. Here's Lessig using other ways in a keynote address to a 2002 convention devoted to discussion of free and open-source software:

I have been doing this for about two years—more than 100 of these gigs. This is about the last one. One more and it's over for me. So I figured I wanted to write a song to end it. But then I realized I don't sing and I can't write music. But I came up with the refrain, at least, right? This captures the point. If you understand this refrain, you're gonna' understand everything I want to say to you today. It has four parts: Creativity and innovation always builds on the past. The past always tries to control the creativity that builds upon it. Free societies enable the future by limiting this power of the past. Ours is less and less a free society.

—LAWRENCE LESSIG, *Keynote Address, 2002 Open Source Convention*

In this brief opening, Lessig lets listeners know that he has a lot of experience with his topic—in fact, he has spoken on it more than a hundred times. His very informal tone suggests that he is a down-to-earth person who has a simple, direct message to give to the people in his audience. In addition, his self-deprecating humor (he can't sing or write music) underscores his self-confidence: He knows he can create the equivalent of a “good song” on a topic about which he has spoken so frequently.

Building common ground. Lessig's use of simple, everyday language helps establish credibility in another way: by building common ground with his audience. He is not “putting on airs” but speaking directly to them; their concerns, he seems to say, are his concerns.

While building common ground cannot ensure that your audience is

“on your side,” it does show that you respect your audience and their views and that you’ve established, with them, a mutual interest in the topic. Each party cares about the issues that you are addressing. Thus, building common ground is a particularly important part of creating an effective argument: Especially is you are addressing an audience unlikely to agree with your position, finding some area of agreement with them, some common ground you can all stand on, can help give the argument a chance of being heard.

No global leader in recent history has been more successful in building common ground than Nelson Mandela, who became the first black president of South Africa in 1994 after the country’s harsh apartheid system of racial segregation ended. In *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Made a Nation*, the basis for the 2009 film *Invictus*, author John Carlin recounts hearing Mandela say that “sport has the power to change the world. . . . It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. . . . It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers.” Carlin uses this quotation as an example of Mandela’s singular ability to “walk in another person’s shoes” and to build common ground even where none seems possible. He goes on to detail the ways in which Mandela, employing one of the appeals, used white South Africans’ fervent love of rugby to build common ground between them and the country’s black majority, which had long seen the almost all-white national rugby team, the Springboks, as a symbol of white supremacy:

He explained how he had . . . used the 1995 Rugby World Cup as an instrument in the grand strategic purpose he set for himself during his five years as South Africa’s first democratically elected president: to reconcile blacks and whites and create the conditions for a lasting peace. . . . He told me, with a chuckle or two, about the trouble he had persuading his own people to back the rugby team. . . . Having won over his own people he went out and won over the enemy.

—JOHN CARLIN, *Playing the Enemy*

Mandela understood, in short, that when people were as far apart in their thinking as black and white South Africans were when apartheid ended, the only way to move forward, to make arguments for the country’s future that both groups would listen to, was to discover something that could bring them together. For Mandela—and for South Africa—rugby provided the needed common ground. His personal meetings with the Springboks players and his public support for the team, including wearing a Springboks

jersey to their matches, paid off to such an extent that when they won a stunning upset victory in the 1995 World Cup final in Johannesburg, the multiracial crowd chanted his name and the country united in celebration. And establishing that common ground, through an emotional appeal, contributed to Mandela's extraordinary ethical appeal—which he put to good use in the difficult arguments he had to make in the transition to a post-apartheid South Africa.

In all the arguments you encounter, you'll want to ask yourself how much you can trust the author. Does he or she seem knowledgeable? represent opposing positions fairly (or at all)? do anything to build common ground?

And as an author yourself, you need to establish your own authority by showing you know what you're talking about by citing trustworthy sources; to demonstrate that you're fair by representing positions other than your own fairly and accurately; and to establish some kind of common ground with your audience.

Logical Appeals

Appeals to logic have long been regarded as the most important of all the appeals, following Aristotle's definition of humans as rational animals. Recent research has made it increasingly clear, however, that people seldom make decisions based on logic alone and that emotion might actually play a larger role in our decision making than does logic. Nevertheless, in academic contexts, logical appeals still count for a lot, especially when it comes to arguments. When we make an argument, we need to provide evidence to support our claims. Such evidence takes many forms, including facts and statistics, data from surveys and questionnaires, direct observations, testimony, experiments, interviews, personal experience, visuals, and more.

Facts and statistics. Facts and statistics are two of the most commonly used kinds of evidence. Facts are ideas that have been proven to be true—and that an audience will accept without further proof. Statistics are numerical data based on research. See how *Men's Health* editor David Zinczenko offers a number of facts and statistics as support for an op-ed argument in the *New York Times* about the effects of fast foods on Americans today:

Before 1994, diabetes in children was generally caused by a genetic disorder—only about 5 percent of childhood cases were obesity-related,

or Type 2 diabetes. Today, according to the National Institutes of Health, Type 2 diabetes accounts for at least 30 percent of all new childhood cases of diabetes in this country.

Not surprisingly, money spent to treat diabetes has skyrocketed, too. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that diabetes accounted for \$2.6 billion in health care costs in 1969. Today's number is an unbelievable \$100 billion a year.

Shouldn't we know better than to eat two meals a day in fast-food restaurants? That's one argument. But where, exactly, are consumers—particularly teenagers—supposed to find alternatives? Drive down any thoroughfare in America, and I guarantee you'll see one of our country's more than 13,000 McDonald's restaurants. Now, drive back up the block and try to find someplace to buy a grapefruit.

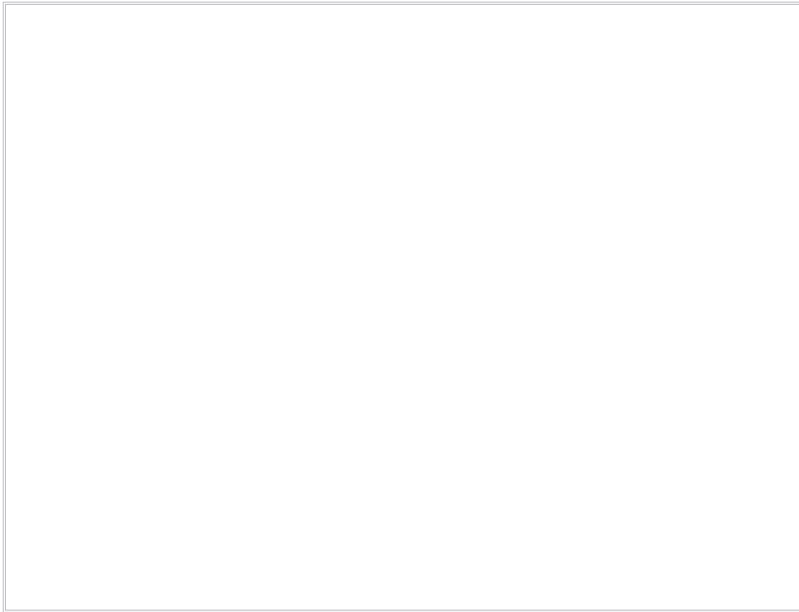
Complicating the lack of alternatives is the lack of information about what, exactly, we're consuming. There are no calorie information charts on fast-food packaging, the way there are on grocery items. Advertisements don't carry warning labels the way tobacco ads do. Prepared foods aren't covered under Food and Drug Administration labeling laws. Some fast-food purveyors will provide calorie information on request, but even that can be hard to understand.

—DAVID ZINCZENKO, *"Don't Blame the Eater"*

The facts Zinczenko presents about the lack of calorie information and warning labels will be obvious to his readers, and most of his statistics come from highly respected health organizations whose authority adds to the credibility of his argument. Statistics can provide powerful support for an argument, but be sure they're accurate, up-to-date, from reliable sources—and relevant to the argument. And if you base an argument on facts, be sure to take into account all the relevant facts. Realistically, that's hard to do—but you should be careful not to ignore any important facts.

Surveys and questionnaires. You have probably responded to a number of surveys or questionnaires, and you will find them used extensively as evidence in support of arguments. A study of reading habits in Ireland, for example, used extensive surveys to gather information about the genres of fiction preferred by reading groups. The data was distilled into a graph that shows what kinds of books groups read most often.

The information displayed in the graph offers evidence that literary fiction is by far the most-read genre among reading groups in Ireland. Be-



Books read by reading groups in Ireland.

fore accepting such evidence, however, readers of the study might want to read further to find out how many groups were surveyed, what methods of analysis the research team used, and how particular works were classified (how did the team distinguish between “literary” and “popular”?) Whether you’re reacting to survey data in an essay or on a PowerPoint presentation, or conducting a survey of your own, you need to scrutinize the methods and findings. Who conducted the survey, and why? (And yes, you need to think about that if you conducted it.) Who are the respondents, how were they chosen, and are they representative? What do the results show?

Observations. A study reported in 2011 in *Science News* demonstrates the way direct observations can form the basis for an argument. In this study, researchers in Uganda observed the way young chimpanzees play, and their findings support arguments about the relative importance of biology and socialization on the way boys and girls play.

A new study finds that young females in one group of African chimpanzees use sticks as dolls more than their male peers do, often treating pieces of wood like a mother chimp caring for an infant. . . .

Ape observations, collected over 14 years of field work with the Kanyawara chimp community in Kibale National Park, provide the first evidence of a nonhuman animal in the wild that exhibits sex differences in how it plays, two primatologists report in the Dec. 21 *Current Biology*. This finding supports a controversial view that biology as well as society underlies boys' and girls' contrasting toy preferences.

—BRUCE BOWER, “*Female Chimps Play with ‘Dolls’*”

As this study suggests, observations carried out over time are particularly useful as evidence since they show that something is not just a onetime event but a persistent pattern. As a college student, you won't likely have occasion to spend 14 years observing something, but in most cases you'll need to observe your subject more than once.

Interviews. Reporters often use information drawn from interviews to add authenticity to their reports by providing evidence “from the horse's mouth,” so to speak. After Raúl Castro took over as leader of Cuba following



A young chimp cradles a piece of bark, in imitation of a mother caring for her child.

his brother Fidel's surgery in 2006, NPR reporter Tom Gjelten used material from an interview with Raúl published in *Granma*, the Cuban Communist Party newspaper, to argue against the assumption that Raúl would defer to his older brother and take few actions on his own:

In fact, he's been busy. As Defense Minister, Raul put the Cuban military on alert in the first hours after Fidel's surgery was announced. He also told the *Granma* editor that he had ordered the mobilization of tens of thousands of army reservists and militiamen because, he said, we could not rule out the risk of somebody going crazy within the U.S. government.

—TOM GJELTEN, "Raul Castro Reticent in Newspaper Interview"

Note that this interview, like many, depicts the subject largely as he wants to be seen. Reporters—and their audiences—would have had to look beyond the interview and track Raul's other actions to see whether they supported the claim Gjelten made on the basis of the interview. As an author, be sure that anyone you interview is an authority on your subject and will be considered trustworthy by your audience.

Testimony. Most of us depend on reliable testimony to help us accept or reject arguments: A friend tells us that *Bridesmaids* is a great movie, and likely as not we'll go to see the film. Testimony is especially persuasive evidence when it comes from experts and authorities on the topic. When you cite authorities to support an argument, you help to build your own credibility as an author. Readers know that you've done your homework and that you are aware of the different perspectives on your topic. In the example on p. 000 about gender-linked behavior among chimpanzees, for example, the *Science News* report notes testimony from the two scientists who conducted the research—and includes their academic affiliations.

Experiments. Evidence based on experiments is especially important in chemistry, engineering, psychology, and other fields in the sciences and social sciences, where data is often the basis for supporting an argument. In arguing that multitaskers pay a high mental price, Clifford Nass, a professor of communications, based his claim on a series of empirical studies of college-age students, who agreed to participate in three tests. They divided the students into two groups, those who were identified as "high multitaskers" and those who were identified as "low multitaskers." In the first two tests, which measured focused attention and memory, the

researchers were surprised to find that the low multitaskers outperformed high multitaskers in statistically significant ways. Still not satisfied that low multitaskers were more productive learners, the researchers designed a third test, hypothesizing that if multitaskers couldn't do well on the earlier tests on focused attention and memory, maybe they would be much better at shifting from task to task more quickly and effectively than others.

Wrong again, the study found.

The test subjects were shown images of letters and numbers at the same time and instructed what to focus on. When they were told to pay attention to numbers, they had to determine if the digits were even or odd. When told to concentrate on letters, they had to say whether they were vowels or consonants.

Again, the heavy multitaskers underperformed the light multitaskers.

"They couldn't help thinking about the task they weren't doing," the researchers reported. "The high multitaskers are always drawing from all the information in front of them. They can't keep things separate in their minds."

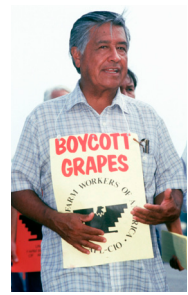
—ADAM GORLICK, "*Media Multitaskers Pay Mental Price*"

Personal experience. Personal experience can provide powerful support for an argument since it brings a kind of "eyewitness" evidence, which can establish a connection between author and audience. Be careful, however, that any personal experience you cite is pertinent to your argument and will be appropriate for your purpose. In an article for the *Atlantic* about the legendary labor organizer César Chávez, Caitlin Flanagan—who grew up in California's San Joaquin Valley, where Chávez's United Farm Workers movement began—recounts her mother's personal experience in support of her argument that Chávez had a "singular and almost mystical way of eliciting not just fealty but a kind of awe."

Of course, it had all started with Mom. Somewhere along the way, she had met Cesar Chavez, or at least attended a rally where he had spoken, and that was it. Like almost everyone else who ever encountered him, she was spellbound. "This wonderful, wonderful man," she would call him, and off we went to collect clothes for the farmworkers' children, and to sell red-and-black UFW buttons and collect signatures.

—CAITLIN FLANAGAN, "*The Madness of Cesar Chavez*"

Charts, images, and other visuals. Visuals of various kinds often provide valuable evidence to support an argument. Pie charts like the one of the literary genres favored by Irish reading groups, photographs like the one of the female chimpanzee cradling a stick, and many other kinds of visuals—including drawings, bar and line graphs, cartoons, screenshots, videos, and advertisements—can sometimes make it easier for an audience to see certain kinds of evidence. Imagine how much more difficult it would be to take in the information shown in the pie chart about the genres read by reading groups had the data been presented in a paragraph. Remember, though, that visual evidence usually needs to be explained with words—photos may need captions, and any visuals need to be referenced in the accompanying text.



César Chávez

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Keep in mind that the medium you're using affects the kind of appeals you choose and the way you convey them. In a print text, your appeals have to be in the text itself; in a digital medium, you can link directly to statistics, images, and other information that makes appeals. In a spoken text, any appeals need to be said or shown on a slide or a handout—and anything you say needs to be simple and direct—and memorable (your audience can't rewind or reread data). And in every case your appeals drawn from sources need to be fully **DOCUMENTED**.

Are There Any Problems with the Reasoning?

Some kinds of appeals use faulty reasoning, or reasoning that some may consider unfair, lacking in sound reasoning, or demonstrating lazy or simpleminded thinking. Such appeals are called fallacies, and because they can often be very powerful and persuasive, it's important to be alert for them in arguments you encounter—and in your own writing. Here are some of the most common fallacies.

Begging the question tries to support an argument by simply restating it in other language, so that the reasoning just goes around in circles. For example, the statement “We need to reduce the national debt because the government owes too much money” begs the question of whether the debt is actually too large, because the parts of the sentence before and after *because* say essentially the same thing.

Either-or arguments, also called *false dilemmas*, argue that only two alternatives are possible in a situation that actually is more complex. A candidate who declares, “I will not allow the United States to become a defenseless, bankrupt nation—it must remain the military and economic superpower of the world,” ignores the many possibilities in between.

Ad hominem (Latin for “to the man”) arguments make personal attacks on those who support an opposing position rather than address the position itself: “Of course council member Acevedo doesn’t want to build a new high school; she doesn’t have any children herself.” The council member’s childlessness may not be the reason for her opposition to a new high school, and even if it is, such an attack doesn’t provide any argument for building the school.

Faulty causality, the mistaken assumption that because one event followed another, the first event caused the second, is also called *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (Latin for “after this, therefore because of this”). For example, a mayor running for reelection may boast that a year after she began having the police patrol neighborhoods more frequently, the city’s crime rate has dropped significantly. But there might be many other possible causes for the drop, so considerable evidence would be needed to establish such a causal connection.

Bandwagon appeals simply urge the audience to go along with the crowd: “Join the millions who’ve found relief from agonizing pain through Weleda Migraine Remedy.” “Everybody knows you shouldn’t major in a subject that doesn’t lead to a job.” “Don’t you agree that we all need to support our troops?” Such appeals often flatter the audience by implying that making the popular choice means they are smart, attractive, sophisticated, and so on.

Slippery slope arguments contend that if a certain event occurs, it will (or at least might easily) set in motion a chain of other events that will end in disaster, like a minor misstep at the top of a slick incline that causes you to slip and eventually to slide all the way down to the bottom. For example, opponents of physician-assisted suicide often warn that making it legal for doctors to help people end their lives would eventually lead to an increase in the suicide rate, as people who would not otherwise kill themselves find it easier to do so, and even to an increase in murders disguised as suicide. Slippery slope arguments are not always wrong—an increasingly

catastrophic chain reaction does sometimes grow out of a seemingly small beginning. But the greater the difference is between the initial event and the predicted final outcome, the more evidence is needed that the situation will actually play out in this way.

Setting up a straw man misrepresents an opposing argument, characterizing it as more extreme or otherwise different than it actually is, in order to attack it more easily. The misrepresentation is like an artificial figure made of straw that's easier to knock down than a real person would be. For example, critics of the 2010 federal Affordable Care Act often attacked it as a “government takeover of health care” or a “government-run system.” In fact, although the legislation increased government's role in the U.S. health-care system in some ways, it still relied primarily on private systems of insurance and health-care providers.

Hasty generalizations draw sweeping conclusions on the basis of too little evidence: “Both of the political science classes I took were deadily dull, so it must be a completely boring subject.” “You shouldn't drink so much coffee—that study that NPR reported on today said it causes cancer.” Many hasty generalizations take the form of stereotypes about groups of people, such as men and women, gays and straights, and ethnic and religious groups. It's difficult to make an argument without using some generalizations, but they always need to be based on sufficient evidence and appropriately qualified with words like *most*, *in many cases*, *usually*, *in the United States*, *in recent years*, and so on.

Faulty analogies are comparisons that do not hold up in some way crucial to the argument they are used to support. Accusing parents who homeschool their children of “educational malpractice” by saying that parents who aren't doctors wouldn't be allowed to perform surgery on their children on the kitchen table, so parents who aren't trained to teach shouldn't be allowed to teach their children there either makes a false analogy. Teaching and surgery aren't alike enough to support an argument that what's required for one is needed for the other.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER PERSPECTIVES?

In any argument, it's important to consider perspectives other than those of the author's, especially those that would not support the claim or would argue it very differently. As a reader, you should question any arguments that don't acknowledge other positions, and as a writer, you'll want to be sure that you represent—and respond to—perspectives other than your own. Acknowledging other arguments, in fact, is another way of demonstrating that you're fair and establishing your credibility—whereas failing to consider other views can make you seem close-minded or lazy, at best, and unfair or manipulative, at worst. Think of all those advertisements you've seen that say, in effect, "Doctors recommend drug X."

The cigarette ad included here is one of the most infamous of these advertising arguments. Of course, this ad doesn't claim that all doctors smoke Camels, but it implies that plenty of them do and that what's good for a doctor is good for other consumers. But what if the ad had been required to con-

"You're like part of the family, Doctor!"

• Doctor, you—doctor of the science of medicine and surgery, with all the knowledge and skill that his years of training and experience provide.
But your doctor is more than that.
He is a wise counsellor to old and young. He is a loyal and understanding friend to all.
He is, indeed, "like part of the family."

According to a recent Nationwide survey: **MORE DOCTORS SMOKE CAMELS THAN ANY OTHER CIGARETTE**

YOUR "I-ZONE" WILL TELL YOU...
The "I-Zone"—I for taste and I for throat—is your own personal proof for any cigarette. For only your taste and your throat can best be you—and how it shows your choice, the real basis of the reputation of Camels, we believe Camels will win your "I-Zone" to a "T."

CAMELS *Costlier Tobaccos*

GENERAL physicians, surgeons, specialists, doctors in every branch of medicine... 113,597 doctors in all... were covered in this survey by three independent research organizations. The object of the survey was to determine what cigarette doctors themselves preferred to smoke. The brand named most was Camel.
After all, a doctor smokes for pleasure too. The pleasing mildness of a Camel can be just as welcome to his throat as to yours... the full, rich flavor of Camel's expertly blended cutler tobacco just as appealing to his taste. If you are not now smoking Camels, try them. Try them in your "I-Zone" (see left).

sider other viewpoints? The result would have been a more honest and more informative, though perhaps a less successful, argument. Today, cigarette ads are required to carry another point of view: a warning about the adverse effects of smoking. So if an argument does not take other points of view into consideration, you will be right to question it, asking yourself what those other viewpoints might be and why they would not have been taken into account.

Compare the misleading Camels ad to the following discussion of contemporary seismology:

Jian Lin was 14 years old in 1973, when the Chinese government under Mao Zedong recruited him for a student science team called “the earthquake watchers.” After a series of earthquakes that had killed thousands in northern China, the country’s seismologists thought that if they augmented their own research by having observers keep an eye out for anomalies like snakes bolting early from their winter dens and erratic well-water levels, they might be able to do what no scientific body had managed before: issue an earthquake warning that would save thousands of lives.

In the winter of 1974, the earthquake watchers were picking up some suspicious signals near the city of Haicheng. Panicked chickens were squalling and trying to escape their pens; water levels were falling in wells. Seismologists had also begun noticing a telltale pattern of small quakes. “They were like popcorn kernels,” Lin tells me, “popping up all over the general area.” Then, suddenly, the popping stopped, just as it had before a catastrophic earthquake some years earlier that killed more than 8,000. “Like ‘the calm before the storm,’” Lin says. “We have the exact same phrase in Chinese.” On the morning of February 4, 1975, the seismology bureau issued a warning: Haicheng should expect a big earthquake, and people should move outdoors.

At 7:36 p.m., a magnitude 7.0 quake struck. The city was nearly leveled, but only about 2,000 people were killed. Without the warning, easily 150,000 would have died. “And so you finally had an earthquake forecast that did indeed save lives,” Lin recalls. . . .

Lin is now a senior scientist of geophysics at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, in Massachusetts, where he spends his time studying not the scurrying of small animals and fluctuating electrical current between trees (another fabled warning sign), but seismometer readings, GPS coordinates, and global earthquake-notification reports. He and

his longtime collaborator, Ross Stein of the U.S. Geological Survey, are champions of a theory that could enable scientists to forecast earthquakes with more precision and speed.

Some established geophysicists insist that all earthquakes are random, yet everyone agrees that aftershocks are not. Instead, they follow certain empirical laws. Stein, Lin, and their collaborators hypothesized that many earthquakes classified as main shocks are actually aftershocks, and they went looking for the forces that cause faults to fail.

Their work was in some ways heretical: For a long time, earthquakes were thought to release only the stress immediately around them; an earthquake that happened in one place would decrease the possibility of another happening nearby. But that didn't explain earthquake sequences like the one that rumbled through the desert and mountains east of Los Angeles in 1992. . . .

Lin and Stein both admit that [their theory] doesn't explain all earthquakes. Indeed, some geophysicists, like Karen Felzer, of the U.S. Geological Survey, think their hypothesis gives short shrift to the impact that dynamic stress—the actual rattling of a quake in motion—has on neighboring faults.

—JUDITH LEWIS MERNIT, “*Seismology: Is San Francisco Next?*”

As this excerpt shows, Lin and Stein's research supports the claim that earthquakes can be predicted some of the time, but they—and the author of the article about them—are careful not to overstate their argument or to ignore those who disagree with it. And the author responds to other perspectives in three ways. She *acknowledges* the “all random” theory that is held by “[s]ome established geophysicists”; she provides evidence (including details not shown here) to *refute* the idea that “earthquakes release only the stress immediately around them.” And in the last paragraph she *accommodates* other perspectives by qualifying Lin and Stein's claim and mentioning what some critics see as a weakness in it.

So remember to consider what objections someone might have to your position—and what other perspectives exist on your topic. You may not agree with them, but they might give reason to qualify your thesis—or even to change your position. In any case, they will help you to sharpen your own thinking, and your writing can only improve as a result.

Whatever you think about other viewpoints, be sure to acknowledge them fairly and respectfully in your writing—and to accommodate or refute them as possible.

WHAT ABOUT ORGANIZATION?

Arguments can be organized various ways. You may decide to approach a controversial or surprising argument slowly, building up to the claim but withholding it until you have established plenty of evidence to support it—as W. E. B. Du Bois does in his argument about Abraham Lincoln on p. 000. On the other hand, you may choose to start right off with the claim and then build support for it piece by piece by piece, as in this opening from a 2011 essay in *Wired* on the power of product tie-ins in today’s world:

Cartoon characters permeate every aspect of our children’s existences. We serve them *Transformers* Lunchables and have them brush with SpongeBob-branded toothpaste. We tuck them in on branded sheets, fix their owies with branded bandages, and change their branded diapers because we know, or at least we think, that the characters will make them happy. Whether our kids are sleeping, bleeding, or pooping, Spider-Man is there. Even if you operate one of those rarefied TV-free households, the brands will penetrate, assuming your children go to preschool, have friends, or eat food.

—NEAL POLLACK, “*Why Your Kids Are Addicted to Cars*”

One common organizational pattern comes from ancient Greek and Roman orators. Such arguments begin with an introduction that gains the audience’s attention, provides any necessary background information, establishes the writer’s credibility, and announces the central claim. The writer then presents good reasons (including emotional, ethical, and logical ones) in support of the claim, considers other perspectives carefully and fairly, and concludes with a summary of the argument that points out its implications and makes clear what the writer wants the audience to think or do. This structure can be useful for extended arguments because it tells your audience everything you want them to know—and that they need to know.

Still another way to organize an argument is to introduce it with a narrative. In arguing that national policies had left great parts of Utah and other western states toxic and extremely hazardous to human health, writer and activist Terry Tempest Williams opens the epilogue to her 1991 book *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* with a narrative based on her own life:

I belong to a clan of one-breasted women. My mother, my grandmothers, and six aunts have all had mastectomies. Seven are dead. The two who survive have just completed rounds of chemotherapy and radiation.

I've had my own problems: two biopsies for breast cancer and a small tumor between my ribs diagnosed as a "borderline malignancy."

This is my family history.

—TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS, "*The Clan of One-Breasted Women*"

As with all rhetorical choices, you will want to select an organizational structure that will be most appropriate for your audience, purpose, and the rest of your **RHETORICAL SITUATION**.

WHAT ABOUT STYLE?

An argument's style usually reinforces its message in as many ways as possible. The ancient Roman orator Cicero identified three basic styles, which he termed "high," "middle," and "low." Today, we can see a wider range of styles, from the highly formal language of U.S. Supreme Court opinions to the informal style of everyday written communication such as memos and email, to the colloquial style of spoken language, to the highly informal shorthand characteristic of texting and *Twitter*.

You can learn a lot by looking closely at the stylistic choices in an argument—the use of individual words and figurative language, of personal pronouns (or not), of vivid images (verbal and visual), of design and format. In 2005, the *Los Angeles Times* announced an experiment it called its "Wikitorial," in which the newspaper cautiously invited readers to log on to its website and rewrite editorials:

Plenty of skeptics are predicting embarrassment; like an arthritic old lady who takes to the dance floor, they say, the *Los Angeles Times* is more likely to break a hip than to be hip. We acknowledge that possibility. Nevertheless, we proceed.

The skeptics turned out to be right, and after three days the paper ended the experiment, saying:

Unfortunately, we have had to remove this feature, at least temporarily, because a few readers were flooding the site with inappropriate mate-

rial. Thanks and apologies to the thousands of people who logged on in the right spirit. —“LA Times Shuts Reader-Editorial Website”

Savvy readers will be alert to the power of stylistic choices in these messages. The description of closing down Wikitorial as “unfortunate” and the equally careful choice of “a few readers,” “flooding,” and “inappropriate material” mark this as a formal and judicious message that stands in sharp contrast to the breezy, slightly self-deprecating style of the first announcement, with its casual use of “plenty of” and its play on “hip.” How does the sober style of the second announcement influence your response as a reader? How different might your response be if the paper had declared, “We’re pulling the plug on this page since a few creeps loaded it with a bunch of crap”?

Now let’s look at a visual argument. This spoof ad was created by Adbusters, whose website identifies it as a “global network of artists, activists, writers, pranksters, students, educators and entrepreneurs” and proclaims

You can find other examples of Adbusters’ arguments at www.adbusters.org.



that its aim is “to topple existing power structures and forge a major shift in the way we will live in the 21st century.” The ad satirizes the belief that drugs can be used to alleviate unhappiness, in this case presenting Prozac as an everyday necessity—like laundry detergent. Note especially the retro style, which evokes “the happy housewife” and “the good life” of the 1950s.

In your own writing, you will need to make similar important stylistic choices, beginning—as is almost always the case—with the overall effects you want to create. Try to capture that effect in a word or two (concern, outrage, sympathy, direct action), and then use it to help you choose words, images, and design that will create that effect and convey it most effectively to your audience.