15

Arguing Your Case

AIMS OF THE CHAPTER

As you learn to synthesize facts and ideas, analyze problems, do research, and think through problems and cases, you will become involved with the issues you examine and more committed to your conclusions. This chapter provides guidance on how to support your conclusions through argument. Argument helps everyone come to a better understanding, even when some disagreement remains after all sides have been heard.

KEY POINTS

1. Often people who think much about the subjects they study disagree with each other. Argument helps them compare and evaluate their conflicting views.
2. In academic argument you present all the reasons and evidence that support your view while still respecting alternative views.
3. In developing an argument paper, you decide what kind of argument you want to make, how your view differs from those your readers might hold, how you can move the readers from their position to yours, and the resources you have available to help them see the value of your position.
4. In presenting your argument, you assert your own position and your reasons clearly, but in a way that both acknowledges and connects with your opponents' views.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- Have you ever avoided stating your opinion because you felt that you couldn't make yourself understood or couldn't develop a strong enough argument to make the other person accept your position?

- Have you ever gotten into a disagreement with a classmate or an instructor? What did you learn from the disagreement? Did you feel you were able to express your ideas well enough so that others could understand what you were saying and why, so that they took your argument seriously? To what extent did you feel that your arguments influenced them?
- On the other hand, did the disagreement simply come to a dead end, with neither side learning from the other or fully understanding the other's position? Why do you think that happened? How could the interaction have been changed to have a more satisfying outcome?
- When have you been persuaded by another's argument? What do you think caused you to see the validity of the other person's position?
- What ideas have you been developing that might put you at odds with some of your classmates, teachers, or members of your community? Who would you like to convince of your new ideas? Why?

Plenty to Say

In the previous chapters of this book we have been working on many kinds of statements that allow you to participate in academic life:

- The kinds of statements that allow you to deploy the material taught in lectures and textbooks (Chapters 5 and 6).
- The kinds of statements that bring in your own experiences and thoughts in relation to the concerns of the course (Chapter 4).
- The kinds of statements that enable you to apply what you are learning to real situations in the world and analyze them (Chapters 7, 8, and 9).
- The kinds of statements that allow you to report the results of your own investigations back into the class (Chapters 10, 11, and 12).
- The kinds of statements that embody your own way of putting complex ideas together (Chapter 13).
- The kinds of statements that present your solutions to problems (Chapter 14).

As you gain skill and confidence in these kinds of statements, you will find that you have much to say. You will have your own way of seeing and talking about things that are important and real to you, as well as many substantial ways of contributing to discussions in the classroom, in discussion groups, and in cafeterias.

Of course, skill in the kinds of statements we have worked on in the book should have a direct effect on your grades — after all, you should be re-

warded for being able to produce the kinds of writing instructors assign. However, as you are able to speak with clarity and confidence about things you know and think and perceive, you will feel the power of a more substantial reward — being able to share knowledge, explorations, and thinking with other people who are learning, exploring, and thinking.

As you enter into these conversations, you will be building ideas, images, visions, and plans in your areas of interest and concern. Finding that other people understand what you are working on and thinking about will give your thinking energy and confidence. Even more, finding people who have been thinking along lines similar to you will confirm to you that something important is to be found in the direction you are going. The conversation becomes even more pleasurable when you discover that others are influenced by your comments.

Complexity of Beliefs

Unfortunately, as you get caught up in your own new ideas and want to share them, you will find that many other people are doing the same. They draw on different experiences and skills, put together different pieces of information, investigate different areas, and develop different concepts.

These other people, busy at looking at what interests them, won't see what you see. They may not even be aware of the kind of thing you are trying to show them. The more alive the learning environment is at your college — the more students bring richer resources to bear on the problems and issues of the classroom — the more different ideas and perspectives people will develop. Moreover, the more people have ideas and information of their own, the more likely they are to resist what you say, for they will have a stake in their own ideas. They will have a standpoint from which to evaluate, criticize, and counter yours.

Professionals in any field often do not see eye to eye on crucial issues, even in areas where there are agreed-upon principles, limited facts, and specific procedures. Even though mathematicians may agree on many things, they hardly think alike — each has picked a personal set of problems to work on, and each has his or her own way of trying to solve them. Mathematicians do not find it easy to convince other mathematicians of a new proof for a theorem. Other mathematicians work very hard from all their perspectives to find flaws, and each has powerful tools for finding them.

Of course, some truths are accepted as part of agreed-upon knowledge and principles. On many standard issues and problems, almost all professionals agree. But such problems are not worth discussing because the answer is obvious: Give the patient penicillin and send them home; file the deed with the county and collect your fee. Those things that are worth discussing are open problems that people are trying to solve, new ways of looking at something, or a confusing turn of events. In trying to come to terms with the uncertain, people will see different things, apply different tools, and

work in different directions. When issues are interesting, people tend to disagree.

In order to be heard in this world of strong and conflicting ideas, you need to present your thoughts clearly and forcefully. To participate in the discussion, you need to know how to argue for your ideas.

USEFUL CONCEPTS FROM RHETORIC

Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric,* identifies three aspects of making an argument:

- *Reasoning, logic, and evidence presented in the text.* For such appeals to the reason, we use the Greek term *logos.* Much of academic argument relies on logos, and much of this book has been devoted to developing the ability to present and analyze facts in extended statements.
- *The character and trustworthiness of the speaker.* The more we see a speaker as knowledgeable, careful, honest, well-intentioned, and intelligent, the more we are likely to accept what the speaker says, whereas we may be more quick to criticize, find flaws, or otherwise discount the words of someone we suspect isn't knowledgeable, careful, reliable, or truthful or who may be ill-willed and hostile to our interests. The Greek term for the trustworthiness of the speaker is *ethos,* from which we get our terms *ethics* and *ethical.* Academic argument cannot totally depend on ethos, for people on all sides of an issue may be intelligent, careful, knowledgeable, and honest; nonetheless, a failure of ethos is likely to make it hard for people to take seriously the logos of your argument. If you are not careful with the facts,

make errors of reasoning, or show an aggressive hostility to opposing opinions, readers may doubt your trustworthiness and may be predisposed to treat the logic of your argument with skepticism.

- *The feelings of the audience.* This emotional part of the argument is called in Greek *pathos.* We often associate emotion with advertising and political movements, for we often think that emotions cloud reason and judgment and therefore are the enemy of reasonable argument. However, many emotions are perfectly consistent with reason — such as a passion for truth, a distaste for unsupported opinions, and professional pride — and reasonable arguments could not be carried out without them. Any argument that asks people to give up their professional pride, their commitment to detailed evidence, or their loyalty to specific sets of ideas developed over the history of their discipline is likely to have rough going. The more we can draw on the strong attachment professionals have for certain kinds of reasoning and investigation, the more likely they are to take our arguments seriously.

EXAMINING ACADEMIC ARGUMENTS

In a subject area of interest to you, identify a recent area of controversy. Locate several articles presenting serious arguments on various sides of the issue. Examine how each article defines the point at issue, identify the position taken in the article, and explain how that position relates to the arguments made by others. What kinds of arguments does each article make for its own position and against alternatives? What kinds of evidence or support are used? What is the attitude or tone taken toward alternative views? What are the standards of mutual respect and decorum? Which kinds of arguments seem to be most effective and persuasive?

From your examination of these examples, describe in several pages what you find about how controversy is conducted in your field. Compare your findings in a discussion with classmates who have been looking at other examples from either your subject area or other areas.

Arguing for Ideas

Arguing for one's ideas in an academic context means presenting your ideas clearly and completely, presenting the most persuasive reasoning and evidence that could lead to your conclusions, and showing the advantage of your view over others'. It does not mean trying to blow opponents away, disregarding their ideas, and dismissing their evidence.

Respect for the ideas of others is not just a matter of politeness. If you are to influence others who have spent time, energy, and serious work developing their own views, it will help you to take those views seriously. Most obviously, you need to understand those views because you need to help them see how your ideas fit or clash with theirs, and then move them from their position to yours. Another reason is that they may have seen something you haven't. Doctors working together in trying to determine a diagnosis may each be convinced of their own view, but each would do well to listen carefully to what the others have to say.

This is where academic and professional argument may differ from other kinds of argument, such as in the political sphere or in commercial advertising. In the political sphere (as opposed to policy discussion, which under the best circumstances may be more like academic and professional argument), you may be looking for a quick win — getting someone's vote for the election just a few days away or getting someone to write a contribution check on the spot. Even if you want voters to develop a long-term belief and commitment to your position, you may wish to work more on their emotions, interests, and self-identity rather than on a careful consideration of the alternative views.

In advertising you want to get consumers to purchase your product or just to remember its name. What consumers believe may not be nearly so important as that they purchase a product or that they wind up carrying a name and a feeling around in their head. Persuading others doesn't necessarily mean respecting or taking them seriously. At times, being less than serious is the right way to go. How else should one sell perfumes and colognes except through fantasies and desires, and might not life be a little more fun for the romantic world evoked?

But academic and professional argument is a way to carry on a serious discussion to come to the best understanding of a phenomenon or the wisest policy or the best bridge design. To do this everyone needs to make his or her wisdom as clear and forceful as possible, identifying all the reasons and evidence that support that wisdom. This cannot be done at the expense of the seriousness of everyone else's proposal.

IDENTIFYING POINTS FOR ARGUMENTS

Review the papers you have written for this term. On a sheet of paper list all the claims you have made (or controversial conclusions you have reached) in those papers. Of all those claims, select the three that might appear most controversial to your classmates, members of your family, one of your former high school teachers, one of your current professors, or some other audience. For each of those three, write a brief informal paragraph explaining who would disagree with you and why.

USEFUL CONCEPTS FROM RHETORIC

Identification

The American rhetorician Kenneth Burke pointed out that one of the deepest tools we have to influence others is not to oppose their arguments, but to get others to identify themselves with us and our arguments. In the most basic sense, rhetorical identification occurs whenever a rhetor (a speaker or writer) identifies his or her interests with those of a reader. Identification encourages audiences to move beyond existing points of agreement to accept new ideas that are made to seem part of the same identity. If, for example, a speaker is talking to a liberal, feminist group about the dangers of pornography, she might identify the spread of pornographic images with rape, sexual abuse, and the exploitation of women. However, the same speaker speaking to a Fundamentalist Christian audience might emphasize the immorality and spiritual degradation that pornography causes and compare it to the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah. In each case, the speaker would be trying to influence others by identifying their interests with her own agenda.

Advertisers regularly engage in this kind of identification. When a potato chip company uses a popular athlete to endorse its product, it is attempting to create an identification between a product and a popular personality. This strategy relies on the fact that we already identify with the sports and entertainment figure because of the emotions we feel as we watch that figure perform.

For Kenneth Burke, however, identification means more than just using someone else's concerns or feelings as a rhetorical ploy. This, Burke insists, is "false identification." True identification occurs when people find areas where their values and perceptions honestly intersect, and then use those areas as the basis for genuine cooperation and compromise. Human interaction for Burke consists of a series of *identifications* (areas of common interest) and a series of *divisions* (areas of conflicting interest). In fact, the two exist on the same ground. Where there are no common interests or assumptions at all, then neither division nor identification can take place, since even disagreeing with someone requires that we have enough common ground upon which to argue.

As an example of the division/identification phenomenon, consider the question of a hypothetical tax increase. On one side, you may have administrators and legislators insisting that an increase in income taxes would sharply decrease disposable incomes and would therefore slow down the economy and lead us into a recession. On the other hand, there may be those who argue that, unless taxes are raised to eliminate the national debt, our debt payments will take up an increasing amount of our money and the economy will suffer. From one perspective, this represents a sharp *division* between opposing sides. From another perspective, though, both sides acknowledge the value of a strong economy and the ne-

cessity of government action to ensure economic growth. All of the parties will have to agree on these points, or there will be no sense in having the argument. The very grounds of disagreement supply a strong *identification* between the two sides. If the opposing sides work with these areas of identification, they may be able to arrive at a working compromise that allows them to cooperate toward the goals they share.

The epigraph of Burke's *Grammar of Motives* reads, in Latin, *ad bellum purificandum*, or "toward the purification of war." This motto reflects Burke's belief that we can never eliminate conflict and division from human interaction. We can, however, "purify" conflict by using rhetoric, instead of violence, to carry out our battles, and we can recognize that, while conflict is inherent in human relationships, identification is inherent in human conflict. The key to the purification of war, so central to Burke's twentieth-century rhetoric, is to recognize that disagreement creates the possibility for agreement and that every division that creates conflict between people also presupposes a common ground upon which we can mediate our differences and begin to cooperate and coexist.

Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, University of California at Berkeley Press, 1969. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, New York, Prentice Hall, 1952.

Building an Idea into an Argument

Assuming you have developed a way of viewing things that you want to share with others, how can you build an argument that presents your ideas in the clearest and strongest light? You begin by thinking through some underlying issues.

1. *State what you want others to see.* As you develop your argument, you may refocus, develop, expand, or otherwise modify the claim that you want to make, but knowing from the beginning what you want others to see will keep you on track. State that claim in a single sentence. Such a sentence can form the core of your argument, with the rest of your essay expanding outward from it but always connecting back to it.

Early in the writing process you can jot down some brief notes to yourself or keep a discovery journal as you start to put your thoughts together. Then as you start to define what your position is, you become more precise about the nature of your claim, how it adds to or is different from the position of others, and what you might have to do to help them see things your way. The following considerations will help you define your task further.

2. *Identify what kind of argument or claim you want to make.* Each kind of argument requires its own kind of support and elaboration. The following are typical kinds of argument:

a. *Arguments over definition.* Often whether an event fits the definition of one category or another is important: Was Smith's action a crime or not a crime? Was it murder or manslaughter? But even in cases where terms do not identify distinct categories into which everything must be pigeonholed, as in law, it is often important to know what something is, how it should be identified and described. Is the change in prices a random fluctuation or an indicator of an economic downturn? In this kind of argument you establish what categories might be possible ways to describe the event or phenomenon you are trying to define and what criteria would help you select among categories or support identification for a particular category. Then you show how the event or phenomenon fits the definitional criteria.

b. *Argument over cause.* In this kind of argument you show how one situation is transformed into another. Moreover, you may need to isolate a specific factor, force, or sequence of events as being responsible for bringing about the change. The most effective way to make such an argument is by explaining a mechanism that could bring about the change and then providing evidence that that was indeed the mechanism. One of the most persuasive findings in the history of neurobiology occurred when the specific chemical mechanism by which an opiate binds to a nerve was identified and chemical evidence was presented to show that this was the process that indeed occurred.

A less forceful method of demonstrating causality is to show a regular pattern of association where event A always seems to lead to situation B. This is a weaker form of argument, because the association could be based on an entirely different third factor. For example, in economics increasing unemployment is often associated with increased inflation; with this belief in mind government policies often slow down inflation if unemployment increases. However, this association is far from a direct cause. High employment may tend to increase spending, and that spending may increase inflation. Or the security of low unemployment may alleviate the anxieties that cause people to save, and that decrease in saving may make less capital available, thereby driving up interest rates and increasing inflation. If either of those is the case, one might adopt policies to hold spending down and keep savings up, even under conditions of low unemployment. Or both high employment and inflation may be caused by a third factor, such as the introduction of new kinds of products that spark demand.

Weakest of all is an argument by analogy. If we agree on the cause of one simpler, less controversial event, we can by analogy make a causal association in a more complex and less cer-

tain set of events. But such analogies are only suggestive and may not accurately tell you what is going on in the new situation. For example, it is now widely recognized that the total centralization of policymaking in Soviet Russia led to great inefficiency and lack of motivation at the local level. Is it accurate, however, to argue by analogy that every centralized policy in the United States inevitably leads to inefficiency and lack of motivation, and that all decisions should be made only locally?

c. *Argument over evaluation.* Whether something is to be considered good or bad depends on what you are evaluating it for. One car may be comfortable on long highway trips but may not handle well in poor weather. So evaluative arguments always address the purpose of the evaluation. They ask, "Good or bad — for what?" Then you establish the criteria that will help you determine whether it is good or bad. Finally, you provide the evidence that indicates how well the object matches the criteria. All three of these stages of the argument — the purposes of evaluation, the criteria, and the evidence matching the criteria — are open to dispute and so must be presented persuasively.

d. *Argument over policy.* In this kind of argument you are trying to establish the wisest course of action. First you establish that there is a need for some action or change. This usually requires some statement of the current situation that reveals some problem or threat that needs to be addressed. Then you identify the goal any solution or action must achieve to be considered successful. This sets the stage for your plan and its justification. In justifying your plan, you usually provide evidence of the plan's likely effectiveness; a projection of the cost in time, money, or trouble; and a comparison to alternative solutions. Only if your audience accepts the need you identify and then accepts that your proposal meets the need better than alternatives and is not more trouble and expense than it is worth will they be likely to pursue your line of action.

3. *Think about the situation* that brought you to your insight and the situation that makes you want to address your readers. Sometimes these may be the same. For example, in political science, your professor may assign all the students to predict the party alignment of American voters over the next ten years; the student papers would then be discussed in class. Here your thoughts come to you as part of the discussion in which you will have to argue for your ideas.

On the other hand, your ideas about party politics may have developed through your work on campaigns outside of class. This background may or may not be relevant if you are asked to write a paper for the class. You may need to take a stance of a disengaged political scientist not caught up in pressing power struggles, or your hands-on experience may give you the credibility of someone who knows politics from the inside. (See the discussion of rhetorical situation on pages 42–43.)

4. Define *what others might think and what questions they might raise* so that you know what issues and points of view you need to address as well as what aspects of their beliefs and knowledge you can use to help make your own point. Think about *those points where your positions meet with or conflict with other views.* (See the discussion of the meeting point or stasis of an argument on page 302.)

In identifying those specific points where you suspect that people may question your argument and where some of your audience may directly oppose you, you can identify those issues you need to address to satisfy those who might have doubts and to counter strong arguments. For example, if in a communications class you are arguing that a recent series of television advertisements is employing a new visual technique, and if you know that your professor has been pointing out all term how most "new" techniques are usually adaptations of prior techniques, you will have to work hard to distinguish your technique from all similar techniques.

On the other hand, identifying points of *agreement* with your likely audience allows you to focus your attention on real points of contention. Even more, you can use points of agreement as foundations on which to build the more controversial parts of your argument. If your communications professor, despite her skepticism about novelty, has presented advertising as the sector of television most responsive to social change, you might be able to show how the technique you are examining is a creative response to recent social changes. (See the discussion of identification on pages 349–350).

5. Identify those *texts* you have all read or the lectures you have all heard that can serve as reference points in the argument. Those reference points present knowledge and ideas you can use because they are already part of the course discussion. Thus, if your psychology textbook examines in detail patterns and causes of human aggression, you can use its ideas and information as you build your own argument on why youth act more aggressively in some situations than in others. (See the discussion of intertextuality on pages 231–232.)

6. Identify those *resources, ideas, and methods* that make your thinking different from other people's. By identifying what has led you to see things differently from others, you will understand better what makes your argument different; moreover, you will have a better sense of what you might have to show readers so they can start to see things your way. For example, if your detailed knowledge about the history of the black baseball leagues gives you a different perspective on the way sports have been related to American politics, perhaps it may be useful to describe relevant moments in that history that will help others see the relationship between sports and politics that you perceive.

7. Identify *what in the readers' minds will have to be added to, changed, reversed, or otherwise modified* for them to accept your view. This is another way to think about the differences raised in the previous points. If you really want to change other people's minds, you have to understand how they think about things now and *what would have to change* for them to think about some-

thing in your terms. Then you can start to develop some strategy for moving their minds from one place to another. So if you want to argue that a plan to cut back on school breakfast programs might have unfortunate consequences that may not be immediately evident in dollars and cents, you may have to convince some of your readers that all interests and consequences are not directly expressed in economic terms. People who believe that the marketplace is the only useful way of working out conflicting interests may not see the point of your argument on school breakfasts until they first see that economic exchange may not be the full and adequate expression of social values. By examining what you will have to change, you will also locate the places in the thinking or commitments of your audience that you will have to touch. (See the discussion of common places below.)

8. Consider why it would *benefit* your readers to adopt your position or vision rather than stay with their own. Think about the *consequences* to the readers of accepting or not accepting your view. What do you hope would happen if your argument were persuasive? Are you attempting to resolve a long-standing problem or only adding a new bit of evidence? Are you attempting to overthrow a major theory or only suggesting that certain elements of that theory be expanded or reconsidered? Are you trying to open a new question up to discussion or are you trying to close off discussion?

9. Think about how you might want to *qualify your claims.* Are there any points about which you do not have certain arguments or where there are plausible alternative accounts? Is there good evidence or reason for some aspects of opposing points of view? The more you identify and honestly present the value of alternative views and the limitations of your own claims, the more precise and credible your argument becomes.

These considerations can be explored in notes or journals or by talking with other students. Not every point will be as useful for each case, but if you think about them you will have a much better view of what the discussion is about, what you need to accomplish, and what resources and obstacles you have in presenting your view.

USEFUL CONCEPTS FROM RHETORIC

Common Places

Where do you look to find persuasive reasons to support your position? The reasons you find need to be recognizable and important to the people you hope to persuade. Your arguments need to touch the beliefs, knowledge, and commitments in their minds. They need to go literally to some *place* in their minds. Those persuasive mental places shared by many people are called the *common places* — the places of

arguments that we share in common. They are also called *topics,* following the Greek word for place, *topus.*

We can understand how mental common places work by thinking about real places that people consider important. For example, if someone running for office promises to lower their taxes, she is in a sense taking the argument to the voters' bank accounts. If, however, her opponent states that tax cuts will make city life unbearable not just for the homeless and poor but for all people, she is taking the argument into the city streets. In a sense, then, the voters must balance their gain in one place against their loss in the other. The candidates may then also visit and argue in the opponent's place of argument, one claiming that tax cuts are the only path to the prosperity that will revive cities, and the other claiming that we will never have prosperity unless we make the city livable for all people.

Common places can also be more totally mental, identifying general mental strategies that might apply in any circumstance. These are places in logic, reasoning, or imagination, such as definition, comparison and contrast, analogy, or classification. Thus, in looking for arguments to support a candidate, you might look to see whether comparing your candidate with the other yields some strong points.

Strong arguments can also be found in the values, beliefs, and ideals of a community, in what is sometimes called *ideology.* Thus, if your audience comes from a community that values strong family cohesion, you might explain how your candidate or proposal will strengthen families and reward those people who maintain traditional families. If your audience values education and free inquiry, you might explain how your candidate or proposal will rely on and strengthen our systems of education and research.

Each area of activity also has special arguments that are regularly useful. In arguing for political candidates there are standard qualifications and criteria that people usually consider and that most campaigns address. The common places of political campaigns include such things as the candidate's honesty, experience in office, roots in the community, lack of obligation to special interests, toughness on crime, and leadership. Often campaigns will wind up going down one of these paths.

Disciplines and professional activities, too, have their special common places. In history, the strongest place to go with your argument is into a previously unexamined archive that provides documents that demonstrate your point. In literary studies, arguments frequently go to the details of the text you are discussing. In experimental psychology, arguments always lead to the laboratory. In contemporary medicine, few decisions are made without first visiting test results. In corporate life, people regularly look at the "bottom line" to clinch their arguments.

If you listen to the arguments people make in your field, you may be able to develop a fairly reliable and specific list of typical places where arguments in your field go. What issues and criteria are always invoked in support of an idea or proposal? If one person wants to counter an opposing view, what points of weakness will be attacked? Such a list of common

places will give you a starting place to think about where you might take your arguments. The concept of common places helps you think about how your words tie in to many aspects of life — the interests people have, the beliefs they hold, the way their minds work, their professional commitments, and the ways in which they carry out their work.

Writing the Essay of Argument

Arguments are carried on in very different ways in different disciplines and professions. Different kinds of claims are made to solve different kinds of questions or establish different kinds of knowledge. Arguing that a particular wing design is best for certain tasks is very different from claiming that the spread of the printing press had several consequences for intellectual life in sixteenth-century Europe. Both are different from arguing that one has identified the structure of a neuron. And even more different is an argument that a certain defendant be declared not guilty.

Each claim does a different kind of work, and each would be supported by different kinds of evidence, reasoning, and argument. The audiences for each kind of argument would have different concerns, know different things, and use different criteria. Each claim would be inserted into different universes of competing claims and consequences. So the best guide as you enter the world of claims is to pay attention to other arguments in the field. Look for examples and models that can help you see how arguments are framed in your field.

Remember that an argument is always addressed to specific people you hope to convince, so you must think about what questions and considerations they will raise, what issues they need to see addressed before they will be willing to go along with you, what alternatives they might entertain, and what criteria and knowledge they have. In academic and disciplinary arguments these considerations and criteria are often revealed in the journals, books, and reports that people in the field read and write for each other. People in a discipline are trained in a certain way of gathering evidence and thinking, and they hold themselves and others accountable to these disciplinary and professional practices. A lawyer who tries to convince other lawyers but refuses to pay attention to the standards of legal argument will have a hard time of it. So it is not surprising that a lawyer's argument will sound like it came from a lawyer. (See the discussion of topics on pages 354–356.)

No matter what professional standards, patterns, and practices your argument needs to follow, a few pieces of general advice can assist you in writing an effective argument.

1. *Define the point you want to make early in the essay.* Both your own energies and the energies of your reader are focused if they are directed to well-identified issues.

2. *Identify the importance of the argument.* If readers know what is at stake in your argument, they will be more likely to take it seriously. Readers may wonder why you are spending so much energy arguing over whether a fossil bone belongs to one species or another. But if the bone identification would place a species on a continent where it had not been observed before, or place it a hundred million years earlier than it had been observed, readers may start to see more at stake than haggling over a few bones. The stakes will increase further if you make clear that the evolutionary picture will change significantly if your identification is correct.
3. *Show how your claim fits in with other things that are known and believed in the field.* This demonstrates that you are competent and well informed in your area and that your argument will add to the shared wisdom of the field.
4. *Take the arguments of other people seriously.* This may mean specifically mentioning and addressing opposing points of view. If parts of your opponents' arguments make sense or are irrefutable to you, admit that, but then carefully identify your points of difference and offer reasons for your position.
5. *Use the kind of evidence accepted in the field, but whenever possible offer substantial evidence.* In every field there are many interesting and exciting ideas, often in conflict with each other. And there are many clever and even brilliant ways of elaborating those ideas. Nonetheless, although ideas by themselves may excite people, they do not in themselves offer good reasons why they and not the alternative exciting idea ought to be accepted. Most fields work on the principle that specific evidence, gathered in ways and according to standards appropriate to the field, are the best way to sort out competing ideas. It pays to do the necessary work to develop persuasive evidence. Your argument will be stronger for your going to the laboratory, doing a survey, or digging more deeply in the library archive.
6. *Make clear what new resources you bring to the discussion.* Arguments are more likely to be decided not by clever words, but by a totally new piece of the picture that makes everyone see the issue differently. A new theory, a new kind of telescope that makes more stars visible, a new experimental technique, or a newly discovered letter where a philosopher explains exactly what an idea means — these are the kinds of resources that make people change their minds. If you can make clear exactly what new thing you are adding to the discussion and how that new resource changes the picture, you may help people move beyond their current ways of seeing things.
7. *At the end explain the consequences of accepting your argument.* If others come to agree with you, what might they see and do as a result? What kinds of positions might they support? What kinds of other ideas gain strength or interest in relation to the ideas argued in your essay? What kinds of research might follow on your claims? This kind of discussion indicates the benefits and value of your view and also directs people to-

ward the kinds of actions that will help carry out your ideas. Ideas thrive only when people continue to use them.

Sample Student Essay

The following essay is based on the selections in Chapter 13 on pages 307–315. The student, after viewing the complexity of the issue of intelligence testing, came to her own conclusions about the value of testing in education. Having come to this conclusion in the course of her analysis of the complex issue, she then wanted to argue her position in a more direct way. The following paper is the result.

Shana O'Malley
IQ Obsession Distorts Education

Throughout the 20th century, standardized IQ tests have become an important part of America's educational system. Intelligence tests are regularly used to counsel students in school and career choices, to give teachers a profile of their student bodies, and to place students with high IQs in special "gifted and talented" classes where they receive extra attention. Some scientists, such as Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray in their 1994 bestseller The Bell Curve, believe that IQ scores actually do give an accurate picture of a person's "cognitive ability" (22) and should therefore be used by scientists and educators as an accurate measurement of intellectual ability. However, many more scientists, such as Harvard biologist Stephen Jay Gould, reject this view entirely and see the IQ score as nothing more than "the mismeasure of man." However, even if we do accept the view that IQ tests accurately measure some abstract quantity of intelligence, we should still be cautious about the importance they have been given in our nation's schools. Our society has made a commitment to attempt to provide a quality education for all of its citizens, and a person's testable cognitive ability should have no bearing whatsoever on this commitment.

The overriding danger of using IQ tests as the basis for any educational policy is that doing so creates a small class of students whose academic abilities are validated and encouraged, while creating an even larger class of students whose special talents are ig-

nored. Most psychologists agree that the IQ test measures something. At the very least, students who perform well on IQ tests are better under test conditions at answering word-association questions and figuring out cognitive puzzles than other students. However, there is no reason to believe that, in an enlightened democracy, these abilities should be valued any higher than other abilities. Many students who score average or low on traditional IQ tests display enormous talents in other areas, such as speech, music, art, mechanics, and spatial relations. Schools should encourage all students in their respective talents, not just the few who demonstrate the ability to solve abstract cognitive problems in a standardized test.

One of the traditional justifications for using IQ tests in elementary and secondary schools is that they allow teachers and administrators to identify "exceptional" children and segregate them accordingly into gifted and talented classes. Despite the fact that all children have their own individual gifts and talents, children are often assigned to these special classes solely on the basis of their IQ score. Thus, students who perform well on timed word-association tests qualify for special attention and extra funding, while all other students who are equally but differently talented do not. Such a practice violates the democratic principles of our society, since it uses taxpayer dollars to encourage one small group of children who are labeled "gifted" while doing nothing to encourage other students whose gifts cannot be measured by an IQ score.

But even when schools do not segregate students on the basis of IQ, they do them a disservice by using the tests as a basis for counseling and evaluation. In the first place, students often learn their IQ scores and use them as a basis for comparing themselves with other students. Even more often, teachers and counselors, upon learning a student's intelligence quotient, treat students differently and allow this abstract score to color their perception of the student's intelligence or potential for success. While teachers do have the right and the responsibility to evaluate students based on their concrete performance, there is no justification for evaluating them on their abstract reasoning capacity unless the course material requires such skills. Standardized intelligence tests

create unnecessary categories that label some students as "superior" and others as "inferior" without any reference to effort, concrete ability, or actual performance.

In the preface to his ground-breaking book Frames of Mind, Howard Gardner writes that our current intelligence testing practices are "not sufficiently well honed to allow assessment of an individual's potentials or achievements in navigating the stars, mastering a foreign tongue, or composing with a computer" (4). The problem, he asserts, lies in the way that we think about intelligence. For Gardner, human intelligence is a broad spectrum that includes a number of different complex talents. It is this perspective, I believe, that our schools need to adopt. For nearly a century, we have valued a specific, narrowly defined cognitive ability as the true mark of intelligence, and this belief has led us to segregate our schoolchildren unfairly on the basis of a single test score.

Works Cited

Gardner, Howard. Frames of Mind. New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Gould, Stephen J. The Mismeasure of Man. New York: Norton, 1981.

Herrnstein, Richard, and Charles Murray. The Bell Curve. New York: Free Press, 1994.

Thinking About Student Writing

1. What is the issue that Shana O'Malley addresses in this essay? How does she use opposing views of other authors to frame the issue? How does the position she takes differ from the positions of the authors she refers to? How does the position she argues for reframe the issue from that argued by the other authors? Why does she reframe the issue in the way she does? How does the reframing help make her argument more credible?
2. What arguments does Shana O'Malley offer in support of her position? How does she elaborate her arguments?
3. How do Shana O'Malley's arguments join specifically with the views and motives of those who hold the opposite view? In what ways does she show she understands and respects those arguments? In what ways does she oppose them?

4. In the course of her argument, where does Shana O'Malley point out how people use IQ tests? Why does she think these are inappropriate uses? What kinds of tests would she allow and for what purposes? What arguments does she give for those tests? Why does she bring in those allowable tests as part of this argument?
5. What overall conclusions does Shana O'Malley come to? How well are these conclusions justified by her argument?
6. What is the overall structure of the argument in the essay? How does one point relate to the next? How do the levels of argument transform? How does the conclusion grow out of what has come before?

Assignments

ARGUMENTATION

1. Choose one claim, statement, or conclusion you developed in response to one of the writing assignments this term which you think is controversial. In an essay, argue the value of this conclusion in order to convince those who might argue against you.
2. Consider the various statements you have heard or read this year in college, from instructors, from other students, or in textbooks. Choose the one statement with which you most disagree. Write an essay arguing either directly against this statement or in support of an opposite statement to convince either the person who made the statement or your classmates to adopt your view.
3. Read the following two statements that take different positions on the question of congressional term limitations. After class discussion, develop your own position on this controversial subject and argue for your position in an essay.

   The simple, essential reason for congressional term limits is to unrig a rigged system, end automatic reelection, and make Congress mortal again.

   Many Americans cling to the now lost idea of the citizen-legislator. Term limits can't completely recreate this extinct creature. But it will take us a couple of places backward and away from the professional congressman-for-life. It will also allow more citizens to serve in Congress, and it could reduce some of the advantages of incumbency, even during the 12-year term.

   Predicting the inner workings of Congress is highly speculative, but, at the least, the seniority system will be truncated and weakened by term limits. At best, it may yield to another system

that could provide more equal opportunities for leadership for all members and less entrenched regionalism.

From Bill Frenzel, "Term Limits and the Immortal Congress," *The Brookings Review* Spring 1992: 18.

Would term limits increase the competitiveness of congressional elections? If more competitiveness means lower reelection rates for incumbents, the answer is clearly no. A term limit would very likely turn into a floor, with would-be candidates deferring their challenge and awaiting the involuntary retirement of the incumbent. If a norm of deference to the term-limited incumbent took root, elections would be contested only in open seats, and then only those not safe for one political party.

Indeed, there is little reason to think that congressional term limits would produce anything approaching a surge in high-quality, well-financed challengers, which is essential for increased competitiveness. More targeted interventions are required to produce that result.

From Thomas E. Mann, "The Wrong Medicine," *The Brookings Review* Spring 1992: 23.

4. Read the following two statements that take different positions on environmental protection. After class discussion, write an essay arguing your view on how far we should go in protecting the environment.

We have taken over this planet as if we owned it, and we call it progress because we think we are making it better, but in fact we are regressing. Species are dying and we seem not to realize that our life depends on theirs. Peter Raven, director of the Missouri Botanical Gardens in St. Louis, says that the destruction of species is more critical for the world than the greenhouse effect and ozone depletion, because it is moving faster and is inevitable. He predicts that over the next thirty years human beings will cause the extinction of a hundred species per day. For fifteen years, I traveled the world warning people about the medical and ecological consequences of nuclear war, not aware that life was already dying quietly and unobtrusively from man's ongoing activities. Now I see that the threat of species extinction is as serious as the threat of nuclear war.

From Helen Caldicott, "Species Extinction," in *If You Love This Planet* (New York: Norton, 1992): 95.

The view that the loss of a single species can have disastrous consequences represents a misguided notion about the significance

of individual animal or plant categories. The Endangered Species Act assumes that preserving one species has enormous value or benefit. But this assumption is not warranted.

Suppose we lost a species. How devastating would that be? "Mass extinctions have been recorded since the dawn of paleontology," writes Harvard paleontologist Stephen Gould. These evolutionary disruptions delineated the major boundaries of geologic time. . . . There is a general agreement among scientists that today's species represent a small proportion of all those that have ever existed — probably less than one percent. This means that over 99 percent of all species ever living have become extinct.

From Michael Copeland, "No Red Squirrels? Mother Nature May Be Better Off," *Wall Street Journal* 7 June 1990: A1.

Getting Involved Electronically

For a controversial or political issue of interest to you, locate a World Wide Web home-page of some relevant organization or advocacy group. Examine how the page and associated materials make a case for one side of an issue. Then locate a home-page for an organization or advocacy group presenting an opposite view. Compare the argumentative strategy of the two sides.