

Upping Your Argument and Research Game

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Strategies for College Writers

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Introduction



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Welcome to *Upping Your Argument and Research Game*! What kinds of games do you play? Do you play video games with friends? Do you play board games like *Settlers of Catan* or *Monopoly* with your family? Do you play basketball in the driveway or at school? All of these games involve a lot of practice – and a lot of fun with friends and family. I hope you will dive into this textbook with the same energy and commitment to practice that you bring to the games you love to play in your free time. Just like any game, the best writing and research occurs with other people – whether those are classmates, teachers, or writers who came before you.

This book is designed for college writers who most likely already have taken the first English course and are ready to learn more advanced strategies. To help you learn these advanced strategies, this book is divided into four main sections: an argumentation overview, rhetorical analysis, argument models and types, and research.

The argumentation overview identifies strategies for reading and understanding arguments, as well as methods for summarizing arguments. What do you think of when you hear the word “argument”? This type of argument is different than a fight. Rather than hard feelings and a fierce commitment to one’s own side, this type of argument is a way to carefully and fairly consider ideas.

Next, we will take a deep dive into the strategies used to persuade readers, viewers, and listeners in the rhetorical analysis section. You may be familiar with the terms *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, but have you ever heard of *Kairos*? We will examine how to use these concepts to understand the persuasion strategies that advertisers, YouTubers, TikTok influencers, politicians, and others use to sway you to their side or to buy their product.

The second argument section looks at different argument models, including one counter-cultural one that calls for developing empathy for your opponents. This is a Rogerian Argument model. We also will learn about different types of arguments: evaluation arguments, definition arguments, causal arguments, and proposals. Learning about different types of arguments can help you to identify the best type for a particular assignment or a piece of workplace writing.

This book also introduces research strategies. While I am sure you are an expert at tossing words or a term into Google, this book will give you strategies for conducting research at the college level. What is a database? How do I find

information in it? How can I dive deeply into a particular topic? What is a peer-reviewed or scholarly source? Once I do find peer-reviewed sources, how do I understand the technical jargon, or should I give up and return to Google? These questions and others will be answered in this textbook.

This book is the result of the hard work of many people, most of whom I have never met. They have generously used Creative Commons licenses that allow others to share and rework their work. Some chapters are from one source, and others are a combination of several sources, plus a few of my own additions. You may notice that some chapters have a more formal tone and others have a more informal tone. You benefit from all of this collaborative work among English teachers. I am especially grateful to Anna Mills of City College of San Francisco for her help via email and her incredible, student-friendly textbook, *How Arguments Work: A Guide to Writing and Analyzing Texts in College*.

I hope your work this quarter also builds upon the work of other writers and researchers – and brings in your unique and intriguing arguments. I hope you practice hard, strengthen your research and argument “game,” and have fun doing so with your classmates.

PART I

ARGUMENTATION OVERVIEW

I. Argumentation Introduction

What Counts as an Argument?

Argument is not the loud, assertive, unwavering statement of your opinion in the hopes of conquering the opposition. I am sure you can think of times when you have encountered this type of argument. Argument—in college—is the careful consideration of numerous positions and the careful development of logically sound, carefully constructed arguments that, when combined, offer a worthwhile perspective in an ongoing debate. Certainly you want to imagine yourself arguing *with* others—and certainly you want to believe your ideas have superior qualities to theirs—but the purpose of argument in the college setting is not always to solve a practical problem and rarely is to shut down a conversation. Rather, it's to illuminate, expand, and further inform a debate happening on a worthwhile subject between reasonable, intelligent people. In other words, calling the opposition *stupid* is not good argument, it's an ad hominem attack on the opponent's character.

All people, including you, make arguments on a regular basis. When you make a claim and then support the claim with reasons, you are making an argument. Consider the following:

- If, as a teenager, you ever made a case for borrowing your parents' car using reasonable support—a track record of responsibility in other areas of your life, a good rating from your driving instructor, and promises to follow rules of driving conduct laid out by your parents—you have made an argument.
- If, as an employee, you ever persuaded your boss to give you a raise using concrete evidence—records of sales increases in your sector, a work calendar with no missed days, and personal testimonials from satisfied customers—you have made an argument.
- If, as a gardener, you ever shared your crops at a farmer's market, declaring that your produce is better than others using relevant support—because you used the most appropriate soil, water level, and growing time for each crop—you've made an argument.
- If, as a literature student, you ever wrote an essay on your interpretation of a poem—defending your ideas with examples from the text and logical explanations for how those examples demonstrate your interpretation—you have made an argument.

Rhetorical Argument and Academic Argument

The two main models of argument desired in college courses as part of the training for academic or professional life are **rhetorical argument** and **academic argument**. If rhetoric is the study of the craft of writing and speaking, particularly writing or speaking designed to convince and persuade, the student studying **rhetorical argument** focuses on how to create an argument that convinces and persuades effectively. To accomplish that goal, you must understand how to think broadly about argument, the particular vocabulary of argument, and the logic of argument. The close sibling of rhetorical argument is academic argument, argument used to discuss and evaluate ideas, usually within a professional field of study, and to convince others of those ideas. In **academic argument**, interpretation and research play the central roles.

However, the academic argument and rhetorical argument often do overlap. A psychologist not only wishes to prove an important idea with research, but she will also wish to do so in the most effective way possible. A politician will want to make the most persuasive case for his side, but he should also be mindful of data that may support

his points. Thus, throughout this chapter, when you see the term **argument**, it refers to a broad category including both **rhetorical** and **academic argument**.

Before moving to the specific parts and vocabulary of argument, it will be helpful to consider some further ideas about what argument is and what it is not.

Argument vs. Controversy or Fight

Consumers of written texts are often tempted to divide writing into two categories: argumentative and non-argumentative. According to this view, to be argumentative, writing must have the following qualities: It has to defend a position in a debate between two or more opposing sides, it must be on a controversial topic, and the goal of such writing must be to prove the correctness of one point of view over another.

A related definition of argument implies a confrontation, a clash of opinions and personalities, or just a plain verbal fight. It implies a winner and a loser, a right side and a wrong one. Because of this understanding of the word “argument,” many students think the only type of argument writing is the debate-like position paper, in which the author defends his or her point of view against other, usually opposing, points of view.

For a fun illustration of the reductive nature of a mere fight, see “**The Argument Clinic**” (<https://youtu.be/XNkjDuSVXiE>, transcript **here**) skit from Monty Python.

These two characteristics of argument—as controversial and as a fight—limit the definition because arguments come in different disguises, from hidden to subtle to commanding. It is useful to look at the term “argument” in a new way. What if we think of argument as an opportunity for conversation, for sharing with others our point of view on an issue, for showing others our perspective of the world? What if we think of argument as an opportunity to connect with the points of view of others rather than defeating those points of view?

One community that values argument as a type of communication and exchange is the community of scholars. They advance their arguments to share research and new ways of thinking about topics. Biologists, for example, do not gather data and write up analyses of the results because they wish to fight with other biologists, even if they disagree with the ideas of other biologists. They wish to share their discoveries and get feedback on their ideas. When historians put forth an argument, they do so often while building on the arguments of other historians who came before them. Literature scholars publish their interpretations of different works of literature to enhance understanding and share new views, not necessarily to have one interpretation replace all others. There may be debates within any field of study, but those debates can be healthy and constructive if they mean even more scholars come together to explore the ideas involved in those debates. Be prepared for your college professors to have a much broader view of argument than a fight over a controversial topic or two.

Argument vs. Opinion

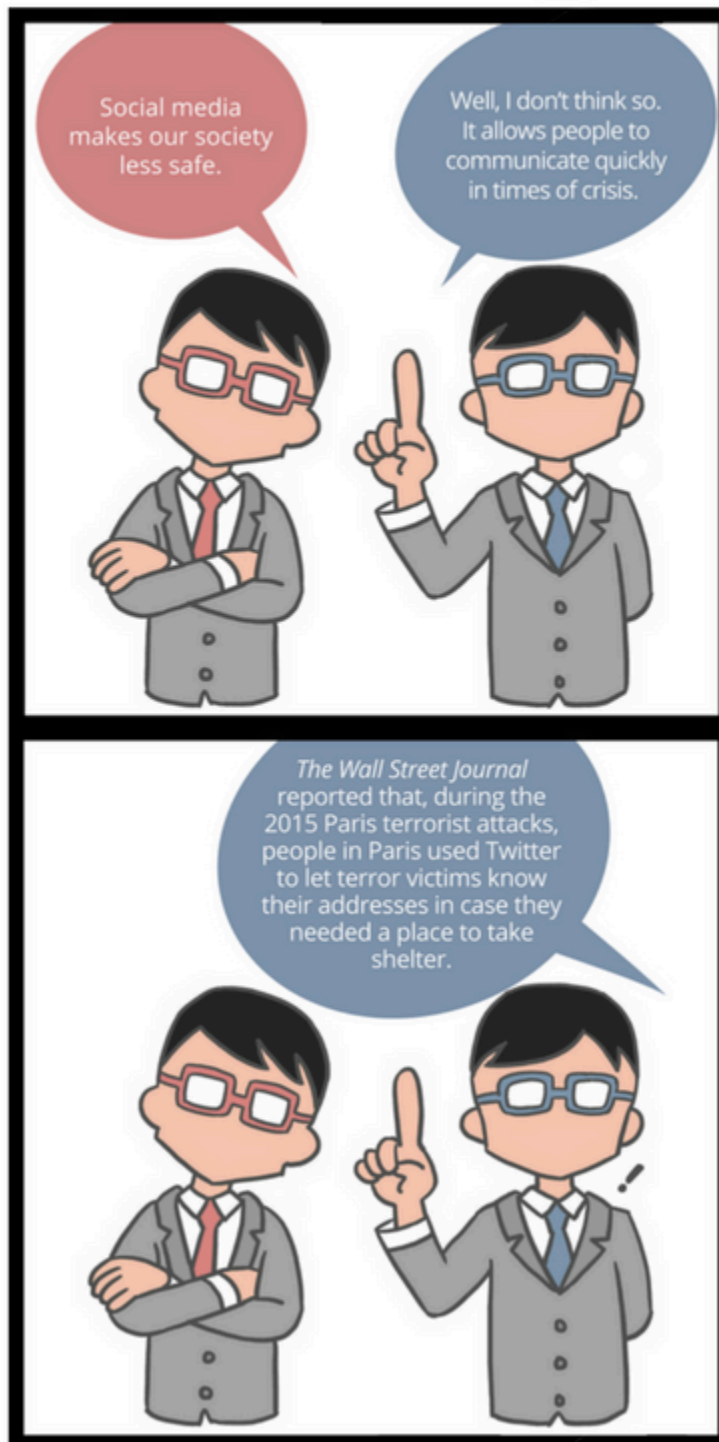
Argument is often confused with opinion. Indeed, arguments and opinions sound alike. Someone with an opinion

asserts a claim that he thinks is true. Someone with an argument asserts a claim that she thinks is true. Although arguments and opinions do sound the same, there are two important differences:

1. **Arguments have rules; opinions do not.** In other words, to form an argument, you must consider whether the argument is reasonable. Is it worth making? Is it valid? Is it sound? Do all of its parts fit together logically? Opinions, on the other hand, have no rules, and anyone asserting an opinion need not think it through for it to count as one; however, it will not count as an argument.
2. **Arguments have support; opinions do not.** If you make a claim and then stop, as if the claim itself were enough to demonstrate its truthfulness, you have asserted an opinion only. An argument must be supported, and the support of an argument has its own rules. The support must also be reasonable, relevant, and sufficient.

Figure 1.1 “Opinion vs Argument”

Opinion vs. Argument



Argument vs. Thesis

Another point of confusion is the difference between an argument and an essay's **thesis**. For college essays, there is no essential difference between an argument and a thesis; most professors use these terms interchangeably. An argument is a claim that you must then support. The main claim of an essay is the point of the essay and provides the purpose for the essay. Thus, the main claim of an essay is also the thesis.

Argument vs. Fact

Arguments are also commonly mistaken for statements of fact. This comes about because often people privilege facts over opinions, even as they defend the right to have opinions. In other words, facts are “good,” and opinions are “bad,” or if not exactly bad, then fuzzy and thus easy to reject. However, remember the important distinction between an argument and an opinion stated above: While argument may sound like an opinion, the two are not the same. An opinion is an assertion, but it is left to stand alone with little to no reasoning or support. An argument is much stronger because it includes and demonstrates reasons and support for its claim.

As for mistaking a fact for an argument, keep this important distinction in mind: An argument must be **arguable**. In everyday life, arguable is often a synonym for doubtful. For an argument, though, arguable means that it is worth arguing, that it has a range of possible answers, angles, or perspectives: It is an answer, angle, or perspective with which a reasonable person might disagree. Facts, by virtue of being facts, are not arguable. **Facts** are statements that can be definitely proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as definitively true or definitively false. For example, $2 + 2 = 4$. This expression identifies a verifiable true statement, or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data. When a fact is established, there is no other side, and there should be no disagreement.

The misunderstanding about facts (being inherently good) and argument (being inherently problematic because it is not a fact) leads to the mistaken belief that facts have no place in an argument. This could not be farther from the truth. First of all, most arguments are formed by analyzing facts. Second, facts provide one type of support for an argument. Thus, do not think of facts and arguments as enemies; rather, they work closely together.

Rhetorical Arguments

Some of the key tools of argument are the strategies that students are asked to consider when doing a rhetorical analysis. Before beginning an argument of your own, review the basic concepts of rhetorical appeals below. As you plan and draft your own argument, carefully use the following elements of rhetoric to your own advantage.

Rhetorical Appeals

Logos

The use of data, statistical evidence, and sufficient support to establish the practicality and rationality of your claims should be the strongest element of your argument. To have a logically sound argument, you should include:

- A debatable and supportable claim
- Logical reasoning to support your claim
- Sound evidence and examples to justify the reasoning
- Reasonable projections
- Concessions & rebuttals
- Avoid logical fallacies

Ethos

An appeal to ethos relies on the credibility of the writer—and the writer's sources. If you do not trust the writer (or creator), you will not find the argument persuasive. To create an appeal to ethos, writers may mention their background, expertise, or relevant personal experience. They may rely on credible and authoritative sources and use citation methods (MLA, APA, etc.) to show readers those sources. The goal is to come across as ethical and trustworthy.

Pathos

The use of examples and language that evoke an appropriate emotional response in your reader—that gets them to care about your topic—can be helpful in argument. For academic essays, pathos may be useful in introductory sections, concluding sections, or as ways to link various parts of the paper together. An appeal to pathos can include personal stories, music (in a video), photos, and descriptions. The goal is to make your audience feel particular emotions and for those motions to move them to think or act in a particular way. However, if your argument is based solely or primarily upon emotional appeals, it will be viewed as weak in an academic setting, especially when data or ethical sources can disprove your claims. Therefore, college writing often puts more emphasis on logos and ethos.

Key Concepts for Academic Arguments

Imagine reading one long block of text with each idea blurring into the next. Even if you are reading a thrilling novel or an interesting news article, you will likely lose interest in what the author has to say very quickly. During the writing process, it is helpful to position yourself as a reader. Ask yourself whether you can focus easily on each point you make. Keep in mind that three main elements shape the content of each essay.

- **Purpose:** The reason the writer composes the essay.
- **Audience:** The individual or group whom the writer intends to address.

- **Tone:** The attitude the writer conveys about the essay's subject.

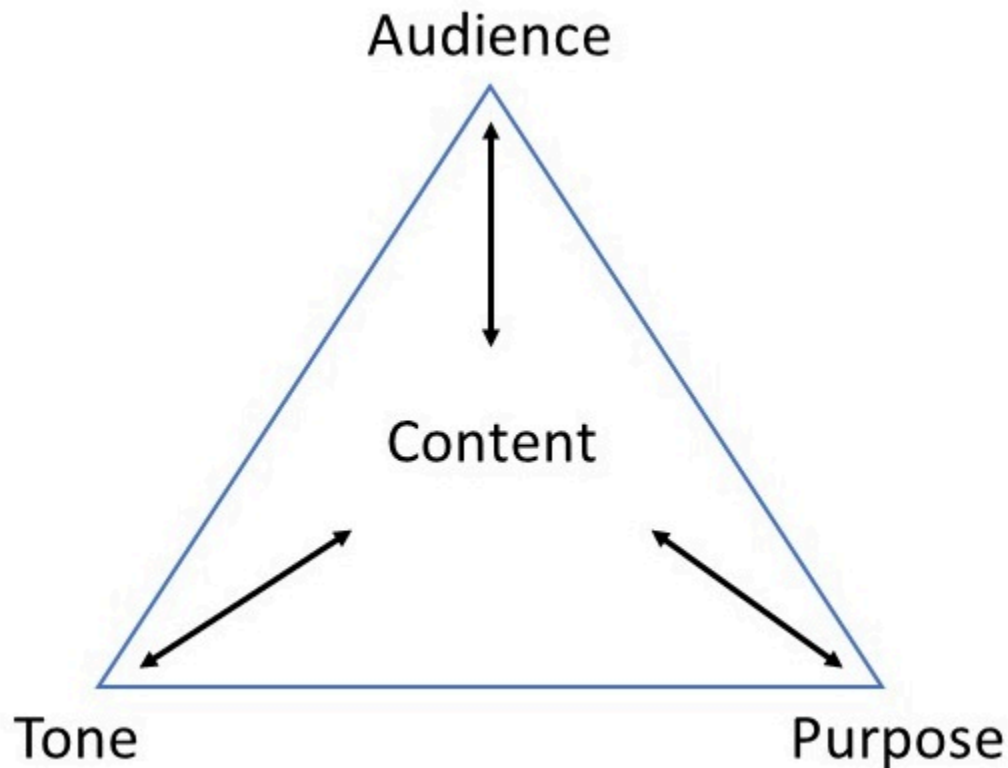


Figure 1.2: The Rhetorical Triangle

The assignment's purpose, audience, and tone dictate what each paragraph of the essay covers and how the paragraph supports the main point or thesis.

Identifying Common Academic Purposes

The purpose for a piece of writing identifies the reason you write it by, basically, answering the question "Why?" For example, why write a play? To entertain a packed theater. Why write instructions to the babysitter? To inform him or her of your schedule and rules. Why write a letter to your congressman? To persuade him to address your community's needs.

In academic settings, the reasons for writing typically fulfill four main purposes:

- to classify
- to analyze
- to synthesize
- to evaluate

A **classification** shrinks a large amount of information into only the essentials, using your own words; although shorter than the original piece of writing, a classification should still communicate all the key points and key support of the

original document without quoting the original text. Keep in mind that classification moves beyond simple summary to be informative.

An **analysis**, on the other hand, separates complex materials into their different parts and studies how the parts relate to one another. In the sciences, for example, the analysis of simple table salt would require a deconstruction of its parts—the elements sodium (Na) and chloride (Cl). Then, scientists would study how the two elements interact to create the compound NaCl, or sodium chloride: simple table salt.

In an **academic analysis**, instead of deconstructing compounds, the essay takes apart a primary source (an essay, a book, an ad, a YouTube video, a TikTok, an article, etc.) point by point. It communicates the main points of the source by examining individual points and identifying how the points relate to one another.

The third type of writing—**synthesis**—combines two or more items to create an entirely new item. Take, for example, the electronic musical instrument aptly named the synthesizer. It looks like a simple keyboard but displays a dashboard of switches, buttons, and levers. With the flip of a few switches, a musician may combine the distinct sounds of a piano, a flute, or a guitar—or any other combination of instruments—to create a new sound. The purpose of an academic synthesis is to blend individual documents into a new document by considering the main points from one or more pieces of writing and linking the main points together to create a new point, one not replicated in either document.

Finally, an **evaluation** judges the value of something and determines its worth. Evaluations in everyday life are often not only dictated by set standards but also influenced by opinion and prior knowledge such as a supervisor's evaluation of an employee in a particular job. Academic evaluations, likewise, communicate your opinion and its justifications about a particular document or a topic of discussion. They are influenced by your reading of the document as well as your prior knowledge and experience with the topic or issue. Evaluations typically require more critical thinking and a combination of classifying, analysis, and synthesis skills.

You will encounter these four purposes not only as you read for your classes but also as you read for work or pleasure and, because reading and writing work together, your writing skills will improve as you read. Remember that the purpose for writing will guide you through each part of your paper, helping you make decisions about content and style.

When reviewing directions for assignments, look for the verbs that ask you to classify, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate. Instructors often use these words to clearly indicate the assignment's purpose. These words will cue you on how to complete the assignment because you will know its exact purpose.

Identifying the Audience

Imagine you must give a presentation to a group of executives in an office. Weeks before the big day, you spend time creating and rehearsing the presentation. You must make important, careful decisions not only about the content but also about your delivery. Will the presentation require technology to project figures and charts? Should the presentation define important words, or will the executives already know the terms? Should you wear your suit and dress shirt? The answers to these questions will help you develop an appropriate relationship with your audience, making them more receptive to your message.

Now imagine you must explain the same business concepts from your presentation to a group of high school students. Those important questions you previously answered may now require different answers. The figures and charts may be too sophisticated, and the terms will certainly require definitions. You may even reconsider your outfit and sport a more casual look. Because the audience has shifted, your presentation and delivery will shift as well to create a new relationship with the new audience.

In these two situations, the **audience**—the individuals who will watch and listen to the presentation—plays a role in the development of presentation. As you prepare the presentation, you visualize the audience to anticipate their expectations and reactions. What you imagine affects the information you choose to present and how you will present it. Then, during the presentation, you meet the audience in person and discover immediately how well you perform.

Although the audience for writing assignments (or multimodal projects)—your readers—may not appear in person,

they play an equally vital role. Even in everyday writing activities, you identify your readers' characteristics, interests, and expectations before making decisions about what you write. In fact, thinking about the audience has become so common that you may not even detect the audience-driven decisions. For example, you update your status on a social networking site with the awareness of who will digitally follow the post. If you want to brag about a good grade, you may write the post to please family members. If you want to describe a funny moment, you may write with your friends' senses of humor in mind. Even at work, you send emails with an awareness of an unintended receiver who could intercept the message.

In other words, being aware of “invisible” readers is a skill you most likely already possess and one you rely on every day. Consider the following paragraphs. Which one would the author send to her parents? Which one would she send to her best friend?

Example A

Last Saturday, I volunteered at a local hospital. The visit was fun and rewarding. I even learned how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR. Unfortunately, I think I caught a cold from one of the patients. This week, I will rest in bed and drink plenty of clear fluids. I hope I am well by next Saturday to volunteer again.

Example B

OMG! You won't believe this! My advisor forced me to do my community service hours at this hospital all weekend! We learned CPR but we did it on dummies, not even real peeps. And some kid sneezed on me and got me sick! I was so bored and sniffing all weekend; I hope I don't have to go back next week. I def do NOT want to miss the basketball tournament!

Most likely, you matched each paragraph to its intended audience with little hesitation. Because each paragraph reveals the author's relationship with the intended readers, you can identify the audience fairly quickly. When writing your own essays, you must engage with your audience to build an appropriate relationship given your subject.

Imagining your readers during each stage of the writing process will help you make decisions about your writing. Ultimately, the people you visualize will affect what and how you write.

While giving a speech, you may articulate an inspiring or critical message, but if you left your hair a mess and laced up mismatched shoes, your audience might not take you seriously. They may be too distracted by your appearance to listen to your words. This response may not be fair—and it may reveal cultural, age, and other biases—but it exists.

Similarly, grammar and sentence structure serve as the appearance of a piece of writing. Most importantly, they communicate your ideas to your readers. Polishing your work using clear writing will impress your readers and allow them to focus on what you have to say. To be clear, all forms of English are equally valid.

Because focusing on your intended audience will enhance your writing, your process, and your finished product, you must consider the specific traits of your audience members. Use your imagination and research to anticipate the readers' demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations.

Demographics

These measure important data about a group of people such as their age range, their ethnicity, their religious beliefs, or their gender. Certain topics and assignments will require these kinds of considerations about your audience. For other topics and assignments, these measurements may not influence your writing in the end. Regardless, it is important to consider demographics when you begin to think about your purpose for writing.

Education

Education considers the audience's level of schooling. If audience members have earned a doctorate degree, for example, you may need to elevate your style and use more formal language. Or, if audience members are still in college, you could write in a more relaxed style. An audience member's major or emphasis may also dictate your writing.

Prior Knowledge

This refers to what the audience already knows about your topic. If your readers have studied certain topics, they may already know some terms and concepts related to the topic. You may decide whether to define terms and explain concepts based on your audience's prior knowledge. Although you cannot peer inside the brains of your readers to discover their knowledge, you can make reasonable assumptions. For instance, a nursing major would presumably know more about health-related topics than a business major would.

Expectations

These indicate what readers will look for while reading your assignment. Readers may expect consistencies in the assignment's appearance such as correct grammar and traditional formatting like double-spaced lines and legible font. Readers may also have content-based expectations given the assignment's purpose and organization. In an essay titled "The Economics of Enlightenment: The Effects of Rising Tuition," for example, audience members may expect to read about the economic repercussions of college tuition costs.

Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker's attitude toward a subject or another person. You may pick up a person's tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may speak excitedly about a fun skiing trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her serious mood. Or, a coworker who needs to let off some steam after a long meeting may crack a sarcastic joke.

Just as speakers transmit emotion through voice, writers can transmit a range of attitudes and emotions through prose—from excited and humorous to somber and critical. These emotions create connections among the audience, the author, and the subject, ultimately building a relationship between the audience and the text. To stimulate these connections, writers convey their attitudes and feelings with useful devices such as sentence structure, word choice,

punctuation, and formal or informal language. Keep in mind that the writer's attitude should always appropriately match the audience and the purpose.

Exercise

Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation?

"Many species of plants and animals are disappearing right before our eyes. If we don't act fast, it might be too late to save them. Human activities, including pollution, deforestation, hunting, and overpopulation, are devastating the natural environment. Without our help, many species will not survive long enough for our children to see them in the wild. Take the tiger, for example. Today, tigers occupy just seven percent of their historical range, and many local populations are already extinct. Hunted for their beautiful pelts and other body parts, the tiger population has plummeted from one hundred thousand in 1920 to just a few thousand. Contact your local wildlife conservation society today to find out how you can stop this terrible destruction."

Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

Content refers to all the written substance in a document. After selecting an audience and a purpose, you must choose what information will make it to the page. Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations, but no matter the type, the information must be appropriate and interesting for the audience and purpose. An essay written for third graders that summarizes the legislative process, for example, would have to contain succinct and simple content.

Content is also shaped by tone. When the tone matches the content, the audience will be more engaged, and you will build a stronger relationship with your readers. When applied to that audience of third graders, you would choose simple content that the audience would easily understand, and you would express that content through an enthusiastic tone.

The same considerations apply to all audiences and purposes.

Argument Overview Takeaways

With this argumentation overview, you can see what rhetorical or academic argument is *not*:

- An argument need not be controversial or about a controversy.

- An argument is not a mere fight.
- An argument does not have a single winner or loser.
- An argument is not a mere opinion.
- An argument is not a statement of fact.

Rhetorical Arguments use three main appeals:

- An appeal to logos (logic)
- An appeal to ethos (credibility/ethics of writer or creator)
- An appeal to pathos (emotion)

You can create an arguments by considering the following elements:

- Purpose
- Audience
- Tone

Use those three elements to shape the content.

This chapter is slightly modified (derivative) and includes the following materials:

“What is an Argument” by Kristen DeVries in *Let’s Get Writing* by Western Virginia Community College under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

“Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content” and “Features of an Argument” in *Informed Arguments: A Guide to Writing and Research, Revised 2nd Edition* is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where noted.

These sources, in turn, included materials from the following sources:

Figure 1.1: “Opinion vs Argument,” by Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, derivative image from original by ijmaki, pixabay, CC-0

Figure 1.2: “The Rhetorical Triangle” image was derived by Brandi Gomez from an image in: Kathryn Crowther et al., *Successful College Composition*, 2nd ed. Book 8. (Georgia: English Open Textbooks, 2016), <https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/english-textbooks/8/>. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. ↵

“Arguing.” In *A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success in First-Year Writing*, by Melanie Gagich and Emilie Zickel. Cleveland: MSL Academic Endeavors. Accessed July 2019. <https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/csu-fyw-rhetoric/chapter/8-2-arguing/>. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Crowther, Kathryn, Lauren Curtright, Nancy Gilbert, Barbara Hall, Tracienne Ravita, and Kirk Swenson. *Successful College Composition*. 2nd edition. Book 8. Georgia: English Open Textbooks, 2016. <http://oer.galileo.usg.edu/english-textbooks/8>. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

2. Reading and Understanding Arguments

Overview: Reading to Write

So when you are just trying to get the barebones ideas about something you have read straight, how do you go about it? An argument is a swarming cluster of words. How do you get to the heart of it? In this chapter we look at how to take notes not just on the meaning of each part of the argument but also on its relation to the other parts. Then we use these notes to draw a visual map of an argument. In the map we see the argument's momentum as the reason points us toward the claim. We see how each element implies, supports, limits, or contradicts other elements. Thus, we begin to imagine where the argument is vulnerable and how it might be modified. We'll discuss how to use this logical map to write a summary, and later, we'll see how to follow up the summary with our own opinions.



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Types of Claims to Look Out For

Claims of Policy

The most familiar kind of argument demands action. It is easy to see when the writer is asking readers to do something. Here are a few phrases that signal a claim of policy, a claim that is pushing readers to do something:

- We should _____.
- We ought to _____.
- We must _____.
- Let's _____.
- The best course is _____.
- The solution is to _____.
- The next step should be _____.
- We should consider _____.
- Further research should be done to determine _____.

Here are a few sample claims of policy:

- Landlords should not be allowed to raise the rent more than 2% per year.
- The federal government should require a background check before allowing anyone to buy a gun.
- Social media accounts should not be censored in any way.

A claim of policy can also look like a direct command, such as “So if you are an American citizen, don’t let anything stop you from voting.”

Note that not all claims of policy give details or specifics about what should be done or how. Sometimes an author is only trying to build momentum and point us in a certain direction. For example, “Schools must find a way to make bathrooms more private for everyone, not just transgender people.”

Claims of policy don’t have to be about dramatic actions. Even discussion, research, and writing are kinds of action. For example, “Americans need to learn more about other wealthy nations’ health care systems in order to see how much better things could be in America.”



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Claims of Fact

Arguments do not always point toward action. Sometimes writers want us to share their vision of reality on a particular subject. They may want to paint a picture of how something happened, describe a trend, or convince us that something is bad or good.

In some cases, the writer may want to share a particular vision of what something is like, what effects something has, how something is changing, or of how something unfolded in the past. The argument might define a phenomenon, a trend, or a period of history.

Often these claims are simply presented as fact, and an uncritical reader may not see them as arguments at all. However, very often claims of fact are more controversial than they seem. For example, consider the claim, “Caffeine boosts performance.” Does it really? How much? How do we know? Performance at what kind of task? For everyone? Doesn’t it also have downsides? A writer could spend a book convincing us that caffeine really boosts performance and explaining exactly what they mean by those three words.

Some phrases writers might use to introduce a claim of fact include the following:

- Research suggests that _____.
- The data indicate that _____.
- _____ is increasing or decreasing.
- There is a trend toward _____.
- _____ causes _____.
- _____ leads to _____.

Often a claim of fact will be the basis for other claims about what we should do that look more like what we associate with the word “argument.” However, many pieces of writing in websites, magazines, office settings, and academic settings don’t try to move people toward action. They aim primarily at getting readers to agree with their view of what is fact. For example, it took many years of argument, research, and public messaging before most people accepted the claim that “Smoking causes cancer.”

Here are a few arguable sample claims of fact:

- It is easier to grow up biracial in Hawaii than in any other part of the United States.
- Raising the minimum wage will force many small businesses to lay off workers.
- Fires in the western United States have gotten worse primarily because of climate change.
- Antidepressants provide the most benefit when combined with talk therapy.

Claims of Value

In other cases, the writer is not just trying to convince us that something is a certain way or causes something, but is trying to say how good or bad that thing is. They are rating it, trying to get us to share her assessment of its value. Think of a movie or book review or an Amazon or Yelp review. Even a “like” on Facebook or a thumbs up on a text message is a claim of value.

Claims of value are fairly easy to identify. Some phrases that indicate a claim of value include the following:

- _____ is terrible/disappointing/underwhelming.
- _____ is mediocre/average/decent/acceptable.

- We should celebrate _____.
- _____ is great, wonderful, fantastic, impressive, makes a substantial contribution to _____.

A claim of value can also make a comparison. It might assert that something is better than, worse than, or equal to something else. Some phrases that signal a comparative claim of value include these:

- _____ is the best _____.
- _____ is the worst _____.
- _____ is better than _____.
- _____ is worse than _____.
- _____ is just as good as _____.
- _____ is just as bad as _____.

The following are examples of claims of value:

- The Bay Area is the best place to start a biotech career.
- Forest fires are becoming the worst threat to public health in California.
- Human rights are more important than border security.
- Experimenting with drag is the best way I've found to explore my feelings about masculinity and femininity.
- It was so rude when that lady asked you what race you are.

Note that the above arguments all include claims of fact but go beyond observing to praise or criticize what they are observing.

Exercises

On a social media site like Facebook or Twitter or on your favorite news site, find an example of one of each kind of claim.

Making Notes on the Writer's Claims

A first step toward summarizing and responding to an argument is to first make margin notes on the claims. Let's take the following argument as an example:

Sample Argument: "Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?"

All the disagreement over immigration policy I have been hearing about in the news lately reminds me that while I

believe in the rule of law, I feel profoundly uncomfortable with the idea of keeping people out who are desperate to come in. Is illegal immigration actually wrong? Is it unethical to cross a border without permission?

I don't have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk. But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.

If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it. I would try to cross a border illegally so my children would get enough to eat and would have a more stable childhood and a chance at a better education and a better career. What parent would sit on their hands and tell themselves, "I want to give my child a better life, but oh well. If I don't have the papers, I guess it would be wrong"?

If most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so, then we must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act. If it is ethical and reasonable, then how can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice? We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated—with empathy, respect, and offers of help.

We can often paraphrase the claims more readily on a second read when we are already familiar with the content. Some need the physicality of taking notes by hand in the margins of a book or a printout. Some take notes by creating comments in Word or Google Docs. Others use online annotation systems like Hypothes.is. Another way is to copy the text into a table in a word processing program and write notes in a second column, as we have done below:

Sample Margin Notes on an Argument's Claims

Section of the text

Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?

All the disagreement over immigration policy I have been hearing about in the news lately reminds me that while I believe in the rule of law, I feel profoundly uncomfortable with the idea of keeping people out who are desperate to come in. Is illegal immigration actually wrong? Is it unethical to cross a border without permission?

I don't have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk. But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.

If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it. I would try to cross a border illegally so my children would get enough to eat and would have a more stable childhood and a chance at a better education and a better career. What parent would sit on their hands and tell themselves, "I want to give my child a better life, but oh well. If I don't have the papers, I guess it would be wrong"?

If most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so, then we must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act. If it is ethical and reasonable, then how can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice? We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated—with empathy, respect, and offers of help.

Notes on the claims

Implies a claim of fact: we would all cross the border (under what circumstances?)

Suggests a claim of value: It might not be wrong to cross illegally.

But also suggests another claim of value: that "the rule of law" is right. Is this a contradiction?

Claim of policy about the border—we shouldn't criminalize people who have legitimate reasons to cross.

Admits there are security risks in "open borders."

Looking for some kind of middle ground that keeps us safe but doesn't criminalize migrants.

Claim of fact: the author would consider it right to cross illegally to benefit their children.

That is, if their whole family didn't have enough money, a safe place to live, or access to a good education.

They imply another claim of fact: that any parent would do the same and feel okay about it.

Starts with the same claim of fact as in the title and the previous paragraph: most people would cross the border illegally. Adds the idea that we wouldn't feel it was wrong.

The implication is that if all these people would feel it is right, then it really is "ethical and reasonable."

"We must recognize" implies a claim of policy—that people should talk about illegal crossings publicly in a different way than we do now.

Claim of policy: Border walls and detention centers are not right.

Ends with three policy recommendations for how to treat migrants: empathy, respect, and help.

Notice that attempting to summarize each claim can actually take more space than the original text itself if we are summarizing in detail and trying to be very precise about what the text claims and implies. Of course, we won't want to or need to do this in such detail for every paragraph of every reading we are assigned to write about. We can resort to it when the argument gets harder to follow or when it's especially important to be precise.

Exercises

Make notes in your own words on the claims of fact, value, and policy you find in an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. Make a table with two columns and paste the argument into the first column. In the second column, summarize the points the author makes as in the example above. If you like, you can make a copy of this Google Docs notes template.

Deciding Which Is the Main Claim



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Now that we have this list of claims in the margin of the text, we know some of the things that the author wants us to believe. How do we sort them and put them in relation to each other? In this case, we found claims of policy, fact, and value, some of which were repeated in different parts of the argument. Which claim is the main point? How do other claims support this one?

We can try asking ourselves the following questions to see if we already have a sense of what the argument's goal is.

- What does the writer want us to believe?
- What does the writer most want to convince us of?
- Where is the writer going with this?
- If the writer had to make their point in just one sentence, what would they say?

A good first place to look for the focus, of course, is the title. Often the title will declare the main claim outright. Here, the title question “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?” implies the answer “Yes.” We can look for the same idea in the text and check whether it seems to be the main one. The third paragraph describes why the author would cross the border and then generalizes to claim that others would do the same. At the start of the last paragraph, the writer declares that “...most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so.” Note that this is a claim of fact about what people would do and how they would feel about it.

But is this the main claim? When we review the other sections, we find several other claims of policy. Introductions set expectations, and here, the first paragraph alludes to public debates on immigration policy. It suggests that it may not be right to stop people from coming into America, and it may not be wrong to cross the border, even illegally. These early references to what is right suggest that the argument aims to do more than describe how people might feel under different circumstances. The argument is going to weigh in on what border policy should be. The second paragraph confirms this sense as it builds up to the still vague sentence, “Surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.”

In the last paragraph, we learn what these ways might involve. Three different claims of policy emerge:

1. “... We must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act.”
2. “How can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice?” (The implication, of course, is that they cannot be.)
3. “We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated—with empathy, respect, and offers of help.”

Which of these final claims is the overall focus? Arguments sometimes emphasize their main point in the very last sentence, in part to make it memorable. However, the end of the argument can also be a place for the author to go a little beyond their main point and suggest issues for further thought. The phrase “empathy, respect, and offers of help” sounds important, but we should note that the rest of the argument isn’t about how to help migrants. However, the idea that we should respond more positively to migrants has recurred throughout. The idea that migrants are not in the wrong—that they are not criminals—is clearly key, and so is the idea that we should change border policy accordingly.

Here is one way, then, to combine those last two ideas into a summary of the overall claim of the argument:

Claim: Border policy should not criminalize undocumented immigrants.

Exercise

Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings, read it closely, and then try to summarize the main claim in your own words. If you are unsure, return to making notes on the writer’s claims and then reflect on the questions above.

Finding the Counterarguments

Very often, as we read an argument we will find not just what the author thinks and believes, but the author's description of other people's opposing arguments as well. An argument is part of an ongoing broader conversation about the subject, and the writer can remind us of what they are responding to. So as we read we can look for and mark these counterarguments.

In a complex text it can be easy to miss that a particular point is actually not one that the writer agrees with—they may be bringing it up in order to shoot it down. We can look out for particular phrases that are often used in academic writing to signal that the writer is switching sides temporarily and describing an idea that goes against the argument.

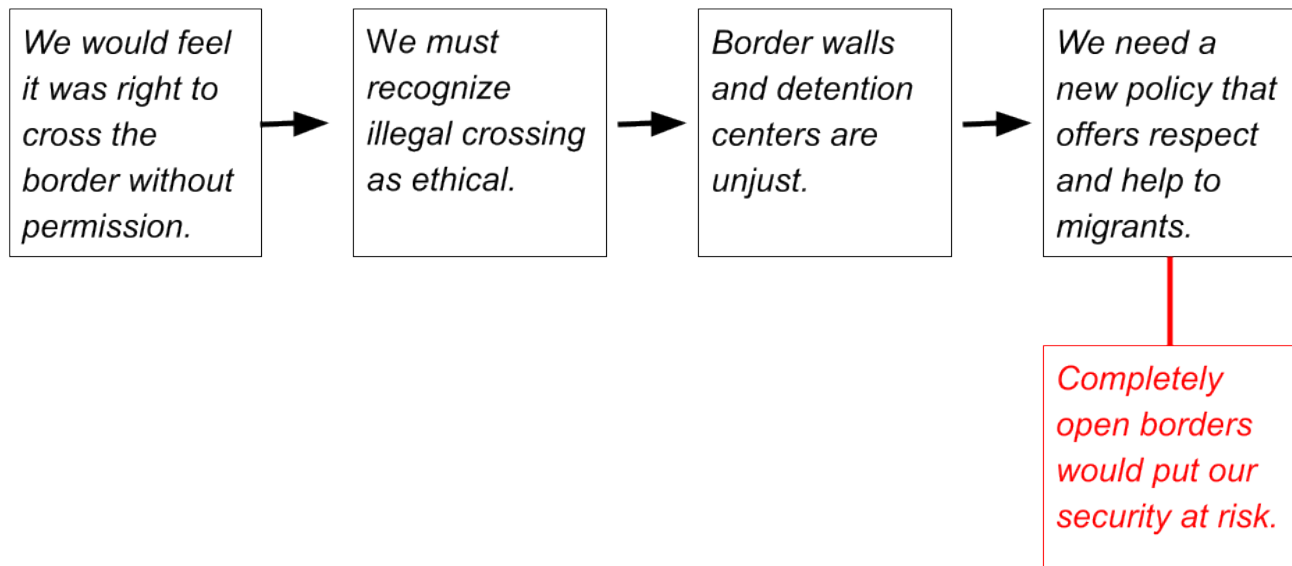
Very often the way the author will both signal to us that they are introducing the counterargument and signal their attitude toward it. They will convey the degree to which they disagree and the respect or contempt they feel for this opposing view.

Common Phrases That Introduce Counterarguments

Attitude to the Counterargument	Phrases
Negative The writer thinks the counterargument is completely wrong.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is a popular misconception that _____.• Some have fallen for the idea that _____.• Many people mistakenly believe that _____.
Neutral The writer is about to describe a counterargument without giving their opinion yet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many people think _____.• Some, on the other hand, will argue that _____.• Some might disagree, claiming that _____.• Of course, many have claimed that _____.• Some will take issue with _____, arguing that _____.• Some will object that _____.• Some will dispute the idea that _____, claiming that _____.• One criticism of this way of thinking is that _____. <p>Note that these neutral examples don't tell us whether the writer thinks the counterargument has any validity. Usually, the writer will want to follow them with a sentence that does reveal their opinion.</p>
Positive The writer sees some merit in the counterargument. They agree with it even though it hurts their argument. This is called concession .	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is true that _____.• I do concede _____.• We should grant that _____.• We must admit that _____.• I acknowledge that _____.• X has a point that _____.• Admittedly, _____.• Of course, _____.• To be sure, _____.• There may be something to the idea that _____.

In the border argument example, the writer never directly mentions other writers who disagree. Instead, they signal with the phrase “I admit” that they are going to summarize a valid point which goes against their own main argument: “I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk.”

We could add this to our map as follows, with the counterargument in red to show it goes against the rest of the argument:



Text description of argument map with counterargument

Exercises

- Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. You may want to focus on a short excerpt of one or more paragraphs.
- Read your text closely and identify any counterarguments it mentions. What is the writer's attitude to each counterargument?
- Describe each counterargument in your own words and add it to your argument map. You can handwrite your map or copy this Google Drawings template.

Finding the Responses to the Counterarguments

After a writer summarizes another perspective, they will signal that they are switching back to their own perspective. If they have not already given a hint about their attitude to the other side, they will have to make their response clear now. Do they see the counterargument as completely wrong-headed, or as having some merit?

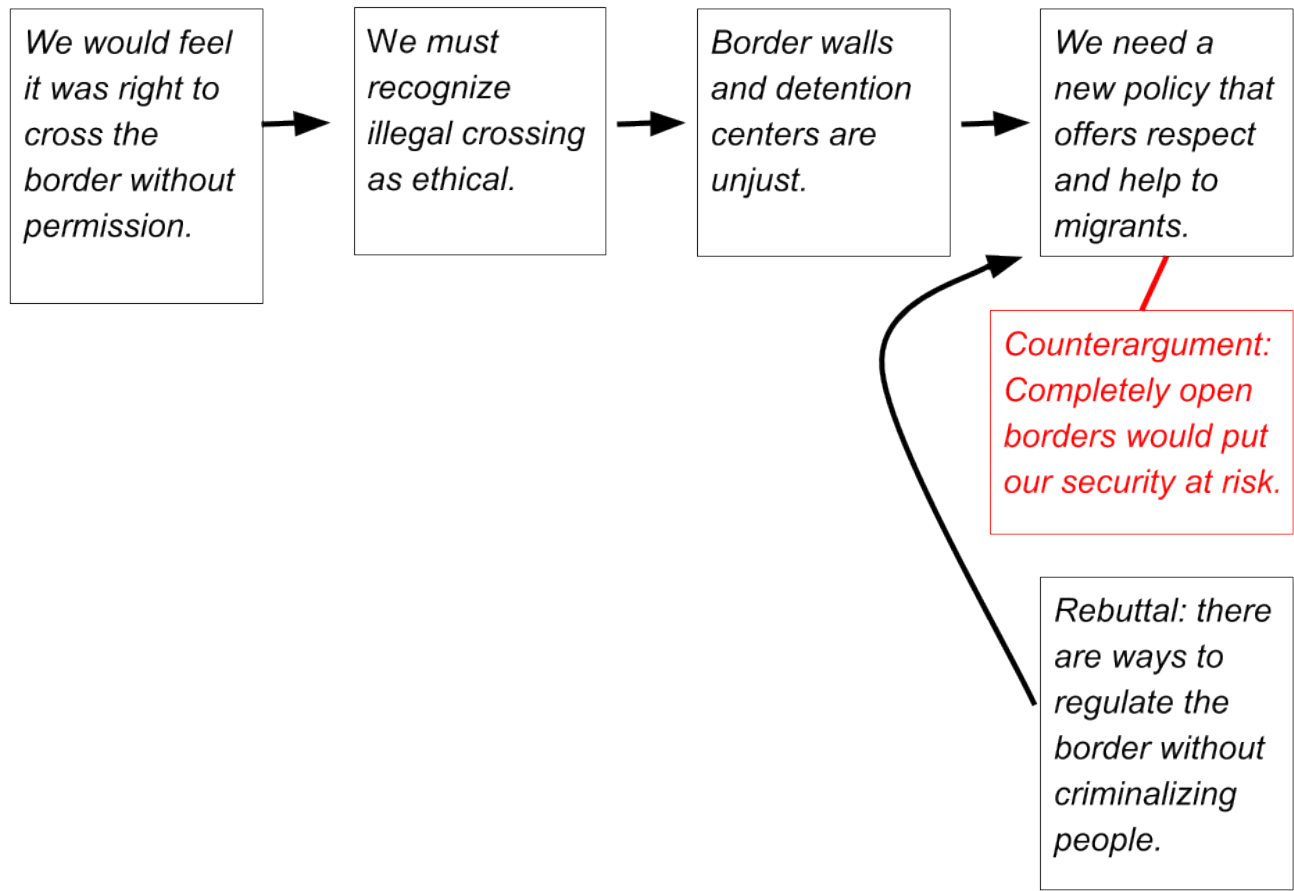
If the writer completely disagrees with the counterargument, they will follow up their description of it by pointing out its flaws. This direct rebuttal will bring the readers back to the writer's side. If they have just conceded a point, they will now emphasize the reason why their own argument still holds. The more the writer has credited the counterargument,

the more they will need to explain why readers shouldn't accept it, at least not completely. Below are some phrases which can point toward the problem or limitation of the counterargument.

Common Phrases for Responding to Counterarguments

Attitude to the Counterargument	Phrases
If the writer considers the counterargument totally wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This idea misses the fact that _____. • I disagree because _____. • This depends on the assumption that _____ which is incorrect because _____. • This argument overlooks _____. • This argument contradicts itself _____. • This is mistaken because _____.
If the writer partly agrees with the counterargument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is true that _____, but _____. • I do concede _____, and yet _____. • We should grant that _____, but we must still acknowledge that _____. • We can admit that _____ and still believe that _____. • I acknowledge that _____, and yet we should nevertheless recognize that _____. • Critics have a point that _____; however it is more important that we focus on _____. • Admittedly, _____. However, _____. • Of course, _____, but I still insist that _____. • To be sure, _____; but _____. • There may be something to the idea that _____, and yet _____.

In the border argument example, the writer concedes that the counterargument does have merit: "I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk." Immediately, the writer responds, "But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions." The word "but" signals the transition from concession back to the writer's own side. In the map, we can put the rebuttal below the counterargument and use the arrow to show it supporting the main claim.



Text description of argument map with counterargument and rebuttal

Exercises

- Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. You may want to focus on a short excerpt of one or more paragraphs.
- Read your text closely and identify any counterarguments it mentions. What is the writer's attitude to each counterargument?
- Decide what your attitude to this counterargument is. Choose a phrase from the above table to introduce the counterargument.

Finding the Limits on the Argument



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If we are getting ready to summarize and respond to an argument, we need to notice exactly how the writer has qualified or limited what they are saying.

Often writers will strengthen their case against the counterargument by taking a step back and limiting what they are claiming. They might make an exception for a particular case which they can't support. Or they might clarify that their claim only applies to a particular group or situation.

Faced with a powerful counterargument, a writer might also admit a certain degree of uncertainty about their claim as a whole. They might consider the argument worth putting forward for consideration even if they are not sure it is right.

Common Phrases Used to Limit Arguments

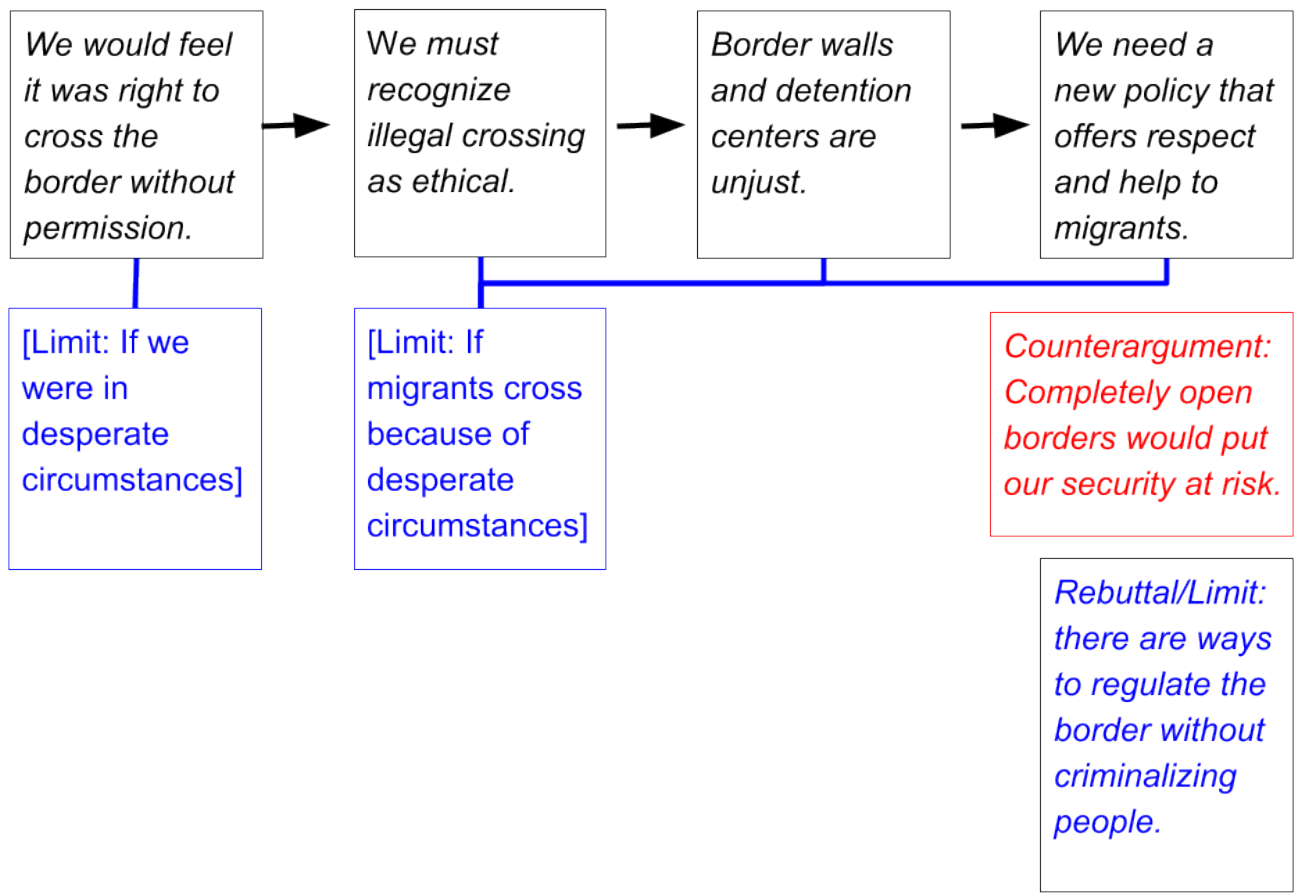
Kinds of limitations on arguments	Phrases
Expressing less than perfect certainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perhaps, _____.• It is worth considering the idea that _____.• _____ may _____.• _____ might _____.• _____ could possibly _____.• Probably, _____.• Very likely, _____.• Almost certainly, _____.
Limiting what the argument is claiming or restricting the scope of the argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Few _____.• In a few cases, _____.• Some _____.• Many _____.• Most _____.• The vast majority of _____.• Almost all _____.• _____ unless _____.• If it is not the case that _____, then _____.• _____, except in the case that _____.• We can exclude cases where _____.

When we read arguments, we can watch for these limitations and add them to our argument map. In the case of the border argument, limitations are found throughout. We have highlighted them and commented on them below.

Sample Notes on an Argument's Limits

Argument	Notes
Title: Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?	Not limited at all—a universal “all”
All the disagreement over immigration policy I have been hearing about in the news lately reminds me that while I believe in the rule of law, I feel profoundly uncomfortable with the idea of keeping people out who are desperate to come in. Is illegal immigration actually wrong? Is it unethical to cross a border without permission?	Limits the group of immigrants we are talking about to those who are desperate. This is an argument about refugees of one kind or another, not about people who just feel they would be happier or more successful in the U.S.
I don't have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk. But surely there are ways to regulate the border without criminalizing people who are driven by need and good intentions.	So maybe the author would still consider it fine to criminalize those who cross illegally because they prefer to live in the U.S. if they are not currently in dire straits.
If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it. I would try to cross a border illegally so my children would get enough to eat and would have a more stable childhood and a chance at a better education and a better career. What parent would sit on their hands and tell themselves, “I want to give my child a better life, but oh well. If I don't have the papers, I guess it would be wrong”?	Clarifies that some “regulation” of borders is okay. Their argument does not condemn all efforts to establish rules and consequences at the border.
If most of us, under desperate circumstances, would cross the border without permission and feel no moral qualms about doing so, then we must recognize this crossing as an ethical, reasonable act. If it is ethical and reasonable, then how can either a wall or a detention center be on the side of justice? We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated—with empathy, respect, and offers of help.	Again, this clarifies that this only applies to migrants with a compelling reason to cross.
	Outlines a specific circumstance that would justify crossing illegally, implying that other circumstances might not justify it.
	Repeats the limitation to migrants who are desperate.
	Note: The final sentences don't mention any limitation on which migrants we are talking about.

The main limitation, then, can be entered into the argument map in blue and in brackets thus:



Text description of argument map with limits

Now that we have analyzed the parts of the argument and their relations to each other, we are ready for the next step demanded by most college writing assignments. Chapter 3 will discuss how to write a clear and precise summary of an argument.

Exercises

- Choose an argument you are reading for class or one of our suggested readings. You may want to focus on a short excerpt of one or more paragraphs.
- Read your text closely and identify any limits it puts on any of its claims.
- Describe each limit in your own words and add it to your argument map. You can handwrite your map or copy this Google Drawings template.

Common Argument Phrases

Here are all of the common phrases discussed in Chapter 2 for introducing different elements of an argument. The section headings link to more information.

Claims

Claims of policy

- We should _____.
- We ought to _____.
- We must _____.
- Let's _____.
- The best course is _____.
- The solution is to _____.
- The next step should be _____.
- We should consider _____.
- Further research should be done to determine _____.

Claims of fact

- Research suggests that _____.
- The data indicate that _____.
- _____ is increasing or decreasing.
- There is a trend toward _____.
- _____ causes _____.
- _____ leads to _____.

Claims of value

- _____ is terrible/disappointing/underwhelming.
- _____ is mediocre/average/decent/acceptable.

- We should celebrate _____.
- _____ is great/wonderful/fantastic/impressive.

Comparative claims of value

- _____ is the best _____.
- _____ is the worst _____.
- _____ is better than _____.
- _____ is worse than _____.
- _____ is just as good as _____.
- _____ is just as bad as _____.

Reasons

- Because _____.
- Because of this, _____.
- If _____, then _____.
- Since _____.
- For this reason, _____.
- We can conclude _____.
- Therefore, _____.
- So _____.
- Consequently, _____.
- As a result, _____.
- Hence _____.
- Thus _____.
- It follows that _____.

Counterarguments

Mistaken counterarguments

- It is a popular misconception that _____.

- Some have fallen for the idea that_____.
- Many people mistakenly believe that_____.

Neutrally described counterarguments

- Many people think _____.
- Some, on the other hand, will argue that _____.
- Some might disagree, claiming that _____.
- Of course, many have claimed that _____.
- Some will take issue with _____, arguing that _____.
- Some will object that _____.
- Some will dispute the idea that _____, claiming that _____.
- One criticism of this way of thinking is that _____.

Counterarguments that have merit

- It is true that _____.
- I do concede_____.
- We should grant that_____.
- We must admit that_____.
- I acknowledge that _____.
- X has a point that _____.
- Admittedly, _____.
- Of course, _____.
- To be sure, _____.
- There may be something to the idea that _____.

Rebuttal to a counterargument

- This idea misses the fact that _____.
- I disagree because _____.
- This depends on the assumption that _____ which is incorrect because _____.
- This argument overlooks _____.
- This argument contradicts itself _____.
- This is mistaken because _____.

Concession to a counterargument

- It is true that _____, but_____.
- I do concede_____, and yet_____.
- We should grant that_____, but we must still acknowledge that _____.
- We can admit that_____ and still believe that _____.
- I acknowledge that _____, and yet we should nevertheless recognize that _____.
- Critics have a point that _____; however it is more important that we focus on _____.
- Admittedly, _____. However, _____.
- Of course, _____, but I still insist that_____.
- To be sure, _____; but _____.
- There may be something to the idea that _____, and yet _____.

Limits

Less than perfect certainty

- Perhaps, _____.
- It is worth considering the idea that _____.
- _____ may_____.
- _____might_____.
- _____could possibly_____.
- Probably, _____.
- Very likely, _____.
- Almost certainly,_____.

Narrowing the scope of the argument

- Few _____.
- Some_____.
- Many_____.
- Most_____.
- The vast majority of _____.
- Almost all_____.
- _____ unless_____.
- If it is not the case that_____, then _____.

- _____, except in the case that _____.
- We can exclude cases where _____.

This chapter is from “Chapter 2: Reading to Figure out the Argument” in *How Arguments Work: A Guide to Writing and Analyzing Texts in College* by Anna Mills under a CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

3. Summarizing an Argument

What is a Summary?



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In Chapter 2: Reading and Understanding Arguments, we discussed strategies for understanding the reading by identifying the claims presented and mapping how they work together. Chapter 3 will focus on how to use this understanding to describe the argument in our own words. Such a description is called a summary, and it forms part of most college writing assignments. In some cases, the summary will be the entire essay. We may be given a page or word count range, which might be as short as a paragraph or as long as several pages. More frequently, the summary will be the starting point; a summary in the introduction or in the first page or two will serve to launch a discussion of our own opinions and ideas. In either case, we can use the summary strategies below to create a coherent chunk of writing that will give the reader a clear picture of the text we are analyzing.

The argument map can guide us as we write the summary. To make the map, we have already had to choose what to leave out and what to emphasize. We have already shown what role each claim plays in the overall argument. Now, instead of colors and arrows and labels like “claim” and “reason,” we will use strategic phrases to show how the parts fit together. As we choose words to paraphrase a writer’s points, we will want to reread the text to see how strongly the writer suggests something or what attitude they take toward a counterargument. Thus the process of writing a summary helps us get even clearer about the writer’s intentions and implications than we would in mapping out an argument. Ultimately, it will prepare us to comment, critique and respond more effectively in your essays.

Introducing the Argument and Main Claim



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Introducing the Argument

Almost immediately, the reader of any summary will need some basic information about the argument summarized. We can name title and author in an introductory phrase. If the publication date and the publication name seem important, we can work those in too. For example, a summary could introduce the basic data on the sample border argument with the phrase “In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?”, Anna Mills...” and follow it with a description of the topic, purpose, or main claim. Some options for introductory phrases include the following:

- In an article for _____, writer _____...
- The account of _____ in the piece _____ by _____...
- Writing in the journal _____, the scholar _____ ...

Next, probably right after the introductory phrase, the reader will want to know the main point of that argument. To introduce the main claim, we’ll need a well-chosen verb to describe the author’s intention, her purpose in writing. The most general possible verb to describe a main claim would be “says,” as in “In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the

Border?” Anna Mills says...” But that would tell us so little about what Anna Mills is trying to do. Readers will be bored and will learn nothing from “says.” If we choose a more dramatic and precise verb like “calls for,” “criticizes,” “describes,” “argues,” or “questions,” then readers will feel the dynamism and momentum of both the argument and the summary. We can convey a lot about the structure of the argument, its degree of conviction or moderation, its tone and attitude by the word or phrase we choose to introduce each claim. As we choose those phrases, we will also be pushing ourselves to get an even clearer picture of the argument than we did by mapping it.

Describing Claims of Fact

If the argument’s main purpose is to describe reality in some way, we will want to let readers know if it is controversial or not. Is the writer defending their idea against obvious objections or counterarguments, or are they aiming to inform us about something we may not be aware of?

Phrases to introduce controversial claims of fact

- They argue that _____.
- She maintains that _____.
- He contends that _____.
- They assert that _____.
- She holds that _____.
- He insists that _____.
- She thinks _____.
- They believe that _____.

Phrases to introduce widely accepted claims of fact

- He informs us of _____.
- She describes _____.
- They note that _____.
- He observes that _____.
- She explains that _____.
- The writer points out the way in which _____.

Describing Claims of Value

If the argument's main purpose is to convince us that something is bad or good or of mixed value, we can signal that evaluation to the reader right off the bat. How dramatic is the claim about its praise or critique? We can ask ourselves how many stars the argument is giving the thing it evaluates. A five-star rating “celebrates” or “applauds” its subject while a four-star rating might be said to “endorse it with some reservations.”

Phrases to describe a positive claim of value

- They praise_____.
- He celebrates_____.
- She applauds the notion that_____.
- They endorse_____.
- He admires_____.
- She finds value in_____.
- They rave about_____.

Phrases to describe a negative claim of value

- The author criticizes_____.
- She deplores_____.
- He finds fault in_____.
- They regret that_____.
- They complain that_____.
- The authors are disappointed in_____.

Phrases to describe a mixed claim of value

- The author gives a mixed review of_____.
- She sees strengths and weaknesses in_____.
- They endorse_____ with some reservations.
- He praises_____ while finding some fault in _____.
- The authors have mixed feelings about_____. On the one hand, they are impressed by_____, but on the other hand, they find much to be desired in_____.

Describing Claims of Policy

If, as in the case of our sample argument, the author wants to push for some kind of action, then we can signal to the reader how sure the writer seems of the recommendation and how much urgency they feel. Since the border argument uses words like “must” and “justice” in its final paragraph, we will want to convey that sense of moral conviction if we can, with a verb like “urges.” Here is one possible first sentence of a summary of that argument:

In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?”, Anna Mills urges us to seek a new border policy that helps desperate migrants rather than criminalizing them.

If we think there should be even more sense of urgency, we might choose the verb “demands.” “Demands” would make Mills seem more insistent, possibly pushy. Is she that insistent? We will want to glance back at the original, probably many times, to double-check that our word choice fits.

If the border argument ended with a more restrained tone, as if to convey politeness and humility or even uncertainty, we might summarize it with a sentence like the following:

In her 2019 article ‘Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?’, Anna Mills asks us to consider how we can change border policy to help desperate undocumented migrants rather than criminalizing them.

Phrases to describe a strongly felt claim of policy

- They advocate for_____.
- She recommends_____.
- They encourage_____to _____.
- The writers urge_____.
- The author is promoting_____.
- He calls for_____.
- She demands_____.

Phrases to describe a more tentative claim of policy

- He suggests_____.
- The researchers explore the possibility of_____.
- They hope that_____can take action to_____.
- She shows why we should give more thought to developing a plan to_____.
- The writer asks us to consider_____.

Elaborating on the Main Claim

Depending on the length of the summary we are writing, we may add in additional sentences to further clarify the argument's main claim. In the border argument example, the summary we have thus far focuses on the idea of helping migrants, but the argument itself has another, related dimension which focuses on the attitudes we should take toward migrants. If we are asked to write only a very short summary, we might leave the explanation of the main claim as it is. If we have a little more leeway, we might add to it to reflect this nuance thus:

In her 2019 article “Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?,” Anna Mills urges us to seek a new border policy that helps desperate undocumented migrants rather than criminalizing them. She calls for a shift away from blame toward respect and empathy, questioning the very idea that crossing illegally is wrong.

Of course, the border argument is short, and we have given an even briefer summary of it. College courses will also ask us to summarize longer, multi-part arguments or even a whole book. In that case, we will need to summarize each sub-section of the argument as its own claim.

Exercise

For each claim below, decide whether it is a claim of fact, value, or policy. Write a paraphrase of each claim and introduce it with a phrase that helps us see the writer's purpose.

- Students should embrace coffee to help them study.
- Coffee is the most powerful, safe substance available to jumpstart the mind.
- Coffee's effect is universal.
- For those of us who believe in the life of the mind, enhancing our brains' abilities is ultimately worth the occasional discomfort associated with coffee.

Describing the Reasoning

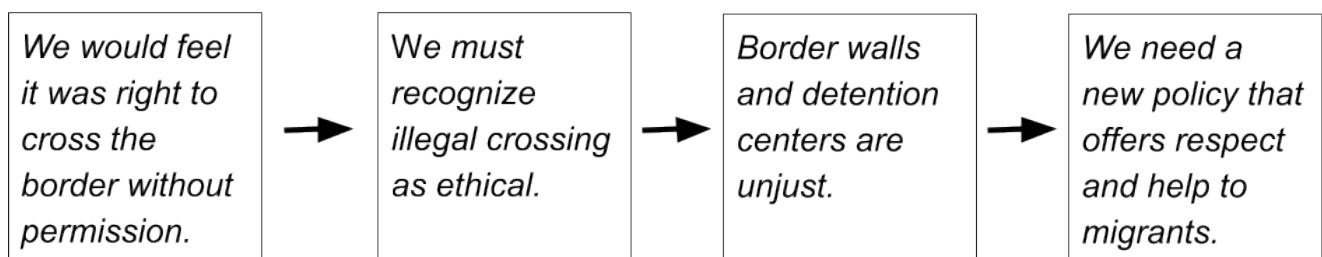


Once we have introduced the argument we will summarize and described its main claim, we will need to show how it supports this claim. How does the writer point us in the direction they want us to go? Whereas we used an arrow in the argument map to show momentum from reason to claim, we can use a phrase to signal which idea serves as a reason for which claim.

Phrases for Introducing Reasons

- She reasons that _____.
- He explains this by_____.
- The author justifies this with_____.
- To support this perspective, the author points out that_____.
- The writer bases this claim on the idea that_____.
- They argue that_____ implies that _____ because_____.
- She argues that if _____, then _____.
- He claims that _____ necessarily means that_____ .
- She substantiates this idea by_____.
- He supports this idea by_____.
- The writer gives evidence in the form of_____.
- They back this up with_____.
- She demonstrates this by_____.
- He proves attempts to prove this by _____.
- They cite studies of _____.
- On the basis of _____, she concludes that _____.

Our border argument map shows a chain of three reasons leading to the main claim, so our summary can describe that chain.



Sample summary

In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?,” Anna Mills urges us to seek a new border policy that helps

desperate undocumented migrants rather than criminalizing them. She calls for a shift toward respect and empathy, questioning the very idea that crossing illegally is wrong. She argues that any parent in a desperate position would consider it right to cross for their child's sake; therefore, no person should condemn that action in another. Since we cannot justify our current walls and detention centers, we must get rid of them.

Practice Exercise $\backslash(\backslash\text{PageIndex}\{1\}\backslash)$

For each pair of claims and reasons below, write a paraphrase of the reason and introduce it with one of the phrases from the chapter or another phrase that serves a similar purpose.

Here's an example. Take the following claim and reason pair: "The right of free speech does not apply to speech that endangers public health. Therefore, Twitter should not allow tweets that promote medical claims that have been proven wrong."

A description of the reason might read as follows: "The writer bases this recommendation on the idea that we do not have a free-speech right to spread ideas that harm other people's health."

1. "Coffee jumpstarts the mind. Therefore, students should embrace coffee to help them study."
2. "Students should avoid coffee. Relying on willpower alone to study reinforces important values like responsibility and self-reliance."
3. "Students should drink black tea rather than coffee because tea has fewer side effects."

Describing How the Author Treats Counterarguments

If the argument we are summarizing mentions a counterargument, a summary will need to describe how the author handles it. A phrase introducing the author's treatment of the counterargument can signal whether the writer sees some merit in the counterargument or rejects it entirely. In either case, we will almost always want to follow up by describing the author's response. If the writer sees merit in the objection, we need to explain why they still maintain their position. On the other hand, if the author dismisses the counterargument, we need to show how they justify this dismissal.

Phrases to Introduce a Writer's Handling of a Counterargument

If the Author Sees Some Merit in the Counterargument

- The writer acknowledges that _____, but still insists that _____.
- They concede that _____; however they consider that _____.
- He grants the idea that _____, yet still maintains that _____.
- She admits that _____, but she points out that _____.
- The author sees merit in the idea that _____, but cannot accept _____.
- Even though he sympathizes with those who believe _____, the author emphasizes that _____.

If the Author Rejects the Counterargument Entirely

- She refutes this claim by arguing that _____.
- However, he questions the very idea that _____, observing that _____.
- She disagrees with the claim that _____ because _____.
- They challenge the idea that _____ by arguing that _____.
- He rejects the argument that _____, claiming that _____.
- She defends her position against those who claim _____ by explaining that _____.

In the case of the sample border argument, we might summarize the treatment of the counterargument thus:

Mills acknowledges that opening the borders completely would compromise security, but she believes that we can “regulate” our borders without blocking or imprisoning migrants.

Note the choice here to quote the one word “regulate” instead of paraphrasing or using the word without quotation marks. The quotation marks draw attention to the author’s original word choice and suggest there may be a problem or question about this word choice. In this case, the summary might observe that the writer does not specify what kind of regulation she means.

Exercise

Below are two sample paragraphs in which an author describes a counterargument. For each description, decide whether the author sees some merit in the counterargument or not (see 2.6). Choose a phrase from the suggestions above to help you summarize the author’s handling of the counterargument.

1. Not everyone agrees with my celebration of coffee. Some object that ingesting substances to help us study leads to addiction. They worry that even a boost to mental functioning will ultimately hurt us because it encourages us to try to fix our mind with substances any time we feel out of sorts. This

argument, however, is nothing short of paranoid. It would result in some ridiculous conclusions. By its logic, we should not drink water when we're thirsty because we will become addicted.

2. Many feel that black tea is a better choice than coffee, arguing that it can improve performance just as well with fewer side effects. This depends on the individual, though. While black tea is worth considering, remember that it can also have side effects, and for many, it simply will not give enough of a boost to the brain.

Describing How the Author Limits the Claim



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In the course of describing the author's claims, reasons, and counterarguments, chances are we will already have mentioned some limits or clarified which kinds of cases an author is referring to. It is worth checking, however, to make sure we haven't left out any key limitations the author has identified.

Phrases to Describe the Way a Writer Limits an Argument

- He qualifies his position by_____.
- She limits her claim by_____.
- They clarify that this only holds if _____.
- The author restricts their claim to cases where_____.
- He makes an exception for_____.

In the case of the border argument, the writer responds to the counterargument about security by clarifying that she does not advocate completely open borders. The sample summary already refers to this when it describes her desire to “regulate” those borders. In addition, when it paraphrases her claims and reasons, it uses the phrases “desperate” and “in a desperate position” to limit the focus to migrants who are fleeing an awful situation.

Exercises

Below are some sample claims that mention limits. Choose one of the phrases above or create another one with a similar purpose to help you summarize each claim and limit.

1. Students should embrace coffee to enhance mental functioning unless they are in the minority of people who experience severe side effects of coffee like anxiety, insomnia, tremors, acid reflux, or a compulsion to drink more and more.
2. Students shouldn't hesitate to enjoy coffee as long as they keep exercising and sleeping well enough to maintain their mental and physical health.
3. In moderation, coffee can be part of a healthy lifestyle.

Putting the Summary Together

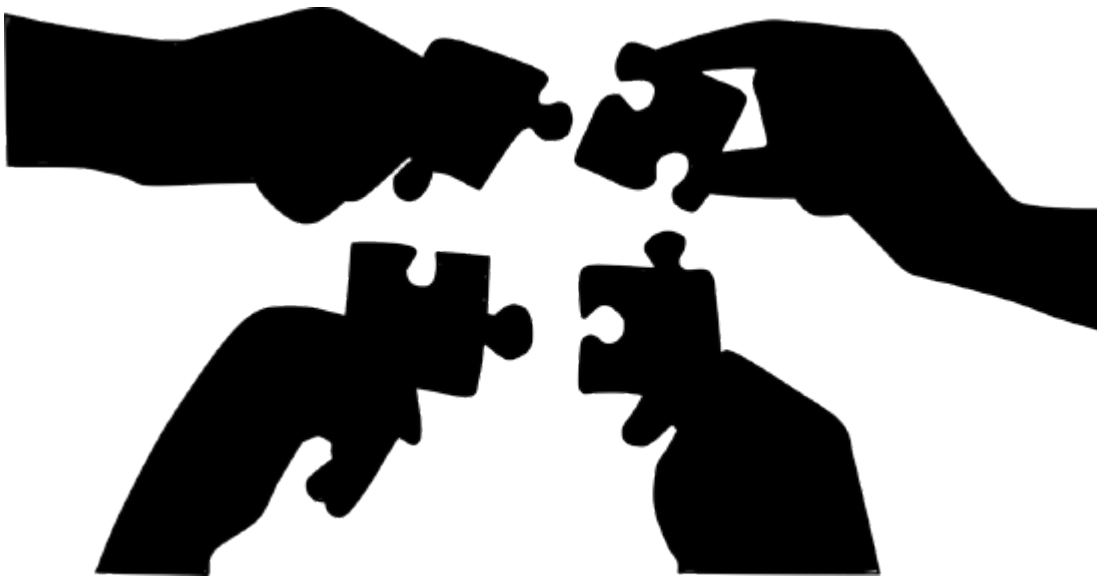


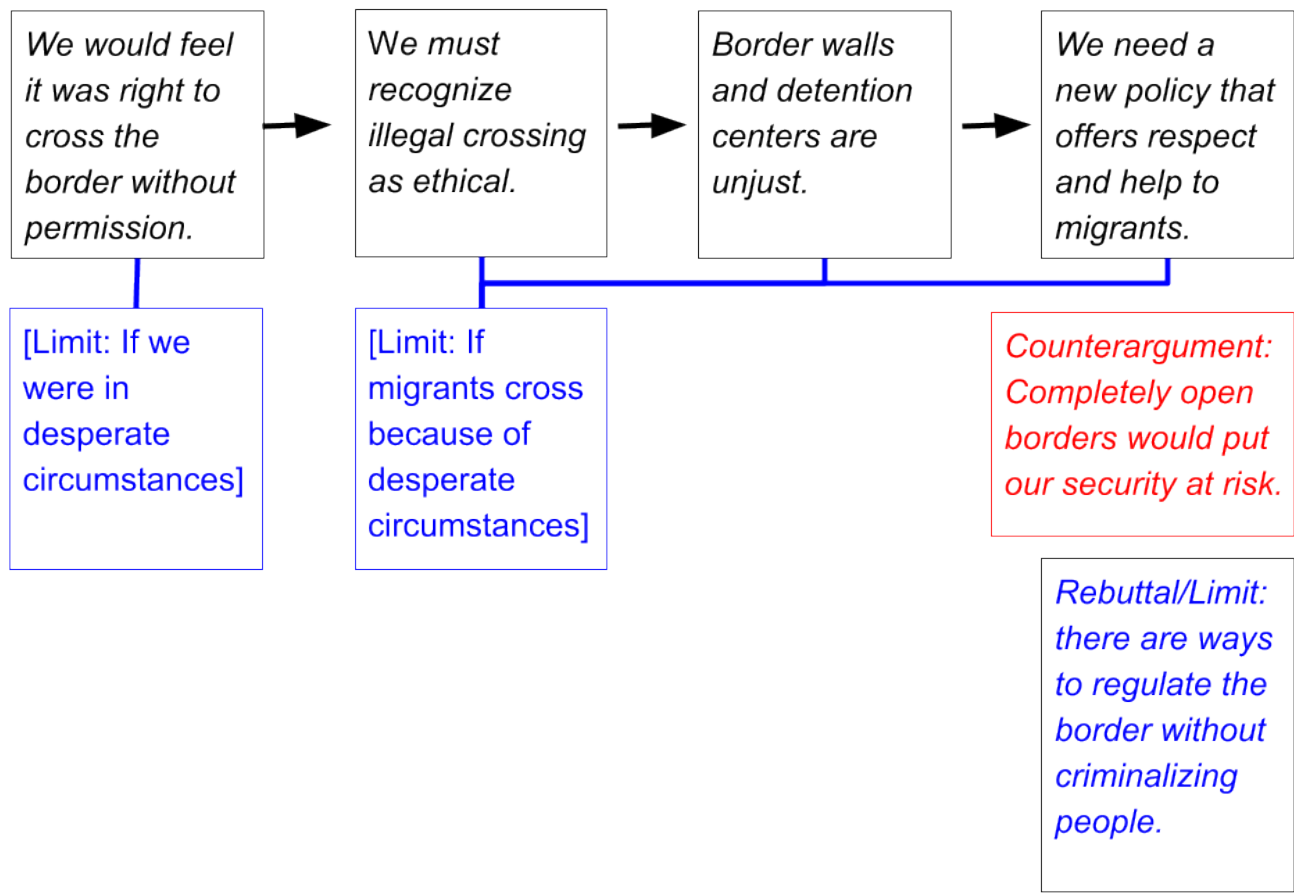
Image by Mohamed Hassan on Pixabay under the Pixabay License.

How can we turn the descriptions of the claims, reasons, counterarguments, and limitations into a cohesive paragraph, page, or essay that we can turn in as our summary? The good news is that by introducing each part of the argument to show how it relates to the others, we have already provided many of the transitions we need. We can generate a first draft of the summary by simply putting them all together in order. Here is what such a draft would look like for the border argument:

Sample Summary

In her 2019 article “Wouldn’t We All Cross the Border?”, Anna Mills urges readers to seek a new border policy that helps desperate undocumented migrants rather than criminalizing them. She calls for a shift toward respect and empathy, questioning the very idea that crossing illegally is wrong. Mills argues that any parent in a desperate position would consider it right to cross for their child’s sake; therefore, no person should condemn that action in another. Since we cannot justify our current walls and detention centers, we must get rid of them. She acknowledges that opening the borders completely would compromise security, but believes that we can still “regulate” our borders without blocking or imprisoning migrants.

Next, we can review our border argument map to make sure that we have covered the main parts of the argument.



If we are writing a longer summary of an extended argument, our map and our knowledge of the role of each part of the text will help us organize the essay into paragraphs and transition between them. For example, in a three-page summary of a twenty-five-page essay, we might spend a full paragraph on the author's description of a counterargument and yet another paragraph on the author's rebuttal to this counterargument. To open this paragraph, we could refer to our earlier list of templates for describing a response to a counterargument.

Practice Exercise \(\PageIndex{r}\)

Summarize the argument below in a few sentences that introduce each element of the argument and its role. If you completed the exercises for the earlier sections in this chapter, you may use some of those answers to those to help you put together this paragraph.

Coffee is a blessing to students. What better way is there to jumpstart the mind and help us engage with our studies? The benefits of coffee are well known, and yet some hold back from it unnecessarily. Some feel that black tea is a better choice, arguing that it can still boost mental performance with fewer side effects. This depends on the individual. While black tea is worth considering, remember that it still comes with side effects, and for many, it simply will not give enough of a boost to the brain. For those of us who believe in the life of the mind, enhancing our brains' abilities is ultimately of more value than avoiding the occasional minor discomfort. Of course, a few people who experience severe side effects like anxiety, insomnia, or tremors should avoid coffee. For most, though, we can drink coffee in moderation and still feel healthy, as long as we exercise

and sleep well. Some object to coffee because they believe that ingesting any substance to help us study leads to addiction. They worry that even a boost to mental functioning will ultimately hurt us because it encourages us to try to fix our mind with substances any time we feel out of sorts. This argument, however, is nothing short of paranoid. It would result in some ridiculous conclusions. By its logic, if we drink water when we're thirsty, we will end up addicted. If you haven't given coffee a fair try under the right circumstances, don't deprive yourself out of fear. Chances are you can do better work and enjoy it more with a moderate coffee habit. Why let life's "Aha" moments pass you by?

Writing a Short Summary of a Long Argument

Thus far we have given examples of summaries that are close in length to the original argument. Very often in college and professional life, though, we will need to summarize a multi-page argument in just a sentence, a paragraph, or a page. How do we cover the most important ideas of the argument in just a few words? How do we decide what to leave out of the summary?



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If we have already sorted out which ideas are the supporting examples and statistics and which are the main claim and reasons, that knowledge can guide us. The summary can allude to the supporting evidence rather than describing its details. It can leave out the specifics of any anecdotes, testimonials, or statistics.

For example, let's imagine we want to summarize an article that encourages people to buy the digital cryptocurrency BitCoin. The article might describe a number of different kinds of products people can buy with BitCoin and tell stories of individuals who used BitCoin for different purposes or invested in BitCoin and made a profit. Depending on how long our summary is supposed to be, we can represent those parts of the argument in more or less detail. If we need to summarize the article in a sentence, we might simply refer to all of this supporting evidence with a couple of words like "variety" and "profit."

Example

Sample one-sentence summary: "Go BitCoin" by Tracy Kim encourages the general public to buy BitCoin by showing us the variety of things we can buy with it and the profit to be made."

If we have a bit more space, we might keep the same single-sentence overview but also throw in a few examples of the kinds of specifics mentioned in the article.

Example

Sample slightly longer summary: “Go BitCoin” by Tracy Kim encourages the general public to buy BitCoin by showing us the variety of things we can buy with it and the profit to be made. First, Kim describes how we would go about paying for a range of products, from a Tesla to a sofa. Second, she gives statistics on BitCoin’s rate of return and tells the stories of three young people who invested modest amounts in BitCoin and saw their money as much as triple within a year.

Notice how, in the above example, the summary alludes to three stories that have something in common but gives a detail that only applies to one of them. The summary writer chose the most memorable example of profit to include. If we have space to write a full paragraph, we could include more detail on the process of buying with bitcoin, on the investment statistics alluded to, and on the stories of investors.

Example

Sample paragraph-long summary: “Go BitCoin” by Tracy Kim encourages the general public to buy the cryptocurrency BitCoin by showing us the variety of things we can buy with it and the profit to be made. First, Kim describes how we would go about paying for a range of products, from a Tesla to a sofa. She shows how more and more vendors are accepting BitCoin directly, but for the moment some of the largest ones, like Amazon, require buyers to use a third-party app to convert their BitCoin. Second, she gives statistics on BitCoin’s rate of return. BitCoin has gone through boom and bust cycles, but most recently its value increased 252% between July 2020 and July 2021. Finally, she tells the stories of three young people who invested modest amounts in BitCoin and saw their money as much as triple within a year. Kim shows how ordinary people can see more options open up in their lives through these investments. One teenager, Vijay Mather, was able to cover four years of college tuition by investing his earnings from working at Trader Joe’s.

The original argument would include many more details, including how Vijay Mather got interested in BitCoin and exactly how much he made on his investment. It probably also includes the names of the other two young people it

profiles and more about their experiences. However, the summary writer has picked out what those experiences have in common—the fact that the profits allowed them to consider new options in their lives. The writer has focused on Tracy Kim’s purpose in presenting those examples: to raise readers’ awareness of the possibilities.

Exercises

Read the two paragraphs below.

1. Summarize them in just one sentence.
2. Summarize them in two to three sentences, including a few more specifics.

The Black/white binary is the predominant racial binary system at play in the American context. We can see that this Black/white binary exists and is socially constructed if we consider the case of the 19th Century Irish immigrant. When they first arrived, Irish immigrants were “blackened” in the popular press and the white, Anglo-Saxon imagination (Roediger 1991). Cartoon depictions of Irish immigrants gave them dark skin and exaggerated facial features like big lips and pronounced brows. They were depicted and thought to be lazy, ignorant, and alcoholic nonwhite “others” for decades.

Over time, Irish immigrants and their children and grandchildren assimilated into the category of “white” by strategically distancing themselves from Black Americans and other non-whites in labor disputes and participating in white supremacist racial practices and ideologies. In this way, the Irish in America became white. A similar process took place for Italian-Americans, and, later, Jewish American immigrants from multiple European countries after the Second World War. Similar to Irish Americans, both groups became white after first being seen as non-white. These cases show how socially constructed race is and how this labeling process still operates today. For instance, are Asian-Americans, considered the “model minority,” the next group to be integrated into the white category, or will they continue to be regarded as foreign threats? Only time will tell.

Sample Summaries

In “Spread Feminism, Not Germs,” student Gizem Gur summarizes the *Atlantic Magazine* article “The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism.” Annotations point out the structure of the summary and the strategies Gur uses.

1.
 - Sample summary “Spread Feminism, Not Germs” in PDF with margin notes
 - Sample summary “Spread Feminism, Not Germs” accessible version with notes in parentheses
2. In “Typography and Identity,” Saramanda Swigart summarizes the *New York Times* article “A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans ‘Black’ or ‘black?’” Annotations point out the structure of the summary and the strategies Swigart uses.
 - Sample summary “Typography and Identity” in PDF with margin notes
 - Sample summary “Typography and Identity” accessible version with notes in parentheses

Screen-Reader Accessible Sample Summary 1

Format note: This version is accessible to screen reader users. Refer to these tips for reading our annotated sample arguments with a screen reader. For a more traditional visual format, see the PDF version above.

Gizem Gur

Eng 1A

Anna Mills

Spread Feminism, Not Germs

COVID-19 is not the first outbreak in history and probably won't be the last one. (Note: The opening statement provides the essay's overall context: the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.) However, its effects will be long-lasting. While the pandemic has affected everyone's lives in every aspect, its impacts on women are even more severe. (Note: The followup statement introduces the essay's particular focus: the impact of the pandemic on women.) Helen Lewis, the author of the *Atlantic Magazine* article "The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism," explains why the pandemic threatens feminism. (Note: Early on, the summary names the author, title, and magazine that published the argument summarized.) Lewis starts her article with a complaint by saying "enough already" because, in terms of housework especially for child care, there has been an inequality since the past. This inequality has become even more explicit with the coronavirus outbreak. Women have to shoulder not only more housework but also childcare more than ever due to school closures. The pandemic started as a public health crisis and brought along an economic one. Lewis argues that the crisis affects women more than men because women are more likely to assume housework and childcare responsibilities while men are expected to work and "bring home the bacon." (Note: The author provides a thesis at the end of the introduction with a clear overview of the main claim of the argument summarized.)

Lewis supports her claim by pointing out that during the pandemic, the gender pay gap pushes women to take on caregiving while men continue to work outside the home. (Note: The phrase "supports her claim" shows us that this paragraph will describe one of Lewis' reasons.) She writes, "all this looking after—this unpaid caring labor—will fall more heavily on women" because households depend more on men's pay. To support this idea, she includes provocative questions from Clare Wenham, an assistant professor of global health policy at the London School of Economics: "Who is paid less? Who has the flexibility?" (Note: The author supports the summary with short quotes from the argument where the wording is important.) The questions express Wenham's frustration. Lewis implies that this existing structure is based upon the gender pay gap, the reality that women make less money. She believes that couples do not have many options: it is a kind of survival rule that whoever earns less should stay at home.

Lewis blames the influence of old-fashioned ideas about gender roles for compounding the effects of the pay gap during the pandemic. Dual-earner parents must find a way to meet children's needs during the shelter-in-place. Lewis observes that women often are the ones who take on the role of stay-at-home parent. (Note: This paragraph shows how another reason, gender role expectations, combines with the economic reason to support the main claim.) She humorously notes, "Dual-income couples might suddenly be living like their grandparents, one homemaker, and one breadwinner." Lewis sees this as a kind of embarrassing regression. The gender dynamic has slid back two generations, showing that cultural beliefs about the role of the mother haven't changed as much as we might think. (Note: The use of the word "embarrassing" suggests that Lewis is not just observing but making a claim of value. The summary reflects Lewis' attitude as well as her ideas.) Lewis acknowledges that some families do try to split childcare equally, but she emphasizes that these are in the minority.

Lewis sees implications for her claim beyond the current pandemic. (Note: The end of the summary notes how Lewis

extends her argument by claiming that other pandemics will have similar gendered effects.) She draws a parallel to the effect on women of the Ebola health crisis which occurred in West Africa in the time period of 2014–2016. According to Lewis, during this outbreak, many African girls lost their chance at an education; moreover, many women died during childbirth because of a lack of medical care. (Note: Lewis supports this with a historical example of another pandemic that disproportionately hurt women.) Mentioning this proves that not only coronavirus but also other outbreaks can be a disaster for feminism. Pandemics, in other words, pile yet another problem on women who always face an uphill battle against patriarchal structures. (Note: The concluding sentence reinforces the extended version of Lewis’ main point in a memorable, dramatic way.)

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Screen-reader Accessible Version of Sample Summary 2

Format note: This version is accessible to screen reader users. Refer to these tips for reading our annotated sample arguments with a screen reader. For a more traditional visual format, see the PDF version above.

Essay Z

English 1C

Prof. Saramanda Swigart

Typography and Identity

John Eligon’s *New York Times* article, “A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans ‘Black’ or ‘black?’” outlines the ongoing conversation among journalists and academics regarding conventions for writing about race—specifically, whether or not to capitalize the “b” in “black” when referring to African-Americans (itself a term that is going out of style). (Note: The opening sentence introduces the text this essay will respond to and gives a brief summary of the text’s content.) Eligon argues that, while it might seem like a minor typographical issue, this small difference speaks to the question of how we think about race in the United States. Are words like “black” or “white” mere adjectives, descriptors of skin color? Or are they proper nouns, indicative of group or ethnic identity? Eligon observes that until recently, with the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement, many journalistic and scholarly publications tended to use a lowercase “black,” while Black media outlets typically capitalized “Black.” He suggests that the balance is now tipping in favor of “Black,” but given past changes, usage will probably change again as the rich discussion about naming, identity, and power continues. (Note: The thesis statement includes two related ideas explored by Eligon: the current trend toward using “Black” and the value of the ongoing discussion that leads to changing terms.)

Eligon points to a range of evidence that “Black” is becoming the norm, including a recent change by “hundreds of news organizations” including the Associated Press. This comes in the wake of the George Floyd killing, but it

also follows a longtime Black press tradition exemplified by newspapers like *The New York Amsterdam News*. Eligon cites several prominent academics who are also starting to capitalize Black. However, he also quotes prominent naysayers and describes a variety of counterarguments, like the idea that capitalization gives too much dignity to a category that was made up to oppress people. (Note: Summary of a counterargument.) Capitalizing Black raises another tricky question: Shouldn't White be likewise capitalized? Eligon points out that the groups most enthusiastic to capitalize White seem to be white supremacists, and news organizations want to avoid this association. (Note: The choice of "points out" signals that everyone would agree that mostly white supremacist groups capitalize White.)

Eligon's brief history of the debate over racial labels, from "Negro" and "colored" to "African-American" and "person of color," gives the question of to-capitalize-or-not-to-capitalize a broader context, investing what might seem like a minor quibble for editors with the greater weight of racial identity and its evolution over time. (Note: This paragraph shifts focus from present to past trends and debates.) He outlines similar disagreements over word-choice and racial labels by scholars and activists like Fannie Barrier Williams and W.E.B. Du Bois surrounding now-antiquated terms like "Negro" and "colored." These leaders debated whether labels with negative connotations should be replaced, or embraced and given a new, positive connotation. (Note: This paragraph summarizes the historical examples Eligon gives. Phrases like "He cites" point out that certain ideas are being used to support a claim.) Eligon observes that today's "black" was once used as a pejorative but was promoted by the Black Power movement starting in the late sixties, much as the word "Negro" was reclaimed as a positive word. (Note: Summary of a historical trend that parallels today's trend.) However, the Reverend Jesse Jackson also had some success in calling for a more neutral term, "African American," in the late eighties. He thought it more appropriate to emphasize a shared ethnic heritage over color. (Note: Summary of a historical countertrend based on a counterargument to the idea of reclaiming negative terms.) Eligon suggests that this argument continues to appeal to some today, but that such terms have been found to be inadequate given the diversity of ethnic heritage. "African-American" and the more generalized "people/person of color" do not give accurate or specific enough information. (Note: Describes a response to the counterargument, a justification of today's trend toward Black.)

Ultimately, Eligon points to personal intuition as an aid to individuals in the Black community grappling with these questions. He describes the experience of sociologist Crystal M. Fleming, whose use of lowercase "black" transformed to capitalized "Black" over the course of her career and years of research. Her transition from black to Black is, she says, as much a matter of personal choice as a reasoned conclusion—suggesting that it will be up to Black journalists and academics to determine the conventions of the future. (Note: This last sentence of this summary paragraph focuses on Eligon's conclusion, his implied argument about what should guide the choice of terms.)

Works Cited

(Note: The Works Cited page uses MLA documentation style appropriate for an English class.)

Eligon, John. "A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans 'Black' or 'black'?" *The New York Times*, 26 Jun 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/black-african-american-style-debate.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

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Chapter Attribution

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PART II

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

4. Rhetorical Analysis Concepts and Strategies

What is Rhetorical Analysis?

Rhetoric: The art of persuasion

Analysis: Breaking down the whole into pieces for the purpose of examination

Unlike summary, a rhetorical analysis does not simply require a restatement of ideas; instead, you must recognize rhetorical moves that an author is making in an attempt to persuade their audience to do or to think something. In the 21st century's abundance of information, it can sometimes be difficult to discern what is a rhetorical strategy and what is simple manipulation. However, an understanding of rhetoric and rhetorical moves will help you become more savvy with the information surrounding you on a day-to-day basis. In other words, rhetorical moves can be a form of manipulation, but if you can recognize those moves, then you can be a more critical consumer of information rather than blindly accepting whatever you read, see, hear, etc. as indisputable truth.

The goal of a rhetorical analysis is to explain *what* is happening in the text, *why* the author might have chosen to use a particular move or set of rhetorical moves, and *how* those choices might affect the audience. The text you analyze might be explanatory, although there will be aspects of argument because you must negotiate with what the author is *trying to do* and *what you think* the author is doing.

One of the elements of doing a rhetorical analysis is looking at a text's rhetorical situation. **The rhetorical situation is the context out of which a text is created.** Another element of rhetorical analysis is simply reading and summarizing the text. You have to be able to describe the basics of the author's thesis and main points before you can begin to analyze it.

To do rhetorical analysis, first connect the rhetorical situation to the text. Move beyond summarizing and instead look at how the author shapes their text based on its context. In developing your reading and analytical skills, allow yourself to think about what you're reading, and to question the text and your responses to it as you read. Consider using the following questions to help you to take the text apart—dissecting it or unpacking to see how it works:

- **Does the author successfully support the thesis or claim?** Is the point held consistently throughout the text or does it wander at any point?
- **Is the evidence the author used effective for the intended audience?** How might the intended audience respond to the types of evidence that the author used to support the thesis/claim?
- **What rhetorical moves do you see the author making to help achieve their purpose?** Are there word choices or content choices that seem to you to be clearly related to the author's agenda for the text?
- **Describe the tone in the piece.** Is it friendly? Authoritative? Does it lecture? Is it biting or sarcastic? Does the author use simple language or is it full of jargon? Does the language feel positive or negative? Point to aspects of the text that create the tone; spend some time examining these and considering how and why they work with the purpose and audience of the piece.
- **Is the author objective, or do they try to convince you to have a certain opinion?** Why does the author try to persuade you to adopt this viewpoint? If the author is biased, does this interfere with the way you read and understand the text?
- **Do you feel like the author knows the audience?** Does the text seem to be aimed at readers like you or at a different audience? What assumptions does the author make about their audience? Would most people find these reasonable, acceptable, or accurate?
- **Does the flow of the text make sense?** Is the line of reasoning logical? Are there any gaps? Are there any spots where you feel the reasoning is flawed in some way?
- **Does the author try to appeal to your emotions?** Does the author use any controversial words in the headline or the

article? Do these affect your reading or your interest?

- **Do you believe the author?** Do you accept their thoughts and ideas? Why or why not?

Once you have done this basic, rhetorical, critical reading of your text, you are ready to think about how the rhetorical situation – the context out of which the text arises – influences certain rhetorical appeals that appear in it.

The Basic Elements of Rhetorical Analysis

The rhetorical appeals of logos, pathos, and ethos make up what is called the Rhetorical Triangle. The ancient Greek scholar Aristotle believed that an argument would not be successful without the skillful use of all three rhetorical appeals to persuade the audience. We also will explore an additional appeal: kairos.

rhetorical triangle illustrating ethos, pathos, and logos at the three points

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The appeals connect the purpose to the audience and are necessary in some fashion for a good argument. An argument that only appeals to logic but lacks emotion, for example, will not move readers to action. An argument that has great logic and emotion, but presents the author as a shady character is not going to be persuasive, either. When the three appeals work in harmony, the most effective arguments are created.

Appeal to Logic (logos)

Logos is the rhetorical appeal based on facts and reason. Evidence and statistics strengthen logical arguments, which can be based on hard evidence or on reason and common sense.

Genomic fun facts: “if you spoke one letter of DNA per second 24
hours a day it would take about 100 years to recite the entire human
genome

“Genomic Fun Facts” by Genomics Education Program licensed CC BY 2.0.

Every reason in the paper should be supported by at least one piece of hard evidence. If a reason listed in the paper cannot be supported by evidence, it is considered *personal opinion*. Personal opinion is valuable in many writing situations, but it is not helpful in argument, where the readers expect the author to offer proof, rather than assumption.

1) **Facts** Facts are ideas that cannot be disputed. They differ from values in that facts are traditionally not controversial. Although anyone can dispute a fact for the sake of argument (the sky is blue; no, the sky is gray), the best facts to use in the paper are those that are widely accepted as true by respected and esteemed sources. This is where signal words can really help. Attributing facts to a reputable source (“According to the *New York Times*” or “According to the White House Press Office”) can add strength to any argument.

2) **Statistics** People trust numbers; therefore, statistics in the paper are very good pieces of evidence. It is, however, simple to view statistics in opposing ways. Whenever statistics are used in the argument, make sure the reasoning behind the argument is clearly supported by the numbers. If the reader looks at the numbers and reads the opposite

argument, the paper will be less persuasive. For this reason, it's very important to use statistics from the original source, not statistics that have been used to support another argument.

3) *Surveys, polls, studies* It is one thing to state in a paper, "most people supported the war." It is a completely different argument to state, "According to a poll conducted by Amnesty International, 35% of Americans supported the war." The first example lacks specificity and proof. The second example is more specific, but it comes from a source that is inherently opposed to war and is therefore likely to be biased. Also in the second example, without the actual question that was addressed in the poll, there is no way to tell for sure exactly to what question people polled were responding. There is also no mention of how many people (out of millions of Americans) were polled. While numbers can be good argumentative tools, be careful to support and interpret data in the argument.

4) *Testimonies, narratives, interviews* Information from experts on a topic can be a very convincing type of evidence. Make sure, however, to establish the credentials of the expert in the text. Stating, "my roommate supports a gun ban" is very different from saying, "John Doe, Director of the Center for Violence against Children, supports a gun ban."

Literally translated, **logos** means "word." In this case, it refers to information, or more specifically, the writer's appeal to logic and reason. A successful **logical appeal** provides clearly organized information as well as evidence to support the overall argument. If one fails to establish a logical appeal, then the argument will lack both sense and substance.

For example, consider this: A writer is crafting a speech for a politician who is running for office, and in it, the writer raises a point about Social Security benefits. What if the writer *only* included a touching story about 80-year-old Mary without providing any statistics, data, or concrete plans for how the politician proposed to protect Social Security benefits? Without any factual evidence for the proposed plan, the audience would not have been as likely to accept his proposal, and rightly so.

When evaluating a writer's **logical appeal**, ask the following questions:

Does the writer organize his information clearly?

- Ideas are connected by transition words and phrases
 - Choose the link for **examples of common transitions** (<https://tinyurl.com/oftaj5g>).
- Ideas have a clear and purposeful order

Does the writer provide evidence to back his claims?

- Specific examples
- Relevant source material

Does the writer use sources and data to back his claims rather than base the argument purely on emotion or opinion?

- Does the writer use concrete facts and figures, statistics, dates/times, specific names/titles, graphs/charts/tables?
- Are the sources that the writer uses credible?
- Where do the sources come from? (Who wrote/published them?)
- When were the sources published?
- Are the sources well-known, respected, and/or peer-reviewed (if applicable) publications?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Logos:

Pay particular attention to numbers, statistics, findings, and quotes used to support an argument. Be critical of the source and do your own investigation of the facts. Remember: What initially looks like a fact may not actually be one. Maybe you've heard or read that half of all marriages in America will end in divorce. It is so often discussed that we assume it must be true. Careful research will show that the original marriage study was flawed, and divorce rates in

America have steadily declined since 1985 (Peck, 1993). If there is no scientific evidence, why do we continue to believe it? Part of the reason might be that it supports the common worry of the dissolution of the American family.

Fallacies that misuse appeals to logos or attempt to manipulate the logic of an argument are discussed in the next chapter.

Exercise 3: Analyzing Logos

The debate about whether college athletes, namely male football and basketball players, should be paid salaries instead of awarded scholarships is one that regularly comes up when these players are in the throes of their respective athletic seasons, whether that's football bowl games or March Madness. While proponents on each side of this issue have solid reasons, you are going to look at an article that is *against* the idea of college athletes being paid.

Take note: Your aim in this rhetorical exercise is *not* to figure out where you stand on this issue; rather, your aim is to evaluate how effectively the writer establishes a logical appeal to support his position, whether you agree with him or not.

See the article **here** (<https://tinyurl.com/y6c9v89t>).

Step 1: Before reading the article, take a minute to preview the text, a critical reading skill explained in **Chapter 1**.

Step 2: Once you have a general idea of the article, read through it and pay attention to how the author organizes information and uses evidence, annotating or marking these instances when you see them.

Step 3: After reviewing your annotations, evaluate the organization of the article as well as the amount and types of evidence that you have identified by answering the following questions:

- Does the information progress logically throughout the article?
 - Does the writer use transitions to link ideas?
 - Do ideas in the article have a clear sense of order, or do they appear scattered and unfocused?
- Was the amount of evidence in the article proportionate to the size of the article?
 - Was there too little of it, was there just enough, or was there an overload of evidence?
- Were the examples of evidence relevant to the writer's argument?
- Were the examples clearly explained?
- Were sources cited or clearly referenced?
- Were the sources credible? How could you tell?

Appeals to Emotion (Pathos)

While logos appeals may convince an audience, it is the **pathos** appeals that move the audience to action through

emotions—anger, sadness, fear, joy, etc. A writer might appeal to a reader’s emotions by telling a story, painting a picture, or using loaded language. Pathos is powerful, but can be difficult to use.



“emotion icon” by Łukasz Strachanowski is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

Emotions can be used to establish a bond between writer and reader. Arguments expressed in emotional terms that readers can relate to can create strong reactions. Using personal experience to communicate hardship, pain, joy, faith, or any other emotion often allows the reader to empathize more fully with the goals of an argument. Some emotions, however, may work in the opposite way. Emotions such as rage, pity, or aggression may turn readers away.

1) *Telling a Story*. Emotions add to the logical reasoning in an argument to make it stronger or more memorable. A simple story relating to the topic can often be the best method of appealing to emotion. It uses personal experience to build bridges with the readers, it gives an example of the topic, and it allows the reader to empathize and connect with the issue at hand.

2) *Vivid Description*. Description works in much the same way as telling a story. For example, by painting a picture of a beach covered with trash, a writer can evoke the a stronger emotion in readers than if they were to simply say that the beach is covered in trash. Putting the reader into the situation and allowing them to “see” it for themselves can be a wonderful way to move then to action.

3) *Loaded Words*. Finally, using loaded words that remind readers of shared values can be a powerful tool to move emotions. For example, careful word choice that evokes feelings of patriotism can help sway an audience. Pay attention to your word choices and work to make your audiences care about your topic enough that they will be moved to action.

When a writer establishes an effective **pathetic appeal**, she makes the audience care about what she is saying. If the audience does not care about the message, then they will not engage with the argument being made.

For example, let’s return to the speech for a politician who is running for office and the point about raising Social Security benefits. In order to make this point more appealing to the audience so that they will feel more emotionally connected to what the politician says, the writer inserts a story about Mary, an 80-year-old widow who relies on her Social Security benefits to supplement her income. While visiting Mary the other day, sitting at her kitchen table and eating a piece of her delicious homemade apple pie, the writer recounts how the politician held Mary’s delicate hand and promised that her benefits would be safe if he were elected. Ideally, the writer wants the audience to feel sympathy

or compassion for Mary because then they will feel more open to considering the politician's views on Social Security (and maybe even other issues).

When evaluating a writer's **pathos appeal**, ask the following questions:

Does the writer try to engage or connect with the audience by making the subject matter relatable in some way?

- Does the writer have an interesting writing style?
- Does the writer use humor at any point?
- Does the writer use narration, such as storytelling or anecdotes, to add interest or to help humanize a certain issue within the text?
- Does the writer use descriptive or attention-grabbing details?
- Are there hypothetical examples that help the audience to imagine themselves in certain scenarios?
- Does the writer use any other examples in the text that might emotionally appeal to the audience?
- Are there any visual appeals to pathos, such as photographs or illustrations?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Pathos:

Up to a certain point, an **appeal to pathos** can be a legitimate part of an argument. For example, a writer or speaker may begin with an anecdote showing the effect of a law on an individual. This anecdote is a way to gain an audience's attention for an argument in which evidence and reason are used to present a case as to why the law should or should not be repealed or amended. In such a context, engaging the emotions, values, or beliefs of the audience is a legitimate and effective tool that makes the argument stronger.

An appropriate appeal to **pathos** is different from trying to unfairly play upon the audience's feelings and emotions through fallacious, misleading, or excessively emotional appeals. Such a **manipulative** use of pathos may alienate the audience or cause them to "tune out." An example would be the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) **commercials** (<https://youtu.be/6eXfvRcIIv8>, transcript **here**) featuring the song "In the Arms of an Angel" and footage of abused animals. Even Sarah McLachlan, the singer and spokesperson featured in the commercials, admits that she changes the channel because they are too depressing (Brekke).

Even if an appeal to pathos is not manipulative, such an appeal should complement rather than replace reason and evidence-based argument. In addition to making use of pathos, the author must establish her credibility (**ethos**) and must supply reasons and evidence (**logos**) in support of her position. An author who essentially replaces logos and ethos with pathos alone does not present a strong argument.

Exercise 2: Analyzing Pathos

In the movie *Braveheart*, the Scottish military leader, William Wallace, played by Mel Gibson, gives a speech to his troops just before they get ready to go into battle against the English army of King Edward I.

See clip **here** (<https://youtu.be/h2vW-rr9ibE>, transcript **here**). See clip with closed captioning **here**.

Step 1: When you watch the movie clip, try to gauge the general emotional atmosphere. Do the men seem calm or nervous? Confident or skeptical? Are they eager to go into battle, or are they ready to retreat? Assessing the situation from the start will make it easier to answer more specific, probing rhetorical questions after watching it.

Step 2: Consider these questions:

- What issues does Wallace address?
- Who is his audience?

- How does the audience view the issues at hand?

Step 3: Next, analyze Wallace's use of pathos in his speech.

- How does he try to connect with his audience emotionally? Because this is a speech, and he's appealing to the audience in person, consider his overall look as well as what he says.
- How would you describe his manner or attitude?
- Does he use any humor, and if so, to what effect?
- How would you describe his tone?
- Identify some examples of language that show an appeal to pathos: words, phrases, imagery, collective pronouns (we, us, our).
- How do all of these factors help him establish a pathetic appeal?

Step 4: Once you've identified the various ways that Wallace tries to establish his appeal to pathos, the final step is to evaluate the effectiveness of that appeal.

- Do you think he has successfully established a pathetic appeal? Why or why not?
- What does he do well in establishing pathos?
- What could he improve, or what could he do differently to make his pathetic appeal even stronger?

Appeal to Character (Ethos)

An appeal to **ethos** (the author's character) establishes a speaker's credibility. Ethical appeals convey honesty and authority. Appeals to character answer the questions, "What does this person know about the subject?" and "Why should I pay attention?" To seem credible sometimes means to admit limitations. Honesty and likeability are important characteristics used to persuade. Your character is established through your use of good support, through documenting your sources, through your tone, and through your background.

Credibility word image

Credibility by Nick Youngson CC BY-SA 3.0 Alpha Stock Images

Claiming Authority: Readers are apt to be skeptical of any claim, but especially in cases where the author is not an expert. In such cases, honesty, integrity, and modesty are essential. Drawing on source material and acknowledging multiple sides of the argument are ways to prove to the reader that though the author may not have studied the topic closely for 20 years, he or she has performed ample research to come to a conclusion.

Establishing Credibility: The tone of the writing can have a big impact on how well the arguments are received. Elevated word choice that does not fit the subject and creates a forced formal tone can cause a reader to view the text as arrogant. In addition, an overly informal word choice that includes slang and simplistic language can cause a reader to view the text as uninformed or elementary. Careful word choice helps establish credibility by allowing the reader to see the honest level of knowledge of the text.

It will be almost impossible to convince all readers in all contexts. However, by paying careful attention to the ways you use the rhetorical appeals, you will be more likely to succeed in your goals.

Evaluating an Appeal to Ethos

Literally translated, ethos means “character.” In this case, it refers to the character of the writer or speaker, or more specifically, his credibility. The writer needs to establish credibility so that the audience will trust him and, thus, be more willing to engage with the argument. If a writer fails to establish a sufficient **ethical appeal**, then the audience will not take the writer’s argument seriously.

For example, if someone writes an article that is published in an academic journal, in a reputable newspaper or magazine, or on a credible website, those places of publication already imply a certain level of credibility. If the article is about a scientific issue and the writer is a scientist or has certain academic or professional credentials that relate to the article’s subject, that also will lend credibility to the writer. Finally, if that writer shows that he is knowledgeable about the subject by providing clear explanations of points and by presenting information in an honest and straightforward way that also helps to establish a writer’s credibility.

When evaluating a writer’s **ethical appeal**, ask the following questions:

Does the writer come across as reliable?

- Viewpoint is logically consistent throughout the text
- Does not use hyperbolic (exaggerated) language
- Has an even, objective tone (not malicious but also not sycophantic)
- Does not come across as subversive or manipulative

Does the writer come across as authoritative and knowledgeable?

- Explains concepts and ideas thoroughly
- Addresses any counter-arguments and successfully rebuts them
- Uses a sufficient number of relevant sources
- Shows an understanding of sources used

What kind of credentials or experience does the writer have?

- Look at byline or biographical info
- Identify any personal or professional experience mentioned in the text
- Where has this writer’s text been published?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Ethos:

In a perfect world, everyone would tell the truth, and we could depend upon the credibility of speakers and authors. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. You would expect that news reporters would be objective and tell news stories based upon the facts; however, Janet Cooke, Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair, and Brian Williams all lost their jobs for plagiarizing or fabricating part of their news stories. Janet Cooke’s Pulitzer Prize was revoked after it was discovered that she made up “Jimmy,” an eight-year old heroin addict

(Prince, 2010). Brian Williams was fired as anchor of the NBC *Nightly News* for exaggerating his role in the Iraq War.



“Brian Williams at the 2011 Time 100 Gala,” David Shankbone, Wikimedia, CC-BY 3.0

Others have become infamous for claiming academic degrees that they didn’t earn as in the case of Marilee Jones. At the time of discovery, she was Dean of Admissions at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). After 28 years of employment, it was determined that she never graduated from college (Lewin, 2007). However, on her **website** (<http://www.marileejones.com/blog/>) she is still promoting herself as “a sought after speaker, consultant and author” and “one of the nation’s most experienced College Admissions Deans.”

Beyond lying about their own credentials, authors may employ a number of tricks or fallacies to lure you to their point of view. Some of the more common techniques are described in the **next chapter**. When you recognize these fallacies, you should question the credibility of the speaker and the legitimacy of the argument. If you use these when making your own arguments, be aware that they may undermine or even destroy your credibility.

Exercise 1: Analyzing Ethos

Choose an article from the links provided below. Preview your chosen text, and then read through it, paying special attention to how the writer tries to establish an ethical appeal. Once you have finished reading, use the bullet points above to guide you in analyzing how effective the writer’s appeal to ethos is.

“**Why cancer is not a war, fight, or battle**” by Xení Jordan (<https://tinyurl.com/y7m7bnnm>)

“**Relax and Let Your Kids Indulge in TV**” by Lisa Pryor (<https://tinyurl.com/y88eptyu>)

“**Why are we OK with disability drag in Hollywood?**” by Danny Woodburn and Jay Ruderman (<https://tinyurl.com/y964525k>)

The Appeal to Kairos (the “supreme moment”)

Literally translated, **Kairos** means the “supreme moment.” In this case, it refers to appropriate timing, meaning *when* the writer presents certain parts of her argument as well as the overall timing of the subject matter itself. While not technically part of the Rhetorical Triangle, it is still an important principle for constructing an effective argument. If the writer fails to establish a strong **Kairotic appeal**, then the audience may become polarized, hostile, or may simply just lose interest.

If appropriate timing is not taken into consideration and a writer introduces a sensitive or important point too early or too late in a text, the impact of that point could be lost on the audience. For example, if the writer’s audience is strongly opposed to her view, and she begins the argument with a forceful thesis of why she is right and the opposition is wrong, how do you think that audience might respond?

In this instance, the writer may have just lost the ability to make any further appeals to her audience in two ways: first, by polarizing them, and second, by possibly elevating what was at first merely strong opposition to what would now be hostile opposition. A polarized or hostile audience will not be inclined to listen to the writer’s argument with an open mind or even to listen at all. On the other hand, the writer could have established a stronger appeal to Kairos by building up to that forceful thesis, maybe by providing some neutral points such as background information or by addressing some of the opposition’s views, rather than leading with why she is right and the audience is wrong.

Additionally, if a writer covers a topic or puts forth an argument about a subject that is currently a non-issue or has no relevance for the audience, then the audience will fail to engage because whatever the writer’s message happens to be, it won’t matter to anyone. For example, if a writer were to put forth the argument that women in the United States should have the right to vote, no one would care; that is a non-issue because women in the United States already have that right.

When evaluating a writer’s **Kairotic appeal**, ask the following questions:

- Where does the writer establish her thesis of the argument in the text? Is it near the beginning, the middle, or the end? Is this placement of the thesis effective? Why or why not?
- Where in the text does the writer provide her strongest points of evidence? Does that location provide the most impact for those points?
- Is the issue that the writer raises relevant at this time, or is it something no one really cares about anymore or needs to know about anymore?

Exercise 4: Analyzing Kairos

In this exercise, you will analyze a visual representation of the appeal to Kairos. On the 26th of February 2015, a photo of a dress was posted to Twitter along with a question as to whether people thought it was one combination of colors versus another. Internet chaos ensued on social media because while some people saw the dress as black and blue, others saw it as white and gold. As the color debate surrounding the dress raged on, an ad agency in South Africa saw an opportunity to raise awareness about a far more serious subject: domestic abuse.

Step 1: Read this **article** (<https://tinyurl.com/yct18o5g>) from CNN about how and why the photo of the dress went viral so that you will be better informed for the next step in this exercise:

Step 2: Watch the **video** (<https://youtu.be/SLv0ZRPssTI>, transcript **here**) from CNN that explains how, in partnership with The Salvation Army, the South African marketing agency created an ad that went viral.

Step 3: After watching the video, answer the following questions:

- Once the photo of the dress went viral, approximately how long after did the Salvation Army's ad appear? Look at the dates on both the article and the video to get an idea of a time frame.
- How does the ad take advantage of the publicity surrounding the dress?
- Would the ad's overall effectiveness change if it had come out later than it did?
- How late would have been too late to make an impact? Why?

When Writers Misuse Logos, Pathos, or Ethos, Arguments can be Weakened

Above, we defined and described what logos, pathos, and ethos are and why authors may use those strategies. Sometimes, using a combination of appeals leads to a sound, balanced, and persuasive argument. It is important to understand, though, that using rhetorical appeals does not always lead to a sound, balanced argument. In fact, any of the appeals could be misused or overused. When that happens, arguments can be weakened. We will learn more about these weaknesses—called fallacies—in the next chapter.

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5. Fallacies

What is a fallacy, and why should we care?

You probably saw a fallacy the last time you watched an advertisement on YouTube or television. Maybe the advertisement suggested that everyone is playing the new video game, so you should, too. Maybe it suggested that YouTube influencer Marco developed upper-body strength in two weeks with the new gadget, so it works well. Both of those are examples of fallacies — a bandwagon and hasty generalization fallacy. If you can identify the fallacies, you can see the flaws in the argument clearly — even if you still find the ad funny or appealing, too.

While fallacies are common, they are fatal flaws in an argument. A fallacy is a flaw in the reasoning for an argument or a distraction from the argument. To create a strong argument that careful readers will trust, writers should avoid fallacies, especially in academic papers.

About Fallacies

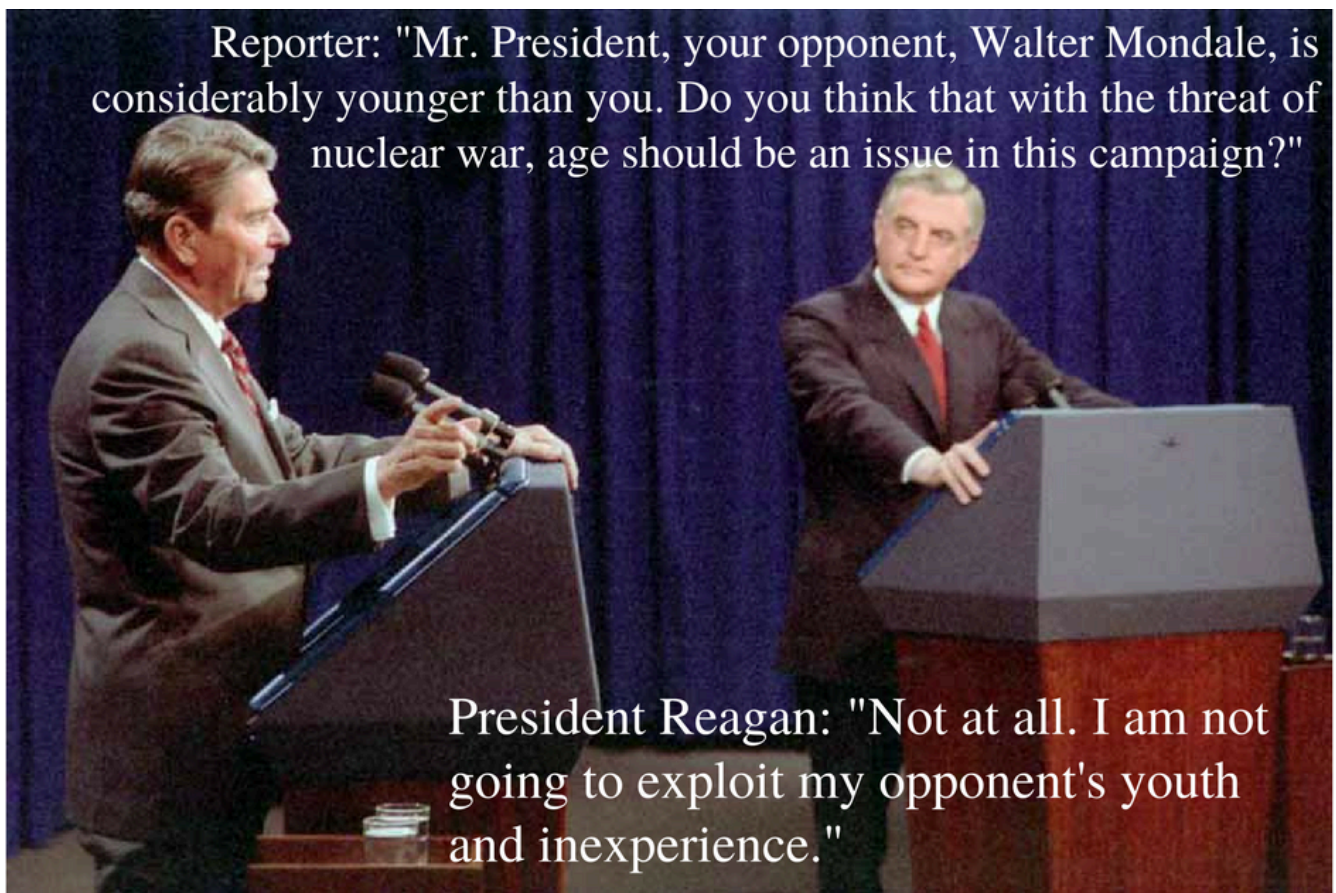
Below is a list of informal fallacies, divided into four main categories: fallacies of irrelevance, presumption, ambiguity, and inconsistency. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it will include some of the most common fallacies used by writers and speakers, both in the world and in the classroom.

Fallacies of Irrelevance

One of the most common ways to go off track in an argument is to bring up irrelevant information or ideas. They are grouped here into two main categories: the **red herring fallacies** and the **irrelevant appeals**.

- **Red Herring Fallacies**—These aim to distract the reader by introducing irrelevant ideas or information. They divert attention away from the validity, soundness, and support of an argument. Think of red herrings as squirrels to a dog—almost impossible to resist chasing once spotted.

Figure 5.1 “Reagan’s Red Herring”



- **Weak/False Analogy**—An analogy is a brief comparison, usually to make writing more interesting and to connect with the reader. While writers often use analogies effectively to illustrate ideas, a bad analogy can be misleading and even inflammatory.

Example: “Taxes are like theft.” This statement makes a false analogy because taxes are legal and thus cannot logically be defined as, or even compared to, something illegal.

- **Tu Quoque**—Also known as an appeal to hypocrisy, this fallacy translates from the Latin as “you, too.” Known on grade school playgrounds around the world, this false argument distracts by turning around any critique on the one making the critique with the implication that the accuser should not have made the accusation in the first place because it reveals him as a hypocrite—even if the accusation or critique has validity.

Example 1: “Mom, Joey pushed me!” “Yeah, but Sally pushed me first!” Any sister who has ratted out a brother before knows she will have to deal with an immediate counter attack, claiming that she has perpetrated the same crime she has accused the brother of doing (and more than likely, she has done so). The brother hopes that the sister’s blatant hypocrisy will absolve him of his crime. Any veteran parent of siblings will know not to fall for this trick.

Example 2: Joe the Politician has been legitimately caught in a lie. Joe and his supporters try to deflect the damage by pointing out the times his opponents have been caught lying, too; this counter accusation implies that Joe’s lie should

be excused because of the hypocrisy of those who found it and who dare to even talk about it. However, this counter accusation does not actually do anything logically to disprove or challenge the fact of Joe's lie.

- **Ad Hominem Attacks**—The *argumentum ad hominem* is one of the most recognizable and irresistible of the red herring fallacies. Ad hominem attacks distract from an argument by focusing on the one making the argument, trying to damage his or her credibility. There are two main types of ad hominem attack: **abuse** and **circumstance**:

Ad hominem attacks of **abuse** are personal (often ruthlessly so), meant to insult and demean. Attacks of abuse distract the audience as well as the speaker or writer because he will believe it necessary to defend himself from the abuse rather than strengthen his argument.

Examples: These can include attacks on the body, intelligence, voice, dress, gender, family, and personal choices and tastes.

Figure 5.2 “Student vs. Freud Ad Hominem”



In ad hominem attacks of circumstance, the debater implies that his opponent only makes an argument because of a personal connection to it instead of the quality and support of the argument itself, which should be considered independent of any personal connection.

Example: “You only support the Latino for this job because you’re a Latino.”

This statement fails the logic test because it only takes a personal characteristic into account—race—when making this claim. This claim does not consider two important issues: (1) People do not base every decision they make on their race,

and (2) there may have been other perfectly logical reasons to support the Latino job applicant that had nothing to do with race.

- **Poisoning the Well**—This is a type of ad hominem attack that attempts to damage the character of an opponent before that person even introduces an argument. Thus, by the time the argument is made, it often sounds weak and defensive, and the person making the argument may already be suspect in the minds of the audience.

Example: If a speaker calls out a woman for being overly emotional or hysterical, any heightened feeling—even a raised voice—may be attributed to her inability to control emotion. Furthermore, if that woman makes an argument, she can be ignored and her argument weakened because of the perception that it is rooted in emotion, not reason.

Figure 5.3 “Poisoning the Well”



- **Guilt by Association**—This red herring fallacy works by associating the author of an argument with a group or belief so abhorrent and inflammatory in the minds of the audience that everyone, author and audience alike, is chasing squirrels up trees—that is, they are occupied by the tainted association to the reviled group—instead of dealing with the merits of the original argument.

Example: the *argumentum ad Nazium*, or playing the Hitler card. To counter an argument, either the arguer or a part of the argument itself is associated with Hitler or the Nazis. (“Vegetarianism is a healthy option for dieters.” “Never! You know, Hitler was a vegetarian!”) Because almost no one wants to be associated with fascists (or other similarly

hated groups, like cannibals or terrorists), the author now faces the task of defending himself against the negative association instead of pursuing the argument. If, however, there are actual Nazis—or the equivalent of Nazis, such as white supremacists or other neofascists—making an argument based on fascist ideology, it is perfectly reasonable to criticize, oppose, and object to their extreme and hateful views.

Figure 5.4 “Guilt by Association”



Irrelevant Appeals—Unlike the rhetorical appeals, the irrelevant appeals are attempts to persuade the reader with ideas and information that are irrelevant to the issues or arguments at hand, or the appeals rest on faulty assumptions in the first place. The irrelevant appeals can look and feel like logical support, but they are either a mirage or a manipulation.

- **Appeal to Emotion**—manipulates the audience by playing too much on emotion instead of rational support. Using

scare tactics is one type of appeal to emotion. Using pity to pressure someone into agreement is another example.

Example: Imagine a prosecuting attorney in a murder case performing closing arguments, trying to convict the defendant by playing on the emotions of the jury: “Look at that bloody knife! Look at that poor, battered victim and the cruelty of all those terrible stab wounds!” The jury may well be swayed by such a blatant appeal to emotion—pity, horror, disgust—but this appeal doesn’t actually provide any concrete proof for the defendant’s guilt. If the lawyer has built a logical case that rests on an abundance of factual data, then this appeal to emotion may be justified as a way to personalize that data for the jury. If, however, the lawyer *only* uses this appeal to emotion, the argument for guilt is flawed because the lawyer has tried to make up for a weak case by turning the jury members’ emotions into the main evidence for guilt.

- **Appeal to Popularity**—Also known as the bandwagon fallacy, the appeal to popularity implies that because many people believe or support something, it constitutes evidence for its validity. However, once we stop to think this idea through, we can easily remember popular ideas that were not at all good or justifiable: The majority does not always make the best choice.

Example: A good example here would be fashion trends. What is popular from one day to the next does not necessarily have anything to do with whether something logically is a good idea or has practical use.

Figure 5.5 “Appeal to Popularity”



- **Appeal to Incredulity**—suggests that a lack of understanding is a valid excuse for rejecting an idea. Just because someone does not personally understand how something works does not mean that thing is false. A person does not need to understand how a car's engine works to know that it *does* work, for instance. Often, in addition to rejecting the difficult idea, the arguer goes on to suggest that anyone who believes in the idea is foolish to do so.

Example: “It’s just common sense that the earth is flat because when I look at it, I can’t see any curve, not even when I’m in an airplane. I don’t need any scientist to tell me what I can clearly figure out with my own eyes.” This person has casually dismissed any scientific evidence against a flat earth as if it did not matter. Often those making an illogical appeal to incredulity will substitute what they think of as “common sense” for actual scientific evidence with the implication that they do not need any other basis for understanding. The problem is that many of the truths of our universe cannot be understood by common sense alone. Science provides the answers, often through complex mathematical and theoretical frameworks, but ignorance of the science is not a justifiable reason for dismissing it.

- **Appeal to Nature**—the assumption that what is natural is (1) inherently good and therefore (2) constitutes sufficient reason for its use or support. This is flawed because (1) how we determine what is natural can and does change, and (2) not everything that is natural is beneficial.

Example: “Vaccines are unnatural; thus, being vaccinated is more harmful than not being vaccinated.” A person making this statement has made an illogical appeal to nature. The fact that vaccines are a product of human engineering does not automatically mean they are harmful. If this person applied that logic to other cases, she would then have to reject, for instance, *all* medicines created in the lab rather than plucked from the earth.

- **Appeal to Tradition/Antiquity**—assumes that what is old or what “has always been done” is automatically good and beneficial. The objection, “But, we’ve always done it this way!” is fairly common, used when someone tries to justify or legitimize whatever “it” is by calling on tradition. The problems are these: (1) Most rudimentary history investigations usually prove that, in fact, “it” has *not* always been done that way; (2) tradition is not by itself a justification for the goodness or benefit of anything. Foot binding was a tradition at one point, but a logical argument for its benefit would strain credulity.

Example: “We should bar women from our club because that is how it has always been done.” The person making this argument needs to provide logical reasons women should not be included, not just rely on tradition.

- **Appeal to Novelty**—the mirror of the appeal to antiquity, suggesting that what is new is necessarily better.

Example: “Buy our new and improved product, and your life will forever be changed for the better!” Advertisers love employing the appeal to novelty to sell the public on the idea that because their product is new, it is better. Newness is no guarantee that something is good or of high quality.

- **Appeal to Authority**—Appealing to the ideas of someone who is a credentialed expert—or authority—on a subject can be a completely reasonable type of evidence. When one writes a research paper about chemistry, it is reasonable to use the works of credentialed chemists. However, the appeal to authority becomes a fallacy when misapplied. That same credentialed chemist would not be a logical authority to consult for information about medieval knights because authority in one area does not necessarily transfer to other areas. Another mistaken appeal to authority is to assume that because someone is powerful in some way that that power accords that person special knowledge or wisdom.

Example: Many societies throughout history have had hierarchical social and political structures, and those who

happened to be in the top tier, like aristocrats and rulers, had authority over those below them. In fact, the term “nobility” in the west had embedded within it the notion that the aristocracy really were better—more ethical, more intelligent, more deserving of reward—than those lower on the social ladder. Careful study of the nobility shows, however, that some members were just as capable of immorality and stupidity as lower social groups.

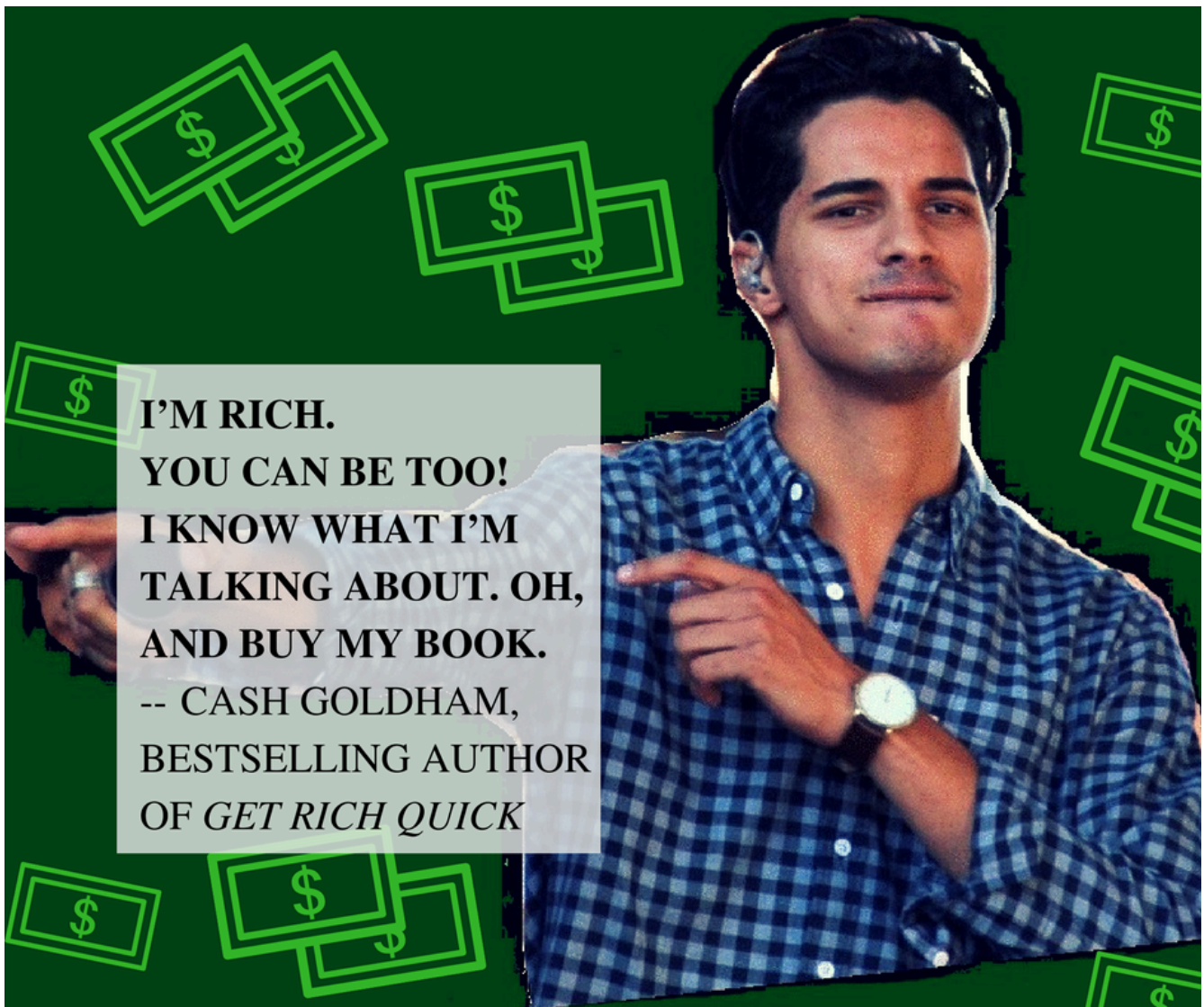
- **Appeal to Consequences/Force**—the attempt to manipulate someone into agreement by either implicit or explicit threats of consequences or force (violence!).

Example: “Agree with me or you’ll be fired!” Holding something over another person’s head is not a reasonable way to support an argument. The arguer avoids giving any sort of logic or evidence in favor of a threat.

- **Appeal to Wealth**—the assumption that wealthy people have special knowledge or wisdom that derives from their economic position and that can then be applied to any area of knowledge.

Example: “Hi, I’m a famous actress, and while I’m not a qualified psychologist, read my new self-help book for how you, too, can avoid depression!” Fame and fortune alone do not turn someone into a qualified expert. Appealing to a person’s expertise solely based on wealth and position is thus logically flawed.

Figure 5.6 “Appeal to Wealth”



- **Appeal to Poverty**—the mirror of the above irrelevant appeal, that poor people have special knowledge or wisdom because of their adverse economic circumstances. This can work in another way: that poor people are particularly deficient in knowledge or wisdom because they are poor. However, neither assumption constitutes sound reasoning. The conditions of poverty are far too complex.

Example: “That man lives on unemployment benefits, so why would I care about his opinion on anything?” The arguer in this scenario unreasonably uses another’s poverty against him, by implying that a poor person would have worthless ideas. This implication has embedded within it the idea that someone is only poor because of some sort of personal lack—intelligence, morality, good sense, and so on. However, it is quite reasonable for a poor person to be intelligent, ethical, and wise. To assume otherwise is to risk making logical mistakes.

Fallacies of Presumption

To call someone presumptuous is to accuse that person of overreaching—making bold assertions without adequate reason or failing to follow the rules of behavior (but presuming it is okay to do so). The logical fallacy version of this involves making a case with inadequate or tainted evidence, or even no evidence whatsoever, or by having unjustified reasons for making the case in the first place.

Working with Flawed Evidence—These fallacies occur when an author uses evidence that has been compromised.

- **Hasty Generalization**—A hasty generalization derives its conclusion from too little information, evidence, or reason.

One type of hasty generalization is jumping to a conclusion from a small amount of evidence.

Example: Having one bad meal at a restaurant and then immediately concluding that all meals from that restaurant will be just as bad.

Figure 5.7 “Hasty Generalization”



Another type of hasty generalization involves relying on **anecdotal evidence** for support. As human beings, we

overestimate the power of personal experience and connections, so they can drown out scientific data that contradict an individual—or anecdotal—experience. Additionally, anecdotal evidence is persuasive because of the human desire for perfection. Perfection is a lofty—and mostly unreachable—goal, and when a product or a person or a program fails to live up to perfection, it becomes easier to dismiss—particularly when a personal story or two of imperfection is involved. Accurate information, however, comes from a much larger amount of data—analysis of hundreds or thousands or even millions of examples. Unfortunately, data can feel impersonal and, therefore, less convincing.

Example: “I love my new Banana[™] laptop. The product ratings for it are very high.” “Oh, no one should ever buy one of their computers! My brother had one, and it was full of glitches.” Basing a judgement or an argument on a personal story or two, as in this case, is not logical but can be incredibly persuasive. However, if 98% of Banana[™] computers run perfectly well, and only 2% have glitches, it is illogical to use that 2% to write this product off as universally terrible.

In scholarship, hasty generalizations can happen when conclusions derive from an **unrepresentative sample**. Data coming from a group that fail to represent the group’s full complexity is unrepresentative, and any results drawn from that data will be flawed.

Example: If advances in cancer research were only, or mostly, tested on men, that would be unrepresentative of humanity because half of the human population—women—would not be represented. What if the cancer treatments affect women differently?

Another type of hasty generalization derived from poor research is the **biased sample**. This comes from a group that has a predisposed bias to the concepts being studied.

Example: If a psychologist were to study how high school students handled challenges to their religious views, it would be flawed to only study students at schools with a religious affiliation since most of those students may be predisposed toward a single type of religious view.

- **Sweeping Generalization**—the inverse of the hasty generalization. Instead of making a conclusion from little evidence, the sweeping generalization applies a general rule to a specific situation without providing proper evidence, without demonstrating that the rule even applies, or without providing for exceptions. Stereotyping is one prominent type of sweeping generalization; a stereotype derives from general ideas about a group of people without accounting for exceptions or accuracy or that there is any sound reasoning behind the stereotype.
- **Confirmation Bias**—a pernicious fallacy that can trip even careful scholars. It occurs when the writer or researcher is so convinced by her point of view that she only seeks to confirm it and, thus, ignores any evidence that would challenge it. Choosing only data that support a preformed conclusion is called cherry picking and is a one-way ticket to skewed results. Related to this fallacy is another—disconfirmation bias—when the writer or researcher puts so much stock in her side of the argument that she does not apply equal critical evaluation to the arguments and evidence that support the other side. In other words, while too easily and uncritically accepting what supports her side, she is unreasonably critical of opposing arguments and evidence.

Example: In the later nineteenth century, when archaeology was a new and thrilling field of study, Heinrich Schliemann excavated the ancient city of Troy, made famous in Homer’s epic poem, *The Iliad*. In fact, Schliemann used *The Iliad* as a guide, so when he excavated, he looked to find structures (like walls) and situations (proof of battles) in the archaeological remains. While Schliemann’s work is still considered groundbreaking in many ways, his method was flawed. It allowed him to cherry pick his results and fit them to his expectations—i.e., that his results would fit the myth. When Schliemann sought to confirm story elements from *The Iliad* in the archaeological record, he risked misinterpreting his data. What if the data was telling a different story than that in *The Iliad*? How could he know for sure until he put the book down and analyzed the archaeological evidence on its own merits? For more on Schliemann and his famous early excavations, see his Encyclopedia Britannica entry (<https://tinyurl.com/y9tk4vou>), or look up “Heinrich Schliemann” in the *Gale Virtual Reference Library* database.

- **No True Scotsman**—a false claim to purity for something that is too complex for purity, like a group, an identity, or an organization. Those making claims to purity usually attempt to declare that anyone who does not fit their

“pure” definition does not belong. For example, national identity is complicated and can mean something different to each person who claims that identity; therefore, it is too complex for a one-size-fits-all definition and for any one litmus test to prove that identity.

Examples: “No real Scot would put ice in his scotch!” “No real man would drink lite beer!” “No real feminist would vote Republican!” Each of these statements assumes that everyone has the same definition for the identities or groups discussed: Scots, men, and feminists. However, the members of each group are themselves diverse, so it is illogical to make such blanket declarations about them. It is actually quite reasonable for a Scottish person to like ice in her scotch and still claim a Scottish identity or for a man to drink lite beer without relinquishing his manhood or for a feminist to vote Republican while still working toward women’s rights.

Figure 5.8 “No True Southerner, No True Scotsman”



Working with No Evidence—These fallacies occur when the evidence asserted turns out to be no evidence whatsoever.

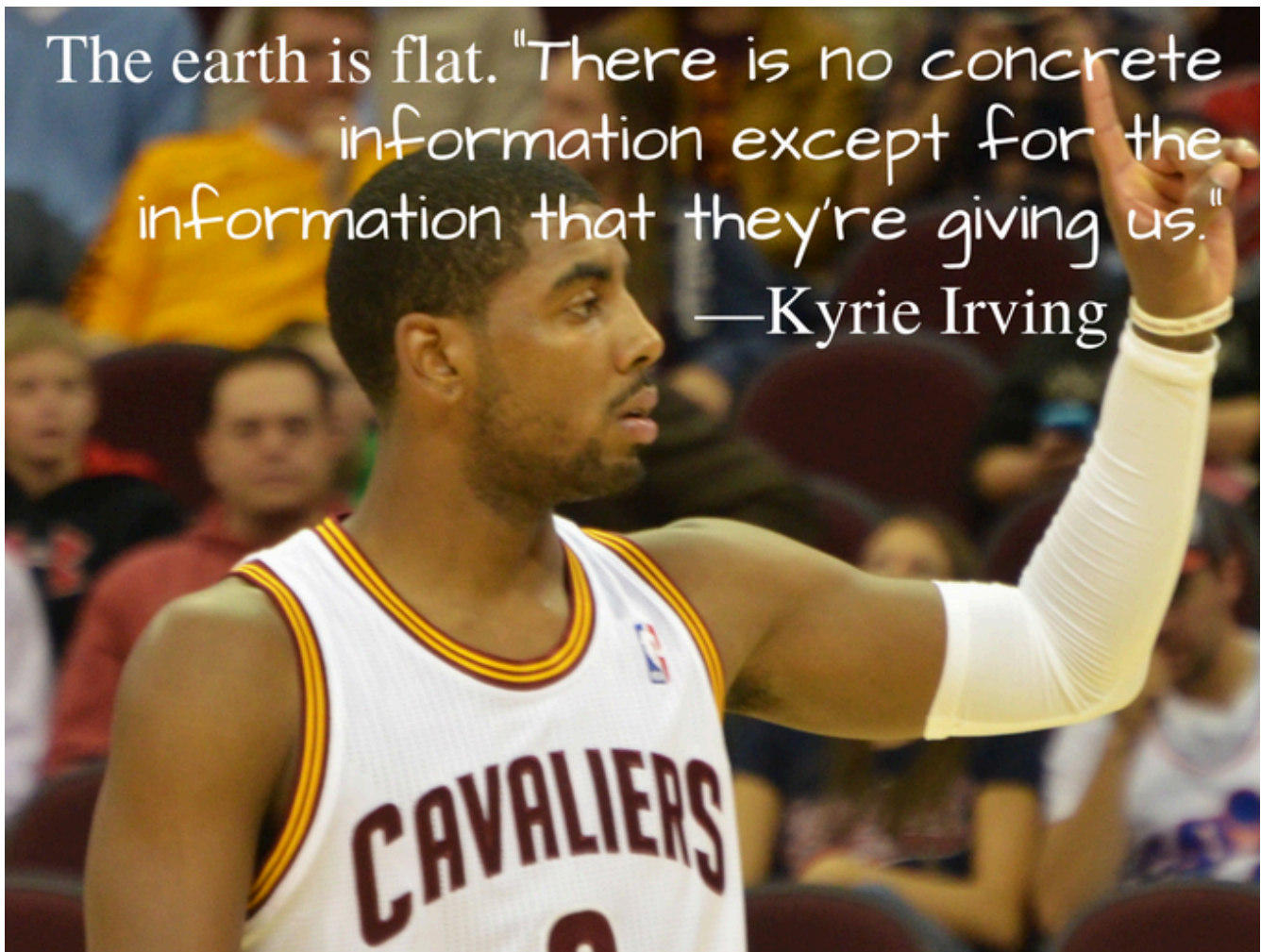
- **Burden of Proof**—This logical fallacy, quite similar to the appeal to ignorance, occurs when the author forgets that she is the one responsible for supporting her arguments and, instead, shifts the burden of proof to the audience.

Example: “Larry stole my painting,” Edith cried. “Prove to me he didn’t!” No: The one making the claim must give reasons and evidence for that claim *before* anyone else is obligated to refute it. If Edith cannot give sound proof of Larry’s guilt, the argument should be rejected.

- **Arguing from Silence or Ignorance**—Like the burden of proof fallacy, this one occurs when the author, either implicitly or explicitly, uses a lack of evidence as a type of proof. This is the basis for most conspiracy theory nonsense, as if the lack of evidence is so hard to believe, the only reason to explain why it is missing is a cover up. Remember, it is the writer’s job to present positive proof (evidence that actually exists and can be literally seen) to support any argument made. If a writer cannot find evidence, he must admit that he may be wrong and then, find a new argument!

Example: “There is no proof that Joe the Politician conspired with the Canadians to rig the elections.” “A-ha! That there is nothing to find is proof that he did! He must have paid off everyone involved to bury the evidence.” Lack of proof cannot be—in and of itself—a type of proof because it has no substance; it is a nothing. Is it possible that proof may arise in the future? Yes, but until it does, the argument that Joe and the Canadians rigged an election is illegitimate. Is it possible that Joe both rigged the election and paid people off to hide it? Again, yes, but there are two problems with this reasoning: (1) Possibility, like absence of evidence, is not in itself a type of evidence, and (2) possibility does not equal probability. Just because something is possible does not mean it is probable, let alone likely or a sure thing. Those supporting conspiracy theories try to convince others that lack of proof is a type of proof and that a remote possibility is actually a surety. Both fail the logic test.

Figure 5.9 “Arguing from Ignorance”



- **Circular Reasoning**—also known as begging the question, occurs when, instead of providing reasons for a claim, the arguer just restates the claim but in a different way. An author cannot sidestep reasons and proof for an argument by just repeating the claim over and over again.

Example: “The death penalty is sinful because it is wrong and immoral.” The conclusion (the death penalty is sinful) looks like it is supported by two premises (that it is wrong, that it is immoral). The problem is that the words “wrong” and “immoral” are too close in meaning to “sinful,” so they are not actual reasons; rather, they are just other ways to state the claim.

- **Special Pleading**—Anyone who makes a case based on special circumstances without actually providing any reasonable evidence for those circumstances is guilty of special pleading.

Example: “Is there any extra credit I can do to make up for my missing work?” Many students have asked this of their college professors. Embedded within the question is a logical fallacy, the insistence that the student asking it should get special treatment and be rewarded with extra credit even though he missed prior assignments. If the student has logical

(and preferably documented) reasons for missing course work, then the fallacy of special pleading does not apply. Those expecting to be given special treatment without reasonable justification have committed the special pleading fallacy.

- **Moving the Goalposts**—happens when one keeps changing the rules of the game in mid-play without any reasonable justification.

Example: This fallacy occurs in Congress quite a lot, where the rules for a compromise are established in good faith, but one side or the other decides to change those rules at the last minute without good reason or evidence for doing so.

- **Wishful Thinking**—involves replacing actual evidence and reason with desire, i.e., desire for something to be true. Wanting an idea to be real or true, no matter how intensely, does not constitute rational support. This fallacy often occurs when closely-held ideas and beliefs are challenged, particularly if they are connected to family and identity or if they serve self interest.

Example: People do not like to see their personal heroes tarnished in any way. If a popular sports hero, e.g., is accused of a crime, many fans will refuse to believe it because they just don't want to. This plays right into the wishful thinking fallacy.

Figure 5.10 “Wishful Thinking”



Working with False Ideas about Evidence or Reasoning—These fallacies either (1) presume something is a reason for or evidence of something else when that connection has not been adequately or fairly established or (2) unfairly limit one's choices of possible reasons.

- **False Dilemma/Dichotomy**—occurs when one presents only two options in an argument when there are, in fact, many more options. Arguments have multiple sides, not just two, so when only two are presented, readers are forced to choose between them when they should be able to draw from a more complex range of options. Another way to talk about the false dichotomy is to call it reductionist because the arguer has *reduced* the options from many to only two.

Example: “So, are you a dog person or a cat person? Are you a Beatles person or a Rolling Stones person? You can be only one!” Both of these examples provide a false choice between two options when there are clearly others to choose from. One might also reasonably choose both or neither. When an arguer only provides two options, she tries

to rig the response and to get the responder to only work within the severely limited framework provided. Life is more complicated than that, so it is unreasonable to limit choices to only two.

Figure 5.11 “False Dilemma”



- **Loaded Question**—embeds a hidden premise in the question, so anyone who responds is forced to accept that premise. This puts the responder at an unfair disadvantage because he has to either answer the question and, by doing so, accept the premise, or challenge the question, which can look like he is ducking the issue.

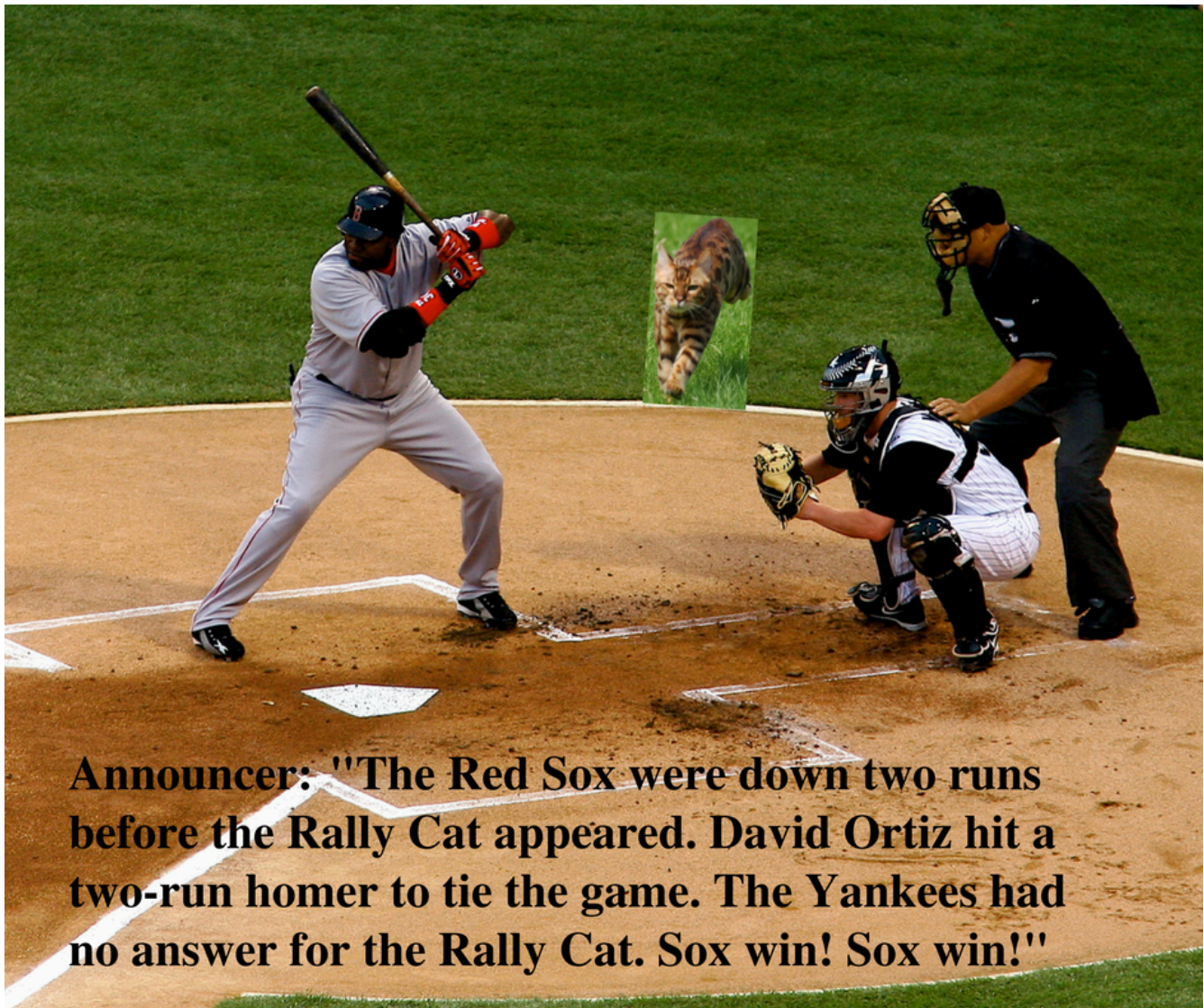
Example: “So, when did you start practicing witchcraft?” The hidden premise here is that the responder is a witch, and any reply is an admittance to that as a fact. An open question, one that does not trick the responder into admitting the presumption of witchcraft, would be this: “Are you a witch?”

False Cause—asserts causes that are more assumptions than actual causes. There are three types of false cause fallacies:

- **Post hoc ergo propter hoc**—In Latin, this phrase means “after this, therefore, because of this,” which asserts that when one thing happens before another thing, the first must have caused the second. This is a false assumption because, even if the two things are related to each other, they do not necessarily have a causal relationship.

Example: Superstitions draw power from this logical fallacy. If a black cat crosses Joe the Politician's path, and the next day Joe loses the election, is he justified, logically, in blaming the cat? No. Just because the cat's stroll happened before the election results does not mean the one caused the other.

Figure 5.12 "Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc"



- **Slippery Slope**—the cause/effect version of jumping to a conclusion. A slippery slope argument claims that the first link in a causal chain will inevitably end in the most disastrous result possible, thus working to scare the audience away from the initial idea altogether. Keep in mind, legitimate and logical causal chains can be argued: where one cause leads to a logical effect, which then leads to the next logical effect, which then leads to the next logical effect, and so on. Those using the slippery slope fallacy, however, do not bother to carefully establish a logical chain but rather skip right ahead to the worst possible conclusion.

Example: "Oh no, if I fail this test, my whole life is ruined!" This is a common fear among panicked students but is a prime example of the slippery slope. The student likely imagines this sort of logical chain: a failed test → failed class →

getting behind in college → flunking out of college → all future job prospects falling through → total unemployment → abject poverty → becoming a pariah to family and friends → a thoroughly ruined life. The worry is that failing a test, should it even happen at all, will automatically result in the worst possible case: a totally failed life. However, when thought through more calmly and logically, hopefully, the student will realize that many mitigating factors lie between one failed test and total ruination and that the total ruination result is actually quite unlikely.

- **Cum hoc ergo propter hoc**—In Latin, this phrase translates to “with this, therefore, because of this,” which suggests that because two or more things happen at the same time they must be related. This, however, doesn’t account for other logical possibilities, including coincidence.

Example: “Gah! Why does the phone always ring as we sit down to dinner?” This question implies that those two events have something to do with each other when there are likely far more logical reasons that they do not.

Fallacies of Ambiguity

To be ambiguous is to be unclear; thus, fallacies of ambiguity are those that, intentionally or not, confuse the reader through lack of clarity. They create a fog that makes it difficult to see what the conclusion or the reasonable parts of an argument are, or the fog prevents a reasonable conclusion in the first place.

- **Quoting out of Context**—occurs when quoting someone without providing all the necessary information to understand the author’s meaning. Lack of context means that the original quote’s meaning can be obscured or manipulated to mean something the original author never intended. Usually that context comes from the original text the quote came from that the borrower has failed to include or deliberately excluded.

Example: Original statement: “You may hand write your assignments but only when instructed to in the assignment schedule.”

Quote used: “You may hand write your assignments.”

Clearly, the quoted part leaves out some crucial information, qualifying information that puts limits on the initial instruction. The scenario may be this: The original statement came from a professor’s syllabus, and the student quoted just the first part to an advisor, for instance, while trying to register a complaint over a bad grade for an assignment he hand wrote but wasn’t supposed to. When the student exclaims, “But my professor told me I could hand write my assignments!” he is guilty of muddying the truth by quoting out of context. He left out the part that told him to verify the assignment instructions to see if handwriting were allowable or not.

- **Straw Man**—Creating a straw man argument involves taking a potentially reasonable argument and misrepresenting it, usually through scare tactics or oversimplification, i.e., by creating an argument that sounds similar to the original but in reality is not. The straw man argument is designed to be outrageous and upsetting, and thus easier to defeat or get others to reject. Why try to dismantle and rebut a reasonable argument when one can just knock the head off the straw man substitute instead?

Example: “I think we need to get rid of standardized testing in junior high and high school, at least in its current form.” “That’s terrible! I can’t believe you don’t want any standards for students. You just want education to get even worse!” In this scenario, the second person has committed the straw man fallacy. She has distorted the first person’s argument—that standardized testing in its current form should be eliminated—and replaced it with a much more objectionable one—that *all* educational standards should be eliminated. Because there are more ways than just testing to monitor educational standards, the second person’s argument is a blatant misrepresentation and an over simplification.

Figure 5.13 “Straw Man”



- **Equivocation**—happens when an author uses terms that are abstract or complex—and, therefore, have multiple meanings or many layers to them—in an overly simple or misleading fashion or without bothering to define the particular use of that term.

Example: “I believe in freedom.” The problem with this statement is it assumes that everyone understands just exactly what the speaker means by freedom. Freedom from what? Freedom to do what? Freedom in a legal sense? In an intellectual sense? In a spiritual sense? Using a vague sense of a complex concept like freedom leads to the equivocation fallacy.

Fallacies of Inconsistency

This category of fallacies involves a lack of logical consistency within the parts of the argument itself or on the part of the speaker.

- **Inconsistency Fallacy**—is one of the more blatant fallacies because the speaker is usually quite up-front about his inconsistency. This fallacy involves making contradictory claims but attempting to offset the contradiction by framing one part as a disclaimer and, thus, implying that the disclaimer inoculates the one making it from any challenge.

Example 1: “I’m not a racist but...” If what follows is a racist statement, the one saying this is guilty of the inconsistency fallacy and of making a racist statement. Making a bold claim against racism is not a shield.

Example 2: “I can’t be sexist because I’m a woman.” The speaker, when making this kind of statement and others like it, assumes that she cannot logically be called out for making a sexist statement because she happens to be a member of a group (women) who are frequent victims of sexism. If the statements she makes can objectively be called sexist, then she is guilty of both sexism and the inconsistency fallacy.

Figure 5.14 “Inconsistency Fallacy”



- **False Equivalence**—asserts that two ideas or groups or items or experiences are of equal type, standing, and quality when they are not.

Example: The belief in intelligent design and the theory of evolution are often falsely equated. The logical problem lies not with desire to support one or the other idea but with the idea that these two concepts are the same type of concept. They are not. Intelligent design comes out of belief, mainly religious belief, while evolution is a scientific theory underpinned by factual data. Thus, these two concepts should not be blithely equated. Furthermore, because these two concepts are not the same type, they do not need to be in opposition. In fact, there are those who may well believe in intelligent design while also subscribing to the theory of evolution. In other words, their religious beliefs do not restrict an adherence to evolutionary theory. A religious belief is faith based and, thus, is not evaluated using the same principles as a scientific theory would be.

- **False Balance**—applies mainly to journalists who, because they wish to present an appearance of fairness, falsely claim that two opposing arguments are roughly equal to each other when one actually has much more weight to it—of both reasoning and evidence.

Example: The majority of scientists accept climate change as established by empirical evidence, while a scant few do not; putting one representative of each on a news program, however, implies that they represent an equal number of people, which is clearly false.

Key Takeaways: Logical Fallacies

- Both formal and informal fallacies are errors of reasoning, and if writers rely on such fallacies, even unintentionally, they undercut their arguments, particularly their crucial appeals to *logos*. For example, if someone defines a key term in an argument in an ambiguous way or if someone fails to provide credible evidence, or if someone tries to distract with irrelevant or inflammatory ideas, her arguments will appear logically weak to a critical audience.
- More than just *logos* is at stake, however. When listeners or readers spot questionable reasoning or unfair attempts at audience manipulation, they may conclude that an author's ethics have become compromised. The credibility of the author (*ethos*) and perhaps the readers' ability to connect with that writer on the level of shared values (*pathos*) may well be damaged.

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Figure 5.14 “Inconsistency Fallacy,” by Dale Dulaney and Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0, derivative image using “Tea Party Where is the Cake Grandma,” by Assy , pixabay, CC-0.

PART III

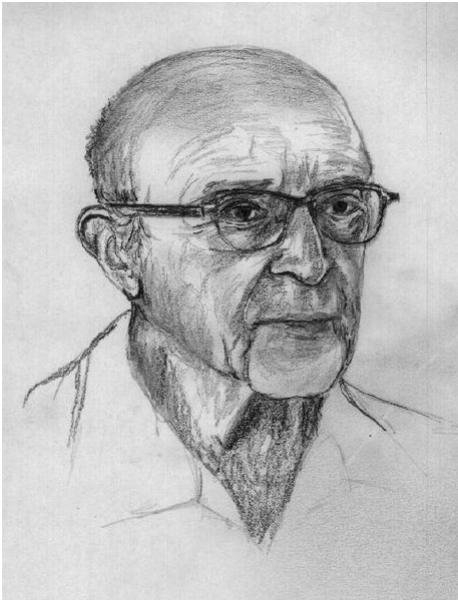
ARGUMENT MODELS AND TYPES

6. The Rogerian Argument Model

The Rogerian Argument

The Rogerian argument, inspired by the influential psychologist Carl Rogers, aims to find compromise or common ground about an issue. If, as stated in the beginning of the chapter, academic or rhetorical argument is not merely a two-sided debate that seeks a winner and a loser, the Rogerian argument model provides a structured way to move beyond the win-lose mindset. Indeed, the Rogerian model can be employed to deal effectively with controversial arguments that have been reduced to two opposing points of view by forcing the writer to confront opposing ideas and then work towards a common understanding with those who might disagree.

Figure 6.1 “Carl Ransom Rogers”



The following are the basic parts of a Rogerian Argument:

1. **Introduction:** Introduce the issue under scrutiny in a non-confrontational way. Be sure to outline the main sides in the debate. Though there are always more than two sides to a debate, Rogerian arguments put two in stark opposition to one another. Crucially, be sure to indicate the overall purpose of the essay: to come to a **compromise** about the issue at hand. If this intent is not stated up front, the reader may be confused or even suspect manipulation on the part of the writer, i.e., that the writer is massaging the audience just to win a fight. Be advised that the Rogerian essay uses an inductive reasoning structure, so *do not* include your thesis in your introduction. You will build toward the thesis and then include it in your conclusion. Once again, state the *intent* to compromise, but do not yet state what the compromise is.

2. **Side A:** Carefully map out the main claim and reasoning for the **opposing side** of the argument first. The writer's view should never really come first because that would defeat the purpose of what Rogers

called **empathetic listening**, which guides the overall approach to this type of argument. By allowing the opposing argument to come first, you communicate to the reader that you are willing to respectfully consider another's view on the issue. Furthermore, you invite the reader to then give you the same respect and consideration when presenting your own view. Finally, presenting the opposition first can help those readers who would side against you to ease into the essay, keeping them invested in the project. If you present your own ideas first, you risk polarizing those readers from the start, which would then make them less amenable to considering a compromise by the end of the essay. **You can listen to Carl Rogers himself discuss the importance of empathy on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/2dLsgpHw5x0>, transcript [here](#)).

3. **Side B:** Carefully go over **your side** of the argument. When mapping out this side's claim and support, be sure that it parallels that of Side A. In other words, make sure not to raise entirely new categories of support, or there can be no way to come to a compromise. Make sure to maintain a non-confrontational tone; for example, avoid appearing arrogant, sarcastic, or smug.

4. **The Bridge:** A solid Rogerian argument acknowledges the desires of each side and tries to accommodate both. In this part, point out the ways in which you agree or can find **common ground** between the two sides. There should be at least one point of agreement. This can be an acknowledgement of the one part of the opposition's agreement that you also support or an admittance to a shared set of values even if the two sides come to different ideas when employing

those values. This phase of the essay is crucial for two reasons: finding common ground (1) shows the audience the two views are not necessarily at complete odds, that they share more than they seem, and (2) sets up the compromise to come, making it easier to digest for all parties. Thus, this section **builds a bridge** from the two initial isolated and opposite views to a compromise that both sides can reasonably support.

5. **The Compromise:** Now is the time to finally announce your compromise, which is your thesis. The compromise is what the essay has been building towards all along, so explain it carefully and demonstrate the logic of it. For example, if debating about whether to use racial profiling, a compromise might be based on both sides' desire for a safer society. That shared value can then lead to a new claim, one that disarms the original dispute or set of disputes. For the racial profiling example, perhaps a better solution would focus on more objective measures than race that would then promote safety in a less problematic way.

Figure 6.2 “Rogerian Argument”

ROGERIAN ARGUMENT

THE ISSUE: You are pro-homeschooling.

THE INTRODUCTION: Indicate your intent to find a compromise. Outline both sides of the argument— what “opponents believe” and what “proponents believe.”

SIDE A: You show an deep understanding of the positions of those who are opposed to homeschooling.

SIDE B: Present your side of the issue— the benefits of homeschooling.

THE BRIDGE: Build a bridge to compromise between the two sides. What can both sides agree on?

Example: Both sides want the best education possible for all students.



THE COMPROMISE: The state can ensure that parents who want to home-school can do so, while it also ensures that home-schooled students receive a high-quality education in a safe environment with information and access to standardized testing.

Sample Writing Assignment

Find a controversial topic, and begin building a Rogerian argument. Write up your responses to the following:

1. The topic or dilemma I will write about is...
2. My opposing audience is...
3. My audience's view on the topic is...
4. My view on the topic is...
5. Our common ground—shared values or something that we both already agree on about the topic—is...
6. My compromise (the main claim or potential thesis) is...

Reading Strategies for a Rogerian Argument

To create a Rogerian Argument, you need to understand your opponent's ideas deeply, and it also helps to understand your own side of the issue in depth. You already learned important skills for reading an argument, understanding an argument, and summarizing an argument. In addition to those skills, here are two new strategies: reading as a Believer and reading as a Doubter. As you can imagine, the first strategy is most relevant for a Rogerian Argument.

Believing and Doubting Games in Reading

When one thinks of reading the first thing that pops into mind is a person holding a book sitting in an easy chair in front of a fire lost in the author's world, sailing the sea with captain Ahab, roaming the south with Faulkner, floating down the Mississippi with Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, reading as a kind of vacation from the real world. Reading is an escape into our imagination and the words and sentences of the writer. We are not tested on this reading or expected to argue about its literary merits. It is not work or pragmatic, it is pleasure, entertainment.

We read now from phones, computers, Nooks, wide screen color televisions, and movie screens as well as books and journals, and much of our reading in school is for a pragmatic purpose. For the purpose of this composition course we will use reading for inquiry (truth seeking) and persuasion (rhetoric).

After you have chosen a topic, or conversation, or have been assigned a conversation by your teacher your next task is to research that topic. You begin this process by seeking the truth about your topic, by inquiring, questioning, and exploring your topic. This involves finding, reading, and using as many sources or voices in the conversation as possible and exploring as many perspectives as possible. You should use a variety of sources that include but are not limited to newspaper articles, op-eds, magazine articles, blogs, posting to chat rooms, visual arguments, documentaries, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

Methods of Reading

Skimming

Skimming is valuable when you are choosing your sources. It involves reading the abstract, the first paragraph, the last paragraph, and gliding or passing quickly through the body paragraphs.

Reading to find the truth about an issue

A good way of reading to explore and find the truth about an issue (inquiry) is by playing the believing and doubting game developed by Peter Elbow.

Believing Game

The believing game begins with what the psychologist Carl Rogers calls empathic listening. Empathy is the identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives. This involves understanding and adopting the authors world view, beliefs, values, and assumptions. You must try to walk in the author's shoes, understand the author's angle of vision, see the world through his or her eyes. You must suspend your world view, which can be difficult, and hear what the author is saying. Peter Elbow says, "The itch for closure brings the itch for argument. Playing the believing game means fighting the itch for closure." He goes on to say, "...most school activities—fulfill their goals perfectly if they slow down on generating final answers but speed up the business of making people more perceptive and intelligent. The shape of the believing game is waiting, patience, not being in a hurry. Try to feel how stupid this impulse is – how the desire for closure impedes any larger slower reordering of thought or experience and really serves the mind's desire to stay the same." (Note: I am not sure we would call our impulses "stupid" now. Perhaps ineffective?)

Close Reading and Summary Writing as a Way to Play the Believing Game

One way to play the believing game is to write an objective summary of the chosen piece of writing. When you summarize a writing selection give the author(s) credit and respect for the work they have done to produce their product. You already have practiced this strategy earlier in the course. This approach, though, really is about your mindset while writing the summary.

Follow these steps:

1. Read the argument slowly and objectively, playing the believing game. Pretend you are the author. Accept the author's world view which involves the writer's beliefs, values, and assumptions. You are engaged in empathetic listening not judging.
2. While you read the selection actively, underline important sentences, write notes in the margins, draw arrows and stars near passages that impress you or are exceptionally written.
3. Also while you read the selection carefully and slowly, write "says" and "does" statements for each paragraph on a separate piece of paper.

- a. A says statement summarizes the content of the paragraph or main idea of the paragraph in your own words.
- b. A does statement summarizes the paragraphs function. Does the paragraph state the main claim or present reasons or evidence? Does the paragraph address the opposition or conclude the argument? Does it use humor or quote another author?
4. Create an outline, idea map, or a list of the arguments main points.
5. Turn your paragraph by paragraph says statements and your outline into a prose summary. Write concise sentences, being objective, and identify the author's main ideas, claims, and evidence. Properly document quotations and paraphrases. Create a works cited entry.
6. At this point you can trim and prune your summary to the desired length. Whether you decide to write a one page, one paragraph, or a one sentence summary use each word and sentence wisely. You will want to revise for conciseness.

Doubting Game

The doubting game seeks truth by indirection – by seeking error. Doubting an assertion is the best way to find error in it. You must assume it is untrue if you want to find its weakness. The truer it seems, the harder you have to doubt it. Non credo ut intelligam: in order to understand what's wrong, I must doubt.

To doubt well, it helps if you make a special effort to extricate yourself from the assertions in question – especially those which you find self-evident. You must hold off to one side the self, its wishes, preconceptions, experiences, and commitments. (The machinery of symbolic logic helps people do this.) Also, it helps to run the assertion through logical transformations so as to reveal premises and necessary consequences and thereby flush out into the open any hidden errors. You can also doubt better by getting the assertions to battle each other and thus do some of the work: They are in a relationship of conflict, and getting them to wrestle each other, you can utilize some of their energy and cleverness for ferreting out weakness.

Peter Elbow

Reading to doubt involves raising objections, asking questions, being a skeptic, and withholding your belief. It is the heart of critical thinking. It can be as difficult as the believing game because it may go against the flow of your deeply held world views.

In the doubting game a reader questions the writer's logic, evidence, beliefs, values, and assumptions about what is true. A skeptic can also question an arguer's rhetorical strategies and note what is not in the argument.

When you play this game write a paragraph believing the assertions the author makes and one paragraph doubting them. Free write both paragraphs or cluster (draw an idea map) of each before you write your paragraphs.

Dialectic Thinking

German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel claimed that each thesis has an opposing thesis or antithesis. The conflict created between these two opposing forces leads to a synthesis that combines both views. This is the philosophical equivalent of the believing and doubting game. When a reader does this, new better ideas emerge from the process. In a way, the Rogerian Argument is using this approach.

Dialectic or dialectics (Greek: διαλεκτική, dialektikḗ), also known as the dialectical method, is a discourse between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject but wishing to establish the truth through reasoned arguments.

Because it's so hard to let go of an idea we are holding (or more to the point, an idea that's holding us), our best hope for leverage in learning to doubt such ideas is to take on different ideas. Peter Elbow

Key Takeaways

Questions to Ask

1. How do the two arguers disagree about the facts and interpretation of facts?
2. How are their beliefs, values, and assumptions different?
3. Do they have shared beliefs, values and assumptions?
4. How have my own beliefs, values, and assumptions changed? Have I been exposed to new ideas? How have my views changed?

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Figure 6.1 “Carl Ransom Rogers,” by Didius, Wikimedia, CC-BY 2.5.

Figure 6.2 “Rogerian Argument,” by Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

7. Toulmin Argument Model

In simplified terms this is the argument of “I am right — and here is why.” In this model of argument, the arguer creates a claim, also referred to as a thesis, that states the idea you are asking the audience to accept as true and then supports it with evidence and reasoning. The Toulmin argument goes further, though, than that basic model with a claim and support. It adds some additional parts such as rebuttals, warrants, backing, and qualifiers to create a water-tight argument.

Preview the Toulmin Argument Model

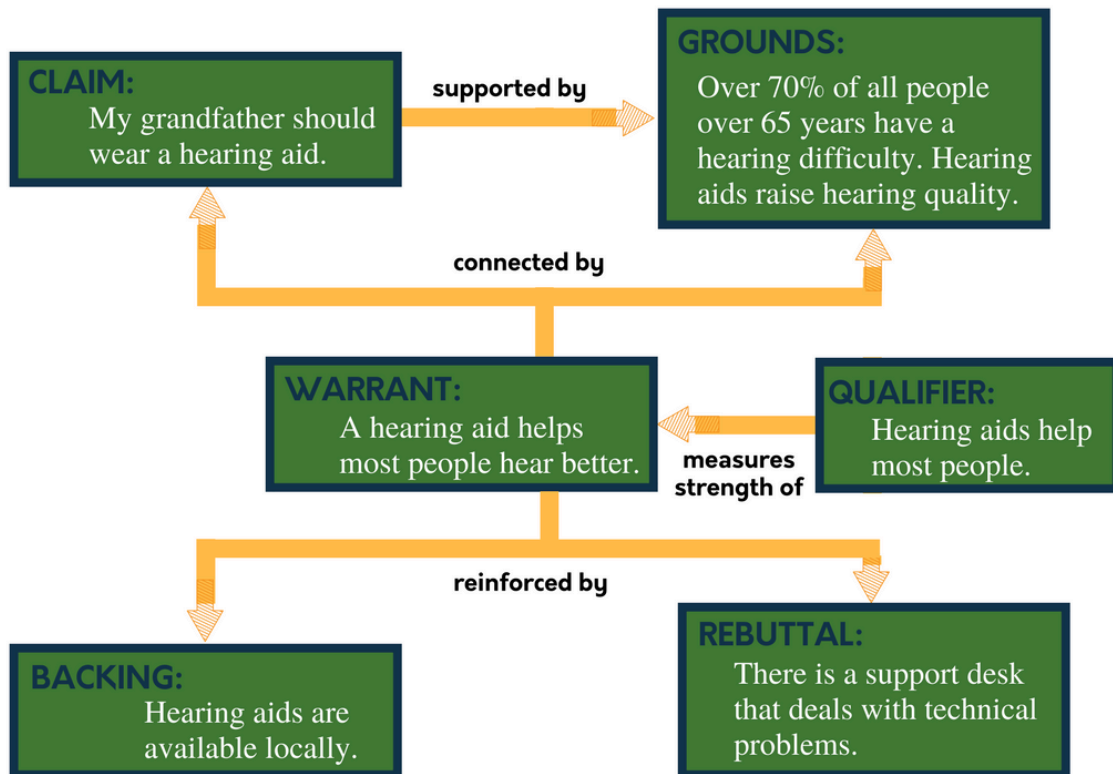


One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://spscc.pressbooks.pub/uppingyourargumentandresearchgame/?p=235#oembed-1>

Stephen Toulmin and His Six-Part Argument Model

Stephen Edelston Toulmin (born March 25, 1922) was a British philosopher, author, and educator. Toulmin devoted his works to analyzing moral reasoning. He sought to develop practical ways to evaluate ethical arguments effectively. The Toulmin Model of Argumentation, a diagram containing six interrelated components, was considered Toulmin’s most influential work, particularly in the fields of rhetoric, communication, and computer science. His components continue to provide useful means for analyzing arguments.

Figure 8.1 “Toulmin Argument”



The following are the parts of a Toulmin argument:

1. **Claim:** The claim is a statement that you are asking the other person to accept as true (i.e., a conclusion) and forms the nexus of the Toulmin argument because all the other parts relate back to the claim. The claim can include information and ideas you are asking readers to accept as true or actions you want them to accept and enact. One example of a claim:

My grandfather should wear a hearing aid.

This claim both asks the reader to believe an idea and suggests an action to enact. However, like all claims, it can be challenged. Thus, a Toulmin argument does not end with a claim but also includes grounds and warrant to give support and reasoning to the claim.

2. **Grounds:** The grounds form the basis of real persuasion and includes the reasoning behind the claim, data, and proof of expertise. Think of grounds as a combination of **premises** and **support**. The truth of the claim rests upon the grounds, so those grounds should be tested for strength, credibility, relevance, and reliability. The following are examples of grounds:

Over 70% of all people over 65 years have a hearing difficulty.

Hearing aids raise hearing quality.

Information is usually a powerful element of persuasion, although it does affect people differently. Those who are dogmatic, logical, or rational will more likely be persuaded by factual data. Those who argue emotionally and who are highly invested in their own position will challenge it or otherwise try to ignore it. Thus, grounds can also include appeals to emotion, provided they aren't misused. The best arguments, however, use a variety of support and rhetorical appeals.

3. **Warrant:** A warrant links data and other grounds to a claim, legitimizing the claim by showing the grounds to be **relevant**. The warrant may be carefully explained and explicit or unspoken and implicit. The warrant answers the question, “Why does that data mean your claim is true?” For example,

A hearing aid helps most people hear better.

The warrant may be simple, and it may also be a longer argument with additional sub-elements including those described below. Warrants may be based on **logos**, **ethos** or **pathos**, or values that are assumed to be shared with the listener. In many arguments, warrants are often implicit and, hence, unstated. This gives space for the other person to question and expose the warrant, perhaps to show it is weak or unfounded.

4. **Backing:** The backing for an argument gives additional support to the warrant. Backing can be confused with grounds, but the main difference is this: Grounds should directly support the premises of the main argument itself, while backing exists to help the warrants make more sense. For example,

Hearing aids are available locally.

This statement works as backing because it gives credence to the warrant stated above, that a hearing aid will help most people hear better. The fact that hearing aids are readily available makes the warrant even more reasonable.

5. **Qualifier:** The qualifier indicates how the data justifies the warrant and may limit how universally the claim applies. The necessity of qualifying words comes from the plain fact that most absolute claims are ultimately false (all women want to be mothers, e.g.) because one counterexample sinks them immediately. Thus, most arguments need some sort of qualifier, words that temper an absolute claim and make it more reasonable. Common qualifiers include “most,” “usually,” “always,” or “sometimes.” For example,

Hearing aids help most people.

The qualifier “most” here allows for the reasonable understanding that rarely does one thing (a hearing aid) universally benefit all people. Another variant is the reservation, which may give the possibility of the claim being incorrect:

Unless there is evidence to the contrary, hearing aids do no harm to ears.

Qualifiers and reservations can be used to bolster weak arguments, so it is important to recognize them. They are often used by advertisers who are constrained not to lie. Thus, they slip “usually,” “virtually,” “unless,” and so on into their claims to protect against liability. While this may seem like sneaky practice, and it can be for some advertisers, it is important to note that the use of qualifiers and reservations can be a useful and legitimate part of an argument.

6. **Rebuttal:** Despite the careful construction of the argument, there may still be counterarguments that can be used. These may be rebutted either through a continued dialogue, or by pre-empting the counter-argument by giving the rebuttal during the initial presentation of the argument. For example, if you anticipated a counterargument that hearing aids, as a technology, may be fraught with technical difficulties, you would include a rebuttal to deal with that counterargument:

There is a support desk that deals with technical problems.

Any rebuttal is an argument in itself, and thus may include a claim, warrant, backing, and the other parts of the Toulmin structure.

When to Use the Toulmin Argument Model

Overall, the Toulmin Argument Model may be used to create a strong, persuasive argument — and it can be used to analyze and examine an argument. You may use this approach for a speech, academic paper, or online argument that you are creating. This approach can help you to create a sound, persuasive argument. You also may use this model to analyze an argument that you read, watch, or hear. The model can help you to identify missing parts in an argument. Sometimes, an argument “feels” wrong, but this approach can help you to identify why it is flawed.

Even if you do not wish to write an essay using strict Toulmin structure, using the Toulmin checklist can make an argument stronger. When first proposed, Toulmin based his layout on legal arguments, intending it to be used analyzing arguments typically found in the courtroom; in fact, Toulmin did not realize that this layout would be applicable to other

fields until later. The first three elements—“claim,” “grounds,” and “warrant”—are considered the essential components of practical arguments, while the last three—“qualifier,” “backing,” and “rebuttal”—may not be necessary for all arguments.

Exercise 5

Find an argument in essay form and diagram it using the Toulmin model. The argument can come from an Op-Ed article in a newspaper or a magazine think piece or a scholarly journal. See if you can find all six elements of the Toulmin argument. Use the structure above to diagram your article’s argument.

Key Takeaways

- **Toulmin’s Argument Model**—six interrelated components used to diagram an argument.
- A Toulmin Argument may be used in academic writing or to persuade someone online.
- A Toulmin Argument model can be used to analyze an argument you read
- A Toulmin Argument model also can be used to create an argument when you are writing.

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Figure 7.1: “Toulmin Argument,” Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0

8. Intro to Researched-Based Types of Arguments

Deciding on the Purpose of a Research-Based Argument

Every argument sets out to convince readers or listeners to believe it, no? In that sense, every argument has the same purpose. However, there are different kinds of beliefs we might want to encourage and different attitudes we might take toward those beliefs. Besides, we may want an argument not just to convince but to lead to action. Sometimes the purpose goes beyond just “Believe me!” For example, when the argument is part of an advertisement, the goal is clear: “Buy me!” The goal of a stump speech is to get listeners to cast their votes in support of a candidate. Sometimes, the purpose is simply to struggle with a topic in order to begin to come up with an informed opinion. Many times, the purpose of a piece of writing is to encourage critical thinking on a subject, and maybe change something wrong in our world in response.

For example, we could set out to write about global warming for different purposes. We might simply aim to make people believe that global warming is real. Alternately, we might try to convince readers to make drastic changes in their lives to combat climate change, or to protest a particular company responsible for climate change. Our purpose will shape the ideas we express, but it will also shape the emotional appeals we make.

Identifying our purpose can help us decide what we need to include to achieve that purpose. Often arguments with a particular kind of purpose will share common features. Below we will describe four kinds of research-based essays, each of which we will explore in more depth in a later section of this chapter.

One note: these basic strategies also can be a part of another type of essay. For example, a definition may be a crucial part of a proposal argument.

Purposes for research papers

We can ask ourselves which of the following best describes our purpose:

- We want to describe the nature of something.
- We want to assess how good or bad something is.
- We want to demonstrate that one thing causes or caused another.
- We want to propose some action.

An argument may contain multiple elements from this list, but if we can decide which is ultimately the most important, we can shape the introduction and conclusion with that goal in mind. Each type of argument has particular questions that may be worth addressing, as we will explore in the later sections.

In the following sections, we suggest strategies and components of four different types of arguments, matched to the four purposes mentioned above.

- **Definition** arguments describe the nature of something or identify a pattern or trend. Generally speaking, they answer the question, “What is it?”
- **Evaluation** arguments assess something according to particular criteria. They answer the question, “How good or bad is it?”

- **Causal** arguments attempt to show that one thing leads to or has led to another. They answer the question, “What caused it?”
- **Proposal** arguments present a case for action. They answer the question, “What should we do about it?”

Let’s look at some examples of argument purposes divided into these categories.

Definition argument examples

- We want readers to know what kinds of communication dolphins are capable of.
- We want to clarify which groups of people the term “Latinx” refers to.
- We want to show how Kurdish communities differ in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

Evaluation argument examples

- We want to recommend a gaming device.
- We want to convince readers that the Supreme Court decision to give corporations First Amendment rights to free speech was misguided.
- We want to show that a new Alzheimer’s drug meets the criteria for emergency use authorization.

Causal argument examples

- We want to argue that the attack on the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021 actually made Americans value American democracy more and want to protect it.
- We want to show that parents can’t change a child’s feeling of being male, female, or nonbinary.
- We want to suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic led to an increase in internet addiction.

Proposal argument examples

- We want readers to take the online Harvard Implicit Association Tests and reflect on what the results suggest about their unconscious biases.
- We want legislators to double the gas tax in order to speed up the transition to clean energy.
- We want to make community college free for all Americans.

Comparing and contrasting for different purposes

It's worth noting that we may want to discuss more than one thing for any of the purposes above. If we are comparing and contrasting two or more things in our essay, we will want to think about essay structure for compare and contrast essays as well as thinking about the elements of the argument according to the overall purpose. See Section 3.9: Comparing and Contrasting Arguments for more on this.

Exercise

For each argument below, select the category that best describes the argument's purpose. Explain how it fits the category.

1. Muslim women should be allowed to wear full face and body coverings such as burkas in public if they choose.
2. Minecraft play offers many opportunities for creativity and learning.
3. The explosion of mental health content on TikTok has reduced the shame many people feel about their mental health issues.
4. Only apartments where the rent is less than 30% of a minimum wage worker's income can truly be considered "affordable housing."
5. Composting food waste can generate energy with a minimum of greenhouse gas emissions.

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Tailoring an Argument to an Audience

There is a common misconception about writing that it is a solitary exercise. As such, each time you get stuck on a word

or sentence, it may be up to you alone to move past that writer's block. However, that's simply not true. Beyond the support of your instructor, peers, or tutors, you have an audience that you're writing to that can help you generate ideas and stay focused. The more we imagine our audience's likely reactions as part of the writing process, the more likely we are to generate ideas, reach them, and convince them or affect their thinking. Why? Because an argument implies a relationship. So, read on to find out more about how you can work together with your audience to develop your paper.



“Audience listens at Startup School” by Robert Scoble is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Audience Awareness in the Writing Process

Analyzing your audience affects nearly every stage of your writing, from early drafting to how you revise and get to the final draft. Beyond writing to answer a prompt, at a really basic level, you're writing to be read, by your peers, your professor, or by any audience designated in your prompt. To do this effectively, consider the following questions. Many of these considerations already happen intuitively when we talk with other people. When we're writing we need to be a bit more conscious about imagining the audience.

- What does your audience probably already know about your topic? Depending on how much your audience knows, there may be background information you should include or leave out. For example, if we are writing on global warming in an English Composition class for an audience of an English professor and assorted students, we might need to use more detailed explanations for scientific concepts. However, if we are writing on global warming in an upper-level environmental science class, we can assume that our audience is more well-versed in the basics of

climate science. We wouldn't need to explain the details of the greenhouse effect works and could probably use more jargon from the discipline without defining every term.

- How is your audience likely to feel about your topic? A skeptical audience needs more evidence than an open-minded one. Is the audience likely to have a prejudice or misconception that needs to be addressed? Assessing how your audience feels may also be the key to finding common ground. Refer to [9.8: Reaching a Hostile Audience](#) for more information.
- What new information can you provide? New information about a topic or its purpose can keep the audience engaged in a way rehashing old information cannot.
- What is your relationship to the audience? This can affect your tone and how much of yourself you insert into the paper. For example, addressing an authority figure would require a different approach than addressing a relative peer or a complete stranger.

The Effect of Audience on Style

Like a conversation, in addition to your audience affecting what you say, your audience can sometimes affect how you say that content as well. The following items are some things to consider:

- **Purpose:** What does your audience care about or believe in? What will move your audience to act? It will help your paper if you can align its purpose with something the audience cares about. See [9.6: Moral Character](#) for more information on this.
- **Backing:** What kind of evidence will convince your audience? Remember what looks like strong evidence to you may appear flimsy to your audience.
- **Sentence Type and Length:** Should you use long and complex sentences? Or short ones? The reading level of your paper should match the reading level of your audience.
- **Level of Formality:** Should you use technical jargon? Or slang? Avoid the temptation to 'sound academic' with technical words and phrases unless the situation calls for it.
- **Tone:** Formal or informal? Serious or humorous? Distanced or personal? Hitting the right tone will help your audience take you more seriously. Consider checking out [8.4: Tone](#) or [9.3: Distance and Intimacy](#) for more resources related to this.

Reaching Out to the Audience

Many audiences form an opinion about what they read by the end of the introduction. Take advantage of this information to make sure you make a positive first impression. Try to pick a title that your audience may recognize or resonate with. Work on a hook that is geared towards your audience (as opposed to something that is purely provocative or

attention-grabbing). Consider making a direct appeal to your audience in the introduction, and end your introduction with a thesis statement modeled after the values you know your reader will identify with. Check out [7.1: Introductions](#) for more information about this.

Addressing a Diverse Audience



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While the previous points have been geared towards writing to a specific audience, the following items are some good practices to observe for any audience you may encounter.

- **Recognize your cultural filter:** Cultures are formed from a variety of factors like class, gender, generation, religion, and education. Your culture shapes how you view the world and can at times prevent you from understanding different backgrounds. Do your best to understand how your cultural values may be affecting your argument and how they may differ from your audience's.
- **Avoid ethnocentrism:** Assuming that your culture's values, customs, or beliefs are superior to another's is ethnocentrism. It's an attitude that can alienate your audience. Be careful not to assume that all cultural practices are shared. Suspend any judgments or cultural stereotypes.
- **Adopt bias-free language:** Biased language is tricky and has a way of sneaking into writing when you least expect it. While you may think writing "the male lawyer" provides important detail, including the lawyer's gender suggests the law is an inherently male or masculine profession. So, be mindful of any biased, sexist, or stereotypical language that may come from unconscious biases as you're writing and edit accordingly.
- **Acknowledge issues of oppression.** Similar to ethnocentrism, the language we write or speak might convey a negative bias towards individuals or groups. If your message stereotypes a group, even unconsciously, you risk offending your audience. Examples of discriminating language to avoid include:
 - **Racism** – Your audience will be diverse. By recognizing that there are many cultural frames of reference, you'll reach each reader or listener effectively. Unless it is necessary, avoid references to ethnicity.

- **Heterosexism** – If your essay or speech depicts a relationship, don't assume that each member of your audience is heterosexual.
- **Ageism** – Many pervasive stereotypes exist with regard to the age of individuals. If you write or speak about an elderly person, challenge discriminating ideas such as “old people are feeble” or “teenagers lack wisdom.”
- **Sexism** – While sexist language assumes one term for both genders, sexism suggests one sex or gender is inferior to the other. To suggest that females are emotional and men are logical privileges one sex over the other, while stereotyping that all of one sex have the same traits or characteristics.

Attribution

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9. Type I: Definition Argument



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What is a definition argument?

A research-based argument may have as its goal to describe the nature of something, whether it be an abstract concept like justice, a historical event, or an ongoing trend. Definition arguments like this are arguments because they seek to shape our vision of reality. We can think of them as answering the question “What is it?”

Definition arguments may attempt to explain what is meant by a particular term. Take the following claim:

Organic, in terms of food, means plants and animals raised without additives or artificial growing conditions.

The argument here hinges upon understanding the definition of the word “organic.” In this case, organic is the subject of the argument. The claim goes on to base the argument on definition criteria. The claim states that two definition criteria of “organic” are “raised without additives” and “raised without artificial growing conditions.” “What do they mean

by ‘artificial’?” If you find yourself questioning other terms used in the claim, that might mean your argument will need to dedicate a paragraph or more to defining those terms. An extended argument on organic food would need to explain in detail what distinguishes artificial growing conditions from natural ones. Can greenhouse-grown food be organic? In such a situation, it may benefit the argument to offer the dictionary definition of “organic” as a way to confirm that writer and the readers’ assumptions are the same.

There are a number of online dictionaries that student authors can derive a definition from, but should the writer wish to ensure trust (ethos) with the audience, the source of the dictionary definition might matter. The dictionary.com site offers this definition for “organic”:

Organic: pertaining to, involving, or grown with fertilizers or pesticides of animal or vegetable origin, as distinguished from manufactured chemicals” (“organic”).

Readers who respect the history and legacy of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) might consider its definition more credible. Considered the most definitive and complete dictionary available, the OED offers differentiated definitions of different uses of the word. In the case of “organic,” we’d need to look at sub-definition 8c to find one that works for our purposes:

Organic: of food: produced without the use of artificial fertilizers, pesticides, or other artificial chemicals.

A definition argument can put a more specific subject into a category based on criteria, as in the following:

Though it omits hormones and antibiotics, organic ice cream remains unhealthy because it contains high levels of fat and sugar, while offering little nutritional value.

Here we have a subject – organic ice cream – and a category – unhealthy. Presumably, unhealthy things often contain similar criteria – high levels of fat and sugar, low nutritional value, and industrial additives. Organic ice cream might not contain industrial additives, but, because it meets the other two criteria, it can still be considered unhealthy. A good way to test your thesis is to try out examples to see if the criteria work to distinguish things that fit the category from things that don’t. Are other things we consider unhealthy full of sugar and/or fat, low in nutrition, and made with industrial additives? Yes. Fast food hamburgers are unhealthy because they contain high levels of fat, low nutritional value, and are full of chemical preservatives.

Definition arguments will need to provide evidence for any generalizations they make about a subject. If they use a specific example, how can they show that the example is **typical**? They may also need to justify the choice of **criteria** for the definition. If we argue that the Vietnam War should not be considered a “World War” even though it involved two global superpowers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, we will need to explain why a criterion like the number of deaths should be considered more important than the number or size of the countries involved.

The benefits of definition

Once we understand the value of definition for clarifying terms in an essay, we can start to appreciate the value of definition in shaping an argument, especially one centered around a contentious term. When controversy revolves around an issue, defining terms explicitly and precisely is even more critical. In Section 4.2: Check If the Meaning Is Clear, we saw how mixing different meanings of one term can disguise a problem with the logic of an argument (if this is done intentionally, it is called **equivocation**). A definition argument can help avoid this kind of slippage, and it can clarify where disagreements lie. Even if it doesn’t resolve the disagreements, it may at least prevent misunderstandings.

One example lies in the definition of “life” in the abortion debate. Those on the pro-life side argue “life” is defined

by the initial meeting of sperm and egg, and the subsequent division of cells. On the other hand, those on the pro-choice side often argue that “life” is determined by autonomy, by the fetus’s ability to survive outside the womb, and this, generally, is possible at twenty-four weeks. Prior to that, the fetus is fully dependent for survival upon the security of the woman’s womb.

To take another example, let’s say the government decides to allow health insurance providers to exclude coverage to individuals with preexisting conditions. The question then arises, what precisely does constitute a preexisting condition? Any diagnosis of cancer, including minor skin cancers? Diabetes? Obesity? Hypertension? Consider how many of our friends and family members have been diagnosed with any of these conditions.

Laws rely on definitions. Many of us are familiar with the purpose of Title IX, which ensured that equal funding should be applied for both male and female athletic programs in schools. However, with the recognition of transgender students and their rights, the U.S. Department of Education offered a statement of clarification to the language of Title IX: “explaining that it will enforce Title IX’s prohibition on discrimination on the basis of sex to include: (1) discrimination based on sexual orientation; and (2) discrimination based on gender identity” (“Title IX”). Schools, students, and parents can now point to this language in debates about who is protected by Title IX status, and who can be included in the funding of gender-specific sports teams. Legal definitions often depend upon qualifiers, as in the case of the gun debate. Many on the pro-gun rights argument will not extend the definition of guns to include fully automatic guns; thus, they will often only agree with new gun restrictions that exclude AR 47s from such regulations.

Definitions involve emotional associations as well as descriptions of literal meaning. Public opinion can be swayed by casting a person involved in a very public event as “famous” or “infamous,” a term that has decidedly negative connotations. In the case of Trayvon Martin, a young black man who was shot by George Zimmerman, a white man, Martin was defined alternately as a “boy in a hoodie” or as a “potential thug.” And Zimmerman was defined as “a neighborhood watch leader” or “private citizen” by some, and a “vigilante” by others. In each case, the label implies a definition of the person and his behavior, and this extends the impression built in the mind of the audience.

Strategies for definition

Referring to existing definitions

A dictionary definition can be helpful if the term under consideration is new or very unusual or uncommon, words which readers may be unfamiliar with, or whose definitions may have become obscured with modern use. If an argument takes the position that reduced literacy rates in freshman college students makes them less apt to learn from a professor who leans toward sesquipedalian speech, yet, such speech is exactly the challenge these students need to pull them away from their social media feeds and engage them in the vigorous mental workout that academia provides, the author is more likely to earn the trust of the audience if a dictionary definition is provided for this uncommon and archaic word: words that are a foot and a half long (O.E.D.).

Identifying emotional associations (connotations)

Emotional associations offer the various levels of meaning a word may have. For example, love can have several variants, such as platonic love, romantic love, familial love, passionate love, self-love, and even more specific ones, such as spirituality, philanthropy, humanity, nationalism/patriotism, and *agapé*, and each carries its own emotional tone which informs the definition. The essay “What is Poverty” offers multiple connotations of poverty through the numerous illustrations.

Defining a term based on what it’s not (negation)

Sometimes complex words are best explained by what they are *not*, specifically by contrasting the word to another term. Needs are often confused with wants, but needs are anything necessary for survival. For example, people often say “I need a vacation,” when what they really mean is, “I want a vacation.” You may *want* coffee, but you *need* water. You may *want* a new car, but a used one may suit your *needs*. In an article about sexual predators, Andrew Vachss says that when he tells people about the individuals he prosecutes for abuse against children, people often say, “that’s sick.” But he clarifies that there is a difference between “sick” and “evil.” A mother who hears voices in her head telling her to lock her baby in a closet is sick. A man who sells a child to pornographers is evil. “Sickness,” he says, “is the absence of choice,” while evil is the volition, the awareness of choice, and the intentional choice to commit a sinister act (Vachss).

Creating an original definition (stipulation)

This use of definition asks the reader to accept an alternate definition from the standard or commonly accepted one. This is usually the best way to utilize definition in an essay, as it allows the author the freedom to put his or her own spin on a key term. But the author must do it responsibly, providing supportive examples. For example, many young people believe that true parental love is the willingness to do *anything at all* for a child. However, real love isn’t expressed by doormat behavior. A parent who does his child’s homework so the child receives all “A” grades isn’t demonstrating love {note the use of negation here}. Rather, true parental love is the willingness to apply fair rules and limits on behavior in order to raise a child who is a good worker, a good friend, and a good citizen.

Elaborating on a definition (extended definition)

There is no rule about how long a definition argument should be. When a simple one-line definition will not suffice, writers can develop a multi-paragraph, multi-page or multi-chapter definition argument. For example, a newspaper article might explore at length what is meant by the phrase “cancel culture.” An entire book each might be needed to explain what is meant by the following terms: “critical race theory,” “microaggression,” “gender identity,” “fascism,” or

“intersectionality.” When the concept under examination is complex, contentious, or weighted by historical examples and emotional connotations, an extended definition may be needed.

Sample definition arguments

This sample outline for an essay titled “When Colleges Talk about Diversity, Equity, and Antiracism, What Do They Mean?” shows the structure of one definition argument.

The student essay “Defining Stereotypes” by Imanol Juarez can serve as another example. Annotations on this essay point out how Juarez uses several definition argument strategies.

- Sample definition essay “Defining Stereotypes” in PDF version with margin notes
- Sample definition essay “Defining Stereotypes” accessible version with notes in parentheses.

Exercises

How are attitudes to gender changing in today’s society? Come up with a definition argument you think has some validity about a current trend related to gender. What kind of evidence could be gathered to support this claim? How would you convince readers that this evidence is typical? You could choose one of the claims below or invent your own.

- People today still associate femininity with weakness and masculinity with strength.
- Women are still more nurturing than men.
- Teenagers today see gender as a spectrum.
- Cisgender people still fear transgender people.

Exercises

Construct a definition with criteria for one of the following terms, or another term of your choice related to gender. Feel free to research the terms to get ideas. Possible terms: masculine, feminine, androgynous, macho, femme, butch, manly, womanly, machista, metrosexual, genderqueer, third gender, transgender.

Exercises

Choose one of the following articles. Which of the definition strategies listed in this section can you identify in the argument? Can you think of any other strategies the author might have used?

- “The True Meaning of the Word ‘Cisgender’” by Dawn Ennis in *The Advocate*
- “The Definition of Terrorism” by Brian Whitaker in *The Guardian*

Attributions

- Parts of the above are written by Allison Murray and Anna Mills.
- Parts are adapted from the Writing II unit on definition arguments through Lumen Learning, authored by Cathy Thwing and Eric Aldrich, provided by Pima Community College and shared under a CC BY 4.0 license.

Screen-Reader Accessible Definition Essay 1

Format note: This version is accessible to screen reader users. Refer to these tips for reading our annotated sample arguments with a screen reader. For a more traditional visual format, see the PDF version of “Defining Stereotypes” above.

Imanol Juarez
Professor Peterkin
English 103
May 8, 2020

Defining Stereotypes

What defines you? As people, we often consider ourselves to be multifaceted, complex beings. (Note: The author opens

the essay with a personal question, a strategy to get the reader's attention.) Yet in every culture people stereotype others, and oversimplified beliefs about people and cultures have a negative impact every day. (Note: A literal definition of the word "stereotypes.") Even though America's society is exceptional in positive ways, it is also exceptional in its use of stereotypes, which can be seen through the racism that still pervades the U.S. Stereotyping is a form of racism that creates a single depiction of a group of people based on one aspect of their identity. (Note: The thesis defines stereotypes and the criteria the essay will use to explain this definition.)

Most cultures intentionally or unintentionally manipulate the images of a certain group or person, and as a result, stereotypical depictions are a widespread form of racism. (Note: The essay focuses on the connotation of stereotypes and how they function in the U.S.) For example, the Ferris State University's Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia can give a dark glimpse into racist depictions of Latinos: "The stereotypical depictions of Mexicans, especially those thought to be in the United States illegally, are harsh and demeaning. The men are portrayed as illiterate criminals. The women are depicted as hypersexual. Both men and women are portrayed as lazy, dirty, physically unattractive menaces" (Ferris State). (Note: Evidence for the assertion that stereotypes are racist.) In extreme cases, racial profiling can be considered a form of stereotyping. Racial profiling is "the use of race or ethnicity as grounds for suspecting someone of having committed an offense." One example of racial profiling took place on February 23, 2020, when two white men took the life of a young 26-year-old African American man named Ahmad Marquez Arbery while he was jogging around his neighborhood: "Gregory McMichael told the police that he thought Mr. Arbery looked like a man suspected in several break-ins in the area," demonstrating the most abhorrent outcome of racist stereotypes (*New York Times*).

Some may argue that there is such a thing as a good stereotype, but all stereotypes are inherently racist. (Note: Juarez addresses the counterargument to his definition of stereotypes.) Yes, many cultures have stereotypes that are positive, but are they truly beneficial? Sam Killermann states in "3 Reasons Positive Stereotypes Aren't That Positive," "Positive stereotypes exist for just about every identity and have the capacity to be just as damaging as the negative ones." Take the stereotype that people of Asian descent are good at math. Positive stereotypes not only set standards high but also discourage individuals from performing; good stereotypes can also alienate individuals and make them depressed because they don't have the characteristics everybody believes they have. (Note: The definition argument leads to a causal argument about how positive stereotyping can impact people.) There are many forms of stereotypes, but one thing is for sure: there is never such a thing as a good stereotype.

(Note: The Works Cited page uses MLA documentation style appropriate for an English class.)

Works Cited

"Mexican and Latino Stereotypes." *Mexican and Latino Stereotypes – Jim Crow Museum – Ferris State University*, www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/mexican.htm.

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The New York Times. "Ahmaud Arbery Shooting: A Timeline of the Case." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 8 May 2020, www.nytimes.com/article/ahmaud-arbery-timeline.html.

Attribution

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Sample Definition Outline

When Colleges Talk about Diversity, Equity, and Antiracism, What Do They Mean?

1. **Thesis:** Colleges sometimes use the terms “diversity,” “equity,” and “antiracism” as if they are interchangeable, but they have very different implications.
2. **Background:** Colleges are looking to use inclusive language to show their support for students who are at a disadvantage in their education because of who they are.
 1. Consider the history of academia, largely centered around white, Western European men.
 2. Social change movements have demanded progress
 1. The Civil Rights Movement lead to access, but no real changes in academic language.
 2. The Equal Rights Amendment increased interest and awareness of Women’s Studies.
 3. Chicano Rights Movement lead to the creation of Chicano Studies courses of study and major programs.
 3. In some cases, mainstream core curriculum maintains a Eurocentric Western male focus; in others, that’s no longer true.
3. **“Diversity”** emphasizes inclusion and representation of different identities.
 1. The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of “diverse”: “Different in character or quality; not of the same kind; not alike in nature or qualities” (OED).
 2. “Diverse” doesn’t refer to a precise form of identity, but can include race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability
 3. Such an open definition extends inclusion to all possible groups in an academic setting.
 4. Note that “Diverse” does not suggest a critique of systems of power that help some people and hurt others.
4. **“Antiracist”** draws attention to one form of oppression and the need to actively oppose that oppression
 1. How the term became popular
 1. The Black Lives Matter Movement: Social outrage over the murders of unarmed African Americans escalated with each new death: Trayvon Martin (2013), George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery
 2. X. J. Kendi’s work, *How to be an Antiracist* introduces the world to the definition of “antiracist.”
 3. The national conversation changes to include antiracist; educators take note and respond.
 2. “Antiracist” doesn’t refer to other forms of oppression, such as classism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, ableism, anti-immigrant sentiment or others.
5. **“Equity”** emphasizes providing educational resources to disadvantaged groups according to need.

1. The Center for Public Education defines equity as “when all students receive the resources they need so they graduate prepared for success.”
2. It suggests trying to compensate for systemic inequalities in how people are able to access their education based on class, race, gender, learning style, ability.
3. What equity doesn't mean (negation): Equity doesn't refer to equal opportunity or equal rights.
4. Image commonly used to show equity: Three people of varying heights pick apples from a tree. Each stands on a stool just high enough to allow them to reach.



Image by MPCA Photos on Flickr, licensed [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

6. **Conclusion:** When considering which term to choose or whether to use all three, we can think about whether we want to emphasize inclusion of an infinite range of identities, resistance against racism in particular, or the attempt to compensate for systemic inequalities and get all students what they need to succeed at a high level.

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10. Type 2: Evaluation Argument

Evaluation Arguments

What is an evaluation argument?

In college, professional life, politics, and everyday life, we constantly must assess how things measure up. We are faced with questions like the following:

- Does our employer treat us fairly?
- Does our local cafe deserve five stars or four?
- Is the “Free City” program that makes City College of San Francisco tuition free for residents a success?
- Is a particular hillside a good location for a wind farm?
- Does the president deserve their current approval rating?

To answer each of these questions and convince others that our answer is valid, we would need to make an evaluation argument. Most commonly, evaluation arguments rate their subject on a scale from positive to negative. Evaluation arguments make a claim about the quality of something. We can think of them as answering the question “How good or bad is it?”



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Criteria

Evaluation arguments usually need to define and justify the **criteria** they use to make the evaluation. These criteria may consist of moral standards, aesthetic standards, or tests of successful functioning. Depending on how controversial the criteria are, the argument may need to defend and explain why they have been chosen. How can we support our choice of criteria? We may cite precedent or the authoritative sources in the field, or we may discuss the merit of the criteria in themselves by arguing for the good results they lead to and aligning them with values we believe our audience will share.

Judgment

Once we have convinced readers that the criteria for quality are valid, we will need to articulate our **judgment** about the extent to which the subject meets or doesn't meet those criteria.

Evidence

Finally, the argument will need to provide **evidence** of the way in which the subject meets or does not meet the criteria. See 4.4: Decide How Strong the Evidence Is and 12.5: Developing Paragraphs. for ideas on the types of evidence to choose from.

Ranking criteria

In cases where there are multiple valid criteria, the writer may need to **rank** them in order of importance and justify this ranking. For example, an editorial supporting Alyesha Jenkins for mayor would need to explain what the city should be looking for in a mayor at the moment. The editorial might argue that the top priority should be finding someone who has a workable plan to address the homelessness crisis. It might then go on to identify as secondary priority finding someone who has been an effective leader of a large organization. Finally, it might argue that finding a candidate who will focus on ending police brutality in the city should be the third priority. Given these criteria, the argument might praise describe Alyesha Jenkins' concrete, popular plan on homelessness and background as a successful city supervisor and head of a law firm. It might note that her record on police brutality is limited, but we still judge her to be a strong candidate.

Types of criteria

We can classify evaluative arguments by the kind of criteria they use. They may focus on aesthetics, that is the appearance or appeal of something (a movie, a work of art, or a building), or practical concerns about how something functions, or moral judgements based on values.

Aesthetic Criteria

What makes a great film can be an academic question or an everyday debate among friends going to the movies. Film critics and Film Studies classes try to identify clear **aesthetic criteria** for award-worthy movies. Film blogger [Tyler Schirado](#), who writes for the San Diego Film festival, details criteria including acting quality, dialogue, pacing, plot coherence, cinematography, production design, and special effects. Each of those criteria could in turn include sub-criteria. For example, the criteria for the quality of the special effects might include both how innovative and how spectacular they are.

Operational Criteria

Sometimes the criteria that matter are very practical. We use **operational criteria** when we are looking for certain concrete results. What does the subject we are evaluating do? If we want to evaluate a new car's safety features, we will ended to see how it performs under challenging conditions. When the FDA evaluates and tests a new vaccine, they follow an set of procedures to test how the vaccine affects first cells, then animal bodies, and finally human bodies. The FDA considers the results of all these procedures to help it decide whether to approve the vaccine or not. And if the consumer has confidence in the FDA's standards for data collection, they can use the criteria about the vaccine's past record of immune protection and side effects to help them decide whether or not to get vaccinated.

Moral Criteria

An evaluation argument based on **moral criteria** will claim that something is right or wrong. It will need to appeal to shared values or make a case for a particular value that serves as criteria. Some values are nearly universal, such as honesty, reasonableness, and fairness, as we will discuss in [9.6: Moral Character](#). However, even values that seem universal may be defined differently by different groups. We each grow up in an environment that instills a particular set of family or cultural or religious values. These help to shape our own sense of morality, or personal values and codes that we chose to live by.

Many values may be unconsciously held, but a moral argument will need to articulate them explicitly in order to make its case. Remembering our discussion of assumptions in [4.5: Check the Argument's Assumptions](#), we recall that each argument is based upon spoken or unspoken beliefs (warrants), such as “free speech is worthy of protection,” or

“democracy is desirable,” or “cheating is wrong.” As we saw in [7.2: Tailoring an Argument to an Audience](#), it can be helpful to recognize our particular audience’s values and see where they align with our own. Convincing readers that we share values can enhance the sense of trust between reader and writer, as we will see in [Chapter 9: How Arguments Appeal to Trust and Connection \(Ethos\)](#).

As an example, the Motion Pictures Academy includes some moral criteria as well as aesthetic criteria when it selects winners for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actors. Responding to the #OscarsSoWhite campaign, the Academy of Motion Pictures decided to incorporate the value of inclusiveness into their criteria. In order to emphasize “the inclusion of people in underrepresented groups, including women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people and those with cognitive or physical disabilities,” they developed a [new set of criteria for nominations for Best Picture](#). The criteria state that starting in 2024, “To be eligible for best picture, a film must meet at least two standards across four categories: ‘Onscreen Representation, Themes and Narratives,’ ‘Creative Leadership and Project Team,’ ‘Industry Access and Opportunities’ and ‘Audience Development,’ (Rottenberg). Each of these new criteria responds to the demands for inclusivity and equity, and is evidence that criteria can and should evolve as social morals evolve.

Comparative Evaluation

Many times we will need to evaluate the worth of one subject in relation to another in order to judge which is better. Of course, we will need to decide on the basis for comparison, or the criteria to be used, and make that basis clear. Then we will need to evaluate each subject according to the criteria. In comparisons, ranking the criteria will often be important because one subject may do better on one criterion and worse on another. We’ll need to know which criterion is more important in order to decide which comes out ahead overall.

The point-by-point organizational technique described in [3.9: Comparing and Contrasting Arguments](#) can be helpful in structuring such an essay because it allows us to write about one criterion at a time and see how both subjects compare on that one point before moving on to the next criterion. For example, we might compare the job of being a nanny with the job of being a preschool teacher. In one section, we would compare earnings for each job, and in another section, we would discuss potential for professional growth. If nannies come out ahead on earnings and teachers come out ahead on professional growth opportunities, then we will need to rank these criteria in order of importance to decide which job to recommend.

Sample evaluation arguments

To get a sense of what research-based evaluation arguments look like in college classes, see this sample evaluation argument essay prompt and the sample outline to match it. For a full sample evaluation essay, see “Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States.” Annotations on that essay point out how the author uses evaluation argument strategies. We offer it in two formats:

- Sample evaluation essay “Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States” in PDF version with margin notes
- Sample evaluation essay “Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States” accessible version with notes in parentheses

Reflect on the following questions to construct your own evaluation argument.

- What makes a person a good role model? Choose your top three criteria.
- How would you rank those criteria in order of importance?
- Choose two prominent public figures from history, pop culture or politics, dead or alive, who would be interesting to compare as role models.
- Evaluate each person according to the three criteria you identified.
- Which figure comes out as the better role model?
- If you ranked the criteria differently, would the other one come out ahead?
- What is most controversial in your evaluation? Is it the choice of criteria, the ranking of the criteria, or the idea that your figure fits certain criteria?

Sample Evaluation Argument Prompt and Outline

Below is a sample essay prompt that calls on students to make a case that a particular environmental focus will meet certain criteria for engaging the public. We offer one sample argument outline to respond to the prompt.

Sample Evaluation Argument Prompt

Background

Environmental groups and journalists choose many different approaches to engaging the public. Clearly, they need to raise awareness about urgent concerns, but they also need to consider what viewers will connect to emotionally. Some issues have direct adverse effects for humans, like toxins in the water we drink. Others have immediate effects on ecosystems, like the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. Others, like endangered species such as elephants and whales, become symbols of human longing, empathy, and reverence.

Assignment

Choose one environmental issue you would recommend such groups to focus on and explain your choice. What

makes this issue both scientifically urgent and emotionally appealing? In order to make your case, consider how you will measure urgency (By statistics on health impacts? Species extinction? Economic disruptions?) and how you will gauge the emotional appeal (By the popularity of past memes and documentaries and campaigns on the issue? By its connection to popular leisure activities? By how relatable it is?).

Sample Evaluation Argument Outline



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Title: My Love is as Great as the Ocean: Engaging Citizen Oceanic Stewards

I. Thesis Statement: Because of its scientific importance and its power in the human imagination, the ocean should be a focus of environmental advocacy.

II. Topic Sentence: The ocean has symbolic resonance because in many cultures, it is connected with the birth of life and powerful goddesses and gods.

1. Mami Wata, a West African water goddess, is important to many in the African Diaspora and has her own priests today.
2. In Hindu mythology and classic texts, Samudra and Varuna play key roles as gods of the ocean.
3. In Greek mythology, Eros, or love, gave birth to earth, Gaia, which included the sea.
4. Greek gods like Poseidon and Roman Neptune have figured in western popular culture for many centuries.
5. In the Ancient Summerian text *Enuma Elish*, the goddess Tiamat gives birth to all life by releasing her waters around Earth.

III. Topic Sentence: The ocean also has symbolic resonance because it gave rise to the first life forms.

1. Ancient myths have their parallel in scientific fact.
2. Science has popularized the idea that life likely originated in the oceans over 3 billion years ago.
3. 2021 research into microbe fossils in South African gold mines supports the idea that life first formed in thermal vents on the sea floor.

III. Topic Sentence: Our visceral response to the ocean's presence is even more powerful than its symbolism.

1. Our intuitive sensory and emotional response to the ocean is deep.
2. We love the ocean because it's powerful; it humbles us with its relentless kinetic energy.
3. It grounds us with its refreshing breeze and rhythmic waves, renewing our spirits.
4. It promotes well-being: water contains negative ions which counter the positive ions that cause bad moods.

III. Topic Sentence: Oceans help heal our planet; they counteract various environmental problems.

1. In addition to fast-disappearing rainforests, oceans provide the majority of our oxygen
2. Recent climate science tells us we're at the tipping point. Oceans help maintain atmospheric temperatures by absorbing carbon dioxide.

IV. Topic Sentence: Yet oceans are being profoundly damaged by human activities.

1. As oceans absorb carbon dioxide, they get more acidic, which threatens species that depend on hard shells.
2. Millions of tons of plastic enter the ocean every year, creating huge garbage patches.
3. Overfishing has depleted fish stocks: there may be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050 unless trends change.

Conclusion: Perhaps if environmental groups focus more on spreading these ideas, many more people will help protect the ocean and feel their love for it grow.

1. While science is an excellent reason to take action, our basic humanity should be commanding us to protect and cherish the oceans that begat us.
2. Love is the greatest quality humans possess and it can and should guide us to protect our mother ocean.

Attributions

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Screen-Reader Accessible Annotated Evaluation Argument

Format note: This version is accessible to screen reader users. Refer to these tips for reading our annotated sample arguments with a screen reader. For a more traditional visual format, see the PDF version of “Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States” above.

Universal Health Care Coverage for the United States

The United States is the only modernized Western nation that does not offer publicly funded health care to all its citizens; the costs of health care for the uninsured in the United States are prohibitive, and insurance companies are often more interested in profit margins than providing health care. These conditions are incompatible with U.S. ideals and standards. Universal health care coverage is a better system for all citizens because it is more cost-effective and upholds the value of human life. (Note: The thesis evaluates universal healthcare based on two specific criteria.)

One of the most common arguments against providing universal health care coverage (UHC) is that it will cost too much money, but in fact, UHC is a cheaper option than private insurance if one considers all costs. (Note: This body paragraph addresses the criteria of cost by answering the question, “How cheap is universal healthcare?” The author summarizes a counterargument about cost and then refutes it.) While providing health care for all U.S. citizens would cost a lot of money for every tax-paying citizen, citizens need to examine exactly how much money it would cost, and more importantly, how much money is too much when it comes to opening up health care for all. Those who have health insurance already pay a considerable amount of money, and those without coverage are charged unfathomable amounts. The cost of publicly funded health care versus the cost of current insurance premiums is unclear. In fact, some Americans, especially those in lower income brackets, could stand to pay less than their current premiums.

Under the current system, even patients with coverage must pay for some treatments out of pocket. (Note: This paragraph continues the discussion of cost, introducing a particular case in which the current system means high costs for patients.) Each day an American acquires a form of cancer, and the only effective treatment might be considered experimental by an insurance company and thus is not covered. The costs may be so prohibitive that the patient will either opt for a less effective, but covered, treatment; opt for no treatment at all; or attempt to pay the costs of treatment and experience unimaginable financial consequences. Medical bills in these cases can easily rise into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, which is enough to force even wealthy families out of their homes and into perpetual debt. Even though each American could someday face this unfortunate situation, many still choose to take the financial risk. Instead of gambling with health and financial welfare, U.S. citizens should press their representatives to set up UHC, where their coverage will be guaranteed and affordable.

A common argument against UHC in the United States is that other comparable national health care systems, like that of England, France, or Canada do not deliver timely patient care. (Note: Introduces a counterargument.) UHC opponents claim that sick patients in these countries often wait in long lines or long wait lists for basic health care. A fair amount of truth lies in these claims, but Americans must remember to put those problems in context with the problems of the current U.S. system as well. (Note: The author admits seeing some merit in the counterargument before they go on to offer a rebuttal.) It is true that people often wait to see a doctor in countries with UHC, but we in the United States wait as well, and we often schedule appointments weeks in advance, only to have onerous waits in the doctor’s waiting rooms.

Even if UHC would cost Americans a bit more money each year, we ought to reflect on what type of country we would like to live in, and what types of morals we represent if we are more willing to deny health care to others on the basis of saving a few hundred dollars per year. (Note: This paragraph focuses on the criteria of values.) In a system that privileges capitalism and rugged individualism, little room remains for compassion and love. It is time that Americans realize the amorality of U.S. hospitals forced to turn away the sick and poor. UHC is a health care system that aligns more closely with the core values that so many Americans espouse and respect, and it is time to realize its potential.

Despite the opponents' claims against UHC, a universal system will save lives and encourage the health of all Americans. It is time for Americans to start thinking socially about health in the same ways they think about education and police services: as a right of U.S. citizens.

Attributions

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Chapter Attribution

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II. Type 3: Causal Arguments

Causal Arguments

Causal arguments attempt to make a case that one thing led to another. They answer the question “What caused it?” Causes are often complex and multiple. Before we choose a strategy for a causal argument it can help to identify our purpose. Why do we need to know the cause? How will it help us?

Purposes of causal arguments

To get a complete picture of how and why something happened

In this case, we will want to look for multiple causes, each of which may play a different role. Some might be background conditions, others might spark the event, and others may be influences that sped up the event once it got started. In this case, we often speak of **near causes** that are close in time or space to the event itself, and **remote causes**, that are further away or further in the past. We can also describe a **chain of causes**, with one thing leading to the next, which leads to the next. It may even be the case that we have a **feedback loop** where a first event causes a second event and the second event triggers more of the first, creating an endless circle of causation. For example, as sea ice melts in the arctic, the dark water absorbs more heat, which warms it further, which melts more ice, which makes the water absorb more heat, etc. If the results are bad, this is called a vicious circle.

To decide who is responsible

Sometimes if an event has multiple causes, we may be most concerned with deciding who bears responsibility and how much. In a car accident, the driver might bear responsibility and the car manufacturer might bear some as well. We will have to argue that the responsible party caused the event but we will also have to show that there was a moral obligation not to do what the party did. That implies some degree of choice and knowledge of possible consequences. If the driver was following all good driving regulations and triggered an explosion by activating the turn signal, clearly the driver cannot be held responsible.

In order to determine that someone is responsible, there must be a clearly defined **domain of responsibility** for that person or entity. To convince readers that a certain party is responsible, readers have to agree on what the expectations for that party in their particular role are. For example, if a patient misreads the directions for taking a drug and accidentally overdoses, does the drug manufacturer bear any responsibility? What about the pharmacist? To decide

that, we need to agree on how much responsibility the manufacturer has for making the directions foolproof and how much the pharmacist has for making sure the patient understands them. Sometimes a person can be held responsible for something they didn't do if the action omitted fell under their domain of responsibility.

To figure out how to make something happen

In this case we need to zero in on a factor or factors that will push the event forward. Such a factor is sometimes called a **precipitating cause**. The success of this push will depend on circumstances being right for it, so we will likely also need to describe the **conditions** that have to be in place for the precipitating cause to actually precipitate the event. If there are likely factors that could block the event, we need to show that those can be eliminated. For example, if we propose a particular surgery to fix a heart problem, we will also need to show that the patient can get to a hospital that performs the surgery and get an appointment. We will certainly need to show that the patient is likely to tolerate the surgery.

To stop something from happening

In this case, we do not need to describe all possible causes. We want to find a factor that is so necessary to the bad result that if we get rid of that factor, the result cannot occur. Then if we eliminate that factor, we can block the bad result. If we cannot find a single such factor, we may at least be able to find one that will make the bad result less likely. For example, to reduce wildfire risk in California, we cannot get rid of all fire whatsoever, but we can repair power lines and aging gas and electric infrastructure to reduce the risk that defects in this system will spark a fire. Or we could try to reduce the damage fires cause by focusing on clearing underbrush.

To predict what might happen in future

As Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor put it in *A Rhetoric of Argument*, “When you argue for a prediction, you try to convince your reader that all the causes needed to bring about an event are in place or will fall into place.” You also may need to show that nothing will intervene to block the event from happening. One common way to support a prediction is by comparing it to a past event that has already played out. For example, we might argue that humans have survived natural disasters in the past, so we will survive the effects of climate change as well. As Fahnestock and Secor point out, however, “the argument is only as good as the analogy, which sometimes must itself be supported.” How comparable are the disasters of the past to the likely effects of climate change? The argument would need to describe both past and possible future events and convince us that they are similar in severity.

Techniques and cautions for causal argument

So how does a writer make a case that one thing causes another? The briefest answer is that the writer needs to convince us that the factor and the event are correlated and also that there is some way in which the factor could plausibly lead to the event. Then the writer will need to convince us that they have done due diligence in considering and eliminating alternate possibilities for the cause and alternate explanations for any correlation between the factor and the event.

Identify possible causes

If other writers have already identified possible causes, an argument simply needs to refer back to those and add in any that have been missed. If not, the writer can put themselves in the role of detective and imagine what might have caused the event.

Determine which factor is most correlated with the event

If we think that a factor may commonly cause an event, the first question to ask is whether they go together. If we are looking for a sole cause, we can ask if the factor is always there when the event happens and always absent when the event doesn't happen. Do the factor and the event follow the same trends? The following methods of arguing for causality were developed by philosopher John Stuart Mill, and are often referred to as "Mill's methods."

- If the event is repeated and every time it happens, a **common factor** is present, that common factor may be the cause.
- If there is a **single difference** between cases where the event takes place and cases where it doesn't.
- If an event and a possible cause are repeated over and over and they happen to varying degrees, we can check whether they always increase and decrease together. This is often best done with a graph so we can visually check whether the lines follow the same pattern.
- Finally, ruling out other possible causes can support a case that the one remaining possible cause did in fact operate.

Explain how that factor could have caused the event

In order to believe that one thing caused another, we usually need to have some idea of how the first thing could cause the second. If we cannot imagine how one would cause another, why should we find it plausible? Any argument about **agency**, or the way in which one thing caused another, depends on assumptions about what makes things happen. If we are talking about human behavior, then we are looking for motivation: love, hate, envy, greed, desire for power, etc. If we

are talking about a physical event, then we need to look at physical forces. Scientists have dedicated much research to establishing how carbon dioxide in the atmosphere could effectively trap heat and warm the planet.

If there is enough other evidence to show that one thing caused another but the way it happened is still unknown, the argument can note that and perhaps point toward further studies that would establish the mechanism. The writer may want to qualify their argument with “may” or “might” or “seems to indicate,” if they cannot explain how the supposed cause led to the effect.

Eliminate alternate explanations

The catchphrase “**correlation is not causation**” can help us to remember the dangers of the methods above. It’s usually easy to show that two things happen at the same time or in the same pattern, but hard to show that one actually causes another. Correlation can be a good reason to investigate whether something is the cause, and it can provide some evidence of causality, but it is not proof. Sometimes two unrelated things may be correlated, like the number of women in Congress and the price of milk. We can imagine that both might follow an upward trend, one because of the increasing equality of women in society and the other because of inflation. Describing a plausible agency, or way in which one thing led to another, can help show that the correlation is not random. If we find a strong correlation, we can imagine various causal arguments that would explain it and argue that the one we support has the most plausible agency.

Sometimes things vary together because there is a common cause that affects both of them. An argument can explore possible third factors that may have led to both events. For example, students who go to elite colleges tend to make more money than students who go to less elite colleges. Did the elite colleges make the difference? Or are both the college choice and the later earnings due to a third cause, such as family connections? In his book *Food Rules: An Eater’s Manual*, journalist Michael Pollan assesses studies on the effects of supplements like multivitamins and concludes that people who take supplements are also those who have better diet and exercise habits, and that the supplements themselves have no effect on health. He advises, “Be the kind of person who takes supplements — then skip the supplements.”

If we have two phenomena that are correlated and happen at the same time, it’s worth considering whether the second phenomenon could actually have caused the first rather than the other way around. For example, if we find that gun violence and violence within video games are both on the rise, we shouldn’t leap to blame video games for the increase in shootings. It may be that people who play video games are being influenced by violence in the games and becoming more likely to go out and shoot people in real life. But could it also be that as gun violence increases in society for other reasons, such violence is a bigger part of people’s consciousness, leading video game makers and gamers to incorporate more violence in their games? It might be that causality operates in both directions, creating a feedback loop as we discussed above.

Proving causality is tricky, and often even rigorous academic studies can do little more than suggest that causality is probable or possible. There are a host of laboratory and statistical methods for testing causality. The gold standard for an experiment to determine a cause is a double-blind, randomized control trial in which there are two groups of people randomly assigned. One group gets the drug being studied and one group gets the placebo, but neither the participants nor the researchers know which is which. This kind of study eliminates the effect of unconscious suggestion, but it is often not possible for ethical and logistical reasons.

The ins and outs of causal arguments are worth studying in a statistics course or a philosophy course, but even without such a course we can do a better job of assessing causes if we develop the habit of looking for alternate explanations.

Sample annotated causal argument

The article “Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth’s Climate” by Jason West, published in *The Conversation*, can serve as an example. Annotations point out how the author uses several causal argument strategies.

- Sample causal essay “Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth’s Climate” in PDF version with margin notes
- Sample causal essay “Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth’s Climate” accessible version with notes in parentheses

Exercises

Reflect on the following to construct a causal argument. What would be the best intervention to introduce in society to reduce the rate of violent crime? Below are some possible causes of violent crime. Choose one and describe how it could lead to violent crime. Then think of a way to intervene in that process to stop it. What method from among those described in this section would you use to convince someone that your intervention would work to lower rates of violent crime? Make up an argument using your chosen method and the kind of evidence, either anecdotal or statistical, you would find convincing.

Possible causes of violent crime:

- Homophobia and transphobia
- PTSD
- Testosterone
- Child abuse
- Violence in the media
- Role models who exhibit toxic masculinity
- Depression
- Violent video games
- Systemic racism
- Lack of education on expressing emotions
- Unemployment
- Not enough law enforcement
- Economic inequality
- The availability of guns

Screen-Reader Accessible Annotated Causal Argument

Format note: This version is accessible to screen reader users. Refer to these tips for reading our annotated sample arguments with a screen reader. For a more traditional visual format, see the PDF version of “Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth’s Climate” above.

Jason West

From *The Conversation*

September 13, 2019

Climate Explained: Why Carbon Dioxide Has Such Outsized Influence on Earth’s Climate

(Note: The title frames the article as a causal argument, a demonstration of how carbon dioxide affects the climate.)

Climate Explained is a collaboration between The Conversation, Stuff and the New Zealand Science Media Centre to answer your questions about climate change.

Question

I heard that carbon dioxide makes up 0.04% of the world’s atmosphere. Not 0.4% or 4%, but 0.04%! How can it be so important in global warming if it’s such a small percentage?

I am often asked how carbon dioxide can have an important effect on global climate when its concentration is so small – just 0.041% of Earth’s atmosphere. And human activities are responsible for just 32% of that amount. (Note: Jason West presents his article as a rebuttal to a counterargument.)

I study the importance of atmospheric gases for air pollution and climate change. (Note: West establishes his credibility as a researcher on the subject.) The key to carbon dioxide’s strong influence on climate is its ability to absorb heat emitted from our planet’s surface, keeping it from escaping out to space. (Note: West summarizes his causal argument by explaining a mechanism that could account for CO₂’s surprising effect on temperature.)

Early greenhouse science

The scientists who first identified carbon dioxide’s importance for climate in the 1850s were also surprised by its influence. (Note: This bit of history underlines West’s sympathy for the surprise expressed in the opening question.) Working separately, John Tyndall in England and Eunice Foote in the United States found that carbon dioxide, water vapor and methane all absorbed heat, while more abundant gases did not.

Scientists had already calculated that the Earth was about 59 degrees Fahrenheit (33 degrees Celsius) warmer than

it should be, given the amount of sunlight reaching its surface. The best explanation for that discrepancy was that the atmosphere retained heat to warm the planet.

Tyndall and Foote showed that nitrogen and oxygen, which together account for 99% of the atmosphere, had essentially no influence on Earth's temperature because they did not absorb heat. (Note: West shows how scientists eliminated what seemed like likely causes for the warming effect.) Rather, they found that gases present in much smaller concentrations were entirely responsible for maintaining temperatures that made the Earth habitable, by trapping heat to create a natural greenhouse effect.

A blanket in the atmosphere

(Note: Comparing heat-trapping gases to a blanket helps readers visualize the causal argument.)

Earth constantly receives energy from the sun and radiates it back into space. For the planet's temperature to remain constant, the net heat it receives from the sun must be balanced by outgoing heat that it gives off. (Note: West gives background on what influences the earth's temperature.)

Since the sun is hot, it gives off energy in the form of shortwave radiation at mainly ultraviolet and visible wavelengths. Earth is much cooler, so it emits heat as infrared radiation, which has longer wavelengths.

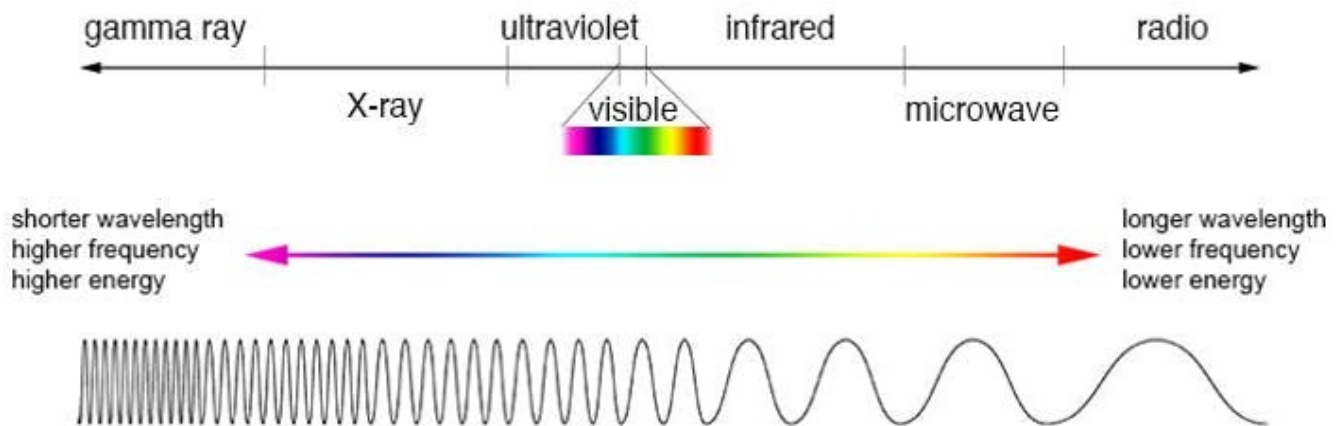


Figure 2: The electromagnetic spectrum is the range of all types of EM radiation – energy that travels and spreads out as it goes. The sun is much hotter than the Earth, so it emits radiation at a higher energy level, which has a shorter wavelength. NASA

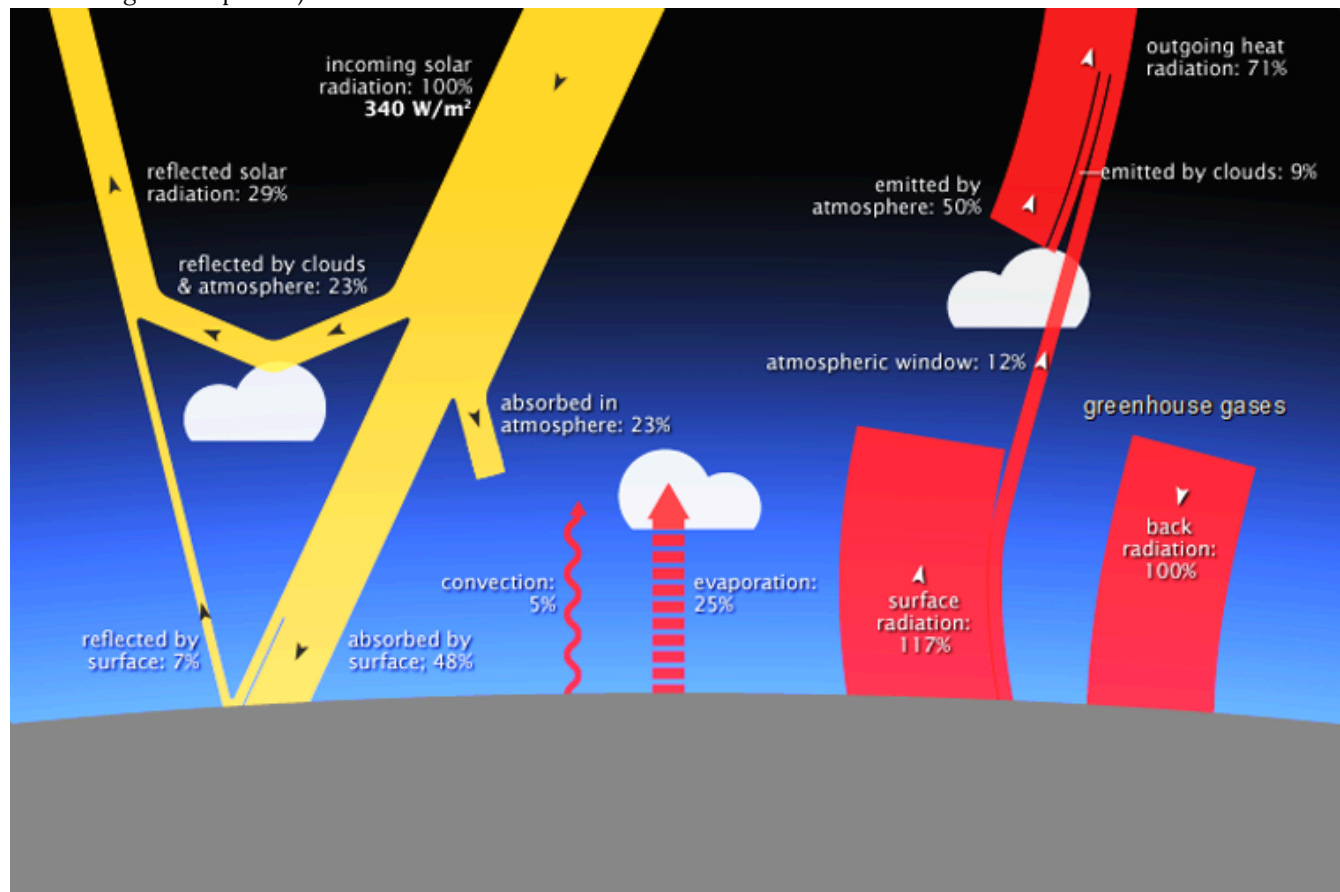
Carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases have molecular structures that enable them to absorb infrared radiation. The bonds between atoms in a molecule can vibrate in particular ways, like the pitch of a piano string. When the energy of a photon corresponds to the frequency of the molecule, it is absorbed and its energy transfers to the molecule. (Note: This section establishes agency, an explanation for how CO₂ could trap heat.)

Carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases have three or more atoms and frequencies that correspond to infrared radiation emitted by Earth. Oxygen and nitrogen, with just two atoms in their molecules, do not absorb infrared radiation. (Note: West explains why two other possible causes of warming, oxygen and nitrogen, do not trap heat.)

Most incoming shortwave radiation from the sun passes through the atmosphere without being absorbed. But most outgoing infrared radiation is absorbed by heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere. Then they can release, or re-radiate, that heat. Some returns to Earth's surface, keeping it warmer than it would be otherwise.

Figure 3: Earth receives solar energy from the sun (yellow), and returns energy back to space by reflecting some incoming light and radiating heat (red). Greenhouse gases trap some of that heat and return it to the planet's surface.

NASA via Wikimedia. (Note: Figure 3, with the rightmost red stripe pointing back to earth, makes a visual argument that greenhouse gases trap heat.)



Research on heat transmission

During the Cold War, the absorption of infrared radiation by many different gases was studied extensively. The work was led by the U.S. Air Force, which was developing heat-seeking missiles and needed to understand how to detect heat passing through air.

This research enabled scientists to understand the climate and atmospheric composition of all planets in the solar system by observing their infrared signatures. For example, Venus is about 870 F (470 C) because its thick atmosphere is 96.5% carbon dioxide. (Note: The comparison to Venus shows that a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere correlates with high temperature on another planet.)

It also informed weather forecast and climate models, allowing them to quantify how much infrared radiation is retained in the atmosphere and returned to Earth's surface.

People sometimes ask me why carbon dioxide is important for climate, given that water vapor absorbs more infrared radiation and the two gases absorb at several of the same wavelengths. The reason is that Earth's upper atmosphere controls the radiation that escapes to space. The upper atmosphere is much less dense and contains much less water vapor than near the ground, which means that adding more carbon dioxide significantly influences how much infrared radiation escapes to space. (Note: In this paragraph, West eliminates another possible driver of climate change, heat-trapping water vapor.)

Carbon dioxide levels rise and fall around the world, changing seasonally with plant growth and decay.

Observing the greenhouse effect

Have you ever noticed that deserts are often colder at night than forests, even if their average temperatures are the same? Without much water vapor in the atmosphere over deserts, the radiation they give off escapes readily to space. In more humid regions radiation from the surface is trapped by water vapor in the air. Similarly, cloudy nights tend to be warmer than clear nights because more water vapor is present.

The influence of carbon dioxide can be seen in past changes in climate. Ice cores from over the past million years have shown that carbon dioxide concentrations were high during warm periods – about 0.028%. During ice ages, when the Earth was roughly 7 to 13 F (4-7 C) cooler than in the 20th century, carbon dioxide made up only about 0.018% of the atmosphere. (Note: West gives more evidence from Earth's history to show a correlation between high carbon dioxide concentration and higher temperatures.)

Even though water vapor is more important for the natural greenhouse effect, changes in carbon dioxide have driven past temperature changes. In contrast, water vapor levels in the atmosphere respond to temperature. As Earth becomes warmer, its atmosphere can hold more water vapor, which amplifies the initial warming in a process called the “water vapor feedback.” (Note: West describes a feedback loop or vicious circle where warming leads to more warming.) Variations in carbon dioxide have therefore been the controlling influence on past climate changes.

Small change, big effects

It shouldn't be surprising that a small amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere can have a big effect. We take pills that are a tiny fraction of our body mass and expect them to affect us. (Note: West supports his causal claim by making a comparison to something more familiar, pills.)

Today the level of carbon dioxide is higher than at any time in human history. Scientists widely agree that Earth's average surface temperature has already increased by about 2 F (1 C) since the 1880s, and that human-caused increases in carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases are extremely likely to be responsible. (Note: West points to a correlation between CO₂ and temperature. Here he relies on experts to support the idea of causation.)

Without action to control emissions, carbon dioxide might reach 0.1% of the atmosphere by 2100, more than triple the level before the Industrial Revolution. This would be a faster change than transitions in Earth's past that had huge consequences. Without action, this little sliver of the atmosphere will cause big problems. (Note: West ends with a brief prediction. He compares the potential rise in carbon dioxide with past changes to imply that the consequences of human-induced climate change will be more dramatic than in the past.)

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12. Type 4: Proposal Argument

Proposal Arguments

Proposal arguments attempt to push for action of some kind. They answer the question “What should be done about it?”

In order to build up to a proposal, an argument needs to incorporate elements of definition argument, evaluation argument, and causal argument. First, we will need to define a problem or a situation that calls for action. Then we need to make an evaluation argument to convince readers that the problem is bad enough to be worth addressing. This will create a sense of urgency within the argument and inspire the audience to seek and adopt proposed action. In most cases, it will need to make causal arguments about the roots of the problem and the good effects of the proposed solution.

Below are some elements of proposal arguments. Together, these elements can help us create a sense of urgency about the need for action and confidence in your proposal as a solution.

Common elements of proposal arguments

Background on the problem, opportunity, or situation

Often just after the introduction, the background section discusses what has brought about the need for the proposal—what problem, what opportunity exists for improving things, what the basic situation is. For example, management of a chain of daycare centers may need to ensure that all employees know CPR because of new state mandates requiring it, or an owner of pine timberland in eastern Oregon may want to make sure the land can produce saleable timber without destroying the environment.

While the named audience of the proposal may know the problem very well, writing the background section is useful in demonstrating our particular view of the problem. If we cannot assume readers know the problem, we will need to spend more time convincing them that the problem or opportunity exists and that it should be addressed. For a larger audience not familiar with the problem, this section can give detailed context.

Description of the proposed solution

Here we define the nature of what we are proposing so readers can see what is involved in the proposed action. For example, if we write an essay proposing to donate food scraps from restaurants to pig farms, we will need to define what will be considered food scraps. In another example, if we argue that organic produce is inherently healthier for

consumers than non-organic produce, and we propose governmental subsidies to reduce the cost of organic produce, we will need to define “organic” and describe how much the government subsidies will be and which products or consumers will be eligible. See 7.2: Definition Arguments for strategies that can help us elaborate on our proposed solution so readers can envision it clearly.

Methods

If we have not already covered the proposal’s methods in the description, we may want to add this. How will we go about completing the proposed work? For example, in the above example about food scraps, we would want to describe and how the leftover food will be stored and delivered to the pig farms. Describing the methods shows the audience we have a sound, thoughtful approach to the project. It serves to demonstrate that we have the knowledge of the field to complete the project.

Feasibility of the project

A proposal argument needs to convince readers that the project can actually be accomplished. How can enough time, money, and will be found to make it happen? Have similar proposals been carried out successfully in the past? For example, we might observe that according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Rutgers University runs a program that sends a ton of food scraps a day from its dining halls to a local farm.¹ If we describe how other efforts overcame obstacles, we will persuade readers that if they can succeed, this proposal can as well.

Benefits of the proposal

Most proposals discuss the advantages or benefits that will come from the solution proposed. Describing the benefits helps you win the audience to your side, so readers become more invested in adopting your proposed solution. In the food scraps example, we might emphasize that the Rutgers program, rather than costing more, led to \$100,000 a year in savings because the dining halls no longer needed to pay to have the food scraps hauled away. We could calculate the predicted savings for our new proposed program as well.

In order to predict the positive effects of the proposal and show how implementing it will lead to good results, we will want to use causal arguments. The strategies in 7.5: Causal Arguments will be helpful here. This is a good time to refer back to the problem we identified early in the essay and show how the proposal will resolve that original problem.

Sample annotated proposal argument

The sample essay “Why We Should Open Our Borders” by student Laurent Wenjun Jiang can serve as an example. Annotations point out how Jiang uses several proposal argument strategies.

- Sample proposal essay “Why We Should Open Our Borders” in PDF with margin notes
- Sample proposal essay “Why We Should Open Our Borders” accessible version with notes in parentheses

Exercises

Find a proposal argument that you strongly support. Browse news and opinion websites, or try [The Conversation](#). Once you have chosen a proposal, read it closely and look for the elements discussed in this section. Do you find enough discussion of the background, methods, feasibility, and benefits of the proposal? Discuss at least one way in which you think the proposal could be revised to be even more convincing.

Works Cited

¹ “Fact Sheet About the Food Scraps Diversion Program at Rutgers University.” *Environmental Protection Agency*, U.S. October 2009, <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-managers-university>. Accessed 12/10/2021.

Attributions

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Screen-Reader Accessible Annotated Proposal Argument

Format note: This version is accessible to screen reader users. For a more traditional visual format, see the PDF version of “Why We Should Open Our Borders” above.

Laurent Wenjun Jiang

Prof. Natalie Peterkin

English 1C

July 25, 2020

Why We Should Open Our Borders

Refugees, inequalities, economic instabilities...the fact that we are bombarded by news on those topics every day is proof that we live in a world with lots of problems, and many of us suffer as a consequence. Nations have tried a variety of solutions, but the reality has not improved. Yet there exists a single easy measure that could solve almost all of the problems mentioned above: an open-border policy. The current border and immigration practices, including border controls and detention centers, are unjustified and counterproductive. (Note: The first body paragraph gives background on the problem, opportunity, or situation.) This paper discusses the refugee problem, the history of open-border policy, the refutations for the current border policies on philosophical and moral grounds, and the arguments why this open-border policy will work economically.

Refugees are a problem of worldwide concern. Recently the biggest wave of refugees came from Syria, which witnessed an eight-year-long civil war. In an interview, a Syrian refugee expresses deep sorrows regarding the loss of her home: “My brothers, sisters, uncles, neighbors, streets, the bread ovens, schools, children going to schools ...we miss all of that, everything in Syria is precious to us” she says, with tears hovering in her eyes (Firpo). She also exposes the terrible living conditions there: “[W]e didn’t run away, Syria has become uninhabitable. Not even animals could live there. No power, no running water, no safety, and no security. You don’t know who to fight...even when you lock yourself away, you’re not safe...I was most scared of seeing my children die right in front of me” (Firpo). (Note: Moving refugee testimonies serve as evidence supporting the claim that their situation is one of great urgency.) As heart-breaking as it sounds, we should also know that this is only the tip of the iceberg: Gerhard Hoffstaedter, an anthropologist at the University of Queensland, states that there are around 70 million displaced people in developing countries, which is the highest recorded number since the 1950s, causing the United Nations to call this world issue “a crisis.” The leading nations in the world do not offer enough support to displaced people living in abject conditions. Refugees at the U.S.-Mexico border and in Southeast Asia and Australia are constantly kept in detention centers. Many nations do not comply with the provisions signed in the 1951 Refugee Convention and the succeeding 1967 Protocol; they treat the refugees only as those in passive need of simply humanitarian aids (Hoffstaedter). In this crisis, it is our common responsibility as members of an international community to help those who are in need.

Historically, the large-scale control of the mobility of people is a relatively new phenomenon worldwide. (Note: This body paragraph starts with a definition argument to show that the current trend is new. This argument later becomes support for the idea that open borders are possible.) In the modern era, border signifies “ever more restrictive immigration policies” at the same time grants “greater freedom of mobility to capital and commodities”, as defined in the editorial “Why No Borders.” This creates a contradictory ideology that could cause potential harm to those who need to migrate (Anderson, et al.). John Maynard Keynes dates the beginning of this process only back to World War I in the early 20th century. However, this trend did not become widespread until after World War II. According to a historical outline created by Christof Van Mol and Helga de Valk, due to the booming in the industrial production in northwestern

Europe in the 1950s, the local workers were increasingly educated and gradually became white-collar employees, leaving vacancies in blue-collar occupations (Mol and Valk).

Thus, those countries started recruiting immigrants from other parts of Europe and even North Africa: for example, Germany and France started seasonal working programs to attract immigrants (Mol and Valk). Because of the lack of job opportunities in the other parts of Europe and North Africa and the need for workers in the industrializing countries in Northern and Western Europe, “international migration was generally viewed positively because of its economic benefits, from the perspective of both the sending and the receiving countries” (Mol and Valk). This early migration pattern within Europe provides the basic model for the European Union that builds on the fundamental ideology of the free movements of goods and human resources. In recent days, the European Union has become one of the biggest multinational organizations, which can also serve as a successful example of this open-border ideology, at least on a regional scale.

Borders do not satisfy the needs of contemporary societies. From both philosophical and moral perspectives, restrictive border policies are not justified. First of all, borders divide and subjugate people. The editorial “Why No Borders” describes the border as being “thoroughly ideological” (Anderson, et al.). The authors argue that because border policies try to categorize people into “desirable and non-desirable” according to their skills, race, or social status, etc., they thus create an interplay between “subjects and subjectivities,” placing people into “new types of power relationship” (Anderson, et al.). This is what is identified as the ultimate cause of the divisions and inequalities between people.

Some fear that competition from immigrants would cause a reduction in the wages of local workers (Caplan). (Note: In this body paragraph, the author attempts to disprove the counterargument about a downside of open borders for local workers.) This is not an uncalled-for worry, but it is also a misunderstanding of the nature of the open-border policy. Nick Srnicek reasons that this kind of competition has already existed under the current trend of globalization, where workers in developed countries are already competing against those in developing countries that have cheaper labor. He argues, “Workers in rich countries are already losing, as companies eliminate good jobs and move their factories and offices elsewhere” (Srnicek). The border serves companies by making workers in the developing world stay where wages are low. Thus, “companies can freely exploit” cheap labor. In this sense, workers on both sides will be better off under an open-border policy (Srnicek). A recent study from the University of Wisconsin-Madison investigating the economic implications of immigration between rich and poor countries concluded that the benefits of an open-border policy far outweigh the cons and that “the real wage effects are small” (Kennan).

Although an open border could lead to minor reductions in the wages of local workers in developed countries, there is a simple solution. Since the labor market follows the economic law of supply, work supply and wages are inversely related, meaning that the lower the supply of labor, the more wages rise. (Note: This paragraph could be seen as a limit and a rebuttal because the open border would need to be combined with changes to labor laws in order to avoid a possible bad effect.) Nick Srnicek proposes, “a shortening of the workweek...would reduce the amount of work supplied, spread the work out more equally among everyone and give more power to workers ... more free time to everyone” (Srnicek). Thus, although the open-border policy is not perfect, its downside is easy to address. (Note: The author does not investigate how much time, money, and will an open border policy would need; the argument remains mostly theoretical because it doesn’t address feasibility.)

As an expatriate myself, I can truly relate to this type of thinking. Due to a variety of the political, economic, and social limitations that I came across in my home country, I was not able to achieve self-actualization. In pursuit of a better education and a more free living environment, I went abroad and finally arrived in this country a few years ago. It was not until then that I gained a vision of my future. Now I am working in hopes that one day the vision could become reality. Sometimes I cannot help wondering what could happen if I was not so lucky to be where I am today. But at the same time, I am also conscious of the fact that there are also millions of people out there who cannot even conceive of what it is like to actualize their lives. (Note: The conclusion humanizes the possible benefits of the proposed solution.) I am sure that one of the mothers who escaped her war-torn home country with her family has the sole hope to witness her children growing up in a happy and free place, just like any mother in the world. I am sure that there is one little girl whose family fled her country in desperation who once studied so hard in school, dreaming of becoming the greatest scientist in the world. I am also sure that there is a young boy who survived persecutions and wishes to become a

politician one day to make the world a better place for the downtrodden. Because of borders, these children can only dream of the things that many of us take for granted every day. We, as human beings, might be losing a great mother, great scientist, great politician, or just a great person who simply wishes for a better world. But everything could be otherwise. Change requires nothing but a minimal effort. With open borders, we can help people achieve their dreams.

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PART IV

RESEARCH STRATEGIES

13. Strategies for Starting a Research Paper

Reasons to be excited about the research paper

Why are research papers assigned so often in college? Why is the research paper the focus of most writing courses?

It's really not because instructors are sadists. Quite the contrary! The research paper is the ultimate tool for academia, the ultimate tool for slow thinking.

The research paper writing process is a tried and true way to figure out what we think. It's a way to make progress in our understanding when the world is complicated. We immerse ourselves in information and listen to different voices on a topic and then come to some conclusion, moving the conversation forward.



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Writing a research paper is also the moment when we fully join the academic conversation on our own terms. As Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein put it in *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, the research paper is “the highest expression of the conversational approach to writing...it is a chance to practice a set of skills that you can use the rest of your life: going out into the community, finding a space for yourself, and making a contribution of your own” (219).



A research paper brings together many voices on a topic. Image by [Marc Wathiew](#) on [Flickr](#), licensed [CC BY NC 2.0](#).

Earlier chapters of this book have focused on responding to other people's arguments. Summaries and response essays require us to write about the things someone else considers important. As we start the research paper, we can enjoy a bit more freedom. We can focus on what seems most important to us. We can find multiple perspectives on the same topic and decide how much of each perspective to include and what to say about each. If we wrote a compare and contrast essay (See Section 3.7 ([link](#))) then we have had a chance to look at two texts side by side, but even that is limited. We are probably also itching to just make our own argument, focusing on what we want to focus on, and presenting our own vision based on all we know.

Many students, after some initial anxiety, ultimately find the research paper to be empowering and meaningful. Here are some of the aspects of the research paper to appreciate:

- We become relative experts on one micro subject.
- We build our own argument and choose our focus.
- We are free to use a variety of sources as needed.
- We don't have to cover everything. We have flexibility about which ideas from each source to include and how to narrow our topic so it isn't overwhelming.
- We pick our own sources; we don't have to use what a teacher selected.
- We can choose a topic that is personally meaningful because it connects to an area of interest, personal experience, or career plans.
- We get to teach the teacher and our classmates something they may well enjoy learning.

A chance to build on existing skills for responding to sources

Thus far we have focused on building skills for close reading and summary of one text (Chapters 2 and Chapter 3) then

deciding how strong that argument is (Chapter 4) and then adding to the conversation in specific response to that text (Chapter 5). All these skills will be useful in the research paper. We are ready now to use the same skills to talk about multiple texts. We will use them a little differently, though. For one thing, we won't be as thorough with each source. We'll focus more on summarizing, assessing and responding to main ideas rather than all the twists and turns of each argument.

Which new skills do we need? Thus far, we have focused on responding to texts put forward by our instructors. Now we are going to be finding them. We need to know where to look. We need to know which sources are credible. And we need to know how to choose sources that we can connect into a description of a conversation on a specific topic. The rest of this chapter will give guidance on these challenges.

In the summary, assessment and response essays the structure was to a large extent determined by the text we were responding to. Now we have a lot more freedom, so we will need new strategies to help us structure our writing. How do we come up with a central idea for our paper that builds on a bunch of different sources? Conversely, how do we mention multiple sources in different paragraphs and use them to support a central idea? Chapter 7 sections on definition, evaluation, causal, and proposal arguments will offer ideas for organization based on the type of main idea we are promoting.

Approaching A Research Paper Assignment



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Before getting started on a research paper, spending some time with the prompt will help keep us from becoming overwhelmed. A research essay **prompt** is the instructor's description of the assignment. It will answer many of the questions we may have about the requirements, such as the following:

1. How many sources will we need?
2. What types of sources (see Section 6.5: Types of Sources)?
3. Do the sources need to be found somewhere specific, like the college library?
4. How long does the research essay need to be?
5. Is there a specific structure we need to follow?



Image by [mmi9](#) from [Pixabay](#) under the Pixabay License.

The steps below will help us analyze the essay prompt to get a clear picture of what the finished paper should include.

- Circle or highlight all of the most important verbs in the essay prompt. Verbs are action words that often communicate the most important requirements, like *analyze*, *evaluate*, *describe*, and so on.
- Then, create a chart that lists the most important verbs on one side and the rest of the sentence on the other side. Use this [chart](#) as an example. This will contain the most important components of the assignment. You may use this to create a final draft checklist.
- Put a star next to the most important sections of the prompt, such as where the main writing task is summarized.
- Underline or highlight any words or requirements you don't understand, and ask your professor to clarify.
- Summarize the research essay prompt aloud by telling a friend or classmate what your assignment is about and the major requirements.

This chapter will guide you on what authoritative sources are, where to find them, and how to choose them, but always take your instructor's specific instructions into consideration.

Finding the Conversation that Interests You

Before we start talking about how to choose search terms and where to search for sources, it can help to get a sense of what we're hoping to get out of the research. We might think that in order to support a thesis we should only look for sources that prove an idea we want to promote. But since writing academic papers is about joining a conversation, what we really need is to gather the sources that will help us situate our ideas within that ongoing conversation. What we should look for first is not support but the conversation itself: who is saying what about our topic?

The sources that make up the conversation may have various kinds of points to make and ultimately may play very different roles in our paper. After all, as we have seen in Chapter 2, an argument can involve not just evidence for a claim but limits, counterarguments, and rebuttals. Sometimes we will want to cite a research finding that provides strong evidence for a point; at other times, we will summarize someone else's ideas in order to explain how our own opinion differs or to note how someone else's concept applies to a new situation.

As you find sources on a topic, look for points of connection, similarity and difference between them. In your paper, you will need to show not just what each one says, but how they relate to each other in a conversation. Describing this conversation can be the springboard for your own original point.



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Here are five common ways research papers can build on multiple sources to come up with an original point:

1. **Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a larger summary argument.** You might find that none of the sources you're working with specifically claim that early 20th-century British literature was preoccupied with changing gender roles but that, together, their findings all point to that broader conclusion.
2. **Combine research findings from multiple sources to make a claim about their implications.** You might review

papers that explore various factors shaping voting behavior to argue that a particular voting-reform proposal will likely have positive impacts.

3. **Identify underlying areas of agreement.** You may argue that the literature on cancer and the literature on violence both describe the unrecognized importance of prevention and early intervention. This similarity will support your claim that insights about one set of problems may be useful for the other.
4. **Identify underlying areas of disagreement.** You may find that the controversies surrounding educational reform—and its debates about accountability, curricula, school funding—ultimately stem from different assumptions about the role of schools in society.
5. **Identify unanswered questions.** Perhaps you review studies of the genetic and behavioral contributors to diabetes in order to highlight unknown factors and argue for more in-depth research on the role of the environment.

There are certainly other ways authors use sources to build theses, but these examples illustrate how original thinking in academic writing involves making connections with and between a strategically chosen set of sources.

Here's a passage of academic writing (an excerpt, not a complete paper) that gives an example of how a writer can describe a conversation among sources and use it to make an original point:

Willingham (2011) draws on cognitive science to explain that students must be able to regulate their emotions in order to learn. Emotional self-regulation enables students to ignore distractions and channel their attention and behaviors in appropriate ways. Other research findings confirm that anxiety interferes with learning and academic performance because it makes distractions harder to resist (Perkins and Graham-Bermann, 2012; Putwain and Best, 2011). Other cognitive scientists point out that deep learning is itself stressful because it requires people to think hard about complex, unfamiliar material instead of relying on cognitive short-cuts.

Kahneman (2011) describes this difference in terms of two systems for thinking: one fast and one slow. Fast thinking is based on assumptions and habits and doesn't require a lot of effort. For example, driving a familiar route or a routine grocery-shopping trip are not usually intellectually taxing activities. Slow thinking, on the other hand, is what we do when we encounter novel problems and situations. It's effortful, and it usually feels tedious and confusing. It is emotionally challenging as well because we are, by definition, incompetent while we're doing it, which provokes some anxiety. Solving a tough problem is rewarding, but the path itself is often unpleasant.

These insights from cognitive science enable us to critically assess the claims made on both sides of the education reform debate. On one hand, they cast doubt on the claims of education reformers that measuring teachers' performance by student test scores is the best way to improve education. For example, the Center for Education Reform promotes "the implementation of strong, data-driven, performance-based accountability systems that ensure teachers are rewarded, retained and advanced based on how they perform in adding value to the students who they teach, measured predominantly by student achievement." The research that Willingham (2011) and Kahneman (2011) describe suggests that frequent high-stakes testing may actually work against learning by introducing greater anxiety into the school environment.

At the same time, opponents of education reform should acknowledge that these research findings should prompt us to take a fresh look at how we educate our children. While Stan Karp of Rethinking Schools is correct when he argues that "data-driven formulas [based on standardized testing] lack both statistical credibility and a basic understanding of the human motivations and relationships that make good schooling possible," it doesn't necessarily follow that all education reform proposals lack merit. Challenging standards, together with specific training in emotional self-regulation, will likely enable more students to succeed.

In that example, the ideas of Willingham and Kahneman are summarized approvingly, bolstered with additional research findings, and then applied to a new realm: the current debate surrounding education reform. Voices in that debate were

portrayed as accurately as possible, sometimes with representative quotes. Most importantly, all references were tied directly to the author's own interpretative point, which relies on the source's claims.

As you can see, there are times when you should quote or paraphrase sources that you don't agree with or do not find particularly compelling. They may convey ideas and opinions that help explain and justify your own argument. Whether or not we agree with a source, we can focus on what it claims and how exactly its claims relate to other sources and to our own ideas.

¹Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2009).

²The sources cited in this example:

- Daniel T. Willingham, "Can teachers increase students' self control?" *American Educator* 35, no. 2 (2011): 22-27.
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14. Choosing a Focused Topic and Research Question



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Choosing a Focused Topic

We can start with any general area of interest within the guidelines of the research essay prompt. See Section 11.3: Brainstorming on ways to come up with ideas. In most cases, as we research we will want to narrow our topic from this general beginning in order to be able to really dive into the conversation on the topic and consider multiple perspectives and counterarguments. We will likely learn about many subtopics as we explore our initial topic. If we read an overview of the initial topic, we can often identify subtopics by the way that overview is organized into sections. Though [Wikipedia](#) is not a scholarly source, it can be very helpful for this phase of the research process. Along the way, we can decide which we are interested in, research some more, and possibly narrow the topic yet further — all before attempting a rough draft.

Let's take the example of solar energy as a general area of interest. As we research solar energy, we will see that there are different ways of harnessing the energy—from the sun's light and from the sun's heat. These correspond to the subtopics of solar photovoltaic energy and solar thermal energy. Say may decide we are more interested in solar thermal energy. We research that topic further and find that the sun's heat can be used to heat water in buildings or to heat the ventilation system, but they can also be used to generate electricity in large solar thermal power plants using a technique called Concentrated Solar Power, or CSP. Let's say that last use intrigues us. However, as we start to read the technical details of how these power plants work, we realize we are more interested in the potential of these plants than in their engineering. We are excited to read about the largest existing solar thermal power plant, the Ivanpah Solar Power Facility in the Mojave Desert of California, and we wonder how that facility can serve as a model for others. So the sequence of topics as we narrow it down goes like this:

1. Solar energy
2. Solar thermal energy
3. The Concentrated Solar Power technique for using solar thermal power to generate electricity
4. The potential renewable energy contribution of Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plants
5. Ivanpah Solar Power Facility as a model for renewable electricity through large-scale Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plants

If you are finding it hard to be specific about a topic, take a break from defining it and keep researching and brainstorming.



Developing a research question

Knowing what question we are trying to answer can help us research efficiently. Before we start, we can use our focused topic to articulate a **research question**.

If we already have a guess as to what our answer is likely to be, we may want to articulate that as well in what is sometimes called a **working thesis**. We can come up with a hypothesis that we will test against the information you find in sources as we research. Keep in mind, we may want to modify the question and the hypothesis as we learn more.

A good research question will be challenging or potentially arguable. It will suggest the need for further investigation. Here are three possible research questions related to the topic above:

- Should we build more large-scale Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plants like the Ivanpah Solar Power Facility?
- What are the environmental and social benefits of a large-scale Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plant like the Ivanpah Solar Power Facility?
- Under what circumstances will large-scale Concentrated Solar Power thermal energy plants like the Ivanpah Solar Power Facility be cost-effective choices for clean energy?

As we research, we can revisit our research question from time to time to see if we are on track to answer it or if we need to change the question or the research.

Exercises

Practice exercise

Write a phrase to describe a general area of interest you would like to investigate. Then do some preliminary online research using Wikipedia to identify subtopics. Choose one subtopic, do some research on it, and identify an even narrower subtopic. Create a list of at least three increasingly specific topics. Use the list above that started with solar energy as your model.

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15. Finding and Using Research Sources

Many college courses require students to locate and use secondary sources in a research paper. Educators assign research papers because they require you to find your own sources, confront conflicting evidence, and blend diverse information and ideas—all skills required in any professional leadership role. Some research papers also allow students to pursue their own topic of interest. In this section, we will answer the following questions:

1. **What are the different types of sources?**
2. **What makes a source scholarly or academic?**
3. **How can I create a research strategy?**
4. **Where can I find credible sources for my paper?**

1. What are the different types of sources?

Why is it that even the most informative *Wikipedia* articles are still often considered illegitimate? What are good sources to use instead? Above all, follow your professor's guidelines for choosing sources. He or she may have requirements for a certain number of articles, books, or websites you should include in your paper. Be sure to familiarize yourself with your professor's requirements.

The table below summarizes types of secondary sources in four tiers. All sources have their legitimate uses, but the top-tier ones are considered the most credible for academic work.

Figure 11.1 Source Type Table

Tier	Type	Content	Uses	How to find them
1	Peer-reviewed academic publications	Rigorous research and analysis	Provide strong evidence for claims and references to other high-quality sources	Academic article databases from the library's website
2	Reports, articles, and books from credible non-academic sources	Well researched and even-handed descriptions of an event or state of the world	Initial research on events or trends not yet analyzed in the academic literature; may reference important Tier 1 sources	Websites of relevant government/nonprofit agencies or academic article databases from the library's website
3	Short pieces from newspapers or credible websites	Simple reporting of events, research findings, or policy changes	Often point to useful Tier 2 or Tier 1 sources, may provide a factoid or two not found anywhere else	Strategic <i>Google</i> searches or article databases including newspapers and magazines
4	Agenda-driven or uncertain pieces	Mostly opinion, varying in thoughtfulness and credibility	May represent a particular position within a debate; more often provide keywords and clues about higher quality sources	Non-specific <i>Google</i> searches

Tier 1: Peer-reviewed academic publications

Sources from the mainstream academic literature include books and scholarly articles. Academic books generally fall into three categories: (1) textbooks written with students in mind, (2) academic books which give an extended report on a large research project, and (3) edited volumes in which each chapter is authored by different people.

Scholarly articles appear in academic journals, which are published multiple times a year to share the latest research findings with scholars in the field. They're usually sponsored by an academic society. To be published, these articles and books had to earn favorable anonymous evaluations by qualified scholars. Who are the experts writing, reviewing, and editing these scholarly publications? Your professors. We describe this process below. Learning how to read and use these sources is a fundamental part of being a college student.

Tier 2: Reports, articles, and books from credible non-academic sources

Some events and trends are too recent to appear in Tier 1 sources. Also, Tier 1 sources tend to be highly specific, and sometimes you need a more general perspective on a topic. Thus, Tier 2 sources can provide quality information that is more accessible to non-academics. There are three main categories.

First, official reports from government agencies or major international institutions like the World Bank or the United Nations; these institutions generally have research departments staffed with qualified experts who seek to provide rigorous, even-handed information to decision-makers.

Second, feature articles from major newspapers and magazines like *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *London*

Times, or *The Economist* are based on original reporting by experienced journalists (not press releases) and are typically 1500+ words in length.

Third, there are some great books from non-academic presses that cite their sources; they're often written by journalists. All three of these sources are generally well researched descriptions of an event or state of the world, undertaken by credentialed experts who generally seek to be even-handed. It is still up to you to judge their credibility. Your instructors, librarians, or writing center consultants can advise you on which sources in this category have the most credibility.

Tier 3. Short pieces from periodicals or credible websites

A step below the well-developed reports and feature articles that make up Tier 2 are the short tidbits that one finds in newspapers and magazines or credible websites. How short is a short news article? Usually, they're just a couple paragraphs or less, and they're often reporting on just one thing: an event, an interesting research finding, or a policy change. They don't take extensive research and analysis to write, and many just summarize a press release written and distributed by an organization or business. They may describe corporate mergers, newly discovered diet-health links, or important school-funding legislation.

You may want to cite Tier 3 sources in your paper if they provide an important factoid or two that isn't provided by a higher-tier piece, but if the Tier 3 article describes a particular study or academic expert, your best bet is to find the journal article or book it is reporting on and use that Tier 1 source instead. Sometimes you can find the original journal article by putting the author's name into a library database.

What counts as a credible website in this tier? You may need some guidance from instructors or librarians, but you can learn a lot by examining the person or organization providing the information (look for an "About" link on the website). For example, if the organization is clearly agenda-driven or not up-front about its aims and/or funding sources, then it definitely isn't a source you want to cite as a neutral authority. Also look for signs of expertise. A tidbit about a medical research finding written by someone with a science background carries more weight than the same topic written by a policy analyst. These sources are sometimes uncertain, which is all the more reason to follow the trail to a Tier 1 or Tier 2 source whenever possible. The better the source, the more supported your paper will be.

Tip

It doesn't matter how well supported or well written your paper is if you don't cite your sources! A citing mistake or a failure to cite could lead to a failing grade on the paper or in the class. For more information about citations, see **Chapter 7, "How and Why to Cite."**

Tier 4. Agenda-driven or pieces from unknown sources

This tier is essentially everything else. These types of sources—especially *Wikipedia*—can be helpful in identifying interesting topics, positions within a debate, keywords to search, and, sometimes, higher-tier sources on the topic. They often play a critically important role in the early part of the research process, but they generally aren't (and shouldn't be) cited in the final paper.

Exercise 1

Based on what you already know or what you can find from Tier 4 sources like *Wikipedia*, start a list of the people, organizations, sources, and keywords that seem most relevant to your topic. You may need this background information when you start searching for more scholarly sources later on.

Tip

Try to locate a mixture of different source types for your assignments. Some of your sources can be more popular, like Tier 3 websites or encyclopedia articles, but you should also try to find at least a few Tier 1 or Tier 2 articles from journals or reputable magazines/newspapers.

Key Takeaways

- There are several different categories of academic and popular sources. Scholarly sources are usually required in academic papers.
- It's important to understand your professor's requirements and look for sources that fill those requirements. Also, try to find a variety of different source types to help you fully understand your topic.

2. What makes a source scholarly or academic?

Most of the Tier 1 sources available are academic articles, also called scholarly articles, scholarly papers, journal articles, academic papers, or peer-reviewed articles. They all mean the same thing: a paper published in an academic journal after being scrutinized anonymously and judged to be sound by other experts in the subfield. Academic articles are essentially reports that scholars write to their peers—present and future—about what they've done in their research, what they've found, and why they think it's important. Scholarly journals and books from academic presses use a **peer-review** process to decide which articles merit publication. The whole process, outlined below, can easily take a year or more!

Figure 11.2 Understanding the Academic Peer Review Process



When you are trying to determine if a source is scholarly, look for the following characteristics:

- **Structure:** The full text article often begins with an abstract or summary containing the main points of the article. It may also be broken down into sections like “Methods,” “Results,” and “Discussion.”
- **Authors:** Authors’ names are listed with credentials/degrees and places of employment, which are often universities or research institutions. The authors are experts in the field.
- **Audience:** The article uses advanced vocabulary or specialized language intended for other scholars in the field, not for the average reader.
- **Length:** Scholarly articles are often, but not always, longer than the popular articles found in general interest magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*, etc. Articles are longer because it takes more content to explore topics in depth.
- **Bibliography or Reference List:** Scholarly articles include footnotes, endnotes or parenthetical in-text notes referring to items in a bibliography or reference list. Bibliographies are important to find the original source of an idea or quotation.

Figure 11.3 Example Scholarly Source

Transnational Debts: The Cultural Memory of Navajo Code Talkers in World War II

wasjournal.org /59-2015/cultural-memory-of-navajo-code-talkers-in-world-war-ii/

by Birgit Däwes, Professor and Chair of American Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria, and Director of the University of Vienna's Center of Canadian Studies.

Abstract

Even 70 years after it ended, World War II continues to endure in the global imagination. In the United States, images of the "Good War" prevail, and memories of the soldiers have been widely translated into displays of national heroism and glorification. At the same time, the celebratory narrative of national unity and democratic triumph is undercut by the counter-histories and experiences of the 44,000 Native American soldiers who served in this war. Their experiences and memories—in oral histories, interviews, as well as in fiction and film—challenge the narrative of a glorious nation in unison, especially in light of the historical conflicts between American nationalism and Native American political sovereignty. This paper investigates the specific memorial debt owed to the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II. Focusing on John Woo's film *Windtalkers* (2002), Joseph Bruchac's novel *Code Talker* (2005), and Chester Nez's memoir *Code Talker* (2011), I will inquire into the field of tension between tribal, national, and **transnational identities** and explore the ways in which these tensions are negotiated at different sites of commemoration, especially in contrast to the distorted, consumer-oriented memory produced by the Hollywood industry. Through codes of orality, communal identity, and **historicity**, I argue, counter-strategies of narrating and remembering World War II not only decisively shape a revisionist writing of recent history and enrich the multicultural narrative of 'America' by Indigenous voices, but they also substantially contribute to current debates about transnational American identities.

Author & Credentials

Specialized Vocabulary

When Navajo (Diné) Code Talker Chester Nez passed away in June 2014 at age 93, his death marked "the end of an era," according to CNN reporters AnneClaire Stapleton and Chelsea Carter: he was the last remaining of the original group of 29 Navajo soldiers who had been recruited to sign up with the U.S. Marine Corps in 1942 in order to develop a communications code based on the Navajo language (cf. Aaseng 27–37, Paul 23–33).¹ Long ignored by the public, over 400 Navajo code talkers, along with hundreds of other Indigenous American communications specialists from nations as diverse as the Comanche, the Seminole, the Hopi, the Assiniboine, or the Cherokee (cf. "Native Words"), substantially complicate and diversify the discourse of the so-called "Good War" and its debts. And while the Navajo code talkers were at least publicly recognized after 1968 (when the code and its developers were declassified), it took until 2013 for Congress to acknowledge the contributions of 33 other Native American nations to the war effort (Vogel).

Endnotes

Notes

¹ The other 28 original code talkers were Frank Pete, Willis Bitsie, Eugene Crawford, John Brown, Cosey Brown, John Benally, William Yazzie, Benjamin Cleveland, Nelson Thompson, Lloyd Oliver, Charlie Begay, William McCabe, Oscar Ilthma, David Curley, Lowell Damon, Blamer Slowtalker, Alfred Leonard, Dale June, James Dixon, Roy Begay, James Manuelito, Harry Tsosie, George Dennison, Carl Gorman, Samuel Begay, John Chee, Jack Nez, and John Willie (Paul 12).

² This was the case when they returned to reservations, where low-cost mortgages and free college education were not available. Ed Gilbert, however, also mentions that "the educational benefits of the GI Bill opened a new world" (60)—at least for those veterans willing to leave the reservation.

³ Another novel entitled *Code Talker: A Novel of the Navajo* was published in 2012 by non-Native author Ivon Blum.

Works Cited

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Adair, John. "The Navajo and Pueblo Veteran." *The American Indian* 4.1 (1947): 6. Print.

—, and Evon Vogt. "The Returning Navajo and Zuni Veteran." *American Anthropologist* 46.3 (Sept. 1947): 10–39. Print.

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Suggested Citation

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Reference List

Writing at Work

Finding high-quality, credible research doesn't stop after college. Citing excellent sources in professional presentations and publications will impress your boss, strengthen your arguments, and improve your credibility.

Key Takeaways

- Academic sources follow a rigorous process called peer-review. Significant time and effort goes into ensuring that scholarly journal articles are high-quality and credible.
- Skim a source and look for elements like a defined structure, author credentials, advanced language, and a bibliography. If these elements are included, the source is likely academic or scholarly.

3. How can I create a research strategy?

Now that you know what to look for, how should you go about finding academic sources? Having a plan in place before you start searching will lead you to the best sources.

Research Questions

Many students want to start searching using a broad topic or even their specific thesis statement. If you start with too broad of a topic, your search results list will overwhelm you. Imagine having to sort through thousands of sources to try to find ones to use in your paper. That's what happens when your topic is too broad; your information will also be too broad. Starting with your thesis statement usually means you have already formed an opinion about the topic. What happens if the research doesn't agree with your thesis? Instead of closing yourself off to one side of the story, it's better to develop a **research question** that you would like the research to help you answer about your topic.

Steps for Developing a Research Question

The steps for developing a research question, listed below, help you organize your thoughts.

Step 1: Pick a topic (or consider the one assigned to you).

Step 2: Write a narrower/smaller topic that is related to the first.

Step 3: List some potential questions that could logically be asked in relation to the narrow topic.

Step 4: Pick the question in which you are most interested.

Step 5: Modify that question as needed so that it is more focused.

Here's an example:

Figure 11.4 Developing a Research Question



Keywords & Search Terms

Starting with a research question helps you figure out precisely what you're looking for. Next, you'll need the most effective set of **search terms** – starting from main concepts and then identifying related terms. These **keywords** will become your search terms, and you'll use them in library databases to find sources.

Identify the keywords in your research question by selecting nouns important to the meaning of your question and leaving out words that don't help the search, such as adjectives, adverbs, prepositions and, usually, verbs. Nouns that you would use to tag your research question so you could find it later are likely to be its main concepts.

Example: *How are birds affected by wind turbines?*

The keywords are birds and wind turbines. Avoid terms like *affect* and *effect* as search terms, even when you're looking for studies that report effects or effectiveness. These terms are common and contain many synonyms, so including them as search terms can limit your results.

Example: *What lesson plans are available for teaching fractions?*

The keywords are lesson plans and fractions. Stick to what's necessary. For instance, don't include: children—nothing in the research question suggests the lesson plans are for children; teaching—teaching isn't necessary because lesson plans imply teaching; available—available is not necessary.

Keywords can improve your searching in all different kinds of databases and search engines. Try using keywords instead of entire sentences when you search *Google* and see how your search results improve.

For each keyword, list alternative terms, including synonyms, singular and plural forms of the words, and words that have other associations with the main concept. Sometimes synonyms, plurals, and singulars aren't enough. Also consider associations with other words and concepts. For instance, it might help, when looking for information on the common cold, to include the term *virus*—because a type of virus causes the common cold.

Here's an example of keywords & synonyms for our previous research question arranged in a graphic organizer called a Word Cloud:

Figure 11.5 What's Your Research Question?

Step 1. What's Your Research Question?

"Are self-driving cars safe?"

Step 2. Creating a Word Cloud

Use the boxes to write down two main ideas from your research question. Use the blank spaces to write down anything else related to your main idea. Anything! Everything! Places? Dates? Country?

- Autonomous vehicles
- Google cars • Waymo project
- United States • 2000-2017

Self-Driving
Cars

- crashes • accidents
- security • driver protection
- airbags

Safety

Once you have keywords and alternate terms, you are prepared to start searching for sources in library search engines called **databases**.

Exercise 2

Using the example shown above, create a Word Cloud for your research question. Think of at least five keywords and alternate terms you might use for searching. If your class had a library session, you will find a copy of the Word Cloud worksheet on your **ENG 111 InfoGuide** (<http://infoguides.virginiawestern.edu/eng111>) .

Key Takeaways

- It's a good idea to begin the research process with a question you'd like to answer, instead of a broad topic or a thesis statement.
- Creating a research strategy and finding keywords and alternate terms for your topic can help you locate sources more effectively.
- Creating a Word Cloud to organize your thoughts makes searching for sources faster and easier.

4. Where can I find credible sources for my paper?

The college library subscribes to **databases** (search engines) for credible, academic sources. Some are general purpose databases that include the most prominent journals in many disciplines, and some are specific to a particular discipline.

Tip

If you can't find the sources you need, visit the library or reach out to a librarian via phone, chat, or email.

Key Takeaways

- Academic libraries subscribe to special search engines for scholarly sources called databases.
- Librarians can help you find and use the best databases for your subject or topic.

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Figure 11.4 “Developing a Research Question,” Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 11.5 “What’s Your Research Question?,” Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.



16. Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

Getting Familiar with Academic Journal Articles

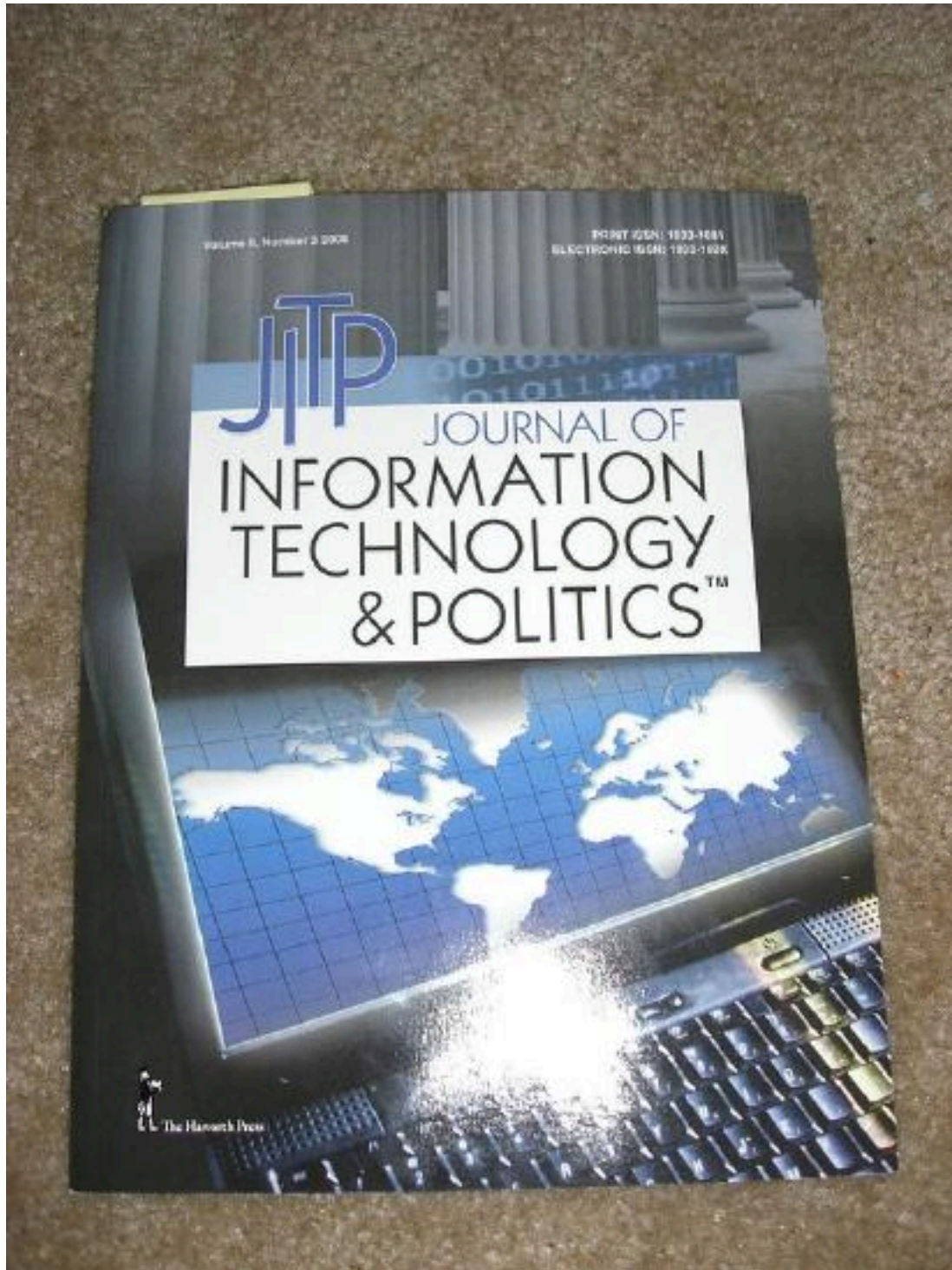


Photo by justgrimes on Flickr, licensed CC BY-SA 2.0.

Most of the Tier 1 sources available are academic articles, also called scholarly articles, scholarly papers, journal articles, academic papers, or peer-reviewed articles. They all mean the same thing: a paper published in an academic periodical after being scrutinized anonymously and judged to be sound by other experts in the subfield. Their origin explains both their basic structure and the high esteem they have in the eyes of your professors.

Many journals are sponsored by academic associations. Most of your professors belong to some big, general one (such as the Modern Language Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, or the American Physical Society) and one or more smaller ones organized around particular areas of interest and expertise (such as the Association for the Study of Food and Society, the International Association for Statistical Computing, or the Slavic and East European Folklore Association). There are also generalist organizations organized by region of the country or state, such as the Eastern Sociological Society or the Southern Management Association. Each of these associations exists to promote the exchange of research findings and collaboration in their disciplines. Towards this end, they organize conferences, sponsor working groups, and publish one or more academic journals. These journals are meant to both publicize and archive the most interesting and important findings of the field.

Academic papers are essentially reports that scholars write to their peers—present and future—about what they’ve done in their research, what they’ve found, and why they think it’s important. Thus, in a lot of fields they often have a structure reminiscent of the lab reports you’ve written for science classes:

1. **Abstract:** A one-paragraph summary of the article: its purpose, methods, findings, and significance.
2. **Introduction:** An overview of the key question or problem that the paper addresses, why it is important, and the key conclusion(s) (i.e., thesis or theses) of the paper.
3. **Literature review:** A synthesis of all the relevant prior research (the so-called “academic literature” on the subject) that explains why the paper makes an original and important contribution to the body of knowledge.
4. **Data and methods:** An explanation of what data or information the author(s) used and what they did with it.
5. **Results:** A full explanation of the key findings of the study.
6. **Conclusion/discussion:** Puts the key findings or insights from the paper into their broader context; explains why they matter.

Not all papers are so “sciencey.” For example, a historical or literary analysis doesn’t necessarily have a “data and methods” section; but they do explain and justify the research question, describe how the authors’ own points relate to those made in other relevant articles and books, develop the key insights yielded by the analysis, and conclude by explaining their significance. Some academic papers are review articles, in which the “data” are published papers and the “findings” are key insights, enduring lines of debate, and/or remaining unanswered questions.

Scholarly journals use a peer-review process to decide which articles merit publication. First, hopeful authors send their article manuscript to the journal editor, a role filled by some prominent scholar in the field. The editor reads over the manuscript and decides whether it seems worthy of peer review. If it’s outside the interests of the journal or is clearly inadequate, the editor will reject it outright. If it looks appropriate and sufficiently high quality, the editor will recruit a few other experts in the field to act as anonymous peer reviewers. The editor will send the manuscript (scrubbed of identifying information) to the reviewers who will read it closely and provide a thorough critique. Is the research question driving the paper timely and important? Does the paper sufficiently and accurately review all of the relevant prior research? Are the information sources believable and the research methods rigorous? Are the stated results fully justified by the findings? Is the significance of the research clear? Is it well written? Overall, does the paper add new, trustworthy, and important knowledge to the field? Reviewers send their comments to the editor who then decides whether to (1) reject the manuscript, (2) ask the author(s) to revise and resubmit the manuscript, or (3) accept it for publication. Editors send the reviewers’ comments (again, with no identifying information) to authors along with their decisions. A manuscript that has been revised and resubmitted usually goes out for peer-review again; editors often try to get reviews from one or two first-round reviewers as well as a new reviewer. The whole process, from start to finish, can easily take a year, and it is often another year before the paper appears in print.



Photo by Mitchell Luo on Unsplash under the Unsplash License.

Understanding the academic publication process and the structure of scholarly articles tells you a lot about how to find, read and use these sources:

1. **Find them quickly.** Instead of paging through mountains of dubious web content, go right to the relevant scholarly article databases in order to quickly find the highest quality sources.
2. **Use the abstracts.** Abstracts tell you immediately whether or not the article you're holding is relevant or useful to the paper you're assigned to write. You shouldn't ever have the experience of reading the whole paper just to discover it's not useful.
3. **Read strategically.** Knowing the anatomy of a scholarly article tells you what you should be reading for in each section. For example, you don't necessarily need to understand every nuance of the literature review. You can just focus on why the authors claim that their own study is distinct from the ones that came before.
4. **Don't sweat the technical stuff.** Not every social scientist understands the intricacies of log-linear modeling of quantitative survey data; however, the reviewers definitely do, and they found the analysis to be well constructed. Thus, you can accept the findings as legitimate and just focus on the passages that explain the findings and their significance in plainer language.
5. **Use one article to find others.** If you have one really good article that's a few years old, you can use article databases to find newer articles that cited it in their own literature reviews. That immediately tells you which ones are on the same topic and offer newer findings. On the other hand, if your first source is very recent, the literature review section will describe the other papers in the same line of research. You can look them up directly.

Students sometimes grumble when they're ordered to use scholarly articles in their research. It seems a lot easier to just Google some terms and find stuff that way. However, academic articles are the most efficient resource out there. They are vetted by experts and structured specifically to help readers zero in on the most important passages.

Practice Exercise \(\PageIndex{1}\)

Enter a topic into a general subscription database that has both scholarly and non-scholarly sources (such as Academic Search Complete or Academic OneFile); browse the first few hits and classify each one as scholarly or not-scholarly. Look at the structure of the piece to make your determination.

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PART V

CITING YOUR RESEARCH

17. Why Should We Cite Research?

In the modern world, it is wonderful to have access to information. It empowers us to have data and knowledge that leads us throughout our busy days and helps us organize our leisure time more efficiently. GPS devices and mobile phones help us locate unfamiliar destinations where we can find places to eat, to stay, and to get entertainment. All of this information is at our fingertips due to modern technology. To some degree, we all take advantage of this technology and use this information to our advantage.

But there are other types of information that we need, not just the kind that provides directions. We seek such information when we are ill and need to look up medical advice. We seek out information when looking for jobs or places to live. We even seek information when in school as very few subjects require only the use of a textbook. In our intellectual work, we need to search for information and then use it because every paper or project produced in college is a product of someone's creativity.

So how should we handle this product of creativity (a.k.a. information)? Let's think about a simple example: apple picking in the fall. It is a popular thing to do. People go to a farm, get bags or baskets, gather apples, and then line up to weigh and to pay for them. The farmers' hard work of growing the crops is being rewarded with the monetary payment from the customers.

Now imagine a different situation. You worked hard and wrote a very good paper and your roommate just copied a couple of paragraphs and inserted them into her own paper because the topics were related. Was this fair? How were you rewarded for your hard work? Just like the farmer was paid for the apples, your roommate should not take your work without making it clear that it was you who wrote it. She should not use your intellectual capital without attribution to you. What she did was an act of plagiarism—intellectual theft.

Imagine that you publish an article in your college newsletter. This article is your intellectual personal property and you hold the copyright, which means that no one has the right to reproduce all or any part of it (i.e. copy it) without your permission. If your roommate wants to distribute copies of your article, she would need to ask your permission in order to respect your copyrights. If, in another scenario, your roommate decides to use some information from your article in her paper, she should provide a citation (the information that will help the reader identify and find your article should they decide to do so). If she is using direct quotes from your article, again, she would need to put double quotes around your words and provide information about the author (you, in this instance) to avoid plagiarism. This avoids intellectual theft and gives credit where credit is due.

However, copyright¹ and plagiarism are just two aspects of ethical authorship with which you need to concern yourself. All writers must respect copyright, i.e. the rights of the author, and avoid plagiarism. However, depending upon what type of information you are using or creating, you may have to make considerations about other forms of intellectual property. Have you heard of **patents**? If you are planning a career in science and technology-related fields then you also have to learn more about patents. Patents deal with creators' rights to their invention of new machinery or processes. But machinery and processes are not the only things subject to patent laws. Plants and designs can also be patented. For more information on patent law,² consult the United States Patent and Trademarks Office (USPTO) <http://www.uspto.gov/patents/law/>. Additionally, trademarks and trade secrets are other forms of intellectual property with which you may have to deal.

In addition to being aware of intellectual property concerns regarding copyright, patents, **trademarks**, and **trade secrets**, you need to be mindful of **open access** issues which relate to valuable research data and academic publications

1. United States Copyright Office, Copyright Law of the United States and the Related Laws Contained in the Title 17 of the United States Code, Circular 92 (May 2021). <https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf>
2. *Consolidated Patent Laws*, USC 35 (March 2021). https://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/pac/mpep/consolidated_laws.pdf.

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There is a lot to learn about using information legally and ethically, but this knowledge will empower you in your academic work and ultimately allow you to succeed. The following examples and tips will get you off to a good start.

Unintentional Plagiarism

Have you ever thought about why teachers and professors seem to spend way too much time urging everyone to be sure to cite all of their sources properly? You've heard it all before: footnote this, endnote that, put this in the bibliography, capitalize this word, where are the italics, the commas, periods, hanging indents, yada yada yada! It's enough to make you give up and just wing it. But hold on a second while you gather your thoughts. Why do your professors always spend so much time urging you to do something that seems to have little practical purpose?

Scenario

Jackie was working on her 10-page research paper at the last minute. It was 3:30 am and her paper was due in class at 9:00 am. She finished the last sentence at 5:15 am, did a spellcheck and voila! Done! Groggy yet awake she went to class, turned in the paper and waited for her grade. She received an email from her professor that read, "There are some major issues with your research paper that I need to discuss with you. Please see me." Uh oh. What could it be?

When she nervously went to see him, Professor Muntz told Jackie that she hadn't cited any of her sources, and because she included a lot of direct quotes in her paper, she was guilty of plagiarism. She received an F on her paper and may be referred to the school administration for academic dishonesty.

Was she really guilty of something that bad? In fact, yes she was. In this chapter we will discuss the importance of managing your information sources and some tips on how to easily and effectively avoid Jackie's pitfall.

Real World Cases

Students often feel that they are being singled out in regard to plagiarism and academic dishonesty. But that is far from the case. There are numerous examples of scholars and other professionals who have been caught plagiarizing. One such person is Doris Kearns Goodwin, a famous historian who wrote the noted *Team of Rivals: the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (2006). She included material in an earlier book, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* (1987), from

three other sources without citing it, according to an article written by Michael Nelson.³ Although she has since published other works, her reputation has been tarnished, and people may not take her work as seriously because of this. Unfortunately, as Nelson points out in his article, she is not the only well-known historian caught plagiarizing.

Another example, with a dramatic outcome, is that of Eugene Tobin. He was the president of Hamilton College in New York State, when it was discovered that he had included plagiarized material in speeches he had given over the course of almost a decade. He resigned from his position as the head of this prestigious institution, admitting his guilt.⁴ Other college presidents and administrators have also been caught violating academic trust: if you try a search using the terms *plagiarism* and *college president*, you may be dismayed at the number of results.

Like some of the historians Nelson cites in his article, many students fall into a trap when they do research because they fail to mention where they found all of their information. Thousands of students in schools, colleges, and universities are guilty of committing plagiarism, but often they don't know they are plagiarizing.

Let's look at plagiarism and how to avoid it, and then continue on to some other intellectual property issues you may need to deal with.

What is Plagiarism?

In short, plagiarism is when you use words, thoughts, or ideas that belong to someone else without giving them credit. In the classroom (and in the world of publishing), documenting your information sources is the only way others can tell how thorough and careful you've been in researching your topic. If you don't tell readers where your information came from, they may think (and many do) that you either made up the information or "stole" it. Failing to cite your sources is plagiarism.

By managing the sources in your papers, you encourage others to do the same and you can be a go-to expert for your friends and classmates when they need help with how to find out how to cite sources properly. The information and advice you impart may help them avoid serious difficulties. Some students truly don't know that they are doing something wrong when they **paraphrase** information without citing the information source. They might feel that paraphrasing the words of someone who is clearly an expert on the topic is the best way to write an accurate paper. And because they aren't quoting it directly, it doesn't need quote marks or attribution, does it? While the penalties they receive might (and this is a big "might") be less severe than someone who buys a paper online or copies and pastes big sections of material into their work, the penalties could still be substantial. Raising your friends' awareness so they won't face this situation would be a kind thing to do.

When to Cite

Now that you have gathered all of your information resources, you need to be mindful about how you used them in your research project. There are some very firm rules about what constitutes plagiarism:

- If you copy a sentence or paragraph verbatim (exactly) from a book, article, website, blog posting, or anywhere online or in print, you must provide information on the author and the publication in which the sentence or paragraph appears. This is known as "citing a source."

3. Michael Nelson, "The Good, the Bad, and the Phony: Six Famous Historians and Their Critics," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 78, no. 3 (2002): 377–394.

4. Maurice Isserman, "Plagiarism: A Lie of the Mind," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 34 (2003): B12.

- If you use some of the exact phrases in a sentence or paragraph, even if you are not copying the whole sentence or paragraph, you must cite your source.
- If you use original information that you have obtained from an interview or conversation with someone, you must cite your source.
- If you do not use the exact sentence or phrase but paraphrase it, or use the ideas inherent in the exact sentence or phrase, you must cite your source.
- If you reprint images, maps, diagrams, charts, or tables, you must cite your source.
- If you embed video files or audio files into your work, you must cite your source.

When Are Citations Not Needed?

- You do not need to provide citations for commonly known dates and facts. One guideline is that if a fact appears in more than five sources it is commonly known. However, if it was **not** common knowledge to you, and you use a source, then go ahead and cite it.
- You do not need to provide citations for common turns of phrase or idioms, such as “One in the hand is worth two in the bush.”

Five Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism

1. **Consider your need for information.** If you are contemplating intentionally plagiarizing something, ask yourself what information you need to finish your assignment and consider alternate means for finding it. Your professor, the Writing Center, and the TAMU Libraries are great places to go to get more information.
2. **Give yourself time.** Make sure that you leave enough time to complete your assignment. If you give yourself enough time to complete your assignment you will be able to ask for help when necessary and will not feel the pressure to “cut and paste” in sections of writing.
3. **Take notes.** When you are researching, always drop in the last name of the author, or even just a note saying “CITE,” in your writing. Take down as much bibliographic data as you can at the moment. This way you can keep track of your ideas and where they came from. You can format your citations later in the **revision** process.
4. **Ask for help.** If you are unsure about what you need to cite and what you don’t, ask your professor, a librarian, or a Writing Center consultant. Here is the address for the TAMU Libraries contact information: library.tamu.edu. Links for contacting librarians by phone, chat, text, or email are at the bottom of the page. The Writing Center’s website is writingcenter.tamu.edu. You can make an appointment to speak with a consultant.
5. **Ask questions about texts and talk to people.** You may feel like you don’t understand the assignment or the text and think that the only way to complete your work is to plagiarize. If this is the case, contact the professor (through email or by going to his/her office hours) to talk about the assignment and/or the text. Your professor is there to help you, and one-on-one meetings are available if you feel like you don’t want to ask questions in class. If you don’t want to talk to your professor, bounce ideas off of a friend, family member, or classmate. Talking about your readings is a great way to start coming up with ideas.

Chapter Attribution

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18. How Should We Cite Research?



Figure 13.1 Citation Needed

One of the most important skills you can develop as a student is the ability to use outside sources correctly and smoothly. Academic knowledge builds on the knowledge of others. When we cite others through our quotations and paraphrases, we start with ideas established by others and build upon them to develop our own ideas.

Specifically, this section will offer answers to these questions:

1. What is a quotation?
2. When should I quote?
3. How long should a quotation be?
4. What is a paraphrase?
5. When should I paraphrase?
6. What is effective paraphrasing?
7. When does paraphrasing become plagiarism?
8. How do I use signal phrases to introduce quotations and paraphrases?
9. How do I make a quotation work with the grammar of my own sentence?
10. How do I make a quotation work with the grammar of my own sentence if I am not quoting a complete sentence?
11. What punctuation should I use with quotations?
12. What is plagiarism?
13. Why should I cite?
14. How can I avoid plagiarism?
15. What is common knowledge?
16. What is MLA?
17. How do I format references?
18. What do I do if my source differs from the basic pattern for a reference?
19. How do I format in-text citations?

1. What is a quotation?

A quotation is one way you may make use of a source to support and illustrate points in your essay. A quotation is made up of exact words from the source, and you must be careful to let your reader know that these words were not originally yours. To indicate your reliance on exact words from a source, either place the borrowed words between quotation marks or if the quotation is four lines or more, use indentation to create a block quotation.

Once you have determined that you want to use a quotation, the following strategies will help you smoothly fit quotations into your writing. We will discuss these strategies in more detail later in this chapter.

- Signal phrases help you integrate quoted material into your essay.
- Quotations must be made to work within the grammar of your sentences, whether you are quoting phrases or complete sentences.
- Quotations must be properly punctuated.
- Quotations must contain a citation.

2. When should I quote?

Quote when the exact wording is necessary to make your point. For example, if you were analyzing the style choices in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, you would quote because it would be important to illustrate the unforgettable language or to use exact wording in a discussion of word choice and sentence structure. You would also quote if the exact wording captures information, tone, or emotion that would be lost if the source were reworded. Use quotations to assist with conciseness if it would take you longer to relate the information if you were to put it into your own words. Finally, if you cannot reword the information yourself and retain its meaning, you should quote it.

Source: It has begun. It is awful—continuous and earthquaking.

Quoting to preserve emotion: One nurse described an exchange between the two sides as "awful—continuous and earthquaking" (Burton 120).

3. How long should a quotation be?

Quote only as many words as necessary to capture the information, tone, or expression from the original work for the new context that you are providing. Lengthy quotations actually can backfire on a writer because key words from the source may be hidden among less important words. In addition, your own words will be crowded out. Never quote a paragraph when a sentence will do; never quote a sentence when a phrase will do; never quote a phrase when a word will do.

Source: It has begun. It is awful—continuous and earthquaking.

Quoting everything: One nurse described an artillery exchange between the two sides. She wrote, "It has begun. It is awful—continuous and earthquaking" (Burton 120).

Quoting key words: One nurse described an artillery exchange between the two sides as "awful—continuous and earthquaking" (Burton 120).

4. What is a paraphrase?

A **paraphrase** preserves information from a source but does not preserve its exact wording. A paraphrase uses vocabulary and sentence structure that is largely different from the language in the original. A paraphrase may preserve specialized vocabulary shared by everyone in a field or discipline; otherwise, the writer paraphrasing a source starts fresh, creating new sentences that repurpose the information in the source so that the information plays a supportive role in its new location. Just like a quotation, you cite the source so that readers can trace the information or idea back to the original source.

5. When should I paraphrase?

Paraphrase when information from a source can help you explain or illustrate a point you are making in your own essay, but when the exact wording of the source is not crucial.

Source: The war against piracy cannot be won without mapping and dividing the tasks at hand. I divide this map into two parts: that which anyone can do now, and that which requires the help of lawmakers.

Paraphrase: Researchers argue that legislators will need to address the problem but that other people can get involved as well (Lessig 563).

If you were analyzing Lessig's style, you might want to quote his map metaphor; however, if you were focusing on his opinions about the need to reform copyright law, a paraphrase would be appropriate.

6. What is effective paraphrasing?

Effective paraphrasing repurposes the information from a source so that the information plays a supportive role in its new location. This repurposing requires a writer to rely on her own sentence structure and vocabulary. She creates her own sentences and chooses her own words so the source's information will fit into the context of her own ideas and contribute to the development of her thesis.

Source: Citizens of this generation witnessed the first concerted attempt to disseminate knowledge about disease prevention and health promotion, downplaying or omitting altogether information about disease treatment.

Effective Paraphrase: Murphy pointed out that in the first half of the nineteenth century, people worked hard to spread information about how to prevent disease but did not emphasize how to treat diseases (415).

7. When does paraphrasing become plagiarism?

A paraphrase should use vocabulary and sentence structure different from the source's vocabulary and sentence structure. Potential plagiarism occurs when a writer goes through a sentence from a source and inserts synonyms without rewriting the sentence as a whole. Plagiarism also occurs when writers include the information from a source without including a citation giving the source credit.

Source: Citizens of this generation witnessed the first concerted attempt to disseminate knowledge about disease prevention and health promotion, downplaying or omitting altogether information about disease treatment.

Potential plagiarism: People of this period observed the first organized effort to share information about preventing disease and promoting health, deemphasizing or skipping completely information about treating diseases (Murphy 141).

The sentence structure of the poor paraphrase is identical to the sentence structure of the source, matching it almost

word for word. The writer has provided an in-text citation pointing to Murphy as the source of the information, but she is, in fact, plagiarizing because she hasn't written her own sentence.

8. How do I use signal phrases to introduce quotations and paraphrases?

Use signal phrases that mention your source to help your reader distinguish between the source and your own ideas. Do not drop quotes into your paper with no setup or explanation. This is your paper and your arguments must be supported; this includes showing how the quote or paraphrase connects to and proves your ideas. A signal verb introduces the quote that is coming and indicates your stance towards the material.

Figure 13.2 Some Sample Signal Verbs

acknowledge	emphasize
admit	illustrate
agree	note
argue	observe
assert	point out
claim	report
comment	state
compare	suggest
complain	summarize
describe	write

Use different verbs of expression to avoid being monotonous but also because some verbs are better for setting up the point you are making. For example, to stress weakness in a source's argument, you might choose to write that your source *admits* or *concedes* a point.

Paraphrase with signal phrase:

As the author points out, quotations are great, but sometimes paraphrases are better (DeVries 3).

Quotation with signal phrase:

In her diary, the nurse lamented that "one of the most stabbing things in this war is seeing the lines of empty motor ambulances going up to bring down the wrecks who at this moment are sound and fit" (Burton 413).

Some signal phrases do not make use of verbs but rely on signal phrases like *according to* or *in the opinion of* or *in the words of*.

9. How do I make a quotation work with the grammar of my own sentence?

Each quotation should be an element inside one of your own sentences and should not stand alone.

Example of an incorrect placement of quotation:

The author wrote about conditions for nurses during World War I. “One of the most stabbing things in this war is seeing the lines of empty motor ambulances going up to bring down the wrecks who at this moment are sound and fit” (Burton 441).

Notice that the quotation stands alone. It is not an element within one of your own sentences. Some beginning writers might try to correct the problem by changing the period after “World War I” to a comma. However, that simply tacks one sentence to the end of another and creates a punctuation error. Instead, each quotation must work within the grammar of one of your sentences.

One way to make a quotation work with sentence grammar is to place it after a verb of expression.

The author states, “One of the most stabbing things in this war is seeing the lines of empty motor ambulances going up to bring down the wrecks who at this moment are sound and fit” (Burton 498).

10. How do I make a quotation work with the grammar of my own sentence if I am not quoting a complete sentence?

A quoted phrase can play any number of roles in the grammar of a sentence: verb, subject or object, adjective or adverb. Look at the example below and pretend that there are no quotation marks. Would the sentence still be grammatical? Yes. That shows that the quoted material works with the grammar of the sentence.

The nurse makes the ambulances sound like tow trucks going to retrieve demolished vehicles when she writes that it was horrible to watch “empty motor ambulances going up to bring down the wrecks” of men (Burton 72).

To integrate a quotation into a sentence, omitting words from the source is acceptable if you follow two rules: use ellipses (...) to signal the omission and avoid distorting the source’s meaning. It is also acceptable to adjust capitalization and grammar provided that you follow two rules: use brackets [] to signal the change and, again, avoid distorting the source’s meaning.

Lessig argues against the position that “[f]ile sharing threatens... the ability of creators to earn a fair return from their creativity” (Lessig 203).

When he wrote his book, nearly everyone in the music industry felt that “[f]ile sharing threaten[ed]...the ability of creators to earn a fair return from their creativity” (Lessig 203).

11. What punctuation should I use with quotations?

Place quotation marks at the start and the end of direct quotations unless the quotation is long enough to justify the use of the block quotation format (four lines or more).

The in-text, or parenthetical, citation shows your reader where your quotation or paraphrase ends. In-text citations are inserted after the final quotation marks. An in-text citation is not found in the words that you are quoting; it is something you create to identify the source for your readers.

If the quotation immediately follows a verb capturing the act of expression, place a comma after the verb:

As the author wrote, “A free culture has been our past, but it will only be our future if we change the path we are on right now” (Lessig 287).

Under limited circumstances, a colon (:) can be used to introduce a quotation. The quotation must re-identify or restate a phrase or idea that immediately precedes the colon.

Lessig reached a radical conclusion about copyrighted material: “It should become free if it is not worth \$1 to you” (251).

12. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is using someone else's work without giving him or her credit. "Work" includes text, ideas, images, videos, and audio. In the academic world, you must follow these rules:

- When you use the exact words, you must use quotation marks and provide a citation.
- When you put the information into your own words, you must provide a citation.
- When you use an image, audio, or video created by someone else, you must provide a citation.

Plagiarism could happen with a sentence, a paragraph, or even just a word! For example, Stephen Colbert, of the television show *The Colbert Report*, made up the word "truthiness," meaning something that sounds like it should be true. If you say in a paper something has a ring of "truthiness," you should cite Colbert. If someone else's words catch your interest, you should cite them.

Figure 13.3 Colbert in May 2009



Key Takeaway

Giving your sources credit is important because it allows readers to trace your ideas back to the original source. Plagiarism also is a serious academic offense.

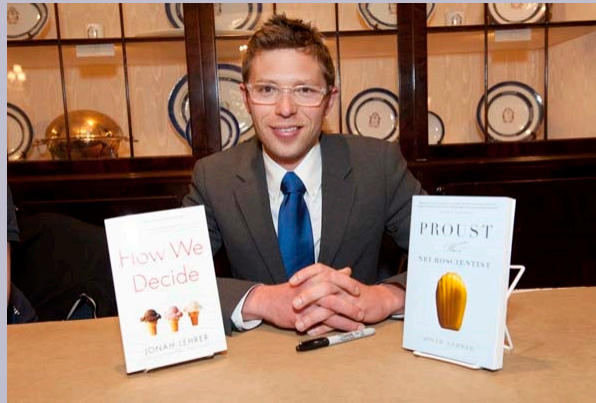


Image 13.4 Jonah Lehrer

Plagiarism isn't just a problem in the academic world. There are many examples of people who plagiarized at work and faced severe consequences. **Jonah Lehrer** (<https://tinyurl.com/yb2ah7me>), an author and staff writer for *The New Yorker*, fabricated quotes and copied previous work for his book *Imagine*. Once his plagiarism was revealed, his book was removed from bookstores and he was forced to resign from his job.

13. Why should I cite?

Whenever you use any outside sources, it is important that you document them completely and accurately. These outside sources include web sites, interviews, quotes from famous authors, books, documentaries, and much more. When you cite your sources, readers can find your strong sources and will trust you more. You make your work more useful to your reader through complete and careful documentation. Documentation in MLA, APA, or another style is an essential part of academic and professional writing.

When asked why you should cite your sources, many students reply, “So you don’t get accused of plagiarizing.” It is true that you must provide citations crediting others’ work so as to avoid plagiarism, but scholars use citations for many other (and more important!) reasons:

- To make your arguments more credible. You want to use the very best evidence to support your claims. For example, if you are citing a statistic about a disease, you should be sure to use a credible, reputable source like the World Health Organization or Centers for Disease Control (CDC). When you tell your reader the statistic comes from such a source, she will know to trust it– and thereby trust your argument more.

- To show you've done your homework. You want to make it clear to your audience that you've researched your subject, tried hard to inform yourself, and know what you are talking about. As you dive deeper into your research, you will probably find certain authors are experts on the topic and are mentioned in most of the articles and books. You should read these experts' works and incorporate them into your paper.
- To build a foundation for your paper. Great breakthroughs in scholarship are accomplished by building on the earlier, groundbreaking work of others. For example, Isaac Newton's law of universal gravitation would not have been possible without Johannes Kepler's law of planetary motion. What articles, books, and texts, inspired you to create your argument? You are not the first person to ever consider this issue. You want to provide references to the works which led to your thesis.
- To allow your readers to find the sources for themselves. Someone interested in your topic may be inspired to read some of the sources you used to write your paper. The citation within the paper tells readers what part of your argument is addressed by a particular source, and the full citation in the bibliography provides the information needed to track down that original research.

Key Takeaway

Citing sources doesn't just save you from plagiarizing, it also adds credibility to your arguments, helps you build a strong foundation for your work, and helps your readers locate more information about your topic.

14. How can I avoid plagiarism?

Don't procrastinate. Students who rush make careless mistakes, such as forgetting to include a particular citation or not having all the information needed for documentation. Students under pressure may also make poor choices, such as not documenting sources and hoping the professor won't notice.

Take careful notes. You need to be very clear in your notes whether you are writing down word-for-word what you found somewhere else, or if you are jotting down your own idea. You should take down all the information you will need to create your citations.

Cite your sources. Whenever you quote, paraphrase, summarize, or share an unusual fact, tell your reader where the information came from. The most common problem is citing quotes, but not citing paraphrases and summaries.

Document at the same time you draft. As you begin drafting, prepare a correctly formatted Works Cited page that captures the information also needed for in-text citations. Insert citations into your paper as you are writing it. If you cite-as-you-go, you won't consume time looking up information all over again at the end, and you make it less likely that you will misidentify or omit necessary documentation.

Get comfortable with the required citation style. The most commonly used citation styles are APA, MLA, and

Chicago/Turabian. While they share many similarities, they also have differing requirements about what and when to cite. In English, we use MLA style.

Figure 13.5 Citations



Ask your professor. If you're not sure about citing something, check with your instructor. Learning when to cite, how to lead-in to sources, and how to integrate them into your sentence structures and ideas takes place over time and with feedback.

Key Takeaway

Don't put off creating your citations until the last minute. Cite as you go and don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it along the way.

15. What is common knowledge?

Common knowledge is information that is accepted and known so widely you do not need to cite it:

- **Common sayings or cliches.** Examples: Curiosity killed the cat. Ignorance is bliss.
- **Facts that can be easily verified.** As you are conducting your research on a topic, you will see the same facts repeated over and over. Example: You are writing a paper on presidential elections, and you want to mention that Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980. Although you might not have known this fact before your research, you have seen it multiple times and no one ever argues about it.
- **Facts that you can safely assume your readers know.** Examples: Richmond is the capital of Virginia. The North won the U.S. Civil War. Fish breathe using gills.

Not all facts are common knowledge. You will still need to cite:

- **Facts that surprise you or your reader.** Example: Michelangelo was shorter than average (Hughes and Elam 4).
- **Facts that include statistics or other numbers.** Example: As of June 2009, forty-two states had laws that explicitly banned gay marriage, and six states had legalized it (U.S. Department of Labor).
- **If you use the exact words of another writer, even if the content could be considered common knowledge.**
Example: Lincoln's first campaign dates to "1832, when he ran as a Whig for the Illinois state legislature from the town of New Salem and lost" (Lincoln 451).

Tip

Common knowledge can be course-specific and audience-specific. For example, the number of bones in the leg could be considered common knowledge in an athletic training course. However, if you are using that fact in an English paper, you cannot assume your professor would have that knowledge, and you would need to cite it.

Key Takeaway

Deciding if something is common knowledge is tricky and can vary depending on your course and your topic. When in doubt, think about your audience.

16. What is MLA?

Different fields prefer different methods of documenting the use of sources. In English, the citation style is called MLA, from the initials of the Modern Language Association. When it comes to documentation, learn to notice and apply the particular style that you are asked to use. The basic concepts about what to cite are similar, but the methods for citing are different.

Writing at Work

Citations aren't just for research papers and schoolwork. Any time you use outside sources, including in a

speech or PowerPoint presentation, you should cite your sources. When you give credit to others, your work is strengthened!

17. How do I format references?

References record bibliographic information about sources that have been cited in the text. The necessary information is author, title, and details about publication (when the source was published and who published it). The order of the information and the punctuation, abbreviation, and spacing conventions may differ depending on the documentation style, but the purpose of the references will be the same: to allow a reader to easily track down your sources.

Basic MLA style reference for a book:

Author(s). *Title of the Book.* **Publisher,** **Date.**

Example:

Burton, Katelyn. *The Best Librarian in the World.* **Oxford Press,** **2016.**

Basic MLA style reference for a journal article:

Author(s). *"Title of the Article."* *Title of the Journal,* **Volume number,** **Issue number.** **Date, including month or season if you have it,** **Page numbers.** *Database Title,* URL/Link to the article.

Example:

Burton, Katelyn. *"Librarians Are Amazing."* *Library Journal,* **vol. 22,** **no. 3.** **Spring 2016,** **pp. 7-28.** **JSTOR,** <http://www.jstor.org/61245>.

Basic MLA style reference for a webpage:

Author(s). “**Title of the Webpage.**” **Title of the Website,** **Date, including day and month if you have it,** **URL/**
Link to the webpage.

Example:

Burton, Katelyn. “**Tips for Citing Sources.**” **Brown Library Website,** **14 June 2016,**
<http://http://www.viriniawestern.edu/library/index.php>.

18. What should I do if my source differs from the basic pattern for a reference?

The basic pattern is easy to recognize, but it is impossible to memorize all the variations for different sources. Some sources are available online; some sources are audiovisual instead of print; some sources have translators and editors. These and other details find their way into references. Learn to consult resources that illustrate some of the variations, and then ask yourself which examples seem closest to the source you are trying to document. Creating helpful references for your readers requires attention to both the basic pattern and to details, as well as problem-solving skills and creativity.

Tip

Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab offers detailed, useful, and up-to-date information about how to create citations using MLA or APA Style.

19. How do I format in-text citations?

In-text citations point readers toward a source that a writer is using in her own article or essay. They are placed inside your paragraphs, a position that explains why they are called “in-text.” In-text citations are also called parenthetical citations because information identifying the source will be placed inside parentheses (). A writer using MLA style will provide the following in-text information for her readers:

- Author’s last name or the name of the organization that created the source, unless it is previously mentioned in the text.
- Page number if available

Example: In the first half of the nineteenth, century people worked hard to spread information about how to prevent disease but did not emphasize how to treat diseases (Murphy 141).

Key Takeaways

- Different fields require different citation styles. In English, we use rules developed by the MLA.
- Don't panic when it comes to learning MLA. Just find an example that closely matches your source, and use the pattern to help you decide what to do.
- Librarians and your college's Writing Center can help you.

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19. MLA Style

MLA citations include two main elements: the works cited entry and the in-text citation. Below you will find sample citations for a variety of commonly-used reference types. For additional questions, consult the MLA Handbook (9th ed) or Purdue University's Online Writing Lab.

Works Cited

The Works Cited page is found at the end of your paper or project, and it includes all of the sources used when developing your paper or project. References are listed in alphabetical order by the author's last name, and each reference will have a hanging indent to make it easier to visually distinguish between each reference.

No Author

If there is no author, the title moves into the place of the author. The reference should then be alphabetized by the first word in the title within the reference list.

Example

"Down the Line." *The Olivo: An Annual*, The Corps of Cadets of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, 1895, pp. 54-58.

Single Author

In MLA style, when there is a single author, you should list them with the last name first, followed by the full first and (if available) middle name or initial.

Example

Lyke, Austin. "Institutional Effects of Higher Education Acquisitions: The Case of Texas A&M School of Law." *AERA Open*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2018, pp. 1-11. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858418816092>.

Two Authors

When there are two authors, the first author with their last name first, followed by their first name and (if available) middle name or initial. The name order is reversed with the second author, and the word *and* is used to connect the two. Be sure to keep the authors in the order in which they appear on the source.

Example

James, Adrian, and Lori Moore. "Understanding the Supplemental Instruction Leader." *Learning Assistance Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2018, pp. 9-29. ERIC, eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1170156.

Three or More Authors

When there are more than three authors, list the first author's last name, followed by *et al.* This is a Latin phrase meaning "and others" and is used in some citation formats as a way to abbreviate a list of names.

Example

LeMire, Sarah, et al. "Taking a Fresh Look: Reviewing and Classifying Reference Statistics for Data-Driven Decision Making." *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2018, pp. 230-234. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/refuserserq.55.3.230.

Institutional Author

Sometimes the author isn't a person – instead, it's authored by an organization. In this case, you'll list the organization as the author. If the organization and the publisher are the same, only list the organization as the publisher and use the title as the author.

Example

Stats in Brief: What High Schoolers and Their Parents Know about Public 4-year Tuition. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, Nov. 2018.

Book

In MLA format, books list the author, followed by the title in italics. MLA, unlike APA, does not typically include the place of publication. If the book is accessed electronically, note that it is an e-book (usually after the title).

Example

Dromgoole, Glenn. *Aggie Savvy: Practical Wisdom from Texas A&M*. State House Press, 2005.

Article from Database

You will commonly access articles from online databases like JSTOR or Project Muse databases, as opposed to finding them directly via a journal or in print. In this case, MLA format requires that you include the name of the article, name of the journal, *and* the name of the database in your citation.

To help the reader access the article, always include the doi (permanent url) if there is one available. It is generally listed near the top of the article. It may appear as doi: or <https://dx.doi.org/> followed by a sequence of numbers and/or letters. The doi number typically starts with the number 10, as in the example below. If there is a doi available, include it in your citation using the format [https://doi.org/\[insert doi number\]](https://doi.org/[insert doi number]). If a permalink is available instead of a doi, it can be used instead.

Example

Rutledge, Lorelei, and Sarah LeMire. "Broadening Boundaries: Opportunities for Information Literacy Instruction Inside and Outside the Classroom." *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2017, pp. 347-362. Project Muse, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2017.0021>.

Newspaper article

Example

Boren, Cindy. "It Took Seven Overtimes for Texas A&M to Beat LSU in the Craziest College Football Game of the Year." *Washington Post*, 15 Nov. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2018/11/25/it-took-seven-overtimes-texas-am-beat-lsu-craziest-college-football-game-year/ Accessed 6 Jul. 2019.

Website

Example

"About Us." *Aggie Shields*, 2019, www.aggieshields.org/about-us/

YouTube video

Example

“Fearless on Every Front.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Texas A&M University, 8 Sept. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIRup0e8kTk

Interview

Unlike APA style, MLA does include unpublished interviews in the Works Cited. Key details to include are the name of the person interviewed and the date of the interview.

Example

Anders, Kathy. Personal interview. 14 Jul. 2019.

Lecture

MLA format also includes lectures and lecture slides in the Works Cited.

Example

Pantuso, Terri. Lecture. Rhetoric and Composition, 10 Sept. 2019, Texas A&M University.

In-Text Citations

MLA in-text citations use the last name(s) of the author followed by a space and the page number for the source material, when available. Only use the page number if the source is paginated (e.g., a book chapter or article that has a page number in the corner). Do not include a page number for web sources that are not paginated.

In MLA format, you can also embed the author name directly into your sentence (e.g., Smith found that...), in which case the parenthetical at the end of the sentence should include only the page number.

No Author

As with the Works Cited entry, the in-text citation will use the title if there is no author available. Use the first few words of the title if it is long, and place it in quotation marks.

Example

("Down the Line" 56).

Single Author

Example

(Lyke 4)

Two Authors

When there are two authors, list the last names of both connected by an ampersand. Be sure to keep the authors in the order in which they appear on the source.

Example

(James and Moore 19).

Three or More Authors

When there are more than three authors, list the first author's last name, followed by *et al.* This is a Latin phrase meaning "and others" and is used in some citation formats as a way to abbreviate a list of names

Example

(LeMire et al. 261).

Institutional Author

As with the reference list, you'll list the organization as the author in the in-text citation.

Example (document is paginated)

(Texas A&M University 14).

Example (document is not paginated)

(Texas A&M University).

Chapter Attribution

Material in this chapter is slightly edited (derivative) and is from the following source:

LeMire, Sarah. "MLA Format." Pantuso, Terri, Sarah LeMire, and Kathy Anders, eds. *Informed Arguments: A Guide to Writing and Research*. Rev. 2nd ed. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2022. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

20. APA Style

Properly formatted APA citations include two main elements: the reference list entry and the in-text citation. Below you will find sample citations for a variety of commonly-used reference types. For additional questions, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.) or visit Purdue University's Online Writing Lab.

Reference List

The reference list is found at the end of your paper or project, and it includes all of the sources used when developing your paper or project. References are listed in alphabetical order by the author's last name, and each reference will have a hanging indent to make it easier to visually distinguish between each reference.

No Author

If there is no author, the title moves into the place of the author. The reference should then be alphabetized by the first word in the title within the reference list.

Example

Down the Line. (1895). In *The Olivo: An Annual* (pp. 54-58). The Corps of Cadets of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas.

Single Author

In APA style, when there is a single author, you should list them with the last name first, followed by the first and (if available) middle initial.

Example

Clark, D. T. (2009). Lending Kindle e-book readers: First results from the Texas A&M University project. *Collection Building*, 28(4), 146-149. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01604950910999774>

Two Authors

When there are two authors, list both and connect them with an ampersand (&). Be sure to keep the authors in the order in which they appear on the source.

Example

Rutledge, L., & LeMire, S. (2016). Beyond disciplines: Providing outreach to underserved groups by demographic. *Public Services Quarterly*, 12(2), 113-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228959.2016.1157565>

Three to Twenty Authors

When there are between three and twenty authors, list each one and use an ampersand (&) before the final author. Be sure to keep the authors in the order in which they appear on the source.

Example

LeMire, S., Graves, S. J., Hawkins, M., & Kailani, S. (2018). Libr-AR-y Tours: Increasing engagement and scalability of library tours using augmented reality. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 25(3), 261-279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2018.1480445>

Twenty-One or More Authors

When there are more than twenty authors, list the first 19 authors, then add an ellipsis (...) and the last author's name. The ellipsis (...) will take the place of author names between author number 19 and the final author. Be sure to keep the authors in the order in which they appear on the source.

Example

Agnese, R., Anderson, A. J., Asai, M., Balakishiyeva, D., Thakur, R. B., Bauer, D. A., Beaty, J., Billard, J., Borgland, A., Bowles, M.A., Brandt, D., Brink, P.L., Bunker, R., Cabrera, B., Caldwell, D.O., Cerdeno, D.G., Chagani, H., Chen, Y., Cherry, M., ... Zhang, J. (2014). Search for low-mass weakly interacting massive particles with SuperCDMS. *Physical Review Letters*, 112(24), 241-302. <https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.112.241302>

Institutional Author

Sometimes the author isn't a person – instead, it's authored by an organization. In this case, you'll list the organization as the author.

Example

Texas A&M University. (2019). *Aggie traditions*. <https://www.tamu.edu/traditions/index.html>

Book

Books list the author, followed by the year and the title in italics. APA also includes the publisher name. If the book is accessed electronically, also include the digital object identifier, or doi.

Example

Dromgoole, G. (2005). *Aggie savvy: practical wisdom from Texas A&M*. State House Press.

Article from Database

Articles from online databases like JSTOR or Project Muse databases include the author names, year of publication, and article title in sentence case. The journal title is put in italics, as is the journal volume number. The issue is in parentheses, followed by the page range.

To help the reader access the article, always include the doi (permanent url) if there is one available. It is generally listed near the top of the article. It may appear as doi: or <https://dx.doi.org/> followed by a sequence of numbers and/or letters. The doi number typically starts with the number 10, as in the example below. If there is a doi available, include it in your citation using the format [https://doi.org/\[insert doi number\]](https://doi.org/[insert doi number]).

Example

Rutledge, L., & LeMire, S. (2016). Beyond disciplines: Providing outreach to underserved groups by demographic. *Public Services Quarterly*, 12(2), 113-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228959.2016.1157565>

Newspaper article

If a newspaper article is found in a database such as *Newspaper Source* or *Access World News*, do not include the database name or URL. If the article is found through the open web, include the URL.

If an article is from an online newspaper (e.g., *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*), italicize the name of the newspaper. If the article is from an online news website (e.g., BBC News, CNN, Reuters), italicize the name of the article and not the site.

Example from an online newspaper

Boren, C. (2018, November 25). It took seven overtimes for Texas A&M to beat LSU in the craziest college football game of the year. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2018/11/25/it-took-seven-overtimes-texas-am-beat-lsu-craziest-college-football-game-year/>

Example from an online news website

Holcombe, M. (2019, July 18). Texas A&M's new program opens the door to college education for students with disabilities. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/18/us/texas-am-program-disabilities/index.html>

Website

Example

Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs. (2019). *Residence life*. <https://reslife.tamu.edu/>

YouTube video

Example

Texas A&M University. (2019, September 8). *Fearless on every front* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIRup0e8kTk>

Interview

In APA format, an unpublished interview is not included in the reference list. This is because the interview is not available for the reader to view. Instead, interviews are cited only in-text.

Lecture

In APA format, if you are citing your professor's lecture slides or content, you should point the reader to a digital copy of that content if possible. If housed in a course management system, direct the reader to the login page for that system.

Example

Pantuso, T. (2019, September 10). *Visual rhetoric* [PowerPoint slides]. eCampus. <https://ecampus.tamu.edu/>

In-Text Citations

APA in-text citations use the last name(s) of the author, followed by a comma and the year of publication. If a direct quotation, also include the page number where that quotation can be found. In APA format, you can also embed the in-text quotation directly into your sentence (e.g., Smith (2001) found that...) which then obviates the need for a parenthetical at the end of the sentence, except in the case of a direct quotation.

No Author

As with the reference list, the in-text citation will use the title if there is no author available. Use the first few words of the title if it is long and place it in quotation marks.

Example

("Down the Line," 1895).

Single Author

Example (no direct quotation)

(Clark, 2009)

Example (direct quotation)

(Clark, 2009, p. 42)

Note: If quoting a source that does not contain page numbers, provide a paragraph number, section number, or other way to help the reader find the quoted passage (e.g., Clark, 2009, para. 4).

Two Authors

When there are two authors, list the last names of both connected by an ampersand. Be sure to keep the authors in the order in which they appear on the source.

Example

(Rutledge & LeMire, 2016).

Three or More Authors

When there are three or more authors, list the first author's last name, followed by *et al.* This is a Latin phrase meaning “and others” and is used in some citation formats as a way to abbreviate a list of names.

Example

(Tribble et al., 2002).

Institutional Author

As with the reference list, you'll list the organization as the author in the in-text citation.

Example

(Texas A&M University, 2019).

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