

Argumentative Essays

The goal of argument is to gain your reader's assent to your central proposition, despite active opposition. Even wise, honest, caring people don't always agree on what is true or is fair. That's why argument is important in academic writing, where students try to convince professors and classmates to accept their ideas, where professors argue with students and with each other.

We argue not because we're angry, but because arguing causes us to examine our own and others' ideas carefully. It causes us to weigh conflicting claims; to make judgments about the nature of evidence and the methods of investigation; to state our thoughts clearly, accurately, and honestly; to consider, respectfully and critically, the ideas of others.

Stating Your Proposition

Besides defining the argument's scope, your proposition should make a claim that is open to debate. A statement like "Some people ruin things for everyone," is weak because it doesn't make clear what the writer has in mind. It's a vague generalization that provides no direction for writer or reader. If pressed to be precise, the writer might say, "A small group of thoughtless fans is jeopardizing the school's whole soccer program." Now we know what we're talking about.

Like a thesis, your proposition shouldn't be self-evidently true (asparagus is a vegetable) or claim something that's purely a matter of opinion (asparagus tastes great). It should have some uncertainty, yet make a claim that your readers will assent to in the end: "Our county agricultural agent should encourage valley farmers to plant more asparagus."

Anticipating Opposition

One essential characteristic of argument is your sense of an adversary. You aren't simply explaining a concept to someone who will hear you out and accept or reject your idea on its merit. Argument assumes active opposition to your proposition. To win acceptance, then, you must not only explain and support your proposition, but also anticipate and overcome objections that the opposition might raise.

In anticipating your opposition, consider questions like the following:

- How strong is the opposition?
- What arguments might it use against my proposition?
- How can I refute these arguments?
- Will I have to concede any points?
- Which of my arguments might the opposition try to discredit?
- How closely does my reader identify with the opposition?
- Can I see any weak links in the opposition's thinking?

Expanding Your Argument

Think in terms of paragraphs, and develop each point as though you planned to build a paragraph around it. You may already sense that developing paragraphs in support of your proposition will be different from developing paragraphs in opposition to it. That's because when you develop arguments for your

proposition, you are confirming; when you develop arguments against your proposition, you are refuting. Both kinds of development are essential. You must show that your own ideas are clear, reasonable, and solid. You must also show how your opposition's case is weak.

Writing paragraphs that confirm or support your proposition is similar to what you've done in the past. Most often you'll state the paragraph's main point in a topic sentence and go on to explain or define key terms, then give specific details that support the topic sentence. Paragraphs refuting the opposition, however, are usually concerned with exploring another person's thinking, especially with pointing out errors of logic and failures of insight. If you can show that your case is strong and the opposition's is weak, chances are excellent that the reader will be on your side at the end--and that's the goal.

Three Argumentative Appeals: Reason, Ethics, Emotion

While there's no infallible formula for winning over every reader in every circumstance, you should learn how and when to use three fundamental argumentative appeals. According to Aristotle, a person who wants to convince another may appeal to that person's reason (logos), ethics (ethos), or emotion (pathos). If we think of these three appeals as independent and of the writer as choosing just one, however, we miss the point. The writer's job is to weave the various appeals into a single convincing argument.

Reason

Briefly, informal reasoning requires clearly linking your general claims with concrete, specific data. Much of the clear thinking we do in our everyday lives follows logical principles, but in a less formal and systematic way than the thinking of a research scientist. And for most occasions this informal reasoning is adequate. Aristotle points out that it would be just as much a mistake to expect certain proofs in argument as to expect only probable proofs in mathematics. That's not to say your argument can be illogical, only that you shouldn't confuse formal logic with clear thinking or good sense, the essential qualities your argument should display.

Ethics

No matter how solid your reasoning, readers may not accept your argument unless they're also convinced that you're a person of wisdom, honesty, and good will. If you misrepresent the evidence, misunderstand the implications of your own value structure, or seek to hurt some individual or group, you can expect to alienate your readers.

The appeal to character is often subtle, affecting readers almost unconsciously, yet often decisively: "Ah, I see. This writer pretends to be a friend of Mexican-Americans, but her word choice shows that she understands almost nothing of our culture. And her proposal would undermine our whole way of life. Of course, she'd get to build her apartments, and it's obvious that's all she really cares about." If you realize that readers are likely to analyze your character and intentions this way, you'll see that the best way to put ethical appeal in your writing is to build a strong, healthy relationship with your readers. Convince them that they can trust you to be fair, honest, well-informed, and well-intentioned. Then, having established that trust, don't betray it.

Emotion

Many people believe that emotional appeals by their very nature subvert reason and are therefore better left to TV hucksters than to writers who want their ideas taken seriously. Because this common view has some validity, emotional appeals must be used with restraint and discretion, or they may prove counterproductive. Nevertheless, while an argument founded mostly on feelings and emotions may be

superficial and biased, an argument that is carefully reasoned and honestly presented probably won't be hurt by a bit of pathos. In fact, it may be helped.

One way to build pathos is to illustrate or dramatize an idea. This may involve little more than folding short descriptive and narrative examples into the argument. Are you arguing that your city needs to take stiffer measures against drunk drivers? Why not find a place to include a description of the face of a child who was injured in an accident caused by drinking? Or you might want to tell the story of a driver who caused several accidents because the individual's license was never revoked. Including such narrative and descriptive passages can help readers feel the urgency of your proposition so that it gets beyond the level of abstract intellectual speculation and becomes a matter of immediate human concern.

Careful word choice also influences an argument's emotional appeal. The point here is that the overall emotional texture of your argument is the result of many individual choices about which word to use. Should I speak of "drunk" or "intoxicated" drivers? Should I call them a "menace" or a "concern"? Should they be "thrown into jail" or "incarcerated"? Such choices, even though they must be made one at a time, can't be seen as independent of each other. Their force is cumulative. They communicate how you feel--and by implication think the reader ought to feel--about your subject. If you want the reader to identify with you emotionally, you'll choose words carefully, making sure they're appropriate for you as a writer, for your readers, and for your overall purpose in writing.

Form: Tradition and Innovation

By now, you've probably amassed many notes and ideas for your argument, but you may be wondering how to sort and organize this material into an essay. The following pattern, which gives the traditional Latin names for each section, may help. Like the thesis/support pattern, it offers a basic structural framework that can be modified for various writing contexts. The essential parts include the Introduction, Statement of the Case, Proposition, Refutation, Confirmation, and Conclusion.

Introduction - Draw your reader into the argument. Build common ground. Establish your tone and style. Establish your credentials. Clarify why the issue is important. Build ethos.

Statement of the Case - Tell the story behind the argument. Give any necessary background information. Illuminate the situational context. Clarify the issue. Characterize and define the issue in terms that are favorable to your point of view.

Proposition Statement - State your central proposition/thesis. Perhaps set up expectations by forecasting important subpoints that will be considered.

Refutation - Examine and refute opposition arguments. Wherever possible expose faulty reasoning. The following questions will help you spot some frequent ways in which people violate the basic principles of clear thinking.

1. Does the evidence truly warrant the general conclusions that the opposition has drawn?
2. Has all the evidence been considered or only evidence that favors the opposition's position?
3. Has the opposition considered all the alternatives or oversimplified and reduced them to two or three?
5. Are conclusions ever drawn from questionable generalizations?
6. Are words always used clearly, accurately, and honestly?
7. Does the argument depend on emotionally charged language?
8. Does the argument ever suggest that ideas or policies are good or bad simply because they are associated with certain individuals or groups?

9. Does the opposition ever argue by comparing one thing to another? If so, is the comparison fair and reasonable?
10. Does the opposition try to sweet-talk and flatter the reader?
11. Does the argument suggest that an idea or course of action is good just because everyone else believes or is doing it?

If you apply these questions to the opposition's case, you'll get a good idea of where the reasoning is vulnerable. In refuting, first show that you understand the opposing argument by summarizing or paraphrasing it in neutral language, then show how the argument is weak. If necessary, make concessions, but try to offer counter-arguments: True, no direct correlation has been shown between higher school funding and increased scores on standardized achievement tests, but these tests are only one measure of educational progress. Moreover, they are not designed to measure the achievement of school systems, but of individual students.

Confirmation - Develop and support your own case. Use examples, facts, and statistics to back up your claims. Avoid logical fallacies. Argue from authority, definition, analogy, cause/effect, value, and purpose. Base your appeal primarily on *logos*.

Once you have a clear vision of the confirmation's main points and supporting details, you can consider a strategy of disclosure. Which point should come first? Which next? Which last? One effective way of ordering the supporting points is to rank them in order of importance and then arrange them as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Second most important point | 3. Point of lesser importance |
| 2. Point of lesser importance | 4. Most important point |

Such an arrangement offers two advantages. It places your strongest points in positions of emphasis at the beginning and end of your confirmation. Also, your strongest point coming last, tends to anchor your argument, almost like the anchor person in a tug of war. If you were to lead off with your best point and then run through the rest, you might give the impression of weakness. The reader might feel you were gradually running out of ideas, becoming more and more desperate. However, if your readers are familiar with the subject, they'll see that you have something in reserve, that you've been scoring points steadily and consistently without even going to your real strength. Coming in the last position, that major point will have great emphasis--like the knock-out punch in a boxing match or the ace of trump in a game of bridge.

Conclusion - Whatever you do, end strongly. Finish with conviction. After all, if you aren't convinced, why should your reader be? You might end with an amplification (ringing conclusion), a review of your main points, a reference to something in your introduction, or a plea for action. You might also invite and facilitate defections from the opposition.

Adapting the Argumentative Pattern

Except for the fact that an introduction by definition demands the first spot and a conclusion the last, other sections can be moved around in a variety of effective ways. If the traditional order--introduction, statement of case, refutation, confirmation, conclusion--doesn't suit your needs, try an alternative.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Open with the introduction. | 1. Open with the introduction. |
| 2. Refute the strongest opposition point. | 2. Offer your proposition as an open question. |
| 3. State the case. | 3. State the case. |
| 4. Confirm your proposition. | 4. Examine and refute the opposition. |
| 5. Refute the weaker opposition points. | 5. Examine and confirm your proposition. |
| 6. End with the conclusion. | 6. Conclude that your prop. should be accepted |

One of the biggest challenges in composing an argument is structuring it. Once you have explored your topic and developed your ideas, you will need to consider the following questions:

- How should I begin my argument?
- In what order should I arrange the points I want to make?
- How can I most efficiently respond to opposing arguments?
- How should I conclude?

The answers to these questions will vary from one essay to another and from one kind of argument (such as a newspaper editorial) to another (a Web page). Even if no single plan will work for all arguments, you can benefit from being familiar with some basic principles of argumentation that may help you organize your argument effectively. Here we will discuss three traditional ways of structuring an argument:

- Classical arrangement
- Rogerian argument
- Logical arrangements

CLASSICAL ARRANGEMENT

Because classical theories of rhetoric developed at a time when most arguments were oral, the great works of classical rhetoric recommended strategies that could be easily understood by listeners. If speakers adhered to essentially the same plan, listeners were able to follow long, complex arguments because the main components were easily recognizable and the order in which they appeared signaled what was likely to follow.

The common plan for organizing an argument along classical lines included six main components: introduction, statement of background, proposition, proof, refutation, and conclusion, as follows.

Introduction <i>(Exordium)</i>	In the introduction you urge your audience to consider the case that you are about to present. This is the time to capture your readers' attention and introduce your issue.
Statement of Background <i>(Narratio)</i>	In the statement of background you narrate, or tell, the key events in the story behind your case. This is the time to provide information so that your audience will understand the nature of the facts in the case at hand.
Proposition <i>(Partitio)</i>	This component divides (or partitions) the part of the argument focused on information from the part focused on reasoning, and it outlines the major points that will follow. You must state the position you are taking, based on the information you have presented, and then indicate the lines the rest of your argument will follow.
Proof <i>(Confirmatio)</i>	Adhering carefully to your outline, you now present the heart of your argument: You make (or confirm) your case. You must discuss the reasons why you have taken your position and cite evidence to support each of those reasons.
Refutation <i>(Refutatio)</i>	In this key section you anticipate and refute opposing views. By showing what is wrong with the reasoning of your opponents, you demonstrate that you have studied the issue thoroughly and have reached the only conclusion that is acceptable in this case.
Conclusion <i>(Peroratio)</i>	The concluding paragraph(s) should summarize your most important points. In addition, you can make a final appeal to values and feelings that are likely to leave your audience favorably disposed toward your case.

Classical rhetoricians allowed variations on this plan, depending on, as the great Roman orator and scholar Cicero wrote, "the weight of the matter and the judgment of the speaker" (*De Oratore* I, 31). For example, a speaker was encouraged to begin with refutation when an audience was already strongly committed to an opposing point of view. But because this basic plan remains strong and clear, it can still help writers organize their thoughts.

One advantage of this method of arrangement is that it helps writers generate ideas for their arguments. If you follow the common classical plan for organizing your argument, you will have to generate ideas for each of the main parts. For example, you will have to provide background information about the issue at hand and include arguments to refute opposing points. As a result, your argument will tend to be thorough.

Much of classical rhetoric focused on political discourse, in which speakers publicly debated issues that required action by elected officials or legislatures. Because of this, classical arrangement can be especially useful when you feel strongly about an issue and you are trying to convince an audience to undertake a proposed course of action. Since classical rhetoric tends to assume that an audience can be persuaded when it is presented with solid evidence and a clear explanation of the flaws in opponents' reasoning, this plan for arranging an argument might be most effective when you are writing for people who share your basic values.

ROGERIAN ARGUMENT

In Chapter 1 we briefly discussed how the ideas of psychotherapist Carl Rogers have influenced scholars interested in argumentation. Rogers focused on listening with understanding in order to avoid miscommunication that can too often accompany serious conflicts. For Rogers the key to resolving conflict is to try honestly to understand what others mean.

Despite questions raised by some scholars about the extent to which Rogers's ideas can be applied to written arguments, you can benefit from viewing persuasion as a means to resolve conflict and achieve social cooperation instead of thinking that the point of an argument is to defeat your opponents. Accordingly, planning a Rogerian argument means emphasizing concessions rather than refutations and placing concessions early in your essay. Like classically arranged arguments, Rogerian arguments have six identifiable parts, as follows.

Introduction

State the problem that you hope to resolve. By presenting your issue as a problem in need of a solution, you raise the possibility of positive change. This strategy can interest readers who would not be drawn to an argument that seems devoted to tearing something down.

Summary of Opposing Views

As accurately and neutrally as possible, state the views of people with whom you disagree. By doing so, you show that you are capable of listening without judging and that you have given a fair hearing to people who think differently from you — the people you most need to reach.

Statement of Understanding

Having summarized views different from your own, you now show that you understand that there are situations in which these views are valid. In other words, you are offering a kind of concession. You are not conceding that these views are always right, but you are recognizing that there are conditions under which you would share the views of your opponents.

Statement of Your Position

Having won the attention of both your opponents and those readers who do not have a position on your issue, you have secured a hearing from an audience that is in

need of or is open to persuasion. Now that these readers know that you've given fair consideration to views other than your own, they should be prepared to listen fairly to your views.

Statement of Contexts

Similar to the statement of understanding, in which you have described situations where you would be inclined to share the views of your opponents, the statement of contexts describes situations in which you hope your own views would be honored. By showing that your position has merit in a specific context or contexts, you establish that you don't expect everyone to agree with you all the time. The limitations you recognize increase the likelihood that your opponents will agree with you at least in part.

Statement of Benefits

You conclude your argument by appealing to the self-interest of people who do not already share your views but are beginning to respect them because of your presentation. When you conclude by showing how such readers would benefit from accepting your position, your essay's ending is positive and hopeful.

(Adapted from Richard Coe, *Form and Substance*. New York: Wiley, 1981.)

Depending on the complexity of the issue, the extent to which people are divided about it, and the points you want to argue, any part of a Rogerian argument can be expanded. It is not necessary to devote precisely the same amount of space to each part. You should try to make your case as balanced as possible, however. If you seem to give only superficial consideration to the views of others and then linger at length on your own, you are defeating the purpose of a Rogerian argument.

Throughout this book we have advocated an approach to argumentation that draws on some of the principles of Rogerian argument, especially the importance of working toward solutions to conflicts. Any style of arrangement — classical, Rogerian, or otherwise — can strive toward the goal of solving problems through argumentation. But a Rogerian argument might be most effective in situations in which people are deeply divided as a result of different values or perceptions. It is especially useful when you are trying to reconcile conflicting parties and achieve a compromise. However, there will be situations in which such an approach might not be the most effective one. If you hold very strong views about a particular issue, for instance, you might find that it is better to consider other ways of organizing your argument. In some situations presenting a strong argument for a specific course of action or viewpoint might be the most ethical way to proceed, even if the ultimate goal is to resolve a conflict. The point is that planning and organizing your argument should be thought of in the larger context of your purposes for engaging in argument.

Here is a student essay about a very complicated and controversial issue: gay adoption. As you'll see, Rachel uses the principles of Rogerian argument to make her case in favor of a national policy for adoption by same-sex couples:

A Reasonable Approach to Gay Adoption

by Rachel Guetter

Adoption by gay parents recently became an open topic with the help of talk show host Rosie O'Donnell. O'Donnell, who went public with her sexuality in 2001, has adopted several children and is a foster mother (Huff and Gest 2). She is currently taking on a Florida law that bans homosexuals from adopting. In doing so, she is prompting everyone to address a situation that is likely to become more common: gay couples seeking to adopt children.

Currently, there is no national policy regarding gay adoptions, and state laws offer a mixed bag of approaches and

restriction. For example, Florida is the only state that has enacted a law explicitly banning gay adoptions. In the states that do not have prohibitory laws, gays and lesbians can file for adoption in court (Maxwell, et al.). It is then up to each court to decide whether a petition for adoption meets the state's adoption policies. Many homosexuals have children from previous marriages, or they become parents by donating their own sperm or egg. Only California, Connecticut, and Vermont have legislation that would allow gays and lesbians to adopt their partner's child (Berman). The forty-six other states must rely on their individual judges to consider the petition. One would hope that a judge would not let personal preference get in the way of a fair ruling, but unfortunately this does not always happen.

The many different state laws may reflect the resistance of many Americans to the idea of gay adoption. Those who feel that children should not be brought up in homosexual households state that their concerns are not the product of homophobia, but are the product of what they find to be in the best interest of the children. These people believe that the best way for a child to be raised is in a family with married mother and father. Also, some opponents of gay adoption argue that children who grow up with same-sex parents are not provided with the same legal benefits and securities as those who are raised in heterosexual, married households.

One reason for this resistance is that America is still dealing with the lack of acceptance for and recognition of homosexuals. Until homosexuality is more widely received, children with gay and lesbian parents will have to deal with the fact that their family is viewed as pejoratively different. Glenn Stanton, senior research analyst for Focus on the Family, says, "While there may be very nice people who are raising kids in homosexual situations, the best model for kids is to grow up with mom and dad" (Stanton). It seems reasonable to believe that having both a mother and father benefits children. Women and men have different parenting traits that give a strong balance for the development of a child. Stanton also states, "Fathers encourage children to take chances ... mothers protect and are more cautious." There exist in parents different disciplining, communication, and playing styles that can be advantages in raising a child. Sandy Rios, president of Concerned Women for America, agrees, "As the single mother of a son, I can see quite clearly that having a mother and father together would be far better for my son" ("Pediatrics").

Another problem is that children who have gay and lesbian parents are not necessarily given the same benefits as children from two-parent, heterosexual families. Often, one person in a same-sex relationship is the biological parent and the other will help raise the child as his or her own. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), children in this situation lose "survivor benefits if a parent dies and legal rights if the parents break up" (Berman 1). Both situations leave a dramatic impact on the child, who then is caught in the middle of legal battles. Another benefit that the child would not be given is health insurance from both parents. In all of these cases, the child is not given the same economic stability as one who has a married mother and father.

Many gays and lesbians are like any other people who dream of one day having a family. But they face great obstacles. Often, one parent in a same-sex family is not given the same rights as the other when one partner has a biological child. Sometimes neither partner in a same-sex family is able to obtain a child through adoption. Despite such obstacles, it cannot be denied that homosexual families exist. Depending on which study you consult, there are anywhere from 1.5 to 5 million children being raised in gay and lesbian families (Maxwell, et al.). The children, however, are the ones who are being hurt by the lack of legality of the situation that they are in. We owe it to these children — and to the same-sex couples who are committed to raising them — to address this problem in a way that is satisfactory for all concerned.

This issue needs to be examined from a national point of view for two reasons. First of all, people who wish to adopt a child are not restricted to adopting within their own states. Often, the demand for certain children requires couples to look in another state. Secondly, people tend to move from state to state. A couple may adopt a child in one state and later decide to move to another with different laws governing parenthood. The adoption needs to be legally recognized in all states, so if a couple adopts in one state, they can move to another and still be protected by law as legal parents. Instead of allowing each state to make its own decision concerning this matter, federal legislation needs to be enacted that would not only permit homosexuals to adopt their partner's child, but also allow gay couples to adopt chil-

dren together. Obviously, such legislation would make it easier for same-sex families to raise their children in safe and happy homes. But it might also address the problem of children who need to be adopted. If homosexuals are legally permitted to adopt, more children waiting to be adopted can be given homes and the homosexual families that currently exist will become legally recognized.

There are children who are constantly being shifted from one foster home to another and deservingly need to be placed in a permanent and stable environment. There are currently not enough homes that children can be adopted into. In 1999, about 581,000 children were a part of the U.S. foster care system. Of those, 22 percent were available for adoption ("Foster Care Facts"). A report by the Vera Institute of Justice states that children raised without a permanent home are more likely to exhibit emotional and behavioral problems and be involved with the juvenile justice system ("Safe and Smart"). This is not to say that the foster care system is bad, but it suggests how important a permanent home and family are for children. Same-sex couples could provide such a home for many of these children.

Florida, the state that bans homosexuals from adopting, nevertheless allows homosexuals to become foster parents (Pertman). It is interesting to think that someone could be allowed to clothe, feed, discipline, and love a child yet not be allowed to call that child their own. By allowing a couple to be foster parents, the state has made a statement about what kind of people those foster parents are: responsible and caring and able to provide a good home and family environment. Why should they not be allowed to become legal parents of their own adopted children?

Both sides agree that children need to be raised in loving and caring families. It is wrong to think that a gay couple cannot provide that. A study in Minnesota shows that "in general, gay/lesbian families tended to score the most consistently as the healthiest and strongest of the family structures" (Maxwell, et al.). Married couples placed a strong second, and unmarried heterosexual couples were found to be the least healthy and least strong, especially when children were a part of the family (Maxwell, et al.). The study done by the courts discloses that homosexual couples deliberately plan to have children and arrange their lives so that both parents are significantly involved with raising the child (Maxwell, et al.). Opponents say that it takes more than just a loving environment; it takes both a mom and dad. As the Minnesota study proved, though, perhaps mother-father households are not as stable as once thought. Gays and lesbians have to make extensive plans in order to obtain or even conceive a child, so the likelihood that a child was an "accident" or unwanted is rare.

In February 2002, AAP issued a new statement titled, "Coparent or Second-Parent Adoption by Same-Sex Parents." It explains the AAP's stance on what is in the best interest of children being raised in same-sex families. Dr. Steven Berman offers a summary: "The AAP concluded that legalizing second-parent adoptions is in the best interest of the children" (Berman). Also in this statement is the reassurance that children are not more inclined to become homosexual or to possess homosexual tendencies from being raised by homosexual parents. Although the AAP does not endorse or condemn homosexuality, they, like the rest of the U.S., cannot ignore the growing number of same-sex families and must deal with what truly would be in the best interest of the children who are caught in the middle.

Whether the stance is for or against gay and lesbian adoption, both sides base their reasoning on what is in the best interest for the children. It would be safe to say that most would agree that having a child brought up in a loving, same-sex family is better than having a child moved from foster home to foster home or raised in an abusive home. Being homosexual does not mean that one loses the right to raise a child. Being an unwanted child does not mean that one loses the right to find a loving home, whether that home is single parent, married, heterosexual or even homosexual.

Works Cited

Notice that Rachel follows the general Rogerian structure described on page 127. After her introduction she presents the views of those who oppose gay adoptions, and she does so without criticism. She offers a statement of understanding, conceding that the concerns of opponents are valid. But she also offers her own concerns, which are based on the same basic goal of protecting children that opponents of gay adoptions hold. This is

the common ground that enables her to present her proposal for national legislation regarding gay adoptions — legislation that she believes will protect children in such situation as well as foster children waiting to be adopted. She clearly lays out the benefits of such legislation.

Although you do not need to follow the Rogerian structure, you can see that it might help you organize your argument in a way that is likely to connect with your opponents — which is one of the goals of Rogerian argument. As in the case of Rachel's essay, an argument structured according to a Rogerian approach structure places your opponents' concerns first. Notice, too, that Rachel's tone is measured, respectful, and concerned throughout her essay, another indication of her desire to seek common ground and find a solution to the problem she is writing about.

LOGICAL ARRANGEMENTS

Arguments can also be shaped by the kind of reasoning a writer employs. In Chapter 2 we discussed the two basic kinds of logic: *inductive reasoning* and *deductive reasoning*. We also discussed informal logic, in particular the Toulmin model. These kinds of logic represent strategies that writers can use to make their arguments, and like the classical and Rogerian approaches, they can be helpful in deciding how to structure an argument.

Inductive Reasoning When you base an argument on inductive reasoning, you are drawing a conclusion based on evidence that you present. For example, let's say you are making an argument for more stringent enforcement of driving laws in your state. In doing so, you might present a variety of relevant information:

- Experiences you've had with speeding drivers
- Anecdotes about friends or family members who have been in accidents that resulted from reckless driving
- Statistics from the U.S. Department of Transportation about automobile accidents and their relationship to speed limits
- Quotations from law enforcement officials or experts who advocate lower speed limits but admit that posted speed limits are often not vigorously enforced.

From all this evidence you draw the conclusion that higher speed limits are dangerous and that drivers would be safer if laws were enforced more rigorously. Such an argument would be based on inductive reasoning.

In making an argument based on inductive reasoning, keep the following considerations in mind:

- *Try to arrange your evidence so that it leads your readers to the same conclusion you have reached.* Obviously, you need to introduce the issue and demonstrate to your readers that it is a problem worthy of attention. But the primary challenge will be to decide which evidence to present first and in what order the remaining evidence will be presented. Consider, too, how best to begin. You might, for example, cite a particular observation that strikes you as especially important. Or you might begin with an anecdote. Whatever approach you use, your introduction should address your particular audience so that they will want to continue reading. A well-structured inductive essay would then gradually expand as the evidence accumulates so that the conclusion is supported by numerous details.
- *Consider how specific kinds of evidence you have gathered will affect your readers.* Will some kinds of evidence likely be more compelling to them than others? If so, will it be more effective to present such evidence earlier or later in the argument? Answering those questions not only can help you decide how best to organize your essay, but also can generate additional ideas for evidence that will make your conclusion as persuasive to your audience as possible.
- *Decide how much evidence is enough.* Eventually, you will reach a point at which you decide that you have offered enough evidence to support your thesis. You might reach this point sooner in some contexts than others. For example, in an essay for your col-

lege writing class, you are not likely to cite as much evidence as you might be expected to include in a research report for a course in freshwater ecology; an essay in a respected political journal such as *Foreign Affairs* will include more extensive evidence than an editorial in your local newspaper. But whatever the context, the process is essentially the same.

- **Interpret and analyze your evidence for your audience.** When you stop citing evidence and move to your conclusion, you have made what is known as an *inductive leap*. In an inductive essay you must always offer interpretation or analysis of the evidence you present. For example, if you use an anecdote about an accident involving a speeding driver in an essay on the enforcement of driving laws, you will have to explain the significance of that anecdote — what it means for your argument. There will always be a gap between your evidence and your conclusion. It is over this gap that the writer must leap; the trick is to do it agilely. Good writers know that their evidence must be in proportion to their conclusion: The bolder the conclusion, the more evidence is needed to back it up. Remember the old adage about “jumping to conclusions,” and realize that you’ll need the momentum of a running start to make more than a moderate leap at any one time.

The advice we offer here suggests that organizing an argument inductively offers you a great deal of flexibility. As always, the decisions you make will reflect your purpose and your sense of how best to address your audience.

Deductive Reasoning Deductive reasoning begins with a generalization and works to a conclusion that follows from that generalization. In that respect it can be thought of as the opposite of inductive reasoning, which begins with specific observations and ends with a conclusion that goes beyond those observations. The generalization you start with in a deductively

arranged argument is called a *premise* and is the foundation for your argument. As we saw in Chapter 2, it takes much careful thought to formulate a good premise. Nevertheless, because so many arguments employ this kind of logic, deductive reasoning can be a powerful way to construct an effective argument.

The process of reasoning deductively might be difficult to grasp in the abstract, but you can follow some general steps that will help you explore your topic and generate an outline for your argument. In effect, you work backward from the conclusion you wish to reach.

A METHOD FOR REASONING DEDUCTIVELY

Because it can be difficult to formulate a good premise, it is often useful to work backward when you are planning a deductive argument. If you know the conclusion you want to reach, write it down, and number it as statement 3. Now ask yourself why you believe statement 3. That question should prompt a number of reasons; group them together as statement 2. Now that you can see your conclusion as well as some reasons that seem to justify it, ask yourself whether you've left anything out — something basic that you skipped over, assuming that everyone would already agree with it. When you can think back successfully to what this assumption is, knowing that it will vary from argument to argument, you have your premise, at least in rough form.

1. **Identifying Your Conclusion.** Suppose that you have become concerned about the consequences of eating meat. Because of worries about your own health, you have reconsidered eating meat, and you have begun to adopt a plant-based, or vegetarian, diet. But in exploring a vegetarian diet, you have also learned that meat production has potentially harmful environmental consequences. In particular, you are concerned about the destruction of forests that are cut down to allow cattle to graze. You believe that if eating meat leads to such environmental damage, it should be stopped.

Obviously, given how prevalent meat consumption is and its prominent place in the American diet, you can't reasonably argue for eating meat to be made illegal or restricted by law in some way. But you can argue that it be discouraged — perhaps in the same way that smoking is discouraged. Most important, you believe that people should at least eat much less meat than they currently do.

So your conclusion is clear: People should eat less meat. Now you begin to write down your outline in reverse:

3. Americans should not consume so much meat.
2. Consuming meat can be unhealthy, and meat production damages the environment.
2. *Examining Your Reasons Carefully.* Before going any further, you realize that not all of your reasons for opposing meat consumption can be taken with equal degrees of seriousness. For one thing, diet can be a personal choice, and your concerns about your own health are not sufficient grounds to argue against other people eating meat. So you need to make sure that your point about the health risks of eating meat does not sound self-serving but has validity for others as well. Your own research has shown that eating meat involves a number of health risks. You also know that a vegetarian diet has health benefits. You will want to discuss these risks and benefits in a way that makes them relevant to people in general so that you are not simply discussing your own health choices.

Your greater concern is the possible environmental damage associated with meat production. Here, too, it might be difficult to convince people who enjoy eating meat that the loss of forests thousands of miles away from their backyard grill should concern them. So it will be important for you to establish not just that meat production leads to the loss of forest, but also that there might also be other environmental consequences closer to home. For example, most livestock in the United States is fed grain, and the production of feed grain not only uses up vast amounts of farmland, but also contributes to pollution through agricultural runoff. Furthermore, the raising of livestock generates pollution in the form of animal waste. There is, as well, the problem of the chemicals and drugs that are used on livestock, which you have heard can be risky for humans who eat meat. All these reasons can be compelling to others who might enjoy eating meat but might be unaware of the problems that can be caused by meat production.

3. *Formulate Your Premise.* You should now be ready to formulate your premise. Your conclusion is that eating meat should be curtailed, and you will urge others to stop or reduce their meat consumption and adopt an alternative diet. So near the beginning of your argument, you need to establish the principle that supports this conclusion. In this case you believe that it is wrong for people to engage in a practice that is ultimately destructive of the environment, especially when there is an alternative to that practice. In effect, you are suggesting that if what we do has damaging consequences (in this case eating meat has negative consequences for the environment and our health), then it is unethical to continue doing it when we have other options. This is your main premise.

A premise can be a single sentence, a full paragraph, or more, depending on the length and complexity of the argument. The function of a premise is to establish a widely accepted value that even your opponents should be able to share. You would probably be wise, therefore, to make a fairly general statement early in your argument — something like this:

It is unethical to continue engaging in an activity that is harmful and environmentally destructive.

Obviously, such a statement needs to be developed, and you will do so not only by showing how destructive meat production and consumption can be, but also by offering alternatives to eating meat. You will want to suggest that our individual choices about things like diet can affect others. That makes those choices ethical ones. Now you have the foundation for a logical argument:

If engaging in a practice or activity is harmful to people and their environment, then it should be stopped. Eating meat is such an activity; therefore, we should avoid eating meat and instead adopt an alternative diet.

This example can help you see the utility of structuring an argument deductively. You can see, too, that generating an argument in this way can deepen your engagement with your topic and eventually lead to a more substantive and persuasive essay.

Using the Toulmin Model Even when you are using logical arrangement to organize your argument, you will rarely follow the rules of logic rigidly. Because most people use logic informally in arguments, the Toulmin model (see pages 31–35) can be extremely useful in helping you construct your argument. The Toulmin model focuses on the *claim* you want to make — that is, the conclusion you are trying to reach or the assertion you hope to prove. Your task, simply put, is to state your claim clearly and offer persuasive reasons (what Toulmin calls *data*) for that claim. The third element in the Toulmin system is the *warrant*, which is the assumption that connects the claim and the data. As we noted in Chapter 2, the warrant is usually a fundamental value or belief that, ideally, is shared by writer and audience (like the premise we discussed in the section above on deductive reasoning).

This model dictates no specified pattern for organizing an argument, so the challenge is to determine how best to present your claim to your intended audience and then to offer adequate reasons for your claim. But the value of this model for constructing an argument lies in the way it requires you to articulate your claim precisely and to pay close attention to the adequacy of your reasons and your evidence, without having to follow the rigid rules of formal logic. In this way the Toulmin model can help you refine your claim and develop convincing support for it. This model also encourages you to think through the often unstated assumptions that lie behind your claim: the warrants. Identifying your warrant can lead to a much more effective argument because it can help you see points of possible contention between you and your audience.

Let's imagine that you live in a small town where a businessperson wishes to build a large meat-processing facility. This person has recently applied to the town board for a permit to begin construction of the plant. As a resident who values the quiet lifestyle of your town as well as its clean and safe environment, you worry about the social and environmental damage the plant might cause. So you decide to write to the town supervisor to express your concerns and urge him to reject the permit for the plant.

Using the Toulmin model for your letter, your first step would be to try to articulate your central claim clearly. You might state your claim as follows:

We should not allow a meat-processing facility to be built in our town.

Before moving to your reasons for your claim, you should consider carefully whether that statement accurately represents the position you want to take. Can you be more specific? Can you focus the claim even more narrowly? In thinking about these questions, you might amend your claim as follows:

Building a meat-packing facility would damage the quality of life and the environment of our town.

Notice that although this version of your claim is related to the first version, it is a bit narrower and more precise. It also points directly to the kinds of data or the reasons you can offer to support the claim. Being clear about your claim is crucial because your reasons must fit that claim closely in order to be persuasive. Now you can begin exploring your reasons.

At this point it is a good idea to brainstorm, listing the main reasons for your belief that the plant should not be built in your town. You have many reasons: the possible damage to local streams from the waste and runoff from the plant, the increased traffic to and from the plant, the odor, the negative impact of a large plant on the quality of life in a small town. You should examine these reasons and try to identify those that are most compelling. So now you have your claim and main reasons for it:

Claim: Building a meat-packing facility would damage the quality of life and the environment of our town.

Reasons: Meat-packing facilities can cause pollution, endanger the health of local residents, and increase truck traffic on local roads.

Before you begin to develop evidence to support these reasons for your claim, you should think about your warrant — the assumptions that lie behind the claim and connect your reason and claim. This is a crucial step in using the Toulmin model because it helps you identify the assumptions behind your claim or the principles on which you base your claim. In Toulmin's model, the warrant is what provides the basis for a claim.

Without an acceptable warrant the claim becomes weak or even invalid. In this case you might state your warrant as follows:

Warrant: We all have a right to live in clean, safe environments.

You can probably be confident that your audience — the town supervisor — would accept this warrant, so you probably don't need to defend it. However, you might decide to state it in your letter, and you might even defend it in order to drive it home. The point is that you have identified a basic value or belief that you assume others share and without which your claim has no foundation.

Now you can begin developing specific evidence to support your claim and your reasons. The reasons stated above suggest the kinds of evidence you might gather. For example, to support the assertion that meat-processing facilities damage the environment, you might find reports of increased pollution in streams near existing meat-packing plants. You can perhaps find similar reports about the impact of truck traffic around such plants. Evidence to support the assertion that your town's lifestyle would be adversely affected might be trickier. First, you will want to establish the character of the town as it is. That might mean providing facts about the number of residences as compared to businesses, the size and use of roads, and so on. The point is to identify specific and persuasive evidence that fits your reasons for your claim — and to gather evidence that will be acceptable and convincing to your audience.

Here's a letter by a student that takes up this issue. In this letter Kristen Brubaker is writing to the supervisor of her small town in rural Pennsylvania. She expresses concern about a resident's request to build a factory hog farm in the town.

Dear Mr. Smithson:

As township supervisor of Wayne Township, you have had a great impact on our community for the past several years. In the coming months, your service will be needed more than ever. Jack Connolly, a resident of our township, has put forth a plan to build a factory hog farm, called a CAFO. His proposed facility will house 5,600 breeding sows, 100,000 piglets, and will cover nearly five acres of buildings (Weist). I am aware that you support this project, but I think there are some points you may be overlooking. We need to work together to ensure that our basic rights as property owners and citizens are not infringed upon and to protect the quality of life in our community.

I know we share similar values when it comes to the protection of our environment. In fact, you are one of the people who helped to shape my view of the environment. When I was younger, I attended the Dauphin County Conservation Camp that you helped to sponsor. I remember several of our activities, including the stream improvement project we completed and the stocking of trout in Powells Creek. Because of these experiences, I was surprised to find out you did not strongly oppose this project. Were you aware that CAFOs have caused extensive damage to trout streams in many states? I hope we don't have to face the destruction of our creek and surrounding valley before we realize that we made a mistake.

Although the risks to our environment are numerous, the first problem most people associate with CAFOs is the smell. In Powells Valley, we have traditionally been an agricultural community, so we're not afraid of the natural, inevitable odor of farms. Although factory farmers argue that the odor of animal waste is simply part of living in a rural, agricultural area, the air pollution caused by CAFOs is often more than a minor inconvenience. Imagine being unable to hang your clothes out to dry because of a thick, permeating smell that saturates everything it touches. The smell is not harmless either. CAFOs produce dangerous levels of ammonia and methane, gases suspected of causing nausea, flu-like symptoms, and respiratory illness, especially in children or the elderly. These chemicals also return to the ground as

rain, polluting our water (Satchell). Another potentially harmful gas produced is hydrogen sulfide. In as small a concentration as 10 parts per million, it causes eye irritation. At 50 parts per million, it causes vomiting, nausea, and diarrhea. At 500 parts per million, hydrogen sulfide causes rapid death (Weist).

Another problem with the proposed location of this facility is its close proximity to houses and the small size of the valley. More than 35 houses are located within a half-mile radius of the proposed operation. Our valley is only a mile wide, so there will be nowhere for the odor to go. It will sit in our valley on hot summer days, saturating the air and everything in it. If this facility must be built, why can't it go somewhere less densely populated or somewhere that would handle odors more effectively?

But the most frightening aspect of having a CAFO in our valley is the strong possibility that we would face severe water pollution. Because of the immense scale of CAFOs, they often produce much more manure than the surrounding land can handle effectively. In cases where overspreading occurs, excess nutrients can run into the streams, disrupting the ecological balance and killing fish. Powells Creek, like most small creeks, sits in a very delicate balance and a small increase of nutrients can seriously alter the habitat of the stream. Nutrients contribute to increased plant and algae life, which can clog waterways and rob them of oxygen. Excess nutrients can also seep into the ground water, creating a problem with illness-causing pathogens such as salmonella (Satchell).

Another cause of water pollution among CAFOs is the waste lagoons used to store manure. Because fields may be spread only certain times of the year, there is a need for immense storage facilities. Most farms use lagoons that can be several acres long, sometimes holding up to 25 million gallons of waste. In North Carolina, waste lagoons are being blamed for the catastrophic fish kills and pollution of the coastal waters that took place in 1996 (Satchell). In the recent flooding in North Carolina due to Hurricane Floyd, over 50 lagoons overflowed, and one burst. Although it is not yet known how these recent spills will affect the environment, more fish kills and contaminated drinking water supplies are virtually guaranteed (Wright).

There are many other problems Powells Valley could face as a result of this facility. The operation that Mr. Connolly is proposing would produce 12 million gallons of waste per year. This waste is going to be spread throughout three townships in our valley. This is a lot of waste for one small stream, yet this is the best-case scenario. Can you imagine what would happen in the case of a leak or spill. Powells Creek is located about 350 feet downhill from these proposed facilities. In the case of an overflow, flood, or leak, the waste would go directly into the creek. To make matters worse, this operation is going to be located in an area that has frequent problems with flooding. In 1996, a small flood destroyed the bridge that crosses Powells Creek just below the proposed operation. If a spill or leak were to occur, the creek's aquatic life would be destroyed. If this facility is approved, we may not have to worry about stocking Powells Creek anymore.

The local increase in traffic is another issue that must be addressed. If this facility goes into operation, there would be approximately 1,750 truck trips per year delivering feed and supplies and transporting the 100,000 piglets to finishing operations. In addition to this, there will be an estimated 3,500 trailer truck trips needed to transport the 12 million gallons of waste (Weist). The roads in our area are not equipped for this kind of traffic. It would put a much greater burden on Wayne Township for the upkeep of its roads. The Carsonville Fire Company, which would be charged with the responsibility of handling any accidents, is dangerously underequipped to handle a large spill. Additionally, the roads entering the area of the proposed operation are small, curvy, and unsafe for large trucks. There are school busses from two school districts traveling these roads. The risk of having a serious accident is simply too high to justify this operation.

One of the key factors that allows these problems to exist largely unchallenged is the lack of regulation for these factory farms. If someone were to build a factory producing the same amount of contaminating waste, they would face numerous regulations. Human waste treatment plants also follow strict environmental controls that ensure that they do not pollute. Because CAFOs are technically agriculture, and not industry, they face virtually no regulations. They are

also protected by the "Right to Farm Act," which was originally passed to protect family farms from harassment and lawsuits by developers. This law is making us defenseless because it will back any lawsuit we could make against the owner of the CAFO. Although nutrient management plans are required for a large operation, such a requirement is not enough protection.

As expected, Jack Connolly's plans have not been stifled by the protests of over 100 citizens. His nutrient management plan was recently rejected by the Dauphin County Conservation District, but he continues to build. He realizes that although many people in the community are afraid of his plans, just as many are unwilling to interfere with his right to do what he wants with his property. We don't like being told what we can and cannot do with our land, and when we give up those rights, we feel it starts a dangerous trend. At the same time, we must think of the property rights of those who have inhabited this valley their whole lives. Operations like this can seriously lower property values. People who can't stand the smell would have two choices. They could sell their homes, their sole investments, for a fraction of their worth or live with the smell.

There are some possible benefits to having this operation in our valley. For one, the factory is expected to create between 20 and 30 local jobs. We don't have a problem with unemployment in our valley, though, so it's likely that these jobs will be filled with outsiders. Also, they aren't going to be the high-quality jobs that most of us would want. Another possible benefit, one I'm sure you're aware of, is the possibility of cheap fertilizer. I noticed on the nutrient plan that you were listed among the recipients. Are you aware that if there is an accident with the waste on your land, you are responsible, not Mr. Connolly? If you still decide that this plan is in the best interests of everyone it will affect, do some research of your own to ensure you're not part of the problem by accepting more manure than your land can safely handle. Also, make sure Mr. Connolly hasn't increased your projected amount without your knowledge in order to satisfy his nutrient management plan.

If you agree that his CAFO is not good for our community, there are steps you should take to postpone, or even reject, this proposal. First, you, as township supervisor, can reject his building permits until he gets the necessary approval from the county and state. These agencies will be more likely to approve his plan if he already has a multi-million dollar complex built to house it. You could also pass ordinances to prevent the growth of this "farm." A common scenario is that after the nearby property values are sufficiently lowered due to the offensive smell, a factory farm owner will buy the surrounding land and build more operations. It only makes sense when you consider that the operation Mr. Connolly has proposed is a breeding facility. This means that the piglets will need to be transported to a finishing facility. Wouldn't it be cheaper and more cost effective to build a near-by facility that could house the hogs as they were prepared for slaughter? After that, why not just build a slaughtering facility as well. It's happened before, and it could happen in our valley. Although people tend to be against zoning in rural communities such as ours, sometimes it is imperative to prevent negative changes.

Please think about the possible effects this will have on our valley. As a life-long resident, you must value its beauty. I also assume that you value the right of every person in this community to live in a safe and clean environment. Imagine a day when you couldn't sit on your porch to eat breakfast because of the overwhelming odor that permeates everything it touches. Imagine your grandchildren getting ill because of water-borne bacteria caused by this CAFO. Imagine the day when you can no longer fish in the creek you helped improve. This day could be upon us if we don't take action now. You're a vital part of this equation, and I trust that we can count on you to help us maintain the land that raised us.

Sincerely,
Kristen Brubaker

References

Notice that Kristen's claim is implicit in her first paragraph, in which she indicates concern about the hog farm, but she doesn't explicitly state that the permit should be denied until the second-to-last paragraph. Notice, too, that she states her warrant in her second paragraph and then reinforces it in her final paragraph. The Toulmin model does not require that the essay be structured in this way. Kristen might just as easily have begun by stating her claim explicitly and proceeded from there; similarly, she might have left her warrant unstated or waited until the final paragraph to state it. Those choices are up to the writer. But using the Toulmin model can help to identify these elements so that you can work with them in constructing an argument.

We should also point out that Kristen has chosen to document her evidence with a list of references, an unusual step in a letter. However, that decision can make her letter more persuasive, since it indicates to the town supervisor not only that Kristen has taken the time to research this issue thoroughly, but also that her facts and figures have been taken from reputable sources.

In considering these different models for arranging an argument, you should understand that they are not mutually exclusive. In a classically arranged argument, for example, the statement of background can be done in the kind of nonjudgmental language emphasized in Rogerian argument. Similarly, the summary of opposing views in a Rogerian argument requires the kind of understanding that a writer following a classical arrangement would need to have before engaging in refutation. In both cases, the writers need to be well informed and fair-minded. And both classical arrangement and Rogerian argument encourage the use of concessions. The difference between the two is best understood in terms of purpose. Although any argument is designed to be persuasive, the purpose of that persuasion varies from one situation to another (see Chapter 1). You might be writing to assert a position or to inquire into a complex issue. Your plan should fit your purpose.

It is also worth remembering that contemporary arguments rarely follow rigid guidelines, except in certain academic courses or in specialized documents, such as legal briefs, or situations like formal debates. For that reason many teachers today advocate the Toulmin model, emphasizing its flexibility in adapting an argument to a specific situation. Moreover, different media represent different opportunities and challenges for how to present an argument (see Chapter 4). All of this means that you have many options for structuring your argument. The more familiar you are with the principles of organization in argumentation, the more likely it is that you will be able to structure your argument effectively.

SUPPORTING CLAIMS AND PRESENTING EVIDENCE

The letter by Kristen Brubaker (page 140) highlights the importance of presenting good evidence to support your argument. Without compelling evidence even the most carefully articulated claim won't be persuasive. But as we noted in Chapter 4 (pp. 76–82), what counts as good evidence will vary from one context to another. So an important part of generating evidence for your argument is considering your audience and its expectations for evidence as well as the rhetorical situation in which you are making your argument. In Kristen's case the audience is very specific: her town supervisor. And she offers evidence that directly addresses a number of issues regarding quality of life that would concern a person in his position. Indeed, one of the strengths of Kristen's argument is that her evidence fits her audience. Another strength is the amount of evidence she provides. She includes statistics and other facts to support her assertions about pollution, road use, odor, and health problems. She also uses values as evidence, appealing to the supervisor's sense of the importance of private property and community well-being (see page 140). Moreover, the amount of evidence suggests that Kristen has done her homework. By presenting so much appropriate evidence so carefully, she helps to establish her credibility. And although she is writing specifically to one person, Kristen's evidence would probably resonate with a broader audience — say, readers of the local newspaper — if Kristen were addressing such an audience. Implicitly addressing a broader audience might strengthen

her argument as well, since the supervisor will probably be sensitive to the views of other people in the community.

Your audience can affect not just the kind of evidence you use, but also whether you need evidence for a particular point. For example, if you are confident that your readers will accept your warrant, then you might decide that you don't need to support it. If it is likely that your audience will disagree with your warrant, then you will need evidence to back it up. Imagine, for instance, if Kristen were writing for a much broader audience — let's say she was making an argument against CAFOs for a newspaper like *USA Today*. Some of her readers might be willing to give up some of the characteristics of a small town for greater economic development. For such readers Kristen might want to defend her warrant about a clean environment, perhaps showing that economic development doesn't have to mean damaging the environment. The point is that your sense of audience and its expectations will affect what you decide to present as evidence and even *whether* some kinds of evidence should be included in your essay.

As you construct your argument and develop your supporting evidence, then, consider the following questions:

- What specific claims and/or warrants am I making that will need supporting evidence?
- What kinds of evidence are available for those claims or warrants?
- Where can I find such evidence?
- What expectations will my audience have for the evidence I present?
- Have I included sufficient evidence for my audience?
- Does the kind of evidence I have included (factual, firsthand experience, philosophical reasoning, expert testimony) make sense for the claims I am making?

USING LANGUAGE EFFECTIVELY

In his famous *Rhetoric*, Aristotle wrote that “the way in which a thing is said affects its intelligibility” (*Rhetoric* 165). We might add that the way in which something is stated also affects its impact and, potentially, its persuasive force. Style matters. It matters because it is sometimes a reflection of the fact that you have followed the appropriate conventions for a particular argument — for example, you have used the right legal terminology in a letter to your insurance company about a pending lawsuit. And it matters because the way an idea or opinion is presented can profoundly affect how an audience reacts to it. In constructing an effective argument, you should attend to how you employ the power of language — how you use diction, sentence structure, tone, rhythm, and figures of speech. Usually, these are matters you can focus on once you have defined your topic, developed your claims and supporting evidence, and arranged your argument appropriately. But how you use language can be an important consideration in constructing an argument, even from the very beginning.

As always, audience is a primary consideration as you decide upon an appropriate style for your argument. Different audiences will have different expectations for what is acceptable — and persuasive — when it comes to your use of language in an argument. You will want to use much more formal language in a cover letter to a potential employer (which is a very common kind of argument) than you might in a letter to the editor of your school's newspaper. Similarly, an essay advocating a specific research method in a biology class will require a different kind of language than an argument in favor of decriminalizing marijuana laws for the campus newsletter of a student advocacy organization. The specific medium in which you are presenting your argument will also influence your decisions about language. *Wired* magazine publishes writing that is noticeably different in style and tone from those of the essays that appear in public affairs magazines such as *Commentary*. The audiences for each magazine are different, but so is each magazine's sense of purpose. *Wired* sees itself as techy, edgy, and hip, and the language its writers use reflects that sense of itself. By contrast, *Commentary* is a more erudite, staid publication,

and the writing style reflects its seriousness. As you work through your argument, think carefully about what kind of language will be most effective for the specific audience, rhetorical situation, and medium you are encountering.

Even within a specific rhetorical situation you have a great deal of latitude in deciding on the style and tone you will adopt for your argument. Consider the following excerpts from an essay that appeared on *Commondreams.org*, a Web site that publishes essays and news with alternative views about important social and political issues. In the essay from which the following excerpts were taken, the writer, John Borowski, a science teacher from Oregon, harshly criticizes efforts by interest groups to ban school science books that present an environmentalist perspective, and he argues for parents and others to oppose such efforts:

Remember this phrase: "Texas is clearly one of the most dominant states in setting textbook adoption standards," according to Stephen Driesler, executive director of the American Association of Publisher's school division. And this November the Texas school board inflamed by the anti-environmental science rhetoric by the likes of Texas Citizens for a Sound Economy and Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) may bring Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451" to life. Recall that "Fahrenheit 451" (the temperature at which paper bursts into flames) depicts a society where independent thought is discouraged, wall-to-wall television and drugs sedate a numb population and "firemen" burn books.

This past fall "book nazis" at the TPPF, led by Republican Senator Phil Gramm's wife (Wendy) and Peggy Venable, director of the 48,000 member Texas Citizens for a Sound Economy, put several environmental textbooks in their "crosshairs." *Environmental Science: Toward a Sustainable Future* published by Massachusetts-based publisher Jones and Bartlett was canned due to political "incorrectness."

We as parents, defenders of the constitution and the vigilant flame-keepers of the light of democracy must rise to meet the challenge.

There is no doubt about how Borowski feels about groups like TPPF. Nor is there any doubt about his goal: to exhort people who share his concerns to action against such efforts to ban books from schools. You might find Borowski's language inflammatory. There is a good chance that he intended it to be so. He certainly knew that the audience for *Commondreams.org* would not likely include many people from organizations such as TPPF. Rather, it would be composed mostly of people who share his political perspective and are likely to be as appalled as he is about these efforts to ban textbooks. Nevertheless, we can ask how those sympathetic readers might react to the strong and very critical language Borowski employs. Will such language be more likely to convince those readers that Borowski is right than a more measured style and a less derogatory tone might be? How does it affect his credibility with his readers? Sometimes, provocative language may be warranted. Is this one of those times?

Posing such questions about your own use of language in constructing your argument can lead to a more effective argument. The rhetorical situation and the issue being addressed will help to determine your approach to using language from the outset. In this case Borowski might well have been angry and concerned enough to have decided, even before he began writing his essay, to adopt a harsh and sarcastic tone. Sometimes, however, you might not have a clear sense of the most appropriate tone or style until after you have completed a draft. And often you will have much less flexibility in adopting a tone or style. (A science report or legal brief, for example, has very strict conventions for such matters.) And bear in mind that at times the choice of a single word can make a great difference in the impact a statement will have on an audience. For example, consider how different this sentence of Borowski's might be if the verb *canned* were replaced by *removed*: *Environmental Science: Toward a Sustainable Future* published by Massachusetts-based publisher Jones and Bartlett was canned due to political "incorrectness."

The passage from Borowski's essay illustrates another set of concerns about language in argument: the use of figurative language. At one point Borowski writes that "the vigilant flame-keepers of the light of democracy must rise to meet the challenge." Here he

invokes the common metaphors of light and dark to suggest good opposed to evil, right against wrong. Those who share his concerns are “flame-keepers of the light of democracy,” a figurative phrase that is clearly intended not only to address his audience in a positive way, but also to stir them to action. Borowski’s is a rather extreme example of the use of figurative language, and it suggests the power such uses of language can have in efforts to move an audience. But figurative language can also have a more subtle but no less important impact in helping to clarify an important point or emphasizing an idea. Here, for example, is *USA Today* sports columnist Mike Lopresti in an essay about the significance of a loss by an American basketball team to Yugoslavia in the 2002 World Championships:

But the big issue is the big picture. The years, the Olympiads, and the World Championships ahead. Because American basketball is like an empty soda cup on the field house floor.

Lopresti’s use of a simile — in which he compares the international status of American basketball to an empty soda cup — vividly drives home his point with an appropriate image that readers who follow sports will quickly recognize. (Notice, too, the informal style of his writing, which is typical of many sports columnists.)

Writers can also make references to myths, literature, or legends that will have significance for readers. Henry David Thoreau, for example, in criticizing what he believed was the wasteful and wasting lifestyle of his fellow citizens, wrote,

The twelve labors of Hercules were trifling in comparison to those which my neighbors have undertaken.

The reference to the well-known Greek myth would have driven home his point to his readers. And his use of farm labor as metaphor for life in the following sentence not only emphasized his primary claim but did so elegantly:

The better part of the man is soon ploughed into soil for compost.

As these examples show, a few carefully chosen words can do a great deal of work as you build your argument.

When you are constructing your own argument, pay close attention to your tone and style. Asking yourself the following questions can help you determine whether your style and tone are appropriate for your purpose, your audience, and the situation about which you are arguing:

- Is my overall tone likely to offend my intended audience? If so, what specifically about my tone might be offensive to my audience? How can I revise to avoid that problem?
- Have I used appropriate words and phrases? Will my audience understand the key terms I have used? Will my audience expect me to use any special language that I have not used?
- Can I use figurative language in any way to enhance my argument?