FOR WRITING

In a paragraph or two, write about an occasion when you allowed someone to convince you to do something that went against your better judgment. Be sure to explain what caused you to give in despite your misgivings.

Write a CAUSE-AND-EFFECT analysis of the difficulties (or triumphs) you have experienced as the result of trying to maintain a particular image of yourself—or perception of someone else. Focus on physical causes and consequences, if you like, but try to touch on mental and emotional ones as well.

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CHAPTER TWELVE
ARGUMENT

ARGUMENT* is the strategic use of language to convince an AUDIENCE to agree with you on an issue or to act in a way that you think is right—or at least to hear you out, even if they disagree with you. You can convince people in three ways: (1) by appealing to their sense of reason, (2) by appealing to their emotions, and (3) by appealing to their sense of ethics (their standards of what constitutes proper behavior). The essays in this chapter illustrate all three appeals.

When you appeal to a reader's sense of reason, you don't simply declare, "Be reasonable; agree with what I say." You must supply solid EVIDENCE for your claim in the form of facts, examples, statistics, expert testimony, and personal experience. And you must use logical reasoning in presenting that evidence. There are basically two kinds of logical reasoning: INDUCTION and DEDUCTION. When we use induction, we reason from particulars to generalities: "You have a gun in your house; this whole neighborhood must be violent." When we deduce something, we reason from general premises to particular conclusions: "All guns are dangerous; your family is in danger because you have one in your house."

Nicholas Carr reasons inductively when he examines how he uses the Internet, p. 563.

Of course, a proposition can be logically valid without necessarily being true. If "all guns are dangerous," then logically a particular gun must be dangerous as well. Given this general premise (or assumption) about guns, the conclusion about any particular gun's being dangerous is a valid conclusion. The same is true of the following argument: "*No* guns are dangerous; this par-

*Words printed in SMALL CAPITALS are defined in the Glossary/Index.

ticular gun is *not* dangerous." This is a valid argument, too; but here, again, not everyone will accept the first (or major) premise about guns in general. Most real-life debates, in fact, take place because rational people disagree about the truth of one or more of the premises on which their conclusions are based.

Whether an argument uses induction or deduction, it must make an arguable statement or CLAIM. Take, for example, the idea that the world's leaders "should start an international campaign to promote imports from sweatshops." Nicholas D. Kristof argued in favor of this controversial proposition in an article published in the *New York Times* in 2002 entitled "Let Them Sweat." Kristof's essay is an instructive example of how all the techniques of argumentation can work together.

Kristof knows that arguing in favor of sweatshops is likely to be an uphill battle. Like any writer with a point to make, especially a controversial one, he needs to win the reader's trust. One way to do this is to anticipate objections that the reader might raise. So before anyone can accuse him of being totally out of his head for promoting sweatshops, Kristof writes: "The Gentle Reader will think I've been smoking Pakistani opium. But sweatshops are the only hope of kids like Ahmed Zia, 14, here in Attock, a gritty center for carpet weaving."

Right away, Kristof is hoping to convince his audience that they are hearing the words of an ethical person who deserves to be heeded. Next, he tugs at the readers' heartstrings:

> Ahmed earns $2 a day hunched over the loom, laboring over a rug that will adorn some American's living room. It is a pittance, but the American campaign against sweatshops could make his life much more wretched by inadvertently encouraging mechanization that could cost him his job.
>
> "Carpet-making is much better than farm work," Ahmed said. "This makes much more money and is more comfortable."

Underlying Kristof's emotional appeal in citing Ahmed's case is the logical claim that Ahmed's plight is representative of that of most factory workers in poor countries. "Indeed," writes Kristof, "talk to Third World factory workers

and the whole idea of 'sweatshops' seems a misnomer. It is farmers and brickmakers who really sweat under the broiling sun, while sweatshop workers merely glow."

The same claim—that other cases are like this one—also lies behind Kristof's second example: "But before you spurn a shirt made by someone like Kamis Saboor, 8, an Afghan refugee whose father is dead and who is the sole breadwinner in the family, answer this question: How does shunning sweatshop products help Kamis? All the alternatives for him are worse." Kristof is appealing to the reader's emotions and sense of ethics, and he is using logical reasoning. If we grant Kristof's premise that in really poor countries "all the alternatives" to sweatshop labor are worse, we must logically concede his main point that, for these workers, "a sweatshop job is the first step on life's escalator" and, therefore, that sweatshops are to be supported.

Kristof has not finished marshaling his reasons and evidence yet. To strengthen his argument, he introduces another, broader example, one that Americans are more likely to be familiar with:

> Nike has 35 contract factories in Taiwan, 49 in South Korea, only three in Pakistan, and none at all in Afghanistan—if it did, critics would immediately fulminate about low wages, glue vapors, the mistreatment of women.
>
> But the losers are the Afghans, and especially Afghan women. The country is full of starving widows who can find no jobs. If Nike hired them at 10 cents an hour to fill all-female sweatshops, they and their country would be hugely better off.
>
> Nike used to have two contract factories in impoverished Cambodia, among the neediest countries in the world. Then there was an outcry after BBC reported that three girls in one factory were under 15 years old. So Nike fled controversy by ceasing production in Cambodia.
>
> The result was that some of the 2,000 Cambodians (90 percent of them young women) who worked in three factories faced layoffs. Some who lost their jobs probably were ensnared in Cambodia's huge sex slave industry—which leaves many girls dead of AIDS by the end of their teenage years.

We can object to Kristof's premises. Can the widows of Afghanistan find no decent jobs whatsoever? Will they actually starve if they don't? Will some of the young women of Cambodia die of AIDS because Nike has pulled out of their impoverished country? (Notice that Kristof qualifies this assertion with "probably.") We can even dispute Kristof's reasoning based on statistics. In statistics, when it is not possible to poll every individual in the set being analyzed, sound practice requires at least a representative sampling. Has Kristof given us a truly representative sampling of *all* the workers in Third World sweatshops?

We can pick away at Kristof's logic—as have many of his critics since this article was first published. But with the exception of a court of law, a good argument does not have to prove its point beyond a shadow of a doubt. It only has to convince the reader. Whether or not you're convinced by Kristof's argument, you can learn from the tactics he uses to support his position.

A BRIEF GUIDE TO WRITING AN ARGUMENT

When you construct an ARGUMENT, you take a position on an issue and then support that position, as Nicholas D. Kristof does in his argument in favor of sweatshops. So the first moves you need to make as you write an argument are to identify the subject or issue you are addressing and to state the claim you are making about it. Here's how Mark D. White and Robert Arp make these fundamental moves near the beginning of their argument in this chapter:

> Pop culture, such as the Batman comics and movies, provides an opportunity to think philosophically about issues and topics that parallel the real world. For instance, thinking about why Batman has never killed the Joker may help us reflect on the nation's issues with terror and torture, specifically their ethics.
>
> —MARK D. WHITE AND ROBERT ARP, "Should Batman Kill the Joker?"

White and Arp identify the subject of their argument (pop culture) and state their claim about it ("provides an opportunity to think philosophically about issues and topics"). Next they narrow the broad field of pop culture to a specific topic ("why Batman has never killed the Joker") and a more limited claim ("may help us reflect on the nation's issues with terror and torture").

The following guidelines will help you make these basic moves as you draft an argument. They will also help you support your claim with reasoning and evidence, avoid logical fallacies, appeal to your readers' emotions and sense of ethics, and anticipate other arguments.

Coming Up with a Claim

Unlike a statement of fact (broccoli is a vegetable) or personal taste (I hate broccoli), a CLAIM is a statement that is debatable, that rational people can disagree with. We can all agree, for example, that pop culture has something to teach us. We might reasonably disagree, however, on what those lessons are. To come up with a claim, think of issues that are debatable: Batman is (is not) a sterling model of ethical behavior. Broccoli provides (does not provide) more health benefits than any other vegetable. Genetic factors are (are not) the main determiners of personality. The risks of climate change have (have not) been exaggerated by the scientific community. Before you decide on a particular claim, make sure it is one you actually care about enough to argue it persuasively. If you don't care much about your topic, your readers probably won't either.

For more debatable claims, see the debate clusters on pp. 558 and 577.

Considering Your Purpose and Audience

The PURPOSE of an argument is to convince other people to listen thoughtfully to what you have to say—even if they don't completely accept your views. Whatever your claim, your argument is more likely to appeal to your audience if it is tailored to their particular needs and interests. Suppose, for example, that you have a friend who habitually sends text messages while driving even though she knows it's dangerous. You think your friend should put down her phone while driving—or pull over when she needs to text. Your friend might be more likely to agree with you if, in addition to citing statistics on increased traffic deaths due to driving while texting, you also pointed out that she was setting a bad example for her younger sister.

So think about what your audience's views on the particular issue are likely to be. Of all the evidence you might present in support of your case, what kind would your intended readers most likely find reasonable and, thus, convincing?

Generating Ideas: Finding Effective Evidence

Suppose you want to argue that the SAT is unfair because it is biased in favor of the wealthy. To support a claim like this effectively, you can use *facts*, *statistics*, *examples*, *expert testimony*, and *personal experience*.

FACTS. To argue that the SAT favors the wealthy, you might cite facts about the cost of tutors for the test: "In New York City, a company called Advantage charges $500 for 50 minutes of coaching with their most experienced tutors."

STATISTICS. You could cite statistics about income and test scores: "On the 2008 SAT, students with family incomes of more than $200,000 had an average math score of 570, while those with family incomes up to $20,000 had an average score of 456."

EXAMPLES. You could discuss a question from an actual SAT exam that might show SAT bias. The following question asks the test taker to select a pair of words whose relationship matches the relationship expressed by RUNNER : MARATHON. The choices are (A) envoy : embassy; (B) martyr : massacre; (C) oarsman : regatta; (D) referee : tournament; (E) horse : stable. The correct answer is C: an oarsman competes in a regatta, an organized boat race, in much the same way as a runner competes in a marathon. But because regattas are largely a pursuit of the wealthy, you could argue that the question favors the wealthy test taker.

EXPERT TESTIMONY. You might quote a statement like this one by Richard Atkinson, former president of the University of California: "Anyone involved in education should be concerned about how overemphasis on the SAT is distorting educational priorities and practices [and] how the test is perceived by many as unfair. . . ."

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PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. The following anecdote reveals, in a personal way, how the SAT favors certain socioeconomic groups: "No one in my family ever participated in a regatta—as a high school student, I didn't even know the meaning of the word. So when I took the SAT and encountered analogy questions that referred to regattas and other unfamiliar things, I barely broke 600 on the verbal aptitude section."

No matter what type of evidence you present, it must be pertinent to your argument and sufficient to convince your audience that your claim is worth taking seriously. It should also be presented to the reader in a well-organized fashion that makes sense logically.

Templates for Arguing

The following templates can help you to generate ideas for an argument and then to start drafting. Don't take these as formulas where you just have to fill in the blanks. There are no easy formulas for good writing, though these templates can help you plot out some of the key moves of argumentation and thus may serve as good starting points.

- In this argument about X, the main point I want to make is _____.
- Others may say _____, but I would argue that _____.
- My contention about X is supported by the fact that _____.
- Additional facts that support this view of X are _____, _____, and _____.
- My own experience with X shows that _____ because _____.
- My view of X is supported by _____, who says that X is _____.
- What you should do about X is _____.

For more techniques to help you generate ideas and start writing an argument, see Chapter 2.

Organizing an Argument

Any well-constructed argument is organized around a claim and support for that claim. Here is a straightforward plan that can be effective for most argument essays. You may, of course, need to supplement or modify this plan to fit a particular topic.

1. In your *introduction*, identify your topic and state your claim clearly. Indicate why you're making this claim and why the reader should be interested in it. Make sure your topic is narrow enough to be covered in the time and space allotted.
2. In the main *body* of your argument, introduce an important example, or a solid piece of evidence, that is likely to catch your reader's attention; then use a clear, logical organization to present the rest of your support. For example, move from your weakest point to your strongest. Or vice versa.
3. Deal with *counterarguments* at appropriate points throughout your essay.
4. In the *conclusion*, restate your claim—and why you're making it—and sum up how the evidence supports that claim.

Narrowing and Stating Your Claim

State your claim clearly at the beginning of your argument—and take care not to claim more than you can possibly prove in one essay. "Sweatshops are acceptable," for example, is too broad to work as an arguable claim. Acceptable for whom, we might ask? Under what circumstances?

To narrow this claim, we could restate it as follows: "In very poor countries, sweatshops are acceptable." This claim could be still more restricted, however: "In very poor countries, sweatshops are acceptable *when the alternatives are even worse.*" Because it is narrower, this is a more supportable claim than the one we started with.

Using Logical Reasoning: Induction and Deduction

In many writing situations, logical reasoning is indispensable for persuading others that your ideas and opinions are valid. As we noted in the introduction, there are two main kinds of logical reasoning, induction and deduction. Induction is reasoning from particular evidence to a general conclusion. It is based on probability and draws a conclusion from a limited number of specific cases. You reason inductively when you observe the cost of a gallon of gas at half a dozen service stations and conclude that the price of gas is uniformly high. In contrast to induction, deduction moves from general principles to a particular conclusion. You reason deductively when your car stops running and—knowing that cars need fuel, that you started with half a tank and have been driving all day—you conclude that you are out of gas.

Deductive arguments can be stated as SYLLOGISMS, which have a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. For example:

Major premise: All scientific theories should be taught in science classes.
Minor premise: Intelligent design is a scientific theory.
Conclusion: Intelligent design should be taught in science classes.

According to Steven Pinker, p. 559, the major premise of most media critics is "You are what you eat."

This is a valid syllogism, meaning that the conclusion follows logically from the premises. (Remember however, that *validity* in a deductive argument is not the same as *truth*.)

The great advantage of deduction over induction is that it deals with logical certainty rather than mere probability. As long as a deductive argument is properly constructed, the conclusion must be valid. The conclusion can still be untrue, however, if one or more of the premises is false. The following syllogism, for example, is properly constructed (the conclusion follows logically from the premises), but not everyone would agree that the major premise is true:

Major premise: Only people who have tattoos are cool.
Minor premise: Robin got a tattoo on her shoulder last weekend.
Conclusion: Robin is cool.

Advertisers use this kind of faulty reasoning all the time to try to convince you that you must buy their products if you want to be a cool person. Many people, however, would consider the major premise false; there are lots of cool people who don't have tattoos at all, so the reasoning is faulty.

You can also run into trouble when you know that some of your readers may disagree with your premises but you still want to convince them to accept (or at least think seriously about) your conclusion. For example, if you are arguing that a particular firearm is not dangerous because "no guns are dangerous," many readers are likely to take exception with your reasoning. What to do?

One tactic would be to tone down your major premise. Your ultimate purpose in constructing any argument, after all, is to convince readers to accept your *conclusion*. So instead of the (obviously loaded) premise that "no guns are dangerous," you might instead restate your premise as follows: "Not all guns are dangerous." That a particular gun is safe does not necessarily follow from this premise, but more readers may be inclined to accept it—and thus more likely to take your conclusion seriously—especially if the rest of your evidence is strong, and you avoid obvious blunders in logic.

Avoiding Logical Fallacies

LOGICAL FALLACIES are errors in logical reasoning. Here are some of the most common logical fallacies to watch out for:

POST HOC, ERGO PROPTER HOC. Assuming that just because one event (such as rain) comes after another event (a rain dance), it therefore occurs *because* of the first event: "From 1995 to 2005, as the Internet grew, the number of new babies named Jennifer grew by 30 percent." The increase in "Jennifers" may have followed the spread of the Internet, but the greater Internet use didn't necessarily *cause* the increase.

NON SEQUITUR. A statement that has no logical connection to the preceding statement: "The early Egyptians were masters of architecture. Thus they created a vast network of trade throughout the ancient world." Since mastering architecture has little to do with expanding trade, this second statement is a *non sequitur.*

BEGGING THE QUESTION. Taking for granted what is supposed to be proved: "Americans should be required to carry ID cards because Americans need to be prepared to prove their identity." Instead of addressing the claim that Americans should be required to prove their identity by having an ID card that verifies it, the "because" statement takes that claim for granted.

APPEAL TO DOUBTFUL AUTHORITY. Citing as expert testimony the opinions of people who are not experts on the issue: "According to David Letterman, the candidate who takes Ohio will win the election." Letterman isn't an expert on politics.

AD HOMINEM. Attacking the person making an argument instead of addressing the actual issue: "She's too young to be head of the teachers' union, so why listen to her views on wages?" Saying she's too young focuses on her as a person rather than on her views on the issue.

To avoid this fallacy, Joe Posnanski refers to a fellow sports-writer as "my great good friend," p. 584.

EITHER/OR REASONING. Treating a complicated issue as if it had only two sides: "Either you believe that God created the universe, or you believe that the universe evolved randomly." This statement doesn't allow for beliefs outside of these two options.

HASTY GENERALIZATION. Drawing a conclusion based on far too little evidence: "In the four stories by Edgar Allan Poe that we read, the narrator is mentally ill. Poe himself must have been insane." There is not nearly enough evidence here to determine Poe's mental health.

FALSE ANALOGY. Making a faulty comparison: "Children are like dogs. A happy dog is a disciplined dog, and a happy child is one who knows the rules

and is taught to obey them." Dogs and children aren't alike enough to assume that what is good for one is necessarily good for the other.

RED HERRING. Leading the reader off on a false scent, away from the main argument: "Sure, my paper is full of spelling errors. But English is not a very phonetic language. Now if we were writing in Spanish . . ."

OVERSIMPLIFICATION. Assigning insufficient causes to explain an effect or justify a conclusion: "In a school budget crunch, art and music classes should be eliminated first because these subjects are not very practical." This argument is oversimplified because it doesn't admit that there are other reasons, besides practicality, for keeping a subject in the school curriculum.

Appealing to Your Readers' Emotions

Sound logical reasoning is hard to refute, but appealing to your readers' emotions can also be an effective way to convince them to accept—or at least listen to—your argument. In a January 2009 follow-up to his 2002 argument in favor of sweatshops, Nicholas D. Kristof writes:

> The miasma of toxic stink leaves you gasping, breezes batter you with filth, and even the rats look forlorn. Then the smoke parts and you come across a child ambling barefoot, searching for old plastic cups that recyclers will buy for five cents a pound.
>
> —NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF, "Where Sweatshops Are a Dream"

Kristof is describing a gigantic garbage dump in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where whole families try to eke out a living under inhumane conditions. Compared to this "Dante-like vision of hell," Kristof argues, "sweltering at a sewing machine" seems like an unattainable dream. By making us feel the desperation of the people he describes, Kristof is clearly tugging at the readers' heartstrings—before going on to supply more facts and examples to support his claim.

Establishing Your Own Credibility

When you construct an argument, you can demonstrate with irrefutable logic that what you have to say is valid and true. And you can appeal to your readers' emotions with genuine fervor. Your words may still fall on deaf ears, however, if your readers don't fully trust you. Here are a few tips to help you establish trust:

- *Present issues objectively.* Acknowledge opposing points of view, and treat them fairly and accurately. If you have experience or expertise in your subject, let your readers know. For example, Kristof tells his readers, "My views on sweatshops are shaped by years living in East Asia, watching as living standards soared—including those in my wife's ancestral village in southern China—because of sweatshop jobs."
- *Pay close attention to the* TONE of your argument. Whether you come across as calm and reasonable or full of righteous anger, your tone will say much about your own values and motives for writing—and about you as a person.
- *Convince your readers* that they are listening to the words of a moral and ethical person who shares their values and understands their concerns.

Anticipating Other Arguments

As you construct an argument, it's important to consider viewpoints other than your own, including objections that others might raise. Anticipating other arguments, in fact, is yet another way to establish your credibility. Readers are more likely to see you as trustworthy if, instead of ignoring an opposing argument, you state it fairly and accurately and then refute it. Kristof knows that many readers will disagree with his position on sweatshops, so he acknowledges the opposition up front before going on to give his evidence for his position:

Johnson C. Montgomery admits, p. 542, that opponents may find his position "inhumane."

> When I defend sweatshops, people always ask me: But would you want to work in a sweatshop? No, of course not. But I would want even less to pull a rickshaw. . . . I often hear the argument: Labor standards can

improve wages and working conditions, without greatly affecting the eventual retail cost of goods. That's true. But . . .

—NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF, "Where Sweatshops Are a Dream"

You still may not agree with Kristof's position that sweatshops are a good idea. But you're more likely to listen to what he, or any other writer, has to say if you think that person has thought carefully about all aspects of the issue, including points of view opposed to his or her own.

EDITING FOR COMMON ERRORS IN ARGUMENTS

As with other modes of writing, certain errors in punctuation and usage are common in arguments. The following guidelines will help you spot such problems and edit them appropriately.

Check to see that you've correctly punctuated the following connecting words: *if, therefore, thus, consequently, however, nevertheless,* and *because*

When the connecting word comes at the beginning of a sentence and links the statement you're making to earlier statements, it should be followed by a comma:

- Therefore, stronger immigration laws will not be necessary.
- Consequently, the minimum drinking age should be lowered to age 18.

When the connecting word comes at the beginning of a sentence and is part of an introductory clause—a group of words that includes a subject and a verb—the entire clause should be followed by a comma:

- Because guest workers will be legally registered, stronger immigration laws will be unnecessary.
- If people are old enough to vote and go to war, they're old enough to drink responsibly.

- If recent statistics from the Department of Transportation are accurate, far fewer people die when the legal drinking age is 21 instead of 18.

When the connecting word indicates a relationship—such as cause and effect, logical sequence, or comparison—between two independent clauses, it is usually preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma:

- Many of the best surgeons have the highest rates of malpractice; thus, the three-strikes-and-you're-out rule for taking away a doctor's license may do more harm than good.

When the connecting word comes in the middle of an independent clause, it should usually be set off by commas:

- A surgeon who removes the wrong leg, however, deserves a somewhat harsher penalty than one who forgets to remove a sponge.

Check for common errors in usage

HOWEVER, NEVERTHELESS

Use *however* when you acknowledge a different argument but want to minimize its consequence:

- The surgeon may have been negligent; ~~nevertheless,~~ however, he should not lose his license because the patient lied about the dosage he was taking.

Use *nevertheless* when you acknowledge a different argument but wish to argue for a harsher consequence anyway:

- The surgeon may not have been negligent; ~~however,~~ nevertheless, he should lose his license because the patient died.

IMPLY, INFER

Use *imply* when you mean "to state indirectly":

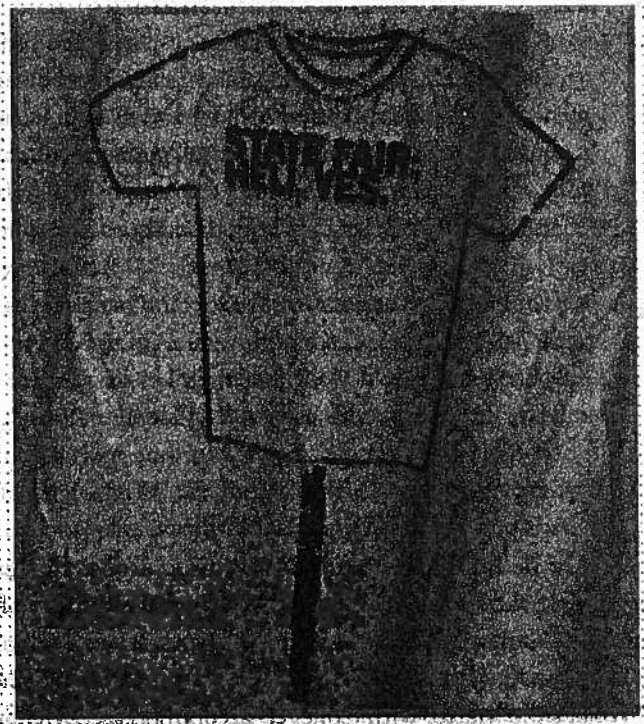
- The coach's speech ~~inferred~~ implied that he expected the team to lose the game.

Use *infer* when you mean "to draw a conclusion":

- From the coach's speech, I ~~implied~~ inferred that the team would lose the game.

EVERYDAY ARGUMENT

T-shirt on a Stick



When you construct an argument, you make a claim and support it with evidence. Your purpose is to convince readers to accept your claim and perhaps even to act on it. The main purpose of the folks who run the shop in Des Moines, Iowa, where this T-shirt was purchased is, of course, to sell T-shirts. Iowa, however, is home to one of the grandest state fairs in the country. This T-shirt, featuring . . . a T-shirt on a stick, is also intended, in a tongue-in-check way, to promote the fair. Yessiree, Bob. Been there, done that—and got the T-shirt? What about a hot dog (or pretzel or fried ice cream) on a stick? Makes it mighty handy to walk around and see all the booths—or the butter cow, tractor pull, llama judging, giant tomatoes, and chain-saw art.