CHAPTER 19

Shaping an Effective Argument

Learning Objectives:

After reading and applying the information in Chapter 19, you'll be able to:

- Identify the three classic appeals used in argument
- Recognize opposing views and overcome objections to your argument
- Draft, develop, and revise a classic argument essay

> *Truth is one forever absolute, but*
> *opinion is truth filtered through the moods,*
> *the blood, the disposition of the spectator.*
>
> —Wendell Phillips (1859)

Hardly a day passes without your persuading someone of something. It may be as trivial as convincing a friend to try a new restaurant or as significant as convincing an interviewer you are qualified for a position. On the job you may write a proposal, a request for new software, a grant application, or other document. In a college class you may be asked to write a persuasive essay, a reaction paper, or a paper of argument. Skill in argument and persuasion will enable you to become a more effective writer and speaker, both in college and in the workplace.

PURPOSE OF ARGUMENT

Although there are many types of argument, the general purpose of any serious argument is to convince readers to accept a belief, adopt a policy, or enact a decision, proposal, or law. In the strictest sense, the term *argument* refers to an assertion that is based on logic and proof, a rational appeal to the intellect.

According to the rhetorical situation, however, many arguments contain not only rational appeals but also ethical and emotional appeals. This chapter explains a classic argument model that includes appeals to logic, ethics, and

emotions. This model is flexible, effective, and practical. It can be adapted in various ways for general use.

THREE CLASSIC APPEALS USED IN ARGUMENT

More than two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle defined three kinds of appeals that make up an argument: *logos* (logic), *ethos* (moral character or ethics), and *pathos* (emotion). Aristotle realized that logic alone is not always sufficient to persuade an audience. To be convincing, you must also gain credibility—the trust of your listeners or readers. To do so, you must be perceived as honest, fair, and responsive to moral obligations. Aristotle called this the appeal to *ethos.* In *Nicomachean Ethics,* he explains:

> Virtue then is twofold, partly intellectual and partly moral, and intellectual virtue is originated and fostered mainly by teaching; it demands therefore experience and time. Moral virtue on the other hand is the outcome of habit, and accordingly its name *éthike,* is derived by a slight variation from *éthos,* habit.
>
> **—from *On Man and the Universe: Metaphysics, Parts of Animals, Ethics, Politics, Poetics.* Louise R. Loomis, Editor**

Logical and ethical appeals are often enough to convince on some issues, but unless emotion moves an audience to act on other issues, the argument will be in vain.

You can identify the three classic appeals by the questions they raise with readers:

- **Logical appeal:** Is the claim or petition factual and reasonable? True or false? Practical or impractical?
- **Ethical appeal:** Is it just or unjust? Honest or dishonest? Right or wrong?
- **Emotional appeal:** Do the words arouse such feelings as empathy and sympathy? Do they cause the reader to care about the subject?

The Logical Appeal

In most rhetorical situations, you will be expected to base your conclusions on sound reasoning and adequate proof. A logical argument appeals to the mind, using evidence, reasons, and examples to support a claim or proposition. Logical appeals are based on facts, sound inferences, and working theories. Reliable evidence may include established truths, primary sources, statistics, expert opinion, or personal experience.

Established Truths Some evidence is so solidly grounded that no reasonable person will seriously debate it. In the examples below, the first three are *established facts,* which have been conclusively proven. The fourth example has been accepted as fact, based on the existing evidence.

- **Historical fact:** Jacques Cartier began his exploration of Canada in Newfoundland, sailing the St. Lawrence to Montréal.

WORKPLACE CASE STUDY

"You Got a Tiger by the Tail!"

Matthew Resome was a programmer at XYZ Company. Matt was a quiet guy with an excellent work record who got along well with other employees. For three years he had tried to work through the right channels to improve wages and working conditions. But neither had changed despite the fact that the company's sales had increased 55 percent during those years.

When Matt contacted the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), they said that if he could secure seventy-five signatures on a petition, then they could come in and conduct a vote to unionize the plant. The company would have to provide a room with a booth where employees could come during work hours. Matt secured the required signatures, and two NLRB representatives conducted the vote at the plant. The vote failed.

The next morning J. B. Smith, the plant manager, told his assistant to fire Matt. The assistant, who had attended law school, refused. Using a *logical* appeal, he warned, "You can't do this. Federal laws prohibit discrimination against peaceful and acceptable union activities. You got a tiger by the tail! Let it go."

But four days later, the irate plant manager called Matt in and stated, "Your job has been phased out. We don't need you any more. You can clear out your desk and leave right now." Matt contacted the NLRB.

ACTIVITY

Assume the role of the NLRB investigator. Examine Matt's work record and investigate the events preceding the firing. Summarize the situation and write a letter to J. B. Smith. Inform him that to prevent legal action, the company must reinstate and reimburse Matt for all lost wages. The company has thirty days to consider the offer.

- **Geographical fact:** Ontario borders four of the five Great Lakes.
- **Scientific fact:** When a heavy object is dropped, it falls to the ground.
- **Scientific theory regarded as fact:** The sun's gravitation attracts the planets and keeps them in their paths. Stars are held on course by the pull of heavenly bodies.

Primary Sources Research that is gathered first-hand carries more credibility than that filtered through secondary researchers. If you can obtain relevant documents, letters, autobiographies, or other primary source materials, these can lend strong support to your argument. Or you may choose to gather evidence first-hand yourself. For further explanation of and suggestions for primary research, see Chapter 22, "Primary Research."

Statistics Reliable statistical findings from recognized and reputable authorities can strengthen your argument. To be reliable, the findings should be based on samples that are representative and random. Yet some widely quoted findings are neither random nor representative, as explained in Chapter 22.

Another problem of reliability occurs when the researcher who is under extreme pressure, such as meeting a deadline, falsifies results. When you find unusual conclusions, check to see if the results are consistent with those of others in the field. Unless an experiment can be replicated under controlled laboratory conditions by qualified researchers, it cannot be accepted as evidence.

Expert Opinion The opinion of a recognized authority in a field generally conveys credibility and enhances a argument. If you decide to use expert opinion, check out the person's qualifications first. Here the Internet is an invaluable and speedy resource for checking on well-known authorities. Interviewing can also be helpful for local issues. For instance, if you were arguing for a proposal to thwart break-ins and burglary, then the chief of police or mayor could be credible sources.

See "Watch for Credentials" Chapter 23.

Personal Experience The personal stories of people who have been involved in an accident, a tragedy, or natural phenomenon such as a tornado, can be powerful. A detailed description of such an event can have a strong emotional impact and buttress a logical argument. Personal experience stories should be used to supplement logical evidence, not supplant it. The experience should be significant and have a definite, relevant point.

Important Considerations When you are presenting inconclusive evidence, avoid confusing theory with fact. Be accurate and precise so as not to overstate and weaken your case. For a reference list, see "Using Tentative Words to Discuss Findings and Theories," page 335.

Inferences are often confused with fact, and generalizations are often made from an invalid sample. For a further discussion of what constitutes reliable evidence, see Chapters 6 and 20. To construct a flawless argument, you need to be able to recognize pitfalls in logic.

The Ethical Appeal

Ethical appeals are designed to strike a responsive chord in the minds of the readers, entreating them to do what is right, good, fair, and best. Ethics can be broadly defined as a set of moral values—principles of conduct for an individual, group, profession, or society. Sound ethics are essential to a well-constructed argument.

To be ethical, an argument must respect the rights and needs of the audience. In other words, deception to obtain a selfish aim is unethical—and often illegal.

An ethical appeal requires you to first demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of your subject. *You have an ethical obligation to give the reader the whole truth*, not just proof that will make your side of the argument *seem* convincing. In other

words, if there are disadvantages to your proposal, you need to be honest about them. Second, you must approach the subject in an even-handed way, presenting differing viewpoints accurately and fairly. Your written voice must sound reasonable, controlled, and concerned.

The Emotional Appeal

Emotional appeals stir the feelings of readers with figurative language, connotation, and anecdote. Such appeals can be powerful, for they bypass the intellect. Emotional appeals work best, however, when used in moderation. They should also be ethical. Do not use an emotional appeal that gives you any misgivings or uneasiness.

Used wisely, emotion can motivate. For example, in the Workplace Case Study earlier, the assistant might have stressed his emotional appeal more. Instead of hinting with "You got a tiger by the tail!" he could have been more direct by saying, "You might lose your own job over this firing. Be careful." Perhaps the boss would have listened.

Using the Three Appeals

The bulk of your argument paper should be a logical appeal, based on sound, logical proof. But keep in mind that credible persuasion rests on a blend of facts and ethical reasons, bonded with appropriate emotion. In other words, emotion usually plays a lesser role. To be effective, all three appeals must harmonize. An emotional appeal that conflicts with either a logical appeal or an ethical appeal is inappropriate.

GUIDELINES FOR USING PERSUASIVE APPEALS

1. ***Alert the audience to a problem by using suitable emotion.***
2. ***Use restraint.*** Do not overstate. Exaggerated appeals can backfire.
3. ***Do not circumvent an issue.*** Focus your argument on the issue. Answer all of the opposition's points with solid evidence and reasons.
4. ***Do not oversimplify.*** Guard against either/or alternatives.
5. ***Avoid conflicting appeals.*** Contradiction undermines arguments.
6. ***Show and tell.*** Use examples and anecdotes to illustrate and heighten interest.
7. ***Read aloud to check for objectivity.*** Evidence should be presented honestly without slanting or manipulation. The writer's voice should sound fair and trustworthy.

UNDERSTANDING OPPOSING VIEWS AND OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

Two landowners were involved in a boundary dispute that dated back to their grandfathers' time. Years before, a rail fence had been erected by one grandparent and moved by the other. At last one man consulted a lawyer. Relating the history of the argument, the client presented one view of the dispute. The lawyer assured him that the law was on his side and asked when he wanted to sue. The client replied, "Never, I just gave you the other guy's version."

Researching both views of an issue provides an opportunity not only to weigh the facts, but also to consider the priorities, values, and attitudes of readers who disagree. Sometimes readers may agree with a proposal, but not act. Then your first task is to discover the *area of resistance* and determine why they are reluctant. The second task is to prepare a persuasive strategy to overcome their objections and resistance. Once you understand the opposing view, you can decide how to shape the argument to emphasize advantages and benefits.

For example, voters may agree that more money is needed to fund local schools, but they may resist voting for a bond levy. How do you convince them that the proposed benefits justify the expense? An appeal combining logic, ethics, and emotion might be the most effective:

> Several of our school buildings are over seventy-five years old. They are drafty and expensive to heat; those big windows have single panes. The frames rattle. The electrical wiring is inadequate; there is no way to plug in computers. Plaster has fallen from some ceilings. Building now will avoid expensive renovations and save money in the long run, because construction costs continue to climb.
>
> The buildings are also overcrowded. For instance, in one building a class meets on the auditorium stage, another in the lunchroom, and two meet at the ends of halls. The children are distracted by passersby, and the acoustics are poor. The children have no place to put their coats.
>
> Our children deserve better. They deserve a place where they can concentrate and do their best. Our children are the future leaders of this country. Surely, we need to give them a chance for optimum learning. Won't you dig down in your pocket to come up with the extra dollars to make this dream come true? Vote yes for the school bond levy!

QUESTIONS TO ANALYZE AN AUDIENCE

1. How much does the audience know about the topic?
2. How strong is their disagreement or resistance?
3. If they agree on a proposal, why are they reluctant to act?
4. What is important to them?
5. What is important to me?
6. What change can I reasonably expect?

WRITING A CLASSIC ARGUMENT PAPER

Many times it is not enough to research the facts on an issue, for facts alone may not convince. People often act on perceptions and instincts that are not always logical. When a problem arises, you may have a practical solution and all the relevant facts; but unless you can tap into your audience's priorities and needs, chances are your proposal will be rejected. Therefore, careful audience analysis is essential to draft an effective strategy of argument. (For explanations of audience analysis, see Chapters 1 and 31.)

The strategy you select will be determined by the purpose, the topic, and the amount of resistance to the proposition. Will the audience show reluctance, firm opposition, or downright hostility? As you shape your strategy, keep in mind the three classic appeals. Consider how they can help you focus your paper.

Selecting a Topic

The topic for an argument paper should be controversial and significant. A controversial topic has at least two points of view. To be significant, the disagreement must involve more than a definition of terms or a question of fact that could be easily checked. This means the topic would centre on more than a simple question of truth or a matter of personal preference. For instance, to argue that computers can be fun would be unsuitable. Or to argue vaguely that U2 is better than the Beatles would be futile since this judgment hinges on personal taste. But a paper that contains adequate support and criteria to evaluate the characteristics of both musical groups could yield a logical argument.

Claims of judgment involve an opinion or rating that is significant and logical, resting on facts and reasons. Aesthetic judgments evaluate the worth or value of music, art, and literature. Ethical judgments evaluate whether something is beneficial or harmful, humane or inhumane, moral or immoral, right or wrong. Functional judgments evaluate how well something or someone works. Arguments, including judgments, make five types of claims.

Five Basic Claims Made in Arguments

1. ***Claim of judgment:*** What is the writer's position on the issue? What are the criteria upon which the judgment is based?
2. ***Claim of fact:*** What is actually true? (Myth as opposed to fact or updates in scientific thinking are typical examples.)
3. ***Claim of interpretation:*** What do the facts mean?
4. ***Claim of cause:*** Why did something happen? Why is it the way it is? (A valid hypothesis provides the simplest and best explanation.)
5. ***Claim of policy:*** What should be done? What is the best alternative to solve the problem? Or are there several acceptable alternatives?

Before an argument can be resolved, the participants must agree on the *basic premise* or *proposition* upon which the argument rests. For example, two students could agree on the basic premise that a college diploma should signify

competency, although they disagree about how competency should be measured. Since they agree on the underlying belief, a logical argument could be constructed.

To write effectively about a value-laden topic, you must be open-minded, fair, and alert. Topics such as abortion and religion carry emotional baggage that make them difficult to argue for three reasons: (1) rarely do the opposing views agree on a basic premise; (2) sources are often slanted toward one view; and (3) you must sift the evidence while keeping your own biases under control. Other topics for argument may have inherent hazards, too. For your consideration, some typical problems that students wade into are listed here:

Common Hazards in Selecting Topics for Argument

1. ***The topic is too broad.*** Subjects should be narrowed to a proposition that can be supported and discussed well in the allotted length.
2. ***The topic is strictly informational.*** A paper of argument does more than collect information. You strive to convince the reader of a proposition.
3. ***The topic is hackneyed.*** Sometimes students resurrect old papers or debate notes from high school. An important reason for assigning a paper of argument is to spur you to think and learn.
4. ***Adequate support is unavailable.*** If a topic is recent, you may find little data available. If a topic is heavily laden with emotion, you may find bias and fallacies in the sources.

Typically, instructors groan when they see old, overused topics such as capital punishment, legalizing illicit drugs, and the like. To be significant, a topic does not have to have worldwide or national implications—it may be a campus, community, or neighbourhood issue. Such topics can yield fresh material.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING AN ARGUMENT TOPIC

1. Is there disagreement about the subject or an area of resistance?
2. Is the issue significant and challenging?
3. Can I obtain enough factual information?
4. After research, will I be able to thoroughly understand the issue?
5. Can I write about the topic in a fair, objective tone?

Gathering Information and Prewriting

The more knowledgeable and sophisticated your readers, the more they will insist on adequate proof of a claim. Yet a writer seldom has all the facts needed to attain a comprehensive view of a controversial topic. To be knowledgeable and objective, you need information from a variety of sources and viewpoints. In

the workplace, you may talk to personnel at other companies who have resolved a similar question or problem. You may also consult journals, trade magazines, or online services.

In a college class, you may be asked to take a position on a literary work and write a paper of argument. In that case, you examine the work closely, make notes, think, and write. Or you may be required to do a research paper with text citations and a list of works cited. To focus a search for information, you might begin by posing a controlling question.

Drafting a Controlling Question A controlling question narrows the search for information and establishes the focus of a paper. This question limits the topic and aids in finding suitable source materials. After you write your controlling question, check to see whether or not it performs these two vital functions:

1. Identifies the *specific* topic and scope
2. Specifies the *direction* of the research

For controversial topics, the wording of the question should receive special attention. The words should be fair and objective. Notice how a few words can change the tone of a question:

Biased: Should students be *forced* to take achievement tests *every year*?

Neutral: Should achievement tests *be given yearly*?

A neutral controlling question will help you to analyze a controversy fairly. Rereading the question from time to time will aid you in withholding judgment until key facts and implications are clear. The researcher who maintains an open mind is more likely to appraise an issue impartially than is one who leaps to a quick decision.

Searching for Reliable Sources You need to gain an accurate overview of an issue, not just gather evidence to bolster one point of view. Understanding varying views is necessary in order to shape a convincing argument. To compare accounts and judge credibility, read from several sources. Not all sources are authoritative or reliable. Some may contain incorrect or outdated information, logical fallacies, or bias.

As you select books, look at the back cover, foreword, or introduction for the writer's credentials. Is he or she an authority in the field? Then scan a few pages and listen to the tone of the writing. Does it sound objective or biased? Does the coverage seem slanted? Do the significant points of the controversy seem to be covered? If you find inconsistencies or differing interpretations, jot down page numbers and authors. These discrepancies should be mentioned in your paper.

To research a local issue, you might interview the people involved and read newspaper accounts. To research a topic in a specialized field, consult journals or trade publications for technical information and opinions of authorities. Popular magazines may give brief, factual overviews of issues, but the treatment may be incomplete. (Also see "Selecting Suitable Sources" and "Evaluating Reliability of Internet Sources" in Chapter 23.)

Note-Taking and Critical Reading While interviewing and reading, gather facts, statistics, expert opinion, cause and effect, reasons, and examples that constitute support for *both* sides. You will need to know the points of the opposing side so that you can refute them effectively. If you cannot answer the opposition's points by citing stronger evidence and better reasons, then your argument will not be convincing.

Take care to represent differing views fairly. That does not mean you give them equal space; you condense their main points. Try to spot anything that seems illogical, biased, or irresponsible. Write your notes in the margins of a copy or on cards. For detailed suggestions for critical reading, see Chapter 26.

Making Con/Pro Lists You can simplify the task of organizing the chief points of a controversy by listing pros and cons while reading. To separate evidence against and for the proposition, just write *con* and *pro* at the top of a sheet of paper. Then as you read, list proof in two vertical columns, placing parallel points side by side. Leave plenty of white space between items to add notes. Follow each item with the name of the author and page number. This identification will save time later. The lists will resemble those below except that actual points and answers will be listed:

Con	*Pro*
Main point (Barnes 140)	Agrees with facts, then disagrees about implications (Aker 39)
Main point (Barnes 141)	Objection and answer (Berry 149)
Main point (Smith 33)	Objection and answer (Conroy 12)

Stating a Position

After listing the significant points of disagreement for an argument, your next task is to select the viewpoint you think is sounder. Then write a proposition, indicating your position on the issue.

Writing a Proposition The thesis statement of an argument is called the *proposition*. The tone of this statement is usually serious and much stronger than that of an ordinary thesis. To draft a proposition, you might start by rewriting your controlling question, then exploring its implications:

Controlling question: Since privacy issues are involved, should telemarketing firms be subject to restrictions?

Possible thesis: Telemarketing is an invasion of privacy that should not be permitted.

Possible thesis: Telemarketing is a legal right that should not be abridged.

Taking a Position of Compromise Sometimes you may not agree wholeheartedly with either view; you see some validity in both views. If you reach an impasse, try a middle-of-the-road approach. Can you think of a way to modify your stand with a compromise that is acceptable to you? The examples below may suggest some ideas:

Compromise: Telemarketing should not be permitted after 6 p.m.

Compromise: Telemarketing by computerized dialing should not be allowed.

Each time you revise your thesis, check it carefully. Does it say what you mean? Could the terminology be confusing to the reader? Does it need to be revised further? Creating a focused title may also be helpful at this point.

Writing a Focused Title A focused title acts like a thesis statement, clearly stating the proposition. Focused titles can be quite beneficial. You can glance back at the title from time to time to ensure that the argument is staying on course. A focused title indicates a position.

Focused title: English Should Be Declared the Sole Official Language of Canada

Focused title: Canada Should Keep Its Two Official Languages, English and French.

When an issue is heated, a writer may pose a question in the title to create a zone of neutrality. This zone allows the writer to present and evaluate the evidence before declaring a position in a *delayed thesis*. This *indirect approach* lowers the temperature of the argument and encourages consideration of differences. Although a neutral question title does not indicate a position, it does indicate a persuasive purpose:

Neutral question title: Should English Be Declared Our Sole Official Language?

Although the neutral question title can be quite effective, your instructor may specify a focused title in order to simplify the writing of your paper. When misused, the neutral question title can lead to vague, rambling papers. Regardless of which kind of title you use, understanding the opposing view will assist in focusing your persuasive strategy.

Planning the Shape of an Argument

There is no "one size fits all" strategy of argument. Arguments come in all shapes and sizes, depending on the rhetorical situation. Thus a writer is left to devise a strategy that will accommodate the situation in the best possible way. The structure of a logical argument consists of four basic parts: (1) making a claim (stating the purpose), (2) anticipating objections from readers, (3) countering objections by supporting the claim with solid evidence, and (4) submitting a conclusion derived from the evidence.

Four Elements of a Logical Argument

Claim: The specific proposition of a writer is the claim. A claim may be made directly or indirectly.

Objections: Knowing the main points of the opponents helps a writer answer objections effectively.

Evidence: A writer supports a claim with facts, interprets the facts, and explains—giving statistics, reasons, examples, or other evidence. (The most effective arguments contain an appeal designed to satisfy or benefit the reader.)

Conclusion: The end of an argument is often a restatement of the claim. It may be a summary of main points or a logical generalization. It may attempt to motivate the reader to act.

Direct or Indirect Order: Early or Delayed Thesis? To organize an effective argument, you first consider whether to use direct or indirect order. In other words, will an early or a delayed thesis be more persuasive? How the four parts of the argument are arranged and developed depends on the implications of the topic and the probable impact on the audience. Think: How will the proposition be received by readers?

Direct Approach If your readers are likely to be well informed and only mildly opposed to a proposition, you may decide to be direct and bring out the proposal early. Then the thesis can be stated in the introduction. Here is an example of a proposition that would probably meet with little resistance from employees who readily accept change:

Early thesis: A new system of billing will speed up the collection process and save an estimated $50,000 annually in collection costs.

Indirect Approach An indirect plan, on the other hand, allows you to delay your thesis until much later in the paper. A delayed thesis allows you to consider the main points of the other side before mentioning your points. This arrangement sets the stage for a congenial discussion. Often it is wise to treat an argument as a misunderstanding or a difference in perception. This low-key approach is less likely to be perceived as threatening or combative. Any hint of antagonism, sarcasm, impatience, or superiority will undermine your stand. A reader who is patronized or derided may be offended. Negative undertones can sabotage the flawless logic of an argument.

Readers who are likely to be uninformed or hostile will require more facts and reasons than will readers who are well informed. You will need to lay extra groundwork for your recommendation. The stronger the objection, the more time you will need to prepare them to accept the proposition. As long as the path of an argument is clear, the thesis statement may be postponed until the body or conclusion.

Delayed thesis: Genetic engineering of food crops can be beneficial.

Sometimes, however, a thesis is implicit (unstated). Still, the argument is focused on one unmistakable conclusion. Since arguments with implicit theses require considerable skill, they are best left to experienced writers. Most instructors require an explicit thesis to aid in establishing the direction of an argument. Regardless of the type of argument you write, stress the benefits, advantages, and strengths of your proposal.

Presenting Opposing Viewpoints To set the tone for a calm, courteous discussion, place the opposing view *before* your own. This method acknowledges the main points of the opposition and shows that you have considered the evidence. This arrangement is akin to listening, indicating a willingness to suspend judgment. This makes your argument stronger, because it emphasizes your answers to the opposing point of view.

When you are *for* an issue, the argument is simpler for most students to organize: *Take the pro side of the issue and place it second:*

(*Opposing view*) Opponents of gambling

(*Pro view*) Proponents of gambling

But when you are *against* an issue, setting up the terminology takes more thought. The order of the viewpoints is *reversed*. (Just remember that your view always comes second.) To prevent possible confusion in your notes, clearly label points of view and place them at the top of your lists of points:

(*Other view*) Proponents of gambling

(*Your view*) Opponents of gambling

After points of view are clearly identified, consider whether to present the argument in block or alternating (point-by-point) form. An outline is essential to keep the argument on track.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN PLANNING AN ARGUMENT

1. What does the audience believe about the issue?
2. How does the audience feel about the issue?
3. Which order will be most effective: direct or indirect?
4. What kind of title will be most effective?
5. How much transition will be needed to make points of view clear?

Block and Alternating Organization There are two basic ways to set up a controversial topic. The simplest is the block method. This way the main points of the opposing side appear in one chunk right after the introduction. One paragraph is usually adequate for this *summary of the opposing view.* Then in the next several paragraphs, you answer *all* the points raised and submit *evidence* to support your reasoning. The block method has an advantage in tone. Describing the opponent's view first not only conveys a sense of fairness but also postpones disagreement.

When an issue is complex, the alternating method is clearer than the block. The alternating pattern pairs one of the opposing points with one of yours, arguing back and forth, emphasizing your answers. (In Figure 19.1, each box represents a paragraph, although others could be added.) A possible disadvantage of alternating is that disagreement emerges earlier than in the block method. Then too, the alternating method requires extra transition.

An unanswered point poses a serious flaw in any argument. If you cannot answer a point adequately and decide to reverse your original position in the argument, it is fine to do so. It shows you have an open, logical mind.

Usually, main points are arranged in least- to most-important order so that the argument builds gradually. The best point is placed last, where it receives the most emphasis. To plan a paper on a controversy, the following questions will be helpful:

Questions for Shaping a Controversial Topic

1. What is at stake? Is there a hidden agenda?
2. Where is the best spot for the proposition? (Direct or indirect order?)
3. Is a definition needed?
4. How much background information will be needed?
5. Is there a common ground?
6. Can any concessions be made?
7. What are the advantages to accepting the proposition?
8. Are there disadvantages?
9. Will the block or alternating method be more suitable?
10. What is the best way to conclude the argument?

Drafting a Neutral Introduction

The purpose of an introduction is to present a factual overview of the argument. The introduction describes the issue and its origin, cause(s), and history. The introduction tells *when*, *who*, *what*, *how,* and perhaps *why,* defining the area of disagreement. The appeal is primarily logical: The tone is neutral. If readers are familiar with a topic, background information may be brief. If a topic is unfamiliar, the introduction should be more detailed.

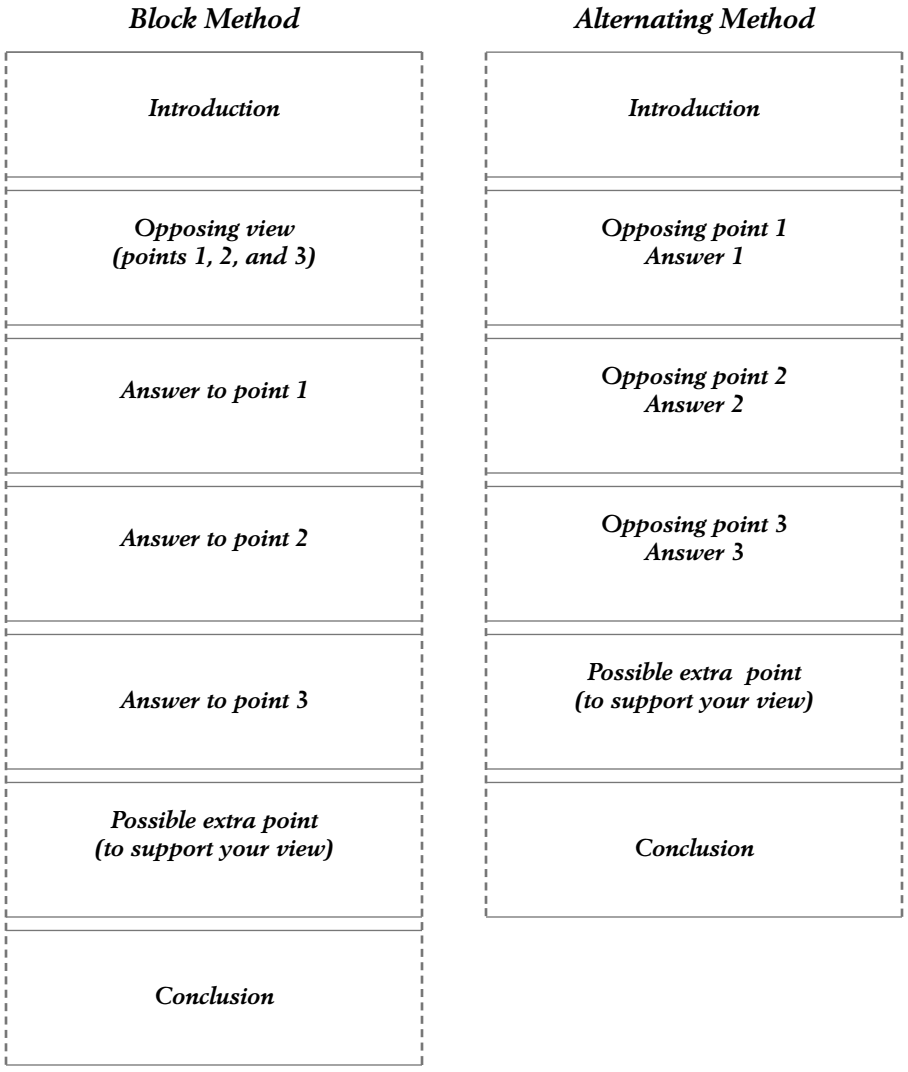

Figure 19.1 Ways to organize an argument.

In this student introduction, Pamela J. Van Camp begins with a definition. Then she gives logical reasons why so many people are turning to alternative medical treatments. At the end of the paragraph, she introduces the element of risk.

Alternative Medicine Has a Healthy Attraction

Alternative medicine is a term that describes nonconventional medical practices such as chiropractic, meditation, yoga, acupuncture, and herbal remedies. In the past two

> decades in the United States, more and more people are seeking alternative treatment. One reason for this growing trend is that people are looking for effective medical help without the side effects that often come with conventional medicine (Peeke 92). They are also attracted by the mind-body connection that alternative therapies claim to address for their total health (92). Many of the alternative medicine patients are well-educated people who pay for treatments out of pocket (Patel 49–50). Some are terminally ill and desperately seeking a cure even though it may carry a risk.

Finding Common Ground

Agreement sets the scene for mutual respect. A point of agreement or *common ground* increases the chances that a proposition will receive thoughtful consideration from readers who disagree. Common ground can be a shared interest, a belief, an understanding, or a goal.

A common ground prepares the reader for a reasonable argument. In a paper about aspartame, Rita Fleming provides facts and advantages before presenting disadvantages:

> Nearly "180 times sweeter than sugar," aspartame is the most popular low-calorie sweetener available today. Each year over "100 million Americans consume carbonated beverages, iced tea, desserts, presweetened cold cereal and other products" sweetened with aspartame (Farber 52). NutraSweet has been referred to as a "dieter's dream" since it contains few calories, and many products containing aspartame have been labeled "low calorie" (*Sweeteners* 49).

To settle on a common ground, a writer not only presents facts but also listens to the connotations of words. Ill-chosen phrases can inflame feelings. But tactful words create an air of peaceful deliberation.

Acknowledging and Clarifying Points of Agreement

While analyzing the main points of the opposing view, watch for a way to grant a point or clarify what you mean. To show agreement with the opposition's point, acknowledge it with a word or phrase such as *certainly, granted, it is true, proponents agree,* or *advocates recognize.* Then present the related pro point. The following phrases or similar ones might be used according to the purpose:

- It is true that . . . but . . .
- Proponents realize that . . . , yet they believe . . .
- Supporters recognize . . . ; still they do not acknowledge . . .
- This is not say that . . . but to . . .
- _____ argues that . . .
- _____ claims that . . .but [include evidence] reveals . . .
- In short, the opponents believe . . . because . . .

Refuting Opposing Points

To refute means to show that the information of claim is irrelevant or just partly true or completely false. In answering opposing points, avoid any hint of disrespect or antagonism; be respectful and friendly. When you show respect for the reader's points, your chances for acceptance of the proposition will increase. To be convincing, a writer needs adequate evidence. The opinion of just one authority is inadequate; multiple sources are required. Opinion must be substantiated by facts, reasons, and examples. As a rule, the more evidence, the more convincing the argument, but do not oversell.

Select the most noteworthy points of the argument. Use quality evidence. Weak evidence will not support a claim for long. Careful readers will be apt to spot distortions, omissions, quotations taken out of context, or other problems. There must be solid proof that the proposition is logical, beneficial, and ethical. Only a sound, ethical argument will stand up under intense scrutiny.

Dodging Fallacies

For an argument to be effective, the logic must be impeccable. A writer who misquotes, transposes statistics, misdiagnoses cause and effect, or trips over hasty generalizations may be perceived as careless, uninformed, biased, or manipulative. Although name-calling, exaggeration, or other blunders may be discounted in conversation, readers are unlikely to be so patient or forgiving. (See Chapter 20 for more on fallacies.) Let's consider two fallacies from papers:

> The most annoying thing in the world is to pick up the telephone after a long day at work and find a telemarketer at the other end of the line.
>
> A voluntary national service would solve the United States's problems.

Both claims are hasty generalizations. Certainly there are greater annoyances than a telephone interruption, and no one action could possibly solve the numerous problems faced by the United States. Another common fallacy is assuming that a complex problem results from a single cause. *Rarely does a complex problem have only one cause.* For example, presidents are often blamed for problems existing long before they took office. The truth is that many factors influence complicated problems.

A final precaution to keep in mind is that *an analogy cannot constitute proof.* Although valid analogies are useful for explanation, they prove nothing.

Writing a Conclusion

A conclusion is the final nail in the building of an argument. The conclusion should be sound, appropriate, and complete. It should not stray into irrelevancies, fail to take a stand, or end abruptly. It should leave the reader persuaded that the reasoning is valid and worthy of consideration. If action is advocated, the tone should convey a sense of immediacy, a feeling that impels the reader to act. Rita Fleming closes with a reference to risk:

> Although the FDA has allowed aspartame to remain on the market, a look at the history of this chemical raises severe doubts about its long-term safety for everyone. The risks of using this product regularly far outweigh any advantages.

To be forceful and complete, most arguments need a restatement of the thesis. Restatement redirects the reader's attention to the proposition, as in the following example. Kathy Kerchner writes:

> Finally, the use of restraints is a prime concern in geriatric facilities. Research on physical or mechanical restraint use is vague, and more is needed. For many confused residents, restraints are harmful in the long run. If a restraint not only denies freedom and dignity for the aged, but also leads to disorientation, then justification for use must outweigh possible consequences. Caregivers should exhaust all other alternatives before applying a restraint and continue to reevaluate its need from time to time.

Kathy's ending is one of compromise. She realizes that there is no one solution for all situations or all patients at all times. Still, she takes a firm stand, pointing out the dangers of long-term use of restraints.

Revising an Argument

Reviewing your outline will help you check the organization of your paper. Could the order be improved? Would any section or subsection fit better in another spot? Reread the paper and check it with the outline as you go. Do you see any discrepancies? This method forces you to look more closely at work that has become familiar. Using a checklist will help you guard against omissions.

In summary, to build an effective argument about a controversial topic, you should (1) define the disagreement, (2) find the area of resistance or dissent, (3) respect the audience, and (4) ensure that evidence is logical and ethical.

CHECKLIST: REVISING AN ARGUMENT

1. Is the issue clearly defined?
2. Does the introduction have a neutral tone?
3. Has a common ground been established?
4. Are points of view clearly identified?
5. Are main points of the opposition presented fairly?
6. Is adequate evidence presented to refute each opposing point?
7. Is the logic sound?
8. Is the language calm and rational?
9. Does the conclusion restate the position?
10. Is the organization clear to the reader?

FOR YOUR REFERENCE:
ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS IN THE READER

- "Why College Grads Get Jobs," Robert Sheppard, page 491
- "It's just money, honey," Irshad Manji, page 499
- "The Other Difference between Boys and Girls," Richard M. Restak, page 502
- "We Have No 'Right to Happiness,'" C. S. Lewis, page 508

SUMMARY

- A *classic* argument combines three appeals: logical, ethical, and emotional; in order to create an effective argument, assess the rhetorical situation and combine appeals appropriately.
- An argument has a basic premise or underlying belief called the proposition. This belief is the starting point of the argument. An argument can make any of five basic claims: claims of fact, interpretation, cause, judgment, or policy.
- Before taking a definite stand, thoroughly research your topic. You might begin by writing a controlling question to direct your research. Making notes in a con/pro format will simplify your analysis of the issue.
- An effective argument has four basic parts: claim (thesis), objection, evidence, and conclusion. For cases in which there is only mild opposition, the thesis may be stated directly and early. When faced with strong opposition, however, the thesis is generally stated indirectly and is delayed. An argument on an issue can be arranged in block or alternate block order. Main points are usually placed in order from least to most important.
- In your *introduction*, describe the background to the issue and define disagreement. Include areas of agreement, if any. In the *body* of your paper, summarize opposing points if using the block method. For the alternating method, place objections and refutations in pairs. Counter each objection with logical evidence. Your *conclusion* should be suitable and complete.

Practice

Writing Exercise: Examining Opposing Points of View

Directions: Select a topic. Write two paragraphs from two *contrasting* points of view. Separate the paragraphs and indicate the person speaking. Be biased and emotional if the occasion calls for it.

1. *Animal Control.* Your town council is considering hiring an animal control officer because of complaints about stray cats, bats, and raccoons. You are a citizen with high property taxes who thinks the officer is unnecessary. You have varmint-proofed your home yourself and cats are not a problem. Next, write from the point of view of a citizen who has had his flowers dug up, his sleep disturbed, and a car scratched by cats. Raccoons have invaded his attic, and he is afraid they may have rabies.
2. *Deadline.* At 4:30 p.m. your boss hands you ten pages of a draft with numerous red-penciled changes. The typed project report is due at 8 a.m. tomorrow. He plans to revise the last six pages while you correct the first ten pages. You have a dinner date and know the job will take at least an hour. You normally work until 5 p.m. Write from your boss's point of view and from your point of view.
3. *Dental charge.* A busy dentist has a policy that if a patient misses an appointment without cancelling, a minimum charge of $25 is added to the bill. A woman who missed her appointment because she took her injured child (who suffered a broken arm) to the emergency room is protesting the extra charge. Write from the dentist's point of view, then from the woman's point of view.
4. *Broken window.* A ten-year-old has just batted a softball through the thermopane window of a neighbour's house. It landed on the dining room table while she was entertaining dinner guests. One guest received a nick on the face from flying glass. Write the batter's version of the event and then the neighbour's.
5. *Ball game.* Imagine you are two reporters writing accounts of the same game. One reporter favours the hometown team; the other does not.

Workplace Issues for Discussion

1. You do not have enough money to buy your lunch. Is it all right to borrow $5 from your cash register and return the money after you get paid that evening? (You will be returning after dinner to work overtime.) Why or why not?
2. Is it all right to use your company's computer to print ten posters for a garage sale you are planning? Why or why not?
3. Is it ethical to use the company computer during work time to send several email messages to friends? To chat online? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Two office mates (one is married) are having a romance that has affected their productivity. How should the employer intervene?
5. In a foreign country where bribes are a part of the economic system, is it all right for a Canadian factory owner to offer a bribe to a purchasing agent? Why or why not?

Ten Ideas for Papers of Argument

1. Should violent, "disturbed" students be permitted to attend public schools? What alternatives exist?
2. Refusal of insurance: Reasonable risk or genetic discrimination?
3. Nuclear Power: Revival or Relapse?
4. Should "nonalcoholic" beer (0.5 percent) be sold to minors?
5. Does "zero tolerance" in public schools make sense?
6. Should children under sixteen be sentenced as adults?
7. Should athletic teams be suspended for repeated poor sportsmanship leading to violence?
8. Should the legal driving age be lowered or raised?
9. Should "great books" courses be revived in high schools?
10. Should copyright protection apply to Internet content?