

If, then, we're interested in teaching our students about argument, we will likely need to teach ourselves about it first.

WHAT IS AN "ARGUMENT," ANYWAY?

In common usage, the word *argument* has two very different meanings. On the one hand, it refers to a set of propositions consisting of a claim and one or more reasons offered in its behalf (Fleming, "Pictures"). Argument in this sense is one of the signal achievements of human intelligence, reflecting our species' capacity not just to assert our opinions but to substantiate them. We see this meaning in the Common Core's definition of the word: "An argument is a reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer's position, belief, or conclusion is valid" (Appendix A 23). But the word "argument" also has a very different meaning, denoting a social interaction characterized by disagreement. In this sense, one *has* an argument, rather than *makes* one; a situation that says less about our capacity for reason than our tendency to differ and dispute. Here, "argument" is about confrontation, something most people find highly stressful.

The difference between these two meanings is so striking that, thirty-five years ago, communication scholar Daniel O'Keefe proposed that we distinguish them, calling the first "argument₁," and the second, "argument₂." Of course, the two meanings are related. Argument₁ only makes sense in the context of argument₂. We support our claims with reasons, after all, because we're trying to persuade skeptical others that they are valid. At the same time, argument₂ depends on argument₁; if it is to be productive, social conflict is a natural expression of human autonomy and diversity, but it can be threatening. Reason helps facilitate, manage, even resolve it.

Unfortunately, school tends to reduce and flatten argument. Students are frequently asked to make an argument without being part of a situation that actually calls for one, without what rhetoricians call an exigence, "an imperfection marked by urgency" (Bitzer). Outside school, meanwhile, argument is often identified with opposition: with attacking others and defending ourselves. The fact is, we have no shared vocabulary for talking about the space where reason and conflict intersect, a space especially crucial in politics, the activity of living with people who are different from us. For that activity, what we need is practice not in rationalizing our opinions, or in defeating our opponents, but in *reasoning with others*. I call that activity "argumentation": the process of *making* an argument in the context of *having* an argument.

Now, "argument" and "argumentation" were originally terms in the ancient art of *rhetoric*, a discipline developed to help people compose, deliver, and respond to public discourse. I first encountered rhetoric when I was introduced to Composition Studies. The more I learned, the more it appealed to me—as a writer, teacher, and citizen. Rhetoric makes argumentation the heart of public life, but it orients that activity to the goal of persuasion, to influencing others' beliefs, moving their passions, and inciting their will to act. It sees human beings as autonomous and rational but also as situated and embodied. It is the art *par excellence* of *homo*

Rhetoric and Argumentation

David Fleming

I like many compositionists of my generation, I fell into the field by accident. I had been an English major at a liberal arts college in the South, reading Shakespeare, Austen, and Whitman and writing my own (rather feeble) fiction and poetry. After graduation, my life moved in a more worldly direction. I taught English and history at a secondary school in East Africa and tracked education policy for a youth advocacy organization in Washington, DC. So when, at twenty-six, I went back to school to get an MA in English, it wasn't long before I thought I had made a terrible mistake. Reading literature had once been the center of a series of concentric circles that also included journalism, politics, and social action; now I felt that vision narrowing, and I worried that my heart wasn't in this more focused activity.

Then, something fortunate happened—I stumbled onto a part of English I didn't know existed. In a course titled Rhetorical Theory and Practice, I read Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Erika Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. I learned about language acquisition and process theory. And I designed my own writing course, a task I found deeply engaging. Though there were no other classes like that for me to take, I stayed in the program, writing a thesis on the use of collaborative writing projects in the classroom. Later, I taught first-year composition at a community college and, after two years, entered a PhD program in "comp-thet," the kind I teach in now.

Looking back, the move from literature to composition must have appealed to me for a number of reasons: My focus changed from Great Authors to ordinary writers; my attention turned from the *analysis* of texts to their *production*; and, perhaps most important of all, the center of my generic universe shifted from "creative writing" to *argument*. Now, having spent a year in a developing country and two years in a city on the front lines of socioeconomic change, I knew that argument was a rich and vital activity. But I had never studied it, and I had no models for its development. In this, I was like nearly every other graduate of our school system. Even as the Common Core State Standards call for expanded attention to argument in K-12 instruction, the language arts there remain dominated by literature.

politicians, a creature driven by the forces of identification and division and thus wracked by argument, inside and out.

CLASSICAL RHETORICS

The Greek word *rhetoriké* was probably coined by Plato in the early fourth century BCE, to denote something he was deeply suspicious of: the art of the *rhetor*, or “public speaker” (Schlappa). The prominence of *rhetores* in democratic Athens (508–322 BCE) reflected the vital role played there by verbal skill. Of course, eloquence has always been important for leadership—the Homeric heroes are often described as “honey-tongued” and “wise in council.” What was new in Athens was the *setting* of eloquence: No longer the battlefield, it was now the *polis*, with its popular assemblies, people’s courts, and boards of magistrates (Hansen). In these *political fora*, audiences ruled the state by listening to opposed speeches and deciding the issues before them. *Rhetores* thus not only had to compose texts and deliver them from memory, they had to ingratiate themselves to people who were neither really their friends nor strangers. To do that, they couldn’t just point to some “truth” of the matter; they had to make their case by appealing to the beliefs and values of others. In a democracy, after all, *the people* decide, even if what they decide is competition among elites (Ober).

The goal of rhetoric was thus to move one’s audience. This meant not just establishing or increasing their adherence to some belief; it meant stirring their emotions and eliciting their actions. Reason-giving discourse was important in that endeavor, but rhetorics mode was never exclusively “logical.” It was an art attuned to the whole situation of political speech. Inevitably, a teaching profession arose to help people learn that art. In Athens, itinerant “sophists” gave demonstrations in verbal skill, and even Plato incorporated rhetoric in his school. Eventually, the art of rhetoric settled into two streams: the Isocratean and Aristotelian (Solmsen).

The first stream is named for the Athenian *rhetor* (Isocrates) (436–338 BCE), who developed a way of teaching eloquence that began with the parts of a speech, a scheme meant to help speakers prepare texts by anticipating their performance.¹

The most common scheme had six parts:

1. Introduction (*exordium*)
2. Statement of facts (*narratio*)
3. Division (*partitio*)
4. Proof (*confirmatio*)
5. Refutation (*refutatio*)
6. Conclusion (*peroratio*)

Other schemes added (or subtracted) parts: for example, *propositio* before *partitio*. But most rhetoricians believed that what was crucial was the *function* of the parts, not their number. For example, if “proof” was about logically supporting one’s

position, the introduction sought “to make our hearers well disposed to us, receptive, and attentive” (Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.80), and the conclusion, to “kindle” their emotions (2.332). *Narratio*, meanwhile, was where one laid out the facts of one’s case. (Teachers today tend to separate argument and narrative, but in the classical tradition, they were part of the same art and oriented to the same goal: persuasion of one’s audience [Fahnestock and Secor, “Classical” 116].)

The “parts” doctrine thus asked rhetors to imagine auditors *experiencing* their speech: What kinds of thoughts and emotions did you want them to have? In what order? How could you secure their attention at the beginning? Inspire them to act at the end? (If there’s continuity here with modern “arts” like the five-paragraph theme, it’s tenuous: The latter provide students with inflexible discourse containers, dictating their thinking rather than helping them compose a text based on the case at hand.)

This focus on performance in Isocratean rhetoric can also be seen in the priority given to style in that tradition. But the key stylistic virtue was *decorum*, the aptness of one’s words to one’s purpose, audience, and occasion, factors summed up by the Greek word *kairós*? The point, in other words, was not to express oneself ornately but *appropriately*. Classical pedagogy thus helped students build up a rich repertoire of verbal resources and the discernment to use them well *in situ*. The touchstone of such pedagogy is Erasmus’ *Or Copia*, which provides 195 variations on the Latin sentence *haec litterae me magnopere delectarunt* (“your letter pleased me greatly”).²

If all this seems merely playful, the real-world power of Isocratean rhetoric can be seen in its emphasis on two-sided argument (in Greek, *dissoi logoi*; in Latin, argument *in utramque partem*). Where modern liberalism assumes that dispassionate interlocutors can ultimately agree on the questions that divide them, traditional rhetoric assumed that people *always* disagree—about everything—and always will. The function of rhetoric was thus to facilitate controversy; not to suppress it (Garsten, *Savring* 6). As a teaching technique, *dissoi logoi* instilled in students the habit of opposing every argument with a counterargument, every counterargument with a rebuttal.³ If we moderns are uncomfortable with such agonism, we should remember that the ancient art was more about persuading a third party, the judges, than confronting one’s opponents. In rhetoric, “[t]he audience is courted, not vanquished” (Fahnestock and Secor, “Classical” 107).

Aristotelian rhetoric differed from Isocratean in, among other things, the way it ordered the art. If the organizing frame for Isocrates was the parts of a speech, for Aristotle it was the “offices” of the rhetor, the stages he or she went through in preparing a speech. Eventually, a standard division of five stages emerged:

1. Invention
2. Arrangement

²A useful resource on classical rhetoric is Gideon Burton’s “Forest of Rhetoric” website: <http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm>

³Isocratean rhetoric was not, however, without a theory of content, especially regarding the question at issue, which was taught through the doctrine of “stases” (Fahnestock and Secor, “Stases”).

⁴Arguing in *utramque partem* is also a powerful invention technique, the rhetor anticipating the arguments of others when developing his own (Greene and Hicks, Sloane).

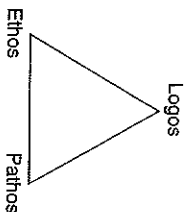
¹The Isocratean tradition is sometimes referred to as the sophistic or Ciceronian tradition (Conley, Walker).

3. Style
4. Memory
5. Delivery

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) thus organized rhetoric “under categories representing essential qualities or functions of any speech” (Solmsen 38). Even today, the system can help students divide up rhetorical problems into manageable tasks and practice the several powers needed for full rhetorical competence.

The most important “office” or “canon” of rhetoric, for Aristotle, was invention; and the heart of invention was proof, or *pisteis*. Aristotle defined rhetoric, in fact as the ability, in each case, to see the available proofs (1.2). The focus was thus not on producing words but on instilling belief in one’s audience—or at least on seeing what that would take. Belief had three sources: the truth, or apparent truth, of the matter at hand (*logos*); the character of the speaker as constructed in the speech (*ethos*); and the emotions of the audience (*pathos*). Although Aristotle faulted other arts for neglecting “logical” persuasion (1.1), he himself claimed that *ethos* was the most authoritative proof (1.2), and he devoted much of Book 2 to the *pathos*. Why? Because “rhetoric is concerned with making a judgment,” and it is necessary therefore not only that the argument be persuasive but that the speaker be seen as a certain kind of person and the judge be prepared to act in a certain way (2.1). This holistic quality of Aristotelian rhetoric makes it not only more realistic than exclusively “logical” theories of argumentation but also more ethical, since it respects the situated, embodied nature of humans’ motivations: “Even if we hope to draw citizens into deliberating reasonably with one another, we cannot help but begin by appealing to them as we find them—opinionated, self-interested, sentimental, partial to their friends and family, and often unreasonable” (Garsten, *Saving* 4–5).

The three sources of persuasion in Aristotelian rhetoric are often represented by a triangle, which can also serve to indicate the three elements of the rhetorical situation itself: speaker (*ethos*), subject (*logos*), and audience (*pathos*).⁵



The triangle is a useful reminder to students to consider all the available proofs in composing—and analyzing—arguments (Heinrichs 38–45).

Aristotle nonetheless made *logical* demonstration—that is, showing through inductive or deductive inference that something is true or apparently true—the “heart” of his rhetorical art (1.1). For induction, he focused on the *example*; for deduction, the *syllogism*, which he defined as a discourse (*logos*) in which, certain things being

⁵A classic statement on balancing writer, subject matter, and audience is Booth.

stated, something other follows.⁶ Unfortunately, “syllogism” later became associated with the highly formal inference pattern Aristotle called “apodictic”;⁷ for example, “If A is predicated of all B, and B of all C, A must be predicated of all C.”⁸ Of course, people don’t argue that way in the real world; that’s why Aristotle also considered the kinds of reasoning people use, together, in situations of radical uncertainty.

The form that deductive reasoning takes in rhetorical situations Aristotle called the *enthymeme*, perhaps the most powerful argumentative tool to come out of classical rhetoric. It is, in essence, a rhetorical syllogism, one that concerns probabilities and contingencies, appeals to emotions and character, and is directed toward judgment. What has most impressed theorists, however, is its truncation. When arguing before a mass audience, one often leaves steps out, not just because the audience can’t be expected to follow a long chain of reasoning, but because letting them supply premises themselves can be seductive. If I argue that the president should resign because he had an extramarital affair, the argument works via a “suppressed” premise which might be rendered, “Having an extramarital affair makes one unfit to be a leader.”

The enthymeme has been taken up in contemporary pedagogy most passionately by John Gage, who defines it as an assertion accompanied by a because clause. But since such argument is always co-constructed by its audience, it actually has four parts:

THE RHETOR’S SHARE	THE AUDIENCE’S SHARE
assertion	question-at-issue
because clause	assumption

The two items in the left-hand column imply the two in the right (Gage, “Enthymeme” 224). This makes the enthymeme not just a form of argument but also a tool of inquiry “because it responds to a ‘question at issue’ and because its claim and reasons are subject to revision . . . based on the responses of an audience that shares the question” (Gage, “Reasoned” 15).

Such “bilateral” reasoning, says Gage, can be used to organize a whole essay:

Beginning: The reader is introduced to a problem that is of shared interest because it needs a solution: this is *the question at issue*.

Middle: The solution depends on the reader and writer sharing a common understanding or value: *the assumption*; given this assumption, an answer to the problem can be developed if a condition is shown to be the case: *the because clause*.

End: Given both assumption and condition, the solution follows: *the assertion*.

For example, I might argue that date rape occurs too often on our campus; we need to do something to reduce its incidence. Informing students that all forced sex is rape and punishable as such can help reduce such incidence. Therefore, we should require all students to undergo education about date rape (Gage, *Shape* 103ff).

⁶*Rhetor Analytics*, 1.1.
⁷Ibid., 1.4.

If the enthymeme was Aristotle's main theory of rhetorical form, the topics was how he accounted for rhetorical content. The key source (topos) of content for Aristotle, was politics, what people argue about in civic situations. There are three kinds of civic situations, defined by the audiences who rule them: namely, judges of both past and future events and spectators of the present. The taxonomy gives us the three genres of Aristotelian rhetoric: forensic, deliberative, and epideictic (1.3). Each genre is associated with its own "topics"; in deliberation, for example, there are recurring arguments about national defense. After exhaustively cataloging these "special" topics, Aristotle enumerated twenty-eight lines of argument or "common" topics, applicable across rhetorical situations, e.g., the topic of division ("All people do wrong for one of three reasons: x, y, or z; if not x or y, it must be z") (2.23).⁸

Given the richness of classical rhetorical theory, whether Isocratean or Aristotelian, it may be surprising to learn that, according to the ancients, "art" was less important as a source of skill than natural capacity and practice.⁹ Practice was itself divided into imitation, exercise, and declamation. In "exercise," students began with short, simple narratives and worked their way up to longer, more complicated arguments. As they progressed, they not only built up a repertoire of rhetorical moves, they developed confidence and internalized cultural values. Eventually, a standard sequence of exercises emerged (see Fleming, "The Very Idea"). Following is my version of the third exercise, the *chreia*, in which the student amplifies a saying attributed to a famous person:

Practice not only develops rhetorical skills
it develops citizens,
ideological belonging

What would this look like in a written essay? Would there be transitions?

The Chreia Exercise

"Men hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they can't communicate with each other; and they can't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other."
—Martin Luther King, Jr.

In a short essay, amplify the saying above through the following topics:

1. Praise the author (panegyric)
2. Re-state the saying (paraphrase)
3. Defend the saying, showing how it is true (proof by cause)
4. Refute its opposite (proof by contrast)
5. Support it by analogy (proof by illustration)
6. Support it by anecdote (proof by example)
7. Support it by testimony (proof by authority)
8. Exhort readers to emulate the author (epilogue)

⁸Aristotelian rhetoric continues to impress (Allen; Garsten, *Seeing Persuasion*), even as Isocrates enjoys a renaissance (Valkar); but rhetoricians increasingly merge the two streams: see, e.g., Falmerston and Secor, "Classical."

⁹On this tradition, see Fleming, "Rhetoric"; Isocrates, *Antidosis* 188.

Rhetoric's long reign at the center of the liberal arts suggests that the curriculum worked, producing individuals with discursive ingenuity, discernment, and accountability (Lausberg 502–503). Later-day rhetoricians have seen these traits as the dispositions needed in "a genuine and open-ended democracy" (Lanham 693).

NEW RHETORICS

Alas, in the Early Modern period, rhetoric declined as an educational force. Philibegs grew suspicious of its emotional appeals and copiousness. And they viewed rhetoric as not just "trivial"—it was dangerous. At the same time, practitioners of the "new science" focused on discovering facts rather than circulating "commonsense" of their polis (Crowley, *Methodical*). To communicate those facts they sought a plain, truth-revealing language, one fixed and spatialized by print (Ong). In the new nation-states, meanwhile, politics was all about representation not participation. And in the romantic era, eloquence was reserved for poetry, "art" inaccessible to technique.¹⁰

There were socioeconomic factors at work, too: namely, the rise of an industrial society run by a professional middle class that defined itself through specialized rather than general education. If the old order needed rhetors for the senate, bar, and pulpit, the new order needed engineers and accountants. And it needed a new kind of language art, one centered on writing and aimed at clarity, rather than eloquence.

Of course, the rhetorical tradition was never completely lost. Professors public speaking rediscovered its techniques, and professors of literature reexamined its historical importance. There was also growing interest, after World War I, in general education, a response to the increasing complexity of society. By the century, with higher education expanding and the Cold War intensifying, a "democratic" rationale for the teaching of composition emerged, one in which rhetoric played a growing role.

However it happened, the years 1950–1980 saw the birth of a host of "new rhetorics" in U.S. English Departments. No text epitomized the revival better than Edw. P. J. Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. Largely Aristotelian, it was later joined by Sharon Crowley's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, more Isocratean in flavor. But new rhetorics also emerged, especially to help students develop content for their writing. "Most teachers know that rhetoric has always lost its way and respect to the degree that invention has not had a significant and meaningful role," Elbert Harrington wrote in 1962 (qtd. in Lauer 74). One of the first new systems came out of the University of Chicago, where Manuel Bilsky and his colleagues proposed a new set of argumentative *topoi*—genus, consequence, similarity, and authority—to help students "say something intelligible" about the world (Bilsky, Hazle Streeter, and Weaver 211). More innovative was Richard Larson's questioning method meant to show students "what is of interest and value in their experiences" (127).¹¹

¹⁰See Bender and Wellbery for an influential treatment of rhetoric's decline.
¹¹See also the "tagmemic" procedure developed by Young, Becker, and Pike.

Burke

Another technique widely used at this time was the "pentad" of Kenneth Burke (1897–1993). According to Burke, "In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*" (*Grammar* xv). David Blakesley later proposed "ratios" of the terms to help students generate arguments. For example, the 1999 Columbine shootings (the *act*) could be read through their suburban *scene*, a place where success is measured in terms of popularity and privilege (38).

Writing in the middle of a violent century, Burke saw more in rhetoric, though, than invention techniques. According to John Ramage and his colleagues, he was the first figure since Aristotle to "encompass the full scope of rhetorical theory" (Ramage, Callaway, Clary-Lemon, and Waggoner 67). Rhetoric was useful, thought Burke, because it helps us "reverse division" (Blakesley 61) by paradoxically encouraging the "parliamentary wrangling of our differences" (Ramage et al. 129). Though located in "the region of the Scramble, of insult and injury, bickering, squabbling, malice, and lie" (Burke, *Rhetoric* 19), rhetoric also facilitates *identification* (20). After all, in trying to change an audience's opinion in one respect, a rhetor "can succeed only insofar as he yields to that audience's opinions in other respects" (56).

Other rhetoricians were less sanguine about the "Human Barnyard." For them, the emphasis of the new rhetoric should be "problem-solving or problem-reduction rather than persuasion" (Herbert Simons, qtd. in Brent 43). A key figure here was U.S. psychotherapist Carl Rogers, who wrote in 1951 that "[T]he major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person" (284–85). We need to learn "empathic understanding—understanding with a person, not about him" (286). Rogers' proposal: "The next time you get into an argument . . . institute this rule: 'Each person can speak up for himself only after he has first restated the ideas and feelings of the previous speaker accurately, and to that speaker's satisfaction'" (286).

Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike later proposed a "Rogerian argument" with the following "phases" (283):

1. An introduction to the problem and a demonstration that the opponent's position is understood.
2. A statement of the contexts in which the opponent's position may be valid.
3. A statement of the writer's position, including the contexts in which it is valid.
4. A statement of how the opponent's position would benefit if he were to adopt elements of the writer's position. If the writer can show that the positions complement each other . . . so much the better.

Rogerian argument was one of the more influential theories to come out of the mid-century rhetoric revival. In a way, it was a forerunner to those rhetorics of understanding that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, many from feminist theorists.

Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin's "invitational rhetoric," for example, viewed audience members "as equal to the rhetor and as experts on their own lives." Similarly, Catherine Lamb explored ways of managing conflict outside of the "male mode" of persuasion (157), using techniques of mediation and negotiation.

The twentieth century also saw the rise of a whole new *philosophical* approach to argument. Two figures are key here. The first, Chaim Perelman (1912–1984), was a Belgian philosopher who, with Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, published *La Nouvelle Rhétorique* (*The New Rhetoric*) in 1958—according to David Frank, "the most important system of argument produced in the twentieth century" (267).¹² The book rejected modern logic, turning instead to Aristotle's *dialectical* reasoning, which aimed not to deduce impersonal consequences from self-evident premises but "to elicit or increase the adherence of the members of an audience to theses that are presented for their consent" (9). The audience is thus *everything*: "There is only one rule in the matter: adaptation of the speech to the audience, whatever its nature" (25).

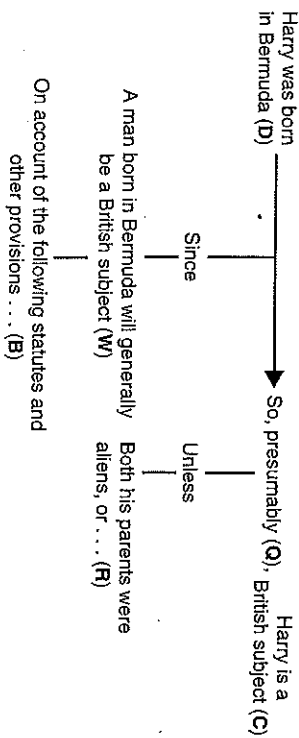
But it was another mid-century thinker, Stephen Toulmin, whose theory had the most impact on postsecondary writing pedagogy. Toulmin (1922–2009) was a British philosopher who also rejected the modern quest for certainty and advocated the recovery of Aristotelian dialectic. And, like Perelman, he published his key work in 1958. That book, *The Uses of Argument*, contrasted the immutable criteria of formal logic with the diversity of arguments put forth in everyday life. According to Toulmin, the grounds we use to justify our claims are *field-dependent*. But the shape and force of our arguments, what Toulmin called their "lay-out," are *field-invariant*. The main thing we do when we argue is make an assertion, committing ourselves to the CLAIM (on others' attention and to their belief) that this involves. The merits of that claim depend, of course, on the arguments produced in its support—what Toulmin called DATA. But other things happen when we argue. Sometimes we are asked to explain *how* it is we get from data to claim; we are thus called upon to identify the WARRANT that authorizes our argument. Warrants differ from data in two ways: They are usually implicit rather than explicit and they are expressed as rules, not facts. A warrant can usually be written in the form "if D, then C" and is thus implied by the argument itself.

Warrants confer varying degrees of force on claims; Toulmin was thus concerned to add QUALIFIERS—words like "presumably" or "certainly"—and conditions of REBUTTAL (e.g., "You should never vote for an adulterer unless . . .") to his layout. And there was a sixth feature that was important to him—it had to do with the support provided for the warrant itself. Sometimes we are asked: Why should *this* warrant be accepted as an authority? Why, for example, are adulterers unfit for public office? Unlike warrants (and like data), the BACKING of an argument can be expressed substantively. But like a warrant (and unlike data), it need not be

¹²According to Crosswhite, its appearance was "the single most important event in contemporary rhetorical theory" (35).

made explicit. Backing for our argument about the adulterous politician, for example, might be the Seventh Commandment of the Mosaic Law, a proscription against adultery.

Following is a diagram of the complete model using one of Toulmin's own examples:



Toulmin went to great pains to contrast his six-part layout with the traditional three-part syllogism, which he thought insufficiently “candid.” Classical logic, he wrote, failed to distinguish two kinds of major premises, warrants and backing. It thus made validity a *formal* matter (118ff): after all, provided the correct warrant, any argument could be expressed in the form “D, W, C” and thus be valid.¹³ Toulmin’s model has other advantages: It employs the argumentative language people use in everyday life; the accompanying visual “layout” makes it easy for students to understand; and the model highlights how the different parts of an argument fit together.

RHETORIC AND ARGUMENTATION TODAY

By the early 1980s, composition teachers not only had several classical rhetorics with which to teach, but a whole slate of *new* rhetorics. Unfortunately, the space for writing instruction itself had contracted. Starting in the 1960s, first-year composition in many schools was reduced to a single semester, an unfortunate trend for argument since it had often been the focus of the second course. In addition, the success of the process movement meant that “personal” writing had become more prominent. Still, the teaching of argument was on the rise in the 1980s and 1990s, as cultural divisions in the academy and society grew. Perhaps the peak year was 1996, when four key books on the topic were published.¹⁴ But the momentum didn’t last. Here I part company with Ramage et al., who claim that we are in the

¹³Malvin Hall and I found some years ago that appropriations of the Toulmin model in composition textbooks typically emphasize only the first three parts of the “layour”—claim, data, and warrant—and neglect the other three—qualifiers, rebuttals, and backing. The elision of backing is especially pernicious, we argued, because, for Toulmin, backing statements are what makes real-world arguments *substantial*—that is, non-amenable to formal assessments of validity—and *field-dependent*—that is, particular to the “logic” of specific communities.

¹⁴See Bertelli, Crosswhite, Emmel, Resch, and Tenney; and Fulkerson.

midst of a “golden age” in argument instruction (5). The events of the last ten to fifteen years—the terrorist attacks of 2001, the rise of Web 2.0, the Great Recession—have put enormous pressure on public reason. Other than Ramage et al., there has been no major book on argument by a compositionist since Barnett in 2002. There has even been a falling off of interest in Toulmin (Bizup). Rhetoric remains one of the richest approaches to writing instruction, but the “golden age” of argument, in my opinion, has passed—at least for now.

In fact, the “argument culture” that the new rhetoricians sought to build is now often seen as a *bad* thing. As Deborah Tannen put it in an oft-cited newspaper column:

Everywhere we turn, there is evidence that, in public discourse, we prize contentiousness and aggression more than cooperation and conciliation. . . . [The resulting animosity] erodes our sense of human connection to those in public life—and to the strangers who cross our paths and people our private lives.

Today, ambivalence about argument shows up in many ways. Research increasingly shows flaws in everyday reasoning,¹⁵ and contemporary public deliberation does not offer promising examples of reason-giving discourse: “Argumentative norms, like listening to both sides of an issue before forming an opinion, making transparent the moves from evidence to warrants and claims, and maintaining civil relations with co-arguers, often do not appear to prevail” today (Päster 64).

There’s also growing evidence about how difficult argument is to do and how late is its development. Children produce fewer words in argumentative tasks than in narrative ones, both orally and in writing (Bereter and Scardamalia), with the big jump in argument skill taking place between ages eleven and fifteen relatively late for language acquisition (Piétrau-Le Bonniec and Valette). And experiments show that, even after age twelve, children tend to see argument as a matter of justification, not refutation (Coirier, Andriessen, and Chanquoy). It’s only from ages fifteen to seventeen that teenagers begin to produce counterarguments (Golder and Coirier). Given this research, we shouldn’t be surprised that the NAEP Writing Report Card consistently shows lower performance for persuasive vs. informative and narrative tasks.¹⁶

That said, thesis-driven prose remains the heart of the academy, the key genre of political life, and perhaps the apogee of humans’ socio-cognitive development. In a 2012 essay, compositionist John Duffy argued that the abysmal state of public discourse today makes first-year composition—one of the few places in the curriculum where students practice the skills of argument—crucial. In making a claim, Duffy writes, students learn to develop trust with readers; in providing evidence for claims, they acknowledge their audience’s rationality; in considering counterarguments, they show tolerance of other points of view. And argument remains a key term in political philosophy: If theorists in the liberal tradition remain focused on institutions and procedures, there is growing interest in the habits that *citizens* need (Allen; Garsten, “Rhetoric Revival”). Neia Crawford has even argued that argument’s political stock is rising: “Gradually displacing the role of brute force coercion,

¹⁵See, e.g., Kahn; but cf. Mercier and Sperber.

¹⁶See <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/writing/>

the increased importance of political argument . . . is one of the most significant changes in world politics over approximately the last 350 years" (103).

And yet the current moment offers challenges for argument and its teaching. "Non-rational" forms of public interaction, for example, seem to be on the rise. As one critic put it in 2002, "What we see all around us . . . is less the use of argument and more a pervasive enactment of the statement" (Bay 694). But the rise of a world characterized by "image and spectacle" (DeLuca and Peoples 129) is not necessarily a sign of argument's decline, though citizens who want to participate in that world need to understand the importance of communicating in the "discourse of images" (136). That discourse has begun to seep into composition instruction, as have the practices of new *interactive* media. Brian Jackson and Jon Wallin claim, for example, that the "back-and-forthness" of rhetoric on Web 2.0 sites like YouTube has potential for encouraging political participation among students, acclimating them "to a public ecology in which the single-authored, one-time essay has lost its significance" (W376). Similarly, Andrew Sullivan argues that the blogosphere "has exposed a hunger and need for traditional writing that, in the age of television's dominance, had seemed on the wane" (285). Teaching written argument in the networked era, in other words, need not be an exercise in futility (Pfeister 64).

In fact, the biggest challenge for argument today may be continued resistance to the idea itself. If textbooks increasingly define argument in terms of "inquiry, discovery, or communication," rather than opposition and persuasion (Knoblauch 249), teachers still too often treat it in formal terms, as a matter of thesis statements and other propositions. Such an approach does not invite students to ask *why* one argues in the first place (Kastely). As James Crosswhite has written, we need to help students see "argumentative reasoning for the wonder that it is" (6).

How do we do that? I'd like to close with a recommendation: that teachers of written argument design classroom activities the way self-governing communities design resolution of their conflicts—by letting members themselves deliberate together about the paths before them. This is a messy, unpredictable, but *democratic* activity. For me, the pedagogical breakthrough came when I began to see my class as a kind of jury, to which I presented cases, provided resources for exploration, organized debates so different sides could be aired, and asked for a final *decision*, all while giving practice in complex, sophisticated, argumentative literacies.¹⁷ Here are the steps I use:

1. **Begin with a problem.** In my course, I give students cases from actual or mock trials: "real-world" problems, organized by opposed claims. But problems need not be framed adversarially—see, e.g., George Hillocks's crime scene for ninth graders—though students *do* need an exigence that can generate wonder, inquiry, and difference.
2. **Defer position-taking.** Heather Dubrow has written about how teachers ask for thesis statements too early in the writing process. An antidote to this, advocated by Barry Kroll, is to ask students to first write "issue briefs" which describe the situation and survey the options before they actually take a stance.

3. **Provide scaffolding.** For these early steps, students need tools and resources to help organize their learning and externalize their thoughts. Use Toulmin diagrams or synthesis maps (Kaufert, Geisler, and Newirth); intermediate products that can help students see how arguers build their cases.

4. **Set up a debate.** According to Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber, human reasoning improves in argumentative settings where disagreements can be aired (62). When one is alone or with people who hold similar views, arguments will not be critically evaluated, and the "confirmation bias" will lead to poor outcomes (65). But in "arguments among people who disagree but have a common interest in the truth," the confirmation bias can contribute to an efficient division of labor since people will hear (and thus evaluate) both sides of a case even if they only produce one.¹⁸

5. **Ask the group to decide the issue.** At the end of each unit, I ask the students, *as a group*, to "resolve" the issue at hand, however provisionally or contingently, unanimously or contentiously. This can be done by voting; but it need not be a zero-sum game. Kroll outlines integrative and reconstructive strategies that can harmonize values or recast problems in ways that reveal new solutions. Each student turns in his or her own argument affirming or dissenting from the group decision.

6. **Publish and circulate final opinions.** Susan Wells has written that in most argument assignments, "students inscribe their positions in a vacuum since there is no place within the culture" where student writing on public issues is of general interest. "Public writing" in such a context means "writing for no audience at all."¹⁹ So, I try to publish my students' work in class journals or weblogs. Let them read each other's opinions. And help them find "outside" audiences who might care about their work.

7. **Finally, encourage reflection.** We need to give students practice not just in *doing* argument but in *talking and thinking about it*. Designing a course with multiple projects or cases means that students can reflect, alone and together, on their growth over each case and across the semester.

I hope I've made my own case here for the teaching of argument. The bibliography includes ideas for more reading on this topic. In addition, there are organizations where new teachers and scholars can find professional and intellectual support. A good place to begin is the Rhetoric Society of America, which has a biennial conference and a student membership rate. There are also numerous journals worth browsing:

<i>Argumentation</i>	<i>Pre/Text</i>
<i>Argumentation & Advocacy</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>Informal Logic</i>	<i>Rhetoric and Public Affairs</i>
<i>Kairos</i>	<i>Rhetoric Review</i>
<i>Philosophy and Rhetoric</i>	<i>Rhetoric Society Quarterly</i>

¹⁷See <http://people.umass.edu/dflaming/english236.html>

¹⁸On the benefits of structured classroom debate for learning, see Light 47–50, 119–126.

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