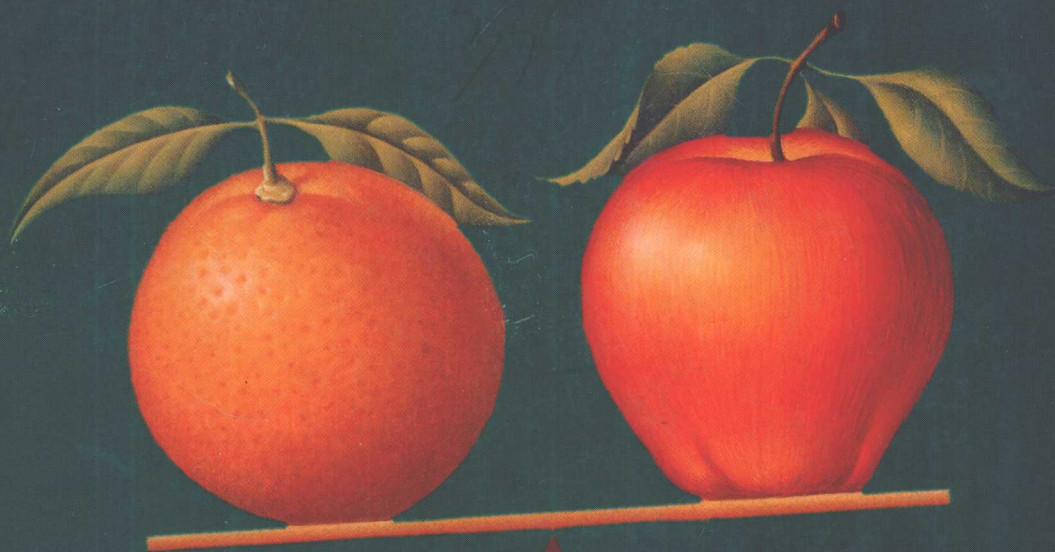


Reading and Writing Short Arguments

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WILLIAM VESTERMAN

Rutgers University

Mayfield Publishing Company

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London • Toronto

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PREFACE

Reading and Writing Short Arguments is an introductory text for courses that emphasize critical thinking and argumentative writing. The book begins with an Introduction to Argument and Persuasion, followed by a collection of 64 short, lively essays by a variety of contemporary writers on controversial current issues. A Minicasebook on the Homeless and a Guide to Finding and Using Information appear at the end of the book. The selections in the minicasebook represent a variety of lengths, levels, and sources of publication, from an editorial and editorial cartoons to two professional academic articles complete with footnotes.

In the main section of the book, each of eighteen controversial issues is addressed by three readings from divergent points of view. This should discourage any belief that either analyzing the arguments of others or forming arguments of one's own is a matter of simply choosing sides between two points of view. Each reading is followed by discussion questions that invite the student to analyze the author's appeals to Logic, Character, and Emotion. In each group a major claim of one argument is analyzed in diagrammatic form according to the Toulmin method of logic. The *Instructor's Manual* that accompanies the text includes, along with other materials, the diagrams for all the readings. Each group ends with "Intertextual Questions" and "Suggestions for Writing." The goal of this main part of the book is to make the reading and writing of arguments easier by constantly encouraging the student to break down complex matters into simpler ones.

For further flexibility in instruction, the next section consists of ten topics represented by a single essay, each without any accompanying analysis or questions. This provides material with which students can practice on their own the skills of analysis and writing. This section is followed by the sections mentioned earlier—the minicasebook and library research guide—which provide material for courses that progress toward longer and more extensively researched arguments. It is hoped that all these sections taken together will support students and instructors alike in the development of argumentative skills.

Many people have helped bring this project to completion. I wish to thank the staff at Mayfield and particularly Tom Broadbent, my editor. I thank Dan Moran for extensive editorial help and Joshua Ozersky and Patti Moran for research help. Special thanks go to W. Ross Winterowd and Geoffrey R. Winterowd of the University of Southern California for allowing me to adapt the sample research paper, "The Death Penalty: For Whom the Bell Tolls," from *The Critical Reader, Thinker, and Writer*.

My thanks are extended also to the following individuals for their thoughtful review of the manuscript: Robert H. Bentley, Lansing Community College; Sue E. Cross, Mission College; Jean F. Goodine, Northern Virginia Community College; Edward McCarthy, Harrisburg Area Community College; Paul J. McVeigh, Northern Virginia Community College; Thomas A. Mozola, Macomb Community College; Joseph Nassar, Rochester Institute of Technology; Kathleen O'Shea, Monroe Community College; Teresa M. Purvis, Lansing Community College; and Richard J. Zbaracki, Iowa State University.

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Introduction to Argument and Persuasion

MOTIVES AND METHODS OF ARGUMENT

Why Argue?

To human beings, forming opinions is as natural and necessary as breathing. Birds never have to decide what kind of nest to build, but humans decide how to build everything from a house to a society on the basis of thought and opinion. A diversity of mental and physical structures has always defined human activity.

We are not born with opinions but form them through our own mental and emotional lives and our interactions with the lives of others. At first we may receive most of our opinions unquestioningly, but very soon we begin to question even the views of our parents. The sounds of “Why?” and “Because!” echo throughout every childhood. However unsatisfactory that primitive dialogue may be (for both parties), those words present the basic structure of inquiry, and they begin to suggest some of the ways we form opinions. We want to know *why*—we want some reasons to follow the *because*—so that we can decide for ourselves whether we agree or disagree.

But our opinions are not just personal decisions. However confident we might have been of our views, and however inevitably convincing they might have seemed to us, “I wish that I had thought to say. . . !” is a common refrain when we find ourselves alone again after a dispute with other people. And merely announcing our views on a topic is seldom enough to convince anyone that we are right to think as we do. Dialogue rather than assertion is the basis of the process. If we want others to take our views seriously, let alone be persuaded by them, we have to argue our positions effectively and responsibly and find answers to reasonable objections.

We ourselves don't change our minds unless we are persuaded by responsible arguments. Yet to benefit from a dialogue, we don't need to be convinced. Though hearing other views and the arguments that support them may not change our minds, having to answer the arguments of others may clarify and strengthen our own opinions. As educated people we should never be satisfied to know what we already know, and we need all the clarity and mental strength we can get to face serious and complex issues. Clarification for ourselves and for others, rather than "winning," is a goal to which both parties in a dialogue can aspire.

Clarity and strength of opinion are necessary not only for education but also for the world of work and action. Thinking critically about problems and explaining suggested solutions are activities that play a large part in any business or profession. Even in a field as concerned with physical facts as engineering, for example, those who succeed are those who are able to explain to their superiors the importance of their work and to argue in support of the ideas they propose. The same skills are required at every level of government, from the smallest local committee to the largest national legislature. Public opinion ultimately controls democratic government, and effectively argued views ultimately control public opinion.

What We Don't Argue About

Argument is a term often incorrectly applied to quarrels, in which mere assertion and name calling replace the rational presentation of opinion and the responsible meeting of opposing viewpoints. Quarrels can take place over any issue, but responsible and effective argument is impossible in certain areas:

- We can't argue about *facts*. For example, that the American Revolution occurred is beyond dispute; we are no longer ruled by Great Britain. While it is of course possible to argue about the significance of facts or the probability that an assertion actually is a fact, verified matters are not matters of opinion.
- We can't argue about the *impossible*. For example, that men should be responsible for bearing children is not an arguable position.
- We can't argue about *preferences*. Preferences resemble opinions, but they are neither formed nor changed by logic. For example, that rap music is better than rock music, that baseball is more graceful than ballet, and that long hair is ugly on men are all matters of preference and not matters of rational debate.
- We can't argue about *beliefs* that lie beyond rational or empirical proof, such as religious faith.

What We Do Argue About

We argue about *opinions* because arguing is the process by which opinions are formed. For this reason, opinion is not the end of rational discussion but the beginning of a dialogue with others and with yourself. In fact, it is safe to say that the process of learning to argue in responsible and effective ways will expand, modify, and strengthen many of the opinions you have now.

Why Analyze the Arguments of Others?

Arguing is an activity requiring skill, and as in most activities, skill is acquired by imitation as well as by instruction. As you read the essays in this book, you will be invited by the discussion questions following them to analyze how and why the writers' arguments work. Having done this, you should be able to imitate their methods to make your own arguments more effective. For simply having opinions is not enough. You must also decide how to organize and express them and how to counter your opponent's objections. The discussion questions will help you master this task by encouraging a dialogue between you and authors of short essays like those you will be asked to write.

The essays here have been chosen because they address a variety of current topics that you can discuss, preliminarily at least, without further research. Some of the essays in this book provide instances of what to *avoid* as an effective writer of arguments. These flawed essays may be just as useful as those better argued in stimulating the growth of your argumentative skills.

Argument and Persuasion

Since arguments offer reasons for taking a position on an issue, argument is often distinguished from persuasion, since we may be persuaded by means other than evidence or logic. These other means of persuasion are generally divided into (a) matters of *character*—the trustworthiness we may grant to the reputation, ethics, or clarity and strength of mind of the writer or speaker—and (b) matters of *feeling*—the emotional agreement we may come to feel with the speaker or writer. In ancient Greece, where these distinctions were first proposed, the appeal of the moral character of the arguer, or speaker, was called *ethos*, while *logos* referred to the powers of logic or reason in the argument, and *pathos* referred to the ways emotion persuaded the audience to agree. The Greeks called the study of persuasive argument *rhetoric*. The following diagram, called the Rhetorical Triangle, may clarify the interaction of the three means of persuasion. To each point of the triangle have been added the terms of the Toulmin theory of logic to which you will shortly be introduced.