ARGUING FROM SOURCES

EXPLORING ISSUES THROUGH READING AND WRITING

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PREFACE

We wrote this book to solve practical problems in teaching original argument from sources, more commonly known as the research or term paper. As longtime teachers of that genre, we made it our custom to ask students to work from sources on an issue of interest, to make responsible inferences from their sources, and then to compose an argumentative essay with fresh insight.

Despite our high expectations, we were seldom satisfied with the results. Rather than handling their sources resourcefully and extending the discussion in useful directions, our students regularly interpreted the assignment as a recitation exercise with optional commentary: tell the teacher about the sources and say what you did or didn't like about them. Our students' interpretation of research writing seemed far less challenging, exploratory, or fun than the assignment we had in mind.

Had we believed that our students were not ready to meet our challenge, we would have long ago abandoned our goals as naive. But as we tried to explain to students the challenge they were missing, it became increasingly clear that the fault lay as much with us as with them. We did not know how to define that challenge.

As everyone who teaches composition knows, writing represents a marvelous opportunity to experiment with authorship—to take a self-rewarding intellectual journey. And yet we found ourselves lecturing students on how to locate sources in the library, how to cite them accurately, how to take notes, and how to polish a rough draft—research writing minus the challenge and the joy.

Out of these concerns, we began a three-year investigation into the tacit expectations that we, other teachers, and experienced writers bring to research writing. Our goal was to try to define the challenge for students without taking the challenge away. We felt that if we could make that challenge more explicit, we could let students in on our secrets, give them better motivation, and offer them better support and feedback.

The result is *Arguing from Sources,* a book organized around a sequence of reading and writing activities that require would-be authors first to summarize the positions of others, next to synthesize these positions, then to analyze these and other potential positions in order to arrive at some conclusions, and, finally, to elaborate their conclusions into an original argument of their own—the four standard academic writing tasks, to which Parts Two through Five of this book correspond.

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Arguing from Sources has several unique features:

- It uses linked assignments. We have assumed that the knowledge and texts that students produce in one phase can be carried over into the next. Thus, summarizing prepares the intellectual ground for synthesizing; synthesizing, for analyzing; analyzing, for contributing. Working through the book from beginning to end will give students a sense of how their thinking must grow and change as they move from reading sources to composing original arguments.
- It presents a series of visual structures for thinking: a line of argument, a grid of common points, a synthesis tree. We have found that these visualizations help students see more clearly how their thinking must develop as they progress through the cycle of reading and writing.
- It focuses on the interaction of structure and content. Structures of argument are presented as methods that help writers organize, explore, and, eventually, master the content associated with an issue. While we don't teach content per se, we do teach students how to deal with an issue-related content in order to design interesting and fresh arguments. The book focuses on a single issue—wilderness—chosen for its relevance and its interest for students.

Every chapter contains "For Class" and "For Your Notebook" exercises. The "For Class" exercises are designed to give students a chance to practice their skills on the wilderness issue. The "For Your Notebook" exercises are designed to help students progress on an issue of their own choosing. The book concludes with a short glossary of the boldface terms defined in the text and an appendix on documenting a research paper.

The book is intended for students who have mastered the basic conventions of reading and writing. It can be used in lieu of a standard textbook on research writing or as a supplement to one; in a course on argument or critical thinking, especially reasoning from cases; as a handy reference for content teachers who assign the major term paper or who wish to structure and sequence writing assignments; and, finally, as a writing-across-the-curriculum textbook, introducing students to the social dynamics of academic communities.

Acknowledgments

Arguing from Sources represents one of the fruits of the WARRANT project, with goals of conducting research, building a curriculum, and designing a computer system to support the reading and writing of issue-centered argument. The project was funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, without whose support we could not have worked. We thank Steve Ehrmann, our original project director, and Rusty Garth, our final one, for their encouragement.

The basic outline of the book was developed over a period of three years by Kaufer and Geisler, drawing on his work teaching an experimental course and on her research on expert/novice differences in arguing from sources. Kau-

fer and Geisler together developed the overall framework for Parts Two through Five. Geisler, with help from Kaufer, developed the specific strategies for Parts Two and Three ("Summarize" and "Synthesize"). Kaufer, with help from Geisler and Neuwirth, developed the specific strategies for Parts Four and Five ("Analyze" and "Contribute"). Neuwirth, with help from Kaufer and Geisler, was responsible for the Instructor's Manual.

We wish to thank our colleagues at Carnegie Mellon University and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, who have given us stimulating environments in which to think and work. We are particularly indebted to Preston Covey, director of Carnegie Mellon's Core Curriculum and Center for Design of Educational Computing, for the original inspiration to examine case-based reasoning and to Richard Young, whose vision of what invention and problem solving are has been a continual source of inspiration to us. We are also grateful to the reviewers of the manuscript, William L. Sipple of Robert Morris College and John N. Snapper of Calvin College.

In addition, we would like to give special thanks to those whose reading, teaching, and talking refined our work: Michael Palmquist, for trying to teach from our earlier manuscript and for his many editorial comments; Sister Barbara Sitko, for a careful reading of drafts of "Summarize" and "Synthesize" and for her focus on acts of interpretation; Michael Halloran, for his insightful reading of an earlier draft of "Summarize" and subsequent discussion of the metaphor of conversation; Charlotte Wilson, for her comments on an earlier draft; Michele Matchett, whose work on wilderness gave us the student essay in "Contribute"; Armar Archbold, for helping us understand what it meant to synthesize; Denise Troll, for her reading of earlier drafts of "Analyze" and "Contribute"; Joel Ness, for his graphic designs; Susan Bouldin, for her careful proofreading; Mary Ellen Lane, for her help in proofreading and collating the glossary; Ann Penrose and Alexander Friedlander, for their work in collecting the data on which this book was based; Paul Nockleby, for his confidence in our project; Natalie Bowen, for her careful attention to our meaning and style; and Marlane Miriello, our editor at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, for bringing this book to press.

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D. S. K.
C. G.
C. M. N.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

1 GET STARTED

The most promising words ever written on the maps of human knowledge are terra incognita—*unknown territory.*

—Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Discoverers*

Throughout history, explorers have relied on incomplete maps of uncharted territories. Columbus started with maps portraying the New World as India. Lewis and Clark started their westward expedition with poorly specified maps of the Missouri River. To make their journeys, explorers go through four phases: (1) they consult the maps of others; (2) they explore similarities and differences among maps; (3) they make the journey themselves; (4) they return to design a new map. The exploration process involves designing and redesigning structures in order to accommodate what is learned from new explorations.

What is true for exploring physical territories is also true for exploring issues. Like physical exploration, the composition of argument involves the structuring and restructuring of maps through an issue—not physical maps but mental maps. Authors are constantly designing and redesigning their mental maps of an issue in order to make their exploration as rich, productive, and up-to-date as possible.

In this book, we'll teach you how to structure and restructure the ideas you'll use in composing written arguments. The major parts of this book correspond to the four phases of exploration:

- In Part Two, Summarize, you'll design a structure called a **line of argument** from an author's text. The line of argument you design for a particular author helps you outline a written summary of that author's position. You will write summaries of the texts of individual authors to teach yourself and others where each author stands and what his or her reasons are for standing there.
- In Part Three, Synthesize, you'll design structures called grids of common points and synthesis trees from the lines of argument of multiple authors. Your synthesis tree becomes the outline of a written synthesis, which you will use to teach yourself and others similarities and differences among these authors' positions on a single issue.
- In Part Four, Analyze, you'll reach your own conclusions on the issue by

exploring and evaluating possible as well as previous positions. Your written analysis will teach yourself and others about strengths and faults in alternative approaches to the issue, and it will give you a chance to get feedback on your conclusions.

- In Part Five, Contribute, you'll elaborate your conclusions into an original line of argument and, eventually, an original essay or contribution. Your original argument will teach you and others why one should stand on the issue where you have decided to stand.

CHOOSE YOUR ISSUE

What you choose as your issue carries important consequences. Your choice will set the boundaries of the territory you explore. Finding out too late that you've chosen the wrong issue is painful. The extra few hours you spend at the beginning of your project worrying about your choice of issue may save you hundreds down the road. An issue is a topic, so when you choose an issue, you are also choosing a topic. A topic is any subject matter about which you can read, think, write, and which you can discuss. Not all topics are issues, however. The following section explains the difference.

What Is an Issue?

An **issue** is a topic that sparks controversy within a community of speakers, readers, and writers. More specifically, an issue is a topic that creates a *tension* in the community, a discontent or dissatisfaction with the status quo. If the tension is commonly acknowledged by the community and judged important enough to command its attention, the topic that created it is recognized as an issue. Members of the community attach a social value to seeing the issue resolved. Not all topics warrant such favored attention. But when they do, they become issues.

To understand better the difference between a topic and an issue, consider carrot soup. Carrot soup is a topic that we can discuss and even disagree about. Imagine the following exchange:

Mary: "Carrot soup is wonderful."
John: "Carrot soup is awful."

Mary and John are having a discussion. The discussion probably won't go very far because there's not much left to discuss once their opinions are exchanged. Moreover, Mary and John's discussion of carrot soup doesn't have visible consequences for anyone but Mary and John. Mary may be trying to convince John to reconsider a soup he gave up at age six, but no one beyond John will be much affected even if he has a change of heart. John's decision to try or not to try carrot soup carries no consequences for a larger community.

When you are looking for an issue to explore, you need to make sure you have more than a topic. Unlike carrot soup, your issue must do more than generate differences of opinion—it should be able to sustain a discussion with consequences for a larger community. To see what this means exactly, consider how carrot soup might become an issue. Suppose one researcher claimed to link carrot soup with cancer. Other researchers disagreed. Evidence and reasons would be marshaled by all concerned and at least some people outside of the disagreeing parties would be affected by the outcome of the debate. Under these circumstances, carrot soup would become an issue.

Types of Issues

As you search through issues, you'll find differences that you should keep in mind when deciding on one to explore.

General versus Specialized Issues Some issues have important implications for every competent adult in a society. That is, the community affected by them includes just about everyone. Nuclear arms, gun control, abortion, and capital punishment are examples. Such issues are referred to as *general* issues because they are seen as affecting the general public.

Other issues affect only subgroups or communities that are narrower in scope than the general public. Issues affecting academic communities (issues in physics, chemistry, biology, the teaching of writing) and professions (lawyers, doctors, plumbers, bakers) fall into this category. These issues are known as *specialized* issues because they address communities more specialized than the general public. The rise of the labor movement in the 1930s and the feasibility of developing superconductors for tomorrow's computers are examples of specialized issues.

To explore specialized issues as an author, you need specialized knowledge. As you search through issues for your own research project, ask yourself whether the issue is general or specialized. If specialized, ask yourself whether you have the background necessary to summarize, synthesize, analyze, and contribute new information. You can't expect to be an original author in an area that you are struggling to learn for the first time. As a student writer simply looking for a subject on which to practice composing argument, you should stick with general issues.

Literate versus Oral Issues Normally, you can assume that all the sides taken in an issue will be *written down,* committed to print in newspapers, articles, or books. In such issues, called *literate* issues, the debate is channeled through formal written argument. These arguments circulate within a community—that is, authors in the community carefully plan written responses to the arguments of previous authors. The library is obviously the best place to learn about literate issues.

However, not all issues are literate issues. In some issues, called *oral* issues, only one side composes a formal position and commits it to writing. The other side (or sides) may prefer other methods of getting their position across. They may boycott, go on strike, filibuster, negotiate, tear up a contract, refuse to talk—but not, for one reason or another, express their position formally as authors. On some issues, furthermore, neither side may express their views in writing. In oral issues, you must rely on word of mouth as well as reading to get a balanced perspective.

Suppose you decide to address the issue of hunting. Is hunting moral or not? You do your library research and find that for every ten authors who deplore hunting, only one seems to defend it. Is the ratio between antihunters and prohunters really ten to one? Not necessarily. The ten-to-one ratio describes only the *antihunters who write formal essays* versus the *prohunters who write formal essays*. Prohunters may prefer to express themselves in ways different from formal written argument—in, say, angry phone calls to members of Congress and financial donations to hunting lobbies.

When you deal with an oral issue, the library is not likely to tell you the whole story, and it won't give you the balance of views and perspectives you'll want your research to include. To get that balance, you'll often need to play the role of journalist or field reporter—corresponding, telephoning, and conducting face-to-face interviews with representatives of various sides. These are useful roles to play even if your issue is literate, but they become essential when your issue is oral.

In your library research, if you cannot find a good balance of alternative positions on the issue you have chosen, you should suspect that the issue might be oral and that to explore it further, you'll have to search beyond the library. In this book, summarizing a conflicting range of positions is a skill we teach. Therefore, you will do better to focus on literate issues, because the library makes all sides of such issues available to you.

Local versus Nonlocal Issues Some issues affect only your school, your neighborhood, your town, city, county, or state. Other issues affect your region, your country, or the world. Issues with narrower scope are *local* in comparison with issues of broader scope; issues with wider scope are *nonlocal* in comparison with issues of narrower scope. There are trade-offs in choosing between local and nonlocal issues.

You are likely to be more familiar with and more personally affected by local issues (your school's grading system, its food service, the traffic lights on campus). Consequently, you may find you can write about them with greater authority and commitment. At the same time, local issues are less likely to be literate issues. You probably won't find many periodicals and books discussing issues on your campus. If you want to make sure to address a literate issue (one relying on abundant and balanced scholarship), you should not pick a local one.

Nonlocal issues have the opposite qualities. You are less likely to have been directly touched by issues that affect large populations. So you will probably find it more difficult to write about such issues with a sense of personal experience and authority. But because nonlocal issues are more likely to be literate issues, and because we are most concerned in this book to teach you how to

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