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英语高级写作：

**论说文入门**

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**Introducing  
Argumentation**

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■ 曲卫国 编著  
Qu Weiguo

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高等教育出版社  
HIGHER EDUCATION PRESS

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# Introducing Argumentation

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## 内容提要

本书是为英语专业高年级学生和研究生编写的写作教材。本书主要以 Toulmin 的论辩理论为框架,在参照美国大学文科学生写作课程的同时,兼顾了中国学生的思维特点。本书的基本内容有:定义、命题、命题类型、如何支持、驳斥命题以及如何引用等。本书旨在帮助读者掌握英语论说文的写作方法,提高独立和批判性思维的能力,使读者能对一般的议题展开有效、合理、较深入的讨论。本书还可以作为训练 GRE 写作的教材,也可以为赴英语国家留学的人士提供写作上的指导。

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# Preface: Never Take Things for Granted

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## 1. The Aim of the Book

This course book is meant to introduce to the 3rd- and 4th-year students or postgraduates of English major some basic notions in argumentative writing as part of the general training of the mental muscles to develop their ability in critical thinking and writing. It is, in a sense, a guide to some prominent argumentation theories and practices in the West, and a practical handbook for advanced argumentative writing.

The main theory used in the book is Stephen Toulmin's, and so the theoretical framework is recognizably his, but based on my research and teaching experience, I have made some amendments for the Chinese context. Although the theoretical foundation is Toulmin's, I also have taken an unusual step to introduce into the book Carl Rogers' theory as a check on the aggressive nature of argumentation. As is shown throughout the book, my aim is not merely to enhance the ability to argue in writing but to promote critical awareness and independent thinking, and in this respect, Rogers' theory, for its stress on fair understanding in the process of interaction, can surely be of help in containing the adversarial nature of argumentation and cultivating a high-level sensitivity to others' views.

One point I have emphasized almost in every stage of the book is the notion "relativity", an emphasis that has been proved uncomfortably unsettling but absolutely necessary as far as the students are concerned in my teaching practice because any fixation to a set of ideas or an unshakable belief in the righteousness of a judgment disregarding the context will dysfunction any critical thinking ability. In addition to the field-dependency in argumentation, a point of relativity upheld by Toulmin, I highlight the shaping function of a selected perspective in forming a judgment. Perhaps "putting things in perspective" is what I intend in the final analysis. Maybe, this is another reason for introducing Rogerian rhetoric into the book. If we can see things from a perspective that is definitely not ours, or to use Rogers' term, to obtain "emphatic" understanding, we may be able, hard as it is, to distance ourselves from our own preconceptions or prejudices. I believe the notion "relativity", postmodern or whatever, does have the desired liberating effect.

I always believe that sharp perception and strong critical thinking ability in argumentation can be trained through a clear understanding of the structure of argument and through well-orchestrated writing exercises since there are some indispensable core skills developed over time which can help students find problems, form valid claims and provide strong support for the claims. Toulmin's anatomy of the structure of argument is remarkably outstanding in

helping achieve such understanding and develop such skills. Regretfully, his discussion is rarely introduced in most Chinese English departments, and at best his is treated as a theoretical asset, far removed from the practice of argumentative writing, despite the fact that his theory has been the cornerstone of most American argumentative writing courses for many, many years. My teaching experience has shown that such understanding and skills are crucial in the development of independent and critical thinking, not to mention argumentative writing.

It should be stressed that this book is not a book about logic, although there is no denying the role logic plays in argumentation. As I see it, logic is form-focused and cares exclusively about the formal rules of inference whereas argumentation is more content-based, focusing more on the interaction or interplay between inference and context, inference and belief system, and inference and audience. In other words, argumentation has more to do with practical inferences. It does not presuppose the truth-value of a premise or a claim but looks at conditions that are supposed to justify the validity of a claim. Although it acknowledges the importance of the logical rules, it does not take the stance that mere correct application of the rules will guarantee the truthfulness of claims. It is argued in the discussions of the book that we should take nothing for granted before we exercise a proper examination of the meaning of a claim, the conditions that contribute to the support of the claim, and the underlying assumptions that validate the relation between a claim and its support.

## **2. The Structure and the Use of the Book**

The book is so structured that the most common notions or skills of argumentation are covered. With each notion, it starts with a theoretical discussion, followed by two exercises, one is “critical thinking activities” and the other “writing tasks.” Relevant theories of various kinds are printed in the “critical thinking activities” and it is highly recommended that the students read the theories in the original. By putting some relevant theoretical writings in the section, I intend to show that my discussion is only one way of looking at the issues. There are obviously differences between my interpretations of the theories and the theories themselves. Students are encouraged to reach their own conclusions. If theirs are different from my discussion or the theoretical writings, it is all the more worth celebrating. Main references are listed at the end of the book for further reading.

I believe the best way to learn argumentation is through arguing in writing about a claim, and practice will work magic for us. For the writing tasks, it is preferable to ask students to write outside class so that they can discuss with each other or search for references. It is essential to the success of

the writing course to let students use library resources to work on the writing tasks. The point is not whether they can submit anything for the writing class but whether they can submit things they compose in a critical manner. The use of the library will be conducive to freeing them from preconceptions and opening up a wide horizon of perspectives. It involves much more work when they log on to the library resources.

From the essays selected in the book, it is not difficult to detect that I choose those of current interest related to the time of my writing the book. It is important for the teacher to find topics of current interest so as to make the writing more real to the students. With topics of current interest, it is easy to arouse the students and for them to find resources in the newspapers and on the internet, etc. It is advisable that teachers change them for the topics of current interest related to the time when the book is being used.

My experience in teaching the course seems to suggest that students' writings will be better focused if they are presented with an essay to comment upon. Reading through the essay and sorting out its claim and support are initial and necessary stages in cultivating one's critical thinking ability. Granting the interactive nature of argumentative writing, it is much more challenging and fruitful for the students to be confronted with some well-developed, powerful argumentative essays. In their responses to them, they can find various kinds of points of departure to start their own arguments. Most importantly, argumentative essays can be guaranteed a relatively fair understanding of the issues in question from the perspectives which are not theirs. The targeted essays will help the teacher with a better grip on the process of thinking on the part of the students, too. The essays selected here for each task are meant to provide models to show how the exercises or writing tasks of a more relevant nature to the students are devised.

### **3. Acknowledgments**

The course and the course book have been funded by Fudan University. Due thanks are given to the people involved. First and foremost, my thanks will go to the extremely lovely and intelligent students in the English Department at Fudan University, without whom it is impossible for me to have such an exciting course, let alone the writing of the coursebook. They have demonstrated an unusual interest in the course and their writings have given me enormous inspiration and encouragement in my preparation for the course and the book. Many of the ideas had been formed when I was discussing or marking their wonderful essays. In fact, some of the examples come directly from their remarkable writings. Their cooperation and responsiveness make the course one of the most exciting moments in my teaching career. Thanks should also go to Prof. Wang Ying, who made things

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Qu Weiguo  
July 30, 2005

<b>Chapter One</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Introducing Theories</b> .....	<b>1</b>
	1.1 Two Theoretical Sources .....	1
	1.2 Stephen Toulmin's Theory .....	2
	1.3 Carl Rogers' Theory .....	6
	Tasks .....	9
	Critical thinking activities: .....	9
	A. The Pattern of an Argument: Data and Warrants (Excerpts) .....	9
	B. Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation .....	12

<b>Chapter Two</b>		
<b>2</b>	<b>Basic Concepts</b> .....	<b>16</b>
	2.1 Defining Argumentation and Argument .....	16
	2.2 Argumentation and Communication .....	23
	2.3 Argumentation and Persuasion .....	26
	2.4 Argumentation and Explanation .....	28
	2.5 Work Ethic for Argumentation .....	30
	Tasks .....	32
	I. Critical thinking activities: .....	32
	A. Where Is Argument? .....	33
	B. Argumentation, Speaker and Audience (Excerpts) .....	37
	C. Persuasion (Excerpts) .....	40
	II. Writing tasks: .....	47
	A. Freeway Sparks Development Dilemma .....	47
	B. China Finds Its Shangri-La in Tourism .....	50

C. Text of President Bush's Speech to the Nation .....	54
D. Text of Saddam Hussein's Speech .....	58

# 3

## Chapter Three

Definition (1) .....	59
3.1 Defining Definition .....	59
3.2 The Need for a Proper Definition in Argumentation .....	61
3.3 Functions of Definition .....	68
Tasks .....	72
I. Critical thinking activities: .....	72
A. Choice, Presence, and Presentation .....	72
B. Persuasive Definition (Excerpts) .....	75
II. Writing tasks: .....	87
A. Text of Bush's Speech .....	88
B. On Freedom .....	90

# 4

## Chapter Four

Definition (2) .....	92
4.1 The Basic Structure of a Definition .....	92
4.2 First-level Definition .....	92
4.3 Common Ways of First-level Defining .....	96
4.4 Second-level Elaboration .....	107
Tasks .....	110
I. Critical thinking activities: .....	110
A. Marriage .....	110
B. Defining Abortion Is a Tricky Business .....	111
II. Writing tasks: .....	111
A. Selection from Plato's Phaedra .....	112
B. "Equal" Does Not Mean "Same" .....	114
C. Gay Marriage and the Right to Vote .....	116

Chapter <b>Five</b>		
<b>5</b>	<b>Claims</b>	<b>118</b>
5.1	The Nature of a Claim	118
5.2	The Function of a Claim	121
5.3	The Structure of a Claim	126
	Tasks	133
I.	Critical thinking activities:	133
A.	Fact and Value (Excerpts)	133
B.	Bush, Kerry Trade Barbs Over Jobs	140
II.	Writing tasks:	142
A.	Ten Reasons Not to Hit Your Kids	142
B.	Stephen Ambrose and the Rights of Passage	145
C.	Should Stephen Ambrose Be Pardoned?	147

Chapter <b>Six</b>		
<b>6</b>	<b>Claims of Fact</b>	<b>149</b>
6.1	Defining a Claim of Fact	149
6.2	Presenting Facts in a Claim of Fact	151
6.3	Relativity of Certainty in a Claim of Fact	153
6.4	Supporting a Claim of Fact	154
6.5	Challenging a Claim of Fact	161
6.6	A Case Study	169
	Tasks	174
I.	Critical thinking activities:	174
A.	Truth and Power (Excerpts)	174
B.	Leader: Show Us the Proof	178
II.	Writing tasks:	179
A.	Loving the Little Emperor	179
B.	Little Emperors, Little Brats	184

Chapter **Seven**  
**7**

118	Claims of Value .....	187
118	7.1 Defining a Claim of Value .....	187
121	7.2 Supporting a Claim of Value .....	192
128	7.3 Challenging a Claim of Value .....	204
131	Tasks .....	215
133	I. Critical thinking activities: .....	215
133	A. Is Ethics a Science? (Excerpts) .....	215
140	B. What Is Noble? (Excerpts) .....	220
142	II. Writing tasks: .....	223
142	A. Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief .....	224
142	B. Last Rights .....	229
147	C. In Response to Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief .....	231

Chapter **Eight**  
**8**

149	Claims of Policy .....	236
148	8.1 Defining a Claim of Policy .....	236
151	8.2 Establishing a Problem .....	237
153	8.3 Matching the Problem with the Course of Action .....	243
154	Tasks .....	245
161	I. Critical thinking activities: .....	245
169	The Analysis of the Problem (Excerpts) .....	245
174	II. Writing tasks: .....	247
174	A. What We Owe to Parents (Excerpts) .....	247
174	B. A Right to Care .....	253
175	C. Worst of Both Worlds .....	258

# Chapter **Nine**

## Support

261	Support	261
261	9.1 Defining Support	261
262	9.2 Evidential Support	262
269	9.3 Motivational Support	269
271	9.4 Measuring the Strength of Support	271
280	Tasks	280
280	I. Critical thinking activities:	280
280	Field Dependence (Excerpts)	280
282	II. Writing tasks:	282
282	A. The Answer to Terrorism? Colonialism	282
285	B. Freedom in a Time of Terrorism	285
286	C. John Kerry's Speech to the National Congress of the American Indians	286

# Chapter **Ten**

## Quoting

289	Quoting	289
289	10.1 Quoting for a Purpose	289
290	10.2 Factors That Constrain Quoting	290
296	10.3 Ways of Quoting	296
300	10.4 System of Quotation	300
303	Tasks	303
303	I. Critical thinking activities:	303
303	Fullness of Argumentation	303
308	II. Writing tasks:	308
308	A. Whatever Happened to the University?	308
311	B. A Proposal to Abolish Grading	311

# 11

Chapter **Eleven**

## Warrant

315	Warrant	315
315	11.1 Defining Warrant	315
322	11.2 Types of Warrants	322
326	Tasks	326
326	I. Critical thinking activities	326
326	A. The Ideological Problem of Social Science (Excerpts)	326
329	B. The Notion of Formal Validity (Excerpts)	329
333	II. Writing tasks	333
333	A. Teach Them the Real America	333
335	B. In Defense of Multiculturalism	335
341	C. Against Multiculturalism	341
346	D. The Bottom of Multiculturalism's Barrel	346

# 12

Chapter **Twelve**

## Concluding Remarks: Critical Reading

349	Concluding Remarks: Critical Reading	349
349	12.1 Critical Reading	349
351	12.2 A Critical Approach	351
354	<b>A Sample Task for the Final Examination</b>	354
357	<b>Worksheet for Argumentation</b>	357
359	<b>Main References</b>	359
361	<b>Essential Glossary of Argument</b>	361
364	<b>Common Fallacies</b>	364

# Chapter One

## Introducing Theories

### 1.1 Two Theoretical Sources

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To have a better understanding of the discussions of the book, we need to know something about the theoretical framework in which the present book is situated. There are two important theoretical sources for our discussions on argumentation or argumentative writing. The first one is Toulmin's argument theory, mainly developed in his two books; *The Uses of Argument* (1958) and *An Introduction to Reasoning* (with Rieke and Janik, 1979). Toulmin's theory is very popular in America, and the teaching of argumentative writing in America is mostly founded thereon. The most striking feature of his theory is that he manages to do away with the daunting technicalities of the traditional logic and rhetoric, explicate clearly the stages of practical inference, and capture the mechanism that constrains the inference process.

The other source is Carl Rogers', who has made unique contributions to theories concerning understanding and constructive relationships in interaction in his discussion and research on psychology. Rogers suggests that in emotional disputes, we should not jump to any conclusion before we have reached a careful, optimally impartial, and empathetic understanding of each other. Since Young, Becker and Pike introduced Rogers' theory in 1970, it has exerted great influence on many rhetoricians. As far as this book is concerned, Rogers' theory has offered us very good guidelines in developing critical reading, decent understanding of others' views, and optimal respect

for anyone who disagrees with us. With his theory of interaction, we may visualize argumentation not as a form of adversarial interaction but a congenial communication, which requires both parties to demonstrate clearly their inferential processes for the claims they challenge or defend.

## 1.2 Stephen Toulmin's Theory

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Stephen Toulmin (1920 - ) has taught in many Western prestigious universities, such as Oxford University and Leeds University in Britain, Columbia University, Stanford University, University of Chicago, California University, Santa Cruz, and currently he is a professor at University of Southern California in America. To a certain extent, it is a daunting task to classify Stephen Toulmin, who has made significant contributions in so many fields. Marx W. Wartofsky has made the following comments on his career:

His intellectual career is a daunting one if one has to cope serially with Toulmin the natural philosopher, Toulmin the ethical theorist, Toulmin the philosopher of clinical medical practice, Toulmin the theorist of rhetoric, Toulmin the historian of concepts, Toulmin the virtuoso of cognitive psychology, Toulmin the historical sociologist of the interface between science and politics, Toulmin the student of Wittgenstein, Toulmin the historian of the physical sciences, and of evolutionary biology, and of medicine, Toulmin the philosopher of practical reason and of rhetoric, Toulmin the culture historian. ①

His most influential publications concerning argument are *The Place of Reason in Ethics* (1950), *The Uses of Argument* (1958), and *An Introduction to Reasoning* (1979) with Richard Rieke and Allen Janik. The one that has changed the writing curriculum in many American universities is *The Uses of Argument*, introduced and popularized by Wayne Broekriede etc.

Toulmin's theory is a reaction against the traditional logic, which he believes is disconnected with real life situations. While there is no denying the rigour or nicety of the traditional logic, Toulmin thinks it shies away from the complexities of inference in real life situations. It tends to replace the real life world with a mathematical reality, pure and simplistic, which, being devoid of content or "substance", makes intellectual life acontextual and ahistorical:

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① Marx W. Wartofsky (1997). Stephen Toulmin: An Intellectual Odyssey. *Humanities*, March/April, Volume 18/Number 2.

A mathematical problem is not a quandary; its solution has no time-limit; it involves no steps of substance. As a model argument for formal logicians to analyse, it may be seducingly elegant, ... (1958: 127)

Elegant as it is, it has thus lost its explanatory power in real life situations, and has achieved a self-defeating autonomy:

In fact, as we shall discover, the science of logic has throughout its history tended to develop in a direction leading it away from these issues, away from practical questions about the manner in which we have occasion to handle and criticize arguments in different fields, and towards a condition of complete autonomy in which logic becomes a theoretical study on its own, as free from all immediate practical concerns as is some branch of pure mathematics. (1958: 2)

For Toulmin, and in fact for many others, logic should be concerned with the actuality of life, being content-based rather than purely form-centred. It should be able to illustrate the process of inference of real-life issues:

Logic is concerned with the soundness of the claims we make — with the solidity of the grounds we produce to support them, the firmness of the backing we provide for them — or, to change the metaphor, with the sort of case we present in defense of our claims. (1958: 7)

The fundamental idea of Toulmin's theory is that in practical inference, i. e. the real life inference, inference involves six basic elements with three of them playing the pivotal role in the process of reasoning. The six elements are

- (1) Claim
- (2) Data
- (3) Warrant
- (4) Backing
- (5) Modal qualifiers and
- (6) Rebuttals

Briefly put, in argumentation, we first make a claim (1) or a statement about a certain event or issue. The claim is based on data (2), which provide essential support for it. The relevance of the data to the claim is established by the underlying assumptions, which are called "warrants" (3), which in turn are built on backing (4). Given the fact that a claim can't be true in all circumstances, appropriate modal qualifiers are needed time and again to contain the claim. In other words, the strength of the claim is subject to many