



THE INFORMED
ARGUMENT
A MULTIDISCIPLINARY
READER AND GUIDE



THIRD EDITION



ROBERT K. MILLER

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UNIVERSITY OF SAINT THOMAS

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PREFACE FOR STUDENTS

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This book has been designed to help you argue on behalf of your beliefs so that other people will take them seriously. Part 1 will introduce you to the basic principles of argumentation that you need to evaluate the arguments you read and to compose arguments of your own. Part 2 will introduce you to strategies for evaluating your reading and to conventions for supporting arguments with information that you have acquired through that reading.

The readings gathered for you in *The Informed Argument*, Third Edition, should give you adequate information for writing on a variety of subjects. Part 3, "Cases for Argument," includes articles on twelve different topics, including a number of questions (such as "Should teenagers get plastic surgery?") that you may not have considered before. These articles were chosen to help get you started in argumentation with topics that easily lend themselves to discussion. The range of topics covered in the book is further broadened by Part 5, "Some Classic Arguments," nineteen important works from the history of ideas.

The readings that form the heart of the book are found in Part 4, "Sources for Argument." In this part of the book, you will find material on the same subject by several different writers. I hope that your reading in Part 4 will leave you better informed about the different subjects that are discussed. But whatever you learn about these subjects is a bonus. The purpose of *The Informed Argument* is not to turn you into an expert on gun control, global warming, or animal experimentation; it is to help you master skills that you can subsequently apply to subjects of your own choice long after you have completed the course in which you used this book.

In choosing the various essays for Part 4, I was guided by two basic principles. I tried to give equal consideration to opposing viewpoints so that you can better understand different sides of the issues in question. I also tried to include examples of different writing strategies. To fulfill these goals, I have included a mixture of old and new essays. You will find the date of original publication in boldface within the introductory note that comes immediately before every selection in Part 4. An essay can embody a strong argument or interesting point of view many years after it was written. On the other hand, an old essay can also include outdated information, so you should consider the age of each source when deciding the extent to which you can rely upon it.

If you read carefully, you will find that almost every written argument includes at least one weak point. This is because it is almost impossible to achieve perfection in writing—especially when logic is involved. One of the

reasons people have been drawn to study philosophy is that some of the great minds of world civilization have occasionally composed arguments that are so brilliant they seem perfect. Most writers, however, usually have to settle for less than perfection, especially when time or space is limited. Experienced writers spend as much time revising their work as they possibly can, but they also know that they cannot expect to have the last word. In any written argument there is almost always going to be a point that has been overlooked or something that could have been better put. Therefore, don't feel that an argument automatically loses all credibility because you have discovered a flaw in it. Although you should be alert for flaws, especially in reasoning, you should consider the significance of the flaw in proportion to the argument as a whole. Some writers undermine their entire argument by contradicting themselves or making wild charges; others are able to make a strong argument despite one or two weak points.

I wrote this book because I saw that students often needed additional information before they could write well-supported arguments but did not always have time to do research. Some writers, however, enjoy doing their own research, and you may want to supplement your reading in this book with material that you have discovered on your own. Part 6, "A Guide to Research," discusses how to find sources in a library. Searching for your own sources will enable you to include recently published material within your arguments. If you discover unusual or surprising information, library research may also help make your arguments more interesting to readers who are already familiar with the material in *The Informed Argument*. The extent to which you decide to go outside the book, if at all, is something to be decided in consultation with your instructor. The book itself has been designed to make research an option rather than a necessity.

This edition includes thirteen essays written by students. These have been included so that you can see how other students have satisfied assignments similar to those you may be asked to undertake. These essays are intended to help you rather than impress you. As is the case with the reprinted essays by professional writers, some of the student essays are stronger than others. You should try to learn what you can from them, but you should not feel that they represent some sort of perfection that is beyond your grasp. All of the students in question are serious enough about writing that they will probably see things they'd like to change as soon as they see their essays in print, for revision is a never-ending task essential to good writing. I want to thank these students for giving me permission to publish their work and remind them that I hope they keep on writing. I also want to thank the many students who studied the first two editions of this book and helped me to see how it could be improved.

PREFACE FOR INSTRUCTORS



The Third Edition of *The Informed Argument* continues to reflect my belief that students resent being asked to write on topics that seem trivial or contrived. Most of the readings are once again assembled into the equivalent of separate casebooks, six of which focus on important issues of the sort students often want to write about but lack adequate information to do so effectively. Instructors are free to treat each section either as a self-contained unit or as a springboard to further reading. To facilitate class discussion, every essay has its own editorial apparatus. This allows for much flexibility. Readings can be assigned in whatever sequence seems appropriate for a particular class. And there is plenty of material, so instructors can vary the assignments given to different classes without undertaking the work of an entirely new preparation.

The 87 selections, 52 of which are new to the Third Edition, are drawn from a variety of disciplines to help students master different types of writing and reading. Among the fields represented are biology, business, history, journalism, medicine, law, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology. In selecting these readings I have been guided by three primary concerns: to provide students with model arguments, expose them to different points of view, and give them information for writing arguments of their own. I have also chosen pieces that require different degrees of experience with reading. Some of the pieces are easily accessible; others are more demanding. My goal was to give students an immediate point of entry into the issues in question and then encourage them to confront more difficult texts representative of the reading that they will be expected to undertake on their own in college.

Although I believe in the importance of writing across the curriculum, I also believe that literature should be part of the curriculum being written across. Consequently, the book still includes a section on literary criticism as a type of argumentation. The thematically organized sections in Part 4 are followed by Part 5, "Some Classic Arguments." This section increases the variety of readings made available to students through inclusion of such well-known essays as "A Modest Proposal" and "Letter from Birmingham Jail" as well as seldom-anthologized arguments by writers such as Émile Zola, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela.

The wish to increase the diversity of readings made available to students contributed to a new feature in this edition. Part 3, "Cases for Argument," addresses twelve different topics that can be used for class discussion or short writing assignments as an alternative to the assignments in Part 4. Other changes in this edition include the addition of material on critical reading to Part 2, "Working with Sources," and extensive revision of Part 6, "A Guide to Research."

Because books have become so expensive, I have designed *The Informed Argument* to satisfy the needs of students in a semester-long class and to be useful to them long afterward. Part 1 introduces students to the principles they need to understand for reading and writing arguments. I have tried to keep the explanations as simple as possible. Examples are provided for each of the concepts discussed, and student essays illustrate both inductive and deductive reasoning as well as the model for reasoning devised by Stephen Toulmin. In addition, two versions of the same student essay illustrate the importance of revision, and another student essay illustrates an expanded section on definition.

Part 2 discusses the evaluation, annotation, paraphrase, summary, synthesis, and documentation of texts. For easy reference, a gray border identifies the pages devoted to documentation. The major documentation styles in use across the curriculum are illustrated—not only those of the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the American Psychological Association (APA), which are discussed in detail, but also the use of documentary footnotes and a numbered system favored in scientific writing. MLA style is also illustrated by several student essays in Part 4 and by the model research paper in Part 6. To help students using APA-style documentation, original publication dates are printed in boldface within the headnotes for selections in Parts 4 and 5. Examples of APA-style essays, and other systems, are provided by one or more of the essays in Part 4.

Several of the suggestions for writing in Parts 4 and 5 encourage students to do library research. How to do so is discussed in Part 6, “A Guide to Research.” In keeping with the book’s multidisciplinary character, I use a search strategy that could be employed to locate material for many different courses. Although this information appears at the end of the book, it can be taught at any time.

Instructors new to *The Informed Argument* might also note that the book contains a total of thirteen student essays. Although student essays can be found in many textbooks, *The Informed Argument* includes essays that respond to sources that are reprinted in the book. I have included these essays because students often profit from studying the work of other students. Given the difficulty of arguing effectively and using sources responsibly, students using the Third Edition should welcome the chance to see how other students coped with assignments similar to their own.

In completing this book, I have contracted many debts. I would like to thank those colleagues who have offered comments and advice: Ruth Dorgan, Nancy Moore, and Al Young, University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point; Mary Joseph, York College; and Suzanne Webb, Texas Women’s University. For their constant encouragement and support, I want to thank Phyllis and Robert Stanley Miller. William Warren Garitano deserves special thanks for his helpful and sage advice during many discussions of this project. And at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Eleanor Garner, Avery Hallowell, David Hill, Stuart Miller, Suzanne Montazer, and Margie Rogers deserve many thanks for their expert help.

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PART 1

AN
INTRODUCTION
TO ARGUMENT

Argument is a means of fulfilling desire. That desire may be for something as abstract as truth or as concrete as a raise in salary. When you ask for an extension on a paper, apply for a job, propose a marriage, or recommend any change that involves someone besides yourself, you are putting yourself in a position that requires effective argumentation. In the years ahead, you may also have occasion to argue seriously about political and ethical concerns. Someone you love may be considering an abortion, a large corporation may try to bury its chemical waste on property that adjoins your own, or you may be suddenly deprived of a benefit to which you feel entitled. By learning how to organize your beliefs and support them with information that will make other people take them seriously, you will be mastering one of the most important skills you are likely to learn in college.

Working your arguments out on paper gives you the luxury of being able to make changes as often as you want until you are satisfied that your words do what you want them to do. This is an important benefit because constructing effective arguments requires that you think clearly without letting your feelings dominate what you say, and this can be difficult at times. But it can also be tremendously satisfying when you succeed in making other people understand what you mean. You may not always succeed in converting others to your point of view, but you can win their respect. This, in a way, is what argument is all about. When you argue for what you believe, you are asking others to believe in you. This means that you must prove to your audience that you are worth listening to. If you succeed this far, you may have won the argument even if you lose the vote on the particular issue at hand. Argumentation is intellectual self-assertion designed to secure consideration and respect, and it should not be confused with quarreling.

Bearing this in mind, you should always be careful to treat both your audience and your opponents with respect. Few people are likely to be converted to your view if you treat them as if they are fools and dismiss their beliefs with contempt. Reason is the essence of effective argumentation, and an important part of being reasonable is demonstrating that you have given consideration to beliefs that are different from your own and have recognized what makes them appealing. Since nobody likes a know-it-all, you should try not to be narrow minded or overly opinionated.

Similarly, you should avoid the temptation of arguing all things at all times. Most points can indeed be argued, but just because something can be argued does not necessarily mean that it *should* be argued. You won't be taken seriously if you seem to argue automatically and routinely. Argument should be the result of reflection rather than reflex, and argumentation is a skill that should be practiced selectively.

CHOOSING A TOPIC

The first step in written argumentation, as in all forms of writing, is choosing a topic. In doing so, you should be careful to avoid subjects that could be easily settled by referring to an authority, such as a dictionary or an encyclopedia. There is no point in arguing about how to spell "separate" or about what is the capital of Bolivia, because questions of this sort can be settled quickly and absolutely, having only one correct answer. Argument assumes the possibility of more than one position on the issue being considered. When you disagree with someone about anything that could be settled by simply checking the facts, you would be wasting your time to argue, even if you are sure you are right.

Almost all intelligent arguments are about *opinions*. But not all opinions lead to good written arguments. There is no reason to argue an opinion with which almost no one would disagree. An essay designed to "prove" that puppies are cute or that vacations can be fun is unlikely to generate much excitement. Don't belabor the obvious. Nearly everyone welcomes the arrival of spring, and you will be preaching to the converted if you set out to argue that spring is a nice time of year. If you've been reading T. S. Eliot, however, and want to argue that April is the cruellest month (and that you have serious reservations about May and June as well) then you may be on to something. You should not feel that you suddenly need to acquire strange and eccentric opinions. But you should choose a topic that is likely to inspire at least some controversy.

In doing so, be careful to distinguish between opinions that are a matter of taste and those that are a question of judgment. Some people like broccoli, and some people don't. You may be the world's foremost broccoli lover, dreaming every night of broccoli crops to come, but no matter how hard you try, you will not convince someone who hates green vegetables to head quickly to the produce department of the nearest supermarket. A gifted

stylist could probably write an amusing essay on broccoli, in the manner of Charles Lamb or E. B. White, that would be a delight to read. But it is one thing to describe our tastes and quite another to insist that others share them. We all have likes and dislikes that are so firmly entrenched that persuasion in matters of taste is usually beyond the reach of what can be accomplished through the written word—unless you happen to command the resources of a major advertising agency.

Taste is a matter of personal preference. Whether we prefer green to blue or daffodils to tulips is unlikely to affect anyone but ourselves. Questions of judgment are more substantial than matters of taste because judgment cannot be divorced from logic. Our judgments are determined by our beliefs, behind which are basic principles to which we try to remain consistent. These principles ultimately lead us to decide that some judgments are correct and others are not, so judgment has greater implications than taste. Should a university require freshmen to live in dormitories? Should men and women live together before getting married? Should parents spank their children? All these are questions of judgment.

In written argumentation, questions of judgment provide the best subjects. They can be argued because they are complex, giving you more angles to pursue. This does not mean that you must cover every aspect of a question in a single essay. Because good subjects have so many possibilities, the essays that are written on them will take many different directions. Good writers sound like individuals, not committees or machines, and it is easier to sound like an individual when you address a subject about which many different things can be said. Moreover, in making an argument writers try to surprise readers with information—or an ingenious interpretation of information—that is not usually considered. If your audience consists of people who know almost nothing about your subject, then you may be able to build a convincing case by simply outlining a few basic points. But an educated audience will be converted to your view only if you move beyond the obvious and reveal points that are often overlooked. This is most likely to happen when the subject itself is complex.

It is important, therefore, to choose subjects that you are well-informed about or willing to research. This may sound like obvious advice, and yet it is possible to have an opinion with nothing behind it but a few generalizations that are impossible to support once you begin to write. You may have absorbed the opinions of others without thinking about them or may have prejudged a particular subject without knowing much about it. Nobody is going to take your views seriously if you cannot support them.

The readings that form Part 3 of this book were chosen to help you begin to argue. Those that form Part 4 were chosen to make you better informed on a number of important questions so that you can argue more effectively. After you have read six or seven essays on the same subject, you should be able to compose an argument of your own that will consider the various views you have encountered. But remember that being “better informed” does not always mean being “well informed.” Well-educated men

and women recognize how little they know in proportion to how much there is to be known. Don't suppose that you've become an expert on animal experimentation simply because you have spent a week or two reading about it. What you read should influence what you think, but as you read more, realize that controversial subjects are controversial because there is so much that could be said about them—much more than you may have realized at first.

DEFINING YOUR AUDIENCE

Argumentation demands a clear sense of audience. Good writers remember whom they are writing for, and their audience helps shape their style. It would be a mistake, for example, to use complicated technical language when writing for a general audience. But it would be just as foolish to address an audience of experts as if they knew nothing about the subject. As the writer you should always be careful not to confuse people. On the other hand, you must also be careful not to insult the readers' intelligence. Although awareness of audience is important in almost all types of writing, it is especially true in written arguments. A clear sense of audience allows you to choose the points you want to emphasize in order to be persuasive. Just as importantly, it enables you to anticipate the objections your readers or listeners are most likely to raise if they disagree with you.

In written argumentation, it is usually best to envision an audience that is skeptical. Unless you are the keynote speaker at a political convention, rallying the members of your party by telling them exactly what they want to hear, there is no reason to expect people to agree with you. If your audience already agrees with you, what's the point of your argument? Whom are you trying to convince? Remember that the immediate purpose of an argument is almost always to convert people to your point of view. Of course, an audience may be entirely neutral, having no opinion at all on the subject that concerns you. But by imagining a skeptical audience, you will be able to anticipate the opposition and offer counterarguments of your own, thus building a stronger case.

Before you begin to write, you should list for yourself the reasons why you believe as you do. Realize that you may not have the space, in a short essay, to discuss all of the points you have listed. You should therefore rank them in order of their importance, considering, in particular, the degree to which they would probably impress the audience for whom you are writing. Once you have done this, compose another list—a list of reasons why people might disagree with you. Having considered the opposition's point of view, now ask yourself why it is that you have not been persuaded to abandon your own beliefs. You must see a flaw of some sort in the reasoning of your opponents. Add to your second list a short rebuttal of each of your opponent's arguments.

You are likely to discover that the opposition has at least one good argument, an argument which you cannot answer. There should be nothing

surprising about this. We may like to flatter ourselves by believing that Truth is on our side. In our weaker moments, we may like to pretend that anyone who disagrees with us is either ignorant or corrupt. But serious and prolonged controversies almost always mean that the opposition has at least one valid concern. Be prepared to concede a point to your opponents when it seems appropriate to do so. You must consider and respond to their views, but your responses do not always have to take the form of rebuttals. When you have no rebuttal and recognize that your opponent's case has some merit, be honest and generous enough to say so.

By making concessions to your opposition, you demonstrate to your audience that you are trying to be fair minded. Far from weakening your own case, an occasional concession can help bridge the gulf between you and your opponents, making it easier for you to reach a more substantial agreement. It's hard to convince someone that your views deserve to be taken seriously when you have belligerently insisted that he or she is completely wrong and you are completely right. Life is seldom so simple. Human nature being what it is, most people will listen more readily to an argument that offers some recognition of their views.

You must be careful, of course, not to concede too much. If you find yourself utterly without counterarguments and ready to concede a half dozen points, you had better reconsider the subject you have chosen. In a short essay, you can usually afford to make only one or two concessions. Too many concessions are likely to confuse readers who are uncertain about what they think. Why should they be persuaded by you when you seem half persuaded by your opponents?

Having a good sense of audience also means illustrating your case with concrete examples your audience can readily understand. It's hard to make people care about abstractions; good writers try to make the abstract concrete. Remember that it is often easy to lose the attention of your audience, so try to address its most probable concerns.

There is, however, a great difference between responding to the interests of your audience by discussing what it wants to know and twisting what you say to please an audience with exactly what it wants to hear. You should remember that the foremost responsibility of any writer is to tell the truth as he or she sees it. What we mean by "truth" often has many dimensions, and when limited space forces us to be selective, it is only common sense to focus on those facets of our subject that will be the most effective with the audience we are attempting to sway. But it is one thing to edit and quite another to mislead. Never write anything for one audience that you would be compelled to deny before another. Hypocrites are seldom persuasive, and no amount of verbal agility can compensate for a loss of confidence in a writer's character.

To better understand the importance of audience in argumentation, let us consider an example. The following essay was recently published as an editorial in a student newspaper.