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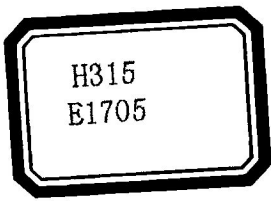
Good Reasons

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In memory of our teacher and friend,
James L. Kinneavy (1920–1999)

Preface

Like many other college writing teachers, we have come to believe that a course focusing on argument is an essential part of a college writing curriculum. Most students come to college with very little experience in reading and writing extended arguments. Because so much writing in college involves arguments in the disciplines, a basic course in writing arguments is foundational for an undergraduate education. You will find that college courses frequently require you to analyze the structure of arguments, to identify competing claims, to weigh the evidence offered, to recognize assumptions, to locate contradictions, and to anticipate opposing views. The ability to write cogent arguments is also highly valued in most occupations that require college degrees. Just as important, you need to be able to read arguments critically and write arguments skillfully if you are to participate in public life. The long-term issues that will affect your life after your college years—education, the environment, social justice, and the quality of life, to name a few—have many diverse stakeholders and long, complex histories. They cannot be reduced to slogans and sound bites.

We find that other argument textbooks spend too much time on complicated schemes and terminology for analyzing arguments and too little time looking at why people take the time to write arguments in the first place. People write arguments because they want something to change. They want to change attitudes and beliefs about particular issues, and they want something done about problems they identify. We start out with why you might want to write an argument and how what you write can lead to extended discussion and long-term results. We then provide you with practical means to find good reasons for the positions you want to advocate. This book is also distinctive in its attention to the delivery and presentation of arguments and to arguments in electronic media. It encourages you to formulate arguments in different genres and different media.

Several textbooks on writing arguments have appeared in recent years that use Stephen Toulmin's method of analyzing arguments. We take a simpler approach. Toulmin's method provides useful analytic tools, but we do not find it a necessary one to teach the practical art of making arguments. In fact, our experience is that Toulmin's terminology is often more confusing than helpful.

The key to the Toulmin method is understanding how warrants work. *Warrants,* in the Toulmin scheme, are the assumptions, knowledge, and beliefs that allow an audience to connect evidence with a claim. We believe that you will understand this concept better if you focus on the rhetorical situation, examining what assumptions, knowledge, and beliefs a particular audience might have about a particular issue, rather than "Toulminizing" an argument. The only technical terms our book uses are the general classical concepts of *pathos, ethos,* and *logos.*

Likewise, you will not find explicit discussions of syllogisms, enthymemes, or fallacies in this book. We have avoided introducing these terms because, like the Toulmin terminology, they too often hinder rather than help. The crux of teaching argument, in our view, is to get you to appreciate its rhetorical nature. What makes a good reason good in public debate is not that it follows logically from a set of truth claims arranged in syllogisms but that the audience accepts the assumptions, knowledge, and beliefs on which the argument is based and thus accepts the reason as a good reason.

Another difference is that our book does not make a sharp distinction between what some people think of as rational and irrational arguments. Rationality is a socially constructed concept. Until the twentieth century, it was rational to believe that women should not participate in politics. To question the absolute nature of rationality is not to say that it doesn't exist. Driving on the right side of the road is rational in North, South, and Central America and most of Western Europe, just as driving on the left side is rational in Great Britain, Ireland, India, and Japan. But the insistence on a dichotomy between rational and irrational has some unfortunate consequences, including a sharp division between argument and persuasion. Advertisements are often held up as typifying persuasion that plays to the emotions rather than reason. Other pieces of writing, however, are not as easy to classify as either argument or persuasion. For example, multicultural readers are filled with narratives that include arguments. Personal narratives are critical in these essays to supply cultural knowledge of other perspectives and group experiences, which in turn enables the writer to employ good reasons. We treat narratives in this book as an important type of argument. We also pay attention to ads and other genres of persuasion that are usually not represented in textbooks on argument. You will find examples in the readings that illustrate the wide range of argument.

The dichotomy between rational and irrational also leads to almost total neglect of the visual nature of writing. Visual thinking remains excluded from the mainstream literacy curriculum in the schools; it is taught only in specialized courses in college in disciplines such as architecture and art history. This exclusion might have been justified (though we would argue otherwise) as long as writing courses were bound by the technology of the typewriter, but the great majority of college students today prepare their work on personal computers. Commonly used word-processing programs and Web page editors now

allow users to include pictures, icons, charts, and graphs, making design an important part of argument. While we still believe the heart of an argument course should be the critical reading and critical writing of prose, we also believe that the basics of visual persuasion should be a part of that course. In chapter 11, you will find an extensive discussion of visual design and how good design can support good reasons.

If our goal is to help you become active citizens in a participatory democracy, then it seems counterproductive to ignore that most of the writing you will do in your future public and private life will be electronically mediated. Most students now have access to the most powerful publishing technology ever invented: the World Wide Web. Until very recently, students who published on the Web had to learn HTML and had to manipulate cumbersome file transfer programs. Current word-processing programs and WYSIWYG ("what you see is what you get") editors bypass the step of coding HTML, and the process of putting Web pages on servers has become almost as simple as opening a file on a PC. The Web has become a vast arena of argument, with nearly every interest group maintaining a Web presence. You will find in chapter 12 an introduction to arguments on the Web.

The popularity of argument courses is not an accident. Even though we hear frequently that people have become cynical about politics, they are producing self-sponsored writing in quantities that have never been seen before. It's almost as if people have rediscovered writing. Although the writing of personal letters may be becoming a lost art, the number of people who participate in online discussion groups, put up Web sites, and send email is expanding at an astounding rate. Citizen participation in local and national government forums, a multitude of issue-related online discussions, and other forms such as online magazines increase daily. You already have many opportunities to speak in the electronic polis. We want you to recognize and value the breadth of information that is available on the Internet and to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize that information. And we want to prepare you for the changing demands of the professions and public citizenship in your future.

Acknowledgments

　　We are especially grateful to our students, who have given us opportunities to test these materials in class and who have taught us a great deal about the nature of argument.

　　We appreciate the work of all those who contributed to this book, including Janet Zepernick, who offered her good ideas on effective research in chapter 13, and Eric Lupfer, who prepared the excellent Instructor's Manual for *Good Reasons.* Our publisher, Eben Ludlow, convinced us we should write this book and gave us wise guidance throughout. Grace Trudo, Lisa Kimball, Annette Joseph, Susan Freese, and the expert production staff at Omegatype all contributed their many talents to our book. Finally, we thank our families, who make it all possible.

Between the time Web site information is gathered and published, it is not unusual for
some sites to have closed. Also, the transcription of URLs can result in unintended
typographical errors. The publisher would appreciate being notified of any problems
with URLs so that they may be corrected in subsequent editions. Thank you.

Many of the designations used by manufacturers and sellers to distinguish their
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and Allyn and Bacon was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been
printed in initial or all caps.

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Part I

Persuading with Good Reasons

What Do We Mean by Argument?

For the past thirty years, the debate over legalized abortion has raged in the United States. The following scene is a familiar one: Outside an abortion clinic, a crowd of pro-life activists has gathered to try to stop women from entering the clinic. They carry signs that read "ABORTION = MURDER" and "A BABY'S LIFE IS A HUMAN LIFE." Pro-choice supporters are also present in a counterdemonstration. Their signs read "KEEP YOUR LAWS OFF MY BODY" and "WOMEN HAVE THE RIGHT TO CONTROL THEIR BODIES." Police keep the two sides apart, but they do not stop the shouts of "Murderer!" from the pro-life side and "If you're anti-abortion, don't have one!" from the pro-choice side.

When you imagine an argument, you might think of two people engaged in a heated exchange or two groups of people with different views, shouting back and forth at each other like the pro-choice and pro-life demonstrators. Or you might think of the arguing that occurs in the courthouse, where district attorneys and defense lawyers debate strenuously. Written arguments can resemble these oral arguments in being heated and one sided. For example, the signs that the pro-choice and pro-life demonstrators carry might be considered written arguments.

But in college courses, in public life, and in professional careers, written arguments are not thought of as slogans. Bumper stickers require
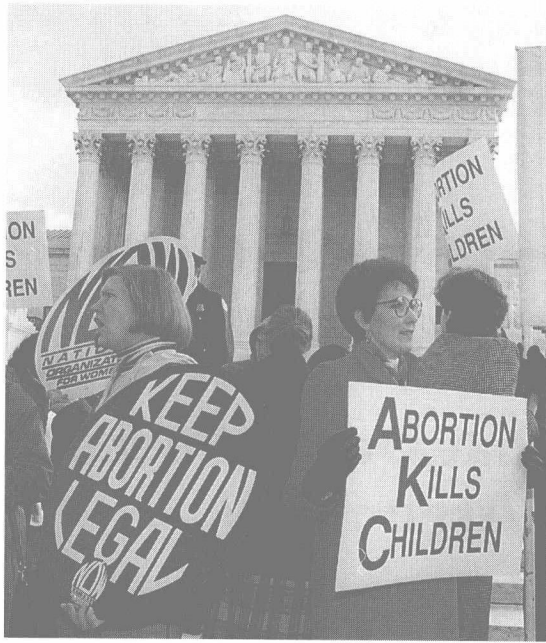
*Demonstration outside the Supreme Court in
Washington, D.C., December 1993*

no supporting evidence or reasons. Many other kinds of writing do not offer
reasons either. An instruction manual, for example, does not try very hard to
persuade you. It assumes that you want to do whatever the manual tells you
how to do; indeed, most people are willing to follow the advice, or else they
would not be consulting the manual. Likewise, an article written by someone
who is totally committed to a particular cause or belief often assumes that
everyone should think the same way. These writers can count on certain
phrases and words to produce predictable responses.

Effective arguments do not make the assumption that everyone should
think the same way or hold the same beliefs. They attempt to change people's
minds by convincing them of the validity of new ideas or that a particular
course of action is the best one to take. Written arguments not only offer evi-
dence and reasons but also often examine the assumptions on which they are
based, think through opposing arguments, and anticipate objections. They ex-
plore positions thoroughly and take opposing views into account.

Extended written arguments make more demands on their readers than
most other kinds of writing. Like bumper stickers, they often appeal to our
emotions. But they typically do much more. They expand our knowledge with

the depth of their analysis and lead us through a complex set of claims by providing networks of logical relations and appropriate evidence. They explicitly build on what has been written before by offering trails of sources, which also demonstrates that they can be trusted because the writer has done his or her homework. They cause us to reflect on what we read, in a process that we will shortly describe as critical reading.

Our culture is a competitive culture, and often the goal is to win. If you are a professional athlete, a top trial lawyer, or a candidate for president of the United States, it really is win big or lose. But most of us live in a world in which the opponents don't go away when the game is over. Even professional athletes have to play the team they beat in the championship game the next year.

In real life, most of us have to deal with the people who disagree with us at times but with whom we have to continue to work and live in the same communities. The idea of winning in such situations can only be temporary. Other situations will come up soon enough in which we will need the support of those who were on the other side of the current issue. Probably you can think of times when friendly arguments ended up with everyone involved coming to a better understanding of the others' views. And probably you can think of other times when someone was so concerned with winning an argument that even though the person might have been technically right, hard feelings were created that lasted for years.

Usually, listeners and readers are more willing to consider your argument seriously if you cast yourself as a respectful partner rather than as a competitor and put forth your arguments in the spirit of mutual support and negotiation—in the interest of finding the *best* way, not "my way." How can you be the person that your reader will want to cooperate with rather than resist? Here are a few suggestions, both for your writing and for discussing controversial issues in class:

- **Try to think of yourself as engaged not so much in winning over your audience as in courting your audience's cooperation.** It is important to argue vigorously, but you don't want to argue so vigorously that opposing views are vanquished or silenced. Remember that your goal is to invite a response that creates a dialog.
- **Show that you understand and genuinely respect your listener's or reader's position even if you think the position is ultimately wrong.** Often, that amounts to remembering to argue against an opponent's position, not against the opponent himself or herself. It often means representing your opponent's position in terms that your opponent himself or herself would accept. Look hard for ground that you already share with your reader, and search for even more. See yourself as a mediator. Consider that neither you nor the other person has arrived at a best solution, and carry on in the hope that dialog will lead to an even better course of