



Clear Thinking for Composition

FIFTH EDITION

Clear Thinking for Composition

FIFTH EDITION

RAY KYTLE

CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Boston, Massachusetts Burr Ridge, Illinois
Dubuque, Iowa Madison, Wisconsin New York, New York
San Francisco, California St. Louis, Missouri

McGraw-Hill

A Division of The McGraw-Hill Companies

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Fifth Edition

14 15 16 17 18 19 BKM:BKM 0987654

CLEAR THINKING FOR COMPOSITION

Copyright © 1987, 1982, 1977, 1973, 1969 by McGraw-Hill, Inc. All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States
Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in
any form or by any means, or stored in a data base or retrieval system, without the
prior written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kytle, Ray.

Clear Thinking for composition.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. Logic I. Title

PE1408.K9 1986 808'.042 86-6710

ISBN 0-07-553969-1

Clear Thinking for Composition

For Dennis and Carol Farley

PREFACE

Clear Thinking for Composition is designed to communicate to the student the reasoning skills essential to convincing and responsible writing. In the course of pursuing this goal, the text should also facilitate a deeper understanding of the roots of illogic. For clear thinking is not simply a matter of recognizing and avoiding fallacies. We must also be aware of the power and pervasiveness of other forces—cultural, psychological, linguistic—that militate against sound reasoning in our own discourse and encourage acquiescence in the unsound reasoning of others.

ORGANIZATION

Overall, the organization of the text is sequential and incremental. Section One introduces analysis as both a method of logical inquiry and a heuristic technique. Section Two discusses the manner in which our cultural assumptions, our psychological makeup, and our linguistic heritage severally and collectively promote faulty reasoning. Section Three, the “logic core” of the text, explains in depth and breadth the specific reasoning errors to which inductive and deductive arguments are prone as well as the major fallacies of relevance that weaken any argument, whatever its form. In the context of this background, Section Four offers the student a unique acronym-based technique for exploring and discrediting faulty argument, whether it is manifested in the speech of others or in their writing. Finally, Section Five discusses the transition from clear thinking to effective writing—from reasoning to rhetoric.

Within this broad structure, however, a nonlinear approach is adopted. One of the reiterated premises of the text is that reasoning errors occur in, and are the product of, a total context. Hence, important concepts are alluded to and elaborated on at various points in the text whenever new material being discussed sheds additional light on them.

CHANGES IN THE FIFTH EDITION

In this edition, the most thoroughly revised since the book's inception, I have tried to exploit the paradox "more is less." To this end, all material that would normally be covered in a core composition text has been excised, allowing the discussion of critical thinking to be significantly expanded without a corollary increase in the length of the text.

Also new to this edition are the highlights that encapsulate key concepts from each chapter, the acronym-based "illogic detector" detailed in Section Four, student and professional essays that exemplify many of the concepts discussed, and the final section, "Reasoning and Rhetoric," which is intended to facilitate the transition from clear thinking to composition.

CONTENTS

PREFACE vii

SECTION ONE / THE PROCESS OF LOGICAL THINKING 1

- 1 Introduction 3
- 2 Analysis in Action 7
 - Highlights 24
 - Applications 24

SECTION TWO / BLOCKS TO LOGICAL THINKING 27

- 1 Cultural Conditioning 29
 - Highlights 40
 - Applications 40
- 2 Resistance to Change 44
 - Highlights 57
 - Applications 59
- 3 Empty Abstractions 62
 - Highlights 75
 - Applications 76

SECTION THREE / ERRORS IN LOGICAL THINKING 81

- 1 Fallacies of Induction 83
- 2 Fallacies of Deduction 107
- 3 Fallacies of Relevance 117

**SECTION FOUR / EXPOSING ILLOGICAL
THINKING 151**

- 1 A Blockbuster 153**
Applications 154

SECTION FIVE / REASONING AND RHETORIC 161

- 1 Persona 163**
2 Rhetorical Stance 165
3 The Internalized Reader 168
Highlights 169
Applications 169

NOTES 177

GLOSSARY OF FALLACIES 179

INDEX 185

SECTION ONE

**THE PROCESS OF
LOGICAL THINKING**

Introduction

Logical thinking is a *process*. The process is relatively simple, it always works, and it can be readily mastered. In the process of logical thinking:

1. *Objectivity* is the prerequisite.
2. *Insight* is the goal.
3. *Analysis* is the method.

OBJECTIVITY

You have not mastered the process of logical thinking until you can achieve an open mind and an *objective attitude* toward any subject. In the dialogues that illustrate analysis and in Section Two, we will examine those forces and reasoning habits that insidiously undermine objectivity.

INSIGHT

Once you are able to achieve and maintain an open mind when analyzing a subject, you will not feel compelled to defend your preconceptions about it. Instead, your attitude will be: "I want to *understand* as much as possible about the subject. And I won't know what I'm going to say about the subject until I have gained as much *insight* as possible into it."

ANALYSIS

The way to achieve this insight is through *analysis*. You should not decide what you are going to say about the subject until *after* you have *analyzed* it.

Analysis is what this book is all about: how you do it, forces that interfere with it, fallacies that subvert it, subjects that require you to inform yourself prior to it. But before we set out, we should have firmly in mind the three principles that govern analysis. These principles are:

1. Examine the subject from various points of view.
2. Classify these points of view.
3. Recognize the complexity of the subject.

The importance of each of these three steps cannot be overemphasized. Looking at the subject from various points of view will lead you to *insight*; classifying these points of view will give *order and structure* to your essay; and recognizing the complexity of the subject will help you *avoid oversimplification*.

When you look at a given subject from as many points of view as possible, you will probably realize that the matter is more complex than you may have thought at first. And in many cases the subject will turn out to be so complex that you will have to acknowledge that no *general* law or principle concerning it can be laid down. This is especially true of broad subjects that, when analyzed, turn out to be composed of almost infinite variables. When you encounter such subjects, you must beware of making any categorical assertions about them. (A categorical assertion is an assertion without any qualification or condition: “Love is good”; “Honesty is the best policy.”) Here are some examples of this type of subject:

| | |
|----------|---------|
| Morality | Beauty |
| Détente | Liberty |
| Honor | Success |

The point is that no single unqualified assertion about any of these subjects can possibly be valid because the subjects denote too many variables. Instead of making a categorical assertion about the subject, you must content yourself with an analysis of it (or of some aspect of it). To illustrate:

SUBJECT: LOVE

| <i>Point of View</i> | <i>Classification</i> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. What kind of love? | Type of love |
| 2. Love of whom? | Object of love |
| 3. Love for what purpose? | Motive of love |

LIMITED SUBJECT: OBJECT OF LOVE

| <i>Point of View</i> | <i>Classification</i> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Love of mother for child | Maternal love |
| 2. Love of father for child | Paternal love |
| 3. Love of child for parent | Filial love |
| 4. Love of brother for sister | Brotherly love |
| 5. Love of sister for brother | Sisterly love |
| 6. Love of one's country | Patriotic love |
| 7. Love for humankind | Humanitarian love |
| 8. Love for the ill and weak | Compassionate love |
| 9. Love for God | Religious love |
| 10. Love for oneself | Narcissistic love |
| 11. Love of another's body | Physical love |

At this point we realize that when we classify love by the *object* of love, we come up with a *type* of love. For example, love of mother for child (object) is classified as maternal love (type). But each type of love can be further subdivided according to the *motives* or *needs* of the person loving. For instance, we may speak of *exploitative* maternal love, *supportive* maternal love, *possessive* maternal love, *nurturing* maternal love, *selfish* maternal love, *self-sacrificing* maternal love, and so forth. So, as is obvious, no generalization about "Love," no statement that "Love is . . .," can possibly be accurate because any such categorical assertion *ignores the complexity of the subject*.

You may sometime find yourself with a subject that is simply too complex to work with. The tip-off is that, when you begin to analyze it, it just keeps on breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces, like a clod of dry earth. The more you handle it, the more it crumbles. In this case, you should work with one of the little pieces that crumbles off, not with the whole subject. For example, we found that maternal love broke down, when examined from different points of view, into such types as "exploitative," "possessive," and so forth. Take *one* of these subdivisions of a subdivision and work with it:

LIMITED SUBJECT: POSSESSIVE
MATERNAL LOVE

| <i>Point of View</i> | <i>Classification</i> |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1. What are the characteristics of possessive maternal love? | Characteristics |

2. What causes a mother to love in this way? Causes
3. What are the effects of this type of love on the children? Effects

SUMMARY

The process of logical thinking requires that you approach your subject with an open mind—with objectivity. The goals of logical thinking are insight and understanding. The method by which to achieve this insight is analysis. To analyze a subject, you look at it from as many points of view as possible and then classify these various points of view. You must always recognize and respect the complexity of the subject because failure to recognize its complexity will lead to oversimplification and, hence, to inaccuracy.

With these general remarks in mind, let us turn to some dialogues that show the process of analysis in action.

Analysis In Action

YVONNE AND THE RUNAWAY MOMS

A TALE OF RAGE AND REASON

Yvonne is a first-year college student of eighteen who was raised according to the gospel as pronounced by Marabel Morgan. Among other lessons, her parents taught her that no man likes a woman with brains, that tears make a woman appealing, and that motherhood is a woman's sacred duty.

When Yvonne left home for college, her worried parents warned her to watch out for radical young college instructors who would try to put wrong ideas in her head. Yvonne really didn't pay much attention, though she dutifully promised to watch out. But then, the very first day she walked into her English composition class, there was the young instructor she had been warned about. And sure enough, after the instructor checked the roll, she assigned an essay on, of all things, the subject "runaway mothers"! As soon as the other students had begun writing, Yvonne rushed to the front of the classroom, and the thrilling dialogue that follows began:

YVONNE (*incredulously*): By "runaway mothers" do you mean a mother who just up and leaves her husband and children?

INSTRUCTOR: Yes.

YVONNE (*impulsively*): Oh! That's terrible! Everybody knows that.

INSTRUCTOR: What do you mean, "terrible"?

YVONNE (*with conviction*): Wrong.

INSTRUCTOR: What do you mean, "wrong"?

YVONNE: She shouldn't do it.

INSTRUCTOR: Why not?

YVONNE (*becoming exasperated*): I already told you. Because it's *wrong!*

How on earth can you ask me to write a whole theme about a subject like that? Running off and leaving your kids is wrong! Period. There's nothing more to say.

INSTRUCTOR: Do you see any advantages or good points about being a social worker?

YVONNE (*suspiciously*): What's that got to do with anything?

INSTRUCTOR: Do you?

YVONNE: Of course. There're lots of good points. Help people, do your part, all sorts of things.

INSTRUCTOR: Do you want to be a social worker?

YVONNE: Ugh! Icky people!

INSTRUCTOR: Social workers?

YVONNE: No, of course not. The people social workers work with.

INSTRUCTOR: Well then?

YVONNE: Well then, what? You're trying to trap me.

INSTRUCTOR: Well then, you can see reasons why a person might choose to be a social worker, but you don't feel that recognizing them means you have to become one.

YVONNE: Of course not.

INSTRUCTOR: Then why not approach the subject of runaway mothers the same way? That is, try to discover some reasons why a mother might decide to leave her husband and children.

YVONNE (*disgustedly*): I just don't understand you. Walking out on your husband and children is *wrong*.

HASTY MORAL JUDGMENT

Psychologist Carl Rogers has observed that the single greatest barrier to meaningful communication between people is the tendency to respond with moral judgments. As we can see from the foregoing exchange between Yvonne and her instructor, hasty moral judgment also blocks objective analysis of a subject or concept.

Don't mistake my meaning here. I'm not for a moment suggesting that you should abandon your value system and regard all actions as equally defensible. Nor am I suggesting that considered moral judgments are to be avoided. After all, deep ethical convictions and principles are hallmarks of our very humanity. Achieving an objective attitude does not mean adopting a moral or ethical neutrality.

But the goals of analysis are understanding and insight. *Hasty* moral judgment blocks understanding and insight because it substitutes an emotional, judgmental label for calm analysis.