

Current ISSUES and Enduring QUESTIONS

*A Guide to Critical
Thinking and Argument,
with Readings*

FOURTH EDITION

SYLVAN BARNET & HUGO BEDAU

CURRENT ISSUES AND ENDURING QUESTIONS

A Guide to Critical Thinking and Argument, with Readings

Fourth Edition

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Preface

This book is a text—a book about reading other people’s arguments and writing your own arguments—and it is also an anthology—a collection of more than a hundred essays, ranging from Plato to the present, with a strong emphasis on contemporary arguments. In a moment we will be a little more specific about what sorts of essays we include, but first we want to mention our chief assumptions about the aims of a course that might use *Current Issues and Enduring Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking and Argument, with Readings*.

Probably most students and instructors would agree that, *as critical readers*, students should be able to

1. summarize accurately an argument they have read;
2. locate the thesis of an argument;
3. locate the assumptions, stated and unstated;
4. analyze and evaluate the strength of the evidence and the soundness of the reasoning offered in support of the thesis;
5. analyze, evaluate, and account for discrepancies among various readings on a topic (for example, explain why certain facts are used or not used, why two sources might differently interpret the same facts).

Probably, too, students and instructors would agree that, *as thoughtful writers*, students should be able to

1. imagine an audience, and write effectively for it (by such means as using the appropriate tone and providing the appropriate amount of detail);
2. present information in an orderly and coherent way;

3. incorporate sources into their own writing, not simply by quoting extensively or by paraphrasing, but also by having digested materials so that they can present it in their own words;
4. properly document all borrowings—not merely quotations and paraphrases but also borrowed ideas;
5. do all these things in the course of developing a thoughtful argument of their own.

Part One • In Part One (Chapters 1–6) we offer a short course in methods of thinking about arguments and in methods of writing arguments. By “thinking” we mean serious analytic thought; by “writing” we mean the use of effective, respectable techniques, not gimmicks such as the notorious note a politician scribbled in the margin of the text of his speech: “Argument weak; shout here.” For a delightfully wry account of the use of gimmicks, we recommend that you consult “The Art of Controversy,” in *The Will to Live*, by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer reminds his reader that a Greek or Latin quotation (however irrelevant) can be impressive to the uninformed, and that one can win almost any argument by loftily saying, “That’s all very well in theory, but it won’t do in practice.”

We offer lots of advice about setting forth an argument, but we do not offer instruction in one-upmanship. Rather, we discuss responsible ways of arguing persuasively. We know, however, that before one can write a persuasive argument one must clarify one’s own ideas—and that includes arguing with oneself—in order to find out what one really thinks about a problem. Therefore we devote Chapter 1 to critical thinking, Chapters 2 and 3 to critical reading, and Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to critical writing. These chapters are not all lecturing: They include twenty-two arguments (three are by students) for analysis and discussion.

All of the essays in the book are accompanied by questions. This is not surprising, given the emphasis we place on asking oneself questions in order to get ideas for writing. Among the chief questions that writers should ask, we suggest, are such matters as “What is X?” and “What is the value of X?” (pp. 1–9). By asking such questions—for instance (to look only at these two types of questions), “Is the fetus a person?” or “Is Arthur Miller a better playwright than Tennessee Williams?”—a writer probably will find ideas coming, at least after a few moments of head-scratching. The device of developing an argument by identifying issues is of course nothing new; indeed, it goes back to an ancient method of argument used by classical rhetoricians, who proceeded by identifying a *stasis* (an issue) and then asked questions about it: Did X do such-and-such? If so, was the action bad? If bad, how bad? And so on.

In keeping with our emphasis on writing as well as reading, we raise issues not only of what can roughly be called the “content” of the essays but also of what can (equally roughly) be called the “style”—that is, the ways in which the arguments are set forth. Content and style, of course, cannot

finally be kept apart. As Cardinal Newman said, “Thought and meaning are inseparable from each other. . . . *Style is thinking out into language.*” In our questions we sometimes ask the student to evaluate the effectiveness of the opening paragraph, or to explain a shift in tone from one paragraph to the next, or to characterize the persona of the author as revealed in the whole essay. In short, the book is not designed as an introduction to some powerful ideas (though in fact it is that, too); it is designed as an aid to writing thoughtful, effective arguments on important political, social, scientific, ethical, and religious issues.

The essays reprinted in this book also illustrate different styles of argument that arise, at least in part, from the different disciplinary backgrounds of the various authors. Essays by journalists, lawyers, social scientists, policy analysts, philosophers, critics, activists, and other writers—including undergraduates—will be found in these pages. The authors develop and present their views in arguments that have distinctive features reflecting their special training and concerns. The differences in argumentative styles found in these essays foreshadow the differences students will encounter in the readings assigned in many of their other courses.

Part One, then, is a preliminary (but we hope substantial) discussion of such topics as *getting ideas*, *using sources*, *evaluating kinds of evidence*, and *organizing material*, as well as an introduction to some ways of thinking.

Part Two • Part Two, *Readings: Current Issues*, begins with one chapter that includes nine debates (pairs of opposing arguments) on such topics as bilingual education, gun control, and prayer in school. The bulk of the section is devoted to nine additional chapters, in each of which several voices speak, on such topics as AIDS, the legalization of drugs, the environment, immigration, multiculturalism, and sexual harassment. (In effect, these chapters, which range from three essays to seven essays, are mini-casebooks, suitable for controlled research papers.)

Part Three • Part Three, *Readings: Enduring Questions*, extends the arguments to such topics as “What Is the Ideal Society?” and “What Are the Grounds of Religious Faith?” Here the reader encounters classical writers such as St. Paul, Machiavelli, Jefferson, and Mill, as well as such contemporary writers as Irving Kristol, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Mitsuye Yamada.

Of the contemporary selections in the book (drawn chiefly from such sources as *Ms.*, *The Nation*, *National Review*, the *New York Times*), many are very short—scarcely longer than the five-hundred-word essays that students are often asked to write.

Part Four • Part Four, *Further Perspectives*, begins with “A Literary Critic’s View: Arguing about Literature.” These pages should help students to see what sorts of things literary critics argue about and *how* they

argue, so the students can then apply what they have learned to the literary readings that appear among the *Enduring Questions*, where we include three stories, seven poems, and a one-act play.

The second chapter in Part Four is a summary of the philosopher Stephen Toulmin's method for analyzing arguments. This summary will assist those who wish to apply Toulmin's methods to the readings in our book. The third chapter, a more rigorous analysis of deduction, induction, and fallacies than is usually found in textbooks designed for composition courses, reexamines from a logician's point of view material already treated briefly in Chapter 3. The fourth chapter, again on logic, is Max Shulman's amusing story, "Love Is a Fallacy." The fifth chapter, an essay by psychotherapist Carl R. Rogers, complements the discussion of audience, organization, and tone in Chapter 5.

The Instructor's Edition includes the appendix, "Resources for Teaching," containing detailed suggestions about ways in which the essays may be approached, and many additional suggestions for writing.

New to the Fourth Edition • In preparing the fourth edition we were greatly aided by suggestions from instructors who were using the third edition. In line with their recommendations, we have amplified the first chapter, a discussion of critical thinking, which examines the roles of imagination, analysis, and evaluation. Also new to Part One are nine of the twenty-two essays, including a new research paper on televising trials. Among the other new essays are "Just Take Away Their Guns" and "Five Myths about Immigration."

In Part Two we have included (in the nine paired debates) new essays on prayer in school and on sex education. In the chapters with more than two essays on a topic, we have added two new topics, "Immigration" and "Television Violence," and we have made many substitutions in the sections that we have retained from the previous edition.

In Part Three, *Readings: Enduring Questions*, we now include eleven works of literature.

In Part Four, "A Literary Critic's View: Arguing about Literature" is new.

There can be no argument about the urgency of the topics that we have added, but there can be lots of argument about the merits of the positions offered in the selections. That's where the users of the book, students and instructors alike, come in.

Note: For instructors who do not require a text with a large number of essays, a shorter edition of this book, *Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing*, is also available. The shorter version contains the first six chapters of the present book (all of the material on critical thinking, reading, and writing) with twenty-eight essays, including three pairs of debates. It also contains five chapters of Part Four, with (1) material on arguing about literature; (2) the material on Toulmin; (3) additional material on deduction;

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