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# The Aims of Argument



A TEXT AND A VIDEO

Timothy W. Crusius | Carolyn E. Channell

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**A TEXT AND READER**

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## *The Aims of Argument: A Text and Reader*

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# The Aims of Argument

*For W. Ross Winterowd*



As its first three editions were, the fourth edition of *The Aims of Argument* is different from other argumentation texts because it remains the only one that focuses on the aims, or purposes, of argument. That this book's popularity increases from edition to edition tells us that our approach does in fact satisfy the previously unmet need that moved us to become textbook authors. We're gratified that our approach has proven useful—and seemingly more effective than others available.

## NOTES ON THIS TEXT'S ORIGINS

With over thirty years of teaching experience between us, we had tried most of the available argument books. Many of them were quite good, and we learned from them. However, we found ourselves adopting a text not so much out of genuine enthusiasm but rather because it had fewer liabilities than any of the others we were considering. True, all textbook selection involves comparisons of the "lesser evil" sort. But we wondered why we were so lukewarm about even the best argumentation textbooks. We found many problems, both major and minor, that explained our dissatisfaction, and we boiled them down to a few major criticisms:

- Most treatments were too formalistic and prescriptive.
- Most failed to integrate class discussion and individual inquiry with written argumentation.
- Apart from moving from simple concepts and assignments to more complicated ones, no book offered a learning sequence.
- Despite the fact that argument, like narrative, is clearly a mode or means of development, not an end in itself, no book offered a well-developed view of the aims or purposes of argument.

We thought that these shortcomings had many undesirable results in the classroom, including the following:

- The overemphasis on form confused students with too much terminology, made them doubt their best instincts, and drained away energy and interest from the process of inventing and discovering good arguments. Informal argumentation is not cut-and-dried but open-ended and creative.
- The separation of class discussion from the process of composition created a hiatus (rather than a useful distinction) between oral and written argument so that students had difficulty seeing the relation between the two and using the insights learned from each to improve the other.
- The lack of a learning sequence—of assignments that begin by refining and extending what students can do without help and that then build on these capacities with each subsequent assignment—meant that courses in argumentation were less coherent and less meaningful than they could be. Students did not understand why they were doing what they were doing and could not envision what might reasonably come next.
- Finally, inattention to what people actually use argument to accomplish resulted in too narrow a view of the functions of argument and thus in unclear purposes for writing. Because instruction was mainly limited to what we call arguing to convince, too often students saw argument only as a monologue of advocacy. Even when their viewpoint was flexible, too often they assumed a pose of dogmatism and ignored any true spirit of inquiry.

We set out consciously to solve these problems—or at least to render them less problematical—when we wrote the first edition of this book. The result was a book different in notable respects from any other argument text available because it focuses on the four aims of argument:

*Arguing to inquire*, the process of questioning opinions

*Arguing to convince*, the process of making cases

*Arguing to persuade*, the process of appealing to the whole person

*Arguing to negotiate*, the process of mediating between or among conflicting positions

## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AIMS OF ARGUMENT

We have found that instructors have certain questions about these aims, especially in terms of how they relate to one another. No doubt we have yet to hear all the questions that will be asked, but we hope that by answering the ones we have heard, we can clarify some of the implications of our approach.

1. *What is the relative value of the four aims? Because mediation comes last, is it the best or most valued?* Our answer is that no aim is “better” than any other aim. Given certain needs or demands for writing and certain audiences, one aim can be more appropriate than an-

other for the task at hand. We treat mediation last because it involves inquiry, convincing, and persuading and thus comes last in the learning sequence.

2. *Must inquiry be taught as a separate aim?* Not at all. We have designed the text so that it may be taught as a separate aim (the use of argument Plato and Aristotle called *dialectic*), but we certainly do not intend this “may” to be interpreted as a “must.” We do think that teaching inquiry as a distinct aim has certain advantages. Students need to learn how to engage in constructive dialogue, which is more disciplined and more focused than class discussion usually is. Once they see how it is done, students seem to enjoy dialogue with one another and with texts. Dialogue helps students think through their arguments and imagine reader reaction to what they say, both of which are crucial to convincing and persuading. Finally, as with the option of teaching negotiation, teaching inquiry offers instructors another avenue for assignments other than the standard argumentative essay.
3. *Should inquiry come first?* For a number of reasons, inquiry has a certain priority over the other aims. Most teachers are likely to approach inquiry as a prewriting task, preparatory to convincing or persuading. And very commonly, we return to inquiry when we find something wrong with a case we are trying to construct, so the relationship between inquiry and the other aims is as much recursive as it is a matter of before and after.

However, we think inquiry also has psychological, moral, and practical claims to priority. When we are unfamiliar with an issue, inquiry comes first psychologically, often as a felt need to explore existing opinion. Regardless of what happens in the “real world,” convincing or persuading without an open, honest, and earnest search for the truth is, in our view, immoral. Finally, inquiry goes hand-in-hand with research, which, of course, normally precedes writing in the other aims of argument.

In sum, we would not defend Plato’s concept of the truth. Truth is not simply “out there” in some wordless realm waiting to be discovered; rather, our opinion is that we discover or uncover truth as we grapple with a controversial issue and that it results largely from how we interpret ourselves and our world. We agree, therefore, with Wayne Booth that truth claims ought to be provisional and subject to revision, held for good reasons until better ones change our minds. Moreover, we agree with Plato that rhetoric divorced from inquiry is dangerous and morally suspect. The truth (if always provisional—some person’s, some group’s, or some culture’s version of the truth) must count for more than sheer technical skill in argumentation.

4. *Isn’t the difference between convincing and persuading more a matter of degree than of kind?* Fairly sharp distinctions can be drawn between inquiry and negotiation and between either of these two aims and the



monologues of advocacy: convincing and persuading. But convincing and persuading do shade into one another so that the difference is only clear at the extremes, with carefully chosen examples. Furthermore, the “purest” appeal to reason — a legal brief, a philosophical or scientific argument — appeals in ways beyond the sheer cogency of the case being made. Persuasive techniques are typically submerged but not absent in arguing to convince.

Our motivation for separating convincing from persuading is not so much theoretical as pedagogical. Students usually have so much difficulty with case-making that individual attention to the logical appeal by itself is justified. Making students focally conscious of the appeals of character, emotion, and style while they are struggling to cope with case-making is too much to ask and can overburden them to the point of paralysis.

Regardless, then, of how sound the traditional distinction between convincing and persuading may be, we think it best to take up convincing first and then persuasion, especially because what students learn in the former can be carried over more or less intact into the latter. And, of course, it is not only case-making that carries over from convincing into persuading. Because one cannot make a case without unconscious appeal to character, emotional commitments (such as values), and style, teaching persuasion is really a matter of exposing and developing what is already there in arguing to convince.

The central tenets of an approach based on aims of argument may be summarized as follows:

- *Argumentation is a mode or means of discourse, not an aim or purpose of discourse; consequently, our task is to teach the aims of argument.*
- *The aims of argument are linked in a learning sequence so that convincing builds on inquiry, persuasion on convincing, and all three contribute to mediation; consequently, we offer this learning sequence as an aid to conceiving a course or courses in argumentation.*

We believe in the learning sequence as much as we do in the aims of argument. We think that anyone giving it an honest chance will come to prefer this way of teaching argument over any other ordering currently available.

At the same time, we recognize that textbooks are used selectively, as teachers and programs need them for help in achieving their own goals. As with any other text, this one can be used selectively, ignoring some parts, playing up others, designing other sequences, and so on. If you want to work with our learning sequence, it is there for creative adaptation. If not, the text certainly does not have to be taught as a whole and in sequence to be useful and effective.

## A NOTE ABOUT THE READINGS

You will discover that many of the issues around which this text's essays are organized unavoidably involve students in issues of race, class, and gender difference. This slant is not intended to be political, nor does it reflect a hidden agenda on our part. Rather, we think students can come to feel more deeply about issues of this sort than they do about others we have tried. Class debates are livelier, maybe because such issues hit closer to home—the home and community they came from, the campus they live on now. Whatever the case, we have found that the issues work, both for students and for us.

They work, we think, because such issues help expose something obvious and basic about argumentation: People differ because they are different, and not just on the basis of race, class, and gender. Without some confrontation with difference, students may miss the deep social and cultural roots of argument and fail to understand why people think in such varied ways about homosexuality, education, welfare, abortion, and other issues that turn on difference, as well as issues such as the news, which may seem at first to have nothing to do with difference.

We have consciously avoided the “great authors, classic essays” approach (with the exception of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” which we include and discuss in depth). Otherwise, we tried instead to find bright, contemporary people arguing well from diverse viewpoints—articles and chapters similar to those that can be found in our better journals and trade books, the sort of publications students will read most in doing research on the issues. We have also tried to bring students into the argument as it currently stands, recognizing that the terms of the debate are necessarily always changing. Finally, we have not presented any issue in a simple pro-and-con fashion, as if there were only two sides to a question. We want the readings to provide models for writing not too far removed from what students can reasonably aspire to, as well as stimulation toward thinking through and rethinking positions on the issues in question.

Included in this range of perspectives are arguments made not only with words but also with images. Therefore, attentive to the predominance, power, and appeal of visuals today, we include (in a full instructional chapter) examples of arguments made in visuals such as editorial cartoons, advertisements, public sculpture, and photographs.

## A FINAL WORD ABOUT THE APPROACH

Some reviewers and users have called our approach innovative. But is it better? Will students learn more? Will instructors find the book more satisfying and more helpful than what they currently use? Our experience—both in using the book ourselves and in listening to the responses of those who have read it or tested it in the classroom or used it for years—is that they will. Students

complain less about having to read this book than about having to read others used in our program. They do seem to learn more. Teachers claim to enjoy the text and find it stimulating, something to work with rather than around. We hope your experience is as positive as ours has been. We invite your comments and will use them in the process of perpetual revision that constitutes the life of a text and of our lives as writing teachers.

## NEW TO THE FOURTH EDITION

On the whole, we think this revision has made *Aims* more user-friendly and more diverse in its appeal while maintaining its attempt not to dodge or gloss over the genuine complexities and special challenges of argumentation. As always, we invite your comments and suggestions, as we continue to learn a great deal from the students and teachers who use this book.

The major changes from the third edition are as follows:

### New Organization

In an effort to make materials easier to locate and more accessible, we've reorganized the book into four parts and changed the format, including the addition of a much-needed second color. We now have up front, in Part One, all the materials we think of as "basic training": understanding rhetoric and argumentation, reading arguments, analyzing them, doing research. The popular chapter on visual rhetoric is here as well because visuals are especially useful for teaching reading and analysis and because they are often used as an aid for making arguments, regardless of aim.

Among other important topics, Chapter 1, Understanding Argument, confronts the popular notions of rhetoric and argument and moves students immediately into working with both. Reading an Argument, Chapter 2, addresses the problems students have in reading arguments and provides detailed strategies for overcoming those challenges. Because many contemporary students are not used to processing uninterrupted blocks of prose that advance sustained arguments, we see this greatly enhanced coverage as part of our continuing effort to develop still better ways to help students become critical readers. This chapter includes an analytical writing assignment and a student example of the completed assignment.

### Entirely Rewritten Inquiry Chapter

Part Two groups together what has been and will always be the foundation of the book: the sequence of four aims. The only significant change in this part is an extensive overhaul of the inquiry chapter. Most composition texts focus on helping students find sources rather than showing them what to do once sources are located. Making useful note cards is important but only a

small part of the problem students face in analyzing and assessing sources. Therefore, the fourth edition of *The Aims of Argument* now offers more detailed guidance, with illustrations, in thinking critically about sources and relating them to the issues connected with controversial topics. Included is a section on how to assess sources defending opposing theses on the same issue, a challenge students typically encounter in research but which is rarely addressed sufficiently in composition textbooks. We also show students, complete with examples and exercises, the difference between conversation and dialogue and especially how to move from merely asserting opinions to questioning them. Finally, we've designed a new assignment for this chapter, one we think will contribute significantly to making the exploratory essay a more rewarding experience for both students and instructors.

### **New Boxes**

In response to reviewers' suggestions, we added numerous boxes throughout Parts One and Two, and to help students get the most out of them, we identify the majority of the boxes as one of two types: Concept Close-Up or Best Practices. We intend each type to achieve a different purpose. The contents of Concept Close-Up boxes provide, as the boxes' name suggests, a summary or an expanded discussion of a covered concept or topic. Best Practices boxes offer guidelines for successfully completing reading, writing, and thinking tasks; employing the full range of argumentation strategies; and writing effective arguments.

### **Two New Casebooks**

Part Three, Two Casebooks for Argument, is entirely new to *Aims's* fourth edition. Comprising Chapters 10 and 11, the two casebooks realize an ambition we've had for some time — to offer more extensive and varied texts on selected topics. The idea was not just to offer more of what we usually encounter in argumentation rhetoric readers. We especially wanted to include background information, knowledge students usually lack and surely need to argue well. Terrorism, unfortunately, is now a topic none of us can ignore, and Chapter 10 primarily offers materials published after the September 11 attack. This section is the only entirely new group of readings for this edition, as Chapter 11, the casebook on marriage and family, includes among its many texts selections carried over from the third edition's chapter on this topic. We chose to expand our treatment of the issues surrounding marriage and family because our students are drawn to them more than to any of the other issues we've offered in readings in past editions. No selection of readings can obviate the need for outside research, but at least these two casebooks take students deeper into the subject matters and open up more avenues for pursuing them. We only wish space would permit us to treat all controversial subjects this way.

Part Four preserves, with few changes, the most-used readings chapters from the third edition: Feminism (Chapter 12), Gay and Lesbian Rights (Chapter 13); The News and Ethics (Chapter 14); and Liberal Education and Contemporary Culture (Chapter 15). We're sorry if the space we needed for the casebooks meant eliminating a readings chapter you especially liked. We hope the casebooks will compensate for your loss.

### New Web Site

In addition to the many changes the fourth edition offers in the text itself, and in addition to the text's print instructor resources manual, this edition of *Aims* is also accompanied by a new Web site that provides not only a wealth of links to relevant sites but also interactive activities to help students develop skills such as evaluating online sources. The Web site's address is <[www.mhhe.com/crusius](http://www.mhhe.com/crusius)>.

### Online Course Delivery and Distance Learning

In addition to the supplements described previously (the print *Instructor's Resources to Accompany The Aims of Argument*, Fourth Edition and the book's new Web site), McGraw-Hill also offers the following technology products for composition classes. The online content of *The Aims of Argument* is supported by WebCT, Blackboard, eCollege.com, and most other course systems. Additionally, McGraw-Hill's PageOut service is available to get you and your course up and running online in a matter of hours—at no cost! To find out more, contact your local McGraw-Hill representative or visit <<http://www.pageout.net>>.

### PageOut

McGraw-Hill's widely used click-and-build Web site program offers a series of templates and many design options, requires no knowledge of HTML, and is intuitive and easy to use. With PageOut, anyone can produce a professionally designed course Web site in very little time.

### AllWrite!

Available online or on CD-ROM, *AllWrite!* offers over 3,000 exercises for practice in basic grammar, usage, punctuation, context spelling, and techniques for effective writing. The popular program is richly illustrated with graphics, animations, video, and Help screens.

### Webwrite

This online product, available through our partner company Meta Text, makes it possible for writing teachers and students to, among other things, comment on and share papers online.

*Teaching Composition Faculty Listserv at <[www.mhhe.com/tcomp](http://www.mhhe.com/tcomp)>*

Moderated by Chris Anson at North Carolina State University and offered by McGraw-Hill as a service to the composition community, this listserv brings together senior members of the college composition community with newer members—junior faculty, adjuncts, and teaching assistants—in an online newsletter and accompanying discussion group to address issues of pedagogy, in both theory and in practice.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have learned a great deal from the comments of both teachers and students who have used this book, so please continue to share your thoughts with us.

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Timothy Crusius  
Carolyn Channell  
Dallas, Texas



## Note to Students

Our goal in this book is not just to show you how to construct an argument but also to make you more aware of why people argue and what purposes that argument serves in our society. Consequently, Part Two of this book introduces four specific aims that people may have in mind when they make arguments: to inquire, to convince, to persuade, and to negotiate. Part One precedes the chapters on the aims of argument and consists of relatively short chapters that focus on understanding argumentation in general, reading and analyzing arguments, doing research, and working with forms of visual persuasion such as advertising.

As examples of the aims of argument, the selections in Parts One and Two offer something for you to emulate. All writers learn from studying the strategies of other writers. The object is not so much to imitate what a more experienced writer does as it is to understand the range of approaches and strategies you might use in your own way and for your own purposes.

Included in this range of approaches are arguments made not only with words but also with images. Part One therefore includes some examples of editorial cartoons, advertisements, and photographs.

The additional readings in Parts Three and Four serve another function as well. To learn about argument, we have to argue; to argue, we must have something to argue about. So we have grouped essays and images around central issues of current public discussion. Parts Three and Four consist of readings and visuals in various controversial topics. Part Three's two casebooks offer expanded treatment of two subjects we think you'll find especially interesting, terrorism and marriage and family. Part Four's chapters provide less extensive selections on issues students have favored from past editions of this book. We selected these particular issues rather than other widely debated ones for two main reasons. One is that they have worked well in our own classes, better than others we tried and rejected. The other reason is that most of these issues deal centrally with society and more or less require us to think

about difference, about what leads people to disagree with one another in the first place.

Basically, people argue with one another because they do not see the world the same way, and they do not see the world the same way because of their different backgrounds. Therefore, in dealing with how people differ, a book about argument must deal with what makes people different, with the sources of disagreement itself—including gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and religion. Rather than ignoring or glossing over difference, the readings in Parts Three and Four will help you better understand difference—as well as provide interesting and significant subjects to argue about.

This book concludes with an appendix that focuses on editing, the art of polishing and refining prose, and on proofreading for some common errors. We suggest that you consult this reference repeatedly as you work through the text's assignments.

Arguing well is difficult for anyone. For many college students it is especially challenging because they have had little experience writing arguments. We have tried to write a text that is no more complicated than it has to be, and we welcome your comments so that we may improve future editions. Please write us at the following address:

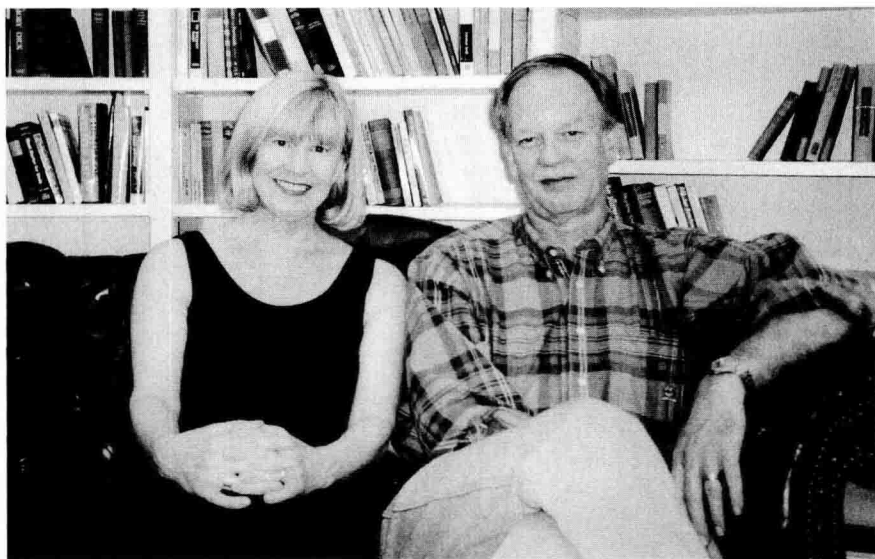
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You may also e-mail your comments to the following address:

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Timothy W. Crusius is professor of English at Southern Methodist University, where he teaches beginning and advanced composition. He's also the author of books on discourse theory, philosophical hermeneutics, and Kenneth Burke. He resides in Dallas with his wife, Elizabeth, and their children, Micah and Rachel.

Carolyn E. Channell taught high school and community college students before coming to Southern Methodist University, where she is now a senior lecturer and a specialist in first-year writing courses. She resides in Richardson, Texas, with her husband, David, and her "child"—a boxer named Heidi.