GOOD REASONS WITH CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTS

Reading, Designing, and Writing Effective Arguments

SECOND EDITION

Lester Faigley

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Good Reasons with Contemporary Arguments

Reading, Designing, and Writing Effective Arguments

Second Edition

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New York San Francisco Boston
London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore Madrid
Mexico City Munich Paris Cape Town Hong Kong Montreal

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

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Cover Design Manager: Nancy Danahy
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Cover Image: © Getty Images/Photodisc, Inc.
Manufacturing Buyer: Lucy Hebard
Printer and Binder: Courier Corporation Westford
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color Corporation

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Faigley, Lester, 1947–
Good reasons with contemporary arguments: reading, designing, and writing effective arguments / Lester Faigley, Jack Selzer.-- 2nd ed.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-321-17277-9
1. English language--Rhetoric. 2. Persuasion (Rhetoric) 3. Report writing. I. Selzer, Jack. II. Title.
PE1431 .F35 2004
808' .042--dc21 2003044607

Please visit our Web site at http://www.ablongman.com/faigley

ISBN 0-321-17277-9
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10—CRW—06 05 04 03

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 concerns 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 after you leave college. 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. If you are to help make your views prevail in your communities, you must be able to participate in sustained give-and-take on a range of civic issues.

We find that other argument textbooks spend too much time on complicated schemes and terminology for analyzing arguments and too little time thinking about helping students produce real arguments that work. This book begins by considering why people take the time to write arguments in the first place. People write arguments because they want things to change. They want to change attitudes and beliefs about particular issues, and they want things done about problems they identify. We start out by making you examine exactly 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 that support convincingly the positions you want to advocate. *Good Reasons* is also distinctive in its attention to the delivery and presentation of arguments—to the visual aspects of argument, in other words—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 feel that you will understand this concept better if you focus not on "Toulminizing" an argument but on conceptualizing the rhetorical situation—examining what assumptions, knowledge, and beliefs a particular audience might have about a specific issue. The only technical terms this book uses are the general classical concepts of *pathos, ethos,* and *logos:* sources of good reasons that emerge from the audience's most passionately held values, from the speaker's expertise and credibility, or from reasonable, commonsense thinking.

Likewise, you will not find explicit discussions of syllogisms or enthymemes in *Good Reasons.* 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 writer or speaker as credible and accepts the assumptions, knowledge, and beliefs on which the argument is based—and thus accepts the reasons given as *good reasons.*

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 rationality does not 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 insisting 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 emotion rather than reason. Other pieces of writing, however, are not so easy to classify as either argument or persuasion. For example, personal and fictional narratives often include arguments or have an argumentative aim. Personal narratives are critical in many essays because they supply cultural knowledge of other perspectives and group experiences, which in turn enables the writer to advance good reasons in support of an argumentative purpose. We treat narratives in *Good Reasons* as an important aspect of argument. We also pay attention to ads and other genres of persuasion that are usually not represented in textbooks on argument. In short, you will find examples in the readings that illustrate the wide range of argument.

The dichotomy between rational and irrational also leads to an almost total neglect of the visual nature of writing. Visual thinking remains excluded from the mainstream literacy curriculum in the schools, and it is taught only in specialized courses in college in disciplines such as architecture and art history. This exclusion might be justified (though we would argue otherwise) if writing courses were still 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 you to include pictures, icons, charts, and graphs, making design an important part of an argument. While we still believe that 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 included as well. In Part 3, therefore, you will find an extensive discussion of visual design and how good design can support good reasons in both written and oral arguments.

If our goal is to help you become an active citizen in a participatory democracy, then it would be counterproductive for us 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. But current word processing programs and WYSIWYG ("what you see is what you get") editors now bypass the step of coding HTML, and the process of putting a Web page on a server 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. Chapter 13 provides 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 never before seen. It's almost as if people have rediscovered writing. While writing personal letters is perhaps becoming a lost art, participating in online discussion groups, putting up Web sites, and sending email have become commonplace. Citizen participation in local and national government forums, in a multitude of issue-related online discussions, and in other forms such as online magazines is increasing daily. You already have many opportunities to speak in the electronic polis. We want you to recognize and value the breadth of information 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.

Those goals govern our selection of example arguments included in Part 4: Contemporary Arguments. So that you can see how argument is a social act—that is, how arguments develop out of and respond to other arguments—we have grouped selections around interesting current issues: the environment, sexual difference, immigration, the body, controlling substances, censorship, affirmative action, and Title IX. We also include visual arguments on child labor. In each section, we represent a range of viewpoints so that you can see how arguers develop their points in response to the perspectives of others—and so that you might develop your own arguments (in some cases) around those various points of view. So that you can observe the range of argumentative styles and approaches that we discuss in the book, you will notice an unusual diversity in the samples provided: You will encounter not only a diversity of opinions and genres (including ads, cartoons, and photos as well as point arguments) but also a diversity of writers and writing styles. You will see arguments that originally appeared on the Internet and others from magazines and newspapers. You will encounter well-known citizens such as Richard Rodriguez, Alice Walker, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., bell hooks, Jesse Jackson, Anna Quindlen, and N. Scott Momaday as well as ordinary citizens who make extraordinary cases. And you will find examples of the kinds of arguments that we discuss throughout Parts 1 through 3: definitions, evaluations, causal arguments, narratives, refutations, and proposals.

Our goal in writing this text has been to offer in one book everything that you will need to become a more effective arguer and a more sophisticated reader of the arguments you encounter each day.

Companion Website and Instructor's Manual

The Companion Website to accompany *Good Reasons with Contemporary Arguments*, Second Edition (http://www.ablongman.com/faigley), written by Katherine Grubbs, offers a wealth of resources for both students and instructors. Students can access detailed chapter summaries and objectives, writing exercises, chapter review quizzes, and links to additional Web resources for further study. Instructors will find sample syllabi, Web resources, and the Instructor's Manual available for download.

The Instructor's Manual that accompanies this text was revised by Eric Lupfer and Victoria Davis and is designed to be useful for new and experienced instructors alike. The Instructor's Manual briefly discusses the ins and outs of teaching the material in each chapter. Also provided are in-class exercises, homework assignments, discussion questions for each reading selection, and model paper assignments and syllabi. This revised Instructor's Manual will make your work as a teacher a bit easier. Teaching argumentation and composition becomes a process that has genuine—and often surprising—rewards.

Acknowledgments

We are much indebted to the work of many outstanding scholars of argument and to our colleagues who teach argument at Texas and at Penn State. In particular, we thank the following reviewers for sharing their expertise: William A. Covino, Florida Atlantic University; Caley O'Dwyer Feagin, University of California, Irvine; Richard Fulkerson, Texas A&M University–Commerce; David Harvey, Central Arkansas University; Peggy Jolly, University of Alabama-Birmingham; Joe Law, Wright State University; Elizabeth Losh, University of California, Irvine; Bea Opengart, University of Cincinnati; Rise A. Quay, Heartland Community College; Gardner Rogers, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Jeffrey Walker, Emory University; Maria W. Warren, The University of West Florida; Patricia J. Webb, Maysville Community College; and Stephen Wilhoit, University of Dayton. 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. The segment on Rick Reilly and Jenny Thompson was suggested by Jessica Horn. Andrew Alexander assisted us in finding selections

and researching information for headnotes in Part 4. And several people suggested particular items or assisted us in obtaining permissions: Robert Burkholder and Anne Hoag of Penn State; Blake Scott, University of Central Florida; H. Lewis Ulman of Ohio State University; Timothy Crusius of Southern Methodist University; Deborah Anderson of Photosearch, Inc.; and Mike Kendall of Longman Publishers.

Our editor, Eben Ludlow, convinced us we should write this book and gave us wise guidance throughout. Elsa van Bergen and Katy Faria at Pre-Press, Bob Ginsberg and Bill Russo at Longman, and our copy editors, Carol Noble and Margery Niblock, all did splendid work in preparing our book for publication. Finally we thank our families, who make it all possible.

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