MAKING ARGUMENTS
Chapter Contents

Readings
“Why a Great Books Education Is the Most Practical!”
  David Crabtree  212
“Cruelty, Civility, and Other Weighty Matters,”
  Ann Marie Paulin  216
“Floppy Disk Fallacies,” Elizabeth Bohnhorst  222
“Whales Are Us,” Jayme Stayer  226
Outside Reading  232

Invention
Point of Contact  234
Analysis  236
Public Resonance  238
Thesis  240
Rhetorical Tools  242
Organizational Strategies  250
Writer’s Voice  252
Vitality  254
Peer Review  256
Delivery  257
“Someone who makes an assertion puts forward a claim—a claim on our attention and to our belief.”

—Stephen Toulmin

Argument is the art of persuading people how to think. This may sound absurd since most people, we hope, already know how to think, or at least what to think about particular issues. But with argument, we can change how people view things, even slightly, and so affect how they approach and process ideas.

Arguments come to us in different forms. We hear them given in speeches, debates, and informal discussions. We hear them every day on talk shows, in break rooms, college hallways, and public meeting places like restaurants and pubs. Arguments get delivered through action. They come explicitly in protests, parades, sit-ins, labor strikes, and elections. They also come in more subtle forms: People donate to charities (thereby expressing their favor of a particular cause); they patronize or boycott a particular store; they choose not to vote (thereby expressing their stance against the entire political process). Arguments get made through art in all media: sculpture, painting, music, and so on. And arguments are major elements of literature. For example, it has been said that Aldous Huxley’s book *Brave New World* argues against the extremes of materialism and industrialization and that Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* argues for a new vision of women’s identity. Even poems offer arguments: Walt Whitman’s masterpiece *Leaves of Grass* argues for the value of common American workers and their common language.

People in all occupations make or deal with arguments. For example: a human resources manager for a packaging company argues in a report that more supervisors should be hired in the coming fiscal year; several department store sales associates collectively write a letter to store and regional managers in which they claim current scheduling practices minimize sales commissions; the public affairs director of a major automobile company argues that a new advertising campaign should not be offensive to a particular demographic group; the lawyers for a major computer software company argue in a district court that the company’s business practices comply with federal anti-trust laws. In academia, argument is everywhere:

- The biology faculty at a state university argue for the need to study cloning and petition the administration for more leeway to do research.
- A historian argues about the number of Native Americans on the continent before European settlers so that people more deeply understand history.
• A psychologist argues that Freudian analysis is overused and that new strategies for exploring patients’ psychological makeup should be further developed.

• College administrators argue for more state funds for their schools.

• Students in an architecture class argue that a particular structural design is more sound than competing designs.

• Students in a nursing program must convince others that a new staff management technique is valuable for large hospitals.

In any situation, those who can deliver the most sophisticated and engaging arguments tend to have the most influence. Of course, a sophisticated and engaging argument involves a great deal of strategy. For instance, in academic argument, blatant personal attacks, outright aggression, and sugar-coated language are not valued, nor are empty phrases (“don’t question what’s in my heart”) and mean-spiritedness (“your ideas are simply idiotic”). But while academic writers are not out to squash an opponent or cuddle up to audiences, they do more than simply present their opinions. In providing a new way of thinking about a particular topic, academic writers must also analyze others’ ideas and explain how their own claims relate to those of others.

This chapter will help you discover an argumentative topic, explore that topic in depth, develop a sophisticated argument, and communicate your argument in writing. The following essays will provide insight to various argumentative strategies. After reading the essays, you can find a topic in one of two ways:

1. Go to the Point of Contact section to find a topic from everyday life.
   or
2. Choose one of the Ideas for Writing that follow the essays.

After you find a topic, go to the Analysis section to begin developing your argument.
Why a Great Books Education Is the Most Practical!

David Crabtree

Academic writers often challenge common assumptions. David Crabtree, president and one of the founders of Gutenberg College in Eugene, Oregon, takes on the common assumption that a specialized education is the best path to a career and financial security. While many college students believe that a narrow focus on a particular set of skills will lead them to successful careers, Crabtree argues that specialization works against students’ best interests. Instead, he invites readers to examine the role of “great books” (classic works of literature, philosophy, and religion) in developing a career path and a productive future. Crabtree knows what he’s up against: Most people assume that studying great books is contrary to a career path in “the real world.” So he begins, in the title of his essay, by taking on that assumption.

Gutenberg College is a great books college. The curriculum is designed to develop good learning skills in students; they read and then discuss in small groups the writings produced by the greatest minds of Western culture as they grappled with the most fundamental questions facing human beings of all ages. When I tell people about Gutenberg College, one of the most common responses is: “It’s a good idea, but not practical.” The thinking seems to be that if one had unlimited time and money, a great books education would be very good to pursue; but in the real world, food has to be put on the table, and a great books education will not do that. I am convinced, however, that a great books education is not only practical, but, in our day and age, the most practical education available.

Modern society has adopted the historically recent perspective that the purpose of education is training for the workplace. In this view, college should provide students with skills and knowledge that will prepare them to procure reasonably high-paying, satisfying employment for the rest of their lives. The common wisdom says that the best way to achieve this goal is: First, as an undergraduate, select a promising occupation and major in the appropriate field of study; and second, after graduating, enter directly into the work force or attend a graduate or professional school for more specialized training. The logic seems to be that the sooner one concludes one’s education and begins work in one’s field, the less will be the cost of education and the better the prospects for advancement into secure, high-paying positions. While this was once a reasonable strategy, it is not suited to the economic environment currently developing.

The world is changing at a bewildering pace. Anyone who owns a computer and tries to keep up with the developments in hardware, software, and the accompanying incompatibilities is all too aware of the speed of change. This rapid change, especially technological change, has extremely important implications for the job market. In the past, it was possible to look at the nation’s work force, determine which of the existing occupations was most desirable in terms of pay and working conditions, and pick one to prepare for. But the rapid rate of change is clouding the crystal ball. How do we know that a high-paying job today will be high-paying tomorrow?

A photographer told me about a talented and highly skilled artisan who touched up photographs. He was the best in our region of the country, and people knew it; because the demand for his skill was so great, he was unable to keep up with the work. A few years ago, however, this artisan suddenly closed his shop; he did not have enough work to stay in business. Due to developments in computer hardware and software, anyone with just a little training can now achieve results previously attainable by only a few highly skilled artisans. Technology had rendered this artisan’s skills obsolete. And this is not an isolated case; technology is antiquating many skills.

One could try to avoid this fate by finding an occupation unlikely to be automated, but automation is not the only cause of job elimination. Historically, mid-management positions in large corporations provided good incomes and considerable job security.
However, AT&T’s recent layoffs have drawn attention to the growing trend in American companies to eliminate mid-level managers as the companies restructure to compete better in the world market. As a result, a glut of unemployed executives are having great difficulty finding employment in their field of expertise. Most of them never dreamed they would be standing in unemployment lines.

Medicine might be a more promising field. There will always be sick people to treat, and doctors have a reputation for high pay. However, recent news reports have called into question the future of this occupation. There is an excess of doctors in the United States right now, largely due to the number of foreign medical students who decide to remain in this country after they complete their training. And physicians’ incomes recently declined for the first time in decades, a change attributed to the proliferation of HMOs and managed health care providers—a trend expected to continue.

To further complicate the picture, in the near future a national health care plan may rise from the ashes of President Clinton’s ill-fated one. What effect such a program would have on physicians’ incomes and working conditions is impossible to predict with certainty, but doctors ought not expect raises under such a plan. In light of such an uncertain future, should a student invest the time and money medical training requires? This is a tough question, but similar uncertainties lie in the future of many professions.

One could forego the traditionally desirable occupations and choose a field certain to grow and develop. Clearly the high demand for programmers, electrical engineers, and computer programmers appears to hold great promise for job security in the foreseeable future, even if one must work for several different employers over the years. However, no one in this field will be able to take his job for granted. Due to the rapid rate of technological change in the computer industry, people in this field need to be constantly learning and updating their skills to keep up with the new technology. In areas of state-of-the-art development, some companies do not want software writers or engineers over thirty-five years old because their training is out of date and they are too set in their ways to approach problems with fresh thinking. These companies prefer to replace older employees with recent graduates. Thus the longevity of one’s career in this fast-changing field could be relatively short.

No matter what occupation one chooses, the future is full of question marks. Although this economic dislocation is in its early stages, statistics already indicate a high degree of instability in the job market. According to the United States government, the average American switches careers three times in his or her life, works for ten employers, and stays in each job only 3.6 years.¹

Such unpredictability calls for a different strategy in preparing for the job market. Rather than spending one’s undergraduate years receiving specialized training, one ought to learn more general, transferable skills which will provide the flexibility to adjust to whatever changes may occur. A well-educated worker should be able to communicate clearly with coworkers, both verbally and in writing, read with understanding, perform basic mathematical calculations, conduct himself responsibly and ethically, and work well with others. These skills would make a person well-suited to most work environments and capable of learning quickly and easily the requisite skills for a new career, should the need arise. Thus a hard-headed realism, with long-term economic security as the goal, would seem to dictate an undergraduate educational strategy of focusing on sound general learning skills—just what a great books education provides.

Therefore, a great books education makes good sense in terms of dollars spent and dollars gained when calculated over a lifetime, and, therefore, good training for the workplace. This is fortuitous, however, because a great books education is not designed with this as the primary goal. It is designed to achieve the even more practical goal historically assigned to education: to teach students how to live wisely. I say this is practical because that which helps one achieve what needs to be done is practical. Living wisely is the most important thing a person can do in his lifetime. Therefore, education with this focus is quintessentially practical.

Wise living means to live as one ought; in other words, to strive to achieve good goals by moral means. This statement immediately evokes an array of fundamental questions: Why are we here? What is valuable or worthwhile? What are the principles of right and wrong? Is there a God? Who is He? What is my relationship to Him? Without having seriously wrestled with these issues, one will be condemned to a life without direction or purpose. Without clearly defined and worthwhile goals, success and fulfillment are impossible. Therefore, one’s answers to these questions have very important implications for how one chooses to earn a living.

Is such a goal realistic or attainable by education? It is difficult to teach a person how to live wisely. In a sense, such a skill cannot be taught; it can only be learned. The student must be challenged to think through these fundamental questions for himself; he must be an extremely active participant in his own education. We all derive our wisdom from careful reflection on our experience, and this reflection can be made more profound by considering the reflections of others who have had similar experiences. That is to say, we can benefit from the wisdom others have attained.

A great books education creates an educational environment conducive to the learning of wisdom. Classes are small, personal, and largely discussion-based. The small class size and the discussion format encourage each student to be actively involved in consideration of important issues, and they allow the course of the discussion to be tailored to the concerns of the students. The writings of the most influential thinkers of our cultural tradition are studied, which provides many thought-provoking insights into the fundamental questions. As students work to understand these writings, they develop important learning skills—reading with understanding, thinking clearly, and writing cogently—which equip them to become life-long learners.

A great books education is not for everyone. In order to benefit from such an education, a student has to be highly motivated, mature enough to realize the importance of such a focus, and self-disciplined. Whatever reasons one might have for not pursuing a great books education, it cannot be because it is not practical!
Why a Great Books Education Is the Most Practical!

Writing Strategies

1. How does Crabtree make his main idea clear to the reader?

2. Crabtree’s introduction puts his essay within a context—that is, he lets the reader know why he is writing about a great books education. Why is this strategy effective? (Many other writers only imply the argumentative context. They do not directly explain the context or the purpose. Why? When is it most helpful to directly state an essay’s context and purpose?)

3. Does Crabtree clearly define a great books education? If so, how? If not, how might he have defined it more clearly?

4. What kinds of evidence (statistics, examples, allusions, personal testimony, reasoning, and so on) does Crabtree provide as support for his main idea?

5. Does Crabtree make concessions or counterarguments—that is, does he acknowledge weaknesses in his own argument or value in opposing positions (concession), or does he anticipate and respond to likely reactions to his points (counterargument)? If so, how do the concessions and/or counterarguments strengthen his argument? If not, what concessions or counterarguments might he have made?

Exploring Ideas

1. What does Crabtree mean by a “great books education”?

2. Crabtree argues that a great books education is the most practical education because the world and workforce are changing at such a rapid rate. Yet many readers disagree with him. What is at the core of these differing opinions.

3. Why else, besides practical training for a job, might a great books education be a good idea?

4. How might a great books education benefit a police officer, a nurse, an accountant?

5. What compromise might college curriculums reach between a purely great books education and purely specialized training?

Ideas for Writing

1. Crabtree argues for the practical value of a great books education, but he does not say that a great books education is for everyone. What else might you argue has practical value, even though you are not arguing that it is for everyone? (Consider a type of education, a way of doing something, a hobby, and so on.)

2. Why are we here? What is valuable or worthwhile? What are the principles of right and wrong? Is there a God? Who is He? What is your relationship with Him? How might you support or refute Crabtree’s claim that “one’s answers to these questions have very important implications for how one chooses to earn a living” (¶ 11)?

3. Crabtree says that “the writings of the most influential thinkers of our cultural tradition are studied, which provides many thought-provoking insights into the fundamental questions” (¶ 13). Can you think of one such insight that has influenced your thinking?

If responding to one of these ideas, go to the Analysis section of this chapter to begin developing ideas for your essay.
Cruelty, Civility, and Other Weighty Matters

Ann Marie Paulin

As with most engaging essays, Paulin’s originates in personal circumstance. (See her invention writing on pages 216, 218.) Also, as with most engaging essays, the writer extends her thinking into the public sphere. As you read “Cruelty, Civility, and Other Weighty Matters,” notice how Paulin puts forth an argument while keeping herself in the background, only briefly referring to herself in the essay’s introduction and conclusion. As you will see, Paulin goes beyond the increasingly common argument against media’s portrayal of women; she reveals something about the subtle effects of that portrayal. Paulin, who teaches English and gender studies at Owens Community College in Toledo, Ohio, shows that a writer’s voice matters—that savvy use of voice actually creates layers to an argument. That is, her voice re-humanizes the issue and the people involved. If the media have dehumanized “fat people,” Paulin does more than argue against the media; she strikes back with an intense, multifaceted presence.

I swear, if I have to sit through one more ad proclaiming that life is not worth living if you aren’t thin, I’ll slug somebody. So much for the theory that fat people are jolly. But, contrary to what magazines, talk shows, movies, and advertisements proclaim, we aren’t all a bunch of sorrowful, empty losers with no friends and no self-esteem, either. As with most complex issues—religion, politics, human relationships—most of what we see in mass media is hugely oversimplified and, therefore, wrong. So, if many of us recognize the media are notorious for getting things less than accurate, you might wonder why I let these images bother me so much. Well, if you were one of the millions of fat Americans living in a culture where you are constantly depicted as some sort of weepy loser, ill-dressed buffoon, or neutered sidekick, your good nature might wear a bit thin as well. But far more important than my ill temper is a creepy sense that these inaccurate images have shifted our vision of what is important in life way out of whack, so far out that people are being hurt. What I’m proposing here is that we need to get some perspective on this issue.

First of all, let me make it clear that I’m not advocating that everyone in America go out and get fat. According to the news media, we are doing that very handily on our own, in spite of all the messages to the contrary and the shelves of diet food in
every supermarket. (One of my colleagues came by today with a newspaper article on the Krispy Kreme Donut chain; evidently, Americans eat three million Krispy Kreme donuts each day. We may talk tofu, but we gobble glazed.) Americans all need to work on eating healthier and getting some exercise. Of course, the thin fanatics claim to advocate a healthy lifestyle as well, but I question how healthy people are when they are living on low-calorie chocolate milk drinks, or taking herbal supplements containing goodness knows what, or loading up on the latest wonder diet pill. Remember Fen-phen? And most diets don’t work. Psychologist Mary Pipher, in her book *Hunger Pains: The Modern Woman’s Quest for Thinness*, cites a 1994 study which found that “90 percent of dieters regain all the weight they lost within five years” (32). The evidence is beginning to pile up out there that being fat may not be nearly as bad for a person’s health as the crazy things people inflict upon their bodies to lose weight.

But beyond these physical things, we need to get our minds straightened out. We need to get back to recognizing that a human being is a collection of qualities, good and bad, and that appearance is not the ultimate way to judge a person’s character or value to society.

Yet there is definitely a prejudice against fat people in this country. Various articles and news magazine programs have reported that Americans of all sizes make far more than simple aesthetic judgments when they look at a fat person. Fat people are assumed to be lazy, stupid, ugly, lacking in self-esteem and pride, devoid of self-control, and stuffed full of a host of other unpleasant qualities that have nothing to do with the size of a person’s belly or thighs. But, as anyone who has ever been the victim of such prejudice can tell you, the impact such foolish notions have on people is real and harmful. For example, Marilyn Wann, in her book *Fat! So?*, reports some alarming statistics: “In a 1977 study, half of the landlords refused to rent an apartment to a fat applicant. All of the landlords were willing to rent the same apartment to a thin applicant” (154). What does dress size have to do with whether or not you pay your rent on time? Or do landlords assume that fat people will not keep the apartments clean? Wann also cites an experiment in which “[r]esearchers placed two fake personal ads, one for a woman described as ‘50 pounds overweight’ and the other for a woman described as a drug addict. The drug addict received 79 percent of the responses” (59). I don’t even want to know what the thinking was here. And, finally, Wann points out that the average fat woman earns about $7000 less per year than her thinner sisters (80). In my case, I teach English at a community college. Jobs in academia require an
advanced degree, so I happen to have a Ph.D., which has nothing
to do with my body size, unless you want to count the weight I
gained from thousands of hours sitting reading, sitting at a key-
board, sitting grading papers.

This weight prejudice hurts real people. When people are
denied a place to live or a means of support not because of any bad
behavior or lack of character or talent on their part but because of
someone else’s wrongheaded notions, then we need to start chang-
ing things.

The messages are particularly insidious when they suggest that
being thin is more important than a man’s or, more often, a wom-
man’s relationships with her loved ones or even than her health. The
media churn the images out, but the public too often internalizes
them. For example, in one commercial for Slim Fast, the woman
on the ad is prattling on about how she had gained weight when
she was pregnant (seems to me, if you make a person, you ought to
be entitled to an extra ten pounds) and how awful she felt. Then
there is a shot of this woman months later as a thin person with her
toddler in her yard. She joyously proclaims that Slim Fast is “the
best thing that ever happened to me!” The best thing that ever hap-
pended to her?! I thought I heard wrong. What about that little child
romping by her heels? Presumably, there is a daddy somewhere for
that little cherub. What about his role in her life? The thought that
losing that weight is the most important thing that ever occurred in
her life is sad and terrifying. It’s even worse for the folks who share
that life with her. I kept hoping that was not what she meant. I’m
sure her family is really most important. But she didn’t say, “Next
to my baby, Slim Fast is the best thing that ever happened to me.”
Advertisers don’t spend millions of dollars creating ads that don’t
say what they intend them to; this message was deliberate. Granted,
this is only one ad, but the message is clear: The consumer is the
center of the universe, and being thin is the only way to ensure
that universe remains a fun place to live. The constant repetition of
this message in various forms does the damage to the humans who
watch and learn.

While we can shrug off advertisements as silly, when we see
these attitudes reflected among real people, the hurt is far less easy
to brush away. For instance, in her essay, “Bubbie, Mommy, Weight
Watchers and Me,” Barbara Noreen Dinnerstein recalls a time in
her childhood when her mother took her to Weight Watchers to
slim down and the advice the lecturer gave to the women present:
“She told us to put a picture of ourselves on the ’fridgerator of us
eating and looking really fat and ugly. She said remember what you
look like. Remember how ugly you are” (347).
I have a problem with this advice. First, of course, it is too
darn common. Fat people are constantly being told they should be
ashamed of themselves, of their bodies. And here we see another
of those misconceptions I mentioned earlier: the assumption that
being fat is the same as being ugly. There are plenty of attractive fat
people in the world, as well as a few butt-ugly thin ones, I might
add. Honestly, though, the real tragedy is that while few people in
this world are truly ugly, many agonize over the belief that they are.
Dr. Pipher reported: “I see clients who say they would rather kill
themselves than be overweight” (91). I never have figured out how
trashing a fellow being’s self-esteem is going to help that person be
healthier.

Another example of this bullying comes from Pipher’s book
_Hunger Pains: The Modern Woman’s Tragic Quest for Thinness_. Pipher
recounts a conversation she overheard one day in a dress shop:

I overheard a mother talking to her daughter, who was try-
ing on party dresses. She put on each dress and then asked
her mother how she looked. Time after time, her mother
responded by saying, “You look just awful in that, Kathy.
You’re so fat nothing fits you right.” The mother’s voice
dripped with disgust and soon Kathy was crying. (89)

Pipher goes on to suggest that Kathy’s mother is a victim of the
culture, too, because she realizes how hard the world will be on
her fat daughter. Unfortunately, what she doesn’t realize is how
much better her daughter’s quality of life would be if she felt loved
by her mother. Any person surrounded by loving family members
at home is much better equipped to deal with whatever the cruel
world outside throws at her or him.

Dinnerstein was lucky; she had a grandmother who was very
loving and supportive. Her grandmother’s advice was, “Be proud,
be strong, be who you are” (348). Sound advice for any child, and
far more likely to produce an all-around healthy human being than
a constant barrage of insults.

But the insensitivity doesn’t stop when you grow up. In Cam-
ryn Manheim’s book _Wake Up! I’m Fat_, the actress discusses her
battle with her weight. She expected many of the difficulties she
encountered from people in the entertainment industry, which is
notorious for its inhuman standards of thinness for women. But
when she gained some weight after giving up smoking, she was
stunned when her father told her she should start smoking again
until she lost the weight (78). In _The Invisible Woman: Confronting
Weight Prejudice in America_, W. Charisse Goodman cites a 1987
study that concluded: “When good health practices and appearance
norms coincide, women benefit; but if current fashion dictated poor health practices, women might then engage in those practices for the sake of attractiveness” (30). Like taking up smoking to stay slim.

Certainly everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion of what is attractive, but no one has the right to damage another human being for fun or profit. The media and the diet industry often do just that. While no one can change an entire culture overnight, people, especially parents, need to think about what they really value in the humans they share their lives with and what values they want to pass on to their children. We need to wake up and realize that being thin will not fix all our problems, though advertisements for diets and weight loss aids suggest this. Losing weight may, indeed, give a man or woman more confidence, but it will not make a person smarter, more generous, more loving, or more nurturing. It won’t automatically attract the dream job or the ideal lover. On the contrary, people who allow the drive to be thin to control them may find that many other areas of their lives suffer: They may avoid some celebrations or get-togethers because of fear they may be tempted to eat too much or the “wrong” foods. They may cut back on intellectual activities like reading or enjoying concerts or art museums because those activities cut into their exercise time too much. The mania for thinness can cause a person to lose all perspective and balance in life. I know. It happened to me. My moment of revelation came about 12 years ago. I was a size ten, dieting constantly and faithfully keeping lists of every bite I ate, trying to lose 15 more pounds. While I was watching the evening news, a story came on about a young woman who was run over by a bus. I vividly recall that as the station played the footage of the paramedics wheeling the woman away on a stretcher, I said to myself, “Yeah, but at least she’s thin.” I’ve been lucky enough to have gained some wisdom (as well as weight) with age: I may be fat, but I’m no longer crazy. There are some things more important than being thin.

**Works Cited**


Writing Strategies

1. Why do you think Paulin refers to “overweight” people as “fat”? What is the effect of this word on the reader?

2. Paulin helps the reader to understand her main ideas by stating them at the beginning of paragraphs. Find three paragraphs in this essay that begin with the main idea. Do those sentences also connect the paragraph to the previous paragraph? If so, describe how.

3. Paulin uses written sources to support her argument. In some places she directly quotes the sources; in others she paraphrases or summarizes (that is, she puts what the source says in her own words). Find an example of each (quote; paraphrase; summary). How do you know the information is from a source? Does Paulin make that clear? Notice how Paulin introduces the information and punctuates it.

4. Paulin’s conclusion does not merely summarize points she has already made. Reread the conclusion and describe how it goes beyond mere summary. What does it try to do? Is it successful?

5. Paulin seems to know that her audience needs to be nudged along to accept her point. In your view, what particular rhetorical strategy is most effective at nudging readers to see the real harm of the media’s portrayal of weight?

Exploring Ideas

1. How is weight a public issue?

2. In her opening paragraph, Paulin says inaccurate images about weight “have shifted our vision of what is important in life way out of whack, so far out that people are being hurt.” Then she calls for perspective. What support can you provide for her claim that our vision of what is important is out of whack? What support can you provide that people are being hurt?

3. Why should or shouldn’t comedians refrain from making fat jokes about specific individuals?

4. Paulin says, “[P]eople who allow the drive to be thin to control them may find that many other areas of their lives suffer” (¶ 12). Apply her thinking to some other situation besides body weight, and explain how a particular drive has led to suffering.

Ideas for Writing

1. What point can you help Paulin make by providing different evidence?

2. What idea of Paulin’s can you explore further, possibly discovering a different way of seeing it?

If responding to one of these ideas, go to the Analysis section of this chapter to begin developing ideas for your essay.
Floppy Disk Fallacies

Elizabeth Bohnhorst

Writing an essay for a class can be difficult. Among the challenges: understanding what you’re being asked to do; thinking and writing adventurously without making a mistake that could hurt your grade; not sounding too much like a student writing an essay as a class requirement, even though that’s what you are doing. The best student writing, like all good academic writing, puts forth a revelatory claim, has an inviting writer’s voice, is to the point and well developed, and ultimately invites readers to think differently about the topic. Elizabeth Bohnhorst’s essay, written for a first-semester English course at Northwestern Michigan College, is adventurous. It takes an unusual position and offers a variety of support strategies. If the essay is successful, you may feel slightly different about computer technology in education.

“Another boring PowerPoint,” responds Jennifer when I ask about her day at school. I might not find these words so discouraging coming from a company executive after a long meeting or even a college student leaving an informative lecture. But these words of an eleven-year-old elementary school student leave me feeling slightly uneasy. PowerPoint presentations are intended to compel students to become more interested in the subject with the use of neon colors and moving graphic images. But these flashy additions to current educational strategies haven’t fooled everyone. The text and material covered is still the same boring grammar and spelling lessons, but the educator has altered: It is a screen.

Computers can undoubtedly contribute wonders to the field of education. In fact, computer education is a must if children intend to thrive in modern society. The possibilities are endless when it comes to surfing the Web or using the thousands of educational programs currently available. These programs are capable of reading text on a computer with icons beside words that take students to a galaxy of options, icons to learn more about the era in which the text was written, fascinating facts about the author, and helpful notes about the morals of the story. But computers are being used more and more frequently as substitutes for books, blackboards, and in some cases, the teachers themselves.

America leads the world in the amount and density of computers in our public schools. In 1992, the typical high school had one computer for every ten students, while elementary and middle schools averaged thirteen students per computer (“Computers”). Compared to current numbers, the early 1990s were a time of deprivation. Some schools, such as Kent Central School in rural Connecticut, are considering funding for each student to have his or her own laptop. After visiting the school, Anne Guignon reports that “students use the computers in school, take them home each night, use the computers for homework, and soon will be able to tap into the Internet.” In such situations, traditional school lingo such as “Take out a piece of paper and a number two pencil” might be replaced with “Take out your floppies and boot up your Toshibas.” Unfortunately for some students, dogs cannot digest discs.

And the Texas Board of Education is only steps behind the Kent Central School. “The Texas Board of Education now has state officials seriously examining whether to give all public school students laptops instead of textbooks,” states a New York Times investigator. The Board “is looking at $1.8 billion in projected costs for textbooks over the next six years, and... given technology improvements that have lowered the price of computers, it may be cheaper, to say nothing of innovative, to lease a laptop for each of the state’s 3.7 million students” (Guignon).

Now, what could possibly be wrong with such a sophisticated device for learning? In reality, “thirty years of research on educational technology has produced almost no evidence of a clear link between using computers in the early grades and improving learning,” states Michael Dertouzus, director of the MIT Laboratory for Computer Science. In fact, evidence of hazardous effects of frequent use of computers in young children is overwhelming. They do little to promote a healthy childhood. “Computers are perhaps the most acute symptom of the rush to end childhood. The national drive to computerize schools, from kindergarten on up,
emphasizes only one of the many human capacities, one that naturally develops quite late—analytic, abstract thinking—and aims to jump start it prematurely,” continues Dertouzos.

Elementary schools are not only responsible for teaching children reading, writing, mathematics, and other basic skills; they also reinforce and indirectly establish guidelines for everyday behavior. Therefore, consistent use of computers in schools ultimately plants the idea in the developing mind that computers are safe, educational, and perhaps one of the most important tools of modern society. Thus, a child returns home from school after hours of staring into an illuminated box, flips through the channels of yet another illuminated box, and then proceeds to play “Final Fantasy Four” on the Macintosh for three more hours. A 1999 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation showed that children ages two to eighteen spent an average of four hours and forty-five minutes per day plugged into electronic media of all kinds. These numbers are excluding the time spent with such machinery during school hours (Dertouzos).

The emotional and social values learned during childhood are also disrupted by computerized education in elementary and middle schools. Students learn more than state capitals and multiplication; they develop a sense of social importance and are taught values of friendship and other relationships. Through interaction with peers, intimacy and companionship are only a few of the many principles computers are unable to relay to children. Dr. Stanley I. Greenspan, former director of the Clinical Infant Development Program, is concerned that the impersonal culture formulated by computerization has serious detrimental effects on children’s emotional development: “So-called interactive, computer-based instruction that does not provide true interaction but merely a mechanistic response to the student’s efforts,” states Greenspan, can be directly linked to “the increasingly impersonal quality that suffuses the experience of more and more American children” (qtd. in Dertouzos). He also adds that lack of nurture for children at home and at school can likely result in “increasing levels of violence and extremism and less collaboration and empathy.” (qtd. in Dertouzos).

“Successful education should not replace children’s curiosity to explore the world around them with Internet Explorer.”

Besides affecting emotional and social development in primary students, computers can also disrupt creative thinking. Like all other electronic viewing systems (television and video games), computers leave little or no room for imagination. Of course, the virtual reality computers create is often full of fantastic images. However, because imagination involves generating one’s own images and ideas, consistent exposure to ready-made images only makes it more difficult for children to summon their own creativity. The intensity of the images squashes the need for intensive creativity. Educational psychologist and former school principal Jane Healy has observed that “teachers find that today’s video-immersed children can’t form original pictures in their mind or develop an imaginative representation. Teachers of young children lament the fact that many now have to be taught to play symbolically or pretend—previously a symptom only of mentally or emotionally disordered youngsters” (qtd. in Dertouzos). Not only do these images affect creativity and imagination; they also have potential to diffuse the sparks of curiosity. For example, if a class is learning about regional watersheds, computerized classrooms will most likely turn to the handy diagrams so conveniently laid out on the screens before the students. In a classroom that values hands-on learning techniques, a school field trip to a local stream or swamp may be an effective strategy. In short, a successful education should not replace children’s curiosity to explore the world around them with Internet Explorer.
On the other hand, technology is an effective way to get kids interested in learning, considering “that there is a passionate love affair between children and computers” (Setzer). A colorful computer screen is obviously more attractive to a child than an old novel or a textbook. But this attraction is more likely a fascination with animation and sound effects rather than a genuine exploration of ideas. Dr. Valdemar W. Setzer, a professor of computer science, wonders, “What happens to a student who gets used to learning with computers? Will she be able to tolerate a normal class without all those cosmetic and video game effects?”

As technology’s role in American society grows, we should observe its influence in public education. It is easy to consider the benefits of computerization: simplicity, standardization, and elimination of other physical controversies. But in the same light we must also consider the hazards and how important traditional education is to children. The obvious concern with traditional education is the students being “left behind” in the rush toward increasing technological advancements.

Educating students in computer skills is and should be a priority in all schools. But when it comes to teaching basic skills and allowing for intellectual development, human interaction and exploration of the real world should never come second to electronic devices. In an effort to preserve the qualities of education, we should not allow ourselves to become mesmerized by teachers that require an electrical outlet and textbooks that require a point-and-click to turn the page.

Works Cited
Writing Strategies

1. Why is or isn’t Bohnhorst’s introduction effective? (What particular sentences or phrases invite you into her thinking? Which do not?)

2. Why does Bohnhorst’s reference to PowerPoint strengthen her argument about computers?

3. Bohnhorst is tackling a common assumption in education: that more technology is inherently good. Describe her strategy for confronting and overturning this assumption. How does she do it?

4. How does Bohnhorst apply appeals to value in her argument?

5. How does Bohnhorst deal with specific opposing ideas? Where does she reveal the shortcomings of other positions? Where does she acknowledge the value of other positions?

Exploring Ideas

1. Consider the following claims made by Bohnhorst:
   - Computers can undoubtedly contribute wonders to the field of education. (¶ 2)
   - In fact, computer education is a must if children intend to thrive in modern society. (¶ 2)

   With others, explore these claims further, trying to discover new ways of thinking about them. Begin by discussing whether or not you think the claims are true, and then pinpoint and explore why people disagree. After several minutes of discussion, how have the claims become more complex?

2. Interview several people who have not read Bohnhorst’s argument, and find out specifically what they think computers can contribute to the field of education. Try interviewing people of various backgrounds and age groups. Following your interviews, write down any new ideas you’ve discovered about computers and education.

3. How might education be better in a school with fewer computers in the classroom? How might computers in the classroom actually interfere with learning? How might education be better in a nation with fewer computers in the classroom?

Ideas for Writing

1. What argument might you make by taking a more extreme stance on the role of computers in education?

2. How might you develop an engaging argument on this topic, based on your own experiences with technology and learning?

3. To develop your own argument, research some claim Bohnhorst makes, such as “teachers find that today’s video-immersed children can’t form original pictures in their mind or develop an imaginative representation” (¶ 8).

   If responding to one of these ideas, go to the Analysis section of this chapter to begin developing ideas for your essay.
Whales R Us

Jayme Stayer

Good writers often invite, and sometimes force, us to confront ideas we would rather not examine. In his argument about Sea World, Jayme Stayer, a professor of literature, sheds new light on the park. His points might seem unreasonable at first. After all, why should someone target a theme park? But Stayer’s essay illustrates an important move in academic writing: uncovering the layers of meaning behind the propaganda of everyday life.

Mickey Mouse scares the bejesus out of me. Shamu, on the other hand, simply makes me queasy. I’m not the first to express loathing for Mickey & Co.: a giggling rodent as mascot for a nasty, litigious, multimedia Über-corporation. But you don’t hear too many people railing against Sea World, though Shamu has a dark side too.

One of the first things to irk me at a Sea World park happened during a bird show. A perky blonde was displaying a few parrots, and she kept up a stream of banter about their feeding habits and origins. “When our ancestors came to this continent,” she breezily explained to an audience chock full of non-Europeans, “they brought with them this breed of parrot from Africa.” Since I’m almost certain that slaves brutally shipped to the Americas were not allowed bird cages as carry-on luggage, what she should have said was that European—not “our”—ancestors stopped off in Africa and loaded up with parrots and slaves. One needn’t be a fanatical multiculturalist to be ruffled by inaccurate history and spurious assumptions about an audience’s makeup.

In America, unexamined notions of history and the coercive politics of majority identity go hand in hand with boorish nationalism. (See, for example, the debate over the Confederate flag and its supposed status as symbol of a unitary “Southern” culture.) Oddly, the bird show at Sea World confirmed this. Her parrots now retired, the perky woman waltzed around the stage with a bald eagle while the audience was subjected to a chummy patriotic tune. So the eagle was presented not as the largest or most impressive of birds, or as indigenous to Canada, or even as another instance of the marvels of creation, but as the Bird of American Democracy—this, in spite of the fact that eagles’ politics tend to the monarchist side and that their feeding habits indicate a predisposition for brutal dictatorship. The bird becomes valued, in other words, for the cultural associations “we” Americans slapped onto it, not for any of its intrinsic properties. The eagle, in Sea World’s monistic version of the world, becomes just another happy commodity—like parrots, slaves, designer clothes sweatshops—that makes America the Great Nation It Has Always Been.

But not all employees were as chipper as the bird show people. There are two types of teenagers who work at Sea World: the aggressively happy and the sullenly aggrieved. These two opposed mentalities are as old as the summer job itself: namely, the optimism of youths who want to change the world vs. the cynicism of kids who despise their jobs, resent their pay, and wouldn’t give a hoot if they were fired because some enraged Yuppie did not get good service with a grovelling smile when he bought his Sno-Cone. I personally sided with the disaffected and wished I had brought copies of The Communist Manifesto to slip into their pockets.

The most important job at Sea World—and teenagers are particularly good at it—is making lots of noise. Since most Americans are terrified of being alone in a store without Muzak, Sea World willingly obliges its customers with rock-concert levels of decibels. All of the shows keep up a noxious patter complete with ear-splitting sound effects; the walkways have abrasively loud music piped over them; and even the exhibits have teenagers chained there with microphones in hand, droning their mantra of dull facts.

It is ironic that a park putatively designed to extol the wonders of nature is obsessed with high-tech wizardry and mega-voltage noise, noise, noise—even when it is extolling the wonders of nature’s silence. Another talking point of the bird show featured how silently an owl could fly. The bird’s flight began in blissful silence, but halfway through its flight the soundtrack faded back in with a shimmer of violins, followed by a cymbal crash when the owl landed. Even the absence of noise is packaged with noise: The owl’s silence is first framed with amplified yakking (noise), then underlined as it...
happens (quiet noise), then punctuated (big noise) so
the audience knows when to clap (make more noise).

One of the most ludicrous moments of the Shamu
show was an assertion by another relentlessly cheer-
ful teenager: “We here at Sea World believe we have
the greatest jobs in the world.” With its overtones of
Orwellian party-speak, it was only slightly risible until
she added: “We get to work with nature’s most won-
derful animals and contribute to the world’s knowl-
edge about them.” Her jejune assumption that “world
knowledge” exists as some kind of huge, accumulative
spittoon—rather than a set of competing claims and
shifting paradigms—was hilarious enough, particular-
ly coming from a kid who is probably still struggling
with basic algebra and who wouldn’t recognize “world
knowledge” if it landed on her in a heap. I imagined her
logging on to a marine biology chat group and making
an announcement—in all caps, no doubt—followed
by an emoticon: “SHAMU DID A BACK FLIP TO-
DAY!!! : )” Thus does the world’s cup of knowledge
runneth over.

And that insistent refrain of “We here at Sea World
believe” was another thing that rankled me, because it
was usually followed by patronizing flimflam. Some
prime examples: “We here at Sea World believe that
animals should not be taken from their natural habi-
tat.” Or: “We here at Sea World believe only in the use
of positive reinforcement in the training of animals.”
The audience is supposed to believe that these are lovely
sentiments. How noble that they try to find injured
or orphaned animals to “befriend.” How comforting
to know Shamu isn’t being shocked with electricity or
poked in the eye when he’s tired or just damned fed up
with giving piggyback rides. Most disturbing was that
these credos came mostly out of the mouths of the teen-
age staff, whose inexperience made their We-Believe
proclamations ring even more hollowly.

Taken individually, some of these moments were
only mildly unnerving, but there was one occurrence
that stood out as gratuitous. Situated on a lake, the
Sea World I visited featured a water show with ski
jumps and corny skits. The theme of that year’s show
was *Baywatch*, which involved—predictably enough—
nubile bodies in poorly choreographed dance routines,
the bold rescue of someone in the water, and the odd
appearances of two buffoons (fat old man with hys-
terical wife), all of which was irritatingly narrated by an
emcee’s we-havin’-fun-yet? voice-over. At one point,
the old man and his wife were “accidentally” pulled
into view: the man (vertical) on skis, the woman (hor-
izontal) with her legs wrapped around his torso. They
were in the unmistakable position of sex, the two actors
in a flurry of feigned embarrassment at having been
“caught.” (Whut in tarnation cud be more funny than
ol’ fat folks havin’ sex? Har dee har har.) The emcee
and other characters on stage slyly absolved themselves
of complicity in this vulgarity by shrugging their shoul-
ders, as if to say: “Golly, what was that all about?” Sea
World, by the way, bills itself as a place for the whole
family.

You might think that a park that sponsors PG-13
shows would divest itself of prudishness. Alas, there was
more self-righteousness there than at a revival. Case in
point: the shark exhibit. Before we could enter, we were
forced to watch a short film about sharks; the doors to
the exhibit were pointedly barred until after the film
was over. The film gave us a hellfire-and-damnation
scolding: you thought that sharks were human preda-
tors? WRONG. You thought sharks were abundant in
the ocean? WRONG AGAIN. After airing its griev-
ances with us—the ill-informed public—it asserted
that much damage had been inflicted on these misun-
derstood fishes. Because we’ve all been shark-haters at
heart, fishermen have felt free to kill them. Quivering
with virtue, the film called “intolerable” the fishermen
who “senselessly” destroyed the sharks, either because
the sharks got caught in the nets or because the sharks
fed on prized fish. With vast self-contentment Sea
World then relayed how they had successfully worked
to stop this great evil.

While I’m pleased to have my horror-film notions
of sharks corrected, the film’s smugness was unbearable.
And in spite of Sea World’s professed vigilance, I’m not
convinced that sharks aren’t still being arbitrarily killed
somewhere in the world. Even so, I wonder if sharks,
given the choice, would prefer to stay in a Sea World
bathtub for the rest of their lives or take a chance with
those fishnets.

Of the many inanities hurled at me, my favorite
was an emcee’s sign-off: “And remember,” she intoned
from a precipitously high moral ground, “before we can have peace on the Earth, we have to make peace with the Earth.” Indeed. As if, in the interest of world peace, the United Nations agenda should be scuttled in favor of dotting the globe with Sea Worlds to promote feel-good vibes between humans and dolphins. Here’s more glib reasoning: to make peace with the Earth implies the Earth was a peaceful place before we humans mucked things up. Yet the last time I looked, the Earth was full of viruses, earthquakes, predatory animals, and a survival-of-the-fittest mentality that Sea World has apparently never heard of.

And maybe it was petty of me to be irked when the woman narrating Shamu’s activities insisted that whales scratch their backs on the pebbled shores when they’re contented. There was captive Shamu scratching his back on the simulated shore. The audience oohed and aahed. Nevermind that Shamu had been explicitly directed to scratch his back, and that to have disobeyed would have resulted not in a whack on the head (lucky for him) but in the withholding of food (not so lucky). Is that contentment then? With the help of an extraordinarily costly visual aid, the audience was expected to “learn” a fact of whale behavior that could be shown only at the cost of candor.

Sea World, I realized after an afternoon of learning very little, was a place that was desperately trying to present itself as a place where education occurs. And for twenty-some bucks, your educational experience goes roughly like this: You can give up an afternoon of watching vapid TV shows and take your whole family to watch a skit based on a vapid TV show. You get to ogle busty women and hirsute men. You get to have constant noise crowd out any independent thoughts that might be percolating to the surface of your brain. You get to harbor the illusion that America is a happy, white, European family, as well as a leading maker of world knowledge, and that Sea World is largely responsible for such happiness and abundance. You get to imagine you hold the key to world peace (remember to give the dog a kiss when you get home). You get to indulge in patriotic goosebumps (“the American eagle!”), have your heart-strings jolted (“Ah—Shamu’s happy to be here!”), get your sluggish sense of morality jump-started (“baaaad fishermen, gooooood sharkie”). And if you’re willing to invest another three bucks, you can fling a sardine at dolphins that have been petted to within an inch of their lives. Best of all, at the end of the day you get to go home with the vaguely self-congratulatory feeling that you’ve learned something, by God.

I’m an educator, and I pay close attention when someone is trying to teach me something. So on my way out of Sea World, I asked myself what I had learned. Like a student who has crammed for an exam, I was able to recall lots of idiocies, but could only say I had truly learned two things. (1) Thanks to the film, I learned that sharks attack humans only when provoked, and, (2) thanks to their anthropomorphizing skits, I learned that sea otters are cute little buggers. Even if these elements were judicious pedagogical objectives (which they are not), they still don’t add up to anything resembling education. In fact, the entire experience of Sea World is suspiciously similar to the exact opposite of education: mind control.

It was only in retrospect that I realized that these annoyances were related: the high-pitched entertainment and trivial sexual jokes, the shut-up-and-listen attitude, the constant noise and verbal presence, the Big Brotherly refrains of exactly what “We here at Sea World believe.” These are all rhetorical strategies of a government diverting its citizens, masking something it doesn’t want the public to know. And what is it that Sea World doesn’t want its customers to think about?

In a review lambasting Disney World, an author hilariously describes the ideology of the place as “benign fascism”: The streets are immaculately clean; the worker bees wear impossibly happy smiles; the rides and trains
run on time; and every day, the gloved hero appears on parade, where the hordes worship him and his lickspittles with songs and fireworks. The author’s comparison of Mickey to Mussolini is more than just amusing: He ties it into his critique of how history is portrayed at the Epcot center. Because Disney does not want to offend any of its ethnically and racially diverse customers (Sea World: take note), their film on American history carefully controls the emotional barometer of its vacationers. The Disney film of American history is whitewashed to the point of banality, and such central topics as the atomic bomb, racial conflict, and imperialist genocide are entirely avoided. The point is that fascists, benign or not, always have political and economic reasons for telling history the way they do. And like Disney World and other fascist operations, Sea World likes to keep a tight grip on what and how its visitors think.

Take, for example, the “we-believe-animals-should-be-treated-in-this-way” gestures that continually crop up. These assertions pose as facts the audience ought to memorize in preparation for an exit quiz. Yet the nervous tic of emphasizing the politically correct means of treating animals in captivity belies Sea World’s uneasiness with the larger, unasked question: Should we even have animals in captivity for our bourgeois amusement? Nowhere in their literature, exhibit signs, or rehearsed prattle of their miked minions is this basic question broached or answered.

Part of the way Sea World can get away with ignoring the obvious fact that these animals are there for our entertainment is that it nervously insists that it is a place of science and research, and disingenuously implies that entertainment easily meshes with education and research. While I scoff at the idea that important research gets done at Sea World, the problem isn’t really with what kinds of knowledge Sea World makes, or how much, or how important it is. Rather, the problem is Sea World’s communication of that knowledge, or to be more explicit, their refusal to level with its visitors about its real cultural role and worth. If they would fess up to the fact that Sea World is essentially a playground and not a classroom, that might be a start towards a real educational experience.

Sea World keeps up its image of itself as a classroom by propagating signs with facts and statistics on them. These factoids—and their Post-it Note ubiquity—are a peculiar manifestation of “textbook knowledge”: boring chunks of data unconnected to any larger, compelling theme. There were a plethora of facts swimming around at Sea World and a dearth of ideas, which is why I couldn’t remember anything at the end of my day. Like the eager student who has a bad teacher, I was given no complex or interesting framework inside of which ideas jostled about; so I was reduced to cramming lists of unconnected information in preparation for a never-to-be-taken exam.

I’m not suggesting that Sea World become a place that sponsors round-table discussions of animal rights and lets biology students present their theses during Shamu intermissions. But I do think that instead of slavishly subscribing to popular notions of science, Sea World might call them into question. This is what real education does.

As it stands, none of our deeply rooted cultural beliefs are explored or challenged at Sea World. After a trip there the visitor is likely to keep thinking that facts are equivalent to knowledge; that America is synonymous with Europe; that science and technology are the greatest goods imaginable; that education means being fed a list of facts in a condescending manner; and that sated, docile fish—who decorously eat buckets of non-cute sardines—are practically vegetarians.

A skit in which a lovably frisky sea otter has its head chomped off by a hungry predator is not the kind of bloody epiphany Sea World is likely to promote. Imagine the screams of the unsuspecting children. Imagine the lawsuits of offended suburbanites who like their nature sanitized and safe. But imagine, too, how such a moment would educate an audience about the dangers of humanizing certain animals at the expense of others. Such a skit might end with a question to the audience about why its government enacts laws to protect the habitat of owls but not of insects or low-income humans.

The only cultural assumption that was seriously challenged at Sea World was the premise of *Jaws*—and that was much too heavy-handed, not to mention incorrect, as events in Florida have shown. It turns out that sharks will attack idle swimmers. It should come as no surprise that a capitalist venture like Sea World can’t
even get its basic facts straight. Neither can the tobacco industry seem to grasp what everyone else knows about nicotine addiction. Nor is Disney equipped to navigate the treacherous waters of American history.

Surely the most real moments at Sea World occurred when the fascists lost control, for example, when the staff had trouble getting the animals to obey their directions. Such glitches in the program put their slapstick routines and canned jokes on hold, and forced them to talk to the audience about fixing this problem. It also gave the teenage apparatchiks an opportunity for some inspired ad-libbing, disburdening them from their less endearing lecture notes.

If the ideology of Disney is benign fascism, then the ideology of Sea World is exploitative spectacle masquerading as education. Too occupied with obscuring the real moral, environmental, and scientific issues at stake, Sea World is constitutionally incapable of teaching respect for nature. Love of nature is spiritually informed and politically assertive. It is not the kind of passive, sentimental quackery Sea World prefers, and it cannot be taught with the crude tools in Sea World’s lesson plans: glib moralizing, base pandering, and clichés masquerading as insights.

But in the last analysis, Sea World—to paraphrase Auden—makes nothing happen. Sea World is a reflection of American culture: a consequence, not a cause; a mirror of consumerist desires, not a promoter of political change via education. The American traits Sea World reflects most clearly are its gullibility and irrationality. It’s a consolation, albeit a small one, to consider that Americans are likewise gullible to the very real beauty of nature. It’s that kind of openness—and not Sea World’s preaching—that makes the connection between humans and dolphins seem worth investigating. It’s less of a comfort to consider another analogy between Americans and marine life that Sea World leaves unexplored: America’s exorbitant arms race, its rape of the environment, its valorization of guns and violence, its giddy, media-fueled acclamation of the death sentence that disproportionately murders minorities: Are these not strikingly similar to the fierce logic of the food chain? Screw the little guy; I’m hungry and more powerful.

So my advice is to go to Sea World anyway. Even inside the ideological frame where they are forced, the creatures there—including the teenagers—are amazing, hilarious, and terrifying. Who can remain unimpressed when a mammal the size of a Mack truck lifts itself out of the water? As for Sea World itself: If aided by earplugs and skepticism you can ignore what they’re trying to teach you, you just might learn something.

**Work Cited**
**Writing Strategies**

1. What word would you use to describe the voice of this essay—humorous, serious, urgent, angry, light, or something else? Identify several passages to support your description.

2. Stayer is trying to call Sea World out—to reveal something disingenuous or fake about the park’s rhetoric. In your own words, what is Stayer trying to reveal?

3. How does counterargument function in this essay? Point to particular passages in which Stayer is countering some opposing claim and explain how that passage figures into the overall point of the essay.

4. How does Stayer use Sea World to make broader points about American culture?

5. How does Stayer’s conclusion work on the audience? Describe what the conclusion does for readers—how it reinforces or develops a kind of relationship between Stayer and the reader.

**Exploring Ideas**

1. What new way of thinking does Stayer introduce? (Consider his points about education, entertainment, theme parks, even American popular culture.)

2. Based on this essay, how are Stayer’s thoughts, values, beliefs, or feelings similar to or different from yours?

3. Stayer argues, “If the ideology of Disney is benign fascism, then the ideology of Sea World is exploitative spectacle masquerading as education.” In small groups, paraphrase this sentence. How does this point work in Stayer’s overall argument?

4. How does Stayer’s thinking go beyond one’s initial ideas about entertainment parks?

**Ideas for Writing**

1. What public place—such as Sea World—presents itself in a way that is different from what you know (or suspect) about that place?

2. What public place presents itself honestly and accurately?

If responding to one of these ideas, go to the Analysis section of this chapter to begin developing ideas for your essay.
Outside Reading

Find a written argument and print it out or make a photocopy. You might find an argument about a social or political issue in a general readership publication (such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, or the *New York Times*). For an argument related to your major, explore an academic journal such as *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Texas Nursing*, or *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. To conduct an electronic search of journals and magazines, go to your library’s periodical database or to InfoTrac College Edition (http://infotrac.cengage.com). For your library’s database, perform a keyword search, or go to the main search box for InfoTrac College Edition and select “keywords.” Enter word combinations such as *debate and community, opinion and politics, argument and politics, debate and sports, argument and art*. (When performing keyword searches, avoid using phrases or articles such as *a, an, the*; instead, use nouns separated by *and.*.) The search results will yield lists of journal and magazine articles.

You can also search the Internet. Try the search engine Dogpile.com. Like most Internet search engines, Dogpile combines words using *and.* In the search box, try various combinations, such as those above.

The purpose of this assignment is to further your understanding of argument and to introduce a broad range of argumentative strategies. As you are probably discovering, argument appears in many different places and in many different contexts. Even among the essays in this chapter, arguments range in tone, style, length, and strategy. As you read through this chapter, keep the written argument you have discovered close by and notice the elements and strategies the writer uses. Depending on your instructor’s suggestions, do one or more of the following:

1. Notice how the writer applies various strategies from this chapter. On the hard copy or photocopy:
   - Highlight the thesis if it is stated in the argument. If the thesis is implied, write it in your own words.
   - Highlight the major support strategies, and write “support” next to each one in the margin.
   - Highlight any passages in which the writer addresses other opinions on the topic, and write “counterargument” or “ca” next to each one in the margin.
   - Highlight any passages in which the writer grants value to another position, and write “concession” or “c” in the margin.

2. Analyze the strategies employed by the writer. The following questions may be helpful:
   - Does this text seem more or less argumentative than the readings in this chapter? Why?
   - How does the writer support his or her argument?
   - Who is the audience for this argument?
   - How does the audience impact the kinds of things said in the argument?

3. Write at least three “Writing Strategies” questions for the argument.

4. Write at least three “Exploring Ideas” questions for the argument.

5. Write two “Ideas for Writing,” such as the ones following the essays in this book, for the argument.
Academic audiences demand more than “three reasons why I believe X” arguments. They want to experience more in an argument than a writer’s personal beliefs; they want to learn a new way of thinking about a topic. So academic writers often look for a new stance, a way to make people rethink an issue entirely. In general, a successful argument creates a new position on a familiar topic or offers a position on a fresh topic. And good writers do not merely choose topics; instead, they build topics from the novel and surprising moments of everyday life.

The following sections are designed to help you develop ideas for your argument: specifically, to discover a topic (in Point of Contact), develop particular points about the topic (in Analysis), make it relevant to a community of readers (in Public Resonance), focus your position (in Thesis), and create support for that position (in Rhetorical Tools). The questions in each section will help you generate intense ideas and start writing. Your responses to the Invention questions may take you in a variety of directions, and some of your responses may get left behind. That is to be expected in academic work—or in any work that seeks to discover something valuable.
Some situations in everyday life are obviously significant—what they mean for our lives, or for the lives of others, is apparent. When our country goes to war or when a new president is elected, for example, most Americans understand the significance. Many situations, however, are far more subtle; their potential meaning is hidden by life’s hustle and bustle. To understand their meaning, we must stop in our tracks and focus on them. Use the following suggestions and questions to explore possible topics. If a question seems engaging to you, or if you associate some emotion or idea with the question, start writing. Ask yourself: “Can I change someone’s mind about this situation or issue?”

**School** What lurking attitude is ruining the learning process? If we’re a country of progress, why should history be taught anyway? How is mainstream fashion brainwashing even the smart kids? Will football be the end of serious public education? How was *Napoleon Dynamite’s* portrayal of high school right on target? How are high schools destroying students’ ability to cope with the first year of college?

**Work** Do my co-workers get along? Do supervisors treat workers fairly? Are the work expectations fair? Are the hours fair to workers? Do fellow workers do a good job? What hidden forces or assumptions work against productivity?

**Home** What does my neighborhood layout suggest about being a human? How does the layout of my house or apartment or dorm help me to be a better person? What is the central appliance in my living space? Does that support my goals as a person? Should more people have gardens? Why?

**Community** Does my town know what to do with teenagers? Does the water taste funny? Does my town offer ample mass transit? How does the police force function—as keepers of the peace or something else? How important are trees?

**Pop Culture** How does *American Idol* impact popular music? Can a democracy seriously thrive without a good punk scene? Should we be leery or supportive of a whole channel dedicated to food? What does the Discovery Channel do for science? Why aren’t there any fun shows about language and writing?

**Your Major** Look through a current journal in your field to find controversial issues: Are entry-level personnel in my field treated fairly? Is some research in my field or major controversial? Is my field undervalued by the public? Has my field changed any of its practices, for better or worse, in recent years? Should my field be more diverse (in gender and/or ethnicity)?

**Activity**

Make a list of other questions that draw attention to troubling situations in the world around you. What attitude or basic assumption lies beneath some troubling behavior or policy? Ask yourself: What behavior or situation or policy is wrong? What could be different? What could be better than it is?

Question everything, especially those things that seem unquestionable.
Analysis cracks open the layers of a topic—and helps a writer to see more than his or her initial thoughts about it. Without analysis, writers may find themselves with little new to say. As you answer the Invention questions, avoid answering too quickly. Instead, use the questions to search for deeper understanding, which will then translate into more intensive writing. Allow time and space for your own thinking to develop.

Invention Questions

- What is the particular point of crisis or tension?
- How has the situation (or condition, behavior, policy) come about, and why does it continue?
- What are the effects of the situation (or condition, behavior, policy)?
- Why do I have an opinion on this topic?
- Why is this belief valuable?

Try to go beyond broad complaints and vague generalities.

Ann Marie Paulin looks beneath the initial tension or problem and discovers a hidden layer. She goes beyond being “angry” and discovers that media trends indirectly support, even “encourage,” mistreatment and incivility:

Why do I have an opinion on this topic?

I have been fat since I was a kid. For about two days in my twenties I starved my way down to a size ten, thereby earning this head-turning compliment from the guy I was then dating: “You’d be a real fox if you’d just lose a few more pounds.” I’ve had complete strangers say the most astonishing things to me on the street. For example, on my way through a parking lot to get to my car, I passed a young man who looked over at me and shouted: “I don’t !@#$ fat chicks!” Who was asking? While these behaviors have sometimes hurt me, they mostly make me angry. And when I look around at the society in which I live, I don’t see any signs that this kind of behavior is discouraged. Indeed, the media seems to suggest that fat people, by their very existence, seem to deserve contempt and abuse.

How has this situation come about?

Where it gets tricky is that by the media’s definition, damn near everyone is fat. How has this situation come about? I’m not sure, but I’ve watched it develop. When my mother was young, a size ten or twelve was a respectable dress size. When I was in my twenties, a size eight was a respectable size. Now, you must be a size four, two, or even better, a zero to be considered thin. Now, a six-foot-tall model who wears a size twelve dress is considered plus size. She only gets her photo in Lane Bryant ads and such. It’s as if society has completely forgotten the concept of “normal size,” and so a person is either thin (if you can count all her bones when she appears in a bathing suit) or she’s fat. And that leaves the majority of women believing they are fat and hating themselves for it.

Paulin’s thinking shows how writers work: In the process of analyzing ideas, they create various possible writing directions. However, as they begin to develop their projects, they become more focused and revelatory; they grab onto one point and take it somewhere. They go beyond the common complaints and reveal a particular quality, effect, or layer of the issue.
Invention Workshop

Enlist the help of another writer in answering one of the Invention questions. Use the question to initiate a discussion. Explore further by questioning one another’s responses to the questions. For example, Jack is focusing on his high school education. Notice how the discussion with Marcus goes beyond Jack’s initial response:

What is the particular point of crisis or tension?
Jack: My high school education was inadequate. I graduated with a B average and I came to college having to take developmental courses before I could even begin taking credit courses.
Marcus: But is that the high school’s fault?
Jack: Well, if I couldn’t cut the mustard in entry-level college courses, why did I get mostly Bs in high school? It seems like something’s out of whack.
Marcus: OK. So the standards are too low in high school?
Jack: Yeah, I think so.
Marcus: Were you ever warned about the standards in college?
Jack: Sure. All the time, teachers would scare us with things like “Wait ‘til you get in college; you’ve got to work constantly to keep your grades up.”
 Marcus: But did anyone ever share specifics with you? Did you know what kinds of writing, for instance, you would be doing in college?
Jack: Not really. It’s all been a big surprise.
 Marcus: Maybe that’s the issue: High school students (and maybe teachers and administrators) don’t really know what kinds of things go on in entry-level college courses.
Jack: Yes—and so there’s this huge gap in between, and some students fall right into it.

It would be easy to reinforce Jack’s initial idea—the inadequacy of high school—by sharing examples of bad teachers or rotten classes, but Marcus and Jack do better. They develop the initial idea into something more specific and revealing: the gap between high school and college standards.

Thinking Further

Analysis is not about answering a question and finding an answer. The real insights lie beneath the answers. Return to your responses to the Invention questions and try to find the most valuable ideas:

• What statements reveal something specific?
• Which statements or phrases seem new to you?
• Which statements or phrases make a new connection, one that you had not considered before?

Now, you can take the statements or phrases forward and use them to develop increasingly intense ideas for your argument. If nothing stands out at this point, consider reapproaching the Invention questions, and invite another person to join your exploration. And this time, deliberately take the ideas further:

• What behavior, policy, or quality is at the heart of the topic? (What is beneath the tension you initially discovered?)
• What attitude, value system, or assumption rests beneath the actions of people who are involved?

Good writing goes further than the writer or reader initially expects.
Writers transform issues or personal concerns into arguable topics, issues that matter in some way to other people. Making a personal concern resonate with a public issue is simply a process of extension. To this end, the following Invention Questions can be used as springboards from personal concerns to public issues. For example, examine the following question: *Is my living situation conducive to my goals as a student?* You may have answered: “Yes. I live at home with my parents and commute to school.” Your situation is not unique. Many college students struggle with their living situations—with the decision of living on campus, in a nearby apartment complex, or at home with their parents, away from the campus altogether. This decision involves more than a simple personal choice. It has something to do with college funding, with the success of college students, with the entire college experience. In this sense, your situation resonates with a more public issue. The initial (more personal) question might evolve into a more public question: *Is it beneficial for college students to live at home while going to school?*

Public resonance is key in Ann Marie Paulin’s project. Her essay shows that the more a topic affects people, the more attention it may deserve. In her responses to the Invention Questions, she explores the hidden messages in ads and the unstated assumptions lurking in the public domain. Paulin’s responses show her making connections between her own situation and many others. By extending her thinking outward, she is developing the public dimensions of her idea:

**Who might care about this issue? Why?**
This is certainly a very public issue because it is almost impossible to escape the media: magazines, newspaper ads, billboards, radio, TV, movies, ads plastered in public restrooms and on the walls of buses, ads in your e-mail every day. And every one of those images that deals with weight or beauty makes it clear that to be fat is completely unacceptable and completely fixable if only a person tries hard enough and buys the right products.

Now, if this were just an issue of vanity, it might be something that could be shrugged off. But it goes much deeper than that. If you really pay attention to those ads, their real message is often that if you are fat, no one will love you. Your husband will leave you (if you ever manage to get one to begin with). Your children will be ashamed of you. Your friends will give up on you. You will be alone and unloved because you are fat. That is the message that really hits us where we live. Who wants to be some lonely outcast? We must conform to whatever it takes.

And so, most of us try the diets, the pills, the exercise classes, the wonder machines, and sometimes even more extreme measures like stomach stapling surgery. But in spite of all the time, money, and effort we expend, most of us are still fat. If you look at the studies done, the results are all about the same: Anywhere from 90% to 98% of the people who lose weight gain it all back within five years.
Sometimes writers need to go beyond the actual effects or consequences of an issue and imagine the possible ways others are involved. Consider the following: A writer is arguing about college students living at home. The issue seemingly affects only college students, and maybe their parents. But the writer makes the issue resonate with many other potential readers by transforming a personal issue into a more public one:

How college students live is not simply a matter of personal choice and comfort. It is a public issue, a public education issue. At the federal, state, and local levels, Americans are increasingly focused on the out-of-school living conditions of elementary and secondary students. Whenever people talk about the quality of education, invariably they end up discussing the living situation of students—the stability of their homes, the qualities of the neighborhoods. Why? Because people are beginning to realize that education does not occur in a vacuum, that how and where students live impact how they learn. But for some reason, we don't seem to be concerned once students are in college. Consequently, millions of college students swarm off to school every fall, often without deeply considering the implications of where they will live. And when millions of dollars of loans and grants go down the drain when students fail out their first year, we don't seem to ask the same questions we ask about elementary and secondary students.

Research
Consider using outside sources to help you invent—to help you imagine the hidden values, assumptions, and attitudes people have about the topic. Discover what has been said about your topic, what people have argued, why they have taken certain positions, or why they have ignored it altogether. (See pages 456–462 for help with finding sources.)

Going from Private to Public

Private Concern:
Why do ads for dieting products make me, an overweight person, so angry?

Public Concern:
Why should more people be concerned about the common portrayal of overweight people?
An argumentative thesis invites debate or suggests that opposing claims exist. For example:

But far more important than my ill temper is a creepy sense that these inaccurate images [about body type] have shifted our vision of what is important in life way out of whack, so far out that people are being hurt.

The process of narrowing down an argument to an intensive single sentence helps writers to understand the heart of their idea. At an early stage in your project, you need not settle into an exact wording, but trying to generate a focused statement can help you focus—and help your ideas gain intensity.

An argumentative thesis should have four qualities:

**Arguability**  It should be arguable. That is, an arguable thesis should take a stand on an issue that has two or more possible positions. If you can conceive of other possible positions on the topic, you are probably in arguable territory.

**Scope**  It should be appropriately narrow. Scope can be addressed by asking narrow enough questions. Be careful of broad questions: *Is my town boring?* To answer such a question, one would have to consider all of the town’s complexities, all of its goings-on, all of its people, all of its places, and so on. However, the question *Does my town offer sufficient activities for teens?* is more easily answerable—and ultimately arguable.

**Public Resonance**  It should address an issue that resonates with the readers. A good argument addresses a concern that others have *or that a writer thinks they should have.* In other words, a thesis should express something that matters (that has some significance) to readers. It should involve others.

**Revelation**  Academic writers attempt to do more than argue for their own opinions. They try to *reveal* an unfamiliar topic or reveal a new layer to a familiar topic. *Revelatory* thesis statements change readers’ (and the writer’s) thinking because they show something new. They clear away the mundane thinking and reveal the roots of an issue. Often, revelatory thesis statements:

- Include a reference to the opposition.
- Overturn or contradict popular opinion.
- Show a particular effect or relationship.
- Uncover a hidden layer.

### Activities

1. Transform the following into revelatory thesis statements:
   - The Internet has changed the world.
   - Video games are bad for kids.
   - Sixteen-year-olds who commit crimes should be punished as adults.

2. In a small group, choose one of the following topics and develop at least one revelatory argumentative statement:
   - Leash laws in your town
   - The process for choosing presidential nominees
   - Product placement in movies
   - The cost of college textbooks
   - High school English courses
**Evolution of a Thesis**

A writer can always increase the focus and revelation of a thesis. The following idea evolves into an increasingly sophisticated point:

- College students benefit from living at home.
- Traditional college students still need the support structure of their home lives to deal with the new challenges of college.
- Because college culture demands intense intellectual and social change from high school culture, traditional college students need the support structure of home.

The first statement announces a simple opinion. The second narrows in on a specific tension: “the new challenges of college.” But the statement is still a bit vague, and the idea will intensify with even more focus on that tension. The third statement brings us up close to the primary tension and shows us something that might otherwise escape our awareness: the “intense intellectual and social change” between high school and college culture. The reader of the last two theses, especially the third, has been given a novel insight about schooling. In this way, revelatory thesis statements are more than personal opinion; they are particular and persuasive insights.

**Common Thesis Problems**

**The Question Problem** A question is not a thesis, because it offers no stance. People sometimes use questions to imply a stance: *Isn’t that the point of college? Why can’t you be like your sister?* But this is generally an informal strategy—something people do in everyday talk. A formal argumentative stance should suggest a particular position amidst a realm of many others.

**The Obvious Fact Problem** An argument that simply announces a commonly known condition is no argument at all. Imagine someone arguing: *Many people go to college for their futures; Americans love cars; or Space exploration is expensive.* Such statements do not invite opposition because they are widely held beliefs. They are safe statements about the condition of our civilization. But the statement *Space exploration is too expensive to continue at its present pace* invites opposition.

**The Personal Response Problem** Argument depends upon the presence of several other perspectives peering at the same topic. However, when people proclaim a personal response (about their tastes, likes, dislikes, or desires), they merely make public their own state of mind. “I really liked the movie” is not an argumentative stance. It is a statement about a person’s tastes. But the statement, “Johnny Depp’s portrayal of a wayward pirate illustrates his superior range as an actor” invites opposition. Other positions can engage the point critically.

**Revision**

Before moving on, try to express the main point of your argument in a single sentence. Then evaluate the statement using the following questions:

- How is the statement arguable? (What other positions might be taken?)
- Can the statement be narrower? (What words are too vague or broad?)
- With what public issue or concern does the statement resonate?
- How does the statement reveal a unique insight or hidden layer of the issue?

You might also exchange your working thesis statement with two to three peers and use these questions to generate helpful responses.
Crafting an essay, or any written text, is a recursive process: Writers move back and forth, drafting, rethinking, redrafting. It is not a simple step-by-step journey through a chapter. But all writers benefit from a large collection of strategies, various tools they can use according to their particular needs, situations, and voices. The strategies in this section will help you build a sophisticated and engaging text—one that emerges from your particular ideas.

Academic argument involves four basic ingredients or elements:
- Main claim/Thesis
- Support
- Counterargument
- Concession
Support

Support gives substance and legitimacy to an argumentative claim and comes in a variety of forms. Consider the following as a collection of usable support strategies, a toolbox for persuading readers of your position, despite the particular topic.

Examples Specific cases or illustrations of a phenomenon. (See Paulin ¶6.)

Allusions References to history, science, nature, news events, films, television shows, or literary texts. (See Crabtree ¶5, Paulin ¶2.)

Personal Testimonies/Anecdotes Individual accounts or experiences. (See Paulin ¶1–2, Bohnhorst ¶1.)

Scenarios Hypothetical or fictionalized accounts. (See Crabtree ¶6.)

Statistics Information (often given as numerical value) collected through experimentation, surveys, polls, and research. (See Paulin ¶4, Bohnhorst ¶3.)

Authorities References to published (most often written) sources. (See Paulin ¶2, Bohnhorst ¶5.)

Facts Agreed-upon events or truths, or conclusions drawn from investigation. (See Crabtree ¶5.)

Additionally, arguments depend on appeals, which make a connection between the topic and the audience’s thought process. In fact, appeals have such rhetorical force that they give meaning to and can even dominate over other forms of evidence. The first three appeals below (to logic, emotion, and character) are often discussed using three classical Greek terms: logos (for logic), pathos (for emotion), and ethos (for character). These are sometimes referred to as the Classical appeals.

Appeal to logic relates the argument to the audience’s sense of reason or creates a line of reasoning for the audience to follow. (See Crabtree ¶9–11, Paulin’s conclusion, Bohnhorst ¶10–11.)

Appeal to emotion relates the argument to an emotional state of the audience, or attempts to create a particular emotional state in the audience. (See Paulin ¶1.)

Appeal of character relates the argument to a quality of the author/speaker. (See Paulin ¶1.)

Appeal to need relates the argument to people’s needs (spiritual, economic, physical, sexual, familial, political, etc.).

Appeal to value Relates the argument to people’s values (judgments about right/wrong, success, discipline, selflessness, moderation, honesty, chastity, modesty, self-expression, etc.). (See Crabtree ¶9, Bohnhorst ¶7–8.)

The appeal to logic, or logos, is the most valued appeal in formal argument. It requires the arguer to establish premises—claims that must be accepted in order for the main claim (or conclusion) to be acceptable. One example is the syllogism, which asserts two premises and a conclusion: A is true and B is true; therefore, C must also be true. The other two Classical appeals, pathos and ethos, have worked into everyday English usage: e.g., He has a particularly engaging ethos. The newspaper dramatized the pathos of the events.
Too often, writers limit themselves by assuming that facts and statistics are the primary support tools for a good argument, when the truth is that facts and statistics are merely a fragment of what’s possible—and what’s most valuable. Writers have the whole world of culture and history within reach. They can make connections (allusions) to historical or current events, literary texts, science, nature, and their personal lives. For example, perhaps you see a connection between your topic and a recent news event. You could briefly explain details of the event and then describe what it means for your topic—how it reveals something significant and ultimately validates your opinion. The same thing goes for a movie, an ad, or a historical event. For instance, imagine a writer developing the argument about college residence policies. He might bring popular culture to his aid:

In movies and popular television shows, college is nearly always portrayed as a raucous social engagement. The typical movie college student (like those in *American Pie* or *Animal House*) is a dormitory, apartment, frat or sorority house dweller who thrives or suffers in the family-free environment. The whole point of college in mainstream movies is to create a living situation in which the students just tread the line between responsible participation in society and utter immersion in bohemian life. It’s no wonder that going to college seems synonymous with “going away” to college. When students long to avoid living in the chaotic social climate of campus life, they are working against more than some college policies. They are working against popular culture.

If you see a connection, especially one that others might not see, it can create a new way of thinking about the topic.

**Invention Questions**

Use the following questions to develop allusions, testimony, and scenarios for your argument:

- Does a historical situation or trend (say, the rise of a particular fashion, organization, or individual) illustrate something about my topic?
- How has popular culture treated my topic? Does it show up in television shows, movies, or commercials? If so, how is it characterized, mishandled, or celebrated?
- Have fictional characters illustrated something important about the topic or some behavior related to it?
- How does nature (animals, life cycles, plants, biological processes, and so on) demonstrate something about my topic?
- What has science taught people about my topic?
- Do any news events illustrate my point or stance?
- What have I witnessed or experienced that illustrates my point?
- What hypothetical situation could illustrate my point?
- What do other writers or authorities on the matter say about the topic?

When using authorities, writers must formally document the use of any information, ideas, and expressions taken from sources. For an extended explanation of formal documentation and integration of sources, see Chapter 13: Research & Writing.
Now, imagine how using appeals can help your argument. The various appeals can be applied to nearly any topic. Notice how a writer might tie an argument about college students to broader values—family intimacy and self-determination:

Going to college should not have to mean going away to college. The intellectual commitment required of a student should not necessarily require a domestic commitment. Coming into an institution should not necessarily mean abandoning the intimacy of family. And entering college should not mean entering a compulsory social climate. But policies that require first-year students to live on campus impose a domestic and social arrangement onto students.

The most valued strategy in formal academic argument is the appeal to logic—or what is often called a line of reasoning. When writers create a line of reasoning, they create an intellectual path for readers—several steps (sometimes called premises) that lead to the writer’s thesis. Consider the topic from the previous section: college students living at home. If we want to convince readers to believe that colleges should not require students to live on campus, we might create the following line of reasoning:

**a.** The shift from high school to college culture is significant.

**b.** Many students experience a kind of culture shock in the transition.

**c.** This culture shock negatively impacts their academic performance.

Each of these statements requires further explanation, examples, illustration, evidence, and appeal. In other words, this line of reasoning might require several lengthy passages of text. But if the readers could accept each claim, then they would be led directly to the main point—that college policies should not require on-campus residence for all first-year students.

### Activity

Generate a variety of appeals for each of the following claims:

- Although war illustrates human cruelty and malice, it also illustrates human compassion and sympathy.

- Most proponents of capital punishment fail to consider the impact on the executed person’s loved ones.

- Democracy cannot thrive in a two-party system.

- Excessive marketing leads to a lack of civility and respect among citizens.
**Counterargument**

Counterarguments anticipate and refute claims or positions that oppose those being forwarded by the writer. Writers must anticipate and account for positions outside of or opposed to their own claims(s) and include reasoning to offset that potential opposition. For example, a savvy teenager who wants to attend a party will imagine his parents’ concerns and work them into his argument about why he should be allowed to go. A politician will anticipate her opponent’s position on an issue and formulate her speech accordingly.

The most successful arguers are good counterarguers. They address and even dismantle the specifics of opposing claims. In her essay, Ann Marie Paulin counterargues by summing up advice given to Barbara Dinnerstein: “She told us to put a picture of ourselves on the ‘fridegerator of us eating and looking really fat and ugly. She said remember what you look like. Remember how ugly you are.” In the paragraph that follows this advice, Paulin explains why she disagrees:

I have a problem with this advice. First, of course, it is too darn common. Fat people are constantly being told they should be ashamed of themselves, of their bodies. And here we see another of those misconceptions I mentioned earlier: the assumption that being fat is the same as being ugly. There are plenty of attractive fat people in the world, as well as a few butt-ugly thin ones, I might add. Honestly, though, the real tragedy is that while few people in this world are truly ugly, many agonize over the belief that they are. Dr. Pipher reported: “I see clients who say they would rather kill themselves than be overweight” (91). I never have figured out how trashing a fellow being’s self-esteem is going to help that person be healthier.

In academic argument, opposing claims are vital. Instead of ignoring or fearing them, good writers use them to develop points. In developing your argument, try to address opposing claims. Doing so will make your own argument more complex, more developed, and more persuasive.

---

**Invention Questions**

- Who might disagree with my position? Why?
- What reasons do people have for disagreeing with me?
- What would support an opposing argument?

**Invention Workshop**

**The Devil’s Advocate** This activity is designed to generate counterarguments. The process involves an intensive group exchange. Follow these steps:

- Assemble writers into small groups (three or four per group work best).
- Each writer should have his or her thesis statement (main argumentative claim) written down.
- The first writer should read his or her thesis statement aloud to the group.
- Taking turns, each group member then should attempt to refute the position given in the statement. The idea is to play devil’s advocate, to complicate the writer’s ideas.
- The writer should record each opposing claim that is offered.
- After everyone in the group has given an opposing claim to the first writer, the second writer should recite his or her thesis, and the process begins again.
Using Counterargument to Qualify Your Thesis

Thesis statements become narrower and more meaningful when they include an understanding of the broader argument (others’ positions on the subject). Let’s examine the opposition to a working thesis: College students benefit from living at home while attending school. Many college students insist that living away from home during college helps to define “the college experience.” They might develop an argument using personal or anecdotal evidence. They might illustrate personal (hence, intellectual) growth that comes from living away from home, away from one’s family, away from familiar turf. They might point to stories in literature in which a character leaves her or his homeland to seek knowledge or wisdom in the world and gains insight only because of the new surroundings. They might point to movies in popular culture that promote that same idea. We would do well to consider these points, and perhaps work against some of them directly. We might even include part of the logic into our own thesis: Despite the attraction of living away from home and experiencing life in unfamiliar territory, college students benefit from living at home while attending school.

Concession

While counterarguments refute objections, concessions acknowledge the value of others’ claims. Put another way, if the writer says that an objection or alternative is wrong, the response is a counterargument; but if the writer says that the objection or alternative is right, that response is a concession.

Concession is a vital aspect of academic argument. Notice how Crabtree concedes a point in the conclusion of his essay. Although he argues for the value of a great books education throughout his essay, he does concede that it demands a particular kind of commitment:

A great books education is not for everyone. In order to benefit from such an education, a student has to be highly motivated, mature enough to realize the importance of such a focus, and self-disciplined. Whatever reasons one might have for not pursuing a great books education, it cannot be because it is not practical!

Concessions might acknowledge the limitations of, or make clear boundaries for, the writer’s own argument. In this case, they are sometimes called qualifiers. When giving a speech on the evils of corporate tax evasion, a senator qualifies her statements: “Granted, most companies in America pay taxes responsibly, but we must focus on those few rogue and politically powerful companies.” When arguing for a salary increase, a union leader acknowledges a point made by the opposition: “We understand that economic times ahead could be perilous and that a salary increase could make the company more financially vulnerable to outside forces, but the future of the company certainly depends upon the well-being of its loyal employees.”

Conceding in academic argument does not make an argument wishy-washy. In fact, a good concession shows that a writer has a broad sense of his or her claims—that they fit into a larger context. A good writer might discuss the logic of another position and show, to some degree, how that position has validity. This does not mean that the writer’s own point is weak; on the contrary, it means that his or her point is so strong and valid that it can even acknowledge the soundness of other positions. (See more on this in the Writer’s Voice section.)

Invention Questions

Consider the following questions for your argument:

- Are there other valid positions that one could take on my topic?
- Are there legitimate reasons for taking another position on this topic?
- Does my argument make any large, but necessary, leaps?
Caution: Logical Fallacies Ahead

Logical fallacies are flaws in the structure of an argument that make the claims invalid. A fallacy is a falsehood, so a logical fallacy is a logical falsehood that makes no sense within a given situation. For example, consider this familiar line:

If you break a mirror, you'll have seven years of bad luck.

We may recognize this as superstition. In academic terms, it is called faulty cause/effect. That is, the broken mirror does not actually cause misfortune in one’s life. The statement seems categorically faulty. However, the success (or logic) of any argument depends on the particular situation. All argumentative statements exist in situations that give those statements credibility. (If someone’s entire fortune were tied to a mirror, then the previous statement would be more logical!) Statements are logical or illogical based on the situation.

In academia, recognizing logical fallacies is part of being a critical thinker in all disciplines. There is no quicker way to make readers of your own work suspicious than committing any fallacies (listed on the next page) when making an argument.

Activities

A. What logical fallacies might you overhear in everyday situations? Consider the following scenarios: a customer trying to return an item; a store clerk trying to sell an extended warranty; a teacher explaining why a student cannot receive credit for a late assignment; a student arguing that he or she should receive a better grade; two politicians debating a tax cut; a husband explaining why he should go fishing with his cousin all weekend.

B. In groups, write an example for each of the fallacies listed in this chapter.

C. In groups, write short argumentative essays loaded with logical blunders. Someone in each group should read the completed essay aloud, and the class should attempt to point out and name the fallacies.

D. Explain the problem with the logic in the internet bumper stickers, and name the fallacy.
Invention 249
Rhetorical Tools

Ad hominem (Latin for to the person) Attacks a person directly rather than examining the logic of the argument.
- We cannot possibly consider Ms. Smith’s proposal because she is a Catholic.
- Mr. Mann’s argument is suspicious because he is a socialist.

Strawperson Exaggerates a characteristic of a person or group of people and then uses the exaggeration to dismiss an argument.
- Islamic fundamentalists are crazy. They only want to destroy Americans. We cannot accept their claims about imperialism.
- Environmentalists are radical. They want to end everyone’s fun by taking cars and boats away.

Faulty cause/effect Confuses a sequential relationship with a causal one. Assumes that event A caused event B because A occurred first.
- Since the construction of the new baseball stadium, homelessness in the downtown area has decreased.
- The tax cut made energy rates drop.

Either/or reasoning Offers only two choices when more exist.
- Either we destroy Russia or it will destroy us.
- The American people will choose to control their own lives or give away their wills to socialist candidates.

Hasty generalization Draws a conclusion about a group of people, events, or things based on insufficient examples (often, the logical flaw behind racist, sexist, or bigoted statements).
- Men are too possessive. My ex-boyfriend would never let me go out alone.
- French people are rude. When I went to France, the civilians grunted French statements when I asked for help.

False analogy Makes a comparison between two things that are ultimately more unlike than alike. The differences between the things make the comparison ineffective or unfair, or the comparison misrepresents one or both of the things involved.
- Writing is like breathing: You just do what comes naturally.
- Like Galileo, Bill Clinton was breaking new ground, but no one understood him.

Non sequitur (Latin for it does not follow) Skips several logical steps in drawing a conclusion.
- If we do not trash the entire tax code, the downtown area will slowly deteriorate.
- A new baseball stadium downtown will help with the homelessness problem.

Oversimplification Does not acknowledge the true complexity of a situation or offers easy solutions to complicated problems.
- If we could give kids something to do, they wouldn’t get depressed.
- This credit card will end all of my financial problems.

Slippery slope Assumes that a certain way of thinking or acting will necessarily continue or extend in that direction (like a domino effect). Such an argument suggests that once we begin down a path, we will inevitably slip all the way down, and so the effects of a particular action or idea are exaggerated.
- If the college makes students take more mathematics, the next thing we know, advanced calculus and quantum physics will be requirements for all graduates.
- If North Vietnam succeeds in making South Vietnam communist, it will eventually threaten the shores of the United States of America.

Begging the question Attempts to prove a claim by using (an alternative wording of) the claim itself.
- Girls should not be allowed into the Boys’ Military Academy because it is for boys only.
- All cigarette smoking should be banned from public places because I believe it in my heart.

Chocolate fixes everything
How Should I Begin?

As with all essays, the sky is the limit. Remember some of the basic introductory tools (anecdote, provocative question, shocking statement). Remember, too, that introductions not only create focus for the topic, but also establish the tone of the essay. They are the invitation to start thinking. But if an introduction is flat, typical, or vague, it is an invitation to stop thinking. Notice this typical, vague introduction:

There are many critical issues facing today’s public schools. They have to consider violence, financial constraints, teacher training, drugs, and student apathy, just to name a few. But in this difficult era, educators have become enamored with a saving grace: technology. Computers are everywhere in our public schools. But the problem is that the technology isn’t the saving grace that it seems. Schools should rethink their allegiance to computers.

This introduction illustrates a few critical mistakes. First, the writer begins with a statement that nearly everyone knows. It is not an invitation to think rigorously or explore an issue. Second, it is far too broad for the reader to get traction. Third, because the introduction begins so broadly, it makes at least two large intellectual leaps in the goal of getting to the writer’s thesis at the end. Fourth, the attempt to place the thesis at the end of the paragraph makes all the other information seem contrived and formulaic.

To the contrary, in her essay Elizabeth Bohnhorst takes us directly to the critical issue, showing a specific example. She does not need to rush through several vague statements to suggest her position on the issue. She makes it indirectly from the outset:

“Another boring PowerPoint,” responds Jennifer when I ask about her day at school. I might not find these words so discouraging coming from a company executive after a long meeting or even a college student leaving an informative lecture. But these words of an eleven-year-old elementary school student leave me feeling slightly uneasy. PowerPoint presentations are intended to compel students to become more interested in the subject with the use of neon colors and moving graphic images. But these flashy additions to current educational strategies haven’t fooled everyone. The text and material covered is still the same boring grammar and spelling lessons but the educator has altered: It is a screen.

Bohnhorst does go on in her essay to speak about computer technology in general, but here she focuses on a specific program, PowerPoint, which gives her argument, and her readers, a focal point.

Where Should I Put Counterarguments?

Counterarguments can be tricky, but they need not be. First, they can be placed anywhere in a paper: at the beginning, throughout the body, and even at the conclusion. You might explain an opposing point and then counter, explain another opposing point and then counter. (Depending on the amount of detail given to each counter, each point might be an entire paragraph, or more, with supporting evidence.)

Opposing Point A
Your counterargument
Opposing Point B
Your counterargument
Opposing Point C
Your counterargument
Some writers use a turnabout paragraph for counterarguments. A turnabout paragraph begins with one point and then shifts to an opposing or alternative point while giving the reader a clear sign of the shift. For example, you might begin a paragraph explaining an opposing position, and then counterargue in that same paragraph. In the following example, the opposing claim (that global warming is not a real problem) is addressed within the paragraph. The paragraph also includes the change of direction (“This argument, however . . .”):

Some people argue that global warming is not a problem at all. They suggest that all the discussion about the ozone layer is merely fear-mongering by left-wing political activists. This argument, however, ignores the volumes of evidence compiled by scientists (many of whom are Nobel Prize winners) from around the world—scientists from different cultures, from different religious contexts, from different political systems, and with different political agendas. The amount of data they have collected and the sheer din of their collective voices ought to be enough to convince people that global warming is much more than the delusions of a few environmental groups.

You might decide that the opposing viewpoint(s) require significant explanation, and that it would be best to keep them grouped together. Therefore, you might devote a chunk of space at the beginning of your paper before countering:

Opposing Point A
Opposing Point B
Opposing Point C
Your counterargument to A
Your counterargument to B
Your counterargument to C

You also might decide that your argument only needs a single main counterargument. That counter might come after you have given your supporting evidence and appeals, or it might even begin the argument. Or several opposing claims might be discussed, and addressed, in one paragraph. (See Paulin ¶ 2.)

**Activity**

Examine the essays in this chapter for counterarguments. Notice their different organizational strategies.

**How Should I Make Transitions?**

Regardless of your general organization strategy, make certain to cue the reader when giving a counterargument. It is important that the reader understand when the focus is shifting from counter to main argument. You might begin a paragraph with an opposing viewpoint: “Some opponents might argue that. . . .” If so, you will need to shift the reader back to your logic: “But they do not understand that. . . .”

Here is a list of some strategic transitions when doing counter argument:

On the other hand,
Contrary to this idea,
Although many people take this stance,
However, (; however,)
Despite the evidence for this position,
But
Argument need not be cast as an act of aggression or belligerence. While arguments are sometimes heated and intense, they need not attempt to belittle their opponents. In fact, the fastest way to alienate, or turn off, a reader is to sound narrow-minded, mean, arrogant, or intimidating. A good argument attracts readers and engages those who might oppose the claims being made; a bad or unsuccessful argument loses readers. Here are some strategies for maintaining a cool tone—one that invites readers rather than alienates them.

**Making Concessions**

Conceding or qualifying a point can make an argument seem more controlled and more inviting; therefore, even when writers have a very strong conviction, they will often acknowledge the value of some other point or the limits of their own argument. Imagine the following argument:

First-year college students are not mature enough to live on their own, without the guidance of parents and the familiarity of home turf. Dorm life is a celebration of self-destruction and disorientation. The social distractions draw students away from the real purpose of college and defeat even the most focused and determined students. Colleges should rethink the requirements for first-year students to live on campus.

While these claims unfairly generalize college students (see *logical fallacies*) and threaten the logical soundness of the argument, they also project a hasty or pushy voice. Such unqualified claims create a certain character in readers’ minds—someone who is overly anxious and forceful. But the same argument can be cast with a different voice (which uses concession). The following paragraph acknowledges some value in dorm life and, as a result, seems fairer and less alienating:

Dorm life does hold some value for young students. It can create a climate of inquiry and academic engagement. However, many young college students are overcome by the utter freedom, lack of genuine guidance, and constant social distractions. And too many students who would otherwise succeed in their first years at college are suffering or failing because they are forced to live on campus. Colleges should, at least, begin to reevaluate requirements for on-campus living.

While conceding can create a more engaging voice, conceding unnecessarily, or too often, can have negative results. Imagine the same argument, but with a distracting degree of concession:

Living in dorms can be the best thing possible for a college student; however, dorm life can also defeat many students. Sometimes, even the brightest and most determined students can be overcome by the social distractions. Although it all depends on the individual student’s personality and upbringing, college dorm life can actually work against the whole purpose of going to college. Certainly, each college should consider the characteristics of its own student body, but policies that require students to live on campus should be reevaluated.

All the concessions undermine the importance of the argument. The voice behind the text seems concerned about offending potential readers. But, ironically, such writing makes readers feel distant or detached from the ideas. Because the writer seems uncommitted, readers have no reason to engage the ideas. (Be cautious not to concede away your argument—and your level of commitment.)
Avoiding Harsh Description

It is often easy to use the most emotionally loaded terms to describe something or someone, to proclaim an opposing view as “dumb” or “evil.” Such description, however, is most often exaggerated, and suggests that the writer has not fully investigated the subject. In the following, Paulin does not attack the media and the diet industry with aggressive adjectives, but argues that they damage people’s lives. This is a far more sophisticated and useful strategy than merely dismissing them with a simple negative word or phrase:

Certainly everyone is entitled to his or her own opinions of what is attractive, but no one has the right to damage another human being for fun or profit. The media and the diet industry often do just that. While no one can change an entire culture overnight, people, especially parents, need to think about what they really value in the humans they share their lives with and what values they want to pass on to their children.

Talking with, Not Arguing at, Readers

An academic argument is not an argument with readers. It is a conversation with readers about an argumentative position. And if that conversation is compelling, the reader may find that position valuable. In other words, argumentative writing speaks with the reader about a particular position or set of positions and attempts to make one position more logical and/or valuable than others.

To help visualize the role of the writer and reader, imagine the following: The writer sits beside the reader, pointing at and directing attention to a set of claims. The writer does not sit in front of and point his or her finger at the reader. This may seem like a subtle difference, but notice how it may change a passage. In the example below, David Crabtree speaks to the reader about the need for workers in America to be intellectually capable of changing work environments. He does not command the reader:

Such unpredictability calls for a different strategy in preparing for the job market. Rather than spending one’s undergraduate years receiving specialized training, one ought to learn more general, transferable skills which will provide the flexibility to adjust to whatever changes may occur.

But imagine a different approach if Crabtree had talked at us directly. In the following, the writer tries to convince the reader (“you”) to change his or her behavior. Rather than speak with the reader about an issue, this passage targets the reader’s own behavior, which is generally avoided in academic writing:

Such unpredictability should make you realize the need to be ready for a shifting job market. Rather than spending undergraduate years receiving specialized training, you ought to learn more general, transferable skills which will provide the flexibility to adjust to whatever changes may occur.
VITALITY

While the editing strategies in other chapters can be applied here, argumentative writing has potential difficulties of its own. Because argument is such a common everyday practice, writers have to be especially mindful of some informal habits that can make formal written argument less intense and vital.

Avoid Unnecessary Attention to I

In argumentative writing, it is especially tempting to use the first-person pronouns I, me, and my. As in the following two sentences, personal pronouns can distract the reader from the argument itself and bog down the sentences:

I think that social security ought to be tied to the marketplace.
It is my personal belief that social security should not be a gamble.

In each of these sentences, the main idea is subordinated in a that clause. I statements such as these are unnecessary in argumentative writing because the claims are already attributed to the writer. By simply attaching his or her name to an essay, the writer has already implied “I believe.” Saying it again is redundant.

However, writers do occasionally choose to insert personal pronouns. When dealing with several claims or outside sources, writers may insert the first-person pronoun in order to make a clear distinction between their own thoughts and others’, as Paulin does:

For instance, in her essay, “Bubbie, Mommy, Weight Watchers and Me,” Barbara Noreen Dinnerstein recalls a time in her childhood when her mother took her to Weight Watchers to slim down and the advice the lecturer gave to the women present: “She told us to put a picture of ourselves on the ‘fridgerator of us eating and looking really fat and ugly. She said remember what you look like. Remember how ugly you are.”

I have a problem with this advice. First, of course, it is too darn common.

Paulin could also have avoided the first-person pronoun:

But this advice is dangerous to young women.

But she chose the first-person pronoun, perhaps because it is less formal and coincides with the personal voice she has established in her essay. While it is good practice to avoid unnecessary use of first-person pronouns, writers like Paulin can make effective, occasional use of it.

Writers also use I for personal narratives—telling a story or anecdote involving their own experiences. Such uses are legitimate and important. Narratives draw attention to the relevant experience of the writer, which requires use of the first-person pronoun.

Unnecessary / Statement

I think that history should be taught with more attention to the lives of everyday people.

Appropriate Personal Narrative

When I was in high school, my history courses focused almost exclusively on big battles and big governmental moments.

Avoid Unnecessary Attention to You

The second-person pronoun you refers directly to the reader—the person holding your text and reading from it. And because academic essays are invitations to a broad audience (to instructors, peers, and even the broader community of thinkers that they represent), you is generally avoided. Like the first-person singular pronouns (I, me, my), you distracts the reader from the issue at hand. But you is especially hazardous in academic writing because it makes writers shift into the imperative mood—the mood of commands. Here, the writer shifts focus and mood:

Political parties do their best to keep people from closely examining issues. Instead, they wash over complexities and invite voters to stand on one side or another. You should consider your allegiance to any political party.
The first two sentences focus on political parties, people, and voters. But the final sentence shifts and suddenly speaks at the reader. To most academic audiences, this shift is unacceptable. (See more about speaking with versus at the reader in Writer’s Voice.)

Avoiding first- and second-person pronouns keeps the writer, and therefore the reader, focused on the ideas—on the argument itself.

**Vitalize with Verbs**

Verbs are the engine of a sentence. And they are the agent of motion for the reader’s mind: They move the reader’s thoughts. Weak verbs make for little movement. In the following, the first sentence depends on a weak verb:

- Telemarketers are bad for home life.

- Telemarketers have diminished the sanctity of the home.

The verb of the first sentence, *are*, is often called a linking verb. When linking verbs act as the main engine of a sentence, they limit what’s possible. Often, they corner the writer into using a vague adjective, in this case *bad*. The second sentence uses an active and more intensive verb: *diminished*. The second sentence creates a more engaging image. In the following sentences, linking verbs actually create unnecessary layers and clauses. Notice how each can be tightened and vitalized with an active verb:

- The problem with this *is* that the house is too expensive for our budget.

  **Vitalized:** Here’s the problem: the cost of the house *exceeds* our budget.

- The committee *is* not prone to allowing everyone *to be* as free with their money as they want.

  **Vitalized:** The committee will probably not *allow* everyone to *spend* resources freely.

Using active verbs rather than linking verbs vitalizes writing. This is not to say that using linking verbs is always a mistake. (Sometimes, they are necessary.) However, changing to more active verbs can dramatically impact your writing, creating more focused statements, more intensive ideas, and more revelatory thinking.

**ACTIVITY**

Revise and vitalize the following sentences. Try replacing the linking verb first and see how that impacts your decision about other parts of the sentence:

1. Energy drinks may give you wings but they are not helping students to focus.

2. It’s going to be a long time before that cat is home again.

3. The arguments against global warming are often full of strawperson fallacies, which are fallacies that unfairly characterize a person or group of people.

4. Presidential candidates seem to be getting more mean-spirited as time goes by, but elections early in American history were often deeply hostile as well.
PEER REVIEW

Exchange drafts with at least one other writer. Before passing your draft to others, underline the thesis, or write it on the top of your essay. This way, reviewers will get traction as they read. Reviewers should use the following questions to guide a helpful response:

1. Could the thesis be more narrow and revelatory? How? (What words or phrases are too broad?)

2. Can you think of another cultural, literary, historical, or political allusion that relates to the writer’s position?

3. How well can you follow the writer’s line of reasoning? (See appeals to logic, page 245.) Imagine the line of reasoning as though it is a stone path. If the path is well laid out, you should feel a stone at every step. If it is not, you might miss a step; you might feel like some intellectual step is missing.

4. Suggest specific points that the writer should concede or qualify. For instance, the writer’s position might seem too extreme; the claims might include too many people or a large, diverse group without making any distinctions. Point out such claims, and help the writer to see the need to acknowledge subtlety, complexity, and exceptions.

5. Can you imagine another opposing point that the writer could address in a counterargument? While the writer may have dealt with several opposing positions, you might think of an additional issue that should be addressed.

6. Consider the writer’s voice. Circle passages or sentences that shift mood and speak at, rather than with, the reader. Suggest an alternative strategy or phrasing.

7. Do paragraphs focus on one main point? Point to sentences in paragraphs that stray from the initial idea put forth in the paragraph.

8. What is the most engaging passage in the draft so far? Why?

9. Check for sentence vitality.
   - Where can the writer change linking verbs to active verbs?
   - Where can the writer avoid drawing attention to I and you?
   - Consider vitality strategies from other chapters:
     — Help the writer change unnecessary clauses to phrases.
     — Help the writer change unnecessary phrases to words.
     — Point to expletives (such as there are and it is).
     — Help the writer change passive verbs to active verbs for more vitality.
     — Help the reader avoid common grammatical errors: comma splices, sentence fragments, or pronoun/antecedent agreement.

Questions for Research

If the writer used outside sources,
   - Where must he or she include in-text citations? (See pages 484–485.)
   - Are quotations blended smoothly into the argument and punctuated correctly? (See pages 475–478.)
   - Where could more direct textual cues or transitions help the reader? (See pages 479–481.)
   - Is the Works Cited page formatted properly? (See pages 486–497.)
DELIVERY

Academic essays are not merely vehicles for communicating thought. They are intellectual playing fields—places for writers and readers to discover something. Those discoveries do not exist in the vacuum of an essay; they resonate outward through the lives of the writers and readers. An argument essay in particular sets out to assert something about the world, and that assertion is bound to impact reality—because people live according to the arguments they accept.

Now that you have written an argumentative essay, respond to the following:

• How do your claims challenge something in your life? The lives of your friends and family?
• Do your words support mainstream intellectual life? Or does your essay challenge something about the way most people live and think?
• What particular groups, organizations, or people should read your essay? How might it impact their behavior?

Beyond the Essay: The Open Letter

Argumentative essays have changed the world. They’ve started revolutions, supported religious movements, initiated new scientific organizations, spotlighted atrocities, and prompted a broad range of political events. But sophisticated arguments can impact the world through other genres.

The open letter is closely related to the essay. It is aimed at a particular audience, a particular reader or set of readers, but it also resonates with a broader audience. An open letter draws both writer and reader, and an otherwise private discussion, into a public setting—a powerful move! For example, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” was originally aimed at nine fellow clergy members, but the letter also speaks to millions of others. In effect, King performs a response to a particular audience for a broader audience. The conversation occurs between a few particular people, but the issues and claims involve many. Or consider the apostle Paul’s letters to the Romans that now constitute part of the New Testament.

They have become known to millions of readers, but they were originally aimed at a particular group of people. Or more currently, newspapers and magazines often print open letters to the president, to an editor, or to corporate heads.

Because letters are written with a particular audience in mind, they may draw attention to specifics about the readers’ life, such as specific behaviors, policies, attitudes, or events. The writer may then draw out the significance, explaining the impact on or meaning for others.

Return to your essay and imagine a particular person or group of people who should read and accept your claims. Then develop an open letter addressed to that particular audience.

Invention Questions

The following questions may help shape your ideas:

• Who has the power or authority over the issue?
• How can you make a specific connection between them and the issue?
• To what specific behavior, attitude, event, or policy can you draw attention?
• What is the public significance of that behavior?

“People don’t operate based on reality. They operate based on their perceptions of reality. And with language, we can change those perceptions.”

—David Hawes