

CLASSICAL TECHNIQUES AND CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTS

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

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Developing Arguments Through Rhetorical Strategies

PANIC! This is a common student response to a paper assignment that begins with the words, “Write an 8–10 (or 10–12; or 12–15)-page paper . . .” Many college writers, even those who are quite comfortable with their writing ability, freeze at the thought of writing a paper whose length exceeds a few pages.

For other writers, the panic doesn’t hit until the paper is in its “final revision” stage, and the draft for a ten-page paper comes to only seven or eight pages of typed text. You know what happens next: margins expand by a quarter- or half-inch on each side, fonts bump up by a half size, the leading between lines increases. And often, a bunch of filler phrases get injected into sentences—e.g., “due to the fact that” replaces “because”; “it came to their attention” replaces “they discovered.” Usually, the result is a brief comment from the teacher when the paper comes back: “Wordy,” “Unfocused,” or even “Less language, more substance.”

Chapters 3 and 4 provided you with detailed instructions on how to develop a pro/con grid listing the most important points that support or oppose your argument. But while a well-developed pro/con grid provides a good start on the “what” of an argument, it doesn’t give all the help you need on the “how” of that argument—the steps needed to produce an argument that is more than just a listing of statements which either support or oppose a topic.

Aristotle’s *Topoi*: Identifying Classical Argument Strategies

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle provided a list of strategies—the *topoi*—for developing arguments beyond the “list” stage. *Topos* means “place” in

Greek, and the *topoi* are places or areas of thought from which you can develop arguments. Aristotle's *topoi* provide you with fresh approaches to a topic, which can help you to develop your argument by providing an analytical structure for the information on your pro/con grid.

Defining Rhetoric

Topoi (plural form of *topos*, meaning “place” in Greek): argument strategies that can be used to develop essays.

Aristotle discussed twenty-eight *topoi* in the *Rhetoric*, many of which will be discussed here. (In this chapter, you'll find strategies related to definitions, relationships, comparisons, and feasibility, while Chapter 7 deals with strategies that directly relate to research.) You would never include all of these argument strategies in any one argument, but they provide a good checklist of ways to organize your information into a structured essay.

Definitions

Many disagreements hinge on the failure to define terms. For example, imagine two people arguing at length about gun control—one strongly favoring and one strongly opposing the topic. Several minutes into the argument, the following interchange occurs:

Pro: I honestly don't see why you would oppose registration of firearms and a short waiting period before being able to purchase a handgun.

Con: I don't oppose that.

Pro: I thought you were against gun control.

Con: I am—I'm against depriving law-abiding citizens of their right to own guns.

Pro: That's not what I meant by gun control. I meant registration and a waiting period.

Con: Why didn't you say so?

Because a term as complex as “gun control” can have many possible definitions, a definition of the term should appear very early, preferably in the introduction, in any argument on this topic.

This is equally true concerning a topic as complex as the use of Affirmative Action for determining college admissions. Affirmative Action policies have included such practices as establishing a percentage of minority students that will be admitted, adding a specified number of points for minority admissions, or automatically admitting a certain percentage of students from each high school in the state.

Without a clear definition of Affirmative Action, any argument concerning its place in determining college admissions would be very weak.

Category and Distinguishing Characteristics One way to define a topic is by telling what it is (its *category*) and listing the elements that make it different from other members of its category (its *distinguishing characteristics*). For example, you might define a hammer this way:

A hammer is a hand tool. It consists of a head commonly made of metal and a handle commonly made of wood or heavy fiberglass. It's used for striking.

The first sentence of the definition places hammers into the category of hand tools, along with other items such as wrenches, saws, and pliers. The second and third sentences list characteristics that distinguish hammers from other hand tools: the composition of their components and their usage.

Another example of this type of definition follows:

A guitar is a musical instrument with a large sound box and (usually six) strings. It can be played by strumming or plucking.

Into what category does this definition place guitars? What distinguishing characteristics differentiate guitars from other musical instruments?

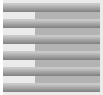
Of course, most definitions common in argumentative writing are more complex than these. Thomas Nagel, in "A Defense of Affirmative Action" (see p. 70), uses both category and distinguishing characteristics in the definition that appears early in his article:

The term *affirmative action* has changed in meaning since it was first introduced. Originally it referred to only special efforts to ensure equal opportunity for members of groups that had been subject to discrimination. These efforts included public advertisement of positions to be filled, active recruitment of qualified applicants from the formerly excluded groups, and special training programs to help them meet the standards for admission or appointment. There was also close attention to procedures of appointment, and sometimes to the results, with a view to detecting continued discrimination, conscious or unconscious.

More recently the term has come to refer also to some degree of definite preference for members of these groups in determining access to positions from which they were formerly excluded. Such preference might be allowed to influence decision only between candidates who are otherwise equally qualified, but usually it involves the selection of women or minority members over other candidates who are better qualified for the position.

Let me call the first sort of policy "weak affirmative action" and the second "strong affirmative action." It is important to distinguish between them, because the distinction is sometimes blurred in practice. It is strong affirmative action—the policy of preference—that arouses controversy. Most people would agree that weak or precautionary affirmative action is a good thing, and worth its cost in time and energy. But this does not imply that strong affirmative action is also justified.

Nagel presents two definitions of Affirmative Action, an earlier one and a more recent one, before extending the definition further by separating the definitions and renaming each. He *stipulates* that, for the purposes of his discussion in this article, he will define the earlier Affirmative Action policy as “strong affirmative action” and the later policy as “weak affirmative action.” When you present your own definition of a word or term or specify which already-existing definition you are using, you create a *stipulative definition*.



TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-a

Writing Definitions

Write a one-sentence definition for each of the following words or terms, using the following pattern: *A(n) _____ is a(n) _____ that _____.* (Ex.: *A computer is a machine that processes large amounts of coded data.*)

tsunami

catalytic converter

DVD player

college degree

wrench

patriot

geek

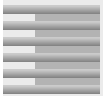
success

tuba

Relationships

Arguments based on relationships look at the connections or presumed connections between two events, situations, or qualities. Being able to discern relationships is central to acquiring knowledge.

Similarity and Difference Comparing similarities and differences is an analytic method that develops very early in the minds of children. A very young child



TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-b

More Definitions

Write one-sentence definitions for five words used regularly in your major field of study, the career field you plan to enter, or a sport, hobby, or interest you pursue.

might learn the word “doggie” in reference to the family’s beagle. Then, on encountering a neighbor’s cat for the first time, the child, seeing the similarity between the two animals, might call the cat “doggie.” Once the parents explain, probably in words something like, “No, this is a *kitty*. See how different her fur is? Listen to how she purrs,” the child learns that despite the similarities between a cat and a dog, there are enough differences to distinguish them as separate animals. (What would the likely outcome be when the child encounters another neighbor’s ferret?)

Because looking for similarities and differences is a natural cognitive function, particularly when encountering something new, you can use these elements of comparison to help readers see an argument in a new light. For example, if you argue that Affirmative Action is the same as other preferences commonly used in college admissions, such as athletic scholarships, legacies (preference for the children of alumni), or grants for students with particular skills, such as music or theater, you’re using similarity. Another argument of similarity would be to compare the “unfairness” of Affirmative Action to the “unfairness” of other legal decisions such as military conscription (the draft), arguing that if military conscription, while unfair to individuals, has been accepted because it promotes the good of society, then the same can be said for Affirmative Action.

On the other hand, you can also make a good argument by focusing on the ways in which two things differ. For example, you might contrast Affirmative Action policies on a particular campus with quotas, which are clearly against the law. In this case, you would argue that awarding points to minority applicants (a common Affirmative Action policy) differs significantly from assigning a certain percentage of positions to minority students. By explaining the difference, you would counter/refute the argument that Affirmative Action establishes quotas.

Degree The relationship of degree focuses on *more* or *less* rather than on similarity or difference. An understanding of degree develops quite early in childhood as well; children learn the meanings of such terms as “taller” or “shorter” while very young. In argument, degree is often used in determinations of “better” (more to the good) or “worse” (less to the good). The argument that Affirmative Action provides an atmosphere that familiarizes students with diversity, thus benefiting society, is an example of argument of degree, since its basis is that a society that embraces diversity is better than a society that does not.

Another argument based on degree would be that the University of Michigan admissions policy, which added 20 points to the applications of minority students, provided too great a preference for minorities. This argument might then conclude that *less* preference would be acceptable.

You have probably seen arguments of degree frequently in advertising. Companies whose products are leading sellers often trumpet that fact, implying that if more people use Brand A than Brand B, Brand A must be superior. If you argued that

Affirmative Action must be a good policy because so many universities and colleges use it, you would be using argument of degree.

Cause and Effect Mark Twain once said that if a cat jumps on a hot stove, it will never jump on a hot stove again—but it will never jump on a cold stove, either. This statement shows both the power and the danger of the cause-and-effect argument.

A cause-and-effect argument makes the case that doing one thing will cause another thing to happen. The concept of cause and effect, like the concepts of similarity and difference or more and less, develops very early in childhood. Even babies can learn, remarkably quickly, what specific cries or behaviors will elicit the reactions they wish from their parents.

But cause and effect often leads to misunderstanding, particularly in regards to stereotyping. The child who reaches out to pet a dog and is bitten may fear all dogs for a very long time after the event. Often not even the parents' careful explanations about the warning signals dogs give or about the trustworthiness of particular dogs are enough to overcome the child's fear that the previous action (petting a dog) will lead to the same unwanted effect (getting bitten).

To use cause and effect in developing an argument, you need to prove that the cause actually produced the effect. Because one event precedes another does not mean that the first event caused the second—*post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacies are based solely on chronology, on the fact that one event preceded another, with no actual proof of cause (see pp. 214–215). For example, the statement, “Of course it's raining—I just washed my car” implies that washing the car led to the arrival of the rain, a logical impossibility.

LOOKING CRITICALLY: THE *POST HOC* FALLACY Consider this argument and, with a classmate or group, see how many reasons you can find for the argument not holding up:

1. This company never had a woman CEO in its 120 years of existence.
2. Two years ago, the company hired a woman as the new CEO.
3. The company's stock value has dropped to its lowest level in history.
4. Clearly, women CEOs can't run companies like this one.

It will help your analysis if you make the company a specific kind: a manufacturer, a retailer, a publisher, or anything else. Then factor in the variables that are unique to this kind of firm.

The argument that diversity on college campuses promotes the development of a black middle class by providing more diversity in the workplace is a cause-and-effect argument in favor of Affirmative Action; the argument that Affirmative Action leads to fewer career opportunities for white students and to the emergence of less-qualified people in various professions is a cause-and-effect argument against it.

If/Then Arguments A complete definition of the *syllogism* appears in Chapter 8, on deductive arguments. The if/then argument is a form of syllogistic thinking that states *if* something is true, *then* something else must be true. For example, *if* you know that all professors at your school’s main campus have doctorates, *then* you know that your math professor must have a doctorate, as illustrated in the following syllogism:

Major Premise: All professors at this campus have doctorates.
 minor premise: My math professor teaches at this campus.
 Conclusion: My math professor has a doctorate.

Similarly, *if* you know that all Snickers candy bars are “packed with peanuts,” *then* you know that the Snickers bar you just picked up at the local convenience store will contain plenty of peanuts.

An argument in favor of Affirmative Action based on the if/then argument might be that *if* colleges and universities have the right to determine the qualifications necessary for admission, *then* they have the right to include Affirmative Action as one of those qualifications.

If/then arguments can also be used with opposites, based on the thinking that if something is good, then its opposite must be bad; for example, *if* health is good, *then* illness must be bad, or *if* wealth is good, *then* poverty must be bad. Of course, in making an argument based on opposites, both the writer and the reader must agree on the benefits and liabilities of the two qualities being compared, as well as on how the particular situation fits those qualities.

You could use this type of if/then argument to either support or oppose Affirmative Action, based on the statement, “*If* equal opportunity is good, *then* unequal opportunity is bad.” Affirmative Action could be portrayed as supporting inequality by being unfair to white students, or as supporting equality by helping to lessen inequality between white and minority students. Another example of an if/then argument that supports Affirmative Action would be the following:

Affirmative Action in determining college admissions is often seen as being unfair to white applicants. If American society were an equal playing field, this would be true. But this is not the case. A smaller percentage of minorities graduate from college than whites, and minorities, on average, make less money than whites. Because of the inequities in our social system, Affirmative Action in determining college admissions is still necessary.

Feasibility

Often, the argument is made that, although a certain policy or action might be beneficial, it’s just not feasible or possible. For example, an individual opposing a tax increase that would pay for a new high school might argue that although the benefits of a new school are obvious, taxpayers simply can’t afford to pay higher taxes while the local economy is in a slump. On a much larger scale, you could argue that equality

for all is an ideal that unfortunately can never be realized: no society has been able to attain absolute equality for all its citizens.

One way to argue feasibility is by showing that a challenge more difficult than the one currently proposed has already been accomplished: if it's possible to accomplish a more difficult challenge, a less difficult one can surely be accomplished as well. This type of argument is commonly seen in such expressions as "If we can send a man into space, we can . . ." Any appropriate challenge can complete the statement (i.e., ". . . invent automobiles more favorable to the environment" or ". . . end poverty in our cities").

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one argument against the abolition of slavery was that blacks would never be able to succeed in white culture: their experiences as slaves would make them unable to compete economically. A supporter of Affirmative Action could use feasibility in arguing that since blacks have, over time, been able to approach economic equity with whites, establishing Affirmative Action policies in college admissions would make it possible for them to take the final, more possible step of achieving complete equity.

Example Another argument based on feasibility is the example; after all, if something has happened once, it's possible for it to happen again. Aristotle focused on legal precedents (as are cited in courtrooms) as examples, while other rhetoricians have used hypothetical situations (i.e., New Testament parables). But one of the most commonly used strategies is the personal example; in addition to providing feasibility to an argument, a personal example can contribute to making an argument compelling in other important ways.

We've all heard personal examples throughout our lives, from stories our parents told us about their experiences as children (perhaps hoping that we would learn from their mistakes) to interviews of accident survivors on news programs. Although the telling of one person's story is certainly not representative of all experience, when you present a personal example you put a "face" on an argument, appealing to its *pathetic*, or emotional, component.

A personal example can comprise an entire argument. (Chapter 9 contains some exceptionally effective arguments composed almost entirely of personal examples: i.e., Langston Hughes' "Salvation" and Ron Kovic's *On Patrol*.) But short examples of as little as two or three sentences can also be used to develop arguments within essays. Stephen L. Carter, in his article supporting Affirmative Action, "Racial Preferences? So What?" (p. 87), uses personal example several times to illustrate his point, beginning in his introduction with an example from his own life:

I got into law school because I am black.

As many black professionals think they must, I have long suppressed this truth, insisting instead that I got where I am the same way everybody else did. Today I am a professor at the Yale Law School. I like to think that I am a good one, but I am hardly the most objective judge. What I am fairly sure of, and can now say without trepidation, is that were my skin not the color that it is, I would not have had the chance to try.

Later in the essay, Carter uses an example of a woman interviewing for a prospective internship with a large law firm:

The immediate source of Baker & McKenzie's problems was a racially charged interview that a partner in the firm had conducted the previous fall with a black third-year student at the school. The interviewer evidently suggested that other lawyers might call her "nigger" or "black bitch" and wanted to know how she felt about that. Perhaps out of surprise that she played golf, he observed that "there aren't too many golf courses in the ghetto." He also suggested that the school was admitting "foreigners" and excluding "qualified" Americans.

Carter includes an extended narrative about his college graduation as a personal example toward the end of his essay:

The incident I have in mind occurred during the fall of 1978, my third year in law school, a few months after the Supreme Court's decision in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, which placed what seemed to many of us unnecessarily severe restrictions on the operation of racially conscious admission programs. The air was thick with swirling critiques of racial preferences, most of the couched in the language of merit versus qualification. Everywhere we turned, someone seemed to be pointing at us and saying, "You don't belong here." We looked around and saw an academic world that seemed to be doing its best to get rid of us.

So we struck back. We called the critics racist. We tried to paint the question of our qualifications as a racist one. And one evening, when the Yale Political Union, a student organization, had scheduled a debate on the matter (the title, as I recall, was "The Future of Affirmative Action"), we demonstrated. All of us.

Our unanimity was astonishing. Then as now, the black students at law school were divided, politically, socially, and in dozens of other ways. But on this issue, we were suddenly united. We picketed the Political Union meeting, roaring our slogan ("*We are not debatable! We are not debatable!*") in tones of righteous outrage. We made so much noise that at last they threw wide the doors and invited us in. In exchange for our promise to end the demonstration so that the debate could be conducted, we were offered, and we accepted, the chance to have one of our number address the assembly. That task, for some reason, fell to me.

I remember my rising excitement as I stood before the audience of immaculately attired undergraduates, many of them still in their teens. There was something sweet and naïve and appealing about the Political Union members as they sat nervously but politely in their tidy rows, secure (or, perhaps, momentarily insecure) in their faith that a commitment to openness and debate would lead to moral truth. But I set my face against the smile that was twitching there, and tried to work up in its stead a glower sufficient to convey the image of the retributive fury of the radical black left. (Having missed those days in college, I thought perhaps to rekindle them briefly.) And while some of the kids seemed annoyed at the intrusion, others looked frightened, even intimidated, which I suppose was our goal. I spoke briefly, pointing out that it was easy for white people to call for color-blind admissions when they understood perfectly well that none of the costs would fall on them. I carefully avoided the word *racism*, but I let the implication hang in the air anyway, lest I be misunderstood.

And then we marched out again, triumphantly, clapping and chanting rhythmically as though in solemn reminder that should the Political Union folks get up to any more nonsense, we might return and drown them out again. (A few of the undergraduates and one of the speakers joined us in our clapping.) We were, for a shining moment, in our glory; the reporters were there, tapes rolling, cameras clicking; in our minds, we had turned back the calendar by a decade and the campuses were in flames (or at least awash with megaphones and boycotts and banners and an administration ready to compromise); the school would meet us with a promise of justice or we would tear it down!

Then all at once it was over. We dispersed, returning to our dormitory rooms and apartments, our law review and moot court activities, our long nights in the library to prepare for class and our freshly cleaned suits for job interviews, our political differences and our social cliques. We returned to the humdrum interests of law school life, and suddenly we were just like everybody else again. Absolutely nothing had changed. *Bakke* was still the law of the land. There was no magic, the campus was not in flames, and there had never been a shining moment. There was only the uneasy tension of our dual existence. The peculiar uncertainty provoked by affirmative action was still with us, and our outrage at being reminded of its reality was undiminished. And as for the eager young minds of the Political Union, I suppose they held their debate and I suppose somebody won.

Carter's use of examples—from his own and another's experiences—illustrates the points he's making about Affirmative Action in a way that straightforward argumentative prose cannot. While a good example doesn't actually *prove* anything (even many random examples that point to the same conclusion aren't actually proof), presenting a compelling example is often the best way to help someone see a situation from your perspective.

Finding Argument Strategies

You've probably encountered the strategies described here many times already in your reading and in discussions with others, without actually recognizing them as a class. In "Farewell to Fitness," Mike Royko uses a number of the argument strategies discussed in this chapter to illustrate the point he wishes to make about Americans' quest for physical fitness.

Farewell to Fitness

Mike Royko

At least once a week, the office jock will stop me in the hall, bounce on the balls of his feet, plant his hands on his hips, flex his pectoral muscles and say: "How about it? I'll reserve a

Personal
Example

Mike Royko, "Farewell to Fitness," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 11, 1980. © 1980 The Chicago Sun-Times, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reproduced with permission. Further reproduction is prohibited.

racquetball court. You can start working off some of that. . . .”
 And he’ll jab a finger deep into my midsection.

It’s been going on for months, but I’ve always had an excuse: “Next week, I’ve got a cold.” “Next week, my back is sore.” “Next week, I’ve got a pulled hamstring.” “Next week, after the holidays.”

But this is it. No more excuses. I made one New Year’s resolution, which is that I will tell him the truth. And the truth is that I don’t want to play racquetball or handball or tennis, or jog, or pump Nautilus machines, or do push-ups or sit-ups or isometrics, or ride a stationary bicycle, or pull on a rowing machine, or hit a softball, or run up a flight of steps, or engage in any other form of exercise more strenuous than rolling out of bed.

This may be unpatriotic, and it is surely out of step with our muscle-flexing times, but I am renouncing the physical-fitness craze.

5 Oh, I was part of it. Maybe not as fanatically as some. But about 15 years ago, when I was 32, someone talked me into taking up handball, the most punishing court game there is.

From then on it was four or five times a week—up at 6 a.m., on the handball court at 7, run, grunt, sweat, pant until 8:30, then in the office at 9. And I’d go around bouncing on the balls of my feet, flexing my pectoral muscles, poking friends in their soft guts, saying: “How about working some of that off? I’ll reserve a court,” and being obnoxious.

This went on for years. And for what? I’ll tell you what it led to: I stopped eating pork shanks, that’s what. It was inevitable. When you join the physical-fitness craze, you have to stop eating wonderful things like pork shanks because they are full of cholesterol. And you have to give up eggs benedict, smoked liverwurst, Italian sausage, butter-pecan ice cream, Polish sausage, goose-liver paté, Sara Lee cheesecake, Twinkies, potato chips, salami-and-Swiss-cheese sandwiches, double cheeseburgers with fries, Christian Brothers brandy with a Beck’s chaser, and everything else that tastes good.

Instead, I ate broiled skinless chicken, broiled whitefish, grapefruit, steamed broccoli, steamed spinach, unbuttered toast, yogurt, eggplant, an apple for dessert and Perrier water to wash it down. Blahhhhh!

You do this for years, and what is your reward for panting and sweating around a handball-racquetball court, and eating yogurt and the skinned flesh of a dead chicken?

10 —You can take your pulse and find that it is slow. So what? Am I a clock?

Personal Example

Personal Example

Cause and Effect

Similarity and Difference

If/Then

—You buy pants with a narrower waistline. Big deal. The pants don't cost less than the ones with a big waistline.

—You get to admire yourself in the bathroom mirror for about 10 seconds a day after taking a shower. It takes five seconds to look at your flat stomach from the front, and five more seconds to look at your flat stomach from the side. If you're a real creep or a narcissist, you can add another 10 seconds for looking at your small behind with a mirror.

That's it.

Wait, I forgot something. You will live longer. I know that because my doctor told me so every time I took a physical. My fitness-conscious doctor was very slender—especially the last time I saw him, which was at his wake.

15 But I still believe him. Running around a handball court or jogging five miles a day, eating yogurt and guzzling Perrier will make you live longer.

So you live longer. Have you been in a typical nursing home lately? Have you walked around the low-rent neighborhoods where the geezers try to survive on Social Security?

If you think living longer is rough now, wait until the 1990s, when today's Me Generation potheads and coke sniffers begin taking care of the elderly (today's middle-aged joggers). It'll be: "Just take this little happy pill, gramps, and you'll wake up in heaven."

It's not worth giving up pork shanks and Sara Lee cheese-cake.

Nor is it the way to age gracefully. Look around at all those middle-aged jogging chicken-eaters. Half of them tape hair-pieces to their heads. That's what comes from having a flat stomach. You start thinking that you should also have hair. And after that comes a facelift. And that leads to jumping around a disco floor, pinching an airline stewardess and other bizarre behavior.

20 I prefer to age gracefully, the way men did when I was a boy. The only time a man over 40 ran was when the cops caught him burglarizing a warehouse. The idea of exercise was to walk to and from the corner tavern, mostly to. A well-rounded health-food diet included pork shanks, dumplings, Jim Beam and a beer chaser.

Anyone who was skinny was suspected of having TB or an ulcer. A fine figure of a man was one who could look down and not see his knees, his feet or anything else in that vicinity. What do you have to look for, anyway? You ought to know if anything is missing.

If/Then

Cause and Effect

If/Then

If/Then

Similarity and Difference

A few years ago I was in Bavaria, and I went to a German beer hall. It was a beautiful sight. Everybody was popping sausages and pork shanks and draining quart-sized steins of thick beer. Every so often they'd thump their magnificent bellies and smile happily at the booming sound that they made.

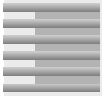
Personal
Example

Compare that to the finish line of a marathon, with all those emaciated runners sprawled on the grass, tongues hanging out, wheezing, moaning, writhing, throwing up.

Similarity
and
Difference

If that is the way to happiness and a long life, pass me the cheesecake.

- 25 May you get a hernia, Arnold Schwarzenegger. And here's to you, Orson Welles.



TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-c

Topoi at Work

Roger Rosenblatt uses many argument strategies in his mediated argument “Ending the Abortion War” (pp. 179–185). Identify the strategies he is using in the following passages:

- a. “She, for her part, paced up and down directly in front of him, saying nothing. Instead, she held high a large cardboard sign on a stick, showing the cartoonish drawing of a bloody coat hanger over the caption, ‘Never again.’ Like his, her face was taut with fury, her lips pressed together so tightly they folded under and vanished.”
- b. “In the 4,000-year-old history extending from the Greeks and Romans through the Middle Ages and into the present, every civilization has taken abortion with utmost seriousness. Yet ours seems to be the only civilization to have engaged in an emotional and intellectual civil war over the issue.”
- c. “Officially, America is an a-religious country; the separation of church and state is so rooted in the democracy it has become a cliché. Yet that same separation has created and intensified a hidden national feeling about faith and God, a sort of secret, undercurrent religion, which, perhaps because of its subterranean nature, is often more deeply felt and volatile than that of countries with official or state religions.”

 **TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-d****Finding the *Topoi***

Choose an article from Section 4: “Rhetoric Today: Contemporary Issues,” and determine which argument strategies the author used to develop his or her argument. In a short essay (500–750 words), discuss the author’s use of strategies, focusing particularly on whether or not the strategies used clarified the argument and made it more persuasive.

 **TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-e****Using the *Topoi***

Using the topic you’re currently writing about or one you’ve written about before, select three argument strategies already presented in this chapter (similarity/difference; degree; cause and effect; if/then; feasibility; example) that could reasonably be used to develop that argument. Write three extended paragraphs for that topic, using a different strategy in each paragraph.

Assumptions: Identifying the Ideas that Underlie Arguments

Assumptions can be defined as statements made without any evidence provided, but that are presumed to be true. Assumptions can further be understood as ideas and beliefs that lie beneath the surface of the argument. Assumptions are subtle persuaders—you might not recognize them in the arguments you hear, or even in the arguments you make.

 **Defining Rhetoric**

Assumption: a statement in an argument that is accepted as truth, without any proof or evidence having been given.

Assumptions are called *explicit* when they're actually stated, and *tacit* or *implicit* when they're only implied. A good example of explicit assumption can be found in the Declaration of Independence (see Chapter 8):

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness . . .

While Jefferson referred to self-evident truths, he was really listing assumptions, beliefs that he chose to present as truths. Many in Jefferson's time didn't believe that all were created equal; certainly King George of England held himself above his subjects. And with the institution of slavery firmly entrenched in many of the colonies (Jefferson himself held slaves), liberty for all was not seen as an unalienable right. Calling these assumptions self-evident truths was a good introduction to the radical and revolutionary ideas Jefferson would be presenting in his declaration.

But many assumptions are only implied. How many assumptions can you find in the following sentence?

The Department of Children and Family Services needs to be much more effective in removing children from homes where they are being abused and neglected and placing them in foster care.

To accept the validity of the sentence, you need to accept as true a number of assumptions that are implied, but not proved or validated, within the sentence. The most obvious one may be that the Department of Children and Family Services is *not* being effective in its job of removing children from homes where they're being abused and neglected, and that they're capable of becoming *more effective* in doing so. But other assumptions are inherent in what may seem to be a straightforward statement.

The sentence assumes that at least some children are currently living in homes where they are being abused or neglected. It also implies that the terms "abuse" and "neglect" can be defined in ways that are accepted as standard, and that the Department of Children and Family Services is able to clearly identify and determine what constitutes abuse and neglect of children. But many different cultures, religions, and individual families would argue that what one person sees as abuse is in fact discipline, or what another sees as neglect is actually acceptable behavior within the bounds of good parenting.

Other assumptions inherent in the statement include the following:

- the Department of Children and Family Services has the right and duty to intervene when it believes that children are not being properly cared for.
- children should be removed from homes in which it is believed that they are not being properly cared for.

- foster homes are a better environment for children who have been abused or neglected in their own homes.
- good foster homes are available for all the children who need them.

All four of these assumptions have been challenged in court cases brought by individuals and groups who believe that family beliefs and values should take precedence over government regulations when the issue at stake is individual family autonomy. What at first may seem to be a clear, straightforward statement is, in fact, made up of many assumptions that may not be held by all, or even a majority, of those reading the sentence.

Assumptions Underlying the Abortion Controversy

One of the most hotly contested issues of our time is abortion, with those who favor a woman's right to abortion calling themselves "pro-choice" and those who oppose all or most abortions calling themselves "pro-life." These terms call up assumptions that are very misleading in themselves. Those who favor abortion would never see themselves as the enemies of life, and those who oppose abortion don't see themselves as opposed to women making choices.

But different assumptions about life and its beginnings lie at the base of the serious differences between the pro-life and pro-choice movements. To most of those who would call themselves pro-life, human life—with all the rights and protections that come with being human—begins at the moment when egg and sperm connect. Aborting a fetus even one day after conception is equal to murder to many dedicated pro-lifers, and it's as serious a crime as killing a child who's already several years old. In contrast, most whose position on abortion is pro-choice argue that human life doesn't actually exist until the fetus is capable of living on its own. Until then, the pro-choice side argues, pregnant women have the right to choose to terminate the pregnancy. (As medical advancements make life possible for babies born more and more prematurely, adjustments will likely have to be made to this argument.)

The pro-life movement will never be persuaded by arguments about the rights of women: they see the fetus as a child and argue that the right of a child to life takes precedence over the right of a woman to decide whether or not to become a mother. Similarly, pro-choice adherents feel that banning abortion places a hardship on women who are forced to become mothers before they are emotionally or financially able to take on such a burden. Because they don't see the unviable fetus as a child, this hardship is seen as unfair and discriminatory.

Tacit assumptions can be used to cloud the issues in an argument. As a careful reader, you need to be aware of the rhetorical impact of tacit assumptions, and look for these assumptions in the arguments you read. As a careful writer, you should use assumptions judiciously and consciously, always being aware of whether what you're writing is factual or assumed.



TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-f

Finding Assumptions

Find any assumptions that underlie the following statements:

- a. Because Saddam Hussein had the capability and intent to produce weapons of mass destruction, removing him from power in Iraq was necessary for the security of the United States.
- b. Prosecuting those who download music from the internet will lead to less illegal sharing of music.
- c. People who neglect or abuse animals should be prosecuted to the same extent as those who neglect or abuse children.
- d. Reinstating prayer in school will help curtail the discipline problems plaguing our schools.
- e. Standardized testing in elementary and high schools is an effective way to promote student learning.

Logical Fallacy: Learning How *Not* to Argue

Catherine Zeta-Jones sells cell phone contracts, although she has no particular expertise in telecommunications. Howie Long has been a long-term spokesperson for Radio Shack, despite having no academic credentials or other expertise in the field of electronics. Both are successful not because of any specialized knowledge of the products they represent, but because they're attractive, well-known celebrities.

In political campaigns, advertising often focuses more on candidates' personal lives than on their voting records. Negative ads regularly quote candidates out of context or offer intentionally misleading interpretations of their backgrounds or positions. This leaves voters with slanted views of candidates, making it difficult for them to assess the relative merits of those running for office.

Our discussion of argument so far has focused on *how* to reason well; the logical fallacies, on the other hand, give us some guidelines for how *not* to reason. While **logical fallacy**, or false reasoning, is commonly seen in written (opinion pages in newspapers), spoken (political speeches), and visual (advertising copy) arguments, its effectiveness is diluted when directed toward a person (like your writing instructor) who has studied and understands logical fallacy. Although logical fallacy is commonly used to divert attention from the real, substantial points of an argument, using fallacies is unfair and can detract from the real merits of your work. Once a discerning

reader discovers fallacy, he or she is likely to dismiss or distrust the remainder of your argument.

Defining Rhetoric

Logical fallacy: flawed reasoning based on such mistakes as oversimplification or unfair comparison.

Though rhetoricians don't agree on the number of fallacies, and it's probably not important that you remember them by name, the following list is provided to make you aware of the kinds of arguments that are considered fallacious.

1. *Hasty generalization* is a general term for a pattern of careless thinking that masquerades as thoughtful reasoning. In hasty generalization, assumptions are based on insufficient evidence or on evidence that isn't really representative of the majority of cases. Stereotypes are examples of hasty generalization.
 - Example: We'd better watch that man wearing the turban. He could be a terrorist.
 - Example: Football linemen are athletic but not intelligent.

Hasty generalization can result when one member of a set is judged by the general characteristics of the set, or when a set is judged by one of its members.

- Example: I read in *Newsweek* that doctors' average salaries are pretty high. My neighbor, Dr. Smith, must be really rich.
- Example: Dr. Smith is one of the wealthiest men in town, so Dr. Mandrel must be wealthy too.

The *either/or* fallacy is a type of hasty generalization in which the number of choices a reader has on a given argument is oversimplified.

- Example: If you don't support our party's policies, you are a traitor.
- Example: America: Love It or Leave It.

The second example illustrates what's commonly called "Bumper Sticker Logic," in which an extremely complicated issue (the responsibilities of a patriotic citizen) is minimized to a statement small enough to fit on a bumper sticker. In all forms of hasty generalization, complex issues are treated in an oversimplified manner that does not recognize the complexity that causes them to be argumentative.

2. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* (in Latin, "after this, therefore because of this") fallacies are commonly seen in cause and effect arguments. As you saw earlier with the female CEO example, in a post hoc fallacy, an effect is attributed to a cause solely because one event precedes the other.
 - Example: I told you the seers were right. Didn't the volcano stop erupting last week after we tossed in those virgins?
 - Example: I didn't study for my chemistry test last week and still did well. No sense studying for next week's test.

3. *Non sequitur*, which translates as “It does not follow” in Latin, occurs when no logical relationship exists between two or more ideas that are represented as being related.
 - Example: Although it has been demonstrated that inner city clinics need better facilities, I will not support appropriations for improving their facilities as long as doctors charge such exorbitant fees.

Although both parts of the above statement relate to medical costs, doctors’ fees are not used to improve clinic facilities. The argument does not follow.
4. An *argument to the person* (also called *argument ad hominem*), avoids an issue by focusing on irrelevant positive or negative references to an individual supporting or opposing a particular position.
 - Example: Madonna is way too old to wear those jeans. I’m not buying anything from a company that’s so clueless about basic fashion sense.
 - Example: How can we trust Senator Merriweather’s work on economics when we know he’s been cheating on his wife for years?
 - Example: How can this person be the Commander in Chief of our armed forces? He experimented with marijuana in college and avoided military service.
5. In *argument to the people* (also called *argument ad populum*), a writer or speaker arouses emotion in an audience by an appealing to their biases, whether those biases are for or against the topic.
 - Example: Although Medicare is an important program for the elderly and the infirm, increasing Medicare eligibility is nothing more than a liberal plan to promote big government.
 - Example: Curtailing freedom of speech may be necessary to maintain our national security.

In these examples, emotion-laden buzzwords (“liberal,” “security”) are used to evoke a response in readers.
6. *Begging the question* occurs when the persuader assumes the validity of an unproven premise: that is, when an assumption is taken as a fact. It can be signaled by introductory statements like “Everybody knows . . .” or “History tells us . . .”
 - Example: Because the death penalty deters murderers, it should be the mandatory sentence for all convicted killers.

Unless it’s been proven that the death penalty does in fact deter murderers (which is a highly contested argument in itself), the example *begs the question*.
7. An *appeal to ignorance* is based on the assumption that something is true if it hasn’t been proven false.
 - Example: UFOs must be alien spacecraft, because scientists have not proven that they aren’t.

Sometimes it’s difficult to see where valid use of the *topoi* ends and fallacies begin. For example, at what point does presenting yourself or another person as

a reliable supporter of an issue become argument to the person? At what point does the use of a relevant case study become a hasty generalization? How much proof is necessary to distinguish a valid cause-and-effect relationship from a post hoc fallacy?

The only way to judge the validity of an argument is to look at the whole argument: does the writer produce compelling evidence or rely solely on developing ethos? Does the writer use only generalization, or back up the argument with specific evidence? Does the writer support claims of cause with logical explanation? Valid arguments will stand on their own merits, without resorting to trickery or diversion, while weak ones will divert reader attention by resorting to fallacies—intentionally or not.



TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-g

Identifying and Understanding Fallacies

Write five sentences that you believe to be fallacious, using several of the logical fallacies described above. Switch papers with a classmate: see if he or she can identify the fallacy illustrated in each of your sentences.

Introductions: Creating Audience Interest

How would you evaluate the following paragraph as the introduction to an argument?

In today's complex world, Affirmative Action is a very controversial issue. Many argue strongly in favor of Affirmative Action, citing study results and other evidence to support their position, while many others are equally opposed to Affirmative Action and support their beliefs with similarly extensive evidence. This paper looks at the arguments for and against Affirmative Action with the goal of reaching some understanding of the complexities of this very controversial issue.

Is the paragraph direct and to the point? Without a doubt. Does it state the topic and give some idea of the arrangement of the paper that is to follow? Definitely. But now the big question: Would you really *want* to read the paper?

While the paragraph does follow two of the goals of an introduction—to identify (literally, *introduce*) the topic and give some idea of the content and arrangement of the paper that will follow—it doesn't reach the crucial goal of interesting readers

enough to encourage them to continue reading. In the real world of writing, an audience won't continue reading something that doesn't generate interest (unless, of course, they're required to read it).

The above introduction fails because it's generic and formulaic. If you substitute the words "Affirmative Action" with "animal rights," "gun control," "cloning," or any other argumentative topic, the paragraph becomes equally meaningful—and equally generic. The introduction might *address* the topic, but it doesn't *introduce* readers to the paper's purpose, scope, and depth. In fact, because the "intro" is so shallow, most readers will rightfully guess that the paper that follows is shallow, too.

There are, however, many ways you can avoid writing generic introductions. The following student examples illustrate just a few.

As church bells rang joyfully, the young couple, holding hands, stepped out of the chapel into a beautiful, sunny day. They raised their hands to their eyes, partly to block the sun's strong rays, partly to fend off the handfuls of rice being flung their way by their cheering friends. Dashing toward a white limousine bedecked with paper carnations and a sign saying "Just Married," they smiled and waved before making their escape. It was a beautiful sight, but should this day be happening for Judy and Jennifer? Should the law permit this gay couple to marry?

This introduction illustrates a common, and often effective, way to begin an argumentative paper—with a *narrative* that leads the reader into the topic. But, in addition, the last two sentences offer a twist that makes readers realize that the subject of the paper won't be what they expected. This introduction states the topic and gives some idea of the direction the paper will take without being generic.

Another way to begin a paper with a narrative is by portraying a hypothetical outcome to a current problem:

Early on the morning of October 15, 2072, Susie Simmons dragged herself out of bed and sleepily headed downstairs for breakfast. She quickly ingested the energy bar her mother handed her while going over notes for the test on the history of the space colony on Mars that she would be taking first period. Mrs. Simmons reminded Susie that she had only two minutes before the airbus would arrive at their door—she needed to spend that time getting into her solar protection suit and oxygen mask. Susie groaned. She hated her solar protection suit—not only was it last year's model, but she thought it made her look fat.

The next introduction uses questions to interest a reader in the topic:

Do you like to spend a warm summer afternoon in the shade? Are you fond of birds and squirrels? Do you love the smell of pine needles? Does the sight of a 200-year-old oak fill you with wonder? Most of all, do you like to breathe? If you answered "yes" to any of the above questions, you will be horribly alarmed by the forestry guidelines recently proposed by the current administration.

Beginning a paper with a set of startling statistics can also be effective.

Five million deaths, 400,000 of them in the United States. Reduction in lifespans averaging 15%. Fifty billion dollars in U.S. health care expenses and 47 billion in lost earnings and productivity. More than 168,000 fires in the U.S. alone. Smokers complain that \$5.00 a pack is too expensive for cigarettes. But the real expense of cigarettes far exceeds their price.

Many successful writers have begun essays and articles with relevant and powerful quotes from other sources:

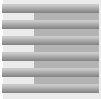
“Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices . . . may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about (Union of Concerned Scientists).” Predictably dire warnings from the Sierra Club or Greenpeace? If only that were true. This warning is the introduction to a paper signed by 1700 scientists, many of whom were Nobel laureates.

These examples comprise only a few of the creative ways to introduce argumentative essays: your options are limited only by your own creativity. One further note about writing your introduction: there is no law stating that an introduction must be written *first*. Many of our students have found to their distress that the introductions they labored over early in their writing process became irrelevant after the paper itself was completed. We encourage you to discover the advantages of waiting until a work has been fully developed, sometimes even completely written, before tackling the job of writing your introduction.

TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-h

Focusing on Introductions

Read the introductions of several of the selections from Section 4, paying particular attention to the introductory techniques the authors used. Write one-paragraph critiques on the effectiveness of the introductory techniques used for three of those selections.



TECHNIQUES FOR WRITERS 5-i

Writing Introductions

For the draft of the paper you're currently writing or for a revision of a paper you wrote earlier, compose three 1-paragraph introductions. Use three of the introductory techniques discussed above, or write your introductions using other techniques that you would consider particularly effective.