

AP<sup>®</sup>  
EDITION

# Language and Composition

The Art of Voice

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# CHAPTER 3

## Argumentation and Synthesis

Traditionally, we think of an argument as a verbal fight. And yes, an argument *can* be a quarrel or a dispute. But it is also a formal debate in which participants express opposing viewpoints on a topic, or a series of reasons for or against a position or an issue. Notice that in all of these examples, the purpose is the same: the speaker or the writer aims to persuade or convince the audience of his or her position.


In their book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson discuss the idea of an argument as “war.” Indeed, if we have a verbal “battle,” we see anyone who does not agree with our point as an opponent or enemy. Then we attack their claims and defend our own. We try to shoot down their weak points. We target their indefensible claims, and then we try to rebut their argument. It is little wonder that our discussions are heated at times.

In this chapter, you’ll learn to think of an argument essay not as a fight but instead as civilized discourse. Like a dance in which you take the lead, you want to *persuade* your reader to follow you. Or, like a lawyer, you build a position and subject your opponent’s position to dissection in an effort to win the case.

An argument asserts an opinion based on evidence. You find arguments everywhere: blogs, editorials, scientific articles, and so on. People can use argument to sift through competing viewpoints to achieve a consensus everyone can live with.

You must learn argument as a mode of thinking, reading, and writing in classroom situations, but you should use it in your civic and social life as well. When you engage in argumentation, you offer reasons to support a position, belief, or conclusion. You also communicate your opinions in ways that are thoughtful, considerate, and interesting.





A typical argument essay makes a point not everyone agrees with and defends it by presenting widely accepted facts or direct personal observations, combined with interpretation in support of the debated point. Closely allied with argumentation is *persuasion*, in which the writer appeals to readers' intelligence, emotions, and beliefs in order to influence them to adopt a position or act in a certain way. Logic and persuasive appeal often combine when a writer tries to convince an audience that his or her position is valid and that other perspectives, while understandable perhaps, require reconsideration.

It is important to distinguish between oral arguments and written ones. Admittedly, both spoken and written arguments have a common purpose in their attempt to convince someone to agree with a particular position, make a certain decision, or take a specific action. In both your oral and written arguments, you will usually invoke reasons and attempt to manipulate language skillfully. However, with an oral argument, you rarely have access to factual evidence needed to support your reasons. Nor will you often have time to organize an oral argument the way you would organize a written one. Oral arguments therefore tend to be more emotional and less organized.

Unlike most oral arguments, effective written arguments can be carefully planned, organized, researched, and revised. You as the writer can consider your likely audience, and anticipate and answer objections to the assertions being made. Moreover, you can also take time to assess the validity of the logic (interpretation of evidence) and other persuasive techniques used. Finally, you have time to choose the appropriate language and style for your argument, exploring rhetorical devices you learned about in Chapters 1 and 2: the use of striking diction, figurative language, rhythmic sentence patterns, and various tones and shades of meaning during the prewriting, drafting, and revision stages.

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CONTEMPORARY ▼



Eddie Adams/AP Images

Horried by the excesses of the Napoleonic invasion of his homeland and the Spanish war for independence, the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya (1746–1828) painted *The Third of May, 1808*, a vivid rendition of an execution during wartime.

Another wartime execution, this time captured on film by Eddie Adams in an image that won the Pulitzer Prize for spot news photography in 1969, brought home to Americans the horrors and ambiguities of the Vietnam War.

# What Is an Argument?

**Using a Critical Perspective** What images and strategies do the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya and the American photographer Eddie Adams employ to construct an argument about war? What exactly is their argument? Comment on the nature and effectiveness of the details they use to illustrate their position. Which work do you find more powerful or engaging? Explain.

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## Analyzing Visuals and Their Rhetoric

1. In the Goya painting, why do you think that the man being executed is illuminated?
2. Is the “enemy” clearly defined in either image? Explain.
3. Thinking about question 2, give several reasons why the persecuted are portrayed as sympathetic figures.
4. What “argument” do the painter and the photographer make about war?



# Elements of Argumentation

Constructing an effective argument depends on the careful arrangement of claims, evidence, and refutation—steps we will cover more thoroughly in the pages that follow. The list below, however, shows at a glance what an argument might include:

- This is what I believe (claim—introductory paragraph).
- This is the *first* reason I believe what I do, plus my supporting evidence (body paragraph).
- This is the *second* reason I believe what I do, plus my supporting evidence (body paragraph).
- These are some things YOU believe, and they are valid points, but here is some information that explains why you are wrong (concession; followed by refutation, rebuttal, and counterargument).
- These are some conclusions that support why I am right (concluding paragraph).

## The Test of Justification

Before you can begin any argument or persuasive essay, you need a controversial topic, or at least an opinion that seems worth defending. Whether a writer can construct an argument or not hinges on the concept of *justification*—the recognition that a subject lends itself to legitimate differences of opinion.

Not all statements require justification. A statement that is a verifiable fact or a commonly accepted assumption or belief—what we term a *warrant*—generally does not need justification. To test the concept of justification, consider the following four statements.

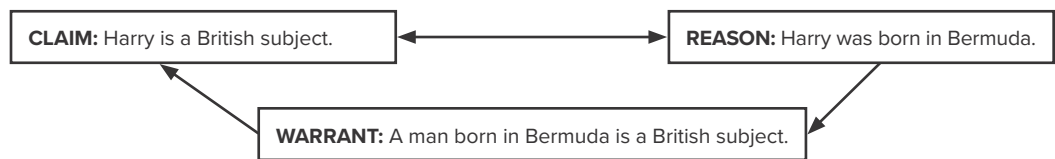
1. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963.
2. Children should not smoke.
3. The death penalty is fair retribution for murderers.
4. Only people between the ages of 18 and 75 should be able to receive a driver's license.

Which of these statements require justification? The first statement about President Kennedy is a verifiable fact, and the second statement strikes any reasonable audience as common sense. Thus, the first two statements do not require justification and consequently could not be the subject of an argument essay. In contrast, the third statement, concerning the death penalty, offers an opinion that would elicit either agreement or disagreement but in either case would demand substantiation. Similarly, the fourth statement, about drivers' licenses, is an issue that is debatable from a variety of positions. Therefore, statements 3 and 4 require justification: They are open to argumentation.

## Understanding Claims and Warrants

A useful approach to argument appears in *An Introduction to Reasoning* and *The Uses of Argument* by British logician and philosopher Stephen Toulmin. In his studies, Toulmin observes that any argument involves a *claim* supported by *reasons/evidence*

(facts, examples, statistics, and expert testimony). Underlying the claims and evidence are warrants. As mentioned on the previous page, *warrants* are commonly accepted assumptions or beliefs, and they lead from reason/evidence to claim. Here is the way Toulmin presents his model:



In truth, Toulmin's example is too simplistic. The claims you wrestle with when reading or writing arguments typically are more complex and controversial than Toulmin's diagram suggests, and the need for extensive evidence is more demanding. Nevertheless, Toulmin's model offers a useful way to understand the fundamental nature of argumentative reasoning.

## Claims

When you formulate an argument in writing, you make a specific claim, which is an assertion you plan to prove. You present this claim, or major proposition, as truth, and you support the claim with a series of logically related statements. Think of a claim as the thesis or main point of the argument that holds all other logically related statements together. The claim is the main idea you set out to prove, and in a well-reasoned argument, everything makes the claim seem inevitable. Any paper you write that fails to state a claim—your position in an argument—will leave readers wondering if you actually have an argument to present.

As mentioned earlier, a claim must be an arguable point, one you can build a carefully reasoned paper around. For example, to say "Turn down that techno music" to your friend is a command but doesn't qualify as a claim, although it could get you involved in a heated conversation. The argument below fails the test of justification because there is no credible evidence and interpretation:



### Fails the Test of Justification

**Claim:** Techno music is awful (so turn it down!)

**Evidence:** I hate it.

**Interpretation:** If I hate something, it must be awful.

**Fallacy:** Weak definition of *awful* as "everything that I happen to hate."

To transform the command into a legitimate claim or an arguable point, you would have to state a proposition that expresses your main idea about techno music. The version of the argument below passes the test of justification:



### Passes the Test of Justification

**Claim:** A considerate friend would not play loud techno music, *unless alone in the apartment.*

(Why? asks the friend.)

**Evidence:** Techno music irritates *some* people because techno is too repetitive and the bass is overpowering, and we're all sharing the same space.

**Interpretation:** Anything shared *should* be kept acceptable to everyone sharing it (like a pizza: if you pick up every piece with your bare hands, nobody else can really feel good about sharing it).

A complex, extended argument essay often reveals several types of claims. A *claim about meaning* (What is techno music?) is a proposition that defines or interprets a subject as it establishes an arguable point. A *claim about value* (Techno music is good or bad) advances an ideally open-minded view of the subject based on a coherent framework of aesthetic or ethical values. A *claim about policy* (Music stations should be forced to limit playing techno music) advances propositions concerning laws, regulations, and initiatives designed to produce specific outcomes. Finally, *claims about consequences* (People who listen to techno music lose appreciation for authentic instruments) are rooted in propositions involving various forms of cause-and-effect relationships. Constructing an argument around one or more of these types of claims is essential to gaining an audience's acceptance.

## Qualifiers

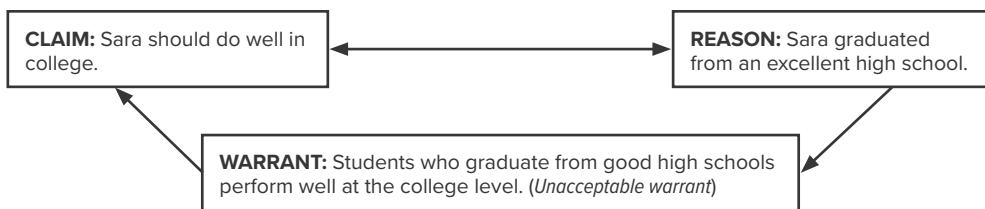
Many claims, of course, cannot be presented as absolute propositions. You as a writer must seek common ground with readers, and foster a degree of trust by anticipating that some members of any audience will disagree with your claim, treat it with skepticism, and perhaps even respond with hostility. For this reason, it is important to *qualify* or clarify the nature of your claim. The words shown in italics in the sample arguments above are qualifiers. A *qualifier* restricts the absolute nature of a claim by using such cue words and phrases as *sometimes*, *probably*, *usually*, and *in most cases*. Qualifiers can also explain certain circumstances or conditions under which the claim might not be true: The friend can play techno as loud as he/she wants if alone, for example. The use of qualifiers enables a writer to anticipate certain reactions and handle them in an effective and subtle way. When you take the AP Exam, you may be asked to “agree, disagree, or qualify” your position regarding an issue, so qualifiers are important.

## Warrants

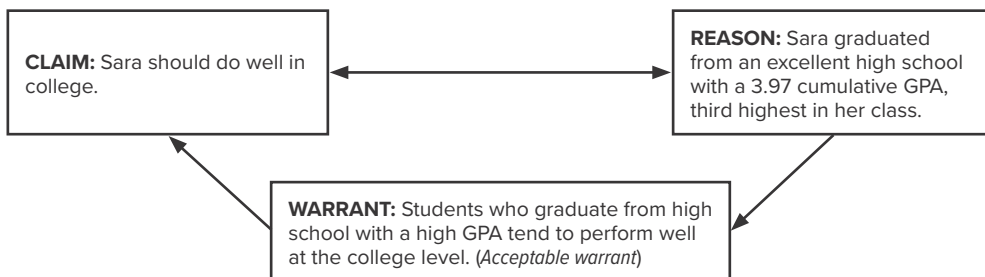
Even more important than the possible need to qualify a claim is the need to justify it. This is done by linking the claim to reasons/evidence in such a way that the audience sees the train of thought leading from the evidence to the claim. If you look again at the model Toulmin provides, you see that the reason “Harry was born in Bermuda” does not completely support the claim “Harry is a British subject.” What is required is a *warrant*—a general belief, principle, or rule—that underscores the claim and the reason/evidence. Thus, the warrant “Since a man born in Bermuda is a British subject” explains *why* the claim follows from the reason/evidence.

Think of warrants as the assumptions that lead writers to hold the opinions they present. From this perspective, we can see that a weak or unclear warrant will undermine an argument and render it invalid. For example, review the claim, reason, and warrant at the top of the next page.





The warrant above is not satisfactory: To state that college success is based solely on the quality of one's high school education is to base the argument on a warrant few readers would find acceptable. Now read the claim supported by the following reason/evidence and new warrant:



We see that the new warrant establishing the link between reason/evidence and claim becomes more acceptable. There is, in fact, a general belief among experts that a person's grade point average (GPA) in high school is a sound predictor—perhaps sounder than SAT scores—of his or her potential for success in college.

If you disagree with a writer's assumptions, you are questioning the warrants underlying the argument. An effective argument should rest on an acceptable warrant.

Even if a warrant, stated or unstated, is clear, understood, and backed with support, however, readers might still disagree with it. For example, one could argue that Sara might have obtained her lofty GPA in high school by taking easy courses, and consequently we cannot readily predict her success in college. Not everyone will accept even the most reasonable of warrants.

## Evidence

One of the pleasures in reading mysteries is the quest for evidence. The great writers of crime and mystery fiction—Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie—were adept at creating a chain of clues, or evidence, leading to the solution to the crime. Whether it is a letter lying on a desk in Poe's "The Purloined Letter" or a misplaced chair in Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, it is evidence we seek to solve the crime.

When writing arguments, evidence is used more to prove a point than to solve a mystery. Good writers must know what constitutes evidence—examples, facts, statistics, quotations, information from authoritative sources, personal experience, careful reasoning—and how to use it to support certain claims. Writers must also determine if the evidence and interpretations accompanying the evidence are valid and relevant.

Evidence is the data, or *grounds*, used to make claims clear, concrete, and convincing. In argumentation, the presentation of evidence must be examined from the perspective of logic or sound reasoning. Central to logic is the relationship of evidence to a *generalization*, a statement or conclusion that what is applicable in one situation also applies to similar situations. You cannot think and write clearly unless you test evidence to see that it supports your claims, assumptions, or general statements.

Here are some basic questions about evidence to consider when reading and writing argument essays:

- **Is the evidence typical and representative?** Examples must fairly represent the condition or situation if your claim is to be valid. If evidence is distorted or unrepresentative, a claim will not be logical or convincing.
- **Is the evidence relevant?** The evidence should speak directly to the claim. It should not utilize peripheral or irrelevant data.
- **Is the evidence specific and detailed?** In reading and writing arguments, do not trust broad, catchall statements presented as “evidence.” Valid evidence should involve accurate quotations, paraphrases, and presentations of data from authoritative, legitimate sources.
- **Is the evidence accurate and reliable?** A claim is only as valid as the data supporting it. Facts should come from reliable sources. Current evidence, rather than outdated evidence, should predominate in a current argument. Sources should be cited accurately for the convenience of the reader. Although personal observation and experience are admissible as types of evidence, such testimony rarely serves as conclusive proof for a claim.
- **Is the evidence sufficient?** There must be enough evidence to support claims and reasons. One piece of evidence, no matter how carefully selected, is rarely sufficient to win an argument.

Argument essays should provide a clear, logical link between the evidence and the writer’s claim, assertion, generalization, or conclusion. If an argument essay reveals false or illogical reasoning—that is, if the step from the evidence to the generalization is misleading, confusing, or deceptive—readers will not accept the truth of the claim or the validity of the evidence.

## The Argument’s Purpose

Whether you are reading another writer’s argument or starting to plan one of your own, you need to consider the purposes of the argument. As an AP student, your general aim is to communicate in essay form to a literate and knowledgeable audience of teachers. When thinking about the subject for an essay, you also have to consider a more specialized *purpose*—the specific nature or aim—behind your composition. You might have to report the result of an experiment in animal behavior, analyze a poem, compare and contrast Mario Puzo’s novel *The Godfather* with its film adaptation, or assert the need for capital punishment. In each instance, your essay requires a key rhetorical strategy or set of strategies. These strategies

reflect your purpose—your intention—in developing the essay. An argument essay may serve one or more purposes:

- To present a position, belief, or conclusion in a rational and effective way
- To defend a position against critics or detractors
- To persuade people to agree with a position or take a certain action
- To attack a position, with or without presenting an alternative or opposing viewpoint

An effective argument essay often combines a variety of forms and purposes. For example, an argument essay on legalizing marijuana might explain effects, analyze laws, or evaluate data. When you take time to consider your purpose before you even begin to write, the decisions you make will help you to think more clearly about both the design and intention of your essay.

## Appeals to Reason, Emotion, and Ethics

You must establish rapport with your audience in an argument essay. Recall the rhetorical triangle from Chapters 1 and 2. According to Aristotle, you can utilize three types of appeals: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. The first type, *logos*, is the logical appeal in which you use reason and present evidence. The second type, *pathos*, is an appeal to the emotions of your audience. You can present specific anecdotes and evidence to produce a desired emotional reaction toward your position on the topic. The third type, *ethos*, is an ethical appeal that helps you establish your credibility, either through your own credentials or through those of your sources. Aristotle thought the best and most effective argumentative writing blended logical, emotional, and ethical appeals to move an audience to a desired action. Let's take a closer look at each appeal and how it can be utilized.

### Appeals to Reason (Logos)

The *appeal to reason* or logic is the primary instrument of effective argument. The most common way of developing an argument according to the principles of sound reasoning is *deduction*, or an ordering of ideas from the general to the particular. With deduction, you move from a general assertion or claim to reasons/evidence and other support focused on the assertion. Consider the following student paragraph, which uses the deductive method:

Anti-marijuana laws make people contemptuous of the legal system. This contempt is based in part on the key fact that there are too many contradictions and inconsistencies in criminal penalties for marijuana use. Laws vary radically from state to state. In Texas, you can be sentenced to 180 days in jail, a \$2,000 fine, and two years of probation for possession of fewer than two ounces of marijuana. In contrast, marijuana is legal in California and Colorado.

Deduction is a convincing way of arranging ideas and information logically. By stating the proposition or generalization first, you present the most important idea. Then, as in the paragraph above, you move to more specific ideas and details.



Examined more rigorously, deductive reasoning involves a process of critical thinking known as *sylogism*, in which you move from a major statement or premise, then through a minor premise, to a third statement or conclusion. Aristotle's famous syllogism captures this mental process:

**Major premise:** All human beings are mortal.

**Minor premise:** Socrates is a human being.

**Conclusion:** Socrates is mortal.

The soundness of any deductive argument rests on the *truth* of the premises and the *validity* of the syllogism itself. In other words, if you grant the truth of the premises, you must also grant the conclusion.

*Inductive* reasoning reverses the process of deduction by moving from particular ideas to general ones. In the following excerpt from a speech, Abraham Lincoln presents various ideas and evidence that lead to a major proposition at the end:

The real issue in this controversy—the one pressing upon every mind—is the sentiment on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery in this country as a wrong, and of another class that does not look upon it as a wrong. . . . On this subject of treating it as a wrong, and limiting its spread, let me say a word. Has anything ever threatened the existence of this Union save and except this very institution of slavery? What is it that we hold most dear amongst us? Our own liberty and prosperity. What has ever threatened our liberty and prosperity, save and except this institution of slavery? If this is true, how do you propose to improve the condition of things by enlarging slavery—by spreading it out and making it bigger?

Lincoln-Douglas Debates. From *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works*, Volume One. Edited by John G. Nicolay and John Hay. New York: The Century Co. 1920

By presenting his supporting idea first, Lincoln is able to interest us before we reach the climactic argument at the end of the paragraph. Of course, whether we accept Lincoln's argument or are prepared to debate his claim depends on the strength of the reasons and evidence he offers.

Many of the argument essays you read and much of the argumentative writing you undertake will reflect the mental processes of deduction and induction. Constructing an argument through the use of logos, or logical reasoning, is a powerful way to convince or persuade a particular audience about the validity of your claims.

## Appeals to Emotion (Pathos)

In addition to developing your argument logically using the appeal to reason, you should consider the value of incorporating *appeals to emotion*. A letter home asking for more money would in all likelihood require a certain carefully modulated emotional appeal. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the 1963 March on Washington (see Chapter 6), is one of the finest contemporary examples of emotional appeal. King's speech ends with this invocation:

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day

when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!"

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King's skillful application of balanced biblical cadences, connotative and figurative language, and a strong, almost prophetic tone demonstrates the value of carefully crafted emotional appeal in the hands of an accomplished writer of argument.

Of course, in constructing an argument, you should avoid the sort of cynical manipulation of emotion that is common in the world of spoken discourse and the media in general. (A list of unfair emotional appeals appears later in this chapter.) But honest emotional appeal provides a human context for the rational ideas and evidence you present in an argument essay—ideas that might otherwise be uninteresting to your audience. Assuredly, if you want to persuade your audience to undertake a particular course of action, you must draw members of this audience closer to you as a person, and inspire them by skillfully using your feelings about the subject or issue.

## Appeals to Ethics (Ethos)

For an emotional appeal to achieve maximum effectiveness, it must reinforce not only the rational strength of your argument but also the ethical basis of your ideas. When you use *ethical appeal*, you present yourself as a well-informed, fair-minded, honest person. Aristotle acknowledged the importance of *ethos*, or the character of the writer, in the construction of an argument. If you create a sense that you are trustworthy, your readers or listeners will be inspired or persuaded. The "sound" or "voice" of your essay, which you convey to the reader through your style and tone, will help in convincing the audience to share your opinion.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke to Congress and the American people after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. In the following portion of the speech, he uses his credentials—*ethos*—to appeal to Congress to declare war.

As commander in chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense. But always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us.

Address by Franklin D. Roosevelt to Congress Asking That a State of War Be Declared Between the United States and Japan. December 8, 1941. [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

In an appeal to ethics, you try to convince the reader that you are a person of sound character—that you possess good judgment and values. As a person of goodwill and good sense, you also demonstrate an ability to empathize with your audience, to understand their viewpoints and perspectives. The psychologist Carl Rogers suggests that a willingness to embrace a potentially adversarial audience, to treat this audience more like an ally in an ethical cause, is a highly effective way to establish both goodwill and credibility. In Rogerian argument, your willingness to

understand an opposing viewpoint and actually rephrase it reflectively for mutual understanding enables you to further establish your ethical and personal qualities.

Analyze the powerful combination of rational, emotional, and ethical appeals in Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Gettysburg Address.

## The Gettysburg Address

Abraham Lincoln

**Abraham Lincoln** (1809–1865) was born the son of a pioneer in 1809 in Hodgenville, Kentucky, and moved to Illinois in 1831. After brief experiences as a clerk, postmaster, and county surveyor, he studied law and was elected to the state legislature in 1834. A prominent member of the newly formed Republican Party, Lincoln became president on the eve of the Civil War. In 1862, after the Union victory at Antietam, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves—the crowning achievement of an illustrious presidency. Although he was an outstanding orator and debater throughout his political career, the Gettysburg Address is one of his greatest speeches—and certainly his most famous. It was delivered at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery in 1863. Its form and content reflect the philosophical and moral views of the time as well as the rhetorical skill of its speaker. Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth in 1865, shortly after Robert E. Lee's surrender and the end of the Civil War.

<sup>1</sup> Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

<sup>2</sup> Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

<sup>3</sup> But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

"The Gettysburg Address" by Abraham Lincoln. From *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works*, Volume One. Edited by John G. Nicolay and John Hay. New York: The Century Co. 1920



## Comprehension

1. Although this speech was supposed to be a “dedication,” Lincoln states that “we cannot dedicate.” What does he mean by this?
2. Lincoln uses abstract words such as *liberty*, *freedom*, and *nation*. What does he mean specifically by each of these terms?
3. What exactly happened “Fourscore and seven years ago” in the context of the speech? Why is this reference so significant to the purpose of Lincoln’s address?

## Rhetorical Analysis

4. Note the progression of imagery from that of “death” to that of “birth.” How does this structure contribute to the claim and coherence of the speech?
5. How do the syntax (arrangement of words within a sentence), punctuation, and choice of the first-person plural form of address contribute to our understanding that this message was intended to be spoken rather than written?
6. Note how Lincoln refers to the combatants as “brave” and “honored.” How does he suggest that their struggle differed from that of “us the living”? How does this comparison and contrast create clear similarities and differences between those who fought and those who are present to carry on the soldiers’ work?
7. The American Civil War was a battle between the North and the South, as were the opponents at the Battle of Gettysburg. However, Lincoln does not mention this. What is the reason behind this omission? How does it create a speech focused on more comprehensive issues?
8. Besides being president, Lincoln was by definition a politician. In what ways can we determine that this is a political speech as well as a dedication?
9. Speeches are intended to be heard. What are some elements in this speech—for example, vocabulary, syntax, length or brevity of the sentences, and juxtaposition of sentences—that appeal to the reader’s sense of sound?
10. Does this speech appeal primarily to the intellect or the emotions, or equally to the two? What are two or three sentences that demonstrate one or both of these appeals? What is the rationale behind your selections? Does Lincoln include any ethical appeals?

## Writing

11. Research the actual historical events that occurred during the Battle of Gettysburg. Write an argument essay in which you discuss the significance of this particular speech at this point in the Civil War. Use a minimum of two secondary source materials.
12. Read the speech three times. Then write a paraphrase of it. Examine your paraphrase to discover what elements you recalled. Then reread the speech and write an expository essay focusing on how the structure of the speech contributed to your understanding of the subject.

# Writing Powerful Arguments

One of the most common writing assignments is the argument essay. Unlike narrative essays, descriptive essays, and the major forms of expository writing—comparison and contrast, definition, classification, process, and causal analysis—an argument essay requires you to take a stand and to support a position. You must present your ideas as powerfully as possible to advance your point of view and convince readers to accept your position or take a specific course of action. Before you start writing, consider the questions below. Knowing the answers will help you hook and persuade the reader.

- **To whom are you writing?** Are you writing to authorities? Power elites? Teachers? Average readers? Yourself?
- **What is your attitude?** Are you angry? Pleased? Perplexed? What tone will you project?
- **What, exactly, are you trying to accomplish?** An official response? A change of attitude? An explanation? Entertainment?
- **What are you contributing to the debate?** What's the added value here? Just your opinion? New facts? A solution? New arguments, contexts, or dimensions to consider?
- **Have you sincerely questioned your own assumptions?** Will your position survive scrutiny? How would your opponents answer your most compelling arguments?

The process for writing powerful arguments that appears in this section is useful, but it is not a formula. Ultimately, you can construct powerful arguments in numerous ways, but you always must consider the relationship between your ideas, your purpose, and your audience.

## Identify an Issue

Not every subject lends itself to useful or necessary argument. Certain subjects—for example, playing soccer—might appeal to you personally and powerfully, but are they worth arguing about? Consequently, your first step in writing an effective argument essay is to identify a subject or an issue that will elicit two or more differing opinions and pass the test of justification discussed earlier.

Not all issues in argument essays must be of national or global concern. In fact, issues like capital punishment, gay marriage, or global climate change might not be of special interest to you. However, if your teacher requires an argument essay on one of these broad hot-button topics, you will need to prepare by first establishing an argumentative perspective on it—in other words, by choosing your side on the issue. Fortunately, you often have opportunities to select issues of more immediate, personal, or local concern: Should fast-food franchises be permitted in the student cafeteria? Should there be a school policy on mandatory community service?

Whether dealing with an issue assigned by the teacher or selecting your own issue for an argument essay, ask yourself at the outset what your position on the issue is and how it can be developed through logic and evidence.

## Take a Stand and Clarify Your Claim

After you have identified an issue that lends itself to argumentation, you must take a clear stand on the issue. During this prewriting stage, you want to begin to articulate and pinpoint your claim, and thereby start to limit, control, and clarify the scope of your argument. Consequently, the first step at this stage is to establish as clearly as possible what your claim is going to be. You might want to experiment with one or more of the following strategies:

- List some preliminary reasons for your response. By listing reasons, as well as the types of evidence you will need to support those reasons, you will be able to determine at an early stage whether you have enough material for a solid argument essay and what forms of research you will have to conduct.
- Gather and explore information on the issue from debates on radio, television, or the Internet. Keep notes of examples, facts, and ideas that might support your claim.
- Write informally about the issue, considering your immediate response to it—how it makes you feel or what you think about it. If the issue provokes an emotional response, what are the causes? What are your more thoughtful or intellectual responses to the issue?
- Begin to think about possible objections to your position, and list these opposing viewpoints.

After you have developed a preliminary approach to an issue, you should be prepared to state your claim in the form of a thesis statement. Recall from Chapter 2 that you must limit the scope and purpose of your thesis or claim. Too broad a claim will be hard to cover in a convincing fashion in a standard argument essay. One useful way to limit and clarify your claim is to consider the purpose of your argument:

- Do you want to argue a position on a particular issue?
- Do you want to argue that a certain activity, belief, or situation is good or bad, harmful or beneficial, effective or ineffective?
- Do you want to persuade readers to undertake or avoid a particular course of action?
- Do you want readers to consider an issue in a new light?
- Do you want readers to endorse your interpretation or evaluation of an artistic or literary work?

By narrowing your primary purpose, you will arrive at the main point of your argument—your claim.

Read the statement below. This is typical wording for an argument prompt on an AP exam:

**Prompt:** Consider the issues surrounding cell phone use, and develop a position on whether cell phones should be allowed in the classroom.



Good essays explore the complexity of the issue, including the gray areas, and develop a nuanced position. They qualify their position by showing it is valid under certain conditions. For example, a qualified claim on this issue might state, “With a teacher’s supervision, students could use their cell phones to enhance learning in a classroom.”

## Analyze Your Likely Readers

All writing can be considered a conversation with an audience of readers. In argumentative writing, it is especially important to establish a common ground of belief with your readers if you expect them to accept your claim or undertake a certain course of action. To establish common ground, it is important to know your audience well so you can steer them favorably to your claim and the reasons and evidence supporting it. You also want to know your audience so you can select the best type of evidence to appeal to them in the body paragraphs of your essay. If you determine the nature of your audience *before* you compose the first draft of your essay, you will be able to tailor the appeal, style, content, and tone to a specific person or group.

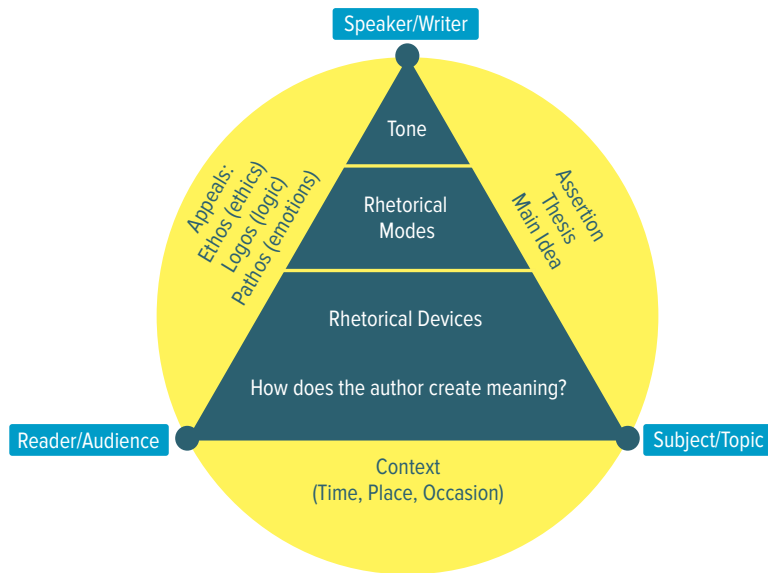
Try to anticipate audience expectations by asking basic questions about your readers:

- How much do readers know about the issue? Is it an audience of experts or a general audience with only limited knowledge of the issue?
- What does the audience expect from you in terms of your purpose? Do the readers expect you to prove your claim or persuade them to accept it, or both?
- Will the readers be friendly, hostile, or neutral toward your argument? What political, cultural, ethical, or religious factors contribute to the audience’s probable position on this issue?
- What else do you know about the readers’ opinions, attitudes, and values? How might these factors shape your approach to the argument?

Suppose you are planning to write an argument essay on pollution. What common expectations would an English teacher, a psychology teacher, and a chemistry teacher have concerning your argument? What differences in approach and content would be dictated by your decision to write for one of these teachers? Now consider the following different audiences for a paper on the topic of pollution: a group of grade-school children in your hometown; the Environmental Protection Agency; the manager of a landfill operation; or a relative whose town has been experiencing chemical pollution. In each instance, the type and nature of the audience will influence your approach to the issue and even your purpose.

Remember that through your purpose you find the proper context for your argument. See this connection between the topic and the audience in the rhetorical triangle on the next page. In addition, any writer who wants to communicate effectively with his or her audience will adjust the content and tone of an argument so as not to lose, confuse, or mislead the reader.

## Aristotelian or Rhetorical Triangle



### Establish Your Tone

Recall from Chapters 1 and 2 that by *tone* we mean the attitude you take toward your subject. Tone is the personal *voice* a reader “hears” in your writing. This voice will vary depending on the situation, your purpose, and your audience. It may be personal or impersonal and range across a spectrum of attitudes: serious or humorous, subjective or objective, straightforward or ironic, formal or casual, and so on. Your tone derives from your word choice (diction), sentence structure (syntax), figurative language such as metaphor and symbolism, and other rhetorical devices such as analogy, allusion, and repetition.

You adjust your tone to match your purpose in writing. In argumentation, an effective tone will be a true and trustworthy reflection of the writing situation. After all, you are writing an argument essay to convince and persuade, and consequently you need to sound like a reasonable, well-organized, and rational individual. When writing for teachers, you must be especially careful to maintain a reasonable and principled tone and attend to ethical responsibilities, including the need to document sources with integrity. You do not have to sound scholarly, legalistic, or overly technical in presenting your argument, but you do have to employ a personal voice that is appropriate to the writing occasion and audience expectations.

To achieve an appropriate tone in argumentative writing, you will often need to be forceful in presenting your ideas. You are staking out a position, perhaps on a controversial issue, and you must seem willing to defend it. Try to maintain a consistent voice of authority, but do not be overbearing. A voice that is too emotional, overblown, or irrational will in all likelihood alienate the reader and erode your claim.

# Develop and Organize the Grounds for Your Claim

You establish the validity of your claim by setting out the evidence and interpretation—the *grounds*—that support your main point. Whereas the claim presents your general or major proposition, as you develop your grounds you organize the argument into *minor propositions*, evidence, and *refutation* (counterargument). By establishing the grounds for your claim, you explain the particular perspective or point of view you take on an issue. The grounds for your claim permit the reader to “see” the strength of your position. Keep in mind the difference between your *opinions*, which in the broadest sense are beliefs you cannot verify logically, versus *reasons*, which are based on logic, evidence, and direct proof.

There are numerous ways to state the primary reasons or grounds for holding your position. Think of these primary reasons as minor propositions underlying the basis of your claim—reasons that readers would find it difficult to rebut or reject. Three possible models for organizing claims and grounds in an essay can be considered:

## Model 1

- ▶ Introduction: statement and clarification of claim
- ▶ First minor proposition and evidence
- ▶ Second minor proposition and evidence
- ▶ Third minor proposition and evidence
- ▶ Refutation of opposing viewpoints for minor propositions
- ▶ Conclusion

## Model 2

- ▶ Introduction: statement and clarification of claim
- ▶ First minor proposition and evidence; refutation
- ▶ Second minor proposition and evidence; refutation
- ▶ Third minor proposition and evidence; refutation
- ▶ Conclusion

## Model 3

- ▶ Statement and clarification of claim
- ▶ Summary of opposing viewpoints and refutation
- ▶ First minor proposition and evidence
- ▶ Second minor proposition and evidence
- ▶ Third minor proposition and evidence
- ▶ Conclusion

You can arrange your argument in numerous ways. Sometimes you may need more than the three minor propositions illustrated in these models to support your claim. Certainly only a single reason will not provide sufficient grounds to prove an argument. The models can serve a useful purpose, however, especially as a handy template in exams that require argumentative responses to a question.

## Gather and Evaluate Your Evidence

After you have established your claim and your reasons, you can turn your attention to developing evidence for your claim. Collecting evidence is a bit like the strategies for successful fishing presented on page 75: You want to fish the top, the middle, and the bottom of your subject. Phrased somewhat differently, you want to cast a wide net as you seek evidence designed to support your claim and reasons.

### Gathering Evidence Online

At the outset, a carefully designed online search can yield ample evidence, permitting you to establish links to sites and listservs where you can download or print full or abstracted texts from periodicals, books, documents, and reports. Searching online, however, can be like navigating a minefield. Useless “facts,” misinformation, hoaxes, and informational marketing ploys are sometimes presented alongside serious research, honest reporting, and critical analysis. Sometimes the title of a source for the topic you are researching may seem quite appealing, but that does not mean it is a reliable source. Look at the domain name, and then, if you decide to read on, be aware of biases. Researching online requires you to consider qualifications, compare and contrast information, evaluate depth of coverage, check and review data, look elsewhere, and more. The chart below lists basics you should check when engaging with materials online.

#### Guidelines for Assessing Websites

A good website:

- ▶ Clearly states the author and/or organizational **source** of the information
- ▶ Clearly states the **date** the material was written and when the site was last revised
- ▶ Provides **accurate** data whose parameters are clearly defined
- ▶ Keeps **bias** to a minimum, and clearly indicates point of view
- ▶ Provides live **links** to related high-quality websites
- ▶ Is clearly **organized** and designed for ease of use
- ▶ Keeps advertising separate from content, and does not permit advertisers to determine content



## Gathering Evidence at the Library

To guard against the pitfalls involved in relying exclusively on browser-based searching, you should also make a trip to the library. Research librarians can help you evaluate websites and direct you to the best sources—both traditional and electronic—for the types of evidence you are seeking. (See Chapter 13 for more on library and online research.)

## Gathering Expert Testimony

Depending on your subject, you might consider interviewing individuals who can provide expert testimony designed to support your claim and reasons. Finally, your personal experience and the experiences of your friends and acquaintances might provide useful evidence, although such kinds of anecdotal or firsthand support should be treated judiciously and not serve as the entire basis of your paper. For instance, you and your friends might claim a current horror movie is great, but such personal evidence must be tempered by a willingness to consult established critics for additional support.

## Utilize Unintended Evidence

If you cast a wide net, you will almost always catch more than you require. Yet the very process of searching comprehensively for evidence can produce exciting, unintended consequences. You might discover that certain evidence suggests a need to revise or qualify your claim. Evidence can also help you articulate or confirm the warrants that are the foundation of your argument. The insights gained by considering other evidence might cause you to develop a new reason for your claim you had not considered initially. You might also discover evidence that helps you refute the ideas of your anticipated opposition. Skillfully exploit the wealth of evidence at your disposal.

## Refine Your Evidence

After you have collected adequate evidence to bolster your claim and the key reasons supporting that claim, the next necessary step is to evaluate and select the *best* evidence. Writers who carefully evaluate and select their evidence produce effective arguments. At the outset, the nature of the writing situation—an exam, a term paper, a letter to the editor—will dictate to an extent the type of evidence you need to evaluate. In most instances, however, your evidence should be *credible*, *comprehensive*, and *current*. Your evidence is *credible* when your sources are reliable and the evidence itself is representative. Your evidence is *comprehensive* when you provide a broad range of facts, information, and data designed to cover all aspects of your argument. In presenting evidence comprehensively, you also make certain there is sufficient support for each of your reasons—not too much evidence for one and too little for another, but an even balance between and among the minor propositions. Finally, always try to locate the most *current* evidence available to support your claim. Data and statistics often do not age well and tend to lose their relevance. In some arguments, however, older evidence can be compared with newer information. For example, a paper arguing that immigration to the United States is out of control could make skillful use of data from the 1960 Census *and* the 2020 Census.

Evidence is the heart of any argument. Without evidence, readers will not be interested in your claim and support. Make certain that your evidence—facts, examples, and details—is accurate and skillfully presented so readers become interested in your more abstract propositions, identify with your position, and come away convinced of your argument’s validity.

## Consider the Warrants Used to Interpret Your Evidence

Even as you clarify your claim and assemble your reasons and evidence, you must also consider the warrants, or unstated assumptions, underlying your argument. Sometimes these assumptions are stated, but often they remain unstated. In either instance, they are not necessarily self-evident or universally accepted. They are significant, nevertheless, for warrants serve as the bedrock of an argument; as generalizations, they are far broader than claims and evidence.

When you are writing for a friendly or supportive audience, you can usually assume your readers will accept the warrants or unstated assumptions supporting your claim, so you might not even need to state them. For example, if you claim in a report for your biology teacher that creationism should not be taught in high school science classrooms, your argument is based on several assumptions or warrants: that there is no scientific basis for creationism, for example; or that the U.S. Constitution requires the separation of church and state.

But what if you were to make your claim in a letter to a local school board, several of whose members want to revise the ninth-grade earth science curriculum to emphasize creationism and evolution equally? In this instance, you would be presenting your argument to a skeptical audience, so you would have to state your assumptions or warrants clearly, bolster them with adequate support, and back up your assumptions with further arguments—evidence and interpretation supporting them.

Develop the habit of looking for and evaluating warrants behind the argument. If you are reading an argument essay, and the assumptions are stated, that will make this task easier. If the warrants are unstated, you will have to detect and evaluate them. If you are writing an argument essay, you should consider whether your audience will understand and consent to the warrants that serve as the foundation of your paper. If you have any doubt, then you should include the warrants.

## Refutation: Deal With Opposing Viewpoints

Any controversial issue is going to have more than one viewpoint, and you must recognize contending claims and handle them fairly. As suggested in the section on audience analysis, you can enhance your credibility by describing these opposing viewpoints fully and accurately, with a respectful rather than hostile tone, even as you demonstrate that your position is the most reasonable and valid.

As a prewriting strategy for *refutation*, or counterargument, you might try dividing a sheet of paper or your computer screen into three columns, labeling them, from left

to right, “Supporting Viewpoints,” “Opposing Viewpoints,” and “Refutation.” Then list the main supporting points for your claim, thinking of possible opposing responses and writing them down as you go. Foretelling how the opposition will respond to your supporting reasons will help you develop counterarguments. You can use the resulting chart as a guide to organize sections of your argument essay.

This technique for counterarguments forces you to acknowledge opposing viewpoints and also to refute them in a systematic way. It is perfectly appropriate—and even necessary—to demonstrate the weakness or insufficiency of opposing arguments. Refutation strengthens your position. Any complex argument you present will not be complete unless you skillfully refute all predictable opposing viewpoints, using one of the following techniques:

- **Question the opposition’s claim.** Is it too flimsy or broad, overstated, or improperly grounded in minor propositions?
- **Question the opposition’s evidence.** Is it insufficient, outdated, or inaccurate?
- **Question the warrants of an opposing argument.** What assumptions and beliefs wrongly underpin the opposition’s claim?
- **Concede (accept) some part of the opposition’s viewpoint.** This is a subtle but extremely attractive strategy that shows you are a courteous and unbiased thinker and writer (and constitutes an appeal to ethics).

## Avoid Unfair Emotional Appeals and Errors in Reasoning

When you write and revise an argument essay, you need to avoid certain temptations and dangers unique to this form of discourse. You must make certain your argumentative strategies are fair and appropriate and that you have avoided oversimplifying your argument. You also need to resist the temptation to use persuasive appeals that distort or falsify logical reasoning.

### Unfair Emotional Appeals

Emotional appeals are effective when used appropriately in argumentation, but used unfairly they can distort your logical reasoning. Such loaded arguments are filled with appeals to the reader’s emotions, fears, and prejudices. Here are some of the most common fallacies of emotional argumentation to avoid:

**TRANSFER** *Transfer* is the association of a proposition with a famous person. Transfer can be either positive (“In the spirit of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, we should pass a jobs program for the nation’s unemployed”) or negative (“The president’s immigration policy resonates with Hitler’s Nazism”). Another term for negative transfer is *name calling*. In both the positive and negative types of transfer, there is no logical basis for the connection.

**AD HOMINEM** *Ad hominem* (“against the man” or, literally, “to the person”) is a strategy that discredits a person in an effort to discredit his or her argument. It

attacks the person rather than the position: “Richards is a liberal and consequently cannot understand the dangers of unchecked immigration.” In this instance, the individual becomes a false issue.

**GLITTERING GENERALITIES** *Glittering generalities* is a strategy that deliberately arouses an audience’s emotions about certain institutions and ideas. Certain words have strong positive or negative connotations. Such words as *patriotism* and *motherhood* are *virtue* words. Suggestive words can be used to distort meaning by illogical association and to manipulate an audience to take a stand for or against a proposition: “The school should not take the *totalitarian* step of requiring athletes to maintain a full course load.”

**BANDWAGON** *Bandwagon* is a related strategy in which the writer generalizes falsely that the crowd or majority is always right: “Everyone is voting for Erikson and you should too.” This strategy taps into many people’s fear of missing out (FOMO).

These unfair emotional appeals are often found in political speech writing, advertising, and propaganda. When you write argument essays, you should use persuasive appeal to *reinforce* rather than *distort* the logical presentation of your ideas, blending reasonable claims and valid emotional and ethical appeals to convince rather than trick your audience into agreeing with you.

## Errors in Reasoning (Logical Fallacies)

Equally important is the need to avoid errors in reasoning in the construction of an argument. Here are some types of errors in reasoning, or *logical fallacies*, common in argumentative writing:

**HASTY GENERALIZATIONS** A *hasty generalization* is a conclusion based on insufficient, unrepresentative, or untrue evidence: “Our tennis team won at state, so the other school teams should be able to do the same.” When you indulge in hasty generalizations, you jump to false conclusions. Hasty generalizations are also at the heart of stereotyping—the oversimplified generalization to a group or to individual members of the group. Make certain you have adequate and accurate evidence to support any claim or conclusion.

**BROAD GENERALIZATIONS** A *broad generalization* typically employs words like *all*, *never*, and *always* to state something absolutely or categorically. It is actually a form of overstatement, as in the sentence “Freud always treated sexuality as the basis of human behavior.” Usually, readers can easily find exceptions to such sweeping statements, so it is best to qualify them.

**OVERSIMPLIFICATION** *Oversimplification* reduces alternatives. Several forms of oversimplification might be used:

**Either/Or** Assuming there are only two sides to an issue, or only two possibilities, or only yes or no, or only right or wrong: “Either we make English a four-year requirement or students will not be able to write well.”

**No Choice** Assuming there is only one possibility: “The United States has no other alternative than to build a missile defense system.” Parents and politicians are prone to no-other-choice propositions.



**No Harm or Cost** Assuming a potential benefit will not have significant harms, consequences, or costs: “We should impose tariffs on all goods imported from China.” No-harm generalizations or arguments may overlook significant implications. Always consider alternative evidence.

**One Solution** Assuming a complicated issue has only one solution: “Embryonic stem cells should not be used for research, for using them in this way will lead to the destruction of human life.” Always consider evidence for other solutions or alternative approaches to issues and problems.

**BEGGING THE QUESTION** The logical fallacy labeled “**begging the question**” occurs when a claim is stated without supporting evidence. For example, if you argue that vandalism by teenagers is unavoidable because teenagers are young and irresponsible, you are begging the question because you are not proving your premise—you are only making another claim. Another form of begging the question is to take a conclusion for granted before it is proved.

**FALSE CAUSE-AND-EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS** Perhaps the most common error in trying to establish causal relationships is known as the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy (“after this, therefore because of this”). The fact that one event *follows* another is not proof the first *caused* the second. If you maintain there is an increase in the crime rate every time a full moon occurs, for example, you are falsely identifying an unrelated event as a cause. Many superstitions—popular, political, and otherwise—illogically assume that one event somehow causes another.

**DISCONNECTED IDEAS** Termed *non sequitur* (“it does not follow”), this fallacy in reasoning arises when there is no logical connection between two or more ideas. Put differently, an argument’s conclusion is not related to its premises: “Barack Obama was a good president because he worked out every morning.” Sometimes you perceive a connection exists but you fail to state it in writing. For example, you may think presidents need to stay in shape to be effective leaders. In other words, *you* may see the logical connection between your ideas, but if you do not make it explicit, readers may think there is a *non sequitur*.

**WEAK OR FALSE ANALOGIES** An *analogy* is a type of comparison. A **weak or false analogy** explains a subject by comparing it to the features of another essentially dissimilar subject: “Unless we learn to think critically about the Niagara of information that washes over us every day, we will be lost in a flood of rumors and gossip.” Analogies can be used to illustrate or explain a point, although they should always be used carefully and with discretion. More significantly, an analogy can *never* function as evidence or logical proof of a position.

# The Argument Essay on the AP Exam

You will be asked to write an argument essay on the AP Language and Composition exam. Below is a prompt for an argument essay similar to what you will see on the exam:

An American economist recently defended the existence of sweatshops (low-paying factories) in developing countries, stating that they provide a path for laborers to rise out of poverty.

Consider the economist's claim about sweatshops; then develop a position on the assertion that everyone benefits when multinational corporations set up factories (sweatshops) in developing countries. Support your argument with appropriate evidence from your reading, observation, and experience.

This chapter has discussed how to clarify your claim (thesis), consider your warrants, and gather and evaluate evidence as you create an argument essay. When you take the AP exam, however, you will not be able to research your topic. Without access to research, how should you approach responding to the prompt with “appropriate evidence”? As the prompt above states, you need to create your argument from prior reading, observation, and experience. Although every topic is different, several general issues can be applied to any topic to reveal the complexity and possible views that can be addressed in your argument. The mnemonic, or memory device, “HELPS ME” is an easy way to remember the sort of evidence that “helps me” develop an argument.

## HELPS ME

History

Current Events

Literature and Arts

Personal Experience

Science and Technology

Money

Ethics

### History

Look at a controversial topic from a historical perspective, or events over time. What evidence throughout history affects your argument on the topic? Or, how will a topic's history impact your position? Consider this evidence of how multinationals have impacted the world throughout recent history: Multinationals lead to interdependence, English as an international language, and the U.S. dollar as the global currency.

### Current Events

If you get stuck wondering how to expand your argument, ask yourself: How does your proposal on the topic, or your opponent's proposal, apply to current events? These could be political, social, or environmental events. You might support your argument regarding multinationals with current events this way: Lack of regulations in developing countries has led to pollution and catastrophic factory collapses. Reduced regulations lead to lower costs for consumers, but they also endanger employees.

## Literature and Arts

Supportive examples can be found in literature and visual arts such as paintings, photos, and theater. Using literary examples will not automatically gain you additional credit with scorers at the AP exam, but many argument topics can be handled adroitly with the incorporation of a literature example. If you have read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, for instance, imagine the connections you could make between his analysis of the meatpacking industry and the sweatshop conditions the workers experienced. When incorporating literature in your essay, it is not necessary to provide a summary of the book you are referencing. Instead, consider the overall purpose of the author's writing and incorporate specific details to further your argument.

## Personal Experience

Personal experience is probably the most common type of evidence used in the argument essay. But be cautious and narrate experiences that carry gravitas and are truly relevant to the argument. You will have much more credibility if you detail a time when you truly developed as a human being (learning to cook when a parent was ill) than when you simply struggled to get what you wanted (finding the right outfit for homecoming). For this prompt, it is not likely you have had personal experience with a sweatshop. If you have visited a developing country and witnessed poor labor conditions, however, those details provide compelling evidence to your argument.

## Science and Technology

Consider scientific and technological evidence as you approach the issue and your argument. How do scientific advancements impact the topic? How might your position change based on the speed and efficiency of technology? Part of an argument and supporting evidence regarding multinationals could support this claim: Technology and education offered by multinationals can help create or improve the middle class.

## Money

One issue that concerns most controversial topics is money. Some money questions you might raise include: How is this proposal to be funded? What will it cost in dollars and employees? The bottom line for most arguments is the dollar. In an argument about multinational corporations, a money issue might be: Multinationals pay low wages in developing countries, keeping prices of products low in the U.S.

## Ethics

To present a position effectively, consider not only your beliefs, values, and morals, but also those of your audience. As you take a position on a controversial topic, establish right from wrong and abide by a code of ethics. An ethical issue regarding multinationals might be: Unethical low wages are counterbalanced by offering available jobs.

The hallmark of argumentation is sound critical thinking. A successful argument essay reveals a writer who is able to reason well, judge opinions on the basis of evidence, and back up ideas in a convincing and valid way. If you present your claims, grounds, and evidence carefully, and treat the opposition with respect, you are on your way to constructing a solid argument essay. See Chapter 12 to review a sample student argument essay.

# Synthesizing: Making Connections

Synthesizing is a necessary skill for you to master in AP Language and Composition as well as in life. Throughout your academic and professional careers, you will be asked to gather information to make decisions. More often than not, the information you encounter will be diverse and contradictory. Your task will be to digest the differing sources before you make a valid, compelling argument for some sort of conclusion.

When you synthesize, you create a coherent whole from separate elements. The combination of the elements must be polished and purposeful, and create a valuable end product. Synthesizing information is an advanced form of analysis that involves understanding multiple sources of information, identifying how those sources vary, and combining the information into a cohesive argument.

You synthesize information every day, even though you may not realize it. Suppose you are trying to decide whether to buy a new videogame. You would probably watch a trailer or advertisement for the game, and you might read a review of the game on a favorite website. You may ask your friends about their experience with the game, and each friend might have a different opinion. You would consider all of this information—these arguments—before you make a decision about purchasing the game. You would synthesize all of the messages you received and then form a coherent argument, which would then guide your decision-making. This process is synthesis.

In a synthesis essay, you enter into a “conversation” with two or more writers, attempting to understand their main ideas or arguments, to analyze the evidence they provide, and to evaluate their conclusions. As with any academic conversation, you must present the writers’ ideas with accuracy and respect—but also with an eye to the purpose or aim of your own writing.

When synthesizing, then, what begins as an isolated moment (actively reading a single text) spirals into a series of moments (reading several texts), which demands your powers of comparative analysis and the ability to evaluate relationships among sources. In addition, synthesizing requires you to consider the sources’ biases.

## Writing a Thesis or Claim

There are several types of synthesis. With *explanatory synthesis*, you try to accurately identify the key ideas and purposes of various writers or sources, but you do not argue for or against a certain viewpoint. For example, here is a student’s thesis based on the essays by Peter Elbow and Donald Murray from Chapter 2:

Both Peter Elbow and Donald Murray stress the importance of process in the craft of composition, but approach the process from different perspectives.

In the example above, the student makes a modest but useful attempt to convey information accurately through explanatory synthesis.

With *argumentative synthesis*, the writer takes a side. Consider the shift from explanation to argument as the writer now assumes a position in presenting the ideas of Elbow and Murray:



Although Peter Elbow's theory of freewriting might be useful to certain students with basic writing problems, Donald Murray in his stress on revision offers far more useful advice for high school students who want to improve their writing.

Observe how the writer moves from explanatory to argumentative synthesis as she critiques the two readings and their authors. She takes sides. She presents a claim (which she will have to support with convincing grounds or evidence). She wants us to agree with her interpretation and assessment.

Argumentative synthesis, like all types of argumentative writing, presents a claim about which reasonable people might agree or disagree. The challenge is to formulate your synthesis in such a way that it convinces or persuades your audience to agree with your assessment and fundamental viewpoint.

## Critiquing Sources

Obviously, before you can synthesize various sources, you must read and analyze those sources. In doing so, you should rely on the strategies for active reading and writing outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. At the outset, it is wise to focus on *critiquing*—the evaluation of each separate source's quality or worth based on a clearly defined set of guidelines. With critiquing, you cannot rely on a personal opinion or preference. Critiquing demands clear criteria and objective assessment of the text. It is a necessary aspect of successful argumentative synthesis.

When critiquing sources in AP and college composition courses, you will consider issues such as: style, organization, importance of subject, effectiveness of a writer's claim, and quality of evidence. You will agree, disagree, or (in certain cases) agree *and* disagree to varying degrees with a writer—but do so from the vantage point of informed judgment.

The formal demands of critiquing are neither mysterious nor intimidating. In everyday situations, we engage in critiquing: arguing over the merits of two recent films, evaluating the skills of various sports stars, praising our favorite musicians, or supporting one candidate for political office over all others. Writing a formal critique is perhaps more of a challenge than situations from everyday life, but if you follow basic steps, the process of critiquing becomes manageable.

1. **Carefully read and evaluate each source.** Annotate the selection: Cite the source of the article and the author's intended audience, look for the thesis or claim, identify the author's purpose (to inform, argue, or entertain), highlight the evidence, and consider the style and organization of the piece.
2. **Briefly summarize your findings.** Your summary should focus on the author's main points.
3. **Evaluate the source.** Consider the overall validity of the author's presentation: Has the writer achieved his or her purpose? What is the quality of the supporting evidence? Is the information or evidence convincing and representative? Has the author interpreted the material correctly and argued logically?

# Guidelines for Argumentative Synthesis

Consider the synthesis essay as an argument essay with sources. Your conversation with other writers/source material is used to bolster your own claim—your assertion that you plan to prove and with which other readers can agree or disagree. To support your argument, you seek evidence from relevant sources, analyze and evaluate the merits of that evidence, and use it to support your argument.

1. **Consider your purpose.** Is your purpose to *explain* or to *argue*—or perhaps a combination of both? How will this purpose affect your search for sources?
2. **Select and identify your sources.** Where and when did the article first appear, and what might this publication tell you about the writer’s perspective? Identify the author, noting his or her credentials, publications, and occupation. How does the title or subtitle reveal the writer’s purpose? Does the title seem to align to your purpose? Why or why not?
3. **Read actively.** What is the writer’s primary purpose? What is the main idea or argument? What are the minor points? How do the subpoints relate to the central point? What is the structure of the text—the introduction, middle sections, and conclusion? How does the text reinforce a key idea that you may have in mind for an essay?
4. **Take notes and summarize.** Use the techniques of print and/or electronic annotation. Identify the writer’s main point and rewrite it in one or two sentences.
5. **Establish connections among readings.** What relationships do you detect as you move from text to text? How do major and minor points stressed by the writers in their texts overlap or diverge? What elements of their arguments are similar and dissimilar? Draw up a list of similar and dissimilar points for handy reference.
6. **Write your synthesis.** First, write down your thesis or claim, and develop it in an introductory paragraph. Next, draft body paragraphs that offer support for the thesis or claim; write topic sentences for all paragraphs; incorporate explanatory or argumentative details drawn from the sources that you synthesize; and document your sources properly in order to avoid any charge of plagiarism. Finally, write a conclusion that grows organically from the preceding paragraphs and reinforces your main idea. Then revise your essay.

## The Synthesis Essay on the AP Exam

One of the three essays on the AP Language and Composition exam will ask you to synthesize multiple sources and create a compelling argument based on a prompt. For the synthesis essay question, you will receive a packet of six to eight different sources introduced by a set of guiding thoughts. Each source will have bibliographic information, letting you know the author, publisher, and publication date. Additional context information may be provided for some of the sources as well. Each source is usually several paragraphs to a full page, and some of the sources will be a photograph, chart, political cartoon, or other type of visual. Usually, you are

required to use a minimum of only three different sources in your essay. You will be given 15 minutes to review the sources, and 40 minutes to write the essay.

Read the introductory information thoroughly *before* you examine the sources. An introductory page to the synthesis question will give you context for the situation you will write about. This background information may be broad or specific. The introduction will also provide a description of the specific issue at hand, and it will present different viewpoints on the issue as well. The introduction also provides the prompt as well as information on how to write the essay. You will be told to consider an argument or a statement. You will basically agree or disagree with a statement, idea, or viewpoint—and then explore the topic and support your position with a discussion of the sources. Here is a sample introduction to the AP synthesis essay. The prompt (or task) is bolded:

War seems to be an inevitable part of the human experience. Depending on the circumstances, war is considered ennobling, necessary, and just. However, it may also be seen as corrupt, irrational, or even evil. Must war be an unavoidable part of human civilization? Is the sacrifice of war worth it? Do the casualties outweigh the causes?

Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully. **Then develop a position about what issues should be considered most important in making the decision to declare war.**

Make sure that your argument is central; use the sources to illustrate and support your reasoning. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (Wilson)

Source B (Kennedy)

Source C (Political Cartoon)

Source D (Bush)

Source E (Reagan)

Source F (Department of Veterans Affairs)

Source G (Chart: Department of Defense)

Notice that the prompt wants you to *develop a position*. This means you must state an opinion that someone else can disagree with. If your main argument does not have an opposing viewpoint, then you do not have a strong position. Always connect your argument to a clear, arguable thesis statement. For example, the prompt above asks you to “develop a position about what issues should be considered most important in making a decision to go to war.” Although not explicitly stated, this prompt wants you to create a hierarchy of important factors. In your notes, write your own sentence about what the prompt actually wants you to do.

Very briefly, brainstorm your ideas about each side of the issue. What you do *not* want to do is simply list and briefly discuss each of the factors that should be considered. That structure would lead you straight to a summary, which you want to

avoid. You do not want or need to explain the sources at any point in your essay. Knowledge of the sources is assumed—the reader grading your essay has seen and is familiar with the source material. Instead, create an argument that focuses on one or two issues that should be considered, but then clearly argue for *one* issue that trumps all others. This structure keeps your essay focused and your argument effective.

Now you are ready to read and analyze the sources. Each source comes with an “information box” that tells you about the author, origin, publication, date, and so on. Examine this information carefully. Look for context, the intended audience, bias, authority of the author, the source of the author’s information, and the type of evidence the author presents. Your task, remember, is to use the sources to strengthen your *own* argument. You do not want to summarize the sources, and you do not have to agree with them in order to use them in your essay. You must “converse” with the sources. Use what works with your argument. In addition, form an argument *against* the sources on the opposite side of the issue. Remember, your voice should be the loudest in the “room.”

As you analyze the first source, consider its most convincing arguments:

- Which part of the text would you be most likely to use in an essay?
- Could this piece be used to negate an argument?
- Do you find faulty reasoning in this piece? If so, how could you use this information to strengthen your own argument?
- Is there any bias in the source? If so, discussing the bias will add sophistication to your argument.
- If you like the source, make a mental note to come back to it and possibly use it when writing your essay. If you don’t like the source or don’t find it particularly useful, you don’t have to use it. You are only required to use three of the six to eight sources you are given.

As you analyze the second source, ask the same questions as above—but also compare it to the first source.

After you’ve analyzed the assignment page, dissected the prompt, and examined the sources, you will then craft your synthesis essay. Understand that the prompt has no right or wrong answer. The exam reader cares only about how well you argue your position, not which side of the issue you take. Organize your argument around your own ideas, and then construct your paragraphs around the major points of your argument, using the sources only as supportive evidence or as springboards for discussion.

If you do quote or paraphrase any of the sources, use quotes and paraphrase judiciously and acknowledge the sources with the correct citations. (See Chapter 1 for a refresher on how to use quotations or paraphrase.) Writers who fail to acknowledge their sources correctly—even by accident—commit plagiarism. You may cite the information you use in one of two ways. You can refer to the source by the letter ascribed to it in the prompt: Source A, Source B, and so on. Or you may refer to the source by the author’s last name or the title. Be consistent. Do not switch back and forth between citation styles. See Chapter 12 to review a sample student synthesis essay.



# Famous Arguments

Read and analyze the two sources that follow. Study how Aristotle defines and explains the necessity of rhetoric. See argumentation in action through Thomas Paine's words.

## The Art of Rhetoric

Aristotle

The city-state of Athens saw a surfacing of democracy in the years around 460 B.C.E., when public speaking became an essential skill for politicians in the assemblies and councils and even for ordinary citizens in the courts of law. Thus, skills in rhetorical technique rapidly developed, laying the groundwork for a host of practical manuals for the layman. Unlike the books giving “tricks” for successful debating, “The Art of Rhetoric” held a far deeper purpose. In it, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) establishes the methods of informal reasoning, provides the first artistic and visual evaluation of prose style, and offers detailed observations on character and the emotions. Extremely influential upon later Western culture, “The Art of Rhetoric” is a fascinating consideration of the forces of persuasion and literalism, and a compelling guide to the principles behind oratorical skills. What follows is an excerpt from Aristotle's treatise.

- <sup>1</sup> Rhetoric is useful (1) because things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites, so that if the decisions of judges are not what they ought to be, the defeat must be due to the speakers themselves, and they must be blamed accordingly. Moreover, (2) before some audiences not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction. For argument based on knowledge implies instruction, and there are people whom one cannot instruct. Here, then, we must use, as our modes of persuasion and argument, notions possessed by everybody, as we observed in the *Topics* when dealing with the way to handle a popular audience. Further, (3) we must be able to employ persuasion, just as strict reasoning can be employed, on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if another man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to confute him. No other of the arts draws opposite conclusions: dialectic and rhetoric alone do this. Both these arts draw opposite conclusions impartially. Nevertheless, the underlying facts do not lend themselves equally well to the contrary views. No; things that are true and things that are better are, by their nature, practically always easier to prove and easier to believe in. Again, (4) it is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limbs, but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason, when the use of rational speech is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs. And if it be objected that one who uses such power of speech unjustly

might do great harm, *that* is a charge which may be made in common against all good things except virtue, and above all against the things that are most useful, as strength, health, wealth, generalship. A man can confer the greatest of benefits by a right use of these, and inflict the greatest of injuries by using them wrongly.

- <sup>2</sup> It is clear, then, that rhetoric is not bound up with a single definite class of subjects, but is as universal as dialectic; it is clear, also, that it is useful. It is clear, further, that its function is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow. In this it resembles all other arts. For example, it is not the function of medicine simply to make a man quite healthy, but to put him as far as may be on the road to health; it is possible to give excellent treatment even to those who can never enjoy sound health. Furthermore, it is plain that it is the function of one and the same art to discern the real and the apparent means of persuasion, just as it is the function of dialectic to discern the real and the apparent syllogism. What makes a man a “sophist” is not his faculty, but his moral purpose. In rhetoric, however, the term “rhetorician” may describe either the speaker’s knowledge of the art, or his moral purpose. In dialectic it is different: a man is a “sophist” because he has a certain kind of moral purpose, a “dialectician” in respect, not of his moral purpose, but of his faculty.

- <sup>3</sup> Let us now try to give some account of the systematic principles of Rhetoric itself—of the right method and means of succeeding in the object we set before us. We must make as it were a fresh start, and before going further define what rhetoric is.

- <sup>4</sup> Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject-matter; for instance, medicine about what is healthy and unhealthy, geometry about the properties of magnitudes, arithmetic about numbers, and the same is true of the other arts and sciences. But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us; and that is why we say that, in its technical character, it is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects.

- <sup>5</sup> Of the modes of persuasion some belong strictly to the art of rhetoric and some do not. By the latter I mean such things as are not supplied by the speaker but are there at the outset—witnesses, evidence given under torture, written contracts, and so on. By the former I mean such as we can ourselves construct by means of the principles of rhetoric. The one kind has merely to be used, the other has to be invented.

- <sup>6</sup> Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak. It is not true, as some writers assume in

their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile. It is towards producing these effects, as we maintain, that present-day writers on rhetoric direct the whole of their efforts. This subject shall be treated in detail when we come to speak of the emotions. Thirdly, persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question.

- <sup>7</sup> There are, then, these three means of effecting persuasion. The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions—that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited. It thus appears that rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies. Ethical studies may fairly be called political; and for this reason rhetoric masquerades as political science, and the professors of it as political experts—sometimes from want of education, sometimes from ostentation, sometimes owing to other human failings. As a matter of fact, it is a branch of dialectic and similar to it, as we said at the outset. Neither rhetoric nor dialectic is the scientific study of any one separate subject: both are faculties for providing arguments. This is perhaps a sufficient account of their scope and of how they are related to each other.

*The Works of Aristotle: Rhetorica, by W. R. Roberts. De rhetorica ad Alexandrum, by E. S. Forster. De poetica, by I. Bywater. Volume 11 of The Works of Aristotle, William David Ross. Clarendon Press, 1924.*

## Comprehension

1. The last paragraph points out skills a person must hold to effectively persuade. What are other words for the three listed abilities that a person must hold?
2. What does Aristotle believe to be the most important means for a person to be able to persuade others?
3. Where is rhetoric's place when considering the arts?
4. Aristotle begins and ends this portion of "The Art of Rhetoric" with one clear point about the misuse of rhetoric. What is that point?

## Rhetorical Analysis

5. How does Aristotle use exemplification to assert his position?
6. Aristotle uses the rhetorical strategy of repetition in paragraph 3 (and once in paragraph 7). Identify it and explain why it is effective.
7. What effect do the numerical lists add to Aristotle's rhetorical style?
8. Why does Aristotle choose to write this piece in the first person?

## Writing

9. Write a short paraphrase of this excerpt.
10. Consider areas of expertise where you could be successfully persuasive. Choose three and write three premises for your arguments.
11. Now consider three stumbling blocks to the arguments you listed in answer 2, and write how you would address each stumbling block.

## Common Sense (1776)

Thomas Paine

**Thomas Paine** (1737–1809) was an influential 18th-century writer of essays and pamphlets, including *The Age of Reason*, an essay regarding the place of religion in society; *Rights of Man*, a piece defending the French Revolution; and *Common Sense*, a pamphlet that was published in 1776 during the American Revolution. *Common Sense* is credited with bringing Paine's ideas to the larger audience of the Colonies, swaying the “undecided” public opinion to the view that independence from the British was a necessity. His plain speaking style was one the masses could follow and act upon.

- <sup>1</sup> IN the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of a man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day.
- <sup>2</sup> Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed. Arms as the last resource decide the contest; the appeal was the choice of the King, and the Continent has accepted the challenge.
- <sup>3</sup> It hath been reported of the late Mr. Pelham (who tho' an able minister was not without his faults) that on his being attacked in the House of Commons on the score that his measures were only of a temporary kind, replied, “THEY WILL LAST MY TIME.” Should a thought so fatal and unmanly possess the Colonies in the present contest, the name of ancestors will be remembered by future generations with detestation.
- <sup>4</sup> The Sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a City, a County, a Province, or a Kingdom; but of a Continent—of at least one-eighth part of the habitable Globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed-time of Continental union,



faith and honour. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound would enlarge with the tree, and posterity read in it full grown characters.

<sup>5</sup> By referring the matter from argument to arms, a new era for politics is struck—a new method of thinking hath arisen. All plans, proposals, &c. prior to the nineteenth of April, i.e. to the commencement of hostilities, are like the almanacks of the last year; which tho' proper then, are superseded and useless now. Whatever was advanced by the advocates on either side of the question then, terminated in one and the same point, viz. a union with Great Britain; the only difference between the parties was the method of effecting it; the one proposing force, the other friendship; but it hath so far happened that the first hath failed, and the second hath withdrawn her influence.

<sup>6</sup> As much hath been said of the advantages of reconciliation, which, like an agreeable dream, hath passed away and left us as we were, it is but right that we should examine the contrary side of the argument, and enquire into some of the many material injuries which these Colonies sustain, and always will sustain, by being connected with and dependent on Great Britain. To examine that connection and dependence, on the principles of nature and common sense, to see what we have to trust to, if separated, and what we are to expect, if dependent.

<sup>7</sup> I have heard it asserted by some, that as America has flourished under her former connection with Great Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true; for I answer roundly that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessities of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

<sup>8</sup> But she has protected us, say some. That she hath engrossed us is true, and defended the Continent at our expense as well as her own, is admitted; and she would have defended Turkey from the same motive, viz.—for the sake of trade and dominion.

<sup>9</sup> Alas! we have been long led away by ancient prejudices and made large sacrifices to superstition. We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was INTEREST not ATTACHMENT; and that she did not protect us from OUR ENEMIES on OUR ACCOUNT; but from HER ENEMIES on HER OWN ACCOUNT, from those who had no quarrel with us on any OTHER ACCOUNT, and who will always be our enemies on the SAME ACCOUNT. Let Britain waive her pretensions to the Continent, or the Continent throw off the dependence, and we should be at peace with France and Spain, were they at war with Britain. The miseries of Hanover last war ought to warn us against connections.

<sup>10</sup> It hath lately been asserted in parliament, that the Colonies have no relation to each other but through the Parent Country, i.e. that Pennsylvania and the Jerseys and so on for the rest, are sister Colonies by the way of England; this is certainly a

very roundabout way of proving relationship, but it is the nearest and only true way of proving enmity (or enemyship, if I may so call it.) France and Spain never were, nor perhaps ever will be, our enemies as AMERICANS, but as our being the SUBJECTS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

- <sup>11</sup> But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families. Wherefore, the assertion, if true, turns to her reproach; but it happens not to be true, or only partly so, and the phrase PARENT OR MOTHER COUNTRY hath been jesuitically adopted by the King and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds. Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. This new World hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from EVERY PART of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England, that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home, pursues their descendants still.
- <sup>12</sup> In this extensive quarter of the globe, we forget the narrow limits of three hundred and sixty miles (the extent of England) and carry our friendship on a larger scale; we claim brotherhood with every European Christian, and triumph in the generosity of the sentiment.
- <sup>13</sup> It is pleasant to observe by what regular gradations we surmount the force of local prejudices, as we enlarge our acquaintance with the World. A man born in any town in England divided into parishes, will naturally associate most with his fellow parishioners (because their interests in many cases will be common) and distinguish him by the name of NEIGHBOR; if he meet him but a few miles from home, he drops the narrow idea of a street, and salutes him by the name of TOWNSMAN; if he travel out of the county and meet him in any other, he forgets the minor divisions of street and town, and calls him COUNTRYMAN, i.e. COUNTYMAN; but if in their foreign excursions they should associate in France, or any other part of EUROPE, their local remembrance would be enlarged into that of ENGLISHMEN. And by a just parity of reasoning, all Europeans meeting in America, or any other quarter of the globe, are COUNTRYMEN; for England, Holland, Germany, or Sweden, when compared with the whole, stand in the same places on the larger scale, which the divisions of street, town, and county do on the smaller ones; Distinctions too limited for Continental minds. Not one third of the inhabitants, even of this province, [Pennsylvania], are of English descent. Wherefore, I reprobate the phrase of Parent or Mother Country applied to England only, as being false, selfish, narrow and ungenerous.
- <sup>14</sup> But, admitting that we were all of English descent, what does it amount to? Nothing. Britain, being now an open enemy, extinguishes every other name and title: and to say that reconciliation is our duty, is truly farcical. The first king of England, of the present line (William the Conqueror) was a Frenchman, and half the peers of England are descendants from the same country; wherefore, by the same method of reasoning, England ought to be governed by France.
- <sup>15</sup> Much hath been said of the united strength of Britain and the Colonies, that in conjunction they might bid defiance to the world. But this is mere presumption;

the fate of war is uncertain, neither do the expressions mean anything; for this continent would never suffer itself to be drained of inhabitants, to support the British arms in either Asia, Africa, or Europe.

<sup>16</sup> Besides, what have we to do with setting the world at defiance? Our plan is commerce, and that, well attended to, will secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe; because it is the interest of all Europe to have America a free port. Her trade will always be a protection, and her barrenness of gold and silver secure her from invaders.

<sup>17</sup> I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation to show a single advantage that this continent can reap by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge; not a single advantage is derived. Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe, and our imported goods must be paid for by them where we will.

<sup>18</sup> But the injuries and disadvantages which we sustain by that connection, are without number; and our duty to mankind at large, as well as to ourselves, instruct us to renounce the alliance: because, any submission to, or dependence on, Great Britain, tends directly to involve this Continent in European wars and quarrels, and set us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint. As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions, which she never can do, while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the makeweight in the scale of British politics.

<sup>19</sup> Europe is too thickly planted with Kingdoms to be long at peace, and whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin, BECAUSE OF HER CONNECTION WITH BRITAIN. The next war may not turn out like the last, and should it not, the advocates for reconciliation now will be wishing for separation then, because neutrality in that case would be a safer convoy than a man of war. Every thing that is right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, 'TIS TIME TO PART. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America is a strong and natural proof that the authority of the one over the other, was never the design of Heaven. The time likewise at which the Continent was discovered, adds weight to the argument, and the manner in which it was peopled, increases the force of it. The Reformation was preceded by the discovery of America: As if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should afford neither friendship nor safety.

<sup>20</sup> The authority of Great Britain over this continent, is a form of government, which sooner or later must have an end: And a serious mind can draw no true pleasure by looking forward, under the painful and positive conviction that what he calls "the present constitution" is merely temporary. As parents, we can have no joy, knowing that this government is not sufficiently lasting to ensure any thing which we may bequeath to posterity: And by a plain method of argument, as we are running the next generation into debt, we ought to do the work of it, otherwise we use them meanly and pitifully. In order to discover the line of our duty rightly, we should take our children in our hand, and fix our station a few years farther into life; that eminence will present a prospect which a few present fears and prejudices conceal from our sight.

- <sup>21</sup> Though I would carefully avoid giving unnecessary offence, yet I am inclined to believe, that all those who espouse the doctrine of reconciliation, may be included within the following descriptions. Interested men, who are not to be trusted, weak men who CANNOT see, prejudiced men who will not see, and a certain set of moderate men who think better of the European world than it deserves; and this last class, by an ill-judged deliberation, will be the cause of more calamities to this Continent than all the other three.
- <sup>22</sup> It is the good fortune of many to live distant from the scene of present sorrow; the evil is not sufficiently brought to their doors to make them feel the precariousness with which all American property is possessed. But let our imaginations transport us a few moments to Boston; that seat of wretchedness will teach us wisdom, and instruct us for ever to renounce a power in whom we can have no trust. The inhabitants of that unfortunate city who but a few months ago were in ease and affluence, have now no other alternative than to stay and starve, or turn out to beg. Endangered by the fire of their friends if they continue within the city and plundered by the soldiery if they leave it, in their present situation they are prisoners without the hope of redemption, and in a general attack for their relief they would be exposed to the fury of both armies.
- <sup>23</sup> Men of passive tempers look somewhat lightly over the offences of Great Britain, and, still hoping for the best, are apt to call out, "Come, come, we shall be friends again for all this." But examine the passions and feelings of mankind: bring the doctrine of reconciliation to the touchstone of nature, and then tell me whether you can hereafter love, honour, and faithfully serve the power that hath carried fire and sword into your land? If you cannot do all these, then are you only deceiving yourselves, and by your delay bringing ruin upon posterity. Your future connection with Britain, whom you can neither love nor honour, will be forced and unnatural, and being formed only on the plan of present convenience, will in a little time fall into a relapse more wretched than the first. But if you say, you can still pass the violations over, then I ask, hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then are you not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake hands with the murderers, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend or lover, and whatever may be your rank or title in life, you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a sycophant.
- <sup>24</sup> This is not inflaming or exaggerating matters, but trying them by those feelings and affections which nature justifies, and without which, we should be incapable of discharging the social duties of life, or enjoying the felicities of it. I mean not to exhibit horror for the purpose of provoking revenge, but to awaken us from fatal and unmanly slumbers, that we may pursue determinately some fixed object. It is not in the power of Britain or of Europe to conquer America, if she do not conquer herself by *delay* and *timidity*. The present winter is worth an age if rightly employed, but if lost or neglected, the whole continent will partake of the misfortune; and there is no punishment which that man will not deserve, be he who, or what, or where he will, that may be the means of sacrificing a season so precious and useful.

- <sup>25</sup> It is repugnant to reason, to the universal order of things to all examples from former ages, to suppose, that this continent can longer remain subject to any external power. The most sanguine in Britain does not think so. The utmost stretch of human wisdom cannot, at this time, compass a plan short of separation, which can promise the continent even a year's security. Reconciliation is *now* a falacious dream. Nature hath deserted the connexion, and Art cannot supply her place. For, as Milton wisely expresses, "never can true reconcilment grow where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep."
- <sup>26</sup> Every quiet method for peace hath been ineffectual. Our prayers have been rejected with disdain; and only tended to convince us, that nothing flatters vanity, or confirms obstinacy in Kings more than repeated petitioning—and nothing hath contributed more than that very measure to make the Kings of Europe absolute: Witness Denmark and Sweden. Wherefore, since nothing but blows will do, for God's sake, let us come to a final separation, and not leave the next generation to be cutting throats, under the violated unmeaning names of parent and child.
- <sup>27</sup> To say, they will never attempt it again is idle and visionary, we thought so at the repeal of the stamp act, yet a year or two undeceived us; as well may we suppose that nations, which have been once defeated, will never renew the quarrel.
- <sup>28</sup> As to government matters, it is not in the power of Britain to do this continent justice: The business of it will soon be too weighty, and intricate, to be managed with any tolerable degree of convenience, by a power, so distant from us, and so very ignorant of us; for if they cannot conquer us, they cannot govern us. To be always running three or four thousand miles with a tale or a petition, waiting four or five months for an answer, which when obtained requires five or six more to explain it in, will in a few years be looked upon as folly and childishness—There was a time when it was proper, and there is a proper time for it to cease.
- <sup>29</sup> Small islands not capable of protecting themselves, are the proper objects for kingdoms to take under their care; but there is something very absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet, and as England and America, with respect to each other, reverses the common order of nature, it is evident they belong to different systems: England to Europe, America to itself.
- <sup>30</sup> I am not induced by motives of pride, party, or resentment to espouse the doctrine of separation and independence; I am clearly, positively, and conscientiously persuaded that it is the true interest of this continent to be so; that every thing short of *that* is mere patchwork, that it can afford no lasting felicity,—that it is leaving the sword to our children, and shrinking back at a time, when, a little more, a little farther, would have rendered this continent the glory of the earth.

*Common Sense* by Thomas Paine. Philadelphia: W. & T. Bradford, February 14, 1776.  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/147/147-h/147-h.htm>



## Comprehension

1. Paine's major complaint with the current political system between Great Britain and America centers on what idea?
2. How does Paine feel about "every quiet method for peace"?
3. What is one of the largest obstacles for Great Britain to remain in control of America?

## Rhetorical Analysis

4. Why was Paine's *Common Sense* so effective in getting people to act?
5. Why does Paine include the quote by Milton in paragraph 25?
6. How does the title influence the emotions of the readers?
7. What would you consider Paine's greatest emotional appeal?

## Writing

8. Think about a situation in which you have felt oppressed. Then write a logical appeal to right the wrongs of that oppression.
9. Brainstorm other political situations that could create a document such as *Common Sense*. Give the historical, sociocultural, or economic background of a chosen political situation and justify why the wrongs should be righted.
10. **Writing an Argument** Write an essay in which you support or discourage political acts that endanger lives.