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ARGUMENT & RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

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**Appendix**: How to Create a Wordpress Site for Class

## Rhetoric, Writing & Argument

This is not a literature class, and it’s probably different from all the English classes you’ve taken.

This semester, you will be studying rhetoric, writing, and argument.

Before we begin, it’s probably a good idea to establish some definitions and goals, just so we’re all on the same page.

**What is rhetoric?**

Rhetoric began in ancient Greece. Citizens studied rhetoric to learn how to argue, communicate and reason, mostly so they could use these skills to participate in public life. Rhetorical education was especially important in law, democratic debate, and political action. The Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle both wrote about rhetoric.

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| **Aristotle provided one of the most influential early definitions of rhetoric.**  **Aristotle noticed that some speakers in Athens were more effective in  persuading the public than others. In *On Rhetoric,* a collection of those observations, he offered this definition:**  “Let rhetoric be defined as the faculty of observing in any case all of the available means of persuasion.” | Description: Aristotle2 |

**Modern rhetoric:** the field of rhetoric has developed enormously over the centuries, drawing from and influencing other disciplines.   
Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg are English professors who discuss the value of learning rhetoric and how to teach rhetoric to college students. Their definition is a little more detailed:

Rhetoric has a number of overlapping meanings . . . the use of language, written or spoken, to inform or persuade; the study of the persuasive effects of language; the study of the relation between language and knowledge; the classification and use of tropes and figures…Nor does this list exhaust the definitions that might be given. Rhetoric is a complex discipline with a long history.”

The web site of the department of Rhetoric & Writing Studies describes rhetoric this way:

Rhetoric refers to the study and uses of written, spoken and visual language. It investigates how texts are used to organize and maintain social groups, construct meanings and identities, coordinate behavior, mediate power, persuade, produce change, and create knowledge.

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| **Description: Stephen_Colbert** | **Comedian Stephen Colbert** describes the importance of studying  rhetoric, stating, “My rhetoric teacher, Professor Crawley, ordered my mind. Simplicity of language, supporting ideas, synthesizing an effective conclusion—that’s what I learned from him.” |

**Why Write?**

**E. M. Forster**, who wrote *Passage to India*, as well as other influential novels, answered the question this way: “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?”

**Young & Sullivan**: “Why write? One important reason is that unless we do there are mental acts we cannot perform, thoughts we cannot think, inquiries we cannot engage in.”

**National Commission on Writing:** “If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, *if students are to learn, they must write*…The reward of disciplined writing is the most valuable job attribute of all: a mind equipped to think.”

**Anne Morrow Lindbergh**, a pioneering aviator and author, gave a more detailed answer. She explained, “I must write it all out, at any cost. Writing is thinking. It is more than living, for it is being conscious of living.”

**What are arguments, and what do they have to do with writing and rhetoric?**

Obviously, we’re not talking about disagreements with parents, siblings, friends, or enemies.

In this case, an argument is a statement or idea that someone tries to persuade somebody else to believe. A reasonable person might disagree with that statement.

An argument may also center on a proposed piece of action, upon which reasonable people might disagree.

Arguments are everywhere. You’ll find them in academic writing, advertisements, newspapers, and films. Politicians use arguments every single day.

In college, you will be asked to read, evaluate, and create arguments. Most of the time those arguments   
will be written.

**WHY IS ARGUMENT IMPORTANT?**

**Gerald Graff**: “Argument literacy is central to being educated.”

**Rolf Norgaard: “**Universities are houses of argument.”

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| **Christopher Lasch**:  If we insist on argument as the essence of education, we will defend  democracy not as the most efficient but as the most educational form of government, one that extends the circle of debate as widely as possible  and thus forces all citizens to articulate their views, to put their views  at risk, and to cultivate the virtues of eloquence, clarity of thought and  expression, and sound judgment. | Description: lasch2 |

## Introduction to Argument

**Jamie Madden, San Diego State University**  
**Reconsidering the term “argument”**The purpose of this section for San Diego State University students is to promote an understanding of and an increased skill in practicing the art of argumentation as it is practiced here in the Rhetoric and Writing Studies department here at SDSU. The art of argumentation is different from what you may have experienced many times as an argument. Most of us have been part of pointless arguments in which two people, rather than listening to other positions and seeking to persuade each other or come to some common ground, simply enjoy stating their own opinions as loudly and frequently as possible. This kind of bickering is common, but rarely useful. It produces neither understanding of one’s own position nor the position of others, and it allows no way forward when people disagree.

Argumentation, as we will use the term in this class, is very different. Argumentation is a process of stating what you believe to be true in a way that is meant to help others come to agree with you – a way of persuading people to take actions or adopt ideas that you want them to take or adopt. Thus, it is an important way for you to exert power in your community – to become a leader, to have a voice in your world. So argumentation is a key skill that you take from your education to use in virtually every part of your life – in school, certainly, but also in your profession, in your personal life, in your life as a member of religious groups, political groups, ethnic and geographical groups . . . are you a fan of Spiderman? Do you think he’s a better superhero than Superman? Then you can use argumentation to make your voice heard among of the community of graphic novel fans.

The study of this kind of argumentation is known as *rhetoric,* the study of the available means of persuasion for any given topic, audience, and occasion. You engage in rhetoric every day, both as a rhetor making the argument and as a listener deciding whether you agree with an argument. You try to persuade roommates to send out for pizza, try to convince somebody to go out with you on Saturday night, make a pitch to professors for more time to turn in a paper. And you listen to arguments in which others try to persuade you to buy products, vote for them, let them borrow your car.

However, it is our position that the study of rhetoric ought to concern itself with questions of both effectiveness and ethics. We contend that arguments can only be effective over the long term if they are also constructed in ways that are ethical, and this section is intended to give you the opportunity to explore what those methods are and how you might use them yourselves as well as recognize when they are employed by others. Our intention is not to demonstrate what particular *positions* are ethical. You must decide for yourself what you believe to be true and good, and this is a lifelong process that involves thinking about your experiences and questioning your assumptions and the assumptions of those around you. Rather, our intention is to demonstrate that once you have decided to speak out for an idea that you believe to be true and good, to try to persuade others that this idea is true and good, that there are ways of presenting that argument that are themselves ethical and should be incorporated into your argumentation.

**What is an argument?**As stated in the section above, an argument is an attempt to persuade others to accept an idea. There are three main components to an argument: an arguable question, a persuadable audience, and an occasion for making the argument.

An arguable question is a question on which reasonable people can disagree. It is thus not an issue of fact for which a single answer is correct and can be identified and agreed upon by most reasonable members of a community. Of course, what is arguable may change over time and from one community to another. For instance, very few people in the 21st century would disagree that the earth is round – there is readily available and widely accepted evidence that this is simply a fact. So that question is not arguable now. But in the fifteenth century, it would have been an arguable question. It may also be treated as an arguable question today by members of a modern flat earth society! But overall, the easiest way to identify an arguable question is to ask yourself if you could imagine reasonable people answering the question in different ways. If so, it is likely an arguable question.

The next component of an argument is a persuadable audience. This means that you have a specific audience in mind, a group of people who do not necessarily agree with you already, for, after all, there is little point in trying to persuade an audience who already agrees with you. Instead, a persuadable audience is one who either has little opinion about the question and thus has an open mind to listen or an audience who is not on board with at least some element of your argument but is willing to listen and open to rethinking their own position.

Sometimes audiences are absolutely unwilling to listen to an argument, either because they hold their positions so strongly that they cannot listen to another idea or because they reject the authority of your evidence. Think, for instance, of two people arguing about politics. One person is arguing for a conservative position; the other person has spent their whole life as a progressive, living in a community of progressives, surrounded by family members who are staunch progressives. The speaker uses an example from Ronald Reagan’s administration to support her argument, but the audience immediately says that Ronald Reagan was the worst president ever and rejects the example. In the case of such an audience, it is still worth making the argument, of course, but you may not succeed in actually persuading them – your goal is more likely to be encouraging them to at least begin questioning some of their own assumptions.

The third component of an argument is an occasion, a specific moment and place in which the argument is made. Sometimes that is a real moment in time and space – like a wedding or a political rally or a meeting between yourself and your professor. These occasions are very different and call for different styles of argument, different kinds of arguable questions, different ways of presenting yourself as a speaker. Other times, the occasion occurs within the pages of a written or visual text, which both creates and responds to the moment in time in which was written and the moment in time in which it is read. Texts are in a way constantly recreating the occasion of their creation because they are “created” anew by each person who reads them.

**Claims – Answers to the Arguable Question**So if the starting point of an argument as we are defining that term is an arguable question, the next part we need to understand is known as the *claim*.

The main claim of an author is the main idea that she or he wants the reader to accept as true. It answers the main arguable question and is supported by evidence and/or reasoning.

There are different kinds of claims:

**Claims about definitions** explain what something means, obviously going well beyond the simple answers found in a dictionary. These claims answer questions such as “what is education?”

Claims about definitions may also become **claims about quality,** in which the author considers whether something is good or not. For instance, a claim about quality may answer a question like “what is a good education?”

**Claims about the causes** of an event or situation focus on why something happened.

**Claims about the consequences** of an event or situation focus on the results or potential results of that event of situation. They often take the form of describing a problem caused by that event. Often, claims like this are used in an argument structure known as the problem-solution argument, in which the author identifies the problems caused by an event and them describes actions that could solve these problems.

A claim about consequences may involve a **claim about seriousness**, a claim that answers a question about how widespread or significant a situation is. For instance, a claim about seriousness could answer a question like “how important is a good education?”

Another kind of claim is a **claim about policy**, in which the writer argues that society (or individuals) should take a specific action, often to solve a problem or to make a good situation even better or more permanent. Such a claim might be: “Student loans for college should have a lower interest rate.”

**What is Not a Claim?**There are many elements commonly found in texts that readers sometimes mistake for claims when in fact they are not claims.

The first of these elements is evidence. Any time you are reading a statement that can be verified, a piece of factual information with which no reasonable person could disagree, you are reading evidence, not a claim. For instance, the Bureau of Labor Statistics numbers from the previous section are facts; they could be verified by checking their government website and further verified by examining other sources or even doing your own original research. These statistics are evidence, not claims.

Another element that is not a claim is a matter of taste. These are matters of personal preference that cannot be changed based on reasoning or evidence. Often, they are aesthetic preferences in which we determine that something looks good, sounds good, tastes, smells, or feels good. For instance, maybe Michael Jackson is your favorite singer from “back in the day.” Nothing is going to convince you that you should abandon Michael Jackson’s music in favor of the Beatles. You just plain like it better, don’t you?

The next element that is not a claim is an opinion. An opinion is an idea that a person believes to be true but for which there is no evidence or reasoning presented, or perhaps even no evidence or reasoning available. That sounds kind of like a claim, doesn’t it? Well, it’s on the way…

One of the things that people sometimes say when they agree to disagree is that “everybody is entitled to their opinion.” And that’s certainly true – everybody is entitled to hold an opinion. The problem is that if you and I have different opinions, there is no way for you to even start convincing me to reconsider, to think about the possibility that your opinion is better in some way that mine is. If you want to convince people who don’t already share your opinion, you need to find a way to turn it into an actual claim by giving evidence and reasoning. Let’s go back to Michael Jackson. Suppose you weren’t saying that you *like* his music better than The Beatles’ music. Suppose you wanted to persuade somebody else to see Michael Jackson the same way you see him, wanting to make an actual argument about his music. You could make a main claim about quality, something like “Michael Jackson’s music is better than The Beatles’ music.” You could present sub-claims, such as “Michael Jackson is more popular than the Beatles’” and support them with evidence like “Thriller has sold more copies than any other record in history and Jackson has five albums on the list of the top ten sellers, while The Beatles has only one.” You could make sub-claims that Jackson has influenced the modern music industry more than the Beatles and provide support like statements from reviews by experts. By doing this, you could start a reader on the path to reexamining their own earlier opinions because they would be able to see that there are good reasons to consider Jackson the better artist. You are no longer just a person with your own personal opinion in a world of people who all have their own opinions. You are now making an argument that can influence the thinking of others.

**Sub-claims: On the Way to the Main Claim**In a very simple argument, there would be just one main claim. But the world is not simple and neither are the arguments we make about that world. Instead, persuading a reader to accept a main claim that answers the main question of an argument tends to involve first convincing them to accept particular answers to a number of other questions first. We call these answers *sub-claims.*

Imagine we were asking how to solve poverty. We would first need to ask what poverty was, what caused poverty, what problems poverty caused, how serious those problems were. The answers to those questions would be sub-claims and would help persuade the reader to accept the final main claim, the idea the author has for solving poverty. (If you notice, each of these sub-claims, as well as the main claim, would correspond to the list of kinds of claims above – take a minute to see which ones are which.)

We would also need *evidence* to support those sub-claims. Evidence is factual information, capable of being verified by anybody through widely acceptable means. If an author were making an argument about poverty and making a sub-claim that poverty in a society causes increases in crime, she or he would need to provide facts to support that idea. For instance, the author may write that reports from researchers at Ohio State University state that serious crime is three times more prevalent in very economically disadvantaged neighborhoods than it is in more prosperous neighborhoods.

So we can think of arguments as having a kind of architecture that looks like this. And of course, there could be multiple subclaims.

Main claim: We can reduce poverty by making education more widely available

First Sub-claim: We need to solve poverty because poverty increases crime.

Evidence: Ohio State University research states that serious crime is three times more prevalent in very economically disadvantaged neighborhoods than it is in more prosperous neighborhood.

Second Sub-claim: Making college more affordable will help reduce poverty.

Evidence: The Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that high school dropouts earn an average wage of less than half the average wage of a college graduate.

Notice that by providing a chain of evidence, sub-claims, and the main claim, you are beginning to provide your readers with a sense of your *reasoning*, a group of statements that explain why you arrived at your ultimate conclusion, your main claim that we can reduce poverty by making education more widely available. Reasoning is very important to the process of persuading your audience. Without it, you are simply asking them to accept your argument based on nothing other than your word that you are correct.

For instance, remember when your parents told you to eat your vegetables? And they tasted nasty, so you said, “why?” This was the beginning to a potential argument, a moment when you introduced an arguable question, a question about which reasonable people could disagree, even when one of those people was, say, four years old.

If your parents said that you should eat your vegetables (made a claim) because they told you to, then your parents didn’t make a real argument. They were simply imposing their authority on four-year-old-vegetable-despising you. And that wasn’t very convincing, was it? Maybe you ate your veggies and maybe you found a way to sneak them to the dog, but you were not persuaded because the claim of an argument requires support in the form of evidence and/or reasoning.

Imagine instead that your parents had said that you should eat your vegetables because they are good for you. Well, now that starts to sound more persuasive, doesn’t it? That’s because your parents were now providing a reason that supports their claim. Maybe you still didn’t *like* your veggies, because it is not possible to make an argument about questions of taste like whether cauliflower is yummy. But you began to understand, maybe even agree, that you should eat them anyway.

**Evidence: “Just the Facts, Ma’am”**So as you can see, giving evidence is central to presenting an argument. This is the step that is crucial to persuading a reader who doesn’t already agree with you. There are a number of different kinds of evidence.

**Historical evidence** presents facts from the past. The goal here is to take a peek forward into our future; if taking an action in the past turned out badly, it may well be that taking a similar action in the present would be a bad idea. Or, of course, if taking an action in the past had a good outcome, repeating that action in the present may have similar benefits.

However, this requires that we all agree that the historical situation is similar enough to the present to tell us something about the present. If there are too many differences between the historical situation that is being described and the present, an audience may well decide that the evidence isn’t relevant and reject it.

Another potential issue is that your audience needs to accept your interpretation of historical evidence. If you want your audience to think that a historical event caused problems but they see that there were also benefits, they will likely reject your evidence and not accept the claim that the evidence supports.

**Statistical or numerical evidence** consists of specific numbers. It often tells us how widespread or serious an issue is and is intended to persuade a reader that a matter is worthy of attention.

One weakness of numerical evidence is that it can seem rather cold and uninteresting. It tells us how widespread poverty is, for instance, but it may not persuade a reader that we should do anything about poverty – it may fail to convince a reader to actually care about an issue.

Another question that readers may ask about numerical evidence is whether it was gathered properly. If there was a study, for instance, the readers want to know that there was an appropriate number of test subjects or that the information was gathered properly.

**Research studies** often involve numerical or statistical evidence but go into more detail about how that information was gathered. These studies are usually performed by academics or experts within fields such as the sciences. Writers may also want to think about using multiple pieces of numerical evidence or research studies that have different qualities. For instance, a writer may want to use a study of a very small group of people because it took place over a long period of time; she or he could then also present another study that looked at a much larger group of people over a much shorter period of time. This would give stronger support to the claim because the two kinds of evidence complement each other.

**Anecdotal evidence** looks at individual examples that are related to a claim. Such examples are best when used together with numerical evidence. Individual examples take the reader “inside” a situation; they help the reader feel what it’s like to walk in somebody else’s shoes, so the reader has a more emotional response and may even find such evidence more interesting, while statistical evidence can help the reader see how widespread the situation is.

In anecdotal evidence, writers are expecting readers to accept that the individual example represents the experience of others, even most others, who are in a similar situation. Like historical evidence, anecdotal evidence can be rejected if the reader decides that the example isn’t relevant. If the reader believes that the example isn’t representative of the experiences of others, the reader would reject the evidence.

**Personal anecdotes** are stories that the writer tells from her or his own experience. These work a lot like anecdotal evidence but also have another potential advantage. They can help the reader learn about the writer himself or herself, helping the reader learn to like and trust the writer, which makes the reader more likely to accept the writer’s claims. Like anecdotal evidence, the reader would need to believe that the author’s experience is typical, that it represents the experience of most other people in a similar situation. If they think that the author is so unique that this experience isn’t common, the reader will likely reject the evidence.

**Expert testimony** is statements from experts who agree with one or more of your claims. The reader needs to believe that the expert’s knowledge is relevant to the question being considered (who wants the opinion of an ophthalmologist on Michael Jackson’s music?).

**Masquerading as Evidence**Sometimes writers present information that appears to be evidence but that actually cannot function effectively as evidence. These are not verifiable facts but are more general statements. Do they work? Well, yes, on some people. These kinds of “evidence” are very persuasive to people who already agree with the claim being made; they are not persuasive to an audience who disagrees with the claim or who doesn’t have an opinion on the claim.

Generalized statements fail to persuade readers because they have no real specifics behind them. Statements like, “Well, everybody knows that apples are better for you than oranges” are a very weak attempt at evidence. They may work well on an audience who already agrees with you, but they cannot persuade an audience who doesn’t agree. They are not among the “everybody” who already thinks this and the writer hasn’t given them any idea about who that “everybody” is or why the reader should pay attention to those people’s knowledge.

Descriptions of hypothetical events are also weak in persuading people. This is when a writer asks the reader to imagine something that hasn’t actually happened and to agree that if such a thing had happened, there would have been some specific consequences. An audience who already agrees with the claim being “supported” by such a hypothetical example is likely to accept that evidence because they find it very easy to imagine this happening. But a more neutral audience will recognize that there is no real basis for accepting this assumption – that they event never really happened and thus gives no basis in fact for accepting that the imaginary “consequences” were inevitable. None of it happened, so it can’t be evidence.

**Evaluating Evidence**As readers, we need to carefully consider how strong the evidence is that writers provide in support of their claims. There are a few questions that we can generally ask of most kinds of evidence.

Keep in mind, also, that evidence needs to be evaluated not only on its own but also in connection with the other pieces of evidence in an argument. Maybe one specific research study only examined a small number of people and you initially see this as a problem – the evidence isn’t sufficient, in your view. However, if the argument later provides some statistics that shows a more broad picture, then the two texts work together to support the argument more fully.

**Historical Evidence:** How is this historical example relevant to the current situation? Are there significant difference between the two situations that would suggest another possible claim? Is the evidence sufficient? That is, if there is one specific historical example of something happening, is that enough to support the claim? Does the historical evidence seem to come from a credible source? Does the historical evidence seem to have been interpreted correctly?

**Statistical Evidence**: Were the numbers specific? Does this information come from a credible source? Does the information appear to have been gathered in a way that’s appropriate? Why are these numbers relevant to the claim being made? Are the numbers significant? (Keep in mind that this depends on a number of factors; a 3% decrease in heart disease may not seem like much, but if it is 3% in a nation of 150 million people, that’s a very significant number.) Is the information recent relative to the time the argument was written?

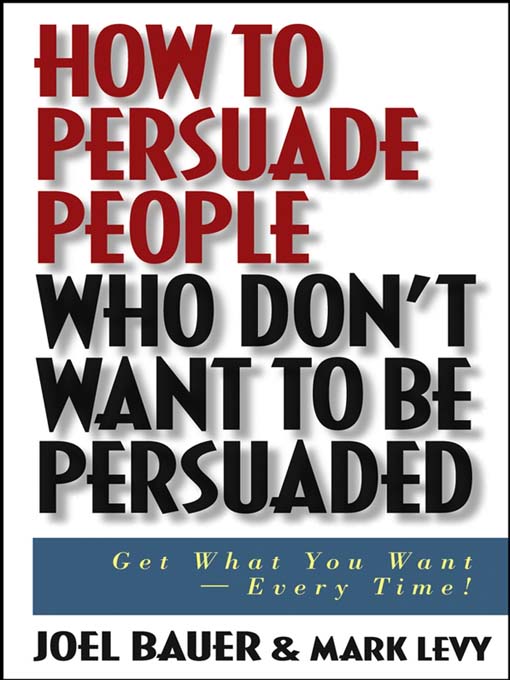
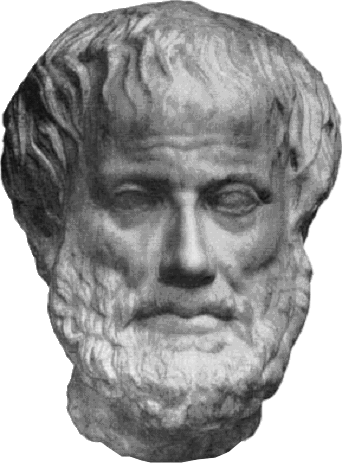
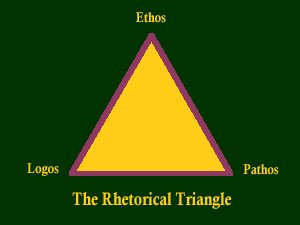
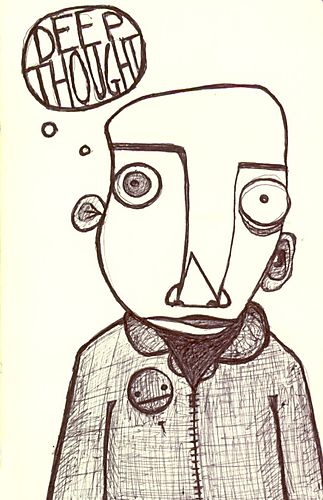
**Research Studies**: Is the source of the study credible, meaning both are they experts in this field and are they unbiased? Was the study well-designed? How is the study relevant to the claim it supports? Are there other ways to interpret the research findings that have been ignored and that contradict or fail to support the author’s claim? Is the research recent relative to the time the argument was written?

**Expert Testimony:** Is the source credible, that is, are they experts in a relevant field and do they seem to be unbiased? Dose the expert’s opinion appear to be itself founded on strong evidence?

**Anecdotal Evidence and Personal Anecdotes:** Is the anecdote detailed enough to persuade a reader that it actually occurred? Does the anecdote appear to be representative of the experiences of a significant number of other people? How is the anecdote relevant to the claim being supported?

**& CONCEPTS**

**KEY RHETORICAL TERMS**



Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to describe arguments, what they are, and how they are constructed. In order to do so, you will identify and discuss rhetorical concepts.

This type of writing is called rhetorical analysis.

## [Rhetorical Analysis](https://blackboard.sdsu.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_14583_1&content_id=_300903_1)



Rhetorical analysis looks **not only at what a text *says*, but at what it *does***. It includes consideration of the claims, devices and strategic “moves” an author makes in hopes of persuading an audience.

Many claims and arguments within texts are implied rather than explicit; performing rhetorical analyses on texts helps us to get a better sense of how, why, and to what extent an argument is effective.

Consider how a text works to convince its audience of the argument at hand. What, besides simply using logic, do authors use to help win a crowd? This work may include describing an author’s argument, use of evidence, rhetorical strategies, textual arrangement, or the complex relationships between author, audience, text, context, and purpose.

Some words used to describe what a text does

argues • appeals to authority • assumes • challenges • complicates

constructs an analogy • contrasts • presents counterexamples • defines

distinguishes (between) • extends • forecasts • frames • implies • parodies

problematized • qualifies • rebuts • ridicules • stresses

supports • synthesizes • theorizes

## PACES: Project, Argument, Claims, Evidence, Strategies

**Project:** An author’s project describes the kind of work she sets out to do – her purpose and the method she uses to carry it out. It is the overall activity that the writer is engaged in--researching, investigating, experimenting, interviewing, documenting, etc. Try to imagine what the author’s goals or hypotheses were as she wrote the text. To articulate a project—and to write an account— you need a verb, such as “researches,” “investigates,” “studies,” “presents,” “connects A with B,” etc.





**Argument: In the broadest sense, an argument is** any piece of written, spoken, or visual language **designed to persuade an audience or bring about a change** in ideas/attitudes. Less broadly, in academic writing the argument often refers to the main point, assertion or conclusion advanced by an author, along with the evidence and reasoning by which this is established. Arguments are concerned with contested issues where some degree of uncertainty exists (we don’t argue about what is self-evident or agreed upon).



**Claims:** To make a claim is to assert that something is the case, and to provide evidence for this. Arguments may consist of numerous claims and sometimes also sub-claims. Claims in academic writing often consist of an assertion, the staking out of a position, the solution to a problem, or the resolution of some shortcoming, weakness or gap in existing research. Often comes with **self-identification** (“my point here is that…”) **emphasis** (“It must be stressed that…”) **approval** (“Olson makes some important and long overdue amendments to work on …”) or a **problem/solution** or **question/answer framework**.



**Evidence:** The component of the argument used as support for the claims made. Evidence is the support, reasons, data/information used to help persuade/prove an argument. To find evidence in a text, ask what the author has to go on. What is there to support this claim? Is the evidence credible? Some **types of evidence**: facts, historical examples/comparisons, examples, analogies, illustrations, interviews, statistics (source & date are important), expert testimony, authorities, anecdotes, witnesses, personal experiences, reasoning, etc.



**Strategies:** [Rhetorical Strategy](https://blackboard.sdsu.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_14583_1&content_id=_300904_1): a particular way in which authors craft language—both consciously and subconsciously—so as to have an effect on readers. Strategies are means of persuasion, ways of gaining a readers’ attention, interest, or agreement. Strategies can be identified in the way an author organizes her text, selects evidence, addresses the reader, frames an issue, presents a definition, constructs a persona or establishes credibility, appeals to authority, deals with opposing views, uses “meta-discourse,” makes particular use of style and tone, draws on particular tropes and images, as well as many of the other textual choices that can be identified.

Hmm...



## Rhetorical Situation

(Jenny Sheppard)

We will often begin our analysis of a text by “situating” it. This means figuring out what kind of text we are dealing with, who it is trying to persuade, and when and where it was written.  
Experienced readers begin their analysis by asking big-picture questions about who the author is, what kind of audience she addresses, the context, the genre of the text, the purpose of the text, and the constraints that exist.  
  
Key Elements of the **Rhetorical Situation**

* + - **Audience**- who is the intended audience? Who might be secondary audiences? How is the text shaped to target those people?
    - **Purpose**- what is a text trying to get people to do or understand?
    - **Constraints**- anything outside the communication that affects the audience’s reception- “Every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (Bitzer)
    - **Context**- similar to constraints, context refers to the situational conditions for which a communication is developed; communication is always shaped by situational (contextual) influences that are specific to that time, place, and occasion; when and where was the text written and where is it intended to be read/seen/heard?
    - **Genre**- the expected format and rhetorical choices for particular situations; conventions for the medium of communication
    - **Kairos**- the often narrow window within which one can speak out to affect an issue, identifying the opportune moment or season when an action or response will make the most sense/have the potential for impact

## Identifying Claims

**A good rule of thumb is to look for the following cues:**

1. **Question/answer patterns.** For example,Kristof begins his text by asking “Why can’t we regulate guns as seriously as we do cars?” His “answer” is that we can and should regulate guns as seriously as we do cars, and this is also his main claim.
2. **Problem/solution** **patterns**. Some authors will structure their argument around one or more problems, and their “solutions” to these problems are often also their main claims.
3. **Look for passages in which evidence is discussed** and work backward to the claim this is intended to support.
4. **Self-identification** (“my point here is that…”)
5. **Emphasis/repetition**  (“it must be stressed that…”)
6. **Approval** (“Olson makes some important and long overdue amendments to work on …”)
7. **Metalanguage that explicitly uses the language of argument** (“My argument consists of three main claims. First, that…”)
8. **Review “beginnings and ends” –** the beginning and end of the entire text, the end of the text’s introduction section, and the beginning and end of paragraphs.
9. **Look for section heading titles that indicate major claims.** Some authorshelp readers follow the arc of their argument by dividing their text up into sections that

## Questions to Ask About the Text BEFORE You Read[[1]](#footnote-1): Previewing, Skimming, Surveying

Your time is valuable. If you’re like most students, you want to finish your reading as quickly as possible. You have other readings for other classes and a fair amount of homework. However, you can learn a lot about a text before you even begin reading and it’s worth it to take a few extra minutes to ask these questions before you begin the reading assignment.

1. **What can I learn from the title?** While titles can sometimes be general or provide few clues to the content of the work, a critical reader can often learn a lot about a text based on its title. A title may indicate the author’s point of view on the subject (e.g. “Keep the Borders Open”) or reveal the author’s argument (e.g. “A Change of Heart About Animals”).
2. **What do I know about the author?** In many academic texts, such as course readers and textbooks, publishers often include a short biographical sketch of the author. From this information a reader can gain insight into the author’s background, credentials, project, argument, purpose, and more. Even when the editor of the course reader or text book doesn’t give you an introduction, you can do a simple Google search to help determine the author’s authority, credentials, background, etc. Many writers (and most academics) have web sites that will tell you a lot about them and the work they do.

You can also use the San Diego State’s online biography resources:

<http://infoguides.sdsu.edu/sub2.php?id=92&pg=13>

1. **Who is the publisher?** While a publisher’s reputation is not an automatic indicator of the source’s reliability, you can learn a lot by discovering who published a particular work. For example, university presses and academic journals tend to expect a high degree of scholarship and many of these works are peer reviewed to ensure a text’s quality. When reading popular periodicals, you may discover that certain magazines and newspapers consistently reflect certain political positions, which can help you anticipate the political position of the text you are about to read. You may also be able to identify the target audience for this particular text, based on the publication source.
2. **When was the text written?** Locating the date of publication can provide useful information about the rhetorical context in which the writer developed their work.
3. **What can I learn from skimming the text?** Proficient readers often skim through a text before reading to gather important information.

* You can survey the *organization* of the text, looking for text divisions, section headings, and subtitles, which may give clues about the text.
* You can also note important signal words, such as *therefore, so, thus, but, however, for example, first, second,* etc. to learn more about the structure of the argument and the rhetorical work of the writer.
* Skim the *visuals* and note the relationship between the visual and written text.
* Look for head-notes, footnotes, and biographical information.

## Active & Critical Reading

Throughout the semester, you will complete charting exercises and a number of rhetorical précis on the texts we’ll read for this course. The best way to complete these exercises and understand the issues is to read actively and critically. Here are some tips.

**Always read a text twice.** The first time you read, you read for content. The second time you read, you read for “moves.” Students often think this takes too much time, but the second read goes much faster than the first, and the better you understand the text, the easier it will be to write your papers. It is time well spent.

**Set a purpose for reading.** What is the outcome of your reading? For example, if you are completing a précis, be sure to look for the author’s argument, evidence, purpose/project, intended audience and tone/strategies toward that audience.

**Flip through the text before reading.**

* Number your paragraphs. This is very helpful for class/group discussion, not to mention reference.
* Look for head-notes, footnotes, biographical information about the author, other explanatory material
* Identify author, publication type, date
* Identify target audience
* Survey the organization of the text; look for text divisions, section headings, and subtitles. *Turn title and all section headings into questions*. Answer these questions as you read.
* Read first and last paragraphs to possibly identify the author’s topic and conclusion/central claim, and while reading, mark repeated terms and synonyms that point to central claim (*Please note*: this “first and last paragraphs” reading works for many, but not all texts because topic and central claim are not always specifically stated or placed in these locations)

**Chart the text.** Marking a text is an incredibly valuable reading skill. As opposed to being a passive recipient of the information a text conveys, proficient readers *actively engage with texts, as if in conversation with the author.* On the left margin summarize what each paragraph/group of paragraphs are *saying*. On the right margin, write what the other is *doing*.

* While you chart—in addition to looking for claims, evidence, strategies, context clues—note unfamiliar words or allusions (for example, with a squiggled line) and look them up. Write definition in the margin. Look up illusions. It may help you understand the context.
* Note signal words such as *therefore, so, thus, but, however, for example, first, second, etc*.
* Note when the author uses the word “I.” This can help you see where the author has inserted themselves in the text (to explain position, what they are doing, the structure of their argument, clarify argument, etc)
* Also, “speak” to the text – jot down questions, comments, rhetorical work being done, etc. Identifying when the author “shifts gears” can help you mark off sections of a text. We will talk more about this strategy in class.

## Some Questions to Ask Any Text

These questions can be posed to any text, and can help you start thinking about texts from a rhetorical perspective.  
  
**THE BIG PICTURE**

1. **Who is the audience?** Who is the author trying to reach? (age, gender, cultural background, class, etc.) Which elements of the text – both things included, and things left out – provide clues about the intended audience? How does the author represent the audience
2. **Who is the author, and where is she coming from?** What can you find out about the author? What can you find out about the organization, publication, web site, or source she is writing for?
3. **What** **is the author’s purpose?** What is the question at issue? Why has the author written this text? What is the problem, dispute, or question being addressed? What motivated her to write, what does she hope to accomplish, and how does she hope to influence the audience?
4. **What is the context** - what is the situation that prompted the writing of this text, & how do you know? When was the text created, and what was going on at the time? Can you think of any social, political, or economic conditions that are particularly important?
5. **What “conversation” is the author part of?** It’s unlikely the author is the first person to write on a particular topic. As Graff points out, writers invariably add their voices to a larger conversation. How does the author respond to other texts? How does she enter the conversation (“Many authors have argued X, but as Smith shows, this position is flawed, and I will extend Smith’s critique by presenting data that shows…”) How does the author position herself in relation to other authors?
6. **How does the author claim “centrality,”** i.e. establish that the topic being discussed matters, and that readers should care?
7. **What is the author’s “stance”?** What is his attitude toward the subject, and how does this come across in his language?
8. **What research went into writing the text, & what material does the author examine?** (project)

ARGUMENT & PERSUASION

1. **What is the most important sentence in this text**, to you? Why?
2. **What is the author’s overall argument, or central claim?**
3. **What are the most important (sub) claims?**
4. **How does the author establish her authority/credibility?** (*ethos*)
5. **How does the author connect with your emotions?** (*pathos*)
6. **What evidence or reasons does the author provide, and do they convince you?** (*logos*)
7. **What are you being asked to believe, think, or do?** (persuasion)
8. **How is the text organized?** Why do you think the author organized the text this way? What effect does it have?
9. **Does the author respond to other arguments**, and if so, are they treated fairly?
10. **How do the author’s stylistic choices reinforce or advance the argument?** Howdo word choice, imagery, metaphor, design, etc. help persuade?
11. **How does the author frame the issues?** Does the author’srepresentation of the issue or problem invite the audience to see things from a particular perspective? How does this help persuade?
12. **How does the author define the central terms being discussed?** How does this help persuade?
13. **What assumptions can you identify?** What does the author take for granted, and what does this tell you about her argument?
14. **What implications follow from the author’s argument?**
15. **Does the author use metadiscourse?** Are there moments when the author talks about what he is doing, or addresses the audience directly? Is this persuasive? How?

## “I know what it says, but what does it do?”

Verbs that can be used to describe what a text does, whether you are articulating the project, the argument, or the claims. Verbs are also used to describe the ways evidence and strategies support claims and arguments.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| **Acknowledges**  **Advises**  **Advocates Amplifies Analyzes Argues Asks (Constructs an)**  **Analogy Asserts**  **Assumes Attacks Challenges Claims Clarifies Compares Complicates Concedes Concludes**  **Connects Contrasts Contradicts (Presents)**  **Counterarguments**  **Criticizes**  **(Presents)**  **Counterexamples** | **Critiques**  **Defends Defines Denies**  **Describes**  **Disagrees Divides/Distinguishes (between)**  **Dramatizes Elaborates Emphasizes**  **Exaggerates**  **Examines Exemplifies/presents examples Explains Extends Generalizes Forecasts Faults Frames/reframes Illustrates**  **Implies**  **Insists Introduces Investigates** | **Justifies**  **Maintains**  **Narrates Opposes Parodies Predicts Problematizes**  **Proposes (Sets up a) parallel Qualifies Questions Rebuts Refines Repeats**  **Resolves Ridicules Satirizes**  **Speculates Suggests Summarizes Supports Synthesizes** |

**Try to AVOID: thinks, believes, says, etc.!**

Consider using the following construction:

This paragraph [VERB] [IDEA] by [EXPLAIN HOW] .

Also see *They Say/ I Say* for verbs organized by use for when authors make claims, are in agreement, question or disagree, and when they make recommendations (see page 37).

## Charting a Text

Charting[[2]](#footnote-2) involves annotating a text in order to show the “work” each paragraph, group of paragraphs, or section is doing. Charting helps identify what each part of the text is *doing* as well as what it is *saying*—helping us move away from summary to analysis. There are two strategies for charting that we’ll look at: *macro*-charting and *micro*-charting.

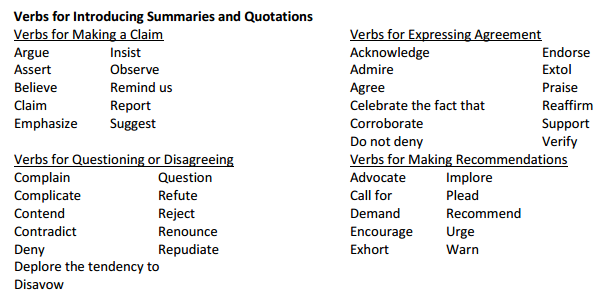
**MACRO-CHARTING**

|  |
| --- |
| How do we do macro-charting?   * Break text down into sections--identify “chunks” or parts of the text that seem to work together to DO something for the overall argument. * Draw lines between sections and label each one, annotating them with “doing” verbs: **providing** context, **making** a claim, **supporting** a claim, **rebutting** counter argument, **illustrating** with personal anecdote, **describing** the issue, etc.     Why do we do macro-charting?   * Macro-charting helps with understanding structure of argument, as well as locating claims, supporting evidence, and main argument. * Macro-charting guides students toward identifying relationships between ideas. * Macro-charting brings awareness that behind every sentence there is an author with intent who makes rhetorical choices to achieve his/her aims. |

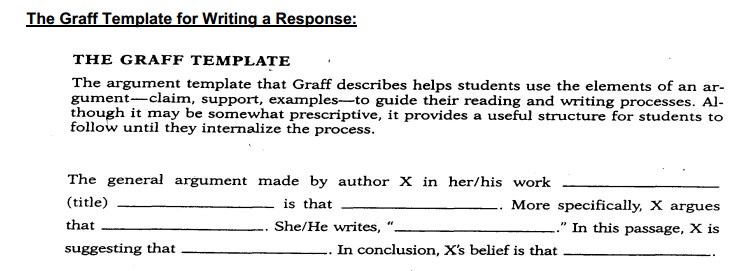
**MICRO-CHARTING**

|  |
| --- |
| How do we do micro-charting?   * Break down sections of text by paragraph to analyze what each paragraph is *doing* for the overall argument. * Detail the smaller “moves” and strategies made within paragraphs: note when, where, and how and author makes a claim, cites evidence, and/or supports his/argument using a rhetorical strategy.   Why do we do micro-charting?   * Micro-charting can serve as a way to thoroughly understand in a detailed way how a text is put together. * Micro-charting encourages readers to look more carefully and closely at a text and helps us to focus our reading on tasks asked for in prompts. * Micro-charting brings awareness of the specific rhetorical choices made throughout a text (addressing particular audiences by making deliberate moves). |

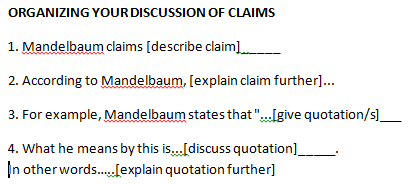
## Some Templates



(From Graff et al., *They Say/I Say*: *The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*.)



**HOME GROWN TEMPLATES**



## Quick Guide to Quotations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1. Choose Carefully** | Choose what you want to use carefully. Make sure you need the quotation to illustrate your point, and that it connects closely with the point you are making. |
| **2. Introduce   or “frame”** | You should ‘set up’ or introduce quotations – don’t just insert them into your text without providing some background. This means they should be introduced with your own words. You should use introductory phrases that provide context or say what the author is doing in the section of the text the quotation comes from– for example, “Author X is concerned about global warming, and describes her alarm in the following terms. She writes, [insert quotation]… |
| **3. Integrate** | Make the quoted words fit the language (part of speech and verb tense) of your writing. You may need to carefully select parts of the quotation to do this. |
| **4. Explain and analyze** | EXPLAIN the relevance of any direct quote you include to the analysis you’re doing within that paragraph or section. Never just leave a quote hanging on its own (aka the “dangling” or “drive-by” quotation, as Graff and Birkenstein put it.) |
| **5. Always Cite** | Always cite the text, author, page number, etc. you are using.. |
| **6. Maintain Your Voice (handle attributions)** | Sometimes when a writer is paraphrasing the ideas of others the viewpoints get mixed up and the reader finds it difficult to know who is saying what. The writer needs to provide good "cueing" so that the reader always knows the difference between what the writer believes and what the source believes. |

**QUOTATION SANDWICH**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Top slice** = **introduction & framing**  (advance your point or interpretation of the author’s claim, or what the author is doing)  **The meat/tofu** = **the actual quotation**  **Bottom slice** = **explain, restate, discuss** significance. Why is it important, and what do you take it to say? | http://www.clipartclipart.com/_images_300/Half_a_peanut_butter_and_jelly_sandwhich_100313-141362-770059.jpg |

**Quotations & Punctuation**

Commas and periods go INSIDE QUOTATIONS unless parenthetical citation follows, in which case the comma or period goes on the other side of the citation (note that in British English it’s the opposite – punctuation goes outside the quotation).

"Really, there is no excuse for aggressive behavior," the supervisor said. "It sets a bad example."

The period goes outside of the quotation mark when using a parenthetical reference.

"Animals have a variety of emotions similar to humans" (Erikson 990).

The colon and semicolon always go outside the closing quotation mark.

He referred to this group of people as his "gang": Heidi, Heather Shelley, and Jessie.

## MLA Documentation Simplified, Glen McClish

Parenthetical Citation:

1. Crediting a source when directly quoted and identified:

Leonard Valverde has called mathematics "the most culture-free subject" (126).

2. Crediting a source when paraphrased or summarized and identified:

Deborah Tannen argues that men and women respond differently to debate in classroom settings (124-26).

3. Crediting multiple sources when paraphrased or summarized and identified:  
  
Peter Marin (191) and John Morrison (174) maintain that our culture devalues men's lives.

4. Crediting unidentified sources:

Most students confuse the semicolon with the colon (Smith 43).  
  
Mathematics has been called “the most culture-free subject” (Valverde 126).

5. Citing multiple sources by the same author requires employing abbreviated versions of the titles of the texts in your parenthetical citations. For example, suppose you have two sources by the author Gerald Graff: an article entitled "Teach the Conflicts" and a book entitled *Literature Against Itself*:

Gerald Graff asserts that a pedagogy in which we focus on "teaching the conflicts" will give our curriculum structure and relevance ("Teach" 51). He argues primarily from a theoretical and global perspective that places educational discord in the framework of larger problems in academic culture (*Literature* 120-27).  
  
Educational discord can be contextualized within larger problems in academic culture (Graf, *Literature* 120-27).

6. Citing sources from the Web without page numbers requires a somewhat different approach. If you are citing such a work by Chris Werry that is unidentified, place his name in parentheses:   
  
With the advent of the Internet, composition pedagogy forever changed (Werry).   
  
If, on the other hand, you identify the text, provide no parenthetical citation:  
  
With the advent of the Internet, argues Chris Werry, “composition pedagogy forever changes.”

7. If the author or title is identified, single-page sources do not require a parenthetical page number.   
  
In “Why Try Zimmerman?” the *Los Angeles Times* declared, “Unless federal authorities uncover some new piece of evidence that suggests obvious racial animus . . . he should not be prosecuted again.”

8. Citing an unidentified, authorless source requires using its title (or a shortened version):

At least one major newspaper discouraged further prosecution of Zimmerman (“Why Try Zimmerman?”).

Works Cited:

List sources in alphabetical order on a separate page under the heading “Works Cited.” Abbreviate Press with P, University with U, and University Press with UP. Please consult a style guide or see me if you will be citing a type of source not represented on this list.

A. a book by a single author:

Griffin, Clifford S. *Their Brothers' Keepers*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1960. Print.

B. a book by multiple authors:  
  
Hand, Shaky, and Ima Klutz. *Surgery Made Easy*. Boston: Fly By Night P, 1991. Print.  
  
Bellah, Robert N., et al. *Habits of the Heart*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985. Print.

C. an edited book:  
  
McClish, Glen. *Punctuation*. Ed. Ellen Quandahl. San Diego: San Diego State UP, 2003. Print.

D. a chapter in a book (usually a collection of essays):  
  
Golding, Alan C. "A History of American Poetry Anthologies." *Canons*. Ed. Robert von Hallberg. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984. 279-307. Print.

E. an article in a journal (accessed in print or online):  
  
Wright, Susan. "Private Language Made Public." *Poetics* 18.1 (1989): 549-78. Print.  
  
Wright, Susan. "Private Language Made Public." *Poetics* 18.1 (1989): 549-78. *ProQuest*. Web. 23 Nov. 2012.

F. an article in a newspaper or periodical (accessed in print or online):  
  
Mangan, Katherine S. "Battle Rages Over Plan to Focus on Race and Gender in the University of Texas Course." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 27 Nov. 1990: A15. Print.  
  
“Dr. W. J. Simmons.” *Christian Recorder*, 20 Nov. 1890: n. pag. *Accessible Archives*. Web. 30 Oct. 2012.

G. an interview (conducted by the author of the essay):  
  
Yeltsin, Boris. Personal interview. 1 Dec. 1994.

H. a text or page from a website (my example comes directly from the Purdue OWL Site):  
  
"How to Make Vegetarian Chili." *eHow*. Demand Media, n.d. Web. 24 Feb. 2009.

author’s and/or editor’s names (if known); title of text, project or website in italics; document date and pages (if known); medium of publication (web); date of your visit; URL optional.

I. a website (my example comes directly from the Purdue OWL Site):  
 *The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2008. Web. 23 Apr. 2008.  
  
Editor, author, or compiler name (if available). *Name of Site*. Version number. Name of institution/organization affiliated with the site (sponsor or publisher), date of resource creation (if available). Medium of publication. Date of access.

J. a source with no author (alphabetize by title):  
  
“Why Try Zimmerman?” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 Jul. 2013: A10. Print.

## Rhetorical Strategies

**Rhetorical strategies** are tools that help writers craft language so as to have an effect on readers. Strategies are means of persuasion, a way of using language to get readers’ attention and agreement.

In your writing or your discussion, you will need to ask and answer certain questions. Why does the author choose to use that strategy in that place? What does he or she want to evoke in the reader? How do these strategies help the author build his or her argument? How do these strategies emphasize the claims the author makes or the evidence he or she uses?

When describing why a strategy is used, you may also want to consider alternative strategies, and think about how they would work differently. It might be helpful to consider what would happen if the strategy were left out – what difference would it make to the argument? This may help you figure out why the particular strategy was chosen.

Remember that any term we have looked at that can be used to describe an argument, can be used strategically. This includes evidence, definitions, metaphors, the GASCAP terms, rebuttals and qualifiers, framing, etc.

**When Discussing Rhetorical Strategies, Remember to:**

1. Identify rhetorical strategies in the text
2. Describe *how* they work
3. Describe *why* they are used – what purpose do they accomplish?
4. Always include a discussion of how this strategy helps the author develop and support the argument.

The following is a list of commonly used strategies and questions that will help you consider why the author may have chosen to use those strategies.

**Authorities or “big names” –** Frequently an author will quote from a famous person or well-known authority on the topic being discussed.

* How does this appeal to authority build trust in her argument that the consensus can be trusted?
* How does this appeal tap into assumptions about scientific method

**Cause and effect analysis**: Analyzes why something happens and describes the consequences of a string of events.

* Does the author examine past events or their outcomes?
* Is the purpose to inform, speculate, or argue about why an identifiable fact happens the way it does?

**Commonplaces –** Also known as hidden assumptions, hidden beliefs, and ideologies. Commonplaces include assumptions, many of them unconscious, that groups of people hold in common.

* What hidden assumptions or beliefs does the speaker have about the topic? How is the speaker or author appealing to the hidden assumptions of the audience?
* Who is the intended audience of this piece? What are some assumptions of this intended audience?

**Comparison and contrast**: Discusses similarities and differences.

* Does the text contain two or more related subjects?
* How are they alike? different?
* How does this comparison further the argument or a claim?

**Definition –**When authors define certain words, these definitions are specifically formulated for the specific purpose he or she has in mind. In addition, these definitions are crafted uniquely for the intended audience.

* Who is the intended audience?
* Does the text focus on any abstract, specialized, or new terms that need further explanation so the readers understand the point?
* How has the speaker or author chosen to define these terms for the audience?
* What effect might this definition have on the audience, or how does this definition help further the argument?

**Description**: Details sensory perceptions of a person, place, or thing.

* Does a person, place, or thing play a prominent role in the text?
* Does the tone, pacing, or overall purpose of the essay benefit from sensory details?
* What emotions might these details evoke in the audience? (See Pathos)
* How does this description help the author further the argument?

**Division and classification**: Divides a whole into parts or sorts related items into categories.

* Is the author trying to explain a broad and complicated subject?
* Does it benefit the text to reduce this subject to more manageable parts to focus the discussion?

**Exemplification**: Provides examples or cases in point.

* What examples, facts, statistics, cases in point, personal experiences, or interview questions does the author add to illustrate claims or illuminate the argument?
* What effect might these have on the reader?

**Ethos –** Aristotle’s term *ethos* refersto the credibility, character or personality of the speaker or author or someone else connected to the argument. *Ethos* brings up questions of ethics and trust between the speaker or author and the audience. How is the speaker or author building credibility for the argument? How and why is the speaker or author trying to get the audience to trust her or him? **See the discussion on Aristotelian Appeals in the textbook.**

* Aristotle says that a speaker builds credibility by demonstrating that he or she is fair, knowledgeable about a topic, trustworthy, and considerate.
* What specifically does the author do to obtain the reader’s trust? How does he or she show fairness? Understanding of the topic? Trustworthy? Considerate of the reader’s needs?
* How does she construct credibility for her argument?

**Identification –** This is rhetorician Kenneth Burke’s term for the act of “identifying” with another person who shares your values or beliefs. Many speakers or authors try to identify with an audience or convince an audience to identify with them and their argument.

* How does the author build a connection between himself or herself and the audience?

**Logos –** Loosely defined, *logos* refers to the use of logic, reason, facts, statistics, data, and numbers. Very often, *logos* seems tangible and touchable, so much more real and “true” than other rhetorical strategies that it does not seem like a persuasive strategy at all. **See the discussion on Aristotelian Appeals in the textbook.**

* How and why does the author or speaker chose *logos?*
* How does the author show there are good reasons to support his or her argument?
* What kinds of evidence does he or she use?

**Metadiscourse –** Metadiscourse can be described as language about language. It announces to the reader what the writer is doing, helping the reader to recognize the author’s plan. (Example: In my paper . . .) Metadiscourse can be used both to announce the overall project or purpose of the paper and to announce its argument. It also provides signposts along the way, guiding the reader to what will come next and showing how that is connected to what has come before. **See the discussion of Metadiscourse in the textbook for more details.**

* Metadiscourse can signal the tone the author wants to convey. What is the author’s voice in this paper? How does she enter in and guide the reader through the text?
* What role does she adopt? What voice does she use?

**Metaphors, analogies, similes** –An analogy compares two parallel terms or situations in which the traits of one situation are argued to be similar to another—often one relatively firm and concrete, and the other less familiar and concrete. This allows the author to use concrete, easily understood ideas, to clarify a less obvious point.

Similarly, metaphors and similes assign help an author frame the argument, to pay attention to some elements of a situation and ignore others or to assign the characteristics of one thing to another. **For example, see “The Power of Green” by Thomas Friedman in this reader.**

* What two things are being compared?
* How does this comparison help an audience view the argument in a new way? How does this frame shape the argument?

**Motive –** Sometimes an author may reference the motives of his or her opponents.

* Why we should or shouldn’t trust someone’s argument –(ex. if the CEO of Krispy Kreme doughnuts argues against nutritional information on product packaging)

**Narration**: Recounts an event.

* Is the narrator trying to report or recount an anecdote, an experience, or an event? Is it telling a story?
* How does this narrative illustrate or clarify the claim or argument?
* What effect might this story have on the audience?
* How does this narrative further the argument?

**Pathos –** Pathos refers to feelings. The author or speaker wants her audience to feel the same emotions she is feeling, whether or not they agree on the actual topic. That way, because they feel the same emotions, they are more likely to agree with the author later on.

* What specific emotions does the author evoke?
* How does she do it?
* How does the author use these emotions as a tool to persuade the audience?

**Precedent –** When an author or speaker argues from precedent, he or she references a previous situation, one that can be compared to the author’s situation.

* Does the author reference any historic instances that he or she claims are similar to the one being discussed?
* What details about this historic situation help the author’s argument?

**Prolepsis –** Anticipating the opposition’s best argument and addressing it in advance.

* Readers interact with the texts they read, and often that interaction includes disagreement or asking questions of the text.
* Authors can counter disagreement by answering anticipating the opposition and introducing it within the text. Authors then respond to it.

**Process analysis**: Explains to the reader how to do something or how something happens.

* Were any portions of the text more clear because concrete directions about a certain process were included?
* How does this help the author develop the argument?

**Rhetorical question –** A question designed to have one correct answer. The author leads you into a position rather than stating it explicitly.

* What is the most obvious answer to this question?
* Why is it important to have the reader answer this question? How does it help the author persuade the audience?

**Transitional questions –** Lead the reader into a new subject area or area of argument.

* What role do these questions play? How do these questions lead the direction of the argument?
* How is this helpful for the reader?

**Structure and Organization**

It is important to consider the organization of information and strategies in any text.

* How does this structure or organization help strength the argument?
* What headings or titles does the author use? How do these strengthen the argument?

Some elements of structure to consider:

**Type of Organization:**

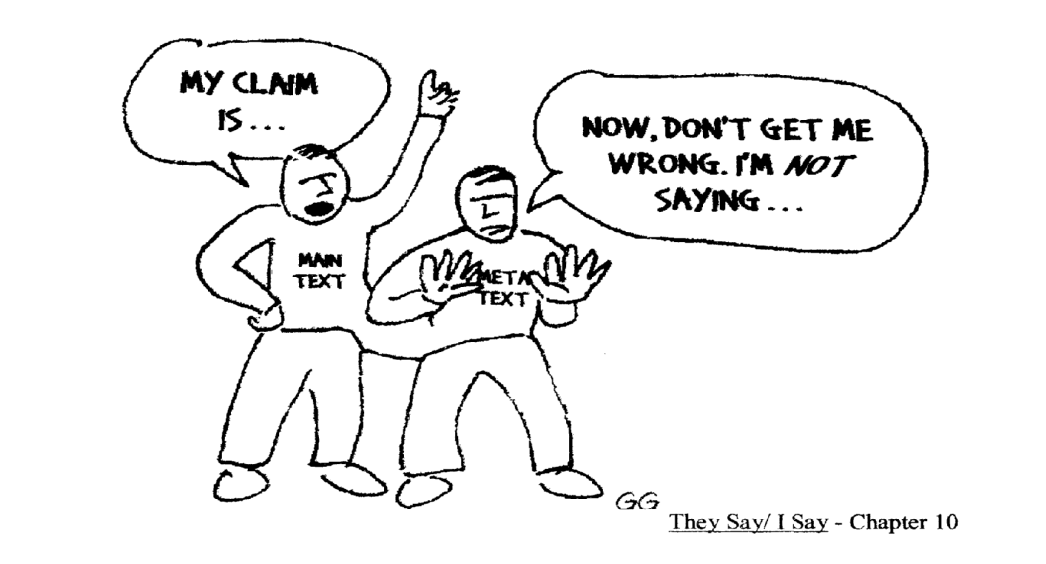
* **Topical**: The argument is organized according to subtopics, like describing a baby’s bubble bath first in terms of the soap used, then the water conditions, and lastly the type of towels.
* **Chronological**: The argument is organized to describe information in time order, like a baseball game from the first pitch to the last at-bat.
* **Spatial**: The argument follows a visual direction, such as describing a house from the inside to the outside, or a person from their head down to their toes.
* **Problem – Solution**: The argument presents a problem and a possible solution, such as making coffee at home to avoid spending extra money.
* **Cause and effect**: Describes the relationship between the cause or catalyst of an event and the effect, like identifying over-consumption of candy as the cause of tooth decay.

**Logical Order of Information:**

* **Inductive**: Moving from one specific example to draw a general conclusion.
* **Deductive**: Moving from a generalized theory or assumption to decide the causes or characteristics of a specific example or event.
* **Linear**: The argument is told in linear order, scaffolding information or reasoning.
* **Circular**: Supporting the argument using assumptions or information from the argument itself.
* **Recursive**: The text consistently moves forward but circles back on specific points in the process.

\*Portions of this discussion modified from “Rhetorical Strategies for Essay Writing,” http://www.nvcc.edu/home/lshulman/rhetoric.htm

## The Rhetorical Strategy of Metadiscourse



Many forms of academic writing utilize metadiscourse. These are moments in the text when the author explicitly TELLS you how to interpret her words.

* In academic texts, metadiscourse occurs when the author stops arguing, stands back and tells you how to interpret the argument.
* In this moment, the author reflects on what he or she is saying. This may involve making explicit the strategies (the strategy of explaining a strategy).
* Metadiscourse is similar to the project statement or thesis in your papers.

Practicing writing metadiscourse is useful. It helps you develop your ideas, generate more text, and get a better sense of both your paper’s structure and how you might change direction.

In clarifying things for your reader, you also clarify things for yourself. Gerald Graff describes the way this works in his article, “How to Write an Argument: What Students and Teachers *Really* Need to Know,” found in this reader. For specific examples, see *They Say/I Say* p. 126-30.

**Authors use metadiscourse to:**

1. Ward off potential misunderstandings.
2. Anticipate and respond to objections.
3. Orient the reader by providing a “map”– where the argument is going,   
   where it has gone, etc.
4. Forecast & review structure and purpose
5. Qualify the nature, scope or extent of an argument
6. Alert readers to an elaboration of a previous idea.
7. Move from a general claim to a specific example.
8. Indicate that a claim is especially important

**Examples of Metadiscourse from *Amusing Ourselves to Death***

Neil Postman, media theorist and professor of media ecology at New York University, utilized metadiscourse throughout his academic writing.

In this example of metadiscourse from his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business,* you can see how metadiscourse might work in your own essays.

**It is my intention in this book to show** that a great . . . shift has taken place in America, with the result that the content of much of our public discourse has become dangerous nonsense.

In this example, Postman outlines both the project and the purpose of his book.

**With this in view, my task in the chapters ahead** is straightforward. **I must, first, demonstrate** how, under the governance of the printing press, discourse in America was different from what it is now – generally coherent, serious and rational; **and then** how, under the governance of television, it has become shriveled and absurd.

Here, the he forecasts the organization of the arguments and maps out what will happen in the book.

**But to avoid the possibility that my analysis will be interpreted as** standard-brand academic whimpering, a kind of elitist complaint against “junk” on television, **I must first explain that . . .** I appreciate junk as much as the next fellow, **and I know full well** that the printing press has generated enough of it to fill the grand canyon to overflowing. Television is not old enough to have matched printing’s output of junk.

First, Postman clarifies what he is about to do, and then he identifies anticipated objections to his argument. Next, he deals with the objection and once again clarifies his position.

## Describing relationships between texts

**How texts “extend,” “complicate,” “illustrate,” “challenge,”** or **“qualify” other texts**

Academic writing requires that you build arguments using multiple texts. To do this effectively, you will want to describe the relationships between these different texts.

**Extend**: When a source advances, develops, expands, or take further some element of an existing argument, we say that the source extends an argument.

* Extending an argument involves presenting additional evidence or reasons that are in line with the original argument but go beyond it.

***Some verbs you might use to describe the way a source extends a text include:***

Gives additional evidence, develops, elaborates, expands, extrapolates, teases out, advances, takes further, provides additional evidence/support, supplements, etc.

**Complicate**: When a source presents evidence, arguments or claims that are at odds with an author’s position, suggesting that the position needs to be qualified, we say that one text complicates another.

* Complicating an author’s argument is not quite the same as disagreeing with it, although disagreement may be involved.
* It usually involves suggesting that an author has not dealt with the full complexity of an issue, has failed to consider relevant evidence, or that there is a gap, shortcoming or limitation in an author’s account.
* Complicatingan argument may involveexposing problems, contradictions, or presentingcounterexamples and counterarguments that challenge some part of the argument.

***Some verbs you might use to describe the way a source complicates a text include:***

challenges, contradicts, disagrees, locates problems with, identifies shortcomings, notes that X fails to account for, notes that X ignores A, suggests that X’s account is exaggerated, is vulnerable to counterarguments/counterexamples, rests on several highly questionable assumptions

**Qualify:**  When a source presents evidence/claims that suggest an author’s argument goes too far, is too strong, or overgeneralizes, we say it qualifies the author’s argument. When a source limits the scope or extent of claims in an argument, we say that the source qualifies the argument.

*Example of unqualified argument*: All video games incite violence and should be banned.

*Qualified argument*: Miller asserts that certain extreme video games may desensitize impressionable young people to violence and advocates a ban on these types of games. However, Jenkins points to evidence from MIT demonstrating that most games are innocent fun and may even teach useful skills. Nevertheless, he acknowledges Miller’s concerns and suggests that only games that realistically simulate murder should be banned. In addition, he limits the ban to children under the age of 14. Thus, Jenkins qualifies Miller’s claims.

**Challenge**: when a source directly contradicts or challenges an author’s position.

**Illustrate**: When a source provides examples, additional evidence, cases or arguments that help explain a position we say that the source illustrates an argument.

* Illustrating an argument means to present additional examples that illustrate or support a claim or argument. The illustration may not be explicitly mentioned by the original author.

***Some verbs you might use to describe the way a source clarifies or illustrates a text include:*** illuminates, exemplifies, explicates, confirms, supports, etc.

## ***Evaluating Evidence***

Remember definition of evidence – factual information relevant to and supportive of the author’s claim or sub-claims. This is a familiar concept to most students, so begin by listing things you see as types of evidence.

**A list should include**

Numerical (including statistics)

Experimental/Research Study results/observations

Historical and current events and examples

Individual examples

Physical evidence

Expert testimony

Personal anecdotes

As you compile the list, explain what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of evidence. Statistics, for instance, gives us an idea of how widespread an issue is, but gives little sense of the lived experience of an issue. Personal experience gives a much better sense of how something affects an individual, but may be biased. This is why many arguments combine different kinds of evidence.

Next, identify some textual moves that are sometimes perceived as evidence but are actually not:

Hypotheticals

“Common sense” statements

Bandwagon

Generalizations

Next, evaluating evidence. We can also consider separately whether you judge the evidence as effective and ethical vs. whether the target audience might judge the evidence as effective and ethical.

Evaluating evidence for effectiveness and ethics:

1. is the evidence actually evidence, and what type?
2. is the evidence relevant to the sub-claim being supported? How so?
3. Is the evidence relevant to the main argument?
4. Is the evidence specific?
5. Is sufficient detail provided?
6. Is the source reliable?
7. Is the evidence current, relative to the time in which the piece was written?
8. Is the evidence accurate? (This one is harder to get a grasp on unless the student has background in the topic, but it’s still in my opinion an important question, one asked by the target audience of an argument.)
9. Is the evidence representative? (Also important; if the writer has cherry-picked evidence to support her or his claim and ignored other evidence that is more in line with the broad picture, then the use of evidence is weak even if that particular example seems persuasive.)
10. Is the evidence sufficient? (Pretty close to #9.)
11. Are there alternative interpretations to the evidence that are not given?

## Toulmin & Argument & Evaluation

In *The Uses of Argument* Stephen Toulminproposes that most good extended written arguments have six parts (claim, warrant, evidence, backing, qualification, and rebuttal.) Toulmin states that three parts - the claim, the support, and the warrant - are essential to just about all arguments. Arguments may also contain one or more of following three elements: backing, rebuttal, and qualifier.

Evidence  
or Reason

Qualifier

Claim

Rebuttal/

Reservation

Warrant

Backing (Support for Warrant)

**The Toulmin Model**

1. *Claim*: the position or claim being argued for; the conclusion of the argument.
2. *Grounds:* reasons or supporting evidence that bolster the claim.
3. *Warrant:* the principle, provision or chain of reasoning that connects the grounds/reason to the claim.
4. *Backing*: support, justification, reasons to back up the warrant.
5. *Rebuttal/Reservation:* exceptions to the claim; description and rebuttal of counter-examples and counter-arguments.
6. *Qualification*: specification of limits to claim, warrant and backing. The degree of conditionality asserted.

**We can also identify 3 other key parts of an argument**

**Assumptions** **Counter-examples**  **Implications**

**Counter-arguments**

**The Value of the Toulmin Model**  
The Toulmin model provides a simple, broad, flexible set of categories for approaching the study of argument. While the model is simple, each major category can be unpacked and used to discuss arguments in increasing levels of detail. For example, once we have identified a rebuttal or reservation in an argument, we can then go on to examine the different kinds of rebuttals that authors make, and discuss which ones tend to be used in different contexts. For instance, we can ask whether a rebuttal consists of a “strategic concession,” “refutation,” or “demonstration of irrelevance” (to name three of the most common forms of rebuttal). We can then examine different forms of strategic concession. Furthermore, once we have used the Toulmin model to establish a common vocabulary for identifying parts of an argument, we can then introduce a set of criteria for evaluating the different parts of an argument. For example, warrants often consist of chains of reasoning that involve generalization, analogy, appeal to a sign, causality, authority, and principle. Once one has identified a chain of reasoning – let’s say a generalization – one can then consider more fine-grained evaluative criteria such as the scope of the generalization, the nature, uniformity, and definition of the population/thing being generalized about; the sufficiency, typicality, accuracy and relevance of the evidence on which the generalization is based, etc.   
  
The Toulmin model has limitations. For example, it is sometimes of limited use in discussing specialized forms of argument such as those that occur in certain types of disciplinary writing   
(we will discuss the Swales model and the milestone model as tools for analyzing academic arguments). The Toulmin model is not much use as a template for generating arguments. You shouldn’t try to rigidly fit every argument into the model’s format – some won’t work. However, it can be useful as a flexible tool for naming and analyzing arguments, and for applying this analysis in a self-reflective way to one’s own argumentation.

**Warrants**

Warrants are chains of reasoning that connect the claim and evidence/reason. A warrant is the principle, provision, or chain of reasoning that connects the grounds/reason to the claim. Warrants operate at a higher level of generality than a claim or reason, and they are often implicit rather than explicit.

*Example*: “Needle exchange programs should be abolished **[claim]** because they only cause more people to use drugs.” **[reason]**  
  
The unstated warrant is: “when you make risky behavior safer you encourage more people to engage in it.”

**General Forms of Reasoning (can also be assumption)**  
There are 6 common chains of reasoning via which the relationship between evidence and claim is often established. They have the acronym “GASCAP.” Sometimes they are explicit, sometimes they are assumptions.

• Generalization G

• Analogy A

• Sign S

• Causality C

• Authority A

• Principle P

These argumentative forms are used at various different levels of generality within an argument, and rarely come in neat packages - typically they are interconnected and work in combination.

Components of the Toulmin Model in More Detail

**Claim**: The claim is the main point of an argument. The claim is sometimes called the thesis, conclusion, or main point. The claim can be explicit or implicit.   
*Evaluation*: At the most general level, the claim is reasonable – buttressed with sufficient evidence, grounds, warrants, etc. Claim follows from (is closely tied to) evidence, grounds and warrants.

The general type of claim – factual, evaluation, definition, recommendation/public policy – influences the nature and amount of support required. Fulkerson argues that different kinds of claim impose different standards and demands when it comes to evidence, and for establishing a *prima facie* case. Substantiation tends more often to involve questions of definition & fact. In practice, these different types of claim are rarely easy to disentangle.

E.g.: affirmative action. Questions of definition and fact: What is affirmative action; what does it seek to address; what kind of problem is racism, and to what extent does affirmative action help lessen its effects.

Questions of evaluation: under what condition is it justified?

Questions of recommendation: what should be done? Should affirmative action be abolished, reformed, extended, etc.

**Evidence/Support for Claim:**The support consists of the evidence, reasons, examples, experience, data, quotations, reports, testimony, statistics etc. that underwrites the claim.

*Evaluation:* Evidence is strong – contains *sufficient* amounts of evidence from statistical, textual, an authority, or from experiential realms to support claim. In each case, there are criteria that determine whether the evidence is strong. E.g. authority is reliable and relevant; the experience is reasonably typical and relevant. The statistics are reliable, applicable, relevant, well researched, involve controls, etc. In general, the evidence is detailed enough, up to date, and verifiable (this includes using proper citation). The evidence is strong in terms of its relevance, sufficiency, scope, consistency, quality and 'fit' with the claim. In the Toulmin model, evidence comes into play in 2 places: as data/evidence that supports a claim with the aid of a warrant; or which functions as 'backing', and directly supports the sufficiency of the warrant.   
  
We can also examine the source of the evidence – how reliable is it? Can it be verified? Is the source fair? What kinds of interests for the source represent?

**GASCAP - Common Forms of Reasoning**

1. ARGUMENT BASED ON GENERALIZATION

This is a very common form of reasoning. It assumes that what is true of a well chosen sample is likely to hold for a larger group or population, or that certain things consistent with the sample can be inferred of the group/population.

*Evaluation*: To evaluate a generalization we need to determine the *scope* of the generalization (some, many, the majority, most, all, etc.). The scope of the argument will determine the degree to which a sufficient amount of typical, accurate, relevant support is required (although the extent to which a generalization is accepted by your audience is also crucial here). We also need to consider the nature, uniformity and stability of the group, category or population being generalized about. For example, when *Consumer Guide* tests a single car, we expect to be able to generalize from the results with a high degree of certainty since cars are standardized objects. If the generalization provided is based on examples, we need to consider whether there are significant counterexamples.   
  
Determining which group or population to base one’s generalization on is often very complex, and as with categories and definitions, this is often highly contested. For example, a key question in the O.J. Simpson trial concerned which population ought to be used when generalizing about the likelihood of a wife-beater going on to murder his spouse. At the beginning of the trial the defense argued that O.J. Simpson’s prior arrest for assaulting his wife should not mislead jurors into thinking that this made O.J. Simpson significantly more likely to have murdered his wife. They said that if you examined the population of men who had been arrested for beating their wives, only a very small percentage of this group went on to kill their spouse. Thus one could not generalize with any confidence about the likely guilt of O.J. Simpson based on this. However, some legal scholars have pointed out that if you begin with the population of men who have a history of beating their spouses, who have been arrested for this, and whose wife turns up dead, then about 50% of the time the husband turns out to be the killer. Selecting a different population to generalize from may change the way an argument turns.

2. ARGUMENT BASED ON ANALOGY

Extrapolating from one situation or event based on the nature and outcome of a similar situation or event. An argument based on parallels between two cases or situations. Arguing from a specific case or example to another example, reasoning that because the two examples are alike in many ways they are also alike in one further specific way. Has links to 'case-based' and precedent-based reasoning used in legal discourse.

*Evaluation*: what is important here is the extent to which relevant similarities can be established between 2 contexts. Are there sufficient, typical, accurate, relevant similarities? If the analogy is based on similarities between two examples, we need to consider whether counterexamples exist. How strong is the claim? (The stronger the claim, the tighter the analogy must be). Are there counteranalogies that refute the original argument from analogy? Are there differences between the two situations that undermine the force of the similarity cited? How willing is the audience likely to be in accepting that the two different examples/cases/situations you present are really similar?

Analogies can also be used critically. If you can draw an analogy between your opponent’s argument and some other, generally unaccepted argument, this may undermine your opponent’s case. For example, many opponents of same-sex marriage argue that an expansion of the definition of marriage risks opening the door to polygamy and bestiality, and will undermine the institution of marriage. Proponents of same-sex marriage have argued that their opponents’ arguments echo, and are closely analogous to ones that were made by opponents of inter-racial marriage. Since opposing inter-racial marriage seems absurd nowadays, constructing an analogy between opponents of same-sex marriage and opponents of inter-racial marriage has the effect of undermining the former argument.

Example of a powerful counter-analogy

The Vatican is increasingly out of touch and exerts a reactionary — even, in this world of AIDS, deadly — influence on health policy in the developing world. Here in El Salvador, church leaders in 1998 helped ban abortions even when necessary to save the life of a woman, and, much worse, helped pass a law, which took effect last month, requiring condoms to carry warnings that they do not protect against AIDS. In El Salvador, where only 4 percent of women use contraceptives the first time they have sex, this law will mean more kids dying of AIDS. **The reality is that condoms no more cause sex than umbrellas cause rain.** (Nicholas Kristof , Don't Tell the Pope, *New York Times*.)

*Example 1*: the debate over president Clinton’s impeachment turned to a some degree on which analogy one used when evaluating Clinton’s perjury – did one compare it to the perjury carried out by other elected officials, did one compare it to perjury carried out by a judge or some other non-elected official, and did one compare it to the kind of perjury carried out in a purely personal context, or one involving affairs of state? Each case of perjury normally carries quite a different legal outcome.

*Example 2*: “George Bush once argued that the Vice-President’s role is to support the President’s policies, whether or not he or she agrees with them, because ‘You don’t tackle your own quarterback.’” (from *A Rulebook for Arguments* by Anthony Weston,1992.)

*Example 3*: When I lived in Pittsburgh some elected officials wanted to bring river-boat gambling to Pittsburgh (state law makes it illegal to have a casino on state land, but the waterways are not officially part of the state). Their reasoning went as follows: Las Vegas is the fastest growing city in the U.S. Its growth is fueled by gambling, and gambling has provided the city a huge revenue base. By analogy, if Pittsburgh has casinos, this will help it grow and provide it with more money. However, critics pointed out that the analogy was a poor one. Pittsburgh is different from Las Vegas in many important ways. Most importantly, people travel *to* Las Vegas to spend money. It seems unlikely many people will come to Pittsburgh to gamble. Instead, Pittsburghers will spend money at the casinos, which means there will be less money in circulation for other local businesses (differences in climate, geography, infrastructure and “attractions” also make the analogy a poor one.)   
  
*Example 4:* Debates about gun control often employ different analogies with foreign countries. Proponents of gun control point out that Japan has very restrictive gun laws, and extremely low rates of violent crime. By analogy, if the U.S. had stricter gun laws, it too might have lower rates of violent crime. Opponents of gun control argue that almost all men in Switzerland have a gun (due to compulsory military training.) Yet Switzerland has extremely low rates of violent crime. By analogy, if Americans were given guns and the proper training, they too might have lower rates of violent crime. Both analogies are questionable – it seems likely that there are other factors besides gun ownership that cause low rates of crime in Japan. In Switzerland, men own and are trained to use *rifles* (not handguns), and the state typically keeps control of the ammunition for these rifles.

*Example 5*: The debate over gay marriage often centers on different analogies. Supporters of gay marriage use the analogy of equal rights for African Americans – they say African Americans were denied equal treatment under the law, and not so long ago anti-miscegenation laws banned interracial marriage. Just as these things were wrong and at odds with the constitution, so too is the denial of the right of gays to marry. Opponents of gay marriage often use the analogy of polygamy. They argue that just as polygamy, an attempt to expand “traditional” understandings of marriage, has been defined as illegal, so too should gay marriage. In San Francisco, marriage licenses have been given to gay and lesbian couples. Analogies have been drawn to the civil disobedience of Rosa Parks, as well as to law breaking, and to polygamy.

3. ARGUMENT VIA SIGN/CLUE

The notion that certain types of evidence are symptomatic of some wider principle or outcome. For example, smoke is often considered a sign for fire. Some people think high SAT scores are a sign a person is smart and will do well in college.   
  
*Evaluation*: how strong is the relationship between the overt sign and the inferred claim? Have sufficient, typical, accurate, relevant instances of this relationship been observed? Have other potential influences been ruled out?

4. CAUSAL ARGUMENT

Arguing that a given occurrence or event is the result of, or is effected by, factor X. Causal reasoning is the most complex of the different forms of warrant. The big dangers with it are:

A) Mixing up correlation with causation

B) falling into the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* trap. Closely related to confusing correlation and causation, this involves inferring 'after the fact, therefore because of the fact').   
C) Identifying one element as the main cause, when in fact there are multiple causes

We can evaluate it via the STAR criteria. That is, for an argument about cause to be reliable, we need a sufficient number of typical, accurate and relevant instances. Also important are questions concerning degree of correlation; the question of controls; elimination of other factors; the extent to which causes are partial, necessary or sufficient, etc.  
  
*Example 1:* Hungarian doctor Ignaz Semmelweis noticed a correlation between high numbers of women dying in childbirth, and doctors who operated on them after dissecting corpses (hospitals where midwives performed deliveries, by contrast, had much lower rates of death). He identified a crucial correlation, and discovered that handwashing radically reduced deaths in childbirth. But the cause he suggested was incorrect – “cadaveric contamination.” Semmelweis's ideas were accepted only years after his death, when Louis Pasteur advanced the germ theory of disease. *Example 2*: It has been observed that on the East coast, levels of crime go up as the sale of ice cream increase, and crime goes down as ice cream sales decrease. However, it would be silly to suggest that ice cream sales *cause* crime. That would be to confuse correlation with causation. Crime and ice cream sales are both influenced by the weather (who wants to shimmy up a drain pipe, mug someone, or buy ice cream when it is 30 below?)  
  
*Example 3*: Some people have suggested that the higher rate of cancer in industrialized countries (when compared to developing countries) is caused by our lifestyle – the artificial lights, food, chemicals in our food, exposure to computers, etc. Stephen Jay Gould has argued this is too simple, noting that the main reason people in developing countries have lower rates of cancer is that they tend to have lower life expectancies, and cancer tends to occur with more frequency the older one lives (“You have to die of something!” Gould writes.) Gould does not claim that lifestyle differences have no impact, but that the main cause of the difference in cancer rates relates to life expectancy.

5. ARGUMENT FROM AUTHORITY

Does person X or text X constitute an authoritative source on the issue in question? What political, ideological or economic interests does the authority have? Is this the sort of issue in which a significant number of authorities are likely to agree on? What kinds of audiences will be persuaded by a particular authority? What credentials or proof of expertise doe the authority have? What kind of peer recognition has the authority received?

Using STAR: can we find a sufficient number of authoritative sources, accurately cited with relevant knowledge, who are in broad agreement, and whose arguments are persuasive?

To what degree does an authority exhibit *logos, pathos* and *ethos* (good sense, good character and good will)?

6. ARGUMENT FROM PRINCIPLE

Locating a principle that is widely regarded as valid and showing that a situation exists in which this principle applies.

*Evaluation*: Is the principle widely accepted? Does it accurately apply to the situation in question? Are there commonly agreed on exceptions? For example, refraining from killing others is generally considered an important principle. However, there are commonly agreed upon exceptions – self-defense, military combat, etc. Are there 'rival' principles that lead to a different claim? In the war with Iraq, proponents argued for the principle of unilateral preemption, whereas others argued for the competing principle of multilateral containment/deterrence. Are the practical consequences of following the principle sufficiently desirable in the context?

## Assumptions, Implications and Counterexamples

The strength of an argument rests on a lot of things. Some of these are: the reasons given to support a claim; the chains of reasoning involved (consistency, coherence, logical rigor, non-contradiction); the strength and type of evidence used (relevance, scope of applicability); the credibility of the authorities invoked; the degree of vulnerability to counter-arguments, etc. Some other important considerations are the assumptions that underlie an argument, the implications that follow from it, and its susceptibility to counterexamples.

**Assumptions:**   
Assumptions are fundamental, taken for granted ways of viewing the world. They are presuppositions, or (often) unstated premises that underlie an argument. Assumptions pervade all arguments in all disciplines, and exist at a number of different levels of generality. Assumptions can be identified in graphic representations (consider the case of maps) and in architectures (consider how the layout of a classroom reflects assumptions about pedagogy and the role of the teacher in classroom instruction.)  
  
It is useful to analyze assumptions in order to:

1. Understand what holds the foundations of an argument together.
2. Better understand the strengths and weaknesses of an argument
3. To find possible sources of critique - one way of interrogating an argument is to identify counterexamples that do not fit with a set of assumptions.
4. Make you aware of your own assumptions when building an argument, so that you can argue with better self-understanding and with better strategies for testing validity.

**Identifying Assumptions:**   
It is often very hard to identify assumptions. They are in the air we breathe, or rather the language we use. Often we may feel 'ill at-ease' by the position advanced in a given argument, without really knowing why, or without really being able to put our fingers on our objections. This may be because the argument assumes the audience takes for granted values or beliefs that we are not comfortable with. Very often major assumptions are unconscious - they are not are not part of a self-consciously examined set of reasons. They are thus hard to identify and argue about.

To identify assumptions, the following strategies are sometimes useful:

1. Try to find significant absences or gaps in an argument. Try to think who or what may be left out in a given position, and then try to identify why. This will often lead to a major assumption. It will help you identify what must be assumed in order for this absence or omission to exist.

*Example*: In the 1960s some American history textbooks came under attack for the historical experiences they left out. One controversial history textbook stated that historians could not be certain about what happened at the Battle of the Little Big Horn because “no-one survived.” Critics argued that this omission of the perspective of Native Americans, and of the oral histories they produced, pointed to a number of problematic assumptions about how Native Americans were represented in American history, and about how history should be written.

2. Try to 'denaturalize' what is taken for granted in an argument. Often, assumptions are preconceptions that have become fossilized or 'naturalized'. Sometimes these will be parts of an argument that the arguer, if questioned, would respond by saying 'well of course its only natural that x or y is the case/behaves this way'. Thus one can look for positions that use the language of 'nature', 'naturalness' or related terminology. De-naturalizing what is taken for granted may proceed by imagining oneself an 'alien', an outsider, or occupying a different position than usual. It may also proceed by taking an orientation that is somewhat 'social constructionist' in character.

*Example*: Media reports of job losses often talk about how the economy has “shed” a certain number of workers. This tends to assume unemployment is part of nature or of natural cycles.

3. Look carefully at the major categories, definitions, and concepts that an argument uses. This will often point to the existence of important assumptions. Consider, for example, the classifications used to assign journalists to news “beats,” or Stroud’s use of the categories “Pornographic Rock” and “healthy music.”

*Example*: Consider what is taken for granted in the following systems of categorization:  
  
1. Far East, Middle East, Near East  
2. Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms.  
3. Negro, Black, African American  
4. The Maori Wars, The New Zealand Wars, The Land Wars

4. Search for significant counterexamples/objections. If you can find an important counterexample to a given position, this will often help you understand what must have been assumed in order for the counterexample/objection to have gone unnoticed.

Example: writers who propose a “simplistic,” unidirectional model of media influence sometimes ignore conspicuous counterexamples. The case of Japan is one such counterexample. Japanese media is far more violent than U.S. media, yet Japanese rates of violence and violent crime tend to be far lower than U.S. ones. This may suggest that simple models of media influence do not consider the full range of factors that shape social problems.

**Implications**

Implications consist of what follows or can be inferred from an argument or set of assumptions. Implications involve what can be extrapolated from an argument, and/or the potential consequences that follow from a given position.

Arguments are often attacked for what can be shown to follow from them -i.e. their implications. A common strategy is to a) describe what ought to follow from an argument, then point out counterexamples to this, b) show that negative or unintended consequences follow from a position or assumption. One must be careful when drawing implications that one does not extrapolate too far from the author’s argument, engage in “creative interpretation” of implications, or fall into the 'slippery slope' fallacy. That is, of constructing a set of implications that go beyond what the author plausibly had in mind.

*Example 1*: *Gun Control.*   
John R. Lott Jr. is one of the best known academic proponents of gun rights. He is a staunch opponent of gun control. Lott is resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, has written *More Guns, Less Crime* (1998), *The Bias Against Guns* (2003), and a number of research articles. Lott argues that permitting people to carry concealed weapons leads to a significant reduction in many different kinds of crime. Lott argues that concealed weapons significantly deter criminals and reduce violent crime. He states that "98 percent of the time that people use guns defensively, they merely have to brandish a weapon to break off an attack" (*More Guns, Less Crime*, p. 3)  
  
There are several implications we can draw from Lott’s arguments. First, states that permit people to carry concealed weapons ought to have lower rates of violent crime than states that do not. Second, after a state passes legislation permitting people to carry concealed weapons, rates of violent crime should decrease (assuming we can factor out other contributory causes of violent crime.)

If we can find counterexamples to the implications listed above, we will have succeeded in problematizing Lott’s arguments. As it happens, evidence exists that could be used to fashion counterexamples and counterarguments to both of these implications. Some states that do not permit concealed weapons have lower rates of crime than states that do. Some states that have passed legislation permitting people to carry concealed weapons have not seen rates of violent crime lessen. [[3]](#footnote-3)

*Example 2: The Doctrine of Preemption*   
One criticism of the doctrine of “preemption” with regards to Iraq focuses on the potential implications of this position: if it is alright for the U.S. to attack a country before it has itself been attacked, then might not other countries adopt a similar policy? Conversely, opponents of war are sometimes criticized for what can be inferred from their arguments regarding intervention. Some authors argue that it is never justified to attack a sovereign country except in self-defense. However, opponents charge that this implies that some past interventions many people now consider vital (Bosnia and Kosovo) and some interventions many think should have been made but weren’t (for example, Rwanda and Burundi) would be ruled out of court.   
  
*Example 3: BST/BGH*

A controversy has arisen over the injection of artificial hormones into cows in order to increase milk production (BST = bovine somatotrophin; BGH = bovine growth hormone). The process was pioneered by Monsanto, and was approved by the FDA in 1993. Milk from BST cows is not required to be labeled. However, there are some questions about the safety of this milk, and about the tests performed by Monsanto when determining its safety. Europe and Canada have put a moratorium on the use of the artificial hormone. Some small companies who produce milk in the U.S. have begun advertising that their milk is “BST-free.” Monsanto is suing these companies, claiming that by stating that their milk is “BST-free,” these companies are *implying* that milk with BST is unsafe.

## **Graff, “How to Write an Argument”**



# **MAIN READINGS**

**Thompson, “Public Thinking”**

Thompson, Clive. “Public Thinking” (pages 46-61 of the book *Smarter than You Think*, Penguin Press, 2013.

**Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”**

Carr, Nicholas. “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” The Atlantic.com. July/August 2008. 19 August 2008. http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/print/200807/google

**Boyd, Dana. "Literacy: Are Today's Youth Digital Natives?"**

Boyd, Dana. "Literacy: Are Today's Youth Digital Natives?" from *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, pages 176 - 198. Yale University Press, 2014.

# **Short Texts**

## Rifkin, “A Change of Heart about Animals”

**They are more like us than we imagined, scientists are finding**

*Jeremy Rifkin****,*** *Los Angeles Times, September 1, 2003. Rifkin is an American economist whose work explores the way science and technological change influence the economy, jobs, culture, and the environment. In a 1989 interview published in Time Magazine, Rifkin argues against some technologies, claiming that in America,[w]e’re so skewed toward efficiency that we’ve lost our sense of humanity. What we need to do is to bring back a sense of the sacred.”*

**[1]** Though much of big science has centered on breakthroughs in biotechnology, nanotechnology and more esoteric questions like the age of our universe, a quieter story has been unfolding behind the scenes in laboratories around the world — one whose effect on human perception and our understanding of life is likely to be profound.

**[2]** What these researchers are finding is that many of our fellow creatures are more like us than we had ever imagined. They feel pain, suffer and experience stress, affection, excitement and even love — and these findings are changing how we view animals.

**[3]** Strangely enough, some of the research sponsors are fast food purveyors, such as McDonald's, Burger King and KFC. Pressured by animal rights activists and by growing public support for the humane treatment of animals, these companies have financed research into, among other things, the emotional, mental and behavioral states of our fellow creatures.

**[4]** Studies on pigs' social behavior funded by McDonald's at Purdue University, for example, have found that they crave affection and are easily depressed if isolated or denied playtime with each other. The lack of mental and physical stimuli can result in deterioration of health.

**[5]** The European Union has taken such studies to heart and outlawed the use of isolating pig stalls by 2012. In Germany, the government is encouraging pig farmers to give each pig 20 seconds of human contact each day and to provide them with toys to prevent them from fighting.

**[6]** Other funding sources have fueled the growing field of study into animal emotions and cognitive abilities.

**[7]** Researchers were stunned recently by findings (published in the journal Science) on the conceptual abilities of New Caledonian crows. In controlled experiments, scientists at Oxford University reported that two birds named Betty and Abel were given a choice between using two tools, one a straight wire,   
the other a hooked wire, to snag a piece of meat from inside a tube. Both chose the hooked wire. Abel,

the more dominant male, then stole Betty's hook, leaving her with only a straight wire. Betty then used her beak to wedge the straight wire in a crack and bent it with her beak to produce a hook. She then snagged the food from inside the tube. Researchers repeated the experiment and she fashioned a hook

out of the wire nine of out of 10 times.

**[8]** Equally impressive is Koko, the 300-pound gorilla at the Gorilla Foundation in Northern California, who was taught sign language and has mastered more than 1,000 signs and understands several thousand English words. On human IQ tests, she scores between 70 and 95.

**[9]** Tool-making and the development of sophisticated language skills are just two of the many attributes we thought were exclusive to our species. Self-awareness is another.

**[10]** Some philosophers and animal behaviorists have long argued that other animals are not capable of self-awareness because they lack a sense of individualism. Not so, according to new studies. At the Washington National Zoo, orangutans given mirrors explore parts of their bodies they can't otherwise see, showing a sense of self. An orangutan named Chantek who lives at the Atlanta Zoo used a mirror to groom his teeth and adjust his sunglasses.

**[11]** Of course, when it comes to the ultimate test of what distinguishes humans from the other creatures, scientists have long believed that mourning for the dead represents the real divide. It's commonly believed that other animals have no sense of their mortality and are unable to comprehend the concept of their own death. Not necessarily so. Animals, it appears, experience grief. Elephants will often stand next to their dead kin for days, occasionally touching their bodies with their trunks.

**[12]** We also know that animals play, especially when young. Recent studies in the brain chemistry of rats show that when they play, their brains release large amounts of dopamine, a neurochemical associated with pleasure and excitement in human beings.

**[13]** Noting the striking similarities in brain anatomy and chemistry of humans and other animals, Stephen M. Siviy, a behavioral scientist at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania, asks a question increasingly on the minds of other researchers. "If you believe in evolution by natural selection, how can you believe that feelings suddenly appeared, out of the blue, with human beings?"

**[14]** Until very recently, scientists were still advancing the idea that most creatures behaved by sheer instinct and that what appeared to be learned behavior was merely genetically wired activity. Now we know that geese have to teach their goslings their migration routes. In fact, we are finding that learning is passed on from parent to offspring far more often than not and that most animals engage in all kinds of learned experience brought on by continued experimentation.

**[15]** So what does all of this portend for the way we treat our fellow creatures? And for the thousands of animals subjected each year to painful laboratory experiments? Or the millions of domestic animals raised under the most inhumane conditions and destined for slaughter and human consumption? Should we discourage the sale and purchase of fur coats? What about fox hunting in the English countryside, bull fighting in Spain? Should wild lions be caged in zoos?

**[16]** Such questions are being raised. Harvard and 25 other U.S. law schools have introduced law courses on animal rights, and an increasing number of animal rights lawsuits are being filed. Germany recently became the first nation to guarantee animal rights in its constitution.

**[17]** The human journey is, at its core, about the extension of empathy to broader and more inclusive domains. At first, the empathy extended only to kin and tribe. Eventually it was extended to people of like-minded values. In the 19th century, the first animal humane societies were established. The current studies open up a new phase, allowing us to expand and deepen our empathy to include the broader community of creatures with whom we share the Earth.

## Kristof, “Do We Have the Courage to Stop This?”

[1] IN the harrowing aftermath of the school shooting in Connecticut, one thought wells in my mind: Why can’t we regulate guns as seriously as we do cars?

[2] The fundamental reason kids are dying in massacres like this one is not that we have lunatics or criminals — all countries have them — but that we suffer from a political failure to regulate guns.

[3] Children ages 5 to 14 in America are 13 times as likely to be murdered with guns as children in other industrialized countries, according to [David Hemenway](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/faculty/david-hemenway/), a public health specialist at Harvard who has written an excellent book on gun violence.

[4] So let’s treat firearms rationally as the center of a public health crisis that claims one life every 20 minutes. The United States realistically isn’t going to ban guns, but we can take steps to reduce the carnage.

[5] American schoolchildren are protected by building codes that govern stairways and windows. School buses must meet safety standards, and the bus drivers have to pass tests. Cafeteria food is regulated for safety. The only things we seem lax about are the things most likely to kill.

[6] The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has five pages of regulations about [ladders](http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=standards&p_id=10839), while federal authorities shrug at serious curbs on firearms. Ladders kill around 300 Americans a year, and [guns 30,000](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-05-07/news/bs-ed-guns-letter-20110507_1_gun-violence-gun-injuries-bin). We even regulate toy guns, by requiring orange tips — but lawmakers don’t have the gumption to stand up to National Rifle Association extremists and regulate real guns as carefully as we do toys. What do we make of the contrast between heroic teachers who stand up to a gunman and craven, feckless politicians who won’t stand up to the N.R.A.?

[7] As one of my Facebook followers wrote after I posted about the shooting, “It is more difficult to adopt a pet than it is to buy a gun.”

[8] Look, I grew up on an Oregon farm where guns were a part of life; and my dad gave me a .22 rifle for my 12th birthday. I understand: shooting is fun! But so is driving, and we accept that we must wear seat belts, use headlights at night, and fill out forms to buy a car. Why can’t we be equally adult about regulating guns?

[9] And don’t say that it won’t make a difference because crazies will always be able to get a gun. We’re not going to eliminate gun deaths, any more than we have eliminated auto accidents. But if we could reduce gun deaths by one-third, that would be 10,000 lives saved annually.

[10] Likewise, don’t bother with the argument that if more people carried guns, they would deter shooters or interrupt them. Mass shooters typically kill themselves or are promptly caught, so it’s hard to see what deterrence would be added by having more people pack heat. There have been few if any cases in the United States in which an ordinary citizen with a gun stopped a mass shooting.

[11] The tragedy isn’t one school shooting, it’s the unceasing toll across our country. More Americans die in gun homicides and suicides in six months than have died in the last 25 years in every terrorist attack and the [wars in Afghanistan and Iraq combined](http://icasualties.org/).

[12] So what can we do? A starting point would be to limit gun purchases to one a month, to curb gun traffickers. Likewise, we should restrict the sale of high-capacity magazines so that a shooter can’t kill as many people without reloading.

[13] We should impose a universal background check for gun buyers, even with private sales. Let’s make serial numbers more difficult to erase, and [back California](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/13/us/code-on-shell-casings-sparks-a-gun-debate.html?pagewanted=all) in its effort to require that new handguns imprint a microstamp on each shell so that it can be traced back to a particular gun.

[14] “We’ve endured too many of these tragedies in the past few years,” President Obama noted in a tearful statement on television. He’s right, but the solution isn’t just to mourn the victims — it’s to change our policies. Let’s see leadership on this issue, not just moving speeches.

[15] Other countries offer a road map. In Australia in 1996, a mass killing of 35 people galvanized the nation’s [conservative prime minister](http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/politics/brothers-in-arms-yes-but-the-us-needs-to-get-rid-of-its-guns-20120731-23ct7.html) to ban certain rapid-fire long guns. The “national firearms agreement,” as it was known, led to the buyback of 650,000 guns and to tighter rules for licensing and safe storage of those remaining in public hands.

[16] The law did not end gun ownership in Australia. It reduced the number of firearms in private hands by one-fifth, and they were the kinds most likely to be used in mass shootings. In the 18 years before the law, Australia suffered 13 mass shootings — but not one in the 14 years after the law took full effect. The murder rate with firearms has dropped by more than 40 percent, according to data compiled by the [Harvard Injury Control Research Center](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/research/hicrc/files/bulletins_australia_spring_2011.pdf), and the suicide rate with firearms has dropped by more than half.

[17] Or we can look north to [Canada](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/fs-fd/moving-emmenager-eng.htm). It now requires a 28-day waiting period to buy a handgun, and it imposes a clever safeguard: gun buyers should have the support of two people vouching for them.

[18] For that matter, we can look for inspiration at our own history on auto safety. As with guns, some auto deaths are caused by people who break laws or behave irresponsibly. But we don’t shrug and say, “Cars don’t kill people, drunks do.”

[19] Instead, we have required seat belts, air bags, child seats and crash safety standards. We have introduced limited licenses for young drivers and tried to curb the use of mobile phones while driving. All this has [reduced America’s traffic fatality rate](http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811346.pdf) per mile driven by nearly 90 percent since the 1950s.

[20] Some of you are alive today because of those auto safety regulations. And if we don’t treat guns in the same serious way, some of you and some of your children will die because of our failure.

*I invite you to comment on this column on my blog,*[*On the Ground*](http://www.nytimes.com/ontheground)*. Please also join me on*[*Facebook*](http://www.facebook.com/kristof)*and*[*Google+*](https://plus.google.com/102839963139173448834/posts?hl=en)*, watch my*[*YouTube videos*](http://www.youtube.com/nicholaskristof)*and follow me on*[*Twitter*](http://twitter.com/nickkristof)*.*

## Kristof, “Some Inconvenient Gun Facts for Liberals.”

Nicholas Kristof, January 17, 2016 <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/opinion/sunday/some-inconvenient-gun-facts-for-liberals.html>

[1] FOR those of us who argue in favor of gun safety laws, there are a few inconvenient facts.

We liberals are sometimes glib about equating guns and danger. In fact, it’s complicated: The number of guns in America has increased by more than 50 percent since 1993, and in that same period the gun homicide rate in the United States has dropped by half.

[2] Then there are the policies that liberals fought for, starting with the assault weapons ban. A 113-page study found no clear indication that it reduced shooting deaths for the 10 years it was in effect. That’s because the ban was poorly drafted, and because even before the ban, assault weapons accounted for only 2 percent of guns used in crimes.

[3] Move on to open-carry and conceal-carry laws: With some 13 million Americans now licensed to pack a concealed gun, many liberals expected gun battles to be erupting all around us. In fact, the most rigorous analysis suggests that all these gun permits caused neither a drop in crime (as conservatives had predicted) nor a spike in killings (as liberals had expected). Liberals were closer to the truth, for the increase in carrying loaded guns does appear to have led to more aggravated assaults with guns, but

the fears were overblown.

[4] One of the puzzles of American politics is that most voters want gun regulation, but Congress resists. One poll found that 74 percent even of N.R.A. members favor universal background checks to acquire a gun. Likewise, the latest New York Times poll found that 62 percent of Americans approved of President Obama’s executive actions on guns this month. So why does nothing get done? One reason is that liberals often inadvertently antagonize gun owners and empower the National Rifle Association by coming across as supercilious, condescending and spectacularly uninformed about the guns they propose to regulate. A classic of gun ignorance: New York passed a law three years ago banning gun magazines holding more than seven bullets — without realizing that for most guns there is no such thing as a magazine for seven bullets or less.

[5] And every time liberals speak blithely about banning guns, they boost the N.R.A. Let’s also banish the term “gun control”: the better expression is “gun safety.” Yet this, too, must be said: Americans are absolutely right to be outraged at the toll of guns. Just since 1970, more Americans have died from guns than all the Americans who died in wars going back to the American Revolution (about 1.45 million vs. 1.4

million). That gun toll includes suicides, murders and accidents, and these days it amounts to 92 bodies a day.

[6] We spend billions of dollars tackling terrorism, which killed 229 Americans worldwide from 2005 through 2014, according to the State Department. In the same 10 years, including suicides, some 310,000 Americans died from guns.

[7] So of course we should try to reduce this carnage. But we need a new strategy, a public health approach that treats guns as we do cars — taking evidence-based steps to make them safer. That seems to be what President Obama is trying to do.

[8] Research suggests that the most important practical step would be to keep guns away from high-risk individuals, such as criminals, those who abuse alcohol, or those who beat up their domestic partners.

That means universal background checks before somebody acquires a gun. New Harvard research confirms a long-ago finding that 40 percent of firearms in the United States are acquired without a background check. That’s crazy. Why empower criminals to arm themselves?

[9] Some evidence supports steps that seem common sense. More than 10 percent of murders in the United States, for example, are by intimate partners. The riskiest moment is often after a violent breakup when a woman has won a restraining order against her ex. Prohibiting the subjects of those restraining orders from possessing a gun reduces these murders by 10 percent, one study found. “If you can keep a gun from someone at that moment of threat, that is very important,” notes Daniel W. Webster, a gun safety expert at Johns Hopkins University who has pioneered research on keeping guns from high-risk individuals.

[10] Some public health approaches to reducing gun violence have nothing to do with guns. Researchers find that a nonprofit called Cure Violence, which works with gangs, curbs gun deaths. An initiative called Fast Track supports high-risk children and reduces delinquency and adult crime.

[11] In short, let’s get smarter. Let’s make America’s gun battles less ideological and more driven by evidence of what works. If the left can drop the sanctimony, and the right can drop the obstructionism, if instead of wrestling with each other we can grapple with the evidence, we can save thousands of lives a year.

## Mullainathan, “Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions”

SENDHIL MULLAINATHAN, *New York Times*, 01/03, 2015

[1] The deaths of African-Americans at the hands of the police in Ferguson, Mo., in Cleveland and on Staten Island have reignited a debate about race. Some argue that these events are isolated and that racism is a thing of the past. Others contend that they are merely the tip of the iceberg, highlighting that skin color still has a huge effect on how people are treated.

[2] Arguments about race are often heated and anecdotal. As a social scientist, I naturally turn to empirical research for answers. As it turns out, an impressive body of research spanning decades addresses just these issues — and leads to some uncomfortable conclusions and makes us look at this debate from a different angle.

[3] The central challenge of such research is isolating the effect of race from other factors. For example, we know African-Americans earn less income, on average, than whites. Maybe that is evidence that employers discriminate against them. But maybe not. We also know African-Americans tend to be stuck in neighborhoods with worse schools, and perhaps that — and not race directly — explains the wage gap. If so, perhaps policy should focus on place rather than race, as some [argue](http://www.beacon.org/Place-Not-Race-P1024.aspx).

[4] But we can isolate the effect of race to some degree. A [study](https://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/0002828042002561) I conducted in 2003 with [Marianne Bertrand](http://www.chicagobooth.edu/faculty/directory/b/marianne-bertrand), an economist at the University of Chicago, illustrates how. We mailed thousands of résumés to employers with job openings and measured which ones were selected for callbacks for interviews. But before sending them, we randomly used stereotypically African-American names (such as “Jamal”) on some and stereotypically white names (like “Brendan”) on others.

[5] The same résumé was roughly 50 percent more likely to result in callback for an interview if it had a “white” name. Because the résumés were statistically identical, any differences in outcomes could be attributed only to the factor we manipulated: the names.

[6] Other studies have also examined race and employment. In a 2009 study, Devah Pager, Bruce Western and Bart Bonikowski, all now sociologists at Harvard, [sent](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/bonikowski/files/pager-western-bonikowski-discrimination-in-a-low-wage-labor-market.pdf) actual people to apply for low-wage jobs. They were given identical résumés and similar interview training. Their sobering finding was that African-American applicants with no criminal record were offered jobs at a rate as low as white applicants who had criminal records.

[7] These kinds of methods have been used in a variety of research, especially in the last 20 years. Here are just some of the general findings:

■ When doctors [were shown](http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199902253400806) patient histories and asked to make judgments about heart disease, they were much less likely to recommend cardiac catheterization (a helpful procedure) to black patients — even when their medical files were statistically identical to those of white patients.

■ When whites and blacks were [sent](http://islandia.law.yale.edu/ayres/Ayres%20Siegelman%20Race%20and%20Gender%20Discrimination%20In%20Bargaining%20%20for%20a%20New%20Car.pdf) to bargain for a used car, blacks were offered initial prices roughly $700 higher, and they received far smaller concessions.

■ Several studies found that sending emails with stereotypically black names in response to apartment-rental ads on Craigslist elicited fewer responses than sending ones with white names. A regularly repeated [study](http://www.huduser.org/portal/Publications/pdf/HUD-514_HDS2012.pdf) by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development sent African-Americans and whites to look at apartments and found that African-Americans were shown fewer apartments to rent and houses for sale.

■ White state legislators were found to be less [likely](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00515.x/full) to respond to constituents with African-American names. This was true of legislators in both political parties.

■ [Emails](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2063742) sent to faculty members at universities, asking to talk about research opportunities, were more likely to get a reply if a stereotypically white name was used.

■ Even eBay [auctions](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ecoj.12082/abstract) were not immune. When iPods were auctioned on eBay, researchers randomly varied the skin color on the hand holding the iPod. A white hand holding the iPod received 21 percent more offers than a black hand.

[8]The criminal justice system — the focus of current debates — is harder to examine this way. [One study](http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/127/2/1017.full), though, found a clever method. The pools of people from which jurors are chosen are effectively random. Analyzing this natural experiment revealed that an all-white jury was 16 percentage points more likely to convict a black defendant than a white one, but when a jury had one black member, it convicted both at the same rate.

[9] I could go on, but hopefully the sheer breadth of these findings impresses you, as it did me.

There are some counterexamples: Data show that some places, like elite colleges, [most likely](http://press.princeton.edu/titles/9072.html) do favor minority applicants. But this evidence underlies that a helping hand in one area does not preclude harmful shoves in many other areas, including ignored résumés, unhelpful faculty members and reluctant landlords.

[10] But this widespread discrimination is not necessarily a sign of widespread *conscious*prejudice.

When our own résumé study came out, many human-resources managers told us they were stunned. They prized creating diversity in their companies, yet here was evidence that they were doing anything but. How was that possible?

[11] To use the language of the psychologist Daniel Kahneman, we think both fast and slow. When deciding what iPod to buy or which résumé to pursue, we weigh a few factors deliberately (“slow”). But for hundreds of other factors, we must rely on intuitive judgment — and we weigh these unconsciously (“fast”).

[12] Even if, in our slow thinking, we work to avoid discrimination, it can easily creep into our fast thinking. Our snap judgments rely on all the associations we have — from fictional television shows to news reports. They use stereotypes, both the accurate and the inaccurate, both those we would want to use and ones we find repulsive.

[13] We can’t articulate why one seller’s iPod photograph looks better; dozens of factors shape this snap judgment — and we might often be distraught to realize some of them. If we could make a slower, deliberate judgment we would use some of these factors (such as the quality of the photo), but ignore others (such as the color of the hand holding the iPod). But many factors escape our consciousness.

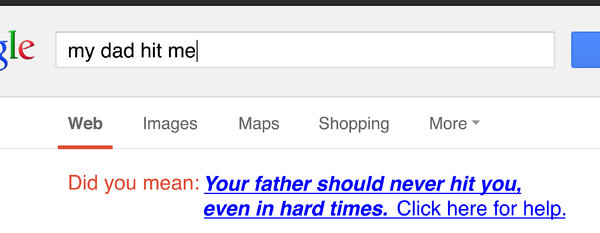
This kind of discrimination — crisply articulated in a 1995 [article](http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/rev/102/1/4/) by the psychologists Mahzarin Banaji of Harvard and Anthony Greenwald of the University of Washington — has been studied by dozens of researchers who have documented implicit bias outside of our awareness.

[14] The key to “fast thinking” discrimination is that we all share it. Good intentions do not guarantee immunity. One [study](http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/bernd.wittenbrink/research/pdf/cpjwsk07.pdf" \o "The study (PDF).)published in 2007 asked subjects in a video-game simulation to shoot at people who were holding a gun. (Some were criminals; some were innocent bystanders.) African-Americans were shot at a higher rate, even those who were not holding guns.

[15] Ugly pockets of conscious bigotry remain in this country, but most discrimination is more insidious. The urge to find and call out the bigot is powerful, and doing so is satisfying. But it is also a way to let ourselves off the hook. Rather than point fingers outward, we should look inward — and examine how, despite best intentions, we discriminate in ways big and small.

## STEPHENS-DAVIDOWITZ, “How Googling Unmasks Child Abuse,”

*New York Times,* July 13, 2013.



DURING the Great Recession, child abuse and neglect appeared to decline**.** Incidents reported to local authorities dropped. “The doom-and-gloom predictions haven’t come true,” Richard Gelles, a child-welfare expert at the University of Pennsylvania, [told The Associated Press](http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2011/12/Data-show-no-spike-in-recession-related-child-abuse-583616/1)in 2011**.**

The real story about child maltreatment during the recession is a grim one**.** I spent months [studying this topic](https://static.squarespace.com/static/51d894bee4b01caf88ccb4f3/t/51d898b8e4b0fc2d0df954e3/1373149368539/child%20abuse%20paper12.pdf), using a number of different data sources, including Google search queries**.** I found that the Great Recession caused a significant increase in child abuse and neglect**.** But far fewer of these cases were reported to authorities, with much of the drop due to slashed budgets for teachers, nurses, doctors and child protective service workers**.**

Here’s what caused the initial optimism: from 2006 to 2009, the number of cases reported to child protective services decreased by 1 percent nationally**.** Remarkably, the biggest drops were in the states hardest hit by the recession**.** Nevada, despite an unemployment rate that rose as high as 13**.**3 percent, showed a 17.5 percent drop in reports of maltreatment of children**.**

The first clue that the official statistics were misleading comes from looking at the most extreme forms of abuse and neglect, which are least susceptible to reporting pressures: child-fatality rates**.** During the downturn, there was a comparative increase in these rates in states that were hardest hit by the recession**.** From 2006 to 2009, Nevada’s fatality rate from abuse or neglect rose 50 percent**.**

But child fatalities are, thankfully, rare**.** I also used a novel technique for studying child maltreatment: an analysis of anonymous, aggregate Google searches**.** (I am currently an intern at Google, but I finished the doctoral research on which this essay is based before joining the company**.**) Google queries provide an immensely powerful database, particularly on sensitive topics that people don’t discuss freely with pollsters or authorities or even the friends and family members they know best**.** Online, often unobserved, we tend to be very honest**.**

I examined a heart-wrenching category of searches: those likely to have been made by recent victims of abuse who were old enough to use Google**.** These searches included “My dad hit me” or “Why did my father beat me**?**” I also examined a more common class of Google queries: those that include the words “child abuse” or “child neglect**.**” In some sense, this Google data is like a survey of how many people suspected child maltreatment at a given time**.** If you see something that worries you, you may well ask Google about “child abuse signs” or “child abuse effects**.**”

Sure, some people search for “child abuse” for other reasons, but these irrelevant searches can often be parsed out**.** The Google numbers are so large — many orders of magnitude larger than in any survey or poll — that the overall rates are telling**.** And they are likely to capture suspected incidents that we would never know about otherwise**.**

After declining for many years in the United States, the searches that seem to have come from abuse victims themselves rose as soon as the Great Recession began**.** On weeks that unemployment claims rose, these searches rose as well**.**

Searches that appear to have originated with people who suspect abuse also provide evidence that the increase is caused by the economic downturn**.** Controlling for pre-recession rates and national trends, states that had comparatively suffered the most had increased search rates for child abuse and neglect**.** Each percentage point increase in the unemployment rate was associated with a 3 percent increase in the search rate for “child abuse” or “child neglect**.**”

If the Great Recession increased suspicion of child maltreatment, why were fewer cases reported**?** Keep in mind first that many, probably most, suspected cases are never reported**.** Even primary care doctors, who are legally mandated to report suspected child abuse, admit in surveys that they do not report 27 percent of suspicious incidents**.**

It is certainly plausible that an economic downturn could lower the rate at which suspect cases are reported**.** Budgets were slashed in hard-hit states, particularly on social programs directed toward children**.** Overworked teachers, doctors and nurses may be that much less likely to go through with the reporting process**.** Shorter hours and more thinly stretched staffs at child protective service agencies may make it harder to report cases**.** There is abundant [anecdotal](http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/viewpoints/articles/20120326stopping-child-abuse-begins-you.html?nclick_check=1)[evidence](http://www.tennessean.com/article/20121015/NEWS01/112090003/DCS-struggles-answer-child-abuse-hotline-calls)of people [attempting to report maltreatment by phone](http://www.eveningsun.com/rss/ci_17008741)facing long [wait times](http://www.woai.com/content/news/newslinks/story/20-minute-hold-times-on-the-CPS-child-abuse/g40vTlSIF0udnSQjqKwg7A.cspx)and hanging up**.**

When you compare places that Google search data suggest have similar levels of abuse or neglect, you find that the less an area spends on social services for children, the lower its reported rates of child maltreatment**.** My research also shows that when a particular group’s budget is reduced, it reports fewer cases of maltreatment**.** Cut resources for teachers, for example, and teachers report fewer of their suspicions**.**

THERE are four take-aways from this research**.** First, the maltreatment of children is yet another cost of the Great Recession, one that will be felt long after the economy fully recovers**.** The evidence from medical researchers and psychologists is overwhelming: as adults, victims of child abuse or neglect will face higher probabilities of mental illness and criminal behavior and lower probabilities of employment and stable family lives**.**

Second, we should be skeptical of statistics based on official reports of crime in general, not just child abuse or neglect**.** According to government surveys, between 2006 and 2010, throughout the United States, 52 percent of violent crimes, 60 percent of property crimes and 65 percent of rapes and sexual assaults were never [reported to the police](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/vnrp0610.pdf)**.** When reported crime drops, it is always possible that this is a result not of a decline in crime itself but of factors that make it more difficult to report crime**.**

Consider, for example, Detroit**.** Its police department recently [reported](http://www.clickondetroit.com/news/How-bad-are-Detroit-s-crime-statistics/-/1719418/19963514/-/e66iar/-/index.html)20 percent reductions in some major crimes**.** Might this be because of dwindling police department resources**?** The average time it takes to get a response to an emergency call to the Detroit police is now[58 minutes](http://blogs.reuters.com/felix-salmon/2013/06/17/detroit-takes-aim-at-its-pensioners/?utm_source=feedly), and many precincts have stopped taking crime reports in evening hours**.**

Third, Google search data can fill holes in our understanding of crime generally**.** If your iPad was stolen, whom would you be more likely to tell: the police or Google**?** Indeed, I have found that Google queries for “stolen iPad” and “stolen iPod” yield meaningful information about property crime rates**.** Searches like “I was just raped” and “rape hot line” might help us measure a city’s true rape rate**.** (Here’s a disturbing side note: Rape proves the most difficult to measure crime using Google data, but not because of women’s historical reluctance to report rapes**.** The problem is that the majority of rape-related Google searches are typed in by people looking for pornography**.**)

Fourth, and most important, the contrast between the search data and the reported data tells a sad story about social services in this country**.** Just when more children are searching for help, we decimate the budgets of the very people who might actually do something to protect them**.**

*Seth Stephens-Davidowitz is an economist who recently received a Ph****.****D. from Harvard.*

## Rockmore, “How Texas Teaches History”

By ELLEN BRESLER ROCKMORE. New York Times, Oct 21, 2015

A TEXAS high school student and his mother [recently called attention](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/us/publisher-promises-revisions-after-textbook-refers-to-african-slaves-as-workers.html) to a curious line in a geography textbook: a description of the Atlantic slave trade as bringing “millions of workers” to plantations in the American South. McGraw-Hill Education, the publisher of the textbook, has since acknowledged that the term “workers” was a misnomer.

The company’s chief executive also promised to revise the textbook so that its digital version as well as its next edition would more accurately describe the forced migration and enslavement of Africans. In the meantime, the company [is also offering to send stickers](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/07/us/texas-publisher-offers-stickers-to-cover-erroneous-caption.html?_r=0) to cover the passage.

But it will take more than that to fix the way slavery is taught in Texas textbooks. In 2010, the Texas Board of Education[approved a social studies curriculum](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html) that promotes capitalism and Republican political philosophies. The curriculum guidelines prompted [many concerns](http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-do-new-texas-textbooks-whitewash-slavery-segregation-20150707-story.html), including that new textbooks would downplay slavery as the cause of the Civil War.

This fall, [five million public school students](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/150-years-later-schools-are-still-a-battlefield-for-interpreting-civil-war/2015/07/05/e8fbd57e-2001-11e5-bf41-c23f5d3face1_story.html) in Texas began using the textbooks based on the new guidelines. And some of these books distort history not through word choices but through a tool we

often think of as apolitical: grammar.

In September, [Bobby Finger of the website Jezebel obtained and published](http://jezebel.com/heres-how-new-texas-public-school-textbooks-write-about-1726786557) some excerpts from the new books, showing much of what is objectionable about their content. The books play down the horror of slavery and even seem to claim that it had an upside. This upside took the form of a distinctive African-American culture, in which family was central, Christianity provided “hope,” folk tales expressed “joy” and community dances were important social events.

But it is not only the substance of the passages that is a problem. It is also their form. The writers’ decisions about how to construct sentences, about what the subject of the sentence will be, about whether the verb will be active or passive, shape the message that slavery was not all that bad.

I teach freshman writing at Dartmouth College. My colleagues and I consistently try to convey to our students the importance of clear writing. Among the guiding principles of clear writing are these: Whenever possible, use human subjects, not abstract nouns; use active verbs, not passive. We don’t want our students to write, “Torture was used,” because that sentence obscures who was torturing whom.

In the excerpts published by Jezebel, the Texas textbooks employ all the principles of good, strong, clear writing when talking about the “upside” of slavery. But when writing about the brutality of slavery, the writers use all the tricks of obfuscation. You can see all this at play in the following passage from a textbook, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, called Texas United States History:

*Some slaves reported that their masters treated them kindly. To protect their investment, some slaveholders provided adequate food and clothing for their slaves. However, severe treatment was very common. Whippings, brandings, and even worse torture were all part of American slavery.*

Notice how in the first two sentences, the “slavery wasn’t that bad” sentences, the main subject of each clause is a person: slaves, masters, slaveholders. What those people, especially the slave owners, are doing is clear: They are treating their slaves kindly; they are providing adequate food and clothing. But after those two sentences there is a change, not just in the writers’ outlook on slavery but also in their sentence construction. There are no people in the last two sentences, only nouns. Yes, there is severe treatment, whippings, brandings and torture. And yes, those are all bad things. But where are the slave owners who were actually doing the whipping and branding and torturing? And where are the slaves who were whipped, branded and tortured? They are nowhere to be found in the sentence.

In another passage, slave owners and their institutionalized cruelty are similarly absent: “Families were often broken apart when a family member was sold to another owner*.”*

Note the use of the passive voice in the verbs “were broken apart” and “was sold.” If the sentence had been written according to the principles of good draftsmanship, it would have looked like this: Slave owners often broke slave families apart by selling a family member to another owner. A bit more powerful, no? Through grammatical manipulation, the textbook authors obscure the role of slave owners in the institution of slavery.

It may appear at first glance that the authors do a better job of focusing on the actions of slaves. After all, there are many sentences in which “slaves” are the subjects, the main characters in their own narrative. But what are the verbs in those sentences? Are the slaves suffering? No, in the sentences that feature slaves as the subject, as the main actors in the sentence, the slaves are contributing their agricultural knowledge to the growing Southern economy; they are singing songs and telling folk tales; they are expressing themselves through art and dance.

There are no sentences, in these excerpts, anyway, in which slaves are doing what slaves actually did: toiling relentlessly, without remuneration or reprieve, constantly subject to confinement, corporal punishment and death.

The textbook publishers were put in a difficult position. They had to teach history to Texas’ children without challenging conservative political views that are at odds with history. In doing so, they made many grammatical choices. Though we don’t always recognize it, grammatical choices can be moral choices, and these publishers made the wrong ones.

## ****Parry, “The Art of Branding a Condition”****

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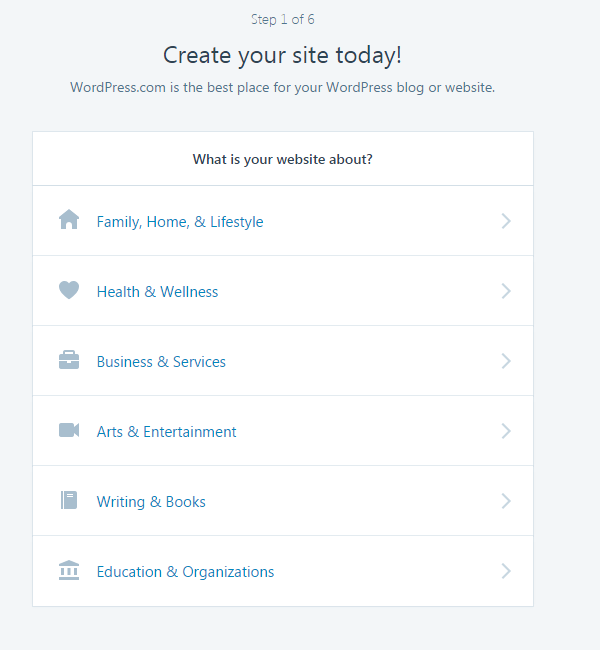
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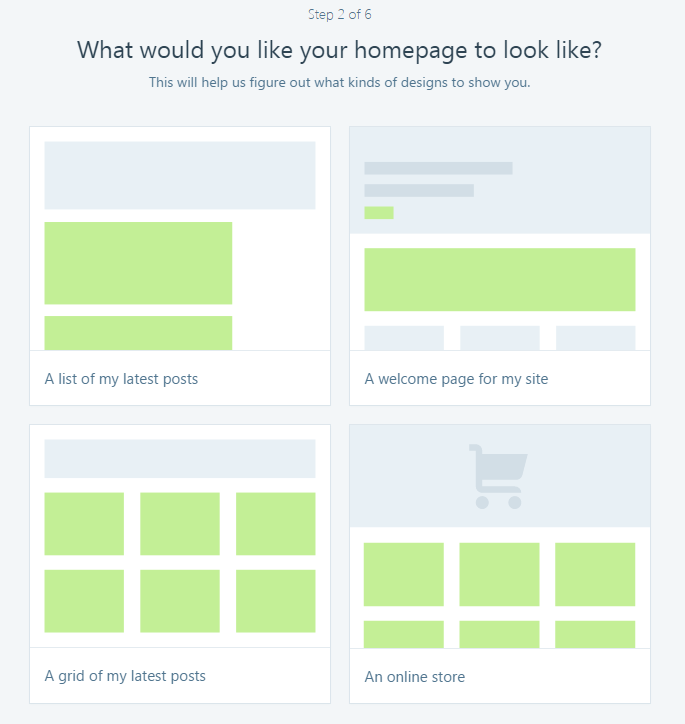
# ****Appendix****

**How to Create a Wordpress Site**

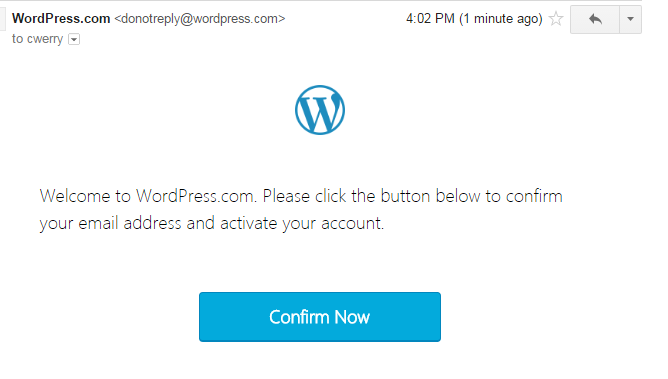
1. Go to http://wordpress.com
2. In the top right corner of the page click on “Get Started”
3. You will see the page below, “Create your site today!” Select the “Writing & Books” or “Education & Organizations” link



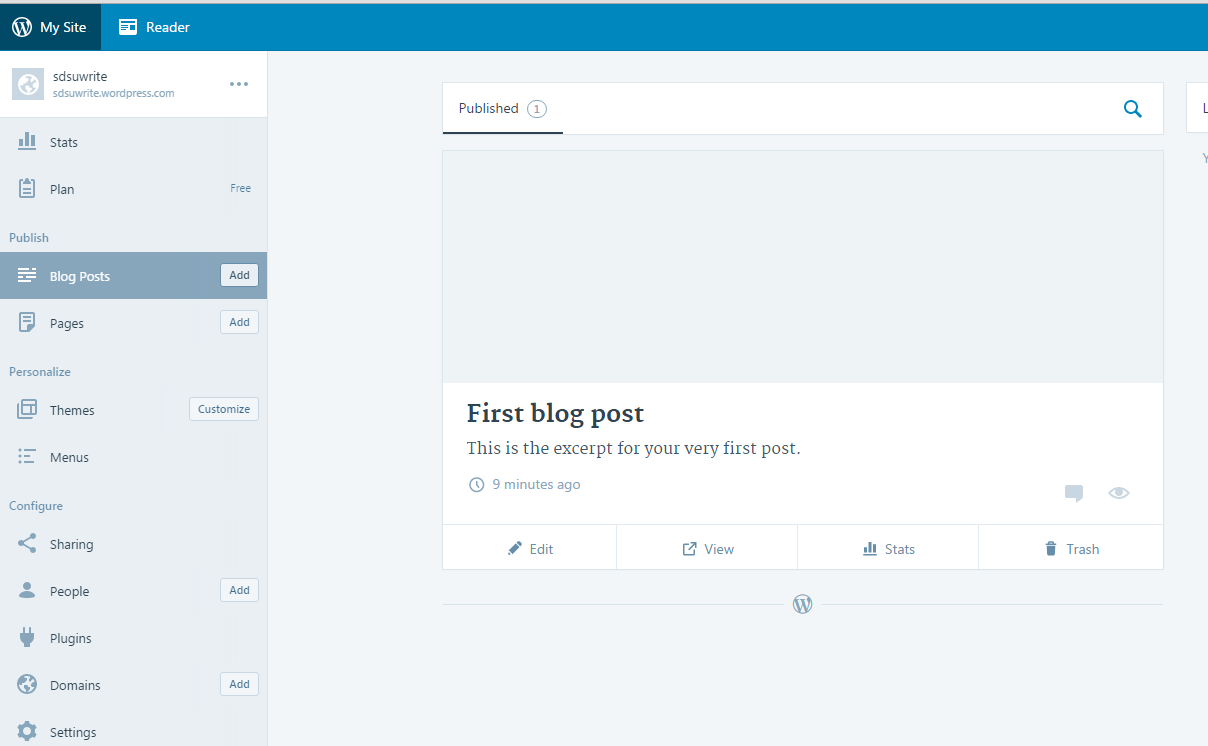
1. You will then be asked what kind of education or writing site you want. Choose whichever you prefer.
2. Next you will see the screen below asking you how you want your homepage to appear. **Please select the first one, “A list of my latest posts.”**



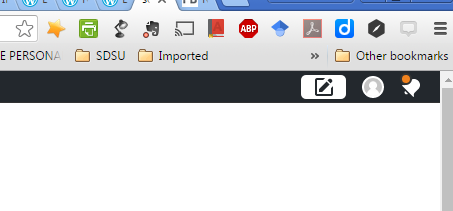
1. You will then be asked to select a theme. Select any one (you can change it later).
2. Next you will be asked to select a domain name for your site, enter your email address and create a password for your blog. Type in a blog name you like (e.g. awesomews100blog). Wordpress will let you know if this is available (make sure you select the free option – you may need to play around with names to find one that has not been taken.) **Make sure you write down the domain name you create, the email address you use, and the password you create for your blog.**
3. Wordpress will send a confirmation email to your inbox (may need to check spam or “updates” folder). Open this email, and click on the “confirm now” button in the email message.   
     
   It will look like this:



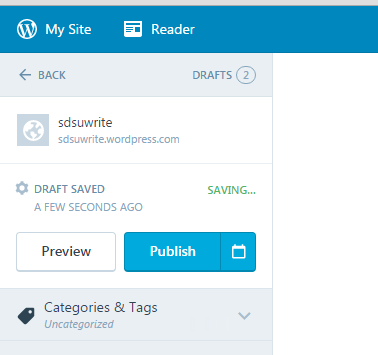
1. You will be taken to page like this inviting you to create your first blog post. You will need to post something to create the blog. It can be a test message (or your first piece of homework).



1. Click on the “edit” button, then start writing. You can select and delete the existing test, and enter your own.
2. To create new posts click on the image of a pen and paper at the top right of the page:



1. To publish your post, look for the “Publish” button on the top left of the page:



1. Note that what you write is note saved until you press “Publish.” You should always compose and save what you write in Word (or some other app) then copy it to your Wordpress site. Never compose directly in Wordpress.
2. In the bottom left of your page there should be a “allow comments” box. Please select this so your classmates can comment on your posts.

HELP VIDEOS -

1. How to create a Wordpress account <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acMKEwYcsJc>

1. Part of this adapted from Yagelski, Robert P. and Robert K. Miller, ed. *The Informed Argument.* 6th ed. Australia: Thompson, 2004, and work by Jamie Fleres. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from work by Micah Jendian and Katie Hughes [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Of course as always, much depends on how one selects and interprets the data. Evidence exists that some states that do not allow concealed weapons have, over certain date ranges, had higher rates of violent crime than those that do. However, if one examines where the guns used in these violent crimes came from (typically from neighboring states with lax gun control laws) and if one takes into account the broad differences between states that permit the concealed carrying of guns and those that do not, Lott’s argument seems shaky at best. (Lott has been criticized for his selection of data from states. Lott compares data collected in the 1980s from rural states that were relatively unaffected by drug violence, with the spike in murders associated with the crack-cocaine epidemic of the late 1980s which was concentrated in specific urban areas, and tended to take place in states with restrictive gun laws.)  
      
    [↑](#footnote-ref-3)