THE METHOD

Practically every day, we try to persuade ourselves or someone else. We usually attempt such persuasion without being aware that we follow any special method at all. Often, we'll state an opinion: We'll tell someone our own way of viewing things. We say to a friend, "I'm starting to like Senator Clark. Look at all she's done to help people with disabilities. Look at her voting record on toxic waste." And, having stated these opinions, we might go on to make a proposal, to recommend that some action be taken. Addressing our friend, we might suggest, "Hey, Senator Clark is talking on campus at four-thirty. Want to come with me and listen to her?"

Sometimes you try to convince yourself that a certain way of interpreting things is right. You even set forth an opinion in writing—as in a letter to a friend who has asked, "Now that you're at New Age College, how do you like the place?" You may write a letter of protest to a landlord who wants to raise your rent, pointing out that the bathroom hot water faucet doesn't work. As a concerned citizen, you may wish to speak your mind in an occasional letter to a newspaper or to your elected representatives.

In many professions, one is expected to persuade people in writing. Before arguing a case in court, a lawyer prepares briefs setting forth all the points in favor of his or her side. Businesspeople regularly put in writing their ideas for new products and ventures, for improvements in cost control and job efficiency. Researchers write proposals for grants to obtain money to support their work. Scientists write and publish papers to persuade the scientific community that their findings are valid, often stating hypotheses, or tentative opinions.

Even if you never produce a single persuasive work (which is very unlikely), you will certainly encounter such works directed at you. In truth, we live our lives under a steady rain of opinions and proposals. Organizations that work for causes campaign with posters and direct mail, all hoping that we will see things their way. Moreover, we are bombarded with proposals from people who wish us to act. Religious leaders urge us to lead more virtuous lives. Advertisers urge us to rush right out and buy the large economy size.

Small wonder, then, that argument and persuasion—and CRITICAL THINKING about argument and persuasion—may be among the most useful skills a college student can acquire. Time and again, your instructors will ask you to criticize or to state opinions, either in class or in writing. You may be asked to state your view of anything from the electoral college to animal rights. You may be asked to judge the desirability or undesirability of compulsory testing for drugs or the revision of existing immigration laws. On an examination in, say, sociology, you may be asked, "Suggest three practical approaches to the most pressing needs of disadvantaged people in urban areas." Critically reading
other people’s arguments and composing your own, you will find, helps you discover what you think, refine it, and share what you believe.

Is there a difference between argument and persuasion? It is, admittedly, not always clear. Strictly speaking, PERSUASION aims to influence readers’ actions, or their support for an action, by engaging their beliefs and feelings, while ARGUMENT aims to win readers’ agreement with an assertion or claim by engaging their powers of reasoning. But most effective persuasion or argument contains elements of both methods; hence the confusion. In this book we tend to use the terms interchangeably.

One other point: We tend to talk here about writing argument and persuasion, but most of what we say has to do with reading them as well. When we discuss your need, as a writer, to support your assertions, we are also discussing your need, as a reader, to question the support other authors provide for their assertions. In reading arguments critically, you apply the critical-thinking skills we discussed in Chapter 1—ANALYSIS, INFERENCE, SYNTHESIS, EVALUATION—to a particular kind of writing.

Transaction Between Writer and Reader

Unlike some television advertisers, responsible writers of argument and persuasion do not try to storm people's minds. In writing a paper for a course, you persuade by gentler means: by sharing your view with readers willing to consider it. You’ll want to learn how to express your view clearly and vigorously. But to be fair and persuasive, it is important to understand your readers’ views as well.

In stating your opinion, you present the truth as you see it: “The immigration laws discourage employers from hiring nonnative workers” or “The immigration laws protect legal aliens.” To persuade your readers that your view makes sense, you need not begin by proclaiming that, by Heaven, your view is absolutely right and should prevail. Instead, you might begin by trying to state what your readers probably think, as best you can infer it. You don’t consider views that differ from your own merely to flatter your readers. You do so to correct your own view and make it more accurate. Regarded in this light, argument and persuasion aren’t cynical ways to pull other people’s strings. Writer and reader become two sensible people trying to find a common ground. This view will relieve you, whenever you have to state your opinions in writing, of the terrible obligation to be 100 percent right at all times.

Thesis Statement

In an argument you champion or defend your opinion about something. This opinion is the THESIS, or claim, of your argument, and it will probably
appear in your essay as your THESIS STATEMENT. Usually, but not always, you'll state your thesis statement at the beginning of your essay, making a play for readers' attention and clueing them in to your purpose. But if you think readers may have difficulty accepting your thesis until they've heard some or all of your argument, then you might save the thesis statement for the middle or end.

The essays in this chapter provide a variety of thesis statements as models. Here are four examples:

Today there is more pressure placed on students to do well [in school]. . . . This new pressure is what is causing the increase in cheating.
—Colleen Wenke, "Too Much Pressure"

I think the observable reluctance of the majority of Americans to assert themselves in minor matters is related to our increased sense of helplessness in an age of technology and centralized political and economic power.
—William F. Buckley, Jr., "Why Don't We Complain?"

Racial profiling is an ugly business. . . . But I'm not opposed to allowing—no, requiring—airlines to pay closer attention to passengers who fit a terrorist profile, which includes national origin.
—Linda Chavez, "Everything Isn't Racial Profiling"

Giving up privacy rights [to government surveillance] can't guarantee physical safety, but it will almost certainly inhibit intellectual freedom and limit cognitive liberty. We Americans who cherish our freedoms should seriously consider whether or not this is a compromise we are willing to make.
—Zara Gelsey, "The FBI Is Reading over Your Shoulder"

Evidence and Appeals

To support the thesis of your argument, you need EVIDENCE—anything that demonstrates what you're claiming. Evidence may include facts, statistics (facts expressed in numbers), expert opinions, examples, reported experience. It should be accurate, should fairly represent the available facts and opinions, should relate directly to your claims, and should be ample to convince readers of your claims. (For concise examples of using evidence effectively, see the paragraphs and letter on pp. 529–31.)

Even the best-supported argument also must appeal to readers' intelligence and to their feelings. In appealing to reason—a RATIONAL APPEAL—you'll want to rely on conventional methods of reasoning (see the facing page) and supply evidence according to the criteria stated above. In appealing to feelings—an EMOTIONAL APPEAL—you'll want to acknowledge what you know of readers' sympathies and beliefs and also show how your argument relates to them.
Emotional appeal requires vigilance, from both writers and readers, because it can be manipulative. "Do you really want to deprive your children of what's best for them?" asks a pitch for a certain learn-to-read program, appealing to pride or shame while neglecting to provide evidence that the program works. Another kind of writing, generally not cynical, relies heavily on emotional appeal for the purpose of inspiring readers who are already partial to the writer's message. (An impressive example is "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King, Jr., reprinted on pp. 625-29.) But even in an argument directed at a skeptical audience and based largely on reason and evidence, an emotional appeal can stir readers by fair means to constructive belief and action. Such an appeal recognizes that we are not intellectual robots but creatures with feelings. Indeed, in any effective argument, a writer had better engage the feelings of readers or they may reply, "True enough, but who cares?" Argument, to succeed in persuading, makes us feel that a writer's views are close to our own.

Yet another resource in argument is ETHICAL APPEAL: impressing your reader that you are a well-informed person of good will, good sense, and good moral character—and, therefore, to be believed. You make such an appeal by collecting ample evidence, reasoning carefully, using an appropriate emotional appeal, and minding your TONE (see pp. 527-28). You can also cite or quote respected authorities. If you don't know whether an authority is respected, you can ask a reference librarian for tips on finding out, or talk to an instructor who is a specialist in that field.

In arguing, you don't prove your assertion in the same irrefutable way in which a chemist demonstrates that hydrogen will burn. If you say, "Health coverage for the uninsured should be given top priority in Congress," that kind of claim isn't clearly either true or false. Argument takes place in areas that invite more than one opinion. In writing an argument, you help your reader see and understand just one open-eyed, open-minded view of reality.

Reasoning

When we argue rationally, we reason—that is, we make statements that lead to a conclusion. From the time of the ancient Greeks down to our own day, distinctly different methods of proceeding from statements to conclusions have been devised. This section will tell you of a recent, informal method of reasoning and also of two traditional methods. Understanding these methods, knowing how to use them, and being able to recognize when they are misused will make you a better writer and reader.
The Toulmin Method

Data, claim, and warrant In recent decades, a simple, practical method of reasoning has been devised by the British philosopher Stephen Toulmin. Helpfully, Toulmin has divided a typical argument into three parts:

DATA The evidence to prove something
CLAIM What you are proving with the data
WARRANT The assumption or principle that connects the data to the claim

Any clear, explicit argument has to have all three parts. Toulmin’s own example of such an argument is this:

Harry was born in Bermuda → So Harry is a British subject
(Data) (Claim)
Since a man born in Bermuda will be a British subject (Warrant)

Of course, the data for a larger, more controversial claim will be more extensive. Here are some claims that would call for many more data, perhaps thousands of words.

The war on drugs is not winnable.
The United States must help to destroy drug production in South America.
Drug addiction is a personal matter.

The warrant at the center The warrant, that middle term, is often crucially important. It is usually an ASSUMPTION or a GENERALIZATION that explains why the claim follows from the data. Often a writer won’t bother to state a warrant because it is obvious: “In his bid for reelection, Mayor Perkins failed miserably. Out of 5,000 votes cast for both candidates, he received only 200.” The warrant might be stated, “To make what I would consider a strong showing, he would have had to receive 2,000 votes or more,” but it is clear that 200 out of 5,000 is a small minority, and no further explanation seems necessary.
A flaw in many arguments, though, is that the warrant is not clear. A clear warrant is essential. To be persuaded, a reader needs to understand your assumptions and the thinking that follows from them. If you were to argue, “Drug abuse is a serious problem in the United States. Therefore, the United States must

help to destroy drug production in Latin America," then your reader might well be left wondering why the second statement follows from the first. But if you were to add, between the statements, "As long as drugs are manufactured in Latin America, they will be smuggled into the United States, and drug abuse will continue," then you supply a warrant. You show why your claim follows from your data—which, of course, you must also supply to make your case.

The unstated warrant can pitch an argument into trouble—whether your own or another writer's. Since warrants are usually assumptions or generalizations, rather than assertions of fact, they are valid only if readers accept or agree that they are valid. With stated warrants, any weaknesses are more likely to show. Suppose someone asserts that a certain woman should not be elected mayor because women cannot form ideas independently of their husbands and this woman's husband has bad ideas on how to run the city. At least the warrant—that women cannot form ideas independently of their husbands—is out there on the table, exposed for all to inspect. But unstated warrants can be just as absurd, or even just doubtful, and pass unnoticed because they are not exposed. Here's the same argument without its warrant: "She shouldn't be elected mayor because her husband has bad ideas on how to run the city."

Here's another argument with an unstated warrant, this one adapted from a magazine advertisement: "Scientists have no proof, just statistical correlations, linking smoking and heart disease, so you needn't worry about the connection." Now, the fact that this ad was placed by a cigarette manufacturer would tip off any reasonably alert reader to beware of bias in the claim. To discover the slant, we need to examine the unstated warrant, which runs something like this: "Since they are not proof, statistical correlations are worthless as guides to behavior." It is true that statistical correlations are not scientific proof, by which we generally mean repeated results obtained under controlled laboratory conditions—the kind of conditions to which human beings cannot be subjected. But statistical correlations can establish connections and in fact inform much of our healthful behavior, such as getting physical exercise, avoiding fatty foods, brushing our teeth, and not driving while intoxicated. The advertiser's unstated warrant isn't valid, so neither is the argument.

**Example of a Toulmin argument** Let's look at how the data-claim-warrant scheme can work in constructing an argument. In an assignment for her course in English composition, Maire Flynn was asked to produce a condensed argument in three short paragraphs. The first paragraph was to set forth some data; the second, a claim; and the third, a warrant. The result became a kind of outline that the writer could then expand into a whole essay. Following is Flynn's argument.
DATA  Over the past five years, assistance in the form of food stamps has not had the effect of decreasing the number of people on welfare. Despite this help, 95 percent of long-term recipients remain below the poverty line today.

CLAIM  The present system of distributing food stamps is a dismal failure, a less effective way to help the needy than other possible ways.

WARRANT  No one is happy to receive charity. We need to encourage people to quit the welfare rolls; we need to make sure that government aid goes only to the deserving. More effective than giving out food stamps would be to help untrained young people learn job skills; to help single mothers with small children to obtain child care, freeing them for the job market; and to enlarge and improve our state employment counseling and job-placement services. The problem of poverty will be helped only if more people will find jobs and become self-sufficient.

In her warrant paragraph, Flynn spells out her reasons for holding her opinion—the one she states in her claim. "The warrant," she found, "was the hardest part to write," but hers turned out to be clear. Like any good warrant, hers expresses those thoughts that her data set in motion. Another way of looking at the warrant: It is the thinking that led the writer on to the opinion she holds. In this statement of her warrant, Flynn makes clear her assumptions: that people who can support themselves don't deserve food stamps and that a person is better off (and happier) holding a job than receiving charity. By generating more ideas and evidence, she was easily able to expand both the data paragraph and the warrant paragraph, and the result was a coherent essay of seven hundred words.

How, by the way, would someone who didn't accept Flynn's warrant argue with her? What about old, infirm, or disabled persons who cannot work? What quite different assumptions about poverty might be possible?

**Deductive and Inductive Reasoning**

Stephen Toulmin's method of argument is a fairly recent—and very helpful—way to analyze and construct arguments. Two other reliable methods date back to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who identified the complementary processes of **INDUCTIVE REASONING** (induction) and **DEDUCTIVE REASONING** (deduction). In Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Robert M. Pirsig gives examples of deductive and inductive reasoning:

If the cycle goes over a bump and the engine misfires, and then goes over another bump and the engine misfires, and then goes over another bump and the engine misfires, and then goes over a long smooth stretch of road and there is no misfiring, and then goes over a fourth bump and the engine misfires
again, one can logically conclude that the misfiring is caused by the bumps. That is induction: reasoning from particular experiences to general truths.

Deductive inferences do the reverse. They start with general knowledge and predict a specific observation. For example, if, from reading the hierarchy of facts about the machine, the mechanic knows the horn of the cycle is powered exclusively by electricity from the battery, then he can logically infer that if the battery is dead the horn will not work. That is deduction.

In inductive reasoning, the method of the sciences, we collect bits of evidence on which to base generalizations. From interviews with a hundred self-identified conservative Republicans (the evidence), you might conclude that conservative Republicans favor less government regulation of business (the generalization). The more evidence you have, the more trustworthy your generalization is, but it would never be airtight unless you talked to every conservative Republican in the country. Since such thoroughness is impractical if not impossible, inductive reasoning involves making an inductive leap from the evidence to the conclusion. The smaller the leap—the more evidence you have—the better.

Deductive reasoning works the other way, from a general statement to particular cases. The basis of deduction is the syllogism, a three-step form of reasoning practiced by Aristotle:

- All men are mortal.
- Socrates is a man.
- Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

The first statement (the major premise) is a generalization about a large group: It is the result of inductive reasoning. The second statement (the minor premise) says something about a particular member of that large group. The third statement (the conclusion) follows inevitably from the premises and applies the generalization to the particular: If the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true. Here is another syllogism:

- **Major Premise** Conservative Republicans favor less government regulation of business.
- **Minor Premise** William F. Buckley, Jr., is a conservative Republican.
- **Conclusion** Therefore, William F. Buckley, Jr., favors less government regulation of business.

Problems with deductive reasoning start in the premises. In 1633, Scipio Chiaramonti, professor of philosophy at the University of Pisa, came up with this untrustworthy syllogism: "Animals, which move, have limbs and muscles. The earth has no limbs and muscles. Hence, the earth does not move." This is
bad deductive reasoning, and its flaw is to assume that all things need limbs and muscles to move—ignoring raindrops, rivers, and many other moving things. In the next pages, we'll look at some of the things that can go wrong with any kind of reasoning.

Logical Fallacies

In arguments we read and hear, we often meet logical fallacies: errors in reasoning that lead to wrong conclusions. From the time when you start thinking about your proposition or claim and planning your paper, you'll need to watch out for them. To help you recognize logical fallacies when you see them or hear them, and so guard against them when you write, here is a list of the most common.

- **Non sequitur** (from the Latin, "it does not follow"): stating a conclusion that doesn't follow from the first premise or premises. "I've lived in this town a long time—why, my grandfather was the first mayor—so I'm against putting fluoride in the drinking water."
- **Oversimplification**: supplying neat and easy explanations for large and complicated phenomena. "No wonder drug abuse is out of control. Look at how the courts have hobbled police officers." Oversimplified solutions are also popular: "All these teenage kids that get in trouble with the law—why, they ought to ship 'em over to China. That would straighten 'em out!" (See also p. 433.)
- **Hasty generalization**: leaping to a generalization from inadequate or faulty evidence. The most familiar hasty generalization is the stereotype: "Men aren't sensitive enough to be day-care providers." "Women are too emotional to fight in combat."
- **Either/or reasoning**: assuming that a reality may be divided into only two parts or extremes; assuming that a given problem has only one of two possible solutions. "What’s to be done about the trade imbalance with Asia? Either we ban all Asian imports, or American industry will collapse." Obviously, either/or reasoning is a kind of extreme oversimplification.
- **Argument from doubtful or unidentified authority**: "We ought to castrate all sex offenders; Uncle Oswald says we should." Or: "According to reliable sources, my opponent is lying."
- **Argument ad hominem** (from the Latin, "to the man"): attacking a person's views by attacking his or her character. "Mayor Burns is divorced and estranged from his family. How can we listen to his pleas for a city nursing home?"
- **Begging the question**: taking for granted from the start what you set out to demonstrate. When you reason in a logical way, you state that because
something is true, then, as a result, some other truth follows. When you beg the question, however, you repeat that what is true is true. If you argue, for instance, that dogs are a menace to people because they are dangerous, you don’t prove a thing, since the idea that dogs are dangerous is already assumed in the statement that they are a menace. Beggars of questions often just repeat what they already believe, only in different words. This fallacy sometimes takes the form of arguing in a circle, or demonstrating a premise by a conclusion and a conclusion by a premise: “I am in college because that is the right thing to do. Going to college is the right thing to do because it is expected of me.”

- *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (from the Latin, “after this, therefore because of this”), or *post hoc* for short: assuming that because B follows A, B was caused by A. “Ever since the city suspended height restrictions on skyscrapers, the city budget has been balanced.” (See also p. 433.)
- *False analogy*: the claim of persuasive likeness when no significant likeness exists. An *analogy* asserts that because two things are comparable in some respects, they are comparable in other respects as well. Analogies cannot serve as evidence in a rational argument because the differences always outweigh the similarities; but analogies can reinforce such arguments if the subjects are indeed similar in some ways. If they aren’t, the analogy is false. Many observers see the “war on drugs” as a false and damaging analogy because warfare aims for clear victory over a specific, organized enemy, whereas the complete eradication of illegal drugs is probably unrealistic and, in any event, the “enemy” isn’t well defined: the drugs themselves? users? sellers? producers? the producing nations? (These critics urge approaching drugs as a social problem to be skillfully managed and reduced.)

**THE PROCESS**

In stating an opinion, you set forth and support a claim—a truth you believe. You may find such a truth by thinking and feeling, by reading, by talking to your instructors or fellow students, by listening to a discussion of some problem or controversy.

In stating a proposal, you already have an opinion in mind, and from there, you go on to urge an action or a solution to a problem. Usually, these two statements will take place within the same piece of writing: A writer will first set forth a view (“Compact discs are grossly overpriced”) and then go right on to a proposal (“Compact discs should be discounted in the college store”).

Whether your essay states an opinion, a proposal, or both, it is likely to contain similar ingredients. One essential is your **thesis**—the proposition or
claim you are going to defend. As we noted earlier (p. 518), the likeliest spot for your thesis statement is near the start of your essay, where you might also explain why you think the thesis worth upholding, perhaps showing how it concerns your readers. If you plan to include both an opinion and a proposal in your essay, you may wish to set forth your opinion first, saving your proposal for later, perhaps for your conclusion.

Your thesis stated, introduce your least important point first. Then build in a crescendo to the strongest point you have. This structure will lend emphasis to your essay and perhaps make your chain of ideas more persuasive as the reader continues to follow it.

For every point, give evidence: facts, figures, examples, expert opinions. If you introduce statistics, make sure that they are up to date and fairly represented. In an essay advocating a law against smoking, it would be unfair to declare that "in Pottsville, Illinois, last year, 50 percent of all deaths were caused by lung cancer" if only two people died in Pottsville last year—one of them struck by a car.

If you are arguing fairly, you should be able to face potential criticisms fairly, and give your critics due credit, by recognizing the objections you expect your assertion will meet. This is the strategy Linda Chavez uses in "Everything Isn’t Racial Profiling" by maintaining, more than once, that racial profiling based on prejudice is wrong and by sympathizing with an Arab American who was not allowed to board a plane because of his ethnicity. As Chavez does, you can tackle possible objections throughout your essay, or you can discuss them early on or near the end. Also like Chavez, you should take pains to reason with opponents, not just dismiss them.

In your conclusion, briefly restate your claim, if possible in a fresh, pointed way. (For example, see the concluding sentence in the essay by William F. Buckley, Jr., in this chapter.) In an essay with a strong emotional component, you may want to end with an appeal to feelings.

Finally, don’t forget the power of humor in argument. You don’t have to crack gratuitous jokes, but there is often an advantage in having a reader or listener who laughs on your side. When Abraham Lincoln debated Stephen Douglas, he triumphed in his reply to Douglas’s snide remark that Lincoln had once been a bartender. “I have long since quit my side of the bar,” Lincoln declared, “while Mr. Douglas clings to his as tenaciously as ever.”

In arguing—doing everything you can to bring your reader around to your view—you can draw on any method of writing discussed in this book. Arguing for or against further reductions in welfare funding, you might give examples of wasteful spending, or of neighborhoods where welfare funds are still needed. You might analyze the causes of social problems that call for welfare funds, or foresee the likely effects of cutting welfare programs or of keep-
ing them. You might COMPARE AND CONTRAST the idea of slashing welfare funds with the idea of increasing them. You could use NARRATION to tell a pointed story; you could use DESCRIPTION to portray certain welfare recipients and their neighborhoods. If it suited your purposes, you could employ several of these methods in writing a single argument.

You will rarely find, when you begin to write a persuasive paper, that you have too much evidence to support your claim. But unless you’re writing a term paper and have months to spend on it, you’re limited in how much evidence you can gather. Begin by stating your claim. Make it narrow enough to support in the time you have available. For a paper due a week from now, the opinion that “our city’s downtown area has a serious litter problem” can probably be backed up in part by your own eyewitness reports. But to support the claim “Litter is one of the worst environmental problems of North American cities,” you would surely need to spend time in a library.

In rewriting, you may find yourself tempted to keep all the evidence you have collected with such effort. Of course, some of it may not support your claim; some may seem likely to persuade the reader only to go to sleep. If so, throw it out. A stronger argument will remain.

Readers are most likely to be persuaded by an argument when they sense a writer who is reasonable, trustworthy, and sincere. Sound reasoning, strong evidence, and acknowledgment of opposing views do much to convey these attributes, but so does TONE, the attitude implied by choice of words and sentence structures.

Generally, you should try for a tone of moderation in your view of your subject and a tone of respectfulness and goodwill toward readers and opponents.

• State opinions and facts calmly:
  
  OVEREXCITED One clueless administrator was quoted in the newspaper as saying she thought many students who claim learning disabilities are faking their difficulties to obtain special treatment! Has she never heard of dyslexia, attention-deficit disorders, and other well-established disabilities?
  
  CALM Particularly worrisome was one administrator’s statement, quoted in the newspaper, that many students who claim learning disabilities may be “faking” their difficulties to obtain special treatment.

• Replace arrogance with deference and sarcasm with plain speaking:
  
  ARROGANT I happen to know that many students would rather party or just bury their heads in the sand than get involved in a serious, worthy campaign against the school’s unjust learning-disabled policies.
  
  DEFERENTIAL Time pressures and lack of information about the issues may be what prevents students from joining the campaign against the school’s unjust learning-disabled policies.
SARCASTIC: Of course, the administration knows even without meeting students what is best for every one of them.

PLAIN: The administration should agree to meet with each learning-disabled student to learn about his or her needs.

- Choose words whose connotations convey reasonableness rather than anger, hostility, or another negative emotion:

HOSTILE: The administration coerced some students into dropping their lawsuits. [Coerced implies the use of threats or even violence.]

REASONABLE: The administration convinced some students to drop their lawsuits. [Convinced implies the use of reason.]

For exercises on language, visit Exercise Central at bedfordstmartins.com/thebedfordreader.

ARGUMENT AND PERSUASION IN PARAGRAPHS

Writing About Television

This self-contained paragraph, written for The Bedford Reader, argues that TV news aims for entertainment at the expense of serious coverage of events and issues. The argument here could serve a number of different purposes in full essays: For instance, in a paper claiming that television is our least reliable
source of news, the paragraph would give one cause of unreliability; or in an essay analyzing television news, the paragraph would examine one element.

Television news has a serious failing: It's show business. Unlike a newspaper, its every image has to entertain the average beer drinker. To score high ratings and win advertisers, the visual medium favors the spectacular: riots, tornados, air crashes. Now that satellite transmission invites live coverage, newscasters go for the fast-breaking story at the expense of thoughtful analysis. "The more you can get data out instantly," says media critic Jeff Greenfield, "the more you rely on instant data to define the news." TV zooms in on people who make news, but, to avoid boredom, won't let them argue or explain. (How can they, in speeches limited to fifteen seconds?) In 1996, as American missiles bombed military sites in Iraq, President Clinton held a press conference to explain the action. His lengthy remarks were clipped to twenty seconds on one news broadcast, and then an anchorwoman digested the opposition to a single line: "Republicans tonight were critical of the president's actions." During the 2004 presidential election, both candidates sometimes deliberately packaged bad news so that it could not be distilled to a sound bite on the evening news—and thus would not make the evening news at all. Americans who rely on television for their news (two-thirds, according to recent polls) exist on a starvation diet.

Writing in an Academic Discipline

Taken from a textbook on public relations, the following paragraph argues that lobbyists (who work to persuade public officials in behalf of a cause) are not slick manipulators but something else. The paragraph falls in the textbook's section on lobbying as a form of public relations, and its purpose is to correct a mistaken definition.

Although the public stereotypes a lobbyist as a fast-talking person twisting an elected official's arm to get special concessions, the reality is quite different. Today's lobbyist, who may be fully employed by one industry or represent a variety of clients, is often a quiet-spoken, well-educated man or woman armed with statistics and research reports. Robert Gray, former head of Hill and Knowlton's Washington office and a public affairs expert for thirty years, adds, "Lobbying is no longer a booze and buddies business. It's presenting honest facts and convincing Congress that your side has more merit than the other." He rejects lobbying as being simply "influence peddling and button-holing" top administration officials. Although the public has the perception that lobbying is done only by big business, Gray correctly points out that a variety of special interests also do it.
These may include such groups as the Sierra Club, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the American Federation of Labor. Even the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons hired a Washington public relations firm in their battle against restrictions on breast implants. Lobbying, quite literally, is an activity in which widely diverse groups and organizations engage as an exercise of free speech and representation in the marketplace of ideas. Lobbyists often balance each other and work toward legislative compromises that not only benefit their self-interests but society as a whole.


**ARGUMENT AND PERSUASION IN PRACTICE**

As a college freshman, Kristen Corcoran commuted to school at night. In the following letter, she appealed to her college's president to have a parking ticket canceled because legal parking was unavailable.

Corcoran's letter is a model of argument for a specific purpose, but it didn't start out that way. In her much longer first draft, she let her anger push her into detailing every one of her five previous parking difficulties and criticizing the president personally for not solving the problem. She did not get to her request to have the ticket canceled until the very end.

Reviewing her draft, Corcoran realized that she was trying to negotiate with the president, not tell her off, and for that a more direct, conciliatory approach was needed. In the revision you see here, Corcoran focuses immediately on her purpose for writing, summarizes her problems with parking, and takes the tack of informing, rather than criticizing, the president.

1073 Dogwood Terrace  
North Andover, MA 01845  
May 2, 2004

President Delores Reed  
North State College  
755 Little Road  
Danvers, MA 01923

Dear President Reed:

I write to ask you to rescind a ten-dollar citation I received on April 4 for parking in North State's Lot E. I know that this lot is reserved for faculty use, but flooding in three of the four commuter lots left
me with no reasonable parking alternatives. The campus police have not been able to help me, so I turn to you.

As you know, flooding is a recurring problem at North State, but perhaps you don't know how it affects commuting students. April 4 was one of six evenings this semester when I arrived to find Lots A, C, and D overrun by nearby marshes. On the other nights, Lot B filled quickly with cars and I was forced on two occasions to hunt for parking in the crowded residential areas off-campus. On April 4, I chose not to spend a half-hour finding a space and parked in Lot E. Many of its spaces are vacant at night when there are fewer classes and most campus offices are closed.

I understand from the campus police that North State has no plan for solving this seasonal problem. I, like hundreds of other commuter students, paid fifty dollars for a parking permit in the beginning of the semester and should be able to expect convenient parking like that described in North State's brochures. The parking problem is a serious one that affects not only commuters, who make up more than half of the student body, but also North State's neighbors, who are inconvenienced by crowds of cars monopolizing their streets each spring.

Please rescind my ticket and try to create some solutions to this problem. As a first step, may I suggest amending the school's parking policy to allow commuter use of Lot E in emergencies?

Sincerely,

Kristen Corcoran

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