Week 2: Reading Arguments
January 15, 2019
ARGUMENT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A FIGHT OR A QUARREL
What is an Argument?

- Argument is not a fight or a quarrel
  - It can be a pleasurable experience
- Argument is not pro-con debate
  - Think of it as a group of reasonable persons seeking the best solution to a problem
It’s Actually Possible to “Respectfully Disagree”

“In as much as I disagree, I agree completely.”
According to Richard Fulkerson:

“An argument is any set of two or more assertions in which one (or more) is claimed to offer support for another.”

This means arguments are made up of propositions (assertions or claims)
What is an Argument?

Arguments can be explicit or implicit, so that it influences audience’s stance on an issue

- Psychological, cognitive impact, emotional response

An explicit argument states directly controversial claims and supports them with reason and evidence

An implicit argument doesn’t look like an argument

- It might be a song, poem, story, etc.

Dr. Louis Sullivan, Secretary of HHS
Looking at explicit arguments, you know right away what the argument is about and what viewpoint is; the argument is usually written out.

An example of this type of argument is when people argue out their views and it is usually like a debate.

Implicit arguments are also similar to explicit arguments because they try to persuade others to take a certain point of view.

They don’t come right out and tell what you should think, but there are hidden and underlying messages to them.
Genres of Argument

ë Genre types:
ë Personal correspondence; Letter to editor; Newspaper editorial or op-ed; Magazine article; Scholarly journal (peer-reviewed); Conference proceedings; Organization white paper; Proposal; Legal briefs and court decisions; Public affairs advocacy advertisements; Advocacy websites; Blogs; Visual arguments; Speeches; Powerpoint presentations; Books; Documentary films

ë Understand status of work in relation to genre
ë Understand stylistic features of each genre
Defining Features of an Argument

- Argument requires justification of its claims
  - It is not sufficient to simply give reasons without justification

- Argument is both a process and product
  - It is a “living” entity that changes the participants

- Argument combines truth seeking and persuasion
  - This is a continuum that we the participants must balance
The Continuum of Truth Seeking and Persuasion

Truth Seeking

- Exploratory essay examining all sides of an issue
- Argument as inquiry, asking audience to think out issue with writer
- Dialogic argument seeking common ground with a resistant audience
- Classical argument aimed at a neutral or possibly skeptical audience
- One-sided argument aimed at a friendly audience (often for fund-raising or calls to action)
- Aggressive one-sided arguments
- Outright propaganda

Outright Propaganda
What is the Purpose?

- The blend of truth seeking and persuasion asks the question, what are we trying to do?
  - Are we trying to get the best solution?
  - Or “win” the argument?

- Argument and the problem of truth
  - Sophists and Socrates – discover Truth through reasonable inquiry
  - There are multifaceted, competing perspectives or visions to truth
  - Truth needs to be negotiated; observe all available evidence
Truth is negotiated
What conversation does this argument join?
What is the argument’s claim?
How does the argument try to do to persuade its audience?
How effective is this argument in making its claim? Why?
A Successful Way of Argumentation

- You can argue adopting any of these angles
  - Definition issues
  - Resemblance issues
  - Cause/consequence issues
  - Evaluation issues
  - Proposal issues
Classroom Activity 2: Role Playing Arguments

“Social networking sites such as Facebook (FB) create conflicts between free speech and the reputations of people and institutions in the public domain” (WA: pg. 16)
Class Activity 2: Role Playing Arguments

Roles
- A student athlete who has been warned to remove FB photo showing partying/drinking alcohol
- General students concerned about institutionally imposed restrictions on FB use
- A faculty who has been libeled on a student’s FB page
- Athletics directors interested in buying tracking technology to monitor student athletes’ FB activity
- A representative of ACLU who supports students’ free speech
- The Dean of Students who is concerned for the reputation of the institution and for the future well-being of students who might be embarrassed by current postings or endangered by disclosing too much personal information
Argument As Inquiry

- Finding Issues to Explore
  - Do some initial brainstorming
  - Be open to the issues around you

- Explore ideas by:
  - Freewriting
  - Idea Mapping (pg. 29)
  - Playing the Believing and Doubting Game (pg. 29)
Brainstorming for developing an argument

- Make an inventory of the communities that are relevant to the issue
- Identify controversies within those communities
- Narrow your list to a handful of problematic issues for which you don’t have a position; share it with others
- Brainstorm a network of related issues
iPads in Education – Pros and Cons

**Pros**
- Volume purchase programs possible
- Eliminate need for textbooks
- Very easy to use
- Apps for almost any application
- Light weight, no need to carry textbooks
- High because pupils love iPads
- Superb information aggregation tool
- Drawing and mind mapping hassle free
- Battery last for a whole school day

**Cons**
- iPads are expensive
- Every pupil needs an iPad
- Apps need to be bought
- No multitasking
- No USB-port
- Sharing not effortless
- Potential danger: distraction
- Not very apt for content creation
- Typing is still a hassle
- Battery charging may be an issue
- Some schools may have no wifi
Class Activity 3: Brainstorming arguments
Reading as a **believer**
- Always a good idea with research literature
- Tearing something apart is trivial

Practice “empathic listening” (see the world through the author’s eyes).
- Requires putting aside your own viewpoint for the moment
The Believing and Doubting Game

Reading as a **doubter**
- Express skepticism
- Look for what is NOT there as well as what is
- Don't assume information sources/citations are fool proof
  - What does the cited item really say?
  - What are the credentials of people cited?
  - What bias is being brought forward?
  - Are alternatives ignored?
Class Activity 4: The Believing and Doubting Game

- How Facebook Makes Us Unhappy:
Make sense of an argument

- Placing arguments in a rhetorical context
  - Genres of argument
  - Cultural contexts – who writes the arguments and why, who is the audience, what is the motivation, what is the author’s purpose, what is the source, writer’s angle of vision
Thinking dialectically – actively seek out alternate views

Questions:
- What would writer A say to writer B?
- To what extent do writer A and writer B disagree about facts and interpretation of facts?
- To what extent do they disagree about underlying beliefs and assumptions and values?
- Can I find areas of agreement between them?
- What new, significant questions does the text post for me?
- After assimilating these information, what are my current views?

Ways:
- Effective discussion
- Reading Logs
- A formal exploratory essay – introduction, views/sources, conclusion
Because an argument involves two or more conflicting assertions, be sure to consider the important disagreements.

Disagreements may be about facts or reality.

“Facts” are often not the empirical facts of science, but are often contested.

Disagreements may be about values, beliefs, or assumptions.

For example, sometimes these disagreements may manifest themselves as disagreements about definitions (e.g., what is pornography or what is a minority).
Using Disagreement Productively to Prompt Further Investigation

- Both a strategy for reading arguments and a bridge towards constructing your own arguments.
- Identify sources of facts and more complete versions of alternative (and the current) views.
- Determine what values are at stake in the issue and articulate your own values.
- Consider ways to synthesize alternative views.