Third Edition

# Arguing *in* Communities

## READING AND WRITING ARGUMENTS IN CONTEXT

Gary Layne Hatch

# Arguing in Communities: Reading and Writing Arguments in Context

Third Edition

**Gary Layne Hatch**
*Brigham Young University*



Boston Burr Ridge, IL Dubuque, IA Madison, WI New York
San Francisco St. Louis Bangkok Bogotá Caracas Kuala Lumpur
Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City Milan Montreal New Delhi
Santiago Seoul Singapore Sydney Taipei Toronto

**McGraw-Hill Higher Education**

*A Division of The McGraw-Hill Companies*

ARGUING IN COMMUNITIES:
READING AND WRITING ARGUMENTS IN CONTEXT



This book is printed on acid-free paper.

4567890 BKM BKM 098

ISBN-13: 978-0-7674-1681-8

ISBN-10: 0-7674-1681-3

President of McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences: *Steve Debow*
Executive editor: *Lisa Moore*
Director of development, English: *Carla Kay Samodulski*
Senior developmental editor: *Renee Deljon*
Senior marketing manager: *David S. Patterson*
Senior media producer: *Todd Vaccaro*
Project manager: *Ruth Smith*
Production supervisor: *Susanne Riedell*
Senior designer: *Jenny El-Shamy*
Lead supplement producer: *Marc Mattson*
Photo research coordinator: *Alexandra Ambrose*
Typeface: *10/12 Galliard*
Compositor: *G&S Typesetters*

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Hatch, Gary Layne.
Arguing in communities : reading and writing arguments in context / Gary Layne Hatch.—3rd ed.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-7674-1681-3 (acid-free paper)
1. Persuasion (Rhetoric) 2. Reasoning. 3. Communication—Social aspects. 4. Rhetoric—Research—Methodology. I. Title.
P301.5.P47H38 2003
808—dc21 2002069596

www.mhhe.com

# Preface

Students are often asked to study arguments apart from any social context, and when they take courses in argumentative writing, they are often presented with an anthology of written arguments lined up like zoo animals removed from their native habitats. These anthologized arguments are usually so far removed from their social contexts that they no longer have any connection to the real world, and students aren't given the chance to see that arguments are all around them. De-contextualized arguments can be studied like zoological specimens, their elements dissected, their structures analyzed, but rarely can they be brought to life, and so students studying them do not learn that arguing and arguments are vitally important to us as social beings. *Arguing in Communities* is an attempt to take students where arguments live, so to speak, to the communities where we live and argue every day. My hope for the book is that it will help students to see argument as a positive part of life, that it will help to improve the quality of our arguments, and with luck, that it will help to improve communities in the process.

My central premise in the text is that arguing productively is an important part of living healthfully in any community and among other communities. Without effective arguing, communities have difficulty making decisions, coming to consensus, living with and negotiating difference, and simply getting things done. Negotiating difference, though, is the key, because difference is a given of human life, of every community. It's usually when arguing breaks down in the face of difference that people resort to some sort of force to accomplish their goals, whether it's through raised voices, physical violence, or legal action. The better able we are to argue effectively about our differences within our own communities and across community lines, the better chance we have at living more peaceful, productive, and satisfying lives.

# Introduction

All around us, we find arguments. In simple terms, an argument is a statement, called a claim, supported by other statements called reasons and assumptions. The claim is the statement under dispute. It is the focus of the argument, a proposition about which at least some people would disagree. But not all disagreements are arguments. Some arguments are constructive and some are destructive. In the media, arguments are often represented as shouting matches between emotional participants. You may even have experienced such arguments. When people become involved in a heated debate with others, where all they do is contradict one another, they often come away from the experience frustrated and angry and no closer to resolving the conflict that caused the disagreement in the first place. These kinds of arguments are typically destructive. In many cases, such disagreements aren't really arguments. Merely setting forth an opinion or making a claim isn't arguing. Neither is contradicting or disagreeing with someone. To argue is to justify or support with reasons what you claim to be true. Reasons are statements that lend credibility and support to the claim, which is disputed. Like reasons, assumptions are also statements that support an argument, but assumptions are often unstated or implied—assumed to be true. Assumptions are often general principles, definitions, and values that help readers make the connection between the reasons and the claim; they fill in the gaps in reasoning.

## WHAT MAKES AN ARGUMENT GOOD?

Not all arguments are good arguments. Not all claims are based on good reasons. Some argue to win at any cost, even if winning involves manipulation, deception, or aggression. There are books that will tell you how to "win every argument" or "sell anything." These books teach you how to get your way

through intimidation, name-calling, distortion, and deception. But people usually don't need training to argue this way. Just turn on any daytime television talk show, or listen to talk radio. Watch political debates. In these contests, the candidates rarely address the issues raised by their opponents. Instead, they just try to "get their message out" or make their opponents look foolish. Often they don't even answer the questions posed by the moderator: They're too busy responding to the last question or answering a question that was never asked. Often, public debate descends into calling names, the way children do on the playground.

But arguments don't have to be this way. Good arguments are constructive. They clarify your position as they persuade. In fact, the word *argument* itself comes from the Latin word for "silver" and literally means to make an idea clear, just as you can see your reflection clearly in polished silver. Because of its social nature, arguing well can bring people together, resolve conflict, and help us work collaboratively. When we argue, we argue *with* others. When we persuade, we are persuading *someone*. Arguing doesn't have to be combative. We don't necessarily have to argue *against* someone. And we don't always have to win by defeating someone else, by having our opinion prevail over another's. Often we argue *along with* others, to sort out our differences and to find good reasons for believing the way we do, perhaps even producing some new or better ideas in the process. Arguing well involves critical thinking, the process of analyzing and evaluating ideas in the pursuit of truth. College provides students an excellent opportunity to develop this ability to think critically. In college, you can clarify your own ideas by testing them against the ideas of others and by working together with other students to improve your skills in arguing well. These skills will help you learn how to learn, and they provide the foundation for a solid education.

According to the traditional definition, arguing is primarily a verbal activity. In other words, whether they are delivered orally or written down, arguments use words. As a verbal activity, arguments reveal themselves through language. Many of the arguments you encounter in your college experience will be verbal arguments. Speeches, lectures, newspaper and magazine articles, scholarly essays, technical reports, reviews, and books are all verbal arguments. But even verbal arguments often have a visual dimension. Although arguing is mainly a verbal activity, arguments may also rely on nonverbal elements, such as gestures and facial expressions (when we are speaking to each other) or symbolic and visual elements of print documents (such as images or document design). These visual elements contribute to the effectiveness of the verbal argument.

Whether we realize it or not, visual arguments are everywhere around us: T-shirts, bumper stickers, billboards, company logos, signs, symbols, television ads, magazine ads. This includes even the way in which we dress, how we interact with others, how we speak, and what we drive. We constantly make claims on others' beliefs—sometimes without being fully aware that we are doing so. We receive thousands of messages every day advancing some claim; often these claims are not stated. For example, look at all the messages people have on their

clothes. In addition to brand names and logos, they may have images or actual verbal messages that make some kind of implied argument.

Because they don't rely as much on language, visual arguments are usually implicit and more highly compact than verbal arguments. This allows you to respond to these arguments without necessarily articulating the claims and reasons. For example, if you are on a dark street and someone threatens you with a knife, you face a situation that demands a response. You may not realize it, but you are part of an argument. You probably wouldn't take the time at that moment to try to translate that argument into language, but you could easily do so. This person's body language is saying, "Give me what I want or I will harm you with this knife." That's a simple claim supported by a reason. Implicit in this argument are also the assumptions that you don't want to be harmed, that you have something this person wants, and that this is a credible threat. Your potential attacker can communicate all of this without using a single word. In addition to being implicit, visual arguments also make an impression or argue a claim in a very short time or very small space. An ad designer might have only 15 seconds of television time, one page of a magazine, a 1-by-8-inch Internet banner, or a small space on a T-shirt, mug, or pen. The need for immediacy and the lack of space or time are reasons people might choose to make a visual argument rather than a verbal argument.

Technology has made visual arguments an increasingly important part of our lives. Television, video, and film are primarily visual media, and even traditional print media, such as newspapers and magazines and books, are using more and more visual content. Recent advances in the development of the Internet and multimedia technology bring the visual and verbal together in ways other media cannot. These media provide not only a new channel for receiving information but also a way for millions of people to publish and disseminate information.

Whether verbal or visual, you will find arguments everywhere around you. We are involved in arguing all the time: It is part of using language and symbols and part of being human. Arguments make up the fabric of the communities in which we live, the groups that we identify with because of our shared language, beliefs, values, activities, and interests. And if you are to be a successful member of these communities, particularly the college community, you need to understand how to argue well and how to respond effectively with arguments of your own.

## ■■ THE ROLE OF ARGUING IN RESPONDING TO DIFFERENCE

As noted earlier, arguments are everywhere, and they are an important part of the life of a community. Why is this so? Even though members of a community have much in common—that which defines them as a group—there is also much that divides them. Although humans are genetically similar, no two people

have experienced the world in exactly the same way. Each person is unique, and because of our unique physical makeup and social background, each one of us will see things in a slightly different way. Our language divides us as well. Language makes understanding and community possible. Language allows us to build common beliefs and values, but it can also create misunderstanding, confusion, and division. The problem of difference within a community is compounded by the fact that most of us belong to a number of different communities, each with its own language, rules, beliefs, and values. If individuals within the same community can misunderstand or disagree with each other, imagine the potential for disagreement that exists between those belonging to different communities.

Our diversity ensures that within any community, there will be disagreement and differences of opinion. Our differences can lead to conflict—even among individuals or communities that have much in common. Because of our differences, some conflict within a community is inevitable.

One way communities respond to conflict is by using force: punishing, silencing, or expelling members of the community who disagree or dissent. This force may be exerted by powerful members of the community, by vote of the majority, through the power of law, through military or physical strength, or through subtle pressure from peers to conform or risk ridicule and alienation. Individuals who dissent or disagree may choose either to fall in line, to accept the punishment and continue to dissent, or to withdraw from the community. Most communities acknowledge what they consider to be legitimate uses of force; however, the use of force, if taken to an extreme, can result in the kind of totalitarian intolerance that led to the Holocaust in Germany and Poland, the "killing fields" of Cambodia, and "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia.

Another way to respond to difference is through tolerance—learning to live with and accept the difference of others. Members of a community can "agree to disagree" as long as they can accept the consequences of leaving the disagreement unresolved. For instance, people who work together may disagree about political, religious, or moral issues, but they will probably set these aside when they come to work—at least they will if they want to get any work done. Most communities tolerate a certain amount of difference; however, when taken to an extreme, accepting difference of every kind can lead to anarchy, apathy, inertia, and the dissolution of the community.

The strength of arguing in responding to difference is that arguing well seeks to bring about change, but without force. Threats of force may cause people to change, but they may do so grudgingly, resenting those who have threatened them. Arguing, on the other hand, may cause people to change their opinions and actions willingly. Ideally, arguing is a decision-making process that involves everyone concerned in a forum of free and open debate, each presenting his or her opinion in good faith, each willing to abide by the consensus or compromise that results from negotiation. Arguing in this manner resolves diverse opinions into a synthesis that is essentially agreeable to all.

Learning to argue effectively is particularly important in a democratic society, which attempts to allow the majority the right to rule and at the same time

protects the rights of those who disagree with the majority opinion: to build consensus, but allow individualism. Of course, this kind of arguing is an ideal that is rarely realized, but perhaps many more conflicts could be resolved peacefully if community members understood more about arguing effectively. If we are ever to coexist and survive as humans, we must learn to live together reasonably, accepting some of our differences and negotiating others. It may be the best hope for humanity.

## WHAT IS CONTEXT?

Students often study arguments removed from any social context. Students taking a course in argumentative writing are often presented with an anthology of written arguments lined up like zoo animals removed from their native habitat. Consequently, many students fail to realize that arguments are all around them. They fail to realize that arguments make up an important part of how they live, work, and study every day.

Whenever we are engaged with ideas and reasons, we are arguing. Whenever someone else makes a claim on our opinions, beliefs, and values, we are arguing. But placing arguments in context includes more than simply identifying who is engaged in arguing—the speakers and listeners or readers and writers. The context for arguing also includes the time, place, and circumstances of arguing. When you understand the complete context for an argument, you will be better able to make sense of the argument and respond effectively.

Writing that matters, including arguing, responds to the needs of actual people in real situations. When you argue, you are part of a conversation made up of the members of a community who care about the issue you are discussing. Others may respond to your argument, inviting you to reply to their response. Writing teachers often refer to the interaction between writers and readers in a particular context as a "rhetorical situation."

*Rhetoric* is the art of persuasion, really the art of arguing effectively for a particular audience, occasion, and purpose.[1] A ***rhetorical situation*** is one that calls for the use of persuasion—it's a situation in which an argument would be an appropriate response. Of course, because arguments are everywhere, rhetorical situations are all around us, too. Whenever true arguing occurs, it happens within the context of a rhetorical situation. Figure 1 identifies the primary parts of the rhetorical situation: the writer, the reader, and the issue.

[1]Some teachers may make a distinction between argument and persuasion, or they may see argument as just one type of persuasion. The distinction they make is primarily between explicit, verbal arguments and implicit, visual arguments. Or they may be limiting argument to "logic." In this more limited view, argument is "rational" and persuasion is "irrational." In this text, I will use argument and persuasion interchangeably because I am arguing that every message, whether verbal or visual, is an argument: Arguing and seeking to persuade are the same activity.

# Brief Contents