

Chapter 4.1: Readings on Argument

Hi. Guess what? You already know stuff. Yes, you already know how to argue. So, before jumping headfirst into “an introduction of argument,” let’s give our brain cells a tiny workout and an argumentative lesson. Let’s see what you already know!

QUICK REVIEW OF TERMINOLOGY

You don’t necessarily have to memorize these terms, but let’s cover them to make sure we’re all on the same page.

ARGUMENT:²

“A discussion in which disagreement is expressed; a debate” or “A quarrel; a dispute” or “A reason or matter for dispute or contention.”

Example: God doesn’t exist.

FACT:³

“Knowledge or information based on real occurrences” or “Something demonstrated to exist or known to have existed” or “A real occurrence; an event.”

Example: The Buddha commonly depicted in statues and pictures is a different person entirely. The real Buddha was actually incredibly skinny because of self-deprivation.

OPINION:⁴

“A belief or conclusion held with confidence but not substantiated by positive knowledge or proof: synonym: view” or “A judgment based on special knowledge and given by an expert” or “A judgment or estimation of the merit of a person or thing.”

Example: iPhones are better than Samsung phones.

PREMISE:

“A proposition upon which an argument is based or from which a conclusion is drawn” or “One of the propositions in a deductive argument.”

Examples: All students like pizza. All swans are white. All dogs are mammals.

RHETORIC:⁶

“The art or study of using language effectively and persuasively.”


² From *American Heritage Dictionary*.

³ From *American Heritage Dictionary*.

⁴ From *American Heritage Dictionary*.

⁵ Image created on Pixlr.com with an Unsplash image from marc Olivier jodoin. Text on image comes from: Richard Nordquist’s article “Premise Definition and Examples in Arguments” on ThoughtCo.com; written January 28, 2020. <https://www.thoughtco.com/premise-argument-1691662>

⁶ From *American Heritage Dictionary*.

A photograph of a hand reaching out towards a sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and lens flare. The water is calm and reflects the sky. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a lighter blue near the horizon.

PREMISE 1: THE WORLD IS AN ORGANIZED SYSTEM.
PREMISE 2: EVERY ORGANIZED SYSTEM MUST HAVE A CREATOR.
CONCLUSION: THE CREATOR OF THE WORLD IS GOD.

A pitstop before jumping into argument would be to think briefly about how writing is subjective, how we need to be good about spotting bullshit, and fake news. These topics may infiltrate much of the creation of your arguments as well as be sidenotes to the arguments you read, see, or hear.

WRITING IS SUBJECTIVE

Let's start with this: writing is subjective. Let's also start with this tweet by Dan Martin:

"I try to teach students to let go of the notion that good writing has a universal definition or that anyone can define what good writing is or can be for every situation." @danmartin_7

How can one claim that writing is subjective? Well, for one, no one can agree on ONE author or one book that is truly THE BEST of all time. Sure, people will argue that they can. Your high school English teachers might've adored X, Y, and Z. But that's their opinion. My favorite writers haven't been part of the mainstream. They are different. They have affected me in ways that I'll never quite comprehend. That's what makes them the best to me, and you probably like completely different authors and books, too. Where does young adult literature fit into all this? Where do graphic novels? See? It's subjective as hell!

What can we do, if writing is subjective and doesn't have PERFECT rules then? We just practice argumentation. We give it our best shot. We just learn new things and practice them and then practice argumentation styles some more...

THE “WHITE PEOPLE” LANGUAGE

I've⁹ been fumbling around w/this idea for a while, & I dunno if I'll say it correctly, yet I also know I'm not the first to say it: when we tell Ss to write "professionally" or use "appropriate language/grammar/spelling," we're saying, "You should sound like a white person." T/F?

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People¹⁰ consistently lament that kids today can't speak properly or that people coming to this country need to learn to write correctly. These lamentations are based on the notion that there is a single correct way of speaking and writing. Currently, the general sentiment is that people should just learn to speak and write proper English. This understanding of writing is rooted called current traditional rhetoric, which focuses on a prescriptive and formulaic way of teaching writing that assumes there is only one way to write (or speak) something for it to be correct. However, over the past several decades, scholars in writing studies have examined the ways in which writing has a close dialectical relationship with identity, style genre, and culture. In other words, the rules for writing shift with the people and the community involved as well as the purpose and type of writing.

This means that while marginalized students and lower-class students are ostensibly being given greater access to education, careers, and other facets of society they had been previously barred from, they are still facing serious barriers that their upper-class white counterparts do not, particularly in terms of culture, language, and literacy.

The way that we conceptualize language is not just detrimental to minorities; it also devalues the identities that working- and lower-class people bring to communicative situations, including the classroom. Lynn Z. Bloom writes that “Freshman Composition is an unabashedly middle-class enterprise.” She argues that one of the reasons composition is required for all students is because it promulgates middle-class values and ways of thinking. These values in the writing classroom are embodied in everything from the notion of property, which undergirds the way that plagiarism and intellectual property are treated, to formality of language and rhetorical choices that are encouraged in papers. Indeed, the way many instructors teach writing, plagiarism, citation, and word choice in papers is not in and of itself good but rather is the socially accepted way of interacting with text as defined by the middle class. Mike Rose and Irvin Peckham write about the tension of middleclass values on working-class students and the cognitive dissonance and struggles with identity that come with imposing such values in writing under the guise of correctness. The idea that there is one correct way of writing devalues the writing, thoughts, intelligence, and identities of people from lower-class backgrounds.

⁹ Sybil's Tweet⁹ from February 3, 2021.

¹⁰ Snippet from = Pattanayak, Anjali. “There is One Correct Way of Writing and Speaking.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

In order to value the diversity of communication and identities that exist in the U.S., we need to start teaching and envisioning writing as a cultural and social activity. We need a more nuanced view of writing in society that encourages everyone to adapt to their audiences and contexts rather than placing an undue burden on those who do not fit the mold of standard English. One strategy for teaching academic English without devaluing a writer's identity is code-switching, a concept already taught in schools with significant marginalized populations as a way of empowering young people. While instruction in code-switching is valuable because it teaches students that they can adopt different linguistic choices to appeal to different audiences, it is deeply problematic that the impetus is still placed on marginalized students with non-standard dialects to adapt. While code-switching is meant to empower people, it is still rooted in the mentality that there is one correct way of writing, because even as code-switching teaches an incredibly nuanced way of thinking about writing, it is still being taught in the context of preparing writers to deal with a society that will use errors in speaking as evidence that they are lesser. As a result, it is a less-than ideal solution because it plays into—rather than undermines—the racism of academic English.

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When we focus on the ways that African American Language and Standard American English are different,¹¹ communicators are able to better understand, acquire, and switch between both, and society is more capable of recognizing the validity of the language and its users. Conflating the two into one linguistic variety is confusing at best and damaging at worst. We need to understand and explain African American Language and Standard American English as different languages, each with its own set of grammatical, phonological, and morphological rules (even though they share a lexicon or vocabulary).

In the writing classroom, teachers can help students navigate Standard American English expectations while not suggesting a linguistic hierarchy. By speaking about language choices in terms of difference rather than deficiency and in relation to academic and nonacademic conventions, we can value both (or any) languages. Delpit suggests validating students by welcoming their home languages—and, therefore, their cultures and identities—into the classroom so they feel respected and might be more willing to add Standard American English to their linguistic repertoires. If students understand that different audiences and contexts expect different language choices and that African American Language is different from Standard American English but that neither is better or worse than the other, then they are better able to accept and use both proficiently.

¹¹ Cunningham, Jennifer M. "African American Language is Not Good English." *Bad Ideas About Writing*. This resource is licensed CC-BY.



Alexa Bach

@ms_bach_says



PSA. Your students saying "ain't", "finna", etc. are cultural. Instead of "correcting" them, talk to them about code switching and how amazingly SMART they are for being able to codeswitch between the two. Valuing your students' identities means valuing the way they speak.

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¹² Tweeted July 25, 2018.

SPOTTING BULLSH*T¹³

First-year writing also works like no other course to push students to explore the possibilities of language, to work with new and uncomfortable ideas and genres, and to analyze important issues and how they are argued in the public sphere. Part of this means getting students to develop better methods of writing and reading in digital environments, which involves discerning what philosopher Harry Frankfurt has called bullshit. A recent survey found that 84% of American students indicated they would benefit from learning whether or not certain online sources are trustworthy. Another study reported that around 82% of middle-schoolers were unable to determine what was sponsored content and what was a real news story on a website. And being able to sift through the bullshit to find reliable sources, meaningful arguments, and a deeper intellectual exchange in public deliberation is a literacy skill developed specifically in first-year writing.

FAKE NEWS

Fake News¹⁴ is "false news stories, often of a sensational nature, created to be widely shared online for the purpose of generating ad revenue via web traffic or discrediting a public figure, political movement, company, etc." Fake News is a type of disinformation (false information with the intent to deceive), and disinformation is a type of misinformation (false or misleading information). In scientific literature, Fake News has been defined as disinformation that "mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent." Fake News often goes beyond this definition to describe misinformation, disinformation, errors, false predictions, and reporting that people don't like.

Fake News itself can be divided into different categories such as:

- Clickbait: Sensational article titles created to increase views in order to "increase ad revenue for websites"
- Propaganda: "Promotes a biased point of view or particular political cause/agenda"
- Satire / Parody: Fake stories that are published for entertainment
- Sloppy Journalism: Stories published containing unreliable information or that are not fact-checked
- Misleading Headings: Using a misleading title to distort story as "only headlines and small snippets...are displayed on...newsfeeds"
- Biased / Slanted News: Confirms and polarizes the biases and beliefs of a particular user

¹³ Branson, Tyler. "First-Year Composition Prepares Students for Academic Writing." *Bad Ideas About Writing*. CC-BY.

¹⁴ "Lentis." *Wikibooks, The Free Textbook Project*. 11 Dec 2019, 17:54 UTC. 10 May 2020, 21:40 <<https://en.wikibooks.org/w/index.php?title=Lentis&oldid=3623847>>.

INTERNET CHANGES OUR PERSPECTIVES¹⁵

"I am going to study abroad." "We are traveling to those countries." "Which countries have you been to?" These conversations often taken place in this globalized world. However, it must have been different a couple decades ago. Even though there were some people who traveled around the world back then, the number of those who did that must have been much fewer than what it is now. What makes this difference? I suppose one of the causes that makes this happen is people's thoughts towards other countries. I am studying in the US now. In terms of me studying abroad, I had a lot of different opinions from my family and friends. At that time, I realized that the opinions were different based on their ages. My grandparents and my parents have quite a few ideas in common, but my friends and people in my generation tend to have different ideas. One of the biggest social changes between my parents' generation and ours is the Internet. Internet or media changes our perspectives dramatically in a widespread way, and their own experience or ones of someone closer to you affect individual points of view.

I interviewed my grandparents, parents, and my friends about their images of the US and researched whether there are somethings in common or different among the three generations. My grandfather said to me, "I used to have very negative images of America and hated it since we experienced WW II . Because of the US, we needed to lead a severe and miserable life." My grandfather was the oldest kid in his family, which means he needed to take care of younger siblings and support his family financially. Therefore, he gave going to high school and started working, even though his grades were remarkable in school and had the opportunity to have better quality of life by getting a higher education. At that time, he blamed America for the hard life. Now, he thinks it is history and he doesn't have any hatred anymore, but still he is slightly afraid of America.

The same as him, my grandmother was scared of the US due to the stereotype of American having guns everywhere or its lack of safety. For her, guns are strongly connected to taking human lives so she cannot help but to be worried about it. Thus, she strongly disagreed with me studying in the US. She thought it was too dangerous for women to go or study there by themselves.

My parents have similar ideas and different ones. They were still worried about how safe the US was because of gun use or military. However, they thought that people were friendly, outgoing, and cheerful. They were concerned about the system of the US, but had a good image of the people. My friends have completely different ideas from any of them. They think that there are a bunch of classic and modern items or that everything is fashionable. Moreover, some talk about aspects which they are interested in, such as sports, fashion, music, and so on. Almost all of them say that it is one of the bucket list destinations because of their interest.

¹⁵ This piece from Yuki Inata comes from *Writing LCC; Writing LCC* by is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Grandparents and parents' generations tend to have common thoughts even though there are slight differences, and our generation has completely different ideas from them.

We collect information by using several tools. I believe that the ways to get to know about other countries are changing over times. According to Japanese Ministry of Internal affairs and Communications' study on what media they use, my grandparents' generation use newspaper the most. My parents' generation use newspaper as well, but more people use internet compared to my grandparents' generation. Our generation mainly use internet and barely read newspaper to gain information (Basic Date and Policy Trend). From this fact, we can see there is a very huge difference of the amount of information people get.

Japanese Ministry of Internal affairs and Communications shows the other significant difference between our generation and other generations is the number of people who watch TV. The population who watch TV is big in grandparents' and parents' generations. However, the number of younger people who do it is half as many as that of the other two generations. Instead of TV, we use the internet (Basic Date and Policy Trend). TV has limited programs as same as newspaper so that automatically those who watch TV have same input about things. On the other hand, internet enables us to access any information we want and search things without any limitation. Accordingly, it is easier to find interesting topics or have different perspective on America. Internet gives us accessibility to more information that matches each person, and people can keep discovering new things by themselves. Therefore, we can find a big difference on the images of America between our generation and the other generations. People's perspectives started to change right after internet became popular.

There is another way to switch people's opinions. After I left Japan and started studying here in the US, my grandparents and my parents' images of America have been changing. Now that I am living here, which is away from my home and where my family has never been, I need to tell them that I am doing good about the life in the US to let them know here is not like the place that they are imagining. Being able to hear the real situations from those who they rely on or feel close to helps them get rid of negative thoughts. My grandparents tell me that they not only feel less anxiety about me studying in the US, but also, they are very interested in what this country is like right now even though they had their own bitter experiences in the past. They are taking more time to learn about America.

We are living in societies which are changing so quickly. In particular, the amount of information that people can get is increasing remarkably thanks to development of the internet. Younger generations are used to dealing with this plentiful amount of information compared to older generations. By using that skill, they collect information following their interest. Therefore, young people see the world with a positive attitude rather than negative perspective or prejudice. If they have unsavory notion, their ideas can be changed by their later experience or stories from significant others. What is obvious is having less information sometimes helps people hold unfavorable opinion on something based on their negative images. I hope this world becomes more and more peaceful by using information properly.

Work Cited

Basic Data and Policy Trend. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2018.
www.soumu.go.jp/johotsusintokei/whitepaper/ja/h30/html/nd252510.html

BONUS FEATURE: YOU ARE A WRITER.

Obviously you can write.¹⁶ And in the age of Facebook and smartphones, you might be writing all the time, perhaps more often than speaking. Many students today are awash in text like no other generation before. You may have even performed so well in high school that you're deemed fully competent in college level writing and are now excused from taking a composition course.

So why spend yet more time and attention on writing skills? Research shows that deliberate practice—that is, close focus on improving one's skills—makes all the difference in how one performs. Revisiting the craft of writing—especially on the early end of college—will improve your writing much more than simply producing page after page in the same old way. Becoming an excellent communicator will save you a lot of time and hassle in your studies, advance your career, and promote better relationships and a higher quality of life off the job. Honing your writing is a good use of your scarce time.

Also consider this: a recent survey of employers conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that 89 percent of employers say that colleges and universities should place more emphasis on “the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing.” It was the single-most favored skill in this survey.

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The most important belief¹⁷ that a writing teacher can have about writing is, as Peter Elbow (a well-known teacher of writing) put it, that everyone can write. And at the heart of that belief is

¹⁶ *Writing in College* by Amy Guptill is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

¹⁷ Snippet from = Brooks, Ronald Clark. “You Need My Credentials to be a Writer.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

the assumption that everyone's experience and perspective is already worth writing about as soon they arrive in the classroom. To expand that belief beyond the classroom, we should generally believe that everyone's experience and perspective is already worth writing about as soon as they arrive at the page or screen. If this belief is essential for teachers of writing, it is even more so for the writers themselves.

Questions for Reflection:

- Do you agree with Peter Elbow that "everyone can write"? Why or why not?
- Do you believe you are a writer? Why or why not?

¹⁸ Blog entry by Sybil Priebe; licensed CC-BY.

By the time¹⁹ students arrive in college, stories beginning with “once upon a time” are long gone, and in their place are difficult and dense texts—often multimedia texts— from a range of fields each with its own set of conventions. Instead of drawing on models of early literacy education that focus on teaching reading and writing simultaneously, college and universities largely privilege writing over reading. This hierarchy is evidenced by the universal first-year writing requirement in American colleges and universities, as well as by writing across the curriculum programs. The integrated approach to teaching reading and writing falls away to students’ peril and causes great frustration in the professors who often attribute students’ struggles in their courses to poor writing ability, when these problems are often related to students’ reading difficulties. While students’ eyes may make their way over every word, that does not mean that students have comprehended a text or that they are prepared to successfully complete the writing tasks associated with the reading, which often involve summary, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

More importantly, if students are not given the opportunity to continue working on their reading throughout their college careers, they may struggle analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating all that surrounds them since comprehension is a crucial step toward these more advanced interpretive practices. Students may lack the ability to read the world around them because they do not have the tools to recognize the values and assumptions that inform the images, advertisements, news stories, political campaigns, and ideas with which they come into contact daily. By not focusing on reading as an equally creative and active enterprise as writing—very much writing’s counterpart in the creation of meaning— colleges and universities are potentially producing students, or citizens, who think reading is passive. These students might blindly accept whatever comes their way rather than actively engaging ideas, asking questions, and seeking out multiple perspectives.

Although writing is more often thought of as a creative act, reading is just as creative. When one writes, one is creating meaning by putting words and ideas together. [...] This is why a few people might read the same novel but each take something different from it. That personal transaction with the text has affected how each reader creates meaning. When reading and writing are taught alongside each other in the college-level classroom, students can gain practice experiencing and relishing in opportunities to create meaning not just through writing, but through reading everything from print texts to art to websites to national news events, all of which they will continue to engage beyond school. Focusing on active reading approaches, including everything from comprehension strategies to ways of determining something’s inherent values and biases to productive methods of responding, is crucial if students are going to leave postsecondary institutions prepared to be informed, aware, and engaged citizens.

Questions for Reflection:

- How many arguments do you think you read (via social media, TV, texts from people) on a daily basis? Try to tally them all up. Is there a theme?

¹⁹ Snippet from = Carillo, Ellen C. “Reading and Writing Are Not Connected.” *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, Digital Publishing Institute, 2017. CC-BY.

BONUS FEATURE: ACTIVE READING TIPS

Start²⁰ by getting familiar with the basic parts and structure of the text:

- What kind of text are you reading? An essay? A web site?
- Every author has a purpose; find it.
- Who is the audience and how does the author try to appeal to them?
- What argument is the author making/question does the text try to answer?
- What evidence does the author provide?
- Are there any key terms the author defines?

As you're reading, make note of anything that especially catches your attention:

- Is there a fact or point that challenged your assumptions?
- Any surprises?
- Did the author make a point or argument that you disagree with?
- Are there any inconsistencies in the text?
- Does the text contain anything (words, phrases, ideas) that you don't understand?

After you've finished reading, read it again:

- Are there things you didn't notice the first time reading the text?
- Does the text leave some questions open-ended?
- Imagine the author is sitting across from you: what would you ask them about the text? Why?

If the text is visual in nature, try these extra tips:

- What first strikes you about the image?
- Who/what is the main subject of the visual?
- What colors/textures dominate the visual?
- What objects/people are in the background/foreground?
- Do words or numbers play any role in the visual?
- When was the visual created?

²⁰ *About Writing: A Guide* by Robin Jeffrey is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

READING STRATEGIES²¹

Most discussions and writing assignments—from brief responses to in-depth research papers—will depend on your ability to understand what you read. Following are some strategies for getting the most out of assigned readings.

- **PURPOSE.** When you start a reading assignment, identify your purpose and write it down somewhere such as on a sticky that you put on the first page of the book or on your computer screen. Keep that information nearby and refer to it occasionally as you read.
- **GOAL.** Your primary goal is to identify the main point, the idea the writer wants to communicate. Finding the main point helps you understand the details—the facts and explanations that develop and clarify the main point. It also helps you relate the reading to things you learned in class or in other assignments.
- **PAUSE.** Regardless of what you read, stop occasionally and assess how well you understand what you are reading. If you aren't confident, go back and read it again. Don't just push ahead.²²
- **MARK IT UP.** The best way to remember the information you read is to do something physical with it, something beyond just letting your eyes scan the page. For example, taking notes as you read helps your brain retain the information.
- **TALK ABOUT IT.** A good way to review and reinforce what you've learned is to discuss the reading with classmates. Discussions can help you determine whether your understanding is the same as that of your peers. They can also spark new ideas or insights.

²¹ 1, 2, 3 *Write!* by Gay Monteverde is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

²² This tip might as well be called The Power of the Pause. Pause in your reading. Take a minute to understand that last sentence or paragraph.

**Realizing you're wrong in
the middle of an argument**



**but fighting anyway all
in the name of pride**