TEACHING COMPOSITION--PERSUASIVELY

By

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Bachelor of Arts

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Stillwater, Oklahoma

1980

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
July, 1983

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## PREFACE

Teaching honors students presents a challenge to college English instructors. Because they have mastered the basics of composition, these students need more than theory to stimulate their writing abilities. This study began as an approach to persuasive writing developed for college honors students but has grown into a method that would serve well for any group of young writers that has attained an acceptable level of writing.

I would like to express my gratitude to and admiration for my major adviser, Dr. William H. Pixton, who taught me the basics of teaching composition and kept me afloat when the seas got rough. My thanks also go to Dr. John Milstead, who opened up "the deep power of joy" that comes from learning and led me to a love of literature, and to Dr. Paul Klemp, who provided me with the support I needed to continue and with occasional comic relief.

This work would not have suggested itself without my students in English 1413--they were a constant source of pain and pride.

Special gratitude goes to my husband, Gregg, our son, Travis, and our daughter, Erin, who have given me "A heart, the fountain of sweet tears; And love, and thought, and joy."

Finally, I wish to express my love and thanks to my grandmother, who has always believed I could.

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I

The difficulties freshmen students have with logic
often stem from what Walter DeMordaunt calls "the
apparently innate love these students have of universal
statements,"[1] sweeping generalizations that cannot be
supported because of obvious exceptions. This preference
for generalized and many times abstract content is all
too often the result of defective logic. Historically,
logic was a part of the trivium of grammar, logic, and
rhetoric. But the place of logic in freshman composition
has been a topic of debate for the last thirty years.
Logic is not a priori knowledge; students must be trained
in formal logic in order to become efficient in its use.
However, most freshman composition instructors do not
have the time in one semester to deal with logic and
persuasion in great detail. Their goal is to bring
their students to an acceptable level of writing by
focusing on grammar, organization, acceptable content,
and the conventional forms of discourse. But whether
writing is expository, argumentative, descriptive, or
narrative, the writer's goal is to make the reader pay
attention and act upon what is written. Once a student
achieves an acceptable level of writing, a study of

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logic and persuasion can facilitate the effective use of support, premises, and conclusions from which the pattern of the essay emerges. Composition students need to be stimulated and challenged to formulate their own ideas, to improve their understanding of logic and its workings in their lives. They will not become better writers simply by knowing where to put commas or how to spell words. Neither is being understood always enough; to hold the reader's interest, the writer must be more than informative. A good writer gets results by being persuasive and uses specific rather than universal statements.

The classical rhetorician used logic as one of many "available means of persuasion,"[2] so the freshman student who studies logic in the classroom is exposed to but a part of persuasive discourse. DeMordaunt suggests that "used as one tool among many, not as an end in itself, formal logic can supply the structural awareness which helps to create the enthusiasm [about writing] we strive vainly to reach."[3] This structural awareness also leads to what Monroe Beardsley calls critical or "straight" thinking--used when there is a theory to test or a proposition to defend or oppose.[4] By asking a reader to pay attention, any writer is engaged in argument, but the persuasive writer is convincing. He demonstrates skill in handling language and logic. The

intent of teaching persuasive writing to composition students is practical: the emphasis is not on the principles of logic, techniques of persuasion, or methods of "good writing," but on showing students how to make what they have to say more effective and meaningful. Persuasive writing encourages students to concentrate upon supporting an arguable topic, accommodating a well-defined audience, and convincing the reader.

In order to make the essay more effective and meaningful, students must begin with a clear, unified thesis. Most students can easily generate a single declarative thesis, which Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor designate as "the seed crystal of argument."[5] The thesis states the main idea an essay will develop, but it can change as students focus their thoughts about the subject and discover what they can actually support. However, not all tentative thesis statements are suitable for a persuasive essay: they must be arguable. Not defining the thesis is a problem that defeats any student in a writing course; the problem becomes greater in a persuasive writing course if the student cannot define what is and is not arguable.

There is a difference between an arguable statement and an inarguable one, and Fahnestock and Secor suggest that "distinguishing the arguable from the inarguable makes good theoretical sense as well, for students must learn to use facts and reject unsupportable opinion in their arguments."[6] We cannot argue about facts (Ronald Reagan is President of the United States), or statements about things that can be verified through measurement

(the moon is 221,600 miles away from the earth). Neither can we argue about individual views, ideas that are supported by altogether personal grounds (Ronald Reagan is a good president because he looks like my father). Statements lacking any objective, impersonal grounds are not subjects for argument but opinions; thus, an arguable thesis contains objective, impersonal grounds.

Many students have difficulty distinguishing an arguable statement from an opinion, or at times may confuse the two. Often an arguable statement is prefaced by personal labels like "I believe," "I think," "I feel," or "It is my opinion." This type of statement appears at first reading to be an opinion based upon personal grounds. Students must look beyond the "I think" or "I feel" to the <u>actual</u> grounds of support. While "I believe the insanity defense should be abolished" may appear to be based on an opinion, its grounds of support are not wholly personal. When asked to give support for this statement, students would not say "Because the insanity defense does not appeal to me" or "I do not care for insanity." Instead, they would produce as support the current misuse of the plea, the original intent of the law, and infamy the law has received due to recently publicized cases. The grounds the students give actually support the thesis that "The insanity

defense should be abolished"; the "I believe" is non-essential.

Another problem for students is the personal statement that masquerades as arguable. Although "I" does not appear in the statement, its grounds for support are purely personal. Students asked to support "Orange is an exquisite color" would not try to argue objectively but would come up with subjective statements instead: "Orange is my school color," "My boyfriend likes orange," or "It reminds me of sunshine and warmth." An opinion is identified by the subjectiveness of its grounds for support, not by the presence of the personal pronoun "I" or a statement of preference. Wording does not immediately identify a matter of argument or a matter of taste, but if the students can discover a reason for support that is objective, they have a subject for argument.

Even after students have discovered what appears to be objective support, they often have an unmanageable topic for an argumentative essay. "Morality is independent of divine origin" sounds like an arguable thesis with objective support, but is hardly a topic for a 1,000-word freshman essay. Students have a tendency to choose a subject that is too broad and should be steadily reminded that a good arguable thesis is supportable in an essay of
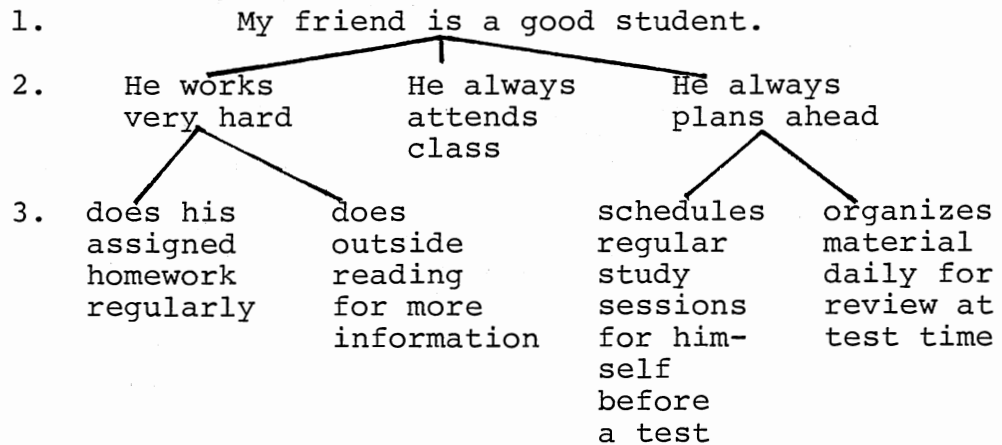
a determined length of 1,000 words.

An arguable thesis deals with a matter of probability, not a fact or matter of taste.  An arguable thesis will be clearly and firmly stated if the predicate either asserts or denies something about the subject:  "Football is a violent sport," "The present format of our college algebra class is unfair," or "Pesticide use by some farmers is excessive."  Once students can easily recognize and generate an arguable proposition in the "X is Y" form, they can move on to more interesting and vivid constructions that are better suited to a particular argument and audience.

Josephine Miles suggests that "the student needs to be aware of his main responsibility toward the reader, to establish an expectation and then to fulfill it."[7]  Good writers meet the expectations of the reader by explaining and developing the assertions they have made with adequate support.  The process involved in distinguishing an arguable proposition requires students to pay particular attention to the ways they support an argument.

The basic tactic of support for any argument is the example.  Students need to recognize that the number of examples used for support is not an issue in an argument.  Sheer number does not determine sufficient support.  Examples must be _typical_ of

what they represent in order to be effective because
they re-create reality for the reader.  In order to avoid
any fallacious reasoning, the students must choose
examples for their typicality rather than their numbers.
There may be some confusion between typicality and
generality, so students need to be reminded that the
argument will be more convincing if they use actual
evidence rather than vague generalities.  Thus, to
support an argument against stricter boxing regulations,
statements such as "No one really cares" or  "Nobody
really worries about injuries" are much less effective
than "Seventy-five percent of boxing fans polled do not
see a need for stricter regulations."  Detailed,
specific writing does not come easily for students,
and some may try to support their arguable proposition
with lower-level propositions:

1.                  My friend is a good student.

2.    He works           He always          He always
      very hard          attends            plans ahead
                         class

3.  does his       does           schedules      organizes
    assigned       outside        regular        material
    homework       reading        study          daily for
    regularly      for more       sessions       review at
                   information     for him-       test time
                                   self
                                   before
                                   a test

Level 2 presents a definition of "a good student," but
there is still a lack of specific examples. What
the student needs at this stage is particular examples
or specific events to convince the reader of the
validity of the overall proposition. Only at level 3
does the student begin to hint at specific examples
that could be developed into more convincing support.

After students have formulated an arguable
proposition, they must determine what type of examples
are best suited to support it: specific incidents,
facts and figures, references to authorities, or
testimonials. In order to choose or modify support,
the student should examine the thesis, and look at the
subject, the predicate, and the connection between
them.

An arguable proposition may make an assertion
about a single individual, thing, or entity. Such
propositions about a single subject should not present
any problems for students, if they identify the issue.
An arguable proposition can also assert something about
a particular group. In dealing with a subject that
has a small definite number of members, a student
should deal with each of them: "Three semesters of
composition are enough to develop good writing skills."
The student should have no problem dealing with details
of each semester's course individually. But, if the

subject contains a large definite number, individual treatment of members may not be feasible. "The athletic programs at our university are underfunded" is an arguable proposition that has a subject with a large, definite number of members. The student may not wish to deal with each program individually due to the number of programs that may be involved. The strategy for support in this case may be to deal with either the typical programs, for instance, golf, track, and field hockey, or to classify the large group into several smaller groups, such as women's sports, non-contact sports, and non-conference sports. The student then has a choice of dealing with either the typical elements of the set or dealing with classifying the large group into several smaller groups.

Students commonly deal with an arguable proposition that asserts something about an indefinite number of members of a group. Indefinite plural subjects like "Some students at City Junior College," "Many voters in the last election," "A few representatives in the State House," or "Most brokers on Wall Street," indicate that the predicate of the proposition cannot be applied to a definite number of the subject's members. If an assertion can be made about all members of a set, with no exceptions, the student can signify a universal subject by using a collective noun

or a plural noun with no quantifiers. "Farmers are gamblers" or "Man is the ruler of his destiny" have universals as subjects. Students must recognize in their own writing that when "some," "most," or "many" are not used, a universal is implied. If challenged, they must be prepared to support the proposition by giving the necessary argument or by admitting exceptions.

The subject of an arguable proposition may also be an abstraction. Abstractions like "government regulation," "socialism," or "freedom" can include any number of different concrete examples, so students need to focus on a strategy to deal with an abstract subject. To give convincing support for a statement like "Government regulation is getting out of hand," students can draw examples from several levels or categories of regulations to support the overall proposition.

Alexander Scharbach states that "Good writing is honest writing";[8] thus, a student may find it more honest, as well as more convenient, to replace the large abstraction with a more modest and more readily supportable term. If the examples for support are limited to wetland management, the student should revise the original thesis to "Government regulation of wetland management is getting out of hand." Any abstraction that is a technical term, such as "wetland

management," needs to be defined for those outside the specific profession. Large philosophical abstractions like "freedom" will need sufficiently inclusive definitions, but freshman students may be overstepping their abilities of argument in dealing with a subject of this nature. As subjects of arguable thesis statements, all abstractions require definition before a student can go on to argue about them. Therefore, the student who chooses "Morality is independent of divine origin" as a thesis must go on to define morality for the audience. The argument can go in many different directions depending on whether the subject is Christian morality, social morality, teenage morality, etc.

The predicate of an arguable proposition, which asserts something about the subject, can help students distinguish between a fact and a controversial statement. It is the predicate that makes a proposition a matter for argument, and the more definition it needs, the more arguable the proposition will be. If the student uses a predicate term with an obvious and generally accepted definition, further definition in the argument is not needed; but the level of argument is usually low when explicit definition is not needed. "Final exams are nerve-wracking" or "Joe is a liar" may be arguable, but the audience does not need an extended

definition of "nerve-wracking" or "liar." The student
who uses such low-level propositions may not be able
to generate enough support to produce a full essay.

Supporting low-level propositions is useful for
short in-class exercises or for developing paragraphs
for more arguable statements. The paragraph a
student develops for "Final exams are nerve-wracking"
can be combined with paragraphs on "Final exams are
not representative of a student's work through the
semester" and "Final exams are too long" to produce
an argument on "Final exams should be eliminated."
Again, each of these lower level statements must be
supported with specific examples in order for the
argument about elimination of final exams to be
convincing to the audience.

Many times the audience will determine the need
for definition of a predicate term in the arguable
proposition. If the predicate is not defined sufficient-
ly, the audience may not make the necessary connection
between the examples given for support of the proposition.
Readers may require more than "an increase in economic
indicators" to be convinced that the economy is
recovering. So, the student needs to define "economic
indicators" as unemployment statistics, interest
rates, and productivity to help the audience associate
increased economic indicators with recovery. Fahnestock

and Secor present a list of situations that will help
students determine if the definition is a necessary
part of their argument:

1. When a specialized, technical, or slang
   term is used with an audience that might
   not understand it.

2. When a signal in the predicate, such as
   "real" or "basically," announces that
   part of the argument will be a
   challenging redefinition of the
   predicate.

3. When a new term is invented or new class
   is created to put the subject in.

4. When a broad term is redefined or only
   part of its meaning is applied to fit
   the evidence.[9]

Without definition either given to or understood by
the audience, the students may fall into circular
argument.

Circular arguments utilize the capacity of our
language to be misunderstood, to say things in such a
way that they end where they begin and begin where they
end. A student who argues that "Banana computers
are the best" might support that argument with referrals
to the increased sales figures and the easy-to-follow
instructions for programming. But, by saying "The

computers are the best because they are Bananas," the student is using a circular argument and does not give the readers any useful information.

J. Michael Sproule in Argument: Language and Its Influence suggests that the writer be an "aware communicator." One aspect of being an aware communicator is to realize "that words may lead to misunderstanding."[10] If students are conscious of the situations in which a definition is essential to their argument, they can provide the information the readers need in order to avoid a circular argument. The student who argues that "Boxing will exist as long as what it reflects in men exists" needs to begin by giving the audience an adequate definition of "what it reflects" or run the risk of falling into an unconvincing circular argument.

Once students understand the importance of generating an arguable thesis statement, they can begin to develop the necessary support that will make their argument persuasive. Avoiding atypical examples, abstract subjects, and circular definitions, the students can turn their attention to the audience of the argument.

III

At this point, students have developed a clear arguable thesis statement and collected support. Their focus now needs to turn toward the audience of their argument. Without a specific audience to address, the student's argument is not going to be effective. James M. McCrimmon advises composition students about the dangers of neglecting to consider members of the audience:

> Most of your problems will come from your failure to realize that a statement that seems clear to you may not be clear to them because they cannot always see from the words alone just what you have in mind. . . . If a writer is to avoid such troubles he must anticipate the reader's needs.[11]

Once students perceive the nature of the audience's view, they can proceed with the support of the argument. But this step is easier said than done. Most students are prone to an objective tone that is directed to a wide variety of people, like that of the evening news or a textbook. When asked to define the audience of their initial drafts of an essay, students may reply "anyone who is interested" or "the general reader."

The students have cleared the first hurdle of defining an arguable topic and supporting it with particulars, only

to fall back into the trap of non-committal, universal
statements about the audience.  In order to be effective,
persuasive writing needs a more specific audience than
"the general reader" or "my instructor."  The student
must know and understand the audience to the extent
that the arguable proposition presented is not only
understood but accepted.  In "How to Begin to Win
Friends and Influence People:  The Role of the Audience
in the Pre-writing Process," Kenneth Jurkiewicz
contends that

> At every stage of composition, the writer
> or speaker must constantly keep in mind
> the intellectual, oral, emotional, and
> psychological capabilities, responses,
> and attitudes of whomever he is supposed
> to be persuading.[12]

The success of persuasive writing is determined by its
ability to get the responses intended, and a useful
tool at this stage would be an audience profile.  By
defining a specific audience and its values, the
student is better able to develop the ethos, tone, and
organization of the essay.  Many times students complain
that their own writing is boring, and boring writing
is often the result of an attempt to appeal to the
general audience of "anyone who is interested."  By
specifically describing their audience, students can
create an audience profile that will help them
eliminate unnecessary definition or explanation.

An audience profile can contain many things depending

upon the needs of the students and the depth of their
topics. However, almost all good profiles will contain
a description of the audience. The student can identify
age, educational background, geographical location,
political and/or religious beliefs, values, and employment.
In an effort to make the audience an entity with which
they can deal, students can supply as much information
about their readers as needed. At times the student
may be addressing a specific individual or group:
congressmen, mayors, the editor of a paper. With this
information written as part of the preliminary work,
a student can refer to the audience profile throughout
the rest of the writing process.

Consideration of the audience affects everything
from individual word choice (test tube babies or in
vitro fertilization) to the entire structure of the
argument (i.e., placement of the thesis). After the
student has described the intended audience, the next
step is to determine how much the audience already
knows about the subject. Is the audience interested?
Will it understand technical terms? How much background
does it have? Answering these questions will help the
student to decide how to establish credibility with the
audience, or ethos. In Book II of the Rhetoric,
Aristotle addresses the issue of ethos, a knowledge of

character, and its importance in persuasion:

> Rhetoric finds its end in judgment
> . . . hence the speaker must not merely
> see to it that his speech [as an
> argument] shall be convincing and
> persuasive, but he must [in and by
> the speech] give the right impression
> of himself. . . for apart from the
> arguments [in a speech] there are
> three things that gain our belief,
> namely, intelligence, character, and
> good will.[13]

Evincing the right character is essential in an argument, and Fahnestock and Secor also suggest that the student should convey an impression of what Aristotle calls a "good person arguing well."[14]

To convey this impression, students must do more than argue logically. They must accommodate the audience. Maxine Hairston points out in A Contemporary Rhetoric that accommodating an audience is not the same as compromising ideas to please an audience:

> There is a distinct difference between
> cynically playing on your audience's
> biases and prejudices and appealing to
> their legitimate interests and concerns.
> The rhetorician who does the first shows
> contempt for an audience by assuming
> that they can be easily manipulated through
> their emotions and do not have the
> intelligence to think for themselves
> . . . . The writer or speaker who tries
> to appeal to an audience's legitimate
> concerns, however, can express opinions
> honestly, but in a way that shows regard
> for the interests and sensitivities of
> the audience.[15]

Again, good writing not only gets results but also is honest writing. Students will not persuade readers

by showing dishonesty or superiority, but by showing

respect for them.

Once writers have established credibility by showing

knowledge of the subject, they can concentrate on tone.

I. A. Richards has defined tone as expressing a literary

speaker's "attitude to his listener."  "The tone of his

utterance reflects. . .his sense of how he stands toward

those he is addressing."[16]  Although use of "tone" here

implies the voice, it can describe the writer as he "talks"

directly to the readers.  Aristotle stressed the impor-

tance of the voice in the delivery of rhetoric and

suggested that "delivery exerts more influence than the

substance of the speech."[17]  However, students may have

difficulty transferring their own tone to the page.

Raymond Paul and Pellegrino W. Goione in Perception and

Persuasion suggest that communicating tone in writing lies

in the use of appropriate punctuation.  "No less than

words, marks of punctuation are tools a writer uses to

express his ideas with as much clarity, emphasis, and

persuasiveness as possible."[18]  Since the writer is not

present to deliver the argument, punctuation allows the

writer to put more meaning on the page.  At times, some-

thing as simple as a misplaced hyphen can cause a

significant change in meaning (twelve-foot long pipes or

twelve foot-long pipes).  Realizing the importance of

delivery, students can choose the most appropriate word

and the most appropriate emphasis without violating their

own principles or insulting the audience. The idea of a "good person arguing well" establishes a mutual respect that is reflected in the tone of the argument and helps to accommodate the audience.

Hairston introduces the idea of the non-threatening argument as a supplement to traditional Aristotelian rhetoric to help the student understand the importance of accommodation.[19] Based on Carl Rogers' article, "Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation," her approach is simple: "You do not convert people to your point of view by threatening them or challenging their values."[20] She emphasizes Aristotle's advice about crediting opponents (or audience) with being rational, intelligent persons of good will, and applies Rogers' approach, developed principally to improve communication for small face-to-face encounter groups, to composition. The first step is to avoid evaluative language that would evoke a negative reaction in the audience; the second is to listen with understanding and acceptance. Her premise is that, "When a person with whom we have a difference of opinion feels that we really understand why he feels as he does, there is a possibility that he may change his mind."[21] Once students understand that their audience may not accept their proposal, they are also beginning to understand the difficulties a persuasive writer faces and the importance of the audience profile. In conducting this

kind of argument, Hairston presents some guidelines for
staying within the non-threatening framework:

1. Give a brief, <u>objective</u> statement of
   the issue under discussion.

2. Summarize in impartial language what
   you perceive the case for the opposition
   to be; the summary should demonstrate
   that you understand their interests
   and concerns and should avoid any
   hint of hostility.

3. Make an objective statement of your
   own side of the issue, listing your
   concerns and interests, but avoiding
   loaded language or any hint of moral
   superiority.

4. Outline what common ground or mutual
   concerns you and the other person or
   group seem to share; if you see
   irreconcilable interests, specify
   what they are.

5. Outline the solution you propose,
   pointing out what both sides may
   gain from it.[22]

Her application of Rogers' strategy to composition
works well in teaching students to write persuasively
because it forces them to look at both sides of the

argument. As John Stuart Mill wrote, "He who knows only his side of the case, knows little of that." Although students may not wish to include the results of Hairston's guidelines within the final essay itself, the approach is extremely useful in the early stages of writing when the students are still trying to establish a clear idea of who the audience is and how to accommodate it.

The importance of the accommodation of an audience cannot be stressed too much, particularly to young writers who may have had little or no experience with writing for a particular audience. Daniel McDonald advises students that "Most readers respond favorably to a concerned and courteous tone," and students should let their "writing reflect a warm, human personality."[23] The word "argument" connotes many negative ideas, and students in a persuasive writing class may not recognize that argument means more than hostility, conflict, and disagreement. Fahnestock and Secor state that every argument has three essential elements:

1. A thesis statement, a claim, a proposition to be supported, which deals with a matter of probability, not a fact or a matter of taste.

2. An audience to be convinced of the thesis statement.

3. Grounds, reasons, or, as they are
   sometimes formally called, <u>premises</u>
   that support the thesis.[24]

Without an audience to be convinced, whether absent from

the beginning or alienated by the writer, the other

two elements do not constitute an argument. At every

stage of writing, students must make a careful analysis

of their audience in order to achieve their desired

result--persuasion.

After students become acquainted with the
definition of argument and the accommodation of an
audience, they are ready to clarify the goal of their
essay. By using persuasion as a goal, the student
faces a challenge of generating more than a demonstra-
tion or conclusion drawn from facts or premises that
have already been established.

The purpose of persuasion is to cause a change
in thinking. The change may be substitution of one
belief for another, or it may result in action.
McCrimmon emphasizes the idea of a change: "Finally,
persuasion must cause a change in belief. No
persuasion is needed to make people believe what
they already believe."[25] Once students are
aware of the goal of persuasion, they can
begin to see how it affects their writing and
their lives. Students face a barrage of persuasion
every day from friends, parents, radio and television
advertisements, and politicans. From all sides there
is a concerted effort to convince them of something,
to make them do or buy something. Teaching persuasive
writing at the level of freshman composition encourages

the student to recognize and use different forms of
persuasion, to think clearly and logically, and to be
creative. Persuasive writing can provide a stimulus for
understanding language as well as a tool to improve the
student's ability to think. Gary Goshgarian suggests that
one of the most difficult problems English teachers have
today is "making students sensitive to language." Students
need more than grammar drills to develop their writing
skills because writing well "requires greater understanding:
knowledge of how language works, how it reconstructs the
real world for us, how it can be used to lead, mislead,
and manipulate us."[26] Students must learn that they can
use language in argument. Aristotle proposes that a
writer has three means of being persuasive: by emotional
appeal (pathos), ethical appeal (ethos), and rational
appeal (logos).[27]

Emotional appeal creates a need for change in the
audience. Once students can be emotionally persuaded
that something must be done, they will consider possible
solutions and choose the one that seems best. In
approaching emotional appeals, students must be careful
not to structure their argument totally on an appeal to
emotion, for in persuasive writing, emotional appeal
cannot be substituted for logical argument. The
newspapers and textbooks students read are thought to
be unemotional since the use of language is supposed
to be objective and rational. However, Howard Kahane

in Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric contends that the view that newspapers, textbooks, political rhetoric, and even advertisements "should be written in emotively neutral language" is not fixed. Emotive meanings are as diverse as individuals. A term that is intensely emotive for one person may be emotively neutral for another. Kahane also suggests that it would be difficult to write history books, news articles, or political speeches with emotively neutral terms. He makes a final point that emotively neutral writing would be extremely dull. Students need to be aware of emotive language and its uses in fallacious arguments. "The point is to understand this language tool--a tool that, like most others, can be, and is, used for both good and evil purposes."[28]

Appeal to emotion is deceiving for many freshman students and they must consider two consequences of the fact that emotion is not under direct control of the will. First, the student should not emphasize the intent to use emotion. Doing so would jeopardize the effectiveness of the appeal, and the student wants the audience members to be convinced through what they believe is purely logic. Secondly, students must take an indirect approach to arouse emotion. The best method of indirect approach is the use of carefully chosen words and examples. By choosing words such as

"illegal immigrants," "illegal aliens," or "criminals

in all but name," the student can indirectly influence

the readers' response. Depending upon the direction of

the argument, the student may choose a positive term like

"freedom seekers" to arouse feelings of sympathy or a

negative term like "criminals" to stir up the audience's

feelings of wrong.

Word choice is important in persuasive writing

because many words that students use have a core and

a surface of meaning that produce a reaction in the

reader. Students need to be aware of how to make the

good and bad associations of words work for their

argument. The choice of words, like all aspects of

persuasive writing, depends upon the audience. Euphemisms

can replace words that the audience would find crude or

socially unacceptable, especially when they are associated

with war, bodily functions, or death. Kahane exemplifies

euphemisms by listing the words used during the Vietnam

War: selective ordinance for napalm, surgical strike

for precision bombing, interdiction for bombing, and

strategic withdrawal for retreat.[29] Students should

be urged to choose words or phrases that have appropriate

associations for the audience and the argument, and

are at the same time precise.

When involved in a particularly sensitive or

controversial issue, students may find that a word

or phrase that would work against them has no

euphemisms. In that case, a good exercise in peri-
phrasis or circumlocution may help the student's
argument. Bureaucrats are masters at periphrasis.
Thus, Richard Nixon lost his <u>plausible deniability</u>
once the White House tapes became public; the CIA
<u>terminates with prejudice</u> rather than assassinates.
In a good argument meaning should not be obscured,
but extended and softened. Neither should circumlocu-
tion be a substitute for preciseness because the
student is unclear about the issue.

A clear arguable thesis is often supported by
examples to tie the thesis to reality, but examples
also have another function. A well-chosen example
personalizes a situation and draws an audience's
emotions toward the student's argument. An example
with emotional appeal--homeless children, lonely old
people, loyal dogs, chortling babies, warm homes--is
used to gain the audience's assent <u>and</u> emotional
conviction. But students must be sure that the examples
they choose will evoke the emotion that will work for
their argument. Many examples will not have a universal
emotional appeal and may undermine an argument if the
reinforcing emotion is not produced.

Emotional appeal plays an important part in persuasion.
Edward P. J. Corbett states that "there is nothing

necessarily reprehensible about being moved to action through our emotions; in fact, it is perfectly normal."[30] The most effective use of appeal to emotion will be determined by the student's consideration of audience and arrangement. Some audiences need to be in the right emotional mood before they will listen to reason; other audiences need to hear appeals to reason and then be roused emotionally.

Even the most effective appeal to emotion, or the soundest appeal to reason, would fall on deaf ears if the audience reacts unfavorably to the writer's character. The greatest intellectual virtue in argument that a student can be aware of is reasonableness or ethical appeal. Reasonable people are open to ethical appeal, which according to Aristotle is exerted in three ways: the writer or speaker is a person of intelligence, character, and good will.[31] The written argument must create these impressions for the audience since often the writer is unknown to them. Students can appear to be reasonable in their writing by displaying moderation in the argument. Audiences (and students) steer clear of extremist views whether they are proclaimed by an overzealous speaker or radical publication. Along with moderation, a student can show conviction in dealing with the issues of the

argument. A well-structured argument will exhibit an understanding of the other side of the issue even if it is wrong. A student could also take a very civilized approach by acknowledging merit in the opposition, though this acknowledgement does not necessarily call for agreement. When defending an issue, students need also to be aware that they do not have to show the other side totally wrong in order to prove the validity of their own position.

The effects of moderation and conviction are connected. Persuasion depends upon an appearance of moderateness, an ethical appeal, because the student cannot afford to create the impression that he is superficial, immoral, dishonest, or malicious.

In addition to emotional appeal and trustworthiness, an appeal to reason is the third means of persuasion. Ideally, reason should dominate all of man's thinking and actions, but actually man is influenced by many other things. In persuasive writing, the student's goal is to convince the audience of the need for change or action. By providing a sound argument that establishes an arguable thesis, provides support, and presents a conclusion, students are leading the audience to an acceptance of their reasoning. Since argument is a logical relation between a premise and a conclusion, it is a general rule that the burden of proof is upon the writer as shown in the next section.

Students have difficulty organizing their initial arguments and often begin with only an assertion. An assertion is not necessarily an argument. However, there are at least five ways to get the student from assertion of an arguable thesis to logical argument: definition, evaluation, cause and effect, proposal, and refutation. I shall discuss each of these in turn in this section.

The more carefully and explicitly students define the terms of their arguable propositions, the more credence and respect their arguments will earn. If readers do not understand or know the definitions of key terms or issues, the student has failed in the first step of persuasive writing. The basic form of the arguable proposition, "X is Y," provides the simplest approach to teaching students argument by definition. Arguments from definition usually do one (or more) of three things: set a standard for evaluation; set an ideal and persuade; or define the ideal by describing the real. By beginning with definition, students learn to <u>support</u> a basic, arguable thesis before moving on to more involved types of argument like the proposal and refutation. To stress the idea of persuasion, students

might be asked to direct their essays toward an audience that has a different viewpoint. Thus, an essay defining the advantages of a college education could be written for a group that chose to enter the work force immediately after high school; a question on the fairness of the ACT test as a scholastic indicator could be presented to a college admissions board. Once students realize that not everyone agrees with them, the possibilities for persuasive arguments are almost limitless. Thus, the "low-level" argument by definition builds a foundation for persuasive arguments for value judgments.

Evaluation involves the student in asserting values that are defined by appealing to a set of standards, not merely to individual judgment of personal taste. Topics for this essay might range from choosing the best pet to choosing the fraternity system over the dormitory to choosing an investment. The strategy for the writer is to persuade an audience from external grounds, either by appealing to an established set of standards or by establishing the standards at the beginning of the argument. The student needs to be reminded that not all standards are equal, and an awareness of the audience's values will help the student determine which standards are more important.

Defending the criteria or standards for evaluation may pose problems for young writers, especially if they

have difficulty distinguishing evaluation from matters of personal taste. The first tactic is to appeal to the audience's values. Students might be asked to describe their prospective audience in detail: its experiences, its standards, its values. Most people are involved in evaluation every day whether they realize it or not, and students can be shown that these evaluations are not arbitrary but made according to a set of standards.

If students need to defend their standard further, they can then appeal to an authority who supports their view. Support might be defended by an appeal to consequences, the good and bad effects of following the set of standards. Sometimes the student may be able to create a comparison to support a criterion, but a comparison assumes that readers can accept the basic comparability of the terms in question (morality in art compared to morality in life). Just about anything a student encounters can be evaluated: natural things, constructed things, people, events, actions. Evaluations of high level abstractions like life, morality, or freedom may present problems for freshmen, so they would be wise to choose a more manageable, concrete topic such as the advantages of a college education or the current NFL college drafting system.

The next unit deals with cause and effect. At this point, the student should be able to do five things:

generate a <u>clear thesis</u> asserting the value of the subject,
a <u>clear definition</u> or description of the subject, a set
of <u>criteria</u> or standards for evaluating, <u>support</u> or
defense of the criteria, and <u>evidence</u> about the subject
pointing to the particular traits that make it bad or
good. Expounding upon this groundwork, the student can
shift attention from the way things are to how they got
that way, causal argument. Students now face beginning
with a current problem and reasoning backwards--not
beginning with a series of past events and asking what
the result was. In the early stages of causal argument,
the need is for an <u>arguable</u> causal thesis, not an
established fact or common knowledge (Anwar Sadat
was assassinated or lack of oxygen causes death in
animals). The students should begin their causal
argument by establishing reasonable probability of their
cause and effect relationship. Thus an argument that
asserts that unemployment is nothing more than a lagging
indicator of an economic recovery might be a good
place to begin. It may be helpful in the beginning to
over-simplify causal argument for the sake of
clarification, but students should be led to see how
causal relationships are actually complex. They need
to establish concrete examples of causation and should
be aware that coincidence is not a cause. There must
be an agent to connect the cause to the effect. In

arguing that progress brings about the obliteration of animals, a student must show the agency, which in this case is man. Causal argument is not convincing if there is not a demonstration of agency.

The organization of causal argument takes on different forms depending upon the audience. John Stuart Mill's methods of inquiry provide a basis for determining cause and effect, and students should be encouraged to apply their subject to each method to see which is most convincing: common denominator, single difference, concomitant variation, or process of elimination.[32] Fahnestock and Secor combine several techniques that also indicate causal connections but are simpler to use than Mill's methods. The four methods supplement Mill's approach and are methods of presenting rather than finding causes: chain of causes, time precedence, singling out examples, or analogy.[33]

Causal arguments aim to depict an interaction of causes or to emphasize the importance of a particular cause. Causal explanations of past events are the foundation for the next step, consideration of the future in the policy paper. A good policy paper begins with a capsule evaluation to demonstrate the existence of a problem. If students can make the reader alarmed about a situation, they have created a need for the proposal that follows. An evaluation of a problem may

include a causal relation, and an understanding of
causes will lead directly to a solution. The basic
form for a proposal statement is a variation of the
arguable proposition: "X should be Y." The key here
is "should be"; X states the problem area and Y indicates
what it should be changed to. A student concerned
with the desperate need for reform of the current
agricultural situation could develop an argument for
the Agriculture Credit Revolving Fund. Developing
the "X should be Y" model, the student could propose a
solution: "If $1 billion were placed in the Agriculture
Credit Revolving Fund, farm income would increase by
$4.46 billion."

The policy paper presents an opportunity for the
students to be creative. The fourth unit in the
course, this paper comes at a time when students should
be fairly competent and confident about their skills in
argumentative writing and can venture out into the realm
of humor if they desire. Students might have the
option of writing a serious proposal (Day care for
the elderly, Modification of guidelines of FCC Fairness
Doctrine) or a mock proposal (Izod clothes for everyone,
Elimination of the doggie waste problem on campus
through Dog-catching Intramurals). As part of the
preparation for the proposal essay, all students
should be required to read Jonathan Swift's "A Modest

Proposal."

An idealized outline of the policy paper contains three basic areas: preliminary arguments, the proposal statement, and supporting arguments. While considerations of audience and purpose will alter the form, all policy papers will include the second element, the proposal statement.

The preliminary arguments include a demonstration that a problem exists. The length of demonstration depends upon the obviousness of the problem and the awareness of the audience, but the student needs to show the audience that things are not as they should be and are in need of improvement. This section can provide background information, relevant statistics, specific examples, and thus make an emotional appeal as well as inform.

The student may want to include the undesirable consequences of the present situation because to show that a situation exists is not necessarily to show that a problem exists. The undesirable consequences may not be the only reasons for the need for change, so a student may want to include an ethical assessment of the situation. The proposal may remedy a situation because it is simply wrong, regardless of the consequences. The preliminary argument may also include a causal analysis of the situation.

The proposal section contains a <u>specific</u> proposal--
an exact description of what must be done to remedy the
situation.  Depending upon its complexity, the proposal
statement itself may take considerable explanation and
students should be reminded that this section merits
careful consideration since it presents a specific call
for action on the audience's part.

The supporting arguments of the proposal give the
audience reason to believe in the proposal.  Students
will not argue for a proposal that brings harm, so
this section will include an overview of the good
consequences of the proposal, the ways in which the
audience will benefit.  Stressing the possible increases
in voter turnout, elimination of the "middle man" in
the electorate, and establishment of a truly democratic
government on a national level, the student gives the
audience a reason to support a proposal for abolishing
the electoral college in favor of the popular vote.
The student may want to remind the audience of the
bad consequences of the current situation if the
reminder will add to the persuasive force of the appeal.
In the preliminary arguments, the student appeals to
a sense of wrong in order to establish the need for
change.  Now the student may want to appeal to the
audience's sense of what is right and present the
ethical appeal of the proposal.

The final aspect of the supporting arguments is the presentation of the feasibility of the proposal. The audience will be far more receptive toward a proposal if the student gives a detailed account of how it will work. By informing the audience that the estimated cost for barrier-free design during construction of buildings is only one-tenth of one percent, the student can show that making buildings accessible for physically disabled persons is an attainable goal. Again, audience analysis is the focal point here, for arguing feasibility entails anticipation of possible questions a skeptical audience may ask.

Students may not want to include every aspect of this outline in their final essay; certain parts may need to be emphasized more than others or the sequence may need change depending upon the audience.

The culmination of a course in persuasive writing requires students to utilize everything they have learned thus far--supporting an arguable thesis, audience analysis, ethos, tone, organization, definition, evaluation, causal analysis, and proposal--in preparing a refutation. All argument has at its core a refutation, and in previous arguments the students have had little or no confrontation with the opponent. Nevertheless, they have had to deal with an implicit opponent in order to establish their own case. One of the best

ways to provide an actual opponent for the student to
meet and dispose of is refuting an editorial. An
editorial about the poor quality of a college education
might be refuted on the grounds of its lack of
organization and lack of adequate support. Another
editorial about inflation could be challenged for its
ambiguous statements and misuse of facts and figures.
Students should choose substantial editorials of
reasonable quality (poor editorials present little
challenge, while superior ones may be irrefutable);
and the editorial should present a real argument.
Before proceeding with a refutation, the student should
identify the thesis and conclusion, the support, and
the areas of the editorial to be refuted. Familiarity
with the editorial, almost to the point of memorization,
will aid students in refuting the views presented by
the opponent. They should be encouraged to read,
re-read, and read again to insure that they fully
understand the views of the editorialist.

A complete refutation addresses four main areas:
the issue, the opponent's argument, validity, and
flaws of accommodation. If the audience is not familiar
with the issue behind the argument, students may need
to summarize the controversy or events. They may
also need to give a summary of the opponent's argument.
The amount of summary depends upon the audience's

awareness of the editorial. Often refutation editorials in papers omit this initial summary because their authors think that the audience will remember the original editorial. But students should do their readers a favor by summarizing a written argument before refuting it. By restating what an editorialist said about the possibilities of admitting organized crime to the state and undermining the morals of the people, a student could present the opponent's view before refuting the editorial against legalized pari-mutuel horse racing. The core of the refutation is based on the editorial's validity. Does it use a valid form of argument? Are the statistics correct? Are all the facts straight? Are there any flaws which might offend the audience? Word choice, format, organization? Faulty appeals to logic, emotion, or character? How the student uses the four areas of a refutation depends upon the readers' knowledge or ignorance of the issue, and their attitude toward the issue. The burden of proof is on the student, not the editorial, to make the support of the refutation reasonable.

As students become more experienced in writing persuasive argument, they will become better equipped to identify the most effective modes of persuasion for a specific purpose: appeals to emotion, ethical

appeals, or appeals to reason.  But that experience is gained by beginning with a simpler form of argument like definition and moving through more involved types like evaluation, causal argument, and proposal, and culminating in one of the most extensive forms, refutation.

Richard Larson suggests that "All . . . forms of argument have in common the desire to persuade. . . . In some sense, all discourse (oral and written) is argument. When we speak or write . . . we seek to draw attention to what we say."[34]   In this context, argument can be found in almost every aspect of life.  By teaching composition students to write persuasive arguments, an instructor can help them understand not only the elements of good writing, but also the elements necessary for constructing a good argument.

A persuasive writing course can incorporate five different kinds of argumentative essays.  Beginning with supporting an argumentative thesis statement, the course deals with evaluation, and cause-and-effect, moves to the policy paper, and culminates in the refutation. The refutation essay requires students to combine everything they have learned about argument into a working unit.

The coursework should revolve around an argument text such as <u>A Rhetoric of Argument</u> by Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor and a reader such as Gary Goshgarian's <u>Exploring Language</u> (2nd ed.).  By incorporating the

use of weekly news magazines like <u>Newsweek</u> and <u>Time</u>,
an instructor can encourage students to keep abreast
of current events and can utilize the editorials for
in-class discussion or examples of argument.  Students
need to learn to construct sound arguments <u>and</u> recognize
flaws in other people's arguments.

Teaching students to write persuasive arguments
develops and polishes the skills that the students have
learned in their previous writing courses.  There is
a practical intent behind teaching students to write
persuasive arguments.  For students who have achieved
an acceptable level of writing and need more than theory
to stimulate their writing abilities, persuasive
writing presents an alternative to the traditional
approaches to logic and composition.  The student
learns to produce clearly organized writing by defining
and supporting an arguable thesis.  Learning to "view"
the argument through the eyes of the audience supports
the student's endeavor to accommodate the audience
and provides the student with an extremely useful tool
in argument, the non-threatening argument.  By defining
a goal of persuasion, the student learns to recognize
and use the modes of persuasion and different types
of argument.

Clearly organized writing develops out of clear
thinking, and an approach to persuasive writing can

improve the student's ability to think as well as write. This approach emphasizes that persuasive writing is not simply a specialized skill but an important tool for encouraging students to become critical readers and careful thinkers.

NOTES

[1] Walter DeMordaunt, "Logic and Originality in Freshman Themes," College Composition and Communication, 10 (1959), 24.

[2] Aristotle, The Rhetoric, Trans. by Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1932), p. 6.

[3] DeMordaunt, p. 26.

[4] Monroe C. Beardsley, Thinking Straight: Principles of Reasoning for Readers and Writers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975), pp. 4, 5.

[5] Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor, A Rhetoric of Argument (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 2.

[6] Fahnestock and Secor, p. 2.

[7] Josephine Miles, "What We Already Know About Composition and What We Need to Know," College Composition and Communication, 27 (1976), 140.

[8] Alexander Scharbach and Ralph H. Singleton, eds., Introd. to Part I, The Lively Rhetoric (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 3.

[9] Fahnestock and Secor, p. 57.

[10] J. Michael Sproule, Argument: Language and Its Influence (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980), p. 50.

[11] James M. McCrimmon, Writing With a Purpose, short edition based on the 6th ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), p. 7.

[12] Kenneth Jurkiewicz, "How to Begin to Win Friends and Influence People: The Role of the Audience in the Pre-Writing Process," College Composition and Communication, 26 (1975), 174.

[13] Aristotle, The Rhetoric, trans. Lane Cooper

(Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1932), pp. 91-92. The brackets are the translator's.

   [14] Fahnestock and Secor, p. 301.

   [15] Maxine Hairston, A Contemporary Rhetoric, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), pp. 79-80.

   [16] I. A. Richards, Practical Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), p. 175.

   [17] Aristotle, The Rhetoric, p. 183.

   [18] Raymond Paul and Pelligrino W. Goione, Perception and Persuasion: A New Approach to Effective Writing (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 33.

   [19] Maxine Hairston, "Carl Rogers's Alternative to Traditional Rhetoric," College Composition and Communication, 27 (1976), 373. For further discussion see Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, Kenneth L. Pike, Rhetoric: Discovery and Change (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1970), p. 225; and Carl Rogers, "Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation," rpt. in Carl Rogers, On Becoming A Person (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961).

   [20] Hairston, "Carl Rogers's Alternative," p. 373.

   [21] Hairston, "Carl Rogers's Alternative," p. 375.

   [22] Hairston, "Carl Rogers's Alternative," p. 373-376.

   [23] Daniel McDonald, ed., Introd. to Part I, The Language of Argument, 4th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 3.

   [24] Fahnestock and Secor, p. 20.

   [25] McCrimmon, p. 191.

   [26] Gary Goshgarian, ed., Exploring Language, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), p. v.

   [27] Lane Cooper, Analysis, The Rhetoric, by Aristotle (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1932), p. xxxviii.

   [28] Howard Kahane, Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric: The Use of Reason in Everyday Life, 3rd Ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1980), p. 126.

[29] Kahane, p. 127.

[30] Edward P. J. Corbett, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 99.

[31] Aristotle, The Rhetoric, p. 92.

[32] John Stuart Mill, A System of Logic (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1893). A complete discussion of the methods of inquiry can be found in BK III, Chpt. VIII.

[33] Fahnestock and Secor, pp. 174-179.

[34] Richard Larson, Foreward, A Rhetoric of Argument by Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor (New York: Random House, 1982), p. vii.

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$\mathcal{V}$

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