CHAPTER 1

BUILDING ARGUMENTS: AN INTRODUCTION

MODULE I-1

ARGUMENT DEFINED

An **argument** is an attempt to persuade someone to think, believe, or act differently by offering reasons in support of a conclusion. Successful arguments persuade readers or listeners to change an opinion, a belief, or a behavior. In this module, we will examine some of the broadest categories of and reasons for argument and discuss some strategies for writing arguments. We'll also take a look at the type of argument of most immediate concern to students: academic arguments.

Strategies for Argument

Whatever their purpose and subject, writers of compelling arguments employ strategies, or tricks of the trade, to persuade audiences. Some basic strategies include appeals to readers' or listeners' tendency to trust authority, appeals to their emotions, and the use of different types of reasoning.

Three ways to appeal to an argument's audience. Arguments are persuasive if they appeal to their intended audience, just as cooking a friend's favorite food for a birthday party is a way of appealing to her appetite and thereby communicating your feelings. The three common rhetorical appeals are described briefly below.

- **An ethical appeal, or *ethos***, involves an author or speaker moving the audience to believe that the source of the message is trustworthy and authoritative. It is an effective strategy because an audience tends to trust writers and speakers who are authorities on the issue at hand. Citing recognized experts in a field, including the academic degrees and publishing record of a source, and carefully documenting your sources using a widely accepted documentation style, such as the system recommended by the Modern Language Association (MLA) or the American Psychological Association (APA), are ways of making an ethical appeal.
- **An emotional appeal, or *pathos***, does just what it says: it appeals to the emotions of the audience in an attempt to move its members to think, believe, or act differently. For example, the SPCA shows images of animals in distress to provoke pity and thereby motivate the audience to send in a donation.
- **A logical appeal, or *logos***, relies upon logical reasoning and verifiable evidence to persuade. Most logical appeals are based on two types of reasoning: inductive and deductive.

Types of Reasoning or Logic

Reasoning is a means of connecting the evidence you have discovered to your conclusion, using logic. The two types of reasoning described below are commonly used in a wide variety of arguments.

- **Inductive reasoning** starts with observations about the world or your surroundings; you then use these observations to draw a conclusion that you believe is probably true. Induction is an exploratory form of reasoning because it can lead to previously undiscovered conclusions.
- **Deductive reasoning** uses one or more rules or general truths to come to a conclusion. Unlike induction, deduction involves the application of known truths or undisputed knowledge.

Chapter 5 describes in detail many different types of arguments and ways to approach your subject and engage your audience. Chapter 5 also includes a number of useful strategies that can help you build persuasive arguments. Although you no doubt make many arguments in your daily life and at work, the type of argument you are probably most concerned about as you read this is an academic argument.

Characteristics of Academic Arguments

An **academic argument** is a specialized way of persuading an audience to think, believe, or act differently for the vital purpose of advancing knowledge. The goal of an academic argument is not simply to win or persuade. Scholars construct

arguments to find, develop, test, and contribute knowledge to the ongoing exploration and discussion among others in a discipline or specialty.

Different disciplines and professors have various specific requirements for a successful academic argument. In general, however, if you are going to join the discussion in a field by making your ideas public in an academic context, you need to know that your audience will expect an argument composed of the elements listed below.

- **A thesis**: Academic arguments are built around a clearly stated thesis, or conclusion, which the reasons and evidence support. The thesis is the assertion to be proved. It typically appears at the beginning of an argument and is often restated and expanded toward the end. However, a thesis comes together at the end, it is the conclusion, of the research process. Chapter 5 discusses thesis development for different forms and genres of argument.
- **Evidence**: Academic arguments include data and other types of information that are used to support the reasons that in turn support the thesis. Evidence must be acceptable, valid, and authoritative in the eyes of the audience if the reasons are to have any persuasive power.
- **Reasoning**: In academic contexts, reasoning is used to connect an argument's reasons (or 'premises') to its conclusion to demonstrate that the conclusion is true. The standards of reasoning and appropriate conclusions may vary from one discipline to another, even when the subject matter is the same. A biologist may reason toward a conclusion about the constitution of the human body, while a dance professor may reason toward a conclusion about the ideal movements of that body. In both cases, the subject is the human body, but the reasoning of the biologist is not like the reasoning of the dance professor.
- **Knowledge of the larger debate**: As stated above, academics argue to contribute to the ongoing exploration and discussion within a particular discipline. To join the conversation, the authors of an academic argument must demonstrate that they know what has already been said (discovered or disputed) by other scholars. Also, they must show why their ideas are relevant and how they contribute to the larger debate.
- **Adherence to conventions**: **Conventions** is another term for the grammar, punctuation, style, format, and tone that adherents of an academic discipline or specialty will expect. Though all disciplines have some conventions in common, such as spelling, different disciplines have different expectations. An argument that does not correctly use the conventions scholars or professors expect will not be persuasive and may suggest that the author or speaker is not ready to join the conversation.

Non-Academic Arguments

Not all arguments are academic. Many discussions in popular media may not be seen as persuasive by an academic audience or welcome in an academic setting. For example, **debates**, in which two people or two teams try to "score points," declare their opinions, or play to the crowd, can be a setting for arguments. However, debates may not be perceived as exploring or contributing to knowledge. **Quarrels**—angry disagreements—happen when people become frustrated with their inability to persuade and either forget to use or give up using reasons and evidence to support their points (see Figure 1.1). One familiar type of quarrel is common to cable TV panel discussions, which are more about the fireworks of clashing personalities than an attempt to discover truth using reasons and evidence. Academics are as passionate as any other profession; however, cool restraint is the expected demeanor of a seeker of knowledge.

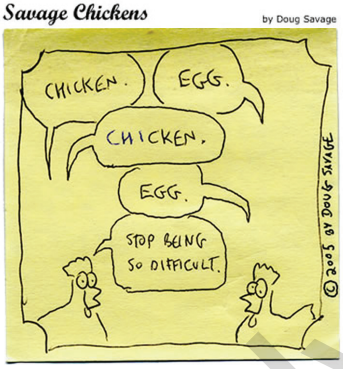

Figure 1.1
Sometimes a quarrel just isn't worth the effort.

Tweets or sound bites, features of media discussions as well as political campaigns, are summaries of positions or short assertions lacking evidence. Tweets or sound bites are closer to bumper stickers than reasoned argument because they lack evidence and reasoning.

Some assertions and disputes are not arguments at all. Self-indulgence and bullying have no place in argument. Self-indulgent speakers talk to hear their own voice and brag about their accomplishments. Though such behavior can seem like an argument, it is rarely persuasive. Bullying or threatening the audience in some way also is not persuasive in any setting, but especially not in an academic setting because the bully is neither using reasons and evidence nor contributing knowledge.

Visual and Multimedia Arguments

Most of the time, academics and others use language to make arguments, but they can also make them using imagery, sound, and technology, as Steve Jobs did when he introduced the first iPhone. You can find videos of Jobs's presentation, titled "Rein-

vent the Phone," on YouTube. His "keynote" is still a good example of a persuasive multimedia argument.

Visual arguments such as the one in Figure 1.2, which are most frequently encountered outside of the academic world, may look very different from written arguments. Visual, multimedia, and textual arguments, however, are built for the same purpose and all are composed of reasons and evidence.

Figure 1.2
Terry Richardson's Equinox ads are provocative and have proven successful in targeting a specific clientele that understands fitness as fashion.

A **visual argument** makes use of elements such as imagery and text, negative and positive space, layout and color, as well as info-graphics such as charts and graphs to persuade someone to think, believe, or act differently. For example, the advertisement shown in Figure 1.2 makes a cause-and-effect argument. The strength of the man is caused "BY EQUINOX." More prominently, the ad would have you believe that the beauty of the woman demonstrating the same strength as the man is also a product of Equinox gyms.

You do not have to be a graphic designer or an advertiser to develop visual arguments. Each time you update your Instagram story with photos or graphics, you are using images and text to persuade others of your personality, qualities, likes, and dislikes.

As multimedia capabilities and tools become as common and easy to use as a smartphone, the expectations for persuasive visual arguments will increase. If you can build a strong argument, you can build a strong visual argument. For more on visual arguments, see Chapter 6.

Invention, Audience, and Authority: Three Lenses for Viewing Argument

Whether you are constructing a written or visual argument, and whatever the argument's context, it is natural to feel overwhelmed by the many decisions you have to make as you move through the process of composing a persuasive text. However, if you look at your task through these three lenses, a great deal of the noise and confusion will melt away:

Invention: Information retrieval and synthesis. In other words, what you find out about an **issue**—a matter about which people disagree—and how you put this information together.

Audience: The people you are attempting to persuade. Understanding the audience's thoughts and expectations is the key to your persuasive power.

Authority: Traits and qualities that establish your credibility, leading an audience to pay attention to and be persuaded by your argument.

Invention, audience, and authority are the essential perspectives that shape *The Argument Toolbox*.

Like any good toolbox, the chapters that follow will give you practical tools, tricks of the trade, time-saving exercises, and simple solutions to the problems that pop up whenever you try to build an argument.

MODULE I-2

INVENTION AND RESEARCH: HOW WILL YOU FIND IDEAS AND EVIDENCE?

Invention is the process of retrieving and synthesizing information and ideas in order to generate new perspectives, ideas, and arguments. An effective invention process suits an individual's style of composing and helps that writer move from frustration to inspiration and break writer's block. The type of information you seek and where it can typically be found should determine your invention process. When you retrieve the information from within your head, the invention process is called *looking within*. Chapter 2 presents invention strategies that will help you look within, including freewriting and imposing artificial limits on your writing. When you seek information outside your own thoughts and beyond your own experience,

you are *looking around* by consulting friends and peers or going into the field to observe. Chapter 2 will also help you look around to invent. *Looking to research* helps you look beyond your immediate experience and the experiences of others that you consult to seek the ideas of scholars and other experts, that is, the authorities in the field. Chapter 2 will also help you locate and gather the ideas of scholars and experts, and help you analyze and evaluate what you have gathered so you can draw informed conclusions.

How Invention Saves Time and Effort

Whatever your composing task, you usually have only a limited period of time to complete it. Within that time, you must gather ideas and information, organize your material and write a draft, and then revise and proofread your writing. When you use one or more invention strategies to develop some ideas to work with, organizing, drafting, revising, and proofreading become much less daunting tasks.

However, the more time you spend looking at a blank page or procrastinating out of fear that you have nothing to say, the less time you will have for the other stages of the composing process. See the Breaking the Block box entitled "Invention Never Stops" for an invention strategy that can help you in this situation.

Breaking the Block
Invention Never Stops

Everyone experiences writer's block. It is important to remember that writer's block is not necessarily caused by a lack of ideas. Often, writers get stuck because they have too many ideas to choose from and too many potential audiences to talk to.

To overcome writer's block, you can use invention throughout the composing process. In addition, you are surrounded by the most valuable invention tool ever discovered—friends and peers.

INSTRUCTIONS: For one week, record your ideas as Step One describes, and then share them with others. Remember to include the day and time of each recorded thought.

Step One: Record Your Ideas

- Keep some means of recording your ideas near you at all times. It could be a notebook, a scrap of paper, or your smartphone's notes or voice memo app.

- Do not judge or dismiss any idea that comes to mind until you have kept it for a week and thought about it numerous times.
- When you have a great idea or a great question, or when you see something amazing, record your thoughts before they evaporate.

Step Two: Share Your Ideas

- Bounce your ideas off friends and peers.
- Write down or record how others respond to your ideas. Also, don't forget to write down your own thoughts and responses.
- Remember that critical responses are just opportunities to re-see and reshape your thinking.

Step Three: Give Your Ideas the Respect They Deserve

- At the end of the week, review all your notes or listen to the recordings you made.
- Look for connections between your ideas and observations and the responses of friends and peers.
- Categorize and prioritize the ideas and responses using some or all of the following, or other categories that seem appropriate to the task:
  - Big ideas I must develop now
  - Ideas related to big ideas
  - Thoughts that need time to develop
  - Problems to be solved
  - Solutions looking for a problem

How Writers Use Research to Discover Ideas

You may think that research consists simply of finding an assigned number of sources to support a thesis. Finding sources that confirm a pre-existing thesis is not research, however. Instead, research is a process of discovery.

Research is another kind of invention. When you conduct research, you internalize information outside of your own experience so that you can challenge and develop your understanding. Research is necessary because new ideas are built upon existing ideas. When you learn about the ideas of others, observe the world around you, and engage in critical thinking and conversations with knowledgeable sources, you will develop a deeper, more informed perspective on your subject, you will have more to say, and your argument will be more persuasive. In short, you do research to discover what you do not know so that you may know more.

When a student reads a scholarly article or when reporters review court records, they are doing research. Research is not limited to print sources such as scholarly books and papers, however. When a sculptor studies the anatomy of a hand, she is doing research. When the famous scientist, anthropologist, and author Jane Goodall observes chimpanzees in their natural habitat, she is doing research. There is no single way to do research. There are, however, good and bad research methods.

Researching How People Think and Talk

Through research, you will also gain an understanding of the expectations of your audience as you discover how your intended audience or those who work in a specific discipline or field think and talk about your subject. Use your understanding of how your audience thinks and what they expect to shape your argument.

Individuals in the film industry, for example, think and talk about *aspect ratios* and *medium shots*, whereas those in the computer industry talk about *LANs* and *bit rates*. If you are writing a paper for a history professor, clues to your professor's expectations will be found in the arguments written by other historians, or in the way that professor formulates her ideas in class.

Knowing how members of your audience think, what they value, and how they will understand you is as important as knowing what you want to say. When the writers of an episode of *CSI* want realism, they ask real crime scene investigators what word they would use to describe a piece of evidence and what procedures they would follow in a given situation. The writers of *CSI* also need to know the words a detective would *never* use to describe evidence. The audience of *CSI* expects realistic dialogue, and the writers do their best to meet this expectation. The same is true of the academic world.

Research helps you determine what you want to say and how to say it. Chapter 3 explains how to read the situation that you and your audience will share and how to discover audience expectations so that you can shape what you want to say appropriately and persuasively.

Using Invention and Research to Shape Your Voice and Authority

Invention and research provide ideas and ways to talk about those ideas. Research can also help you determine the evidence that an audience trusts, respects, and will listen to. Imagine that you are working on a new app for mobile devices that helps students prioritize their daily activities, and you need to make a pitch for it to three entirely different audiences: your friends, potential investors, and a software engineer.

Investors like those in *The Shark Tank* reality TV show will want to hear about the likelihood of sales and returns on investment. Your friends, on the other hand, might be interested in how the app will help them plan their day. However, if you

are trying to describe the app's functions to a software engineer or an app developer, you may need to use technical terms to describe how the app will gather calendar data and then migrate it to an SMS (a Short Message Service on different devices.).

Research and reading in this area will not only help you understand how app developers talk but also help you join their conversation as a respected voice. Of course, an engineer can understand your app as your friends do, but if you can use the language an engineer uses and the information she respects, you and your ideas will have much more persuasive power and be more appropriate for the intended audience.

MODULE I-3

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WRITING IN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

Each university and college classroom is a different situation. And, you may discover the expectations in a single course may change day to day. One way to understand a situation like a classroom is to look at it rhetorically. A **rhetorical situation** consists of all the elements that affect how an audience understands an argument. The audience, writer/speaker, and message form a triangle at the heart of the rhetorical situation as illustrated on the left of Figure 1.3. The rhetorical situation of a classroom or lab is a bit different from other rhetorical situations, as illustrated on the right of Figure 1.3.

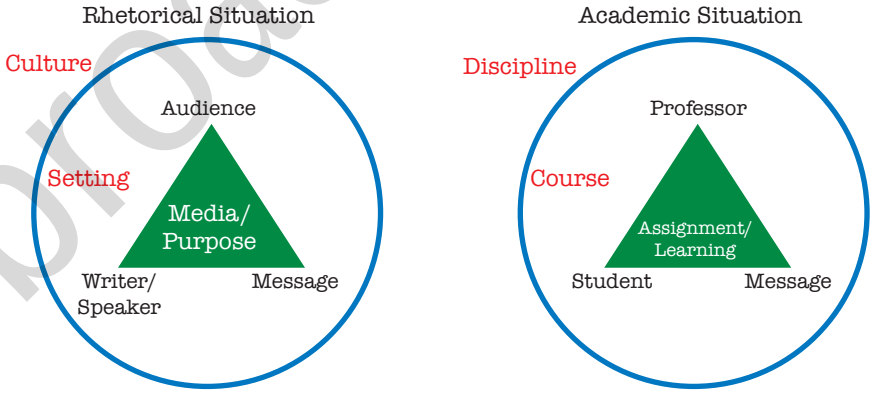

Figure 1.3 The complex rhetorical situations in an academic setting will reflect the discipline of your course and professor.

To break down the differences and similarities of a general rhetorical situation and an academic situation, see the side-by-side comparison in Figure 1.4.

All rhetorical situations exist within some larger cultural environment. As a student you work within the academic tradition; however, in a single course you need to focus on the cultural principles, values, and practices of the specific discipline that course represents.

There are many ways to define a **discipline**. As a student, the best way to think of a discipline is as the practices used by a group of scholars who

- are motivated to increase understanding and contribute to what is known;
- study a common subject or focus on a related set of questions;
- apply the same or similar habits of critical thinking, methods of discovery, and innovative practices; and
- communicate in and are organized by formal, specialized ways of exchanging and evaluating information.

Figure 1.4 Comparing a general rhetorical situation and an academic rhetorical situation reveals important differences.

You may have noticed that a physics professor and a creative writing professor do not teach in the same way. This is probably because they are different people, but mostly because they have years of study, training, and practice in different disciplines that lead them to think, do research, and teach differently.

No text can predict your professor's assignments or expectations. Therefore, relying on any sample paper, template, or outline (except those provided by your professor) is the same as ignoring your audience. For this reason, students who plagiarize papers are likely to be disappointed by their grade, even if their fraud is not discovered, because the author of a purchased paper has no idea what your professor expects in a specific course or assignment.

To understand your audience within the academic situation, you need to study your professor, learn her expectations, and understand the markers of authority in their discipline. The checklist in Figure 1.5 will help you examine the rhetorical situation of any class.

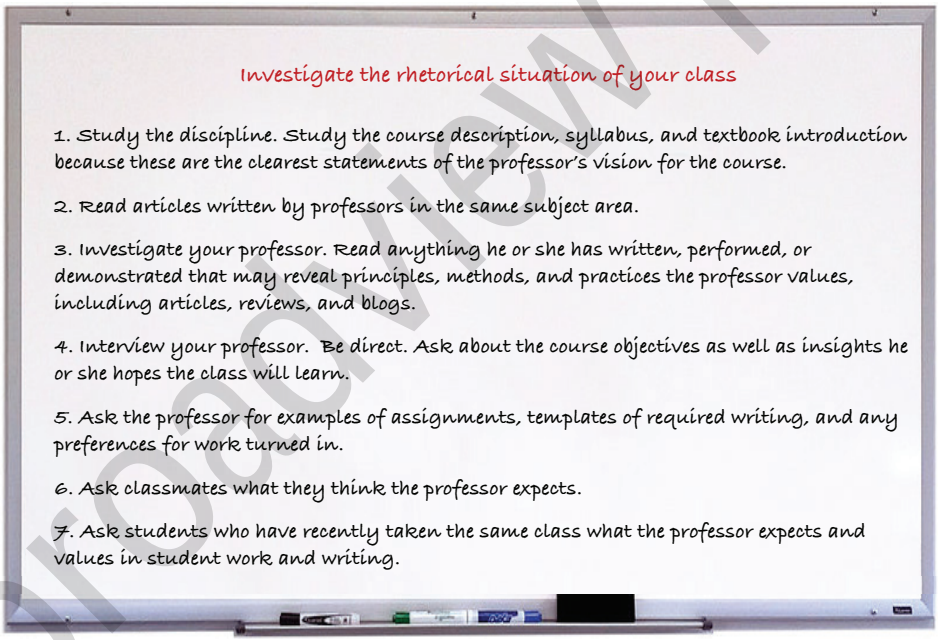

Figure 1.5 Though each discipline is different, the expectations of professors and markers of authority are not secret, and they are easily investigated and understood.

Your audience, your professor, will read your sentences and paragraphs carefully. So too, will they read your use of the markers that communicate authority in an academic situation. **Authority** consists of the traits and qualities that lead an audience

to pay attention to and be persuaded by an argument, thereby shaping the meaning within the situation. The Responsible Sourcing box entitled "Prioritizing Audience Saves Time and Grades" provides a way to think about your voice and authority.

Responsible Sourcing
Prioritizing Audience Saves Time and Grades

All students have to prioritize to save time and energy. Often, it's worth taking time to discover what your academic audience is looking for before spending time on an assignment.

Imagine it is late at night. You have homework in all your classes, a midterm essay to write, and little time. As you think about your next steps, you realize you have many options for the essay, but the results of those options may not be so clear. As the decision tree in Figure 1.6 shows, some decisions can take you where you want to go, while others can lead to less happy results.

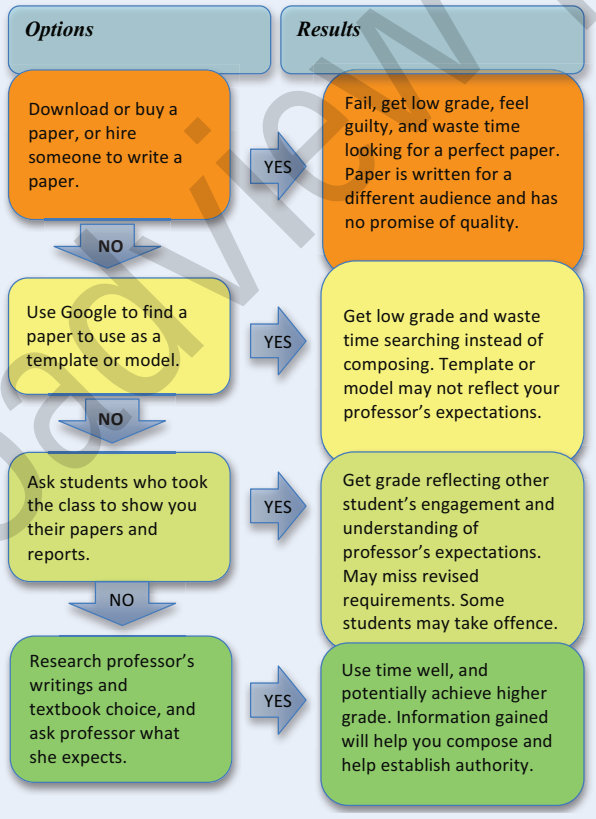

Figure 1.6 Decisions that take a second to make often have long lasting consequences.