

Introduction to Rhetoric and Argument

* These notes are intended to introduce key concepts we will work with, and are not intended as an alternative to doing the readings. You need to complete the readings as soon as possible.

What is argument?

- Arguments are, fundamentally, opinions with support.
- According to Mauk and Metz, “the vast majority of arguments are subtler: small exchanges of ideas with participants urging others to accept their positions. Most often, argument does *not* include beating an opponent, taking up arms, or preaching to an audience, but involves making a debatable position appear reasonable or acceptable” (4).
- Every field of study includes arguments, sometimes with field-specific language (4), and every member of a field is an arguer.

What is rhetoric?

- Rhetoric is commonly defined as the art of persuasion.
- Mauk and Metz further define rhetoric as “a process of recognizing and using the most effective strategies for influencing thought. The Greek Philosopher Aristotle defined rhetoric as the available means of persuasion for each case” (8).
- Classical rhetoricians did not view or study rhetoric as “empty” or misleading language, and while many currently view rhetoric in this way, rhetoric is generally a positive, critical process of asking questions.

Rhetoric continued

- “The student of rhetoric explores the ways in which different uses of language impact people in various situations” (9).
- “When we try to make a point seem reasonable, ethical, or emotional for a particular audience, we are involved in a rhetorical effort” (9).
- “Rhetoric is more than the selection and arrangement of words. It is also a deeper exploration of thought and language” (10).
- “The goal of studying rhetoric is to examine the nuances of persuasive language” in text (10). Text here refers to any type of communication.

Rhetorical canons

- Invention: the discovery and development of ideas
- Arrangement: the organization of ideas in a coherent and engaging fashion
- Style or voice: the personal or individualized use of language conventions, with attention to appropriateness, situation, and audience
- Memory: the recollection of prepared points
- Delivery: the presentation of ideas

Ethos, pathos, and logos

You have probably heard of ethos, pathos, and logos. These, like the canons, originate in Western thought from the Greeks. These are types of appeals used to support one's ideas and/or claims.

- *Ethos*: appeals to character and/or ethics
- *Pathos*: appeals to feeling and emotion
- *Logos*: appeals to reason and logic

These are among the many types of support we will examine and practice this semester.

Invention

- “Invention is the discovery and development of ideas” (13).
 - As Mauk and Metz note in Chapter 1, the process of invention may include brainstorming, and just as often it “can be a deliberate process driven by probing questions and strategic intellectual moves” (13). They go on to observe that invention carries through the entire process of making an argument—the research, development, and response to others.
 - Invention requires asking questions and discovering what others have done and said. A person trying to “invent” a new drug, for instance, relies on the past work of others while attempting to create something new. Likewise, a good arguer relies on the ideas of others while trying to advance the conversation and invite their audiences to think in new or different ways.

Argument and Rhetoric

- If rhetoric is the art of persuasion and the communication of ideas through persuasion, how does it connect with argument?
- As you answer the question above, here are a few considerations:
 - Can rhetorical principles, such as consideration of audience, be used in non-arguments?
 - Does the study of language and context require an argument to be made?
 - Rhetoric is the means by which we make arguments. Is it also the means by which we communicate?

Claims

- A “claim” is our main argument, that which we are setting out to prove or persuade.
 - Claims require support. Otherwise they are simply opinions.
 - Claims may have supporting claims, each supported with evidence and/or appeals.

If you have ever written an essay using the following outline, you are familiar with the above:

- Thesis (paragraph 1) with three supporting points/ideas
- First supporting point/idea (paragraph 2) with two examples
- Second supporting point/idea (paragraph 3) with two examples

And so on.

“Thesis” and “Claim”

- In the context of this class, “thesis” will be referred to as a statement of purpose for an essay. “Claim” will be used as the main term for argumentative statements. According to the Owl at Purdue, “An argumentative or persuasive piece of writing must begin with a debatable thesis or claim. In other words, the thesis must be something that people could reasonably have differing opinions on. If your thesis is something that is generally agreed upon or accepted as fact then there is no reason to try to persuade people.”

Types of Claims

- “Claims of fact argue that a condition exists, has existed, or will exist . . . The Roman Empire influenced all of Europe” (Mauk and Metz 17).
- “Claims of value argue that something possesses or reflects a particular quality . . . The governor’s strategies for getting reelected are underhanded” (18).
- “Claims of policy argue that some action should be taken or that some change made . . . The local Humane Society branch should launch an educational campaign about rabies” (18).
- “Revelatory claims reveal an unfamiliar topic or a new layer of a familiar one . . . Home schooling reestablishes a key concept that disappeared throughout the twentieth century” (23-24).

Can it be argued, or is it worth arguing?

Consider the following claim: It is only by understanding the philosophical and spiritual underpinnings of George Lucas's entire ancestry that we can understand the true genius of Star Wars.

- Can this really be argued?
- Another claim: Cats are evil. Is this worth arguing?
- Another example: Smoking is bad for your health.
- And another: Marijuana should be legalized everywhere.

The question at the top should be one of the first you ask as you consider topics for your essays in this class.

Works Cited

Mauk, John, and John Metz. *Inventing Arguments Fourth Edition*.

Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016.

Purdue Owl. “Developing Strong Thesis Statements.” 23

November, 2013. Web. 18 July, 2017.