

Arguing a Position



Focus: A Well-Presented Issue

Source: *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*
Chapter 6: Arguing a Position

Learning to Argue

(Part 1: Developing Your Argument and Counterargument)

We typically associate the the word “argument” in a negative sense, as we see when Archie and Mike are quarreling, or the type of in-your-face” debating we hear on the radio or television talk shows.



REASONED ARGUMENT



This chapter presents a more deliberate way of arguing that is called “reasoned argument” because it depends on giving REASONS rather than RAISING VOICES.

REASONED ARGUMENT



Although it is not always possible to prove that a position on a controversial issue is right or wrong, it is possible through REASONED ARGUMENT to convince others to ACCEPT or REJECT the position.

REASONED ARGUMENT



To be convincing, an argument must not only present convincing reasons and plausible support for its position.

It must also ANTICIPATE objections and opposing arguments, CONCEDING those that are reasonable and REFUTING those that are not.

BASIC FEATURES



A WELL-PRESENTED ISSUE

A WELL-SUPPORTED POSITION

AN EFFECTIVE COUNTER-ARGUMENT

A READABLE PLAN

The focus of
Part I of this
presentation

The focus of Part II
of this presentation

A WELL-PRESENTED ISSUE:



- Is the issue controversial and clearly arguable?
- Is this an issue on which people can reasonably disagree?
- Has the issue been clearly framed around readers' knowledge and/or assumptions?

Disagreement over controversial issues usually depends on a difference of values, principles, and priorities. Therefore, writers not only need to **identify the issue** early in the essay, but they also need to **present it in a way that sets the stage for the argument.**

To do this effectively, writers need to think about their **PURPOSE** and **AUDIENCE**.

- What do their readers **KNOW** or **NEED TO KNOW** about the issue?
- What they are likely to **THINK** or **BELIEVE** about the issue?

YOU WILL NEED PEN
AND PAPER FOR THE
WRITING ACTIVITIES ON
THE NEXT TWO SLIDES.

WRITING ACTIVITY 1: IDENTIFY YOUR POSSIBLE READERS

- What do my readers KNOW about the issue? How might the issue have affected them personally or professionally?
- What POSITIONS will my readers likely take on this issue? How strongly do they hold these positions?
- Which of my readers' VALUES, PRIORITIES, and INTERESTS might influence their view?
- How far apart are my readers and I? What FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES in worldview or experience might keep us from agreeing?
- What could I REALISTICALLY hope to achieve with these readers—convincing them to adopt my point of view? Getting them to reconsider their own position? Confirming or challenging some of their underlying beliefs?

WRITE FOR 15 MINUTES

WRITING ACTIVITY 2:
DEVELOPING YOUR ARGUMENT AND
COUNTER-ARGUMENT

NOW YOU WILL NEED THE NOTES YOU PREPARED AS A RESULT OF YOUR “SCAVENGER HUNT.”

PICK UP HANDOUT ON TABLE AND CONTINUE TO WORK WITH YOUR NOTES AND THIS HANDOUT.

WRITE FOR 30 MINUTES

END SLIDE SHOW PART I.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Learning to Argue

Part II: Framing and Outlining

BEGIN SLIDE SHOW PART II.

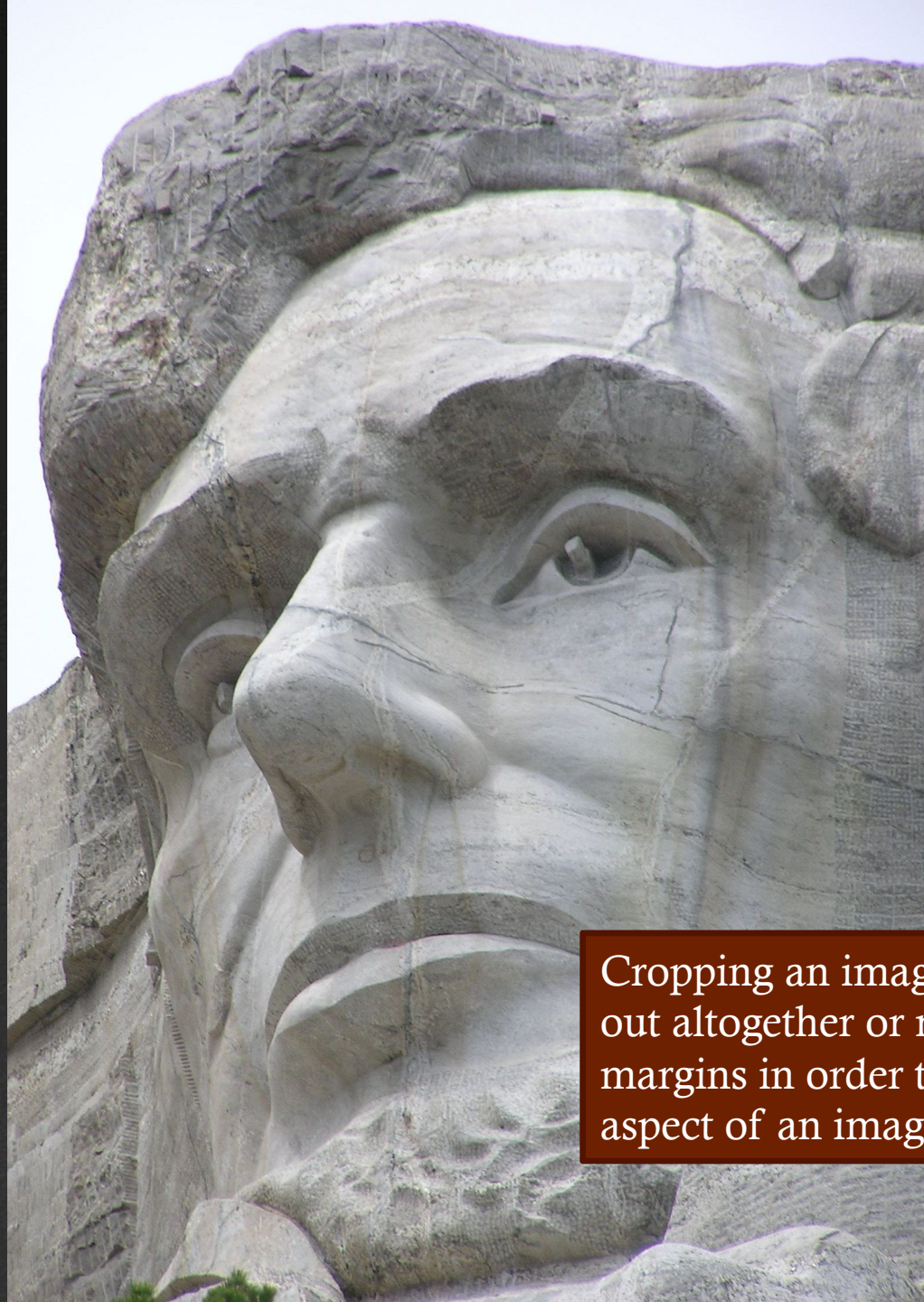
By anticipating the knowledge and assumptions of their readers, writers are better able to present their issue more effectively to their audience.

This process is
known as “framing”
an issue.

Writers frame
(or reframe)
issues to influence how
readers will think
about an issue.

One way to think of
FRAMING an issue
for your reader is to
think of cropping an
image to focus on one
aspect of the image.





Cropping an image cuts some parts out altogether or moves them to the margins in order to focus on one aspect of an image.

Framing an issue in writing essentially does the same thing by focusing attention on one aspect of the issue.

Let's look at a few
examples from the
readings in chapter 6.

DISCUSS:

In “Children Need to Play, Not Compete,” how does student Jessica Statsky frame the issue?

Jessica frames the issue as an issue about **what children need** from athletics, not what parents need.

Over the past three decades, **organized sports for children** have increased dramatically in the United States. And though many adults regard Little League Baseball and Pee wee Football as a basic part of childhood, the games are not always joyous ones. **When overzealous parents and coaches impose adult standards on children's sports, the result can be activities that are neither satisfying nor beneficial to children.**

(Statsky, ¶ 1)

DISCUSS:

In “Sticks and Stones and Sports Team Names,” Richard Estrada points out paragraph 6 the way in which the issue of sports team names has **already been framed by political conservatives**, who use the label “political correctness” to belittle concerns about the issue. The label makes it sound as though those who object are just being overly sensitive.

How does Estrada **RE-FRAME** the issue for the readers?

In order to present his argument, Estrada needs to **RE-FRAME** the issue for the readers, **changing it from a story about oversensitivity to a story about bullying:**

Yet, ultimately, the practice of using a people as mascots is **dehumanizing**. It **sets them apart** from the rest of society ... What makes naming teams after ethnic groups, particularly minorities, reprehensible is that **politically impotent groups continue to be targeted**, while politically powerful ones who bite back are left alone ... It seems to me that what Native Americans are saying is that what would be intolerable for Jews, blacks, Latinos and others is no less offensive to them.

(Estrada, ¶ 4, 11, 13)

DISCUSS:

In “Working at McDonalds,” Amitai Etzioni’s primary audience is parents of teenagers rather than the teenagers themselves. He begins his essay by assuming the issue has **already been framed** (positively) for his audience through their associations and experience.

HOW DOES HE **RE-FRAME** THE ISSUE FOR HIS READERS?

Etzioni has to RE-FRAME the issue for his audience to show them that today's fast-food jobs are not the same as the newspaper routes and lemonade stands that his audience remembers:

At first, such jobs may seem right out of the Founding Fathers' educational manual for how to bring up self-reliant, work-ethic-driven, productive youngsters. **But** in fact, **these jobs undermine school attendance and involvement, impart few skills that will be useful in later life, and simultaneously skew the values of teen-agers**—especially their ideas about the worth of a dollar.

(Etzioni, ¶ 2)

YOU WILL NEED PEN AND PAPER FOR THE
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS ON THE NEXT SLIDES.

WRITING—EXERCISE 1

FRAMING THE ISSUE FOR YOUR READERS: Decide how you might want to present your issue to your readers. In your notes, experiment with some or all of the following ideas:

- Should you place the issue in context, either historically, personally, or having to do with current events? Jot down some ideas.
- Should you use real examples to make the issue concrete for readers? If so, jot down a few possibilities and flesh out these examples on your paper.
- Should you demonstrate that the issue is important by citing statistics or quoting authorities? If so, refer to your notes to identify the most compelling.
- Should you start by describing the negative effects of your issue? Jot down some ideas.
- Should you “reframe” the issue by showing how first impressions are wrong or mistaken? Jot down some ideas.

WRITING—EXERCISE 2

Now that you've identified your potential readers, gathered arguments for and against your issue, gathered arguments for and against the opposing views, and thought up some ideas about how you want to frame your essay, it's time to begin planning how you will write your paper.

Start by making a QUICK SCRATCH OUTLINE that includes the following:

- I. PRESENTATION OF ISSUE
- II. A CLEAR POSITION
- III. REASONS AND SUPPORT FOR YOUR POSITION
- IV. ANTICIPATION OF OPPOSING POSITIONS AND OBJECTIONS

Write for 15 minutes.

WRITING HOMEWORK—EXERCISE 3

Choose one of the two outlines patterns below and FLESH OUT your scratch outline depending on how you want to present your argument.

Option 1

- I. Presentation of the issue (framing)
- II. Accommodation of some aspect of opposing position (use as many paragraphs as you need)
- III. Thesis statement
- IV. First Plausible Reason with Support
- V. Second Plausible Reason with Support
- VI. (Repeat as needed)
- VII. Conclusion

Option 2

- I. Presentation of the issue (framing)
- II. Thesis statement
- III. Your most Plausible Reasons with support (use as many paragraphs as you need)
- IV. First Opposing Argument with Refutation
- V. Second Opposing Argument with Refutation
- VI. (Repeat as needed)
- VII. Conclusion

Prepared by Elaine Minamide
Palomar College
Fall 2011