

Textbook Review for *inReview*
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Lunsford, Andrea and John J. Ruszkiewicz. *Everything's an Argument*. 3rd ed. Bedford: Boston, 2004 848 pages

Introduction

This excellent volume is easy to read and provides a thorough definition of what it means when it says “everything’s an argument.” The text defines various types of argument—definition, evaluation, and causal, among others—and specific instructions for structuring a Toulmin argument. The book is nicely integrated, with the concepts used in later chapters having already been described in earlier chapters. In fact, it’s so well integrated that it’s tempting to want to use a significant proportion of it in a one-semester writing class. Such use might prove unwieldy, given the range and depth of topics covered. The text also successfully expands the idea of “text” to include written and visual; this understanding of text leads to a wider recognition of what constitutes writing and the various rhetorical considerations that come into play when creating an argument. This is a text that you might want to consider using in full in upper-division, advanced composition classes that focus on argument. In the first year classes, I’ve used individual chapters of this book; these chapters (especially chapter eight) have provided more than enough material for studying and practicing the structure of Toulmin argument.

The Parts of the Book

Part One: Introducing Argument

The text is separated into five major sections:

- Part 1: Introducing Argument
- Part 2: Lines of Argument

- Part 3: Writing Arguments
- Part 4: Stylish Argument
- Part 5: Conventions of Argument

As promised, part one introduces argument. The first chapter, “Everything Is an Argument,” establishes that argument isn’t just about winning, but there are in fact several different reasons to engage in argument—to inform, convince, explore, make decisions, and to meditate or pray. The authors spend some pages talking about the occasions for argument before moving on to describe, in brief, some of the kinds of argument that they will discuss at length in this book: Arguments of Fact; Arguments of Definition; Arguments of Evaluation; and Proposal Arguments. Structuring the text so that the earlier chapters anticipate the later chapters helps the reader understand the concepts better by providing multiple exposures. They also help to create the sense the book is all of a piece, and that the authors are cycling through the major concepts of the book rather than bulldozing a path through the history of rhetoric.

In chapter 2, “Reading and Writing Arguments,” the authors describe the lines of argument: Finding Arguments from the Heart; Finding Arguments Based on Values; Finding Arguments Based on Character; and Finding Arguments Based on Facts and Reason. The descriptions are clear and compelling. Again, the readers return to these lines of argument throughout the text, helping them to see that the concepts in the book are interwoven.

Part Two: Lines of Argument

The lines of argument introduced in chapter 2 are developed into whole chapters in the second section of the book; the chapter headings are the same as the section headings in the second chapter of the book. In these chapters, the authors describe various ways of drawing on a particular line of argument as well as different rhetorical situations that might call on the writer to use these lines of argument. The chapter headings—Arguments from the Heart (4), Arguments Based on Values (5), Arguments Based on Character (6), and Arguments Based on Facts and Reason (7)—delineate various reasons why a writer might want to argue along the lines of *pathos* (Heart and Values), *ethos* (Character), and *logos* (Facts and Reason).

In chapter 4, Arguments from the Heart, the authors usefully distinguish between an Argument—a means to discover a truth—and Persuasion, which asks people to take an action (69). They comment that “readers may agree that contributing to charity is a noble act, but that conviction may not be enough to persuade them to part with their spare change. You need a spur sharper than logic, and that’s when emotion might kick in. You can embarrass readers into contributing to a good cause” (69). Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz proceed to provide students with various examples of why using appeals from the heart might be a good choice, including building bridges with an audience and enhancing a logical argument. Chapter 5, Arguments Based on Values, argues that appeals to values are also a kind of pathos. In chapter 2, they write that arguments “that appeal to core values resemble emotional appeals, but they work chiefly within specific groups of people” (34). A writer might use an appeal to values to define an abstract concept such as “what is an American.” This appeal is also useful when you need to convince your

audience that a radical action such as civil disobedience is the direct result of Americans' value of independence.

Chapter 6, Arguments Based on Character, describes several situations in which students might want to use ethical appeals. Maintaining their rhetorical stance, Lunsford and Ruskiewicz describe how the writer must establish credibility with their audience. Telling the reader out right what qualifications you have is the most direct approach, and one that's likely to be necessary if your argument addresses a controversial subject. Writers also establish credibility by, for example, indicating the degrees they hold in the field or even by writing confident prose. In chapter 7, Arguments Based on Facts and Reason, the writers tell us that Aristotle "divided logical proofs into two kinds: those based on what we'd call *hard evidence*) what Aristotle called *inartistic appeals*—facts, clues, statistics, testimonies, witnesses) and those based upon *reason and common sense* (what Aristotle called *artistic appeals*)" (101). This chapter is well placed at the end of this section of the text, since appeals to facts are likely to be a writer's strongest tool. Throughout this chapter, Lunsford and Ruskiewicz incorporate a discussion of how to structure arguments, including an example of a syllogism and an enthymeme. The structure of this chapter helps the student transition into the next part of the book, Writing Arguments.

Part Three: Writing Arguments

This is the section with which I am most familiar, especially chapter eight, "Structuring Arguments." Early in this chapter, the authors tell us that they "won't pretend that learning how to make (or analyze) an argument is easy. Nor will we offer you any foolproof guidelines for being persuasive because arguments are as complicated

and different as the people who make them” (123). This is an important level of honesty in a textbook; it helps set the tone for an investigation of how arguments work rhetorically by emphasizing the basic ambiguity of rhetoric. So as not to scare people, off, however, Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz employ their usual move of assuring us that while complicated, none of this is unfamiliar: “As you’ll see shortly, you understand, almost intuitively, most of the basic moves in effect in logical arguments” (124).

The authors want to give us a vocabulary with which to discuss aspects of argument, and for this they turn to Stephen Toulmin’s *The Uses of Argument*. They present and define Toulmin’s vocabulary: claims, reasons, warrants, grounds and backing. In my classes, the discussion of claims and reasons, and how these combine to make an enthymeme, are usually very productive and help focus the class for the semester. Students redescribe the enthymeme as the thesis or the main claim or the big idea, but we all agree on the definition of the terms that are provided in the book. Claims, the book tells us, “are statements or assertions you hope to prove” and they “tend to be controversial” (124, 125). Attach to the claim a reason, or data, that supports it, and you find yourself with an enthymeme. One technique I practice with students is to get them to write an enthymeme after they begin their research but before they begin their paper. The enthymemes are workshopped in the class, in a large group discussion. Writing and refining an enthymeme, even when it’s likely to change, has been an enormous help to students who are trying to focus their essays.

The rest of the chapter has been less obviously successful in my classes. The discussion of warrants, for example, leaves many students exasperated. Because we’re reading a textbook, they’re looking for a formula, something that can be reproduced by

following a few simple steps. Those who do understand warrants, and that it is at the level of the warrant that your argument is made, find this conceptual work very powerful. The same holds true with discussions of backing and grounds. Fortunately, the writers are candid in their discussion of the difficulty of both constructing an argument following Toulmin and analyzing someone else's argument following that same method: "Do real arguments work the way Toulmin predicts? Such an exercise can be both revealing and a bit embarrassing. Knowledgeable readers often won't agree even on what the core claim in a piece is, let alone its warrants, stated or implied. Yet such an analysis can be rewarding because it can't help but raise basic questions about purpose, structure, quality of evidence, and rhetorical strategy" (139). Taken in this spirit, the chapter can be an extremely useful guide to both constructing arguments and for generating discussions about how language works.

The remainder of the chapters in this section follow the same pattern. Generally, the chapter emphasizes the number of ways the student already uses the kind of argument under discussion. Then, during the discussion, the chapter returns us both to Toulmin analysis and to the lines of argument presented in part two. There are some problems in this arrangement, which I discuss later. The chapter on humorous arguments departs from the model that tells students that this is a form of argument that they produce regularly. The authors loosely define parody and satire, providing examples and exercises. For example, they write that the "key to writing effective satire may be finding a humorous or novel angle on a subject and then following through" (269). However, they wisely suggest that students not get their hopes up too high when they write comedy, writing that "laughter arises from high-spirited, not labored, insights" (272). At the end of each

chapter, there are one or two very good, short examples of the kind of argument under discussion.

Part Four: Stylish Arguments; Part Five: Conventions of Argument

These parts of the book work well as reference sections. Chapter fourteen, *Figurative Language and Argument*, for example, describes and provides examples of tropes such as metaphor, simile, and others, as well as schemes, including parallelism, antithesis, and analogy. Chapter fifteen, *Visual Arguments*, breaks visual arguments down into the same categories presented in chapters four, five, and six: character, facts and reason, and emotion. This provides a useful taxonomy for ways to think about how to use visual images, and even what medium to use. Chapter sixteen, *Arguments in Electronic Environments*, speculates about how Internet communication, especially blogs, is changing rhetoric. The last chapter in part four, *Spoken Arguments*, provides a guide to the differences between written and spoken arguments. Part five, *Conventions of Argument*, concerns itself with questions of evidence, fallacies, intellectual property, and assessing and documenting sources.

Online Supplement at BedfordStMartins.com

For those of us moving toward a more digital composition classroom, the online component is very useful. The site is well organized and easy to use, and it includes Internet specific material. There is an area of student resources that includes links for more examples of classical arguments and other useful information. The site also contains six additional chapters that are not included in the textbook. Chapter 23, *Mirror, Mirror . . . Image and the Media*, contains links to specific areas of the subscription site Adbusters.org and Salon.com. These chapters could have been printed and included in

the textbook, but that would have diminished students' opportunities for looking at material in a variety of media, and it would also have limited the publishers' and authors' ability to update the material. The site also contains links to other Bedford St. Martin's publications such as *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing*. For those of use interested in asking students to create webpages, the site contains a link to "Mike Markel's Web Design Tutorial. The tutorial is thorough, clear, and easy to use.

Overall Impressions

The assignments in the text are provocative. They ask students to think in interesting and challenging ways, and they sometimes take the textbook itself as the object of study. The assignments rely heavily on freewriting and groupwork, and in this way the text helps the teacher who is trying to build a community of writers in her classroom. The readings included in the extended edition of the book are well thought out. Like the rest of the book, the readings represent a wide range of political and social positions; no one perspective is privileged.

Students should appreciate the colloquial language; the authors do a good job of not sounding too much like an English textbook. For example, in describing the structure of argument, they write that on television talk shows "argument becomes entertainment. [. . .] Quick as NBA guards, they offer claims, counterclaims, rebuttals, and apologies in about the time it takes viewers to pop open a can of coke" (121). Ultimately, of course, the text asks them to do somewhat difficult and complicated things, so the language only goes so far in bridging the gap between faculty and students. The language, though, helps makes those difficult concepts more accessible.

Along these same lines, Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz are also eager to get students to see that argument isn't an esoteric, academic subject necessary only in obscure intellectual circles. Argument, they claim again and again, is something everyone does every day, all day long. In their chapter on Arguments of Definition, they write that these arguments "don't just appear out of the blue; they evolve out of the occasions and conversations of daily life, both public and private. You might get into an argument over the definition of 'ordinary wear and tear' when you return a rental car with some battered upholstery. [. . .] In a dozen ways every day, you encounter situations that turn out to be issues of definition" (154). Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz's use of colloquial language, coupled with their assertion that students use all kinds of arguments everyday, work together to make the text both accessible and relevant to students.

One feature of the text that students seem to appreciate is its political balance. The authors have gone out of their way to present examples from the political conservatives and liberals, which enables students to read and identify with a range of examples. In chapter two, for example, the author's cite Michael Moore from *Stupid White Men . . . and Other Sorry Excuses for the State of the Nation* (35); Ann H. Coulter, from *Slander: Liberal Lies about the American Right* (38); and Lynne Cheney, from *Telling the Truth* (39). Then, in a wonderful move that combines stereotypical liberal and conservative interests, they quote Andrew Sullivan, the gay former editor of *The New Republic* and current blogger at AndrewSullivan.com. Sullivan, as a conservative, assimilationist gay man, should go some way in keeping both liberals and conservatives simultaneously happy and unsettled. The book maintains a political and social focus, implicitly arguing that language is never neutral, while at the same time preventing students from being able

to easily level the charge that we present only one-sided arguments. The carefully balanced biases also allow students the space to be able to argue from a position that the teacher might disagree with.

A feature of the text that seems not well integrated is “Cultural Contexts for Arguments,” a text box that appears occasionally throughout the book. The text boxes seemed added on, as if the concepts have not been fully incorporated into the ideas of the text. Perhaps one reason for this is that these concepts are printed on a grey background; the header is a black bar that runs across the page, with white print that reads “Cultural Contexts for Argument.” This visual arrangement has the effect of separating the information, and making it seem inaccessible. This is especially true given the rest of the text, which is very strong visually. There’s a lively interplay of white and dark space, the headers are informative, and there are many interesting and provocative pictures of many different types—webpages, photographs, and promotional materials. In this context, the cultural contexts for argument section seem stilted. And, while some of the information contained in these boxes is concrete, much of it is provocative without being helpful. They tell us, for example to be “aware of the assumptions that guide your own customary ways of arguing a point,” but they don’t tell us how to go about doing that (21). These sections leave me feeling vaguely uncomfortable, with no idea about how to pursue the objective. Similarly, the guides to writing, while useful, seem surprisingly heavy-handed. Perhaps because they’re printed on gray paper and much of the information in them is repeated in each chapter, the guides seem more lock step than I expected them to.

An interesting feature of the text is that in spite of thorough description and analysis of particular argument types, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between one

kind of argument and another. For example, one of the sample essays of evaluation is “Why I Hate Britney,” by Nisey Williams. In this essay, Williams evaluates Britney’s public performance, and tells us that this performance of sexuality frightens her because it teaches young girls to sexualize themselves. Yet this could also have been used as an example of causal argument, arguing that Britney causes the hypersexualization of pre-teenage girls. The difference between the evaluative and causal essays seems to be more of emphasis than of type. Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz address this issue by telling us explicitly that the forms will bleed into each other, writing that although they present the types of argument individually, “you’ll cross boundaries between types of arguments all the time when you make a case on your own. Arguments should be consistent, but they need not follow a single pattern” (115).

The text has much to offer, which might cause some confusion. In the descriptions of the argument types, the authors suggest we follow the Toulmin model that they provide in chapter eight. In addition to distinguishing the subtle differences between the arguments, students also struggle to understand the difference between a reason and a warrant, or what constitutes the difference between the reason in the enthymeme and the reasons that count as evidence. These are not unreasonable confusions, and I worry about overwhelming students with too much information in too little time. In a best-case scenario, a teacher would have sufficient time with students to work through the entire text, since in so doing the students’ perception of rhetoric and argument would be broadened. In the situations in which I find myself, though, it seems sufficient to use a few chapters from the book, focusing on the description of structuring arguments in chapter eight. For this chapter alone, the book is worth its cover price.

The spiffy new red cover and the new images on the cover—a Barbie doll, the seal of the President of the United States, a dove, and an in-motion S.U.V.—speak to the author’s successful attempts to keep this text’s cultural references up to date. They also represent some of the themes that flow through the examples in the book, such as the on-going discussion of the Miss America pageant (which includes a picture of the pageant’s very first winner) as well as an on-going debate about S.U.V.s and their impact on our culture. Though the book is a bit larger and heavier with each edition, and the comfortable, I-could-slip-this-in-my-coat-pocket feel of the first book is long gone, it still has the look and feel of a book you’d like to carry around, that wouldn’t be too much of a burden. Its satisfying weight—neither overbearing nor featherweight—suggests that the book has good, solid information, which it does. Without reservation, I recommend this book to anyone teaching advanced high school or college level argument.