CHAPTER 13

Writing Argumentative Essays

We have all been there: The Fight. The heart-pounding, teeth-clenching, name-calling, blood-boiling battle of words, from our first "*You* are!" "No, *you* are!" and "Did *not*," "Did *too*!" to the more memorable and emotionally charged moments of our lives—

> "Give me one reason why I should let you go to the ball game."
>
> "Is that my sweater you're wearing?"
>
> "It's my house, and while you're living in it . . ."
>
> "You spend too much time with your friends and not enough with me."
>
> "Can't you see why we're meant to be together?"

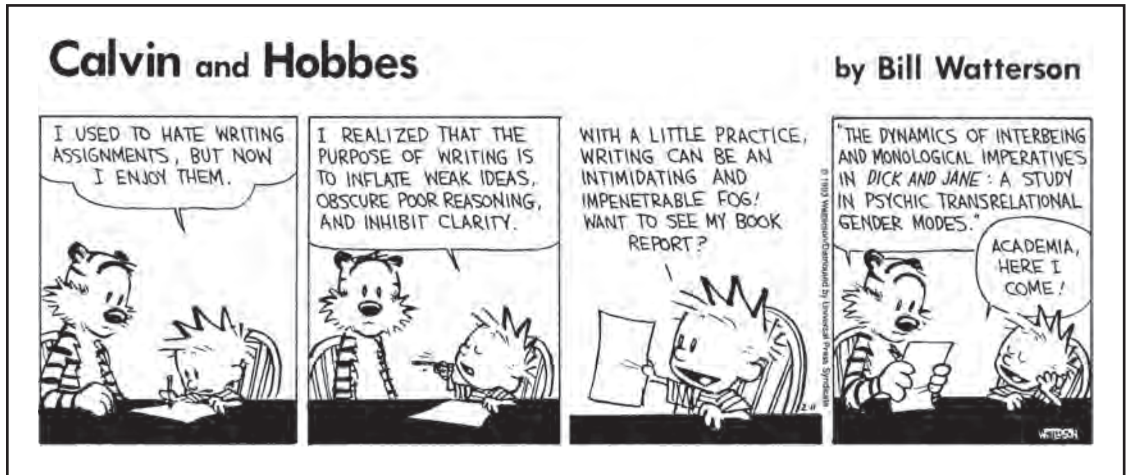
In all disputes, so much as there is of passion, so much is there nothing to the purpose.
—Sir Thomas Browne

—and a thousand other familiar lines that have been the catalyst for our most heated arguments with one another.

Of course, at this point in your reading of this text, you should be saying, "Wait a minute! An argument is not a quarrel or a fight; it's a ________," and you should fill in the blank without batting an eye. If we are honest, though, we all have to admit that even when we know we're supposed to coolly, rationally present evidence to support our claims, we often resort to the kinds of argument most familiar to us: the no-holds-barred matches that take place between us and our families and friends or the nasty tirades often found in blogs or the comment sections of websites.

When you disagree, do so reasonably, and not disputatiously or contentiously.
—Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren

The first rule of argument should be to consider logical discourse less as a battle for supremacy and more as an attempt to work as a community that *communicates* in an effort to arrive at the truth or at least, when it comes to practical matters and decision making, to arrive at compromises that make life easier and more enjoyable. As we have mentioned several times throughout this book, thinking critically often depends on applying the *principle of charity,* which means that unless there is evidence to the contrary, you should assume that your opponents are rational people and that their arguments are sound and cogent. In other words, thinking critically does not mean intellectually beating people up



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or using your thinking skills to take advantage of others. Arguing, as opposed to fighting, means that you respect your opponents, accurately and fairly represent their points of view, and support your conclusions with true premises and sound reasoning. Writers who construct arguments merely to "win," who go for the jugular or manufacture evidence or appeal unfairly to the emotions of their readers, do little to advance knowledge or understanding.

You should always strive to present a solid argument; if you convert others to your way of thinking, great. But if you have presented a powerful and sensible case, you have done your job, even if someone says, "I don't agree with your position, and I'm still voting Democrat" (or voting Republican, or supporting capital punishment, or getting married, or quitting my job, or whatever). Think of it this way: When you write an argument, make it your goal to be heard and listened to, to have your ideas considered and measured, to be regarded as an intelligent, rational, and sensitive person. If you win the argument in the process, congratulations; but the true measure of your success lies in what you have said or written and how you have said or written it, not in who agrees with you.

Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything.
—John Locke

Exercise 13.1

We have been maintaining that your objective in writing an argument should be to present a rational, well-evidenced, solid defense of your claim. Blatant emotional appeals are, we claim, inappropriate in a good argument. What do you think? Is it always the case that you should choose a well-reasoned approach over an emotional approach? Can you think of any occasions (real or imagined) when it would be appropriate to appeal to emotions to win your point?

Writing a Successful Argument

Writing takes place in three very broad stages:

- what you do before you begin writing
- what you do when writing the first draft
- what you do after you've completed your draft

This chapter shows you how to prepare and write an argument, but you should keep one important point in mind as you read: Although the advice and information is arranged in a step-by-step fashion, writing an argumentative essay is *not* a linear process. You can't write a paper the way you follow a recipe, carefully adding one ingredient after the other until the dish is prepared. Writing a paper is more like decorating a room. You start with a vision of what you want the room to look like, but halfway through the process you might change your mind and move the desk to another location or tack your favorite poster to a different wall. You try to move the bookcase, but it won't fit in the new spot, so you return it to its original spot. Or you throw it out and buy one that does fit. Maybe you give up, buy all new furniture and decorations, and start again. Like decorating a room, writing a paper means thinking and rethinking, backing up, adding and subtracting, rearranging ideas, throwing out what doesn't fit, and bringing in new ideas to achieve the look you want. In the process of writing, you may discover an idea that changes the entire focus and point of your paper. You may throw everything out and start again.

The following outline will help you keep track of the steps in the process of writing an argument.

Before You Write

Know yourself

Know your audience

Choose and narrow your topic

Write a sentence that expresses your claim

Gather ideas: brainstorm and research

Organize your ideas

Writing the First Draft

Provide an interesting opening

Include a thesis statement

Develop your body paragraphs

Provide a satisfying conclusion

After the First Draft

Read what you have written and revise
Consider what you have not written and revise
Show your work
Edit your work
Hand it in

Before You Write

You should spend a great deal of time just preparing to write your first draft; in fact, the more time you spend preparing to write, the less difficulty you will have with the actual writing. Taking the time to think before you write will help prevent the panic that comes from plunging into a paper without any clear idea of how cold or deep the water is and then thrashing about without any idea of where you are going or how to get out. Before you write, take some time to think about how well you know your topic and who will be reading your argument. Decide what claim you would like to defend, and gather and organize your ideas for defending that claim.

Know Yourself

To write a good argument, you first must *want* to write a good argument and you must be willing to inventory your critical thinking dispositions: Are you prepared to be precise and accurate, to offer only premises you believe to be true, to fairly represent opposing points of view, to credit your sources, and so forth? If you want only to win the fight, you can resort to sucker punches and taunting; but to present a good argument, you must be willing to work hard at constructing a fair and honest case.

Make it thy business to know thyself, which is the most difficult lesson in the world.
—Cervantes

A healthy approach to writing arguments for a college class means asking yourself the following question: Why are you writing an argument? Of course, you are writing an argument because your professor requires you to. That's true, but you will be in college for only a small fraction of your life. In the "real world," you may be called on to voice a claim and defend it on many occasions—at work, at the PTA meeting, as a member of the school board, in letters to editors or clients or constituents. Learning to argue well in writing allows you to use your talents for good purposes, to defend someone or some group that you feel is being maligned, to oppose what you believe to be an unethical or immoral act, to bring an end to a dangerous situation, or to prevent a disaster. It may sound trite or flattering, but you do have something to say, and you should be willing to take the time to say it well.

Turn your eyes inward, look into your own depths, learn first to know yourself!
—Sigmund Freud

How well do you know the issue you are going to address? If you want to write about a topic you don't know very well, take the time to learn as much as you can about it. If you feel strongly about an issue, you should be willing

> *Doubt and ignorance are sanctified when based on a firm resolve to believe nothing but truth.*
>
> —William Irvine

to defend it intelligently and rationally. That doesn't mean, of course, that you must know all there is to know about an issue before you begin to formulate your opinion and take your stand or that you must present your case in an absolute or exhaustive manner. Few of us can maintain that we know all there is to know about *any* issue, or that we are absolutely, certifiably correct about our point of view, or that new evidence won't be discovered to prove us wrong, or that the opposing side is wholly without merit. It is no crime, when warranted, to use words such as "could be" and "possibly," to modify generalizations with "many" and "some," or to temper advice by saying, "I suggest" or "I recommend." We don't have to be overly humble, but we should be willing to grant our opponent his or her good points and to defend our own gracefully and considerately.

Know Your Audience

Some writers present arguments as if the reader were either an archenemy or a devoted fan. Neither is usually the case, but let's suppose for a moment that one or the other is true. Take the first hypothetical reader, our enemy. If our purpose is to be understood and to present a well-reasoned argument in support of our claim, does it make sense to antagonize the person we hope will judge us fairly? And if we actually do hope to "win" the argument, forget it! Jabbing at someone, taunting him, or hurling insults will almost always result in retaliation.

The second hypothetical reader—our loving champion—may agree with everything we say and, at the end of our presentation, tell us that we have presented a beautiful argument, full of truth and well structured, but there is very little to be gained from being evaluated by someone who is predisposed to compliment us. And what purpose is served, what progress is made, if our arguments are aimed at those who are ready to agree with everything we say? Certainly, we can find examples all around us of "arguments" presented to these two audiences. Listen, for instance, to any number of talk-show hosts on the radio, most of whom speak to an audience that is divided among the true believers and those who despise the host but listen, almost masochistically, because they "can't believe what I'm hearing." Radio hosts know that their audiences are divided this way; few people listen to popular talk radio for a keen analysis of complicated issues. For the sake of the show's sponsors, a radio host must keep the listeners tuned in, so he or she targets two audiences—the committed fans and those who vehemently disagree.

Perhaps we shouldn't fault the talk-show hosts for targeting their audience; that's what they are supposed to do. In fact, the first rule of all communication is to know who your audience is and adjust your style (though not necessarily your point) accordingly. If you were to write a letter to your grandmother, telling her about your romantic weekend, you would most likely use language and a tone different from what you would use in an e-mail to your best friend. If you were asked to prepare a speech on the

difficulties of being a first-year college student, how would that speech be different if you were speaking to seniors in high school, business leaders from the community, elementary students, parents with children in college, and so forth? When preparing an argument, you should try whenever possible to know who your audience is: Are you writing for the citizens of your community, students of your age and background, professionals in the field, political figures, administrators in the school? Knowing who will be reading your argument will help you decide what tone to use, how sophisticated your word choices can be, how much background you must provide, and how much detail you need to go into. In the business world, even your position in a company or firm can dictate how you write your argument or proposal. Are your readers highly skeptical, or are they open to even the riskiest proposals? Do they hate to spend a dime on new ideas, or do they enjoy taking a gamble on costly innovations? Are you in a position of some authority so that your readers must implement your suggestions, or do you have to work hard at proving your case?

Anticipate Your Readers' Reactions On the basis of what you know about your topic and your audience, try to determine how your audience might react to your claim and its defense. Perhaps your topic is appealing and your audience will receive your argument graciously. Say, for example, that you are writing to your classmates urging them to oppose 7:00 A.M. classes. Some of your classmates—those who start work at 8:00 A.M.—might actually want early-morning classes, but it's a safe bet that most of your audience will agree with your claim. If you were to present the same claim to the administration, on the other hand, you could probably assume that their reaction would differ from that of your classmates and that they would offer all sorts of reasons why 7:00 A.M. classes are a good idea. The administration would not necessarily act with hostility toward you or your ideas, but they probably would not embrace your idea without a very solid defense. You might find a more neutral audience in a group of people unaffiliated with the college. We often face neutral audiences when we address topics that our readers or listeners have little knowledge about or issues about which they are undecided. You might find a largely neutral audience if, for example, you argued that life existed on other planets or that Pete Rose should be allowed into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

When you consider how your audience will react to your claim, you almost automatically begin thinking about their reasons for reacting that way. You begin considering their points of view, their claims, their counterarguments. Predicting what an audience might say in response to your claim will help you to create a stronger argument. You should argue courageously and never change your point of view to placate your audience; on the contrary, you will be better able to defend your claim if you are prepared for the reactions you will encounter. Anticipating some of the administration's primary reasons for beginning the class day at 7:00 A.M. will help you head off some of those reasons when you present your case.

To predict your readers' reactions, try the following.

- **Consider how you would feel as a reader.** For example, people . . .
- **Assume that your readers are slightly skeptical, but open-minded and fair.** Believing . . .
- **Assume that your readers are intelligent, rational, and humane.** You don't necessarily have to prove . . .

For example, people generally don't like to be told that they are wrong about something; so, instead of telling your readers that they are wrong, try to discover what values you and they have in common and show that your approach is based on those values, not detrimental to them. If you want to correct what you believe to be dangerous behavior, point out to your readers what you see to be the terrible consequences of continuing to act as they are. If you hope to change their thinking on moral or ethical grounds, don't insult them or write in a haughty or superior tone. Showing an audience that you share their concerns, that you respect them, and that you believe there is merit in both your view and theirs can go a long way toward getting your viewpoint heard.

Assume that your readers are slightly skeptical, but open minded and fair. Believing that they are impartial and objective will prevent you from overstating your case. Assume that your readers are intelligent, rational, and humane. You don't necessarily have to prove that accepting your claim will benefit each reader individually, but you should try to show, when the topic warrants it, that your argument takes into consideration the lives of people other than yourself. Surely, you wouldn't argue that speed limits should be raised because you enjoy driving fast. How would you argue that claim to a slightly skeptical, open-minded, intelligent, rational, humane person? Always assume the best about your audience, but keep in mind that even if a close-minded, prejudicial audience refuses to listen to you, if you have defended your claim with solid evidence and clear reasoning, you have done your job.

Exercise 13.2

Look at the following letter, written to the editor of a newspaper. The paper had recently reported that Pennsylvania teachers were among the best paid in the country. Summarize the key points of the argument in a few sentences. Look for fallacies and examples of vague or slanted language. Then consider the overall effect of the argument. Determine as specifically as you can the writer's purpose. Does he seem to be writing to an audience inclined to agree with him, or is he trying to convince neutral readers and members of the opposition that he is correct in his thinking? How do you think the newspaper's readers would respond to this letter? How would a student of critical thinking evaluate this letter?

Editor:

Once again, the taxpayers of the Wyoming Area School District are being ordered to "open wide" and not for the purpose of checking for cavities.

The dentist in this case is the Wyoming Area School Board and the order to open wide is directed to our wallets. With the passage of the 1998 budget, Wyoming Area has the dubious honor of joining the 200 and Above Club. The new budget includes a 15-mill tax hike, putting Wyoming Area's millage at 200.

When property owners are writing the check to pay that bill, they should remember that the largest part of that check, by far, is going into the pockets of members of the Wyoming Area "Education" Association. The current average cost per teacher to the taxpayers of Wyoming Area is $53 per hour.

To make matters worse, our school board is currently negotiating with the teachers union for a new contract. Unless we act now and let our board members know we will no longer accept big give-away contracts for the sake of peace, we will continue to pay for our silence and complacency with more big tax hikes in the future.

A mere 2 percent pay raise for one year for the $53-per-hour people will cost the taxpayers of Wyoming Area an additional $125,000, or 3.5 mills.

The teachers union is able to extort this money from the taxpayers of Pennsylvania; through their forced union dues, they are able to pour huge sums of money into the campaigns of their lap-dog political candidates. Under the guise of "doing it for the children," these teacher-union lackeys pass laws which make it very easy for the teachers union to get what it wants.

With the upcoming elections in November, taxpayers should know two things:

According to figures I have seen, approximately 40 percent of the delegates at the last Democratic National Convention were members of the teachers union. They apparently have plenty of time on their hands to corrupt our nation's political system.

Secondly, about 90 percent of all teacher union PAC money goes to Democratic candidates. They apparently have plenty of extra money with which they can corrupt our nation's political system. With figures like this, can there be any doubt about who controls the Democratic Party?

In my opinion, the teachers union is the taxpayers' greatest enemy, and a vote for a Democrat, generally speaking, is a vote for the enemy. Had it not been for a Republican governor and a Republican-controlled state House and Senate, we would never have had tenure reform, sabbatical leave reform, charter school legislation, or this meager but promising attempt at tax reform in Pennsylvania.

On the national level, the Democrats and President Clinton have stopped every single attempt made by Republicans to improve education in our country. As the cost of public education continues to sky-rocket with no corresponding improvement in results, the teachers union monopoly must not go on unchallenged.

As bad as things seem, they would be worse without the existence of taxpayer groups. Taxpayer groups are organized all around the state and every taxpayer who cares about fiscal responsibility in government functions should join and support their local group. We do make a difference.

George R. Race
President
Wyoming Area Taxpayers Association
Wyoming, Pennsylvania

Choose and Narrow Your Topic

If your professor has not assigned a topic to be investigated but has, instead, given you freedom to choose, decide on a topic that is both controversial and interesting to you. It does not have to be one you are familiar with; in fact, you might want to select one that you have always been curious about or one that you have always wanted to learn more about so that you can argue your case more convincingly. Also, pick a topic that you can manage to cover completely in the space allowed for your paper. Often the first question students ask is how long the essay should be. It's a fair question. If you are to write a 500- or 750-word essay, you are going to choose a different topic from the one you would select for a 10,000-word essay.

Say the required length is 750 words, or three double-spaced pages, and say you are interested in the topic of work or labor. You could easily list a dozen topics that fall under the broad heading of work: working parents, minimum wage, unemployment, welfare, and so on. To help prepare yourself for an argument in which you must make a claim, list your potential topics in the form of questions:

- Are families harmed when both parents work?
- Do company perks such as on-site gyms and day care hurt employees more than help them?
- Should the minimum wage be increased?
- Should welfare recipients be required to work?
- Should employers be required to give advance notice to employees who are about to be laid off?
- How necessary (useful, outdated, relevant) are labor unions?
- Should child labor laws be relaxed?
- Should your college bookstore sell clothes made in sweatshops?
- Does the U.S. government interfere too much in overseeing workplace safety?
- How serious a problem is sexual harassment in the workplace?
- How far can companies go in "invading the privacy" of workers?
- Should the U.S. institute a four-day workweek?
- Should a law be passed mandating equal pay to both sexes for comparable work?
- Should companies offer benefits to same-sex partners?

Your list of controversial topics could go on for pages if you knew enough about the subject of work. Certainly, because you couldn't write about all these topics in a short argument, you would have to limit yourself to one. But you could also continue to narrow your focus by limiting one of the subtopics listed above. Take the invasion-of-privacy issue, which is narrower

than the issue of work, but which could be further narrowed to something more manageable:

- How far can employers go in using surveillance cameras in the workplace?
- Does an employer have the right to know what an employee does in his or her off-hours?
- How far can an employer go in conducting background checks on a potential employee?
- What questions should and should not be asked in a job interview?
- If an employee receives e-mail from outside the company, does the employer have a right to read it?
- Should an employer have unlimited access to an employee's desk, computer, and file cabinets?
- Should any employer be allowed to randomly test for drugs?
- Does an employer have the right to know an employee's sexual orientation?

Any one of these topics could serve for a short essay, but you could actually narrow the topic even further. The first three topics in the list above, for example, might become

- Should airlines install surveillance cameras in the cockpits of commercial airliners?
- Can an employer with a no-smoking policy fire employees who smoke after business hours and off company property?
- In deciding whether to hire a prospective employee, should an employer consider the applicant's profile on an online social network such as MySpace or Facebook?

You may initially feel that if you narrow the topic down you won't have enough to say, but it is better to work at developing a focused topic than to leave a large issue undeveloped. And as you improve your writing and arguing skills, you will usually find that you have too much to say even about the most slender of topics.

> *Out of clutter, find simplicity.*
> —Albert Einstein

Finally, keep in mind that the best arguments are often those that pre-sent an unusual point of view or a claim few people have considered. When deciding what to write about, don't hesitate to take a risk and choose a topic that is controversial or uncommon. Several of the topics in our first list—"Do company perks such as on-site gyms and day care hurt employees more than help them?" "Should child labor laws be relaxed?"—may strike you as unusual or absurd, but on second thought or after researching the topic, you might see some reason to answer yes to both.

Exercise 13.3

I. Choose one of the broad topics below and narrow the topic to one that could be addressed in a three-page (750-word) argument. Start by listing as

many controversial issues as you can; then narrow even further until you have a workable topic.

the environment	birth control	television
AIDS	domestic violence	professional athletics
alcoholism	free trade	NCAA
gambling	Cuba	genetic testing
HMOs	smoking	9/11 prisons
child abuse	cloning	hip hop

II. The following list of questions provides topics that can be used to practice the skills we discuss in this chapter. In groups of three or individually, choose a question from the list and use it to arrive at a narrow topic that you could address in a three- to four-page argument. As you proceed through the chapter, apply what you are learning to the topic you have selected.

1. Should the government be responsible for the unemployed?
2. Are minorities discriminated against in the media?
3. Should physician-assisted suicide be permitted?
4. Should the United States provide foreign aid to developing nations?
5. Is community service an appropriate punishment for criminals?
6. Isn't police brutality sometimes the only proper response to some situations?
7. Are beauty pageants harmful to those who participate in them?
8. Is feminism an outdated ideology?
9. Have historians been guilty recently of revising history?
10. Have environmentalists gone too far in their efforts to stop global warming?
11. Is there a date-rape crisis in society? On your campus?
12. Has racism diminished at all over the past fifty years in America?
13. Is the mainstream media liberal?
14. Do we need a return to family values?
15. Which does more damage, street crime or white-collar crime?
16. Should pornography be outlawed?
17. Can a businessperson be both successful and ethical?
18. Should Congress continue to propose an amendment outlawing desecration of the American flag?
19. Should taxpayers receive vouchers to send their children to private schools?
20. Do you think marine mammals should be held in tanks and used in shows?

Write a Sentence That Expresses Your Claim

Once you have decided what you want to write about, formulate a single sentence that presents the central claim of your argument and write it on a blank sheet of paper: "I think . . .," "People should . . .," "We must . . .," "It's time for . . .," "It is true that . . .," and so forth. State your claim as forthrightly

as you can and be sure that your claim is debatable, something with which someone could disagree. You might write, for instance, "An employer has no right to read an employee's private e-mail messages," or "Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin of JFK," or "The college should eliminate the football program." At this point you are only focusing your argument, so don't worry about how clumsy or awkward your claim sounds. You can always revise it as your paper gets going.

Gather Ideas: Brainstorm and Research

Writers generally get their ideas from two sources: their own heads and the heads of other people, usually other writers. As with the larger process of writing, the gathering of ideas does not proceed strictly step-by-step. Some writers do a great deal of reading and research before formulating ideas and approaches for a paper; others record their own thoughts first and then look for additional ideas and support; still others combine the two approaches in a variety of ways. The approach you take will depend on your own habits, your familiarity with the topic, and your need for facts and expert opinion to back you up.

Brainstorming is a method for generating ideas for a paper. Like any other kind of storm, brainstorming is spontaneous and wild, but many writers make the mistake of trying to channel their creative thinking into grammatical sentences and coherent paragraphs. When you brainstorm, allow your ideas to flow freely. Write down whatever occurs to you, and don't censor any ideas as irrelevant or uninteresting. Don't worry about being incorrect or even sounding foolish. No one will judge your argument on your brainstorming. It is like a dialogue with yourself. You can always cut ideas after you have listed them.

You can brainstorm in several ways. Some writers like to freewrite, which entails writing for a measure of time, usually fifteen minutes, without stopping. Other writers favor the technique "mapping," in which the writer freely associates ideas, writes them down, and connects them in a weblike fashion. The method we recommend here is slightly more structured than traditional methods of brainstorming, but it will better help you generate ideas for supporting an argument.

List Supporting Premises First, when brainstorming for an argument, list as many reasons as you can to support your claim. For the claim that an employer should not read private e-mail, you might list the following premises:

> E-mail is like regular mail, and it's illegal to open someone else's regular mail, so it should be illegal to open someone's e-mail.
>
> Even if it weren't illegal to read e-mail, it's unfair to the recipient of the e-mail, who might be discussing personal matters, such as medical or family problems.
>
> If people know that their private correspondence might be read by someone else, they might be reluctant to speak freely, which would limit their ideas and perhaps encourage them to be dishonest.

> If an employee knows that his e-mail might be read by the boss, he could take advantage of the situation by telling his friends to send him e-mail about how great the boss is.

Some of these premises might not sound too convincing, and after consideration you might eliminate one or two. That last premise, for example, sounds especially weak and may be impossible to defend.

If you find that you can't think of more than one or two premises, you may want to change your topic. But the inability to come up with premises is not always a sign that you should abandon your topic. If you believe in your claim but cannot think of support for it, you might have to seek help through research. In fact, reading more about your topic and examining the arguments made by other writers can bring on a storm of ideas that otherwise would not have arisen.

> *A doctrine is not judged at all until it is judged in its best form.*
> —John Stuart Mill

List Opposing Premises Second, write down as many premises as you can think of to *oppose* your claim. What would someone who disagreed with you say?

> Employers have paid for the computer, the lines, and the service provider and therefore have a right to see how e-mail is being used.
>
> Employees waste time writing and reading personal e-mail.
>
> E-mail coming into the company or going out might contain sensitive material that the company needs to keep under wraps.

Like your own premises, some of these might be eliminated, and you might have to research your topic to determine if you have overlooked any opposing arguments. Sometimes it helps to get another mind involved at this point. Ask a friend, a family member, or a professor to play devil's advocate and tell you how someone might disagree with you.

Think Critically about Your Claim

- Are you overgeneralizing in any way? Are there any exceptions to your claim? Maybe, for example, some employers (e.g., the Defense Department) must read all incoming e-mail.
- Are you creating false alternatives? Is there some middle ground you have overlooked?
- Are there solutions you have ignored? Has someone else already solved the problem or proposed a viable solution?
- Do you need to modify your claim to allow room for uncertainty?

Think on Paper Now write down what you know or think you know about your topic. In this part of brainstorming, you are simply trying to create and gather ideas from your own mind; in other words, you are thinking on paper. Some of the ideas you come up with will serve as additional premises

to support your central claim; others will serve to clarify, illustrate, and defend the central premises. You may find that in thinking on paper, you begin to conceive a structure for your argument, a structure that includes both central premises and subarguments.

If you have trouble coming up with ideas, ask yourself some questions: "Why did I choose this topic?" "Why does it bother me so much?" "What do I want my readers or listeners to do, to believe, to think?" "What are my experiences with this issue?"

Methods of Development A very productive method for generating ideas is to think about the ways we usually develop and detail our communication with one another: We tell stories, describe people and places, compare and contrast events or things, give examples, define our words, and so on. These methods of development can be very useful both in discovering material to flesh out a paper and in prompting new thoughts in support of your claims.

Narration A narration tells a *story in chronological order.* Are there any stories associated with your topic? Do you know of anyone whose experiences would be worth recounting? For example, perhaps you or someone you know has a story about working in a place where private e-mail is filtered or read by managers.

Description A description gives *concrete details to paint a verbal picture* of a person, place, or thing. There may be in your topic something that can be described.

Cause Causes are *reasons* for the occurrence of an event, a decision, an action, and so forth. Look at your topic and ask, "Why did this happen?" "What caused this?" Ask why some companies began the practice of intercepting and opening private e-mail. Do employees, in fact, dislike the practice? If so, what reasons do they give? Be careful not to commit any of the fallacies that can result from arguing for causes where none may exist.

Effect Effects are the *results* of an event, a decision, an action, and so forth. What effects are associated with your topic? Ask yourself, "What will happen if . . .?" and "What has happened?" "What has the outcome been?" Ask what effect intercepting e-mail has had on companies. Has white-collar crime decreased? Have employees worked harder? Have employees revolted? Has production improved? What was the intended effect in the first place? What might happen if the practice continues? Be careful not to commit a slippery-slope fallacy.

Classification and Division When we classify, we take a large group and break it down into smaller, more manageable, groups. All the students in a college can be grouped by class (freshman, sophomore, junior), major, living status, and so forth. When we divide, we take one thing (a car) and break it down into its various parts, such as systems (electrical, fuel, cooling) or individual items

(seats, battery, rear bumper). Look at your topic to see if classification and division lead to any ideas. Perhaps you are grouping all private e-mail together, when, in fact, you could classify it by sender or where it comes from. Perhaps you could divide, messages into header and text, leading to a compromise in your argument: Managers could see from whom e-mail was coming but could not read the message. (*Remember:* You're just thinking on paper here; some of this—all of it, even—could end up on the cutting-room floor, as they say in the movie industry.)

Contrast When we contrast two things, we show them to be *dissimilar* in important ways. Could you develop your topic through contrasts? Perhaps two companies have widely differing approaches to improving employee work habits, and one of those companies does it without opening e-mail.

One thing will grow plain when compared to another.

—Lucretius

Comparison When we compare two things, we discuss the *similarities* between them. Is there anything in your topic that calls for a comparison? Can you defend your claim by comparing the situation under study to something similar? If you were arguing that your workplace should not intercept e-mail, you might be able to point to other companies that have eliminated the practice without harmful consequences.

As you saw in Chapter 11, a comparison used to support a claim is called an *analogy,* a useful but tricky device when used in an argument. In fact, analogies must be used so carefully that it is sometimes wiser to avoid them. Any major weak spots in a comparison, and the analogy—and the argument—falls apart. For example, if you tried to claim that students should always follow their teacher's advice and offered as support the fact that soldiers must always follow their leaders' orders and salespeople must always follow their managers' instructions, some reader is going to point out all the differences between students, soldiers, and salespeople and between teachers, generals, and managers. You can see why some analogies don't work.

Illustration When we illustrate, we provide *examples* to help clarify a point and defend a general comment. If, for example, you said to someone, "My classmates are very bright," you might follow with, "Take Dawn, for example; she's double-majoring in neuroscience and English." To illustrate the claim that "that movie was terribly frightening," you might say, "In this scene. . . ."

Examples can be very helpful as you begin to build support for your conclusion, but keep in mind that examples have to be carefully chosen. They can come from personal experience or history, or they can be created, depending on your purpose and the topic. If you were trying to support the claim that noise in the dorms sometimes continues past the quiet hour, you might cite some examples of particular nights in the past month on which parties, music, fights, and so forth awakened you in the early hours of the morning. If you were trying to support the claim that U.S. presidents have often had extramarital affairs, you could refer to them by name. Both of those claims could be supported by real examples. Be cautious when you use either personal or

historical examples: Your experiences may be unique, and you may be unable to generalize from your historical examples. Be sure that your examples are representative and that you have chosen as many as you need to establish your conclusion. Rarely are only a few examples sufficient. The best arguments from example usually combine examples with other support, such as expert opinion.

A hypothetical example is used to support a claim for which there may be no readily available real-life examples or for which a hypothetical example works just as well or better. Say the argument is over whether we are obligated to help someone who is in danger. If you were to argue that we are not, you might begin your defense with "Well, suppose, for example, . . ." You are about to give a hypothetical example. The word *suppose* shows that the illustration is one you are creating, although it will serve your point: "Well, suppose, for example, that someone is drowning and I can't swim. Am I obligated to jump into the water anyway?" Someone might respond that you are obligated to throw a flotation device or run for help, but your example has helped clarify the issue and your position. As you continue the discussion, you can further clarify both, perhaps reaching a more discerning position on when we are and are not obligated to help one another.

Definition When we define a word, we tell our readers or listeners exactly *what we mean* by a word or a concept. In daily discourse with one another, we often use definitions to, for example, clarify our use of specific words ("He's not very *romantic;* he never brings me flowers") or to persuade ("I wouldn't call her a friend; a 'friend' is someone who never judges you"). While brainstorming for ideas, look at your claim and your premises and ask if there are any words that should be defined for the reader. In the example on e-mail privacy, perhaps *private* could be defined, or even the larger concept of privacy: What exactly is *private* in the context of the workplace?

Look Over Your Brainstorming Look over the results of your brainstorming and ask yourself the following questions:

- Should I refine my claim? Your brainstorming may lead you to re-evaluate your claim. Decide if you need to modify what you intend to prove. For instance, you may want to limit the scope of your argument or qualify your generalizations: "With a few rare exceptions, employers should not have the right to intercept and read the private e-mails received by employees."
- Are there any additional premises in my rough collection of thoughts and ideas? Did my unstructured thinking on paper produce any additional reasons to support my claim? At this point you should be able to revise your original list of premises.
- What do I still need to find out? Of your premises ask, "Is that really true?" "Do I know that for a fact?" "Where did I hear that?" "Who

told me that?" "When did I learn that or hear that?" "What evidence do I have that I'm right?" (I'm not exactly sure, for example, that it's illegal to open someone else's regular mail. I would need to find out.) Ask yourself what more you will need to do or to find out to make your premises acceptable to a reader. At this point, think long and hard about your audience. What questions might a reader have for you? What evidence might a reader challenge? You may have to conduct research at this point to fill in the gaps, supply more support for your argument, and so forth.

- What can I use, and what do I need to exclude? Often, if you are lucky, your brainstorming will lead to more ideas than you can use in your argument. Your brainstorming may have led you off the track, or you may have gotten into areas (causes, for example) that are not immediately relevant to your claim. If you want to argue that plagiarism is a problem on campus that needs to be stopped, the causes of plagiarism may not be relevant to your argument. You, of course, have to decide. Use caution and be selective when deciding what will end up in your argument: more is not always better. It is also a good idea to file away the ideas you don't use; what doesn't make it into this argument could be useful in another.

Exercise 13.4

As a group, write out a claim and brainstorm ideas for an argument on the topic you chose in Exercise 13.3, part II. When brainstorming, one member of the group should act as secretary while all members of the group provide premises, raise opposing premises, ask critical questions, "think on paper," and look over the ideas that have emerged.

Do Some Research If you haven't already done so, you may at this point need to do research to support your claim and your premises. The support you seek will generally fall into two broad categories—facts and opinions. You can draw from a wide variety of reliable sources, including experts in the field, statistical abstracts, textbooks, encyclopedias, journals, and reliable Internet sites. Because Chapter 12 provided extensive advice for conducting research, we will just recap some key points here.

Facts Certainly, facts are very useful for supporting an argument, but determining what is and is not a "fact" can be tricky; what appears to be certain and indisputable may not be true at all or may actually be a matter of opinion. Loosely defined, a *fact* is something that has objective reality; it is not a matter of perception or opinion. Usually, a fact can be known with some measure of

certainty and can be verified with data. Facts include statistical data, reports of observations, and examples of actual occurrences and events.

When using facts to support your argument, keep a few things in mind:

- You may be mistaken about what you believe to be fact. Don't always rely on your memory, on "conventional wisdom," or on what you have always assumed to be true. Spend the extra time to verify your facts.
- For the most part, use facts that have been verified by reliable sources. If you have any doubt about the truth of information, consult more than one source.
- Ask yourself how widely known your facts are. Some facts are generally agreed upon, but some are not. If you are using factual information that your audience is unfamiliar with or that it will have a hard time believing, you should give the source of your information.

The word "fact" is vital to us. Without it we would be virtually speechless if asked to describe the kind of knowledge we prize.
—Parker J. Palmer

Opinions Yes, we are all entitled to our opinions, but that doesn't mean that we are rationally entitled to believe them or that all opinions are true. Unlike facts, opinions can be so subjective that they are sometimes based on nothing more than prejudice or wishful thinking. Or they can be based on a thorough examination of the facts, formed in a sensitive and reasonable mind and backed by years of experience, study, and research. Clearly, you should choose to support your claims in the second way.

In seeking expert opinion to support your argument, look for opinions from experts who prove that they have the knowledge, fair-mindedness, and clear thinking skills necessary to offer informed opinions. Try to rely on disinterested authorities; and if your readers may be unfamiliar with the authors you rely on, be sure to tell who your experts are, providing their respective backgrounds to make your citation more persuasive.

Finally, don't discount the authority of creative writers such as poets and novelists. You may be able to find some appropriate and useful thoughts from great writers who, although they may not have "studied" the topic you are addressing, may nonetheless have written eloquently and powerfully in defense of your claim. You may be able to use the insights of a writer to help support your argument—Henry James on privacy or Joyce Carol Oates on boxing, for example—or your own thinking might be sparked by those insights.

Organize Your Ideas

Of all the difficulties faced by writers, organizing ideas seems to be the one that presents the most trouble. But the "block" that can occur from trying to organize ideas is actually a good sign that the writer is trying to communicate effectively with the reader. If we weren't worried about the reader, we could just blabber on in any way we liked. In setting up your organization, use your intuitive "audience-sense" to your advantage by looking at organization not

so much from your point of view as from your reader's. Given the claim you are making, how would a reader want to see your evidence and defense presented? What would be the most logical or natural way to present the case? What would be the least confusing way to set up the presentation? You should endeavor not to bore your reader, but there is no need to get too creative or to impress the reader, either. Just present a good, solid, well-reasoned argument.

Once again, remember that the process of writing is nonlinear. New ideas may occur to you as you decide how to organize your essay. You may even change your entire approach. Be prepared to keep thinking and creating. There are many ways to organize an argument. We'll focus on several in this section.

Organize by Premises In deciding how to organize your argument, keep in mind that each paragraph in the body of the argument will be related somehow to your central claim. In most cases, the body paragraph will present a topic idea that is a premise for the claim made in the thesis. For example, if you were defending the claim that your hometown council should approve the placement of a traffic light at an intersection that currently has a four-way stop, you might organize your argument in the following manner:

> *Claim:* Council should approve a traffic light for several reasons.
>
> *First body* ¶: An average of six thousand cars pass through the intersection each day. Other equally busy intersections in the city have traffic lights.
>
> *Second body* ¶: There has been a relatively high number of accidents at that intersection. Traffic lights have been shown to reduce the number of accidents at an intersection.
>
> *Third body* ¶: A busy elementary school and a popular restaurant are located at the intersection.

Each paragraph helps support the claim being made. You might decide to divide some ideas into two separate paragraphs. For example, the two ideas given in the second body paragraph—the number of accidents at the intersection and the study showing how lights reduce the number of accidents—could be divided into two paragraphs:

> *Claim:* Council should approve a traffic light for several reasons.
>
> *First body* ¶: An average of six thousand cars pass through the intersection each day. Other equally busy intersections in the city have traffic lights.
>
> *Second body* ¶: There has been a relatively high number of accidents at that intersection. [The paragraph would give the number of accidents, perhaps collected from a study of police reports, and would compare that number with the number of accidents at other intersections in the city. The paragraph could also include a description of representative accidents that have occurred at that intersection.]

Third body ¶: Traffic lights have been shown to reduce the number of accidents at an intersection. [The paragraph would include statistics to show how many accidents occurred at intersections before and after a traffic light was installed. Examples might be provided for a number of representative intersections.]

Fourth body ¶: A busy elementary school and a popular restaurant are located at the intersection.

If you had a long list of facts and expert opinion to present in support of your claim, you could devote a paragraph to each fact and opinion. For example, if you were arguing that someone is guilty of a crime, you could organize in the following manner:

Claim: Colonel Mustard is guilty.

First body ¶: He was in the billiard room when the murder took place.

Second body ¶: His fingerprints are on the murder weapon, the lead pipe.

Third body ¶: He confessed to the police.

Fourth body ¶: All other suspects have been cleared.

Fifth body ¶: Experts from the Parker Brothers Crime Lab have all testified that only he could have committed the murder.

Sixth body ¶: The psychologist Professor Plum claims that Mustard is just crazy enough to do something like this.

Seventh body ¶: Ms. Scarlet saw him do it.

Eighth body ¶: Professor Plum heard him do it.

Well, you get the picture. Each premise could be developed in its own paragraph so that, for example, you would prove in the first body paragraph that Colonel Mustard was in the billiard room when the murder took place. You couldn't just assert it; you would have to prove it.

If you have too many short paragraphs, you may be able to combine several of them. For example, paragraphs seven (eyewitness) and eight (ear-witness) could be combined into one with a topic sentence about witnesses to the crime. Paragraphs five and six could be combined as well.

Consider Unstated Premises When organizing by premises, be sure to determine whether your claim is supported by any unstated premises or assumptions that may need to be defended. Suppose, for instance, that you wanted to argue that the sale of radar detectors should be outlawed in all states because radar detectors are designed for no purpose other than to break the law. Your argument would look like this:

Premise: Radar detectors are designed for no purpose other than to break the law.

Claim: The sale of radar detectors should be outlawed.

The missing premise in this argument is that *It is illegal to sell any device designed solely to break the law.* Your organized essay would look like this (rearranged with the claim stated first):

Claim: The sale of radar detectors should be outlawed.

Premise: Radar detectors are designed for no purpose other than to break the law. [Here you would show that radar detectors are intended to alert speeding drivers to the presence of radar, allowing the speeding driver to slow down and avoid a ticket. You would show that radar detectors have no other use, despite some creative advertising claims that radar detectors can be used for lawful purposes.]

Premise: It is illegal to sell a device designed solely to break the law. [Here you would show that nothing can be sold in the United States if the product's sole purpose is to allow citizens to break the law. For example, no one can legally sell a "marijuana pipe." You would be careful in this paragraph to show that you are not suggesting that any device that *can be used* illegally should be outlawed; baseball bats can be used by vandals, but they shouldn't be outlawed. You are showing only that any device created *solely* to facilitate illegal activity is itself illegal and cannot be sold.]

Organize by Methods of Development In the writing of an argument, all the methods of development (as discussed on pages 389–391) can come into play. Say, for example, you made the claim that citizens of the United States hate warfare. You could support your claim through **illustration,** calling on history to provide examples of how Americans have hesitated to go to war or have protested involvement in war. Of course, your generalization would need to be modified as you found examples showing that some Americans have supported the country's involvement in war. If you wanted to look at two possible **causes** for an event, you might organize your argument along the lines of a **contrast** or **comparison** essay, looking at one cause, then the other. You could argue that some decision or action would lead to several **effects.** For example, a group of citizens in a town in New Jersey argued before their city council that anyone using a laser pointer to "target" other people should be penalized. Such an argument would most likely be built on an analysis of the harmful effects of such devices, perhaps combining causal analysis with illustrations of the damage that has been done by people misusing laser pointers.

Finally, if your claim were intended to show that a particular action or event does or does not fit the **definition** of a term, you could provide the definition in the first half of your argument and then discuss the event in the second half:

Claim: Buying a paper from an Internet supplier is plagiarism.

First body ¶: Definition of plagiarism: passing off the work of others as your own.

Second body ¶: How buying a paper fits the definition of plagiarism.

If the definition were complicated, you could devote a paragraph to showing how each component of the definition applies to the event:

Claim: Despite what some people claim, stock car racing is a sport.

First body ¶: A sport is competitive; stock car racing is competitive.

Second body ¶: A sport involves physical activity; stock car racing involves physical activity.

Third body ¶: A sport is governed by rules; stock car racing …

Use the Problem-Solution Pattern If you were proposing to solve a difficult problem, you might choose this pattern, which has three options:

1. State the problem and give the solution:

   Claim: Binge drinking could be reduced if the school provided more nonalcohol weekend events.

   First body ¶: The presence of binge drinking on campus (illustrations, perhaps).

   Second body ¶: How nonalcohol events could reduce binge drinking.

2. State the solution and then look at the problem that motivated you to discover a solution:

   Claim: The campus needs more security guards in the evening.
   First body ¶: Why more security is needed (to escort people to their dorms, to prevent uninvited visitors from getting into campus buildings, to stop drivers who speed through the campus, and so forth; of course, each premise could receive its own paragraph).
   Second body ¶: More security would prevent some of the problems we have seen in the past few months.

3. State the problem and consider alternative solutions before arguing for your own:

   Claim: Computer access on campus must be improved.
   First body ¶: We could give all students laptops (too expensive).
   Second body ¶: We could leave the computer labs open all night (not secure enough).
   Third body ¶: We could wire every room in the residence halls (cheaper, and security is not an issue).

Use the Evaluative Pattern This pattern works best when you are trying to determine the worth of something according to certain established criteria. For example, if a professor were to judge the value of a paper you had written, he or she might start by defining what a good paper is, laying out all the criteria for making a judgment: interesting topic and approach, clear organization, coherent paragraphs, and so forth. Then the professor would show how your

essay does or does not meet those criteria. You will notice that this pattern makes use of definition in that "good essay" is defined before the question of whether your essay fits the definition is asked.

> *Hear the other side.*
> —Saint Augustine

Use Your Opponent's Arguments Before you decide exactly how to organize your argument, consider what your opponent will say. If you have brainstormed ahead of time, you have given some consideration to your opponent's argument, and you may have even prepared some rebuttal comments. On the other hand, you may have realized that your opponent has some points you simply cannot refute. Either way, you should work those opposing arguments into your paper somehow.

There are at least three ways to do so:

1. Start the paper with the opposing viewpoints and then organize your argument around a refutation of each point. This approach works well if you are proposing a claim that your readers might find upsetting. You can soften the ground a bit if you show your readers up front that you are familiar with their objections. You may, in fact, show that you share your audience's concerns and values.
2. Mention the opposition within each of your premise paragraphs. Some might argue that it is not a good idea to interrupt a paragraph with the opposing view, but most readers will not be disturbed by the interruption and might prefer that the opposition be dealt with on individual points rather than at the end.
3. Save the opposition for the end, showing that your opponent will raise some objections to your argument.

In any case, you have to decide how to deal with opposing views when you do raise them. If you have a stronger case, present it. If your opponent has a good point, don't overlook it. Your reader will consider you more intelligent and fair-minded if you acknowledge and even concede your opponent's strongest points or at least show that you and your adversary have something in common, perhaps a similar ethical code or a similar desire to do good.

> *Do not find fault before examining the evidence; think first, and criticize afterwards.*
> —Ecclesiasticus 11:7

Combine Patterns Often, the most effective method for organizing an argument is to combine some of the patterns given above. An argument about the connection between eating disorders and advertisers' portrayal of beauty might be organized in the following manner:

Claim: The advertising industry's exclusive use of slender models has contributed to the increase in eating disorders among young women.

First body ¶: *Illustrations* of advertising's use of slender women; *descriptions* of some ads. (Be careful not to overgeneralize.)

Second body ¶: Facts about the prevalence of eating disorders among young women; *comparison* with previous years; some *definition* of "eating disorder."

Third body ¶: Argument to show that advertisements have some *causal* connection to the presence of eating disorders. (Be careful to avoid a questionable cause argument.)

Fourth body ¶: Opposing argument (there is no causal connection); response to opposing argument.

Fifth body ¶: Possible *effects* if current advertising trends continue. (Be sure to avoid a slippery-slope argument.)

When you have decided how you want to proceed in your argument, draw up an outline to keep you on track. Your outline does not have to be elaborate; a few phrases and sentences should do the trick.

Exercise 13.5

Working individually, examine the brainstorming and research your topic has generated and produce an outline for the first draft of your argument. Your outline should indicate what you intend to do in each of the body paragraphs and what support (facts, examples, comparisons, expert opinion, and so forth) you will include in each paragraph. Do not write out long paragraphs; in other words, don't write a draft—just outline one.

After you have completed your outline, compare it with the outlines of the others from your group. Discuss with one another why you chose the pattern you did. As a group, can you decide that any one pattern is better than the others? You should realize from doing this exercise that arguments can be organized in any number of ways. It is also true, however, that one pattern may occur more naturally given the topic, your purpose, and your audience.

Writing the First Draft

The fact that you are more than three-quarters of the way through this chapter should indicate the importance of the activities that lead to the writing of an argument. If you have narrowed your topic, gathered your support, and organized your ideas, you will find writing the first draft of your argument to be much easier and more rewarding than if you had begun your paper with little idea of what you wanted to say, where you wanted to start, or where you wanted to go.

Now it is time to write the first draft. You do not have to follow the advice chronologically. Depending on your own methods for writing papers, you might, for example, write your body paragraphs before you begin your introduction. But your readers will expect your finished product to look like a standard essay, and most successful essays (and arguments) have the following elements:

- an interesting and relevant opening
- a clear thesis

- a definition of key terms
- well-organized ideas in clear paragraphs
- solidly defended topic ideas within those paragraphs
- a satisfying conclusion

One more word of advice before you start: Writing the draft of an argument can lead you to more ideas than you discovered in your brainstorming, researching, and organizing. In fact, the act of writing can inspire such creativity that you may be surprised at the ideas you are coming up with. Don't slavishly adhere to your outline if you find yourself discovering new and better support or if your writing takes you in new directions. Finally, remember that you are writing a draft; you can—and will!—revise it.

Provide an Interesting Opening

You don't have to begin with your claim, but you can if it is startling, very controversial, or attention-grabbing. Otherwise, start with some background on your topic or show why the issue is an important one. Start with some surprising statistics, an apt quote, a little-known fact, or an interesting story relevant to the topic. A personal account of an event can make a good opening. If you are writing to oppose an argument, you might begin with the point that you intend to oppose or with some mention of the values and ideals you hold in common with the opposing side.

Here are some examples for an argument claiming that boxing should be outlawed.

- STOP THE FIGHT! For good. The start of the twenty-first century is the perfect time to end one of the most brutal, deadliest sports on earth: boxing. [Opening with catchy sentence, followed immediately by the claim]
- In May 1995 a young man named Jimmy Garcia was beaten to death in Las Vegas. Although such a violent act is not uncommon on American streets, this beating took place in front of thousands of people—during a boxing match at Caesar's Palace, the site of another boxing fatality thirteen years earlier, when Korean boxer Duk Koo Kim died in a match with Ray Mancini. Unfortunately, Kim and Garcia are not alone. In the hundred years since boxing has been a sport, nearly five hundred athletes have died as a result of injuries sustained in the ring. [Opening with facts and statistics]
- "Boxing is just show business with blood," claimed Frank Bruno, the famed British boxer and sometime-actor. But, of course, actors don't often get killed on the job. [Opening with quote]
- Boxing is still among the most popular sports in the world. In fact, perhaps the most recognizable athlete in any country is Muhammad Ali, who, although he now suffers from a form of Parkinson's disease that

may have been caused by a career of fighting, still draws huge crowds of fans wherever he goes and who still occasionally appears in television commercials. For many people, Ali might represent what is best about boxing, a sport in which the smarter, more adroit, better-conditioned athlete prevails. Because it is in many ways a beautiful sport to watch—a dance in which the point is to avoid contact as much as to make it—it's hard to convince the sport's greatest fans that boxing should be banned. [Opening with concessions to the opposing argument]

Include a Thesis Statement

If you haven't already done so in the opening sentence or two, give a clear, carefully worded statement of your claim (sometimes called a *thesis statement*) somewhere in the opening paragraph. Not all writers place their thesis statement in the first paragraph, and some only imply their thesis. But it is always a good idea to state the claim early in the essay so that your readers know exactly what your point is and can therefore assess the relevance of your claims as they read your argument.

What form your thesis statement takes is up to you. You can give your statement in its own sentence or include it as part of a larger sentence: "Given the popularity of raves and the fact that few problems have been reported in the press, the citizens of Springfield may not realize just how *dangerous these dances can be.*" In the thesis statement of this long sentence, the writer is telling readers that this is the claim that will be defended.

Be sure to limit your thesis statement to the claim you are trying to defend. Say, for example, that you wanted to argue that public schools should not eliminate art and music courses from their curricula, but through brainstorming and research you narrowed your topic to public *elementary* schools and only *music* programs. You might have narrowed it even further to a particular school. Your thesis statement, then, would be "Kingston Elementary should not eliminate music courses from the curriculum."

Your thesis statement can also give some idea of how you plan to defend your claim or some idea of how your paper is organized. The following thesis sentence tells the reader what premises will be offered:

> Because music allows children to express their emotions, helps keep them calm and relaxed, and teaches them to cooperate with one another, Kingston Elementary should not eliminate its music program.

In such a thesis statement, you are announcing your premises and your organization because you will deal with your premises in the order you have presented them.

The following thesis statement also hints at the organization of the argument but does not give away the premises:

> Although music programs are expensive and often hard to staff, Kingston Elementary should retain its program for the benefits it brings to our community's children.

This thesis statement tells the readers that you intend to look at the reasons why the program is being eliminated and then to counter that argument with your own, better reasons to retain the program.

Of course, you are not required to mention either your reasons or the opposition in your thesis; however, your argument should never contradict the thesis statement or digress into areas for which you haven't prepared. If your thesis concerns music programs at Kingston Elementary, you shouldn't start talking about art classes in high school.

Develop Your Body Paragraphs

Start each body paragraph with a topic sentence and develop the paragraph with details that support your topic sentence. Help your readers to better follow your line of thinking by organizing your ideas in a logical, fluid manner and, when necessary, by providing transitional words and phrases that link ideas in a coherent flow.

The following paragraphs, both from Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* are well developed, organized, and coherent. The first paragraph provides many examples, organized chronologically, to illustrate the idea given in the topic sentence. Coherency—or flow—is achieved through the use of parallel sentence structures. In the second paragraph, Postman lists several reasons for the popularity of *Sesame Street* among parents. In that paragraph Postman uses several transitional words and phrases, which we have italicized.

> It is difficult to say exactly when politicians began to put themselves forward, intentionally, as sources of amusement. In the 1950's, Senator Everett Dirksen appeared as a guest on "What's My Line?" When he was running for office, John F. Kennedy allowed the television cameras of Ed Murrow's "Person to Person" to invade his home. When he was not running for office, Richard Nixon appeared for a few seconds on "Laugh-In," an hour-long comedy show based on the format of a television commercial. By the 1970's, the public had started to become accustomed to the notion that political figures were to be taken as part of the world of show business. In the 1980's came the deluge. Vice-presidential candidate William Miller did a commercial for American Express. So did the star of the Watergate Hearings, Senator Sam Ervin. Former President Gerald Ford joined with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for brief roles on "Dynasty." Massachusetts Governor Mike Dukakis appeared on "St. Elsewhere." Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill did a stint on "Cheers." Consumer advocate Ralph Nader, George McGovern and Mayor Edward Koch hosted "Saturday Night Live." Koch also played the role of a fight manager in a made-for-television movie starring James Cagney. Mrs. Nancy Reagan appeared on "Diff'rent Strokes." Would anyone be surprised if Gary Hart turned up on "Hill Street Blues"? Or if Geraldine Ferraro played a small role as a Queens housewife in a Francis Coppola film?

> Parents embraced "Sesame Street" for several reasons, *among them* that it assuaged their guilt over the fact that they could not or would not restrict their children's access to television. "Sesame Street" appeared to justify allowing a four- or

> five-year-old to sit transfixed in front of a television screen for unnatural periods of time. Parents were eager to hope that television could teach their children something other than which breakfast cereal has the most crackle. *At the same time,* "Sesame Street" relieved them of the responsibility of teaching their preschool children how to read—no small matter in a culture where children are apt to be considered a nuisance. They could *also* plainly see that in spite of its faults, "Sesame Street" was entirely consonant with the prevailing spirit of America. Its use of cute puppets, celebrities, catchy tunes, and rapid-fire editing was certain to give pleasure to the children and would *therefore* serve as adequate preparation for their entry into a fun-loving culture.

Just as your paragraphs should flow smoothly, so should the entire essay. Make sure that your reader can follow you from paragraph to paragraph. If the connection between topics is not immediately clear, give the reader some help with phrases such as "Another reason . . .," "In contrast to [the reason just stated] . . .," and "Finally. . . ." Don't force transitional words to do the job that the content should do: Your argument should move smoothly through paragraphs that are held together by a clear thesis sentence. But if a transitional tag will help, by all means use one.

Provide a Satisfying Conclusion

Almost every example of human communication has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Even a simple phone call begins with "hello" and ends with "goodbye." If one of those elements is missing, we are uncomfortable and we usually aren't sure what to do. If a phone call ends abruptly, we might feel we had been hung up on or that the call had dropped.

The same is true in writing an essay. You do not want your readers to feel that you have hung up without saying good-bye, which is the purpose of a conclusion. It lets your readers know that the essay is complete, that there are no missing pages, and that you have said what you intended to say. How you say good-bye will depend on your thesis statement, your organization, your details, and even the length of your argument. If, for example, you have written a short piece—say, an editorial for your campus newspaper—there may be no reason to repeat what you said in your thesis statement or your central premises. After all, most readers can remember the claim and the topic ideas in a short piece, so repeating them may look like an attempt to take up space. If, on the other hand, you write a lengthier or more complicated argument, you might find it necessary to summarize your main ideas. Whatever you do, don't attach a cookie-cutter ending to everything you write. Each essay or argument that you write is unique; try writing conclusions that fit the essay.

Try one of the following ways to conclude your argument:

- *Return to the opening.* Your readers might find your essay more satisfying if it comes full circle to its opening. Suppose you began with a quotation or a story; you might find a way to return to the quotation, providing a new interpretation or reminding your readers of its

aptness, or to return to the story, telling the readers what happened next or simply referring to some of the details.

- *Make a prediction.* Tell your readers that things might get worse or better or that new problems might arise. Be careful not to make an unfair appeal to your readers' emotions. They may feel that you have taken a cheap shot to end your argument.
- *Ask a question.* Let your readers know that your argument raises some questions that still must be answered.
- *Call for action.* Very often a good argument will leave readers wondering what they can do. Encourage your readers, if appropriate, to take action in support of your claim: spread the word, avoid certain behaviors, write letters, join a campaign, and so forth. Be careful not to preach at your readers.
- *End with a story different from the one you started with.* If returning to your original opening is not an option, a new story may help close your argument. If you do opt to tell a story, be sure it is a true one. Making something up will only anger readers who know or suspect that the story is fabricated.
- *Emphasize the importance of your claim.* This strategy works very well if you feel your readers might not see the significance of your argument. For example, in the paper about 7:00 A.M. classes, your readers might say that with all the important issues on campus, this one doesn't deserve the attention you have lavished upon it. The conclusion might provide an opportunity to say that it does indeed.

Whatever method you choose to conclude your essay, keep in mind that your purpose is to end the essay, to say good-bye. Try to do so in a manner that is pleasing and satisfying to the readers and that fits your purpose and your point.

Exercise 13.6

Write an argument. Although the exercises throughout this chapter have been designed to help you create a group paper, your professor may prefer that you write your argument individually.

If you are to work as a group, keep in mind that collaborating on the writing is somewhat more difficult than working as a group to gather and organize ideas. There are several ways to collaborate on a paper: One member can write the entire draft and hand it to the next group member for revisions, who revises it and hands it to the third. Or group members could sit in a circle and, like a three-headed writer, draft the argument. Or each member could take a certain section or number of paragraphs. Although any method will work, the last works best for longer papers such as business reports. For a short paper, the first or the second works well. The first method (one draft writer at a time) is a good option if your

group will be writing more than one argument during the semester because each member can have his or her turn at the first draft. If your professor has no preference, your group will have to choose which method to employ as you write the first draft of your collective argument.

After the First Draft

Once you have organized and defended your argument, you will have a draft of your essay. Most writers like to set their work aside for a short time before they begin revising or editing. Doing so will help you get some distance from your own words, which can seem too familiar if you read them too soon after writing them. It is easy to miss errors if our minds are filling in what we meant instead of what actually appears on the page.

When you return to your first draft, you must be willing to see it as a rough sketch of what your final draft will look like. Few writers are entirely happy with the first words that flow from their pens or appear on the screen. Can you imagine what life would be like if in conversations with one another we had no opportunity to correct what we said or take back a comment or clarify our meaning? Take advantage of the opportunity to correct and clarify your first draft, and take as many drafts as you need to get the argument as you want it.

Read What You Have Written and Revise

After you have written a draft of your essay and given your brain time to cool, return to your essay and read it again with a critical eye. Don't look only for clumsy expressions, grammatical problems, meaningless or repetitive sentences, and the like. Look for the large issues and evaluate your argument from the point of view of someone who disagrees with you. Be honest with yourself; question your evidence. Ask yourself if you are simply repeating what you have heard or what you assume to be true. Check your logic. Put your essay through the same rigorous test you have put other arguments through. Revise your draft to correct any problems.

I have rewritten—often several times—every word I have ever published. My pencils outlast their erasers.

—Vladimir Nabokov

Consider What You Have Not Written and Revise

Most important, consider what you have *not* said. Very often we are so committed to our viewpoints that we fail to examine the ideas and assumptions upon which those views are based. When you look critically at your essay, try to disagree with what you have written by finding a way to reject each of the premises you have offered as support. It may sound like you're being awfully rough on yourself, but it will help reveal areas where connections are left unexplored or where unexamined assumptions are guiding your thinking. You don't have to abandon what you have written; you may simply have to

defend it better. Suppose the topic were salaries and someone had suggested that salaries in the United States should be capped at, say, $250,000. You are asked for your argument on the issue, and you write, "Capping salaries is not a good idea because it would reduce competition." You might write a brilliant paragraph showing that capping salaries would indeed reduce competition. You might provide historical examples and the testimony of experts to back you up. But you need to ask, "So what?" So what if competition is reduced? What's so great about competition anyway? It may be great, but you need to *show* that it is. Your readers may not have the same values that you have. In a case such as this, it is best not to leave anything to chance. If you discover that you have taken too much for granted or that you need to better defend your assertions, revise your essay.

Show Your Work

Show your draft to someone—a friend, a family member, a professor, a tutor in the writing lab—someone who will do you the favor of critically reviewing your essay. Don't let a friend tell you what you want to hear: "It's great. Hand it in." Ask if anything is confusing or undeveloped. Ask your reader to show you where the argument may be weak or unconvincing. Ask if the organization is clear and effective, if the opening paragraph is interesting, and if the conclusion is satisfying. Never hesitate to get advice from a reader. It is not a sign of weakness or insecurity but of strength and intelligence to ask for a critique on a draft. Not even a professional writer considers a piece finished until it has been reviewed by one or more people who can offer advice for improving the writing.

Edit Your Work

When you have revised your argument several times and are happy with the content and organization, look over your sentences very carefully one last time for grammatical mistakes, misused or missing punctuation, misspellings, and typographical errors. And, again, there is no shame in seeking help if you are unsure about things such as comma usage and sentence fragments. Finally, try reading your paper out loud to hear how it sounds. Doing so can sometimes help reveal awkward phrases or repetitive sentence structures.

Hand It In

Someone once said that good writing is never finished, it's just published or, in this case, handed in. You can probably rest assured that your reader—your professor—is the intelligent, impartial, sensitive reader that you have been advised to write for and that your argument will be evaluated on its strength, its form and content, its support, and so forth. If you have done your work well, you will at least get a fair hearing.

Sample Argumentative Essay

Evans 1

Samantha Evans

Professor Gaughran

Humanities 101: Critical Thinking

December 5, 2010

No Public Prayer in Public Schools

In the nearly fifty years since the Supreme Court banned teacher-led prayer in public schools, members of Congress have proposed almost 150 constitutional amendments to return prayer in some form to classrooms (Epstein 212). Their efforts reflect what many Americans, including many students, want. In fact, in a 2005 Gallup poll, slightly more than half of today's teenagers said that schools should be permitted to conduct spoken, non-denominational prayers (Ott). Undoubtedly, daily prayer is important in the lives of many Americans, and we are all entitled to offer private, silent prayers whenever and wherever we wish and even to shout our prayers in our backyards or on street corners. And some prayer must be permitted even in public schools; no one would deny Muslim students, for example, the right to gather to pray at prescribed times during the school day. But such prayers should be conducted in areas removed from the student body, not publicly in classrooms or assemblies where non-Muslim students are gathered. Public prayer on public school grounds, whether organized by school officials or by groups within the student body, must be prohibited. While prayer is permitted in exclusively religious

Interesting opening.

Offers a balanced view: Doesn't try to argue in either/or terms; shows good sense of audience.

Defines *prayer* in a specific context.

Thesis provides some idea of how paper will proceed.

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Evans 2

schools, private schools or colleges, organized public prayer in public schools not only violates the First Amendment, it discourages students from expressing minority views for fear of appearing to go against the majority. Furthermore, allowing prayers in school interferes with parents' rights to raise their children as they see fit.

First premise: Public school prayer violates First Amendment.

First, prayer in public schools violates the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." The rights guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution are familiar to most Americans, and the amendment's underlying principle--personal freedom--plays a part in our daily lives: we may, without government interference, choose our spouse, job, place of residence, college, and so on. That same freedom also applies to religion, a concept that is explicitly protected by two constitutional provisions, namely the establishment and free exercise clauses. Briefly, the establishment clause, in the most basic sense, prohibits the government (interpreted by the Supreme Court to mean both national and state governments) from advancing or inhibiting religion.[1] The second provision—the free exercise clause—allows an individual to practice whatever religion he or she chooses. We take advantage of that simple freedom when we worship at a church or synagogue, or when we choose not to worship at all.

Quotes First Amendment because some readers might be unfamiliar with the exact language.

Uses illustrations to explain "personal freedoms."

Divides the First Amendment statement on religious freedom into two parts, the establishment clause and the free exercise clause, and defines each.

Evans 3

School-sponsored prayer violates the establishment clause, since a public school is funded by tax money and acts as an agent of the state. Just as the government couldn't lead us in a prayer before our driver's test at the Department of Motor Vehicles, it cannot conduct prayer in its schools. As decided in a 1963 case questioning a school's required reading of ten Bible passages per day and in a 2000 case involving the constitutionality of displaying the motto "In God We Trust" in Colorado classrooms, schools cannot perpetuate established religions associated with the Bible and God (Epstein 196–7; Janofsky A9). This fact holds true regardless of how many people believe in and practice that religion. Even if the school did not require but merely supervised organized prayer on school grounds, the school would be in violation of the establishment clause since it would appear to promote or assist in religion.

Shows how school prayer violates the establishment clause.

Supports claim with an analogy.

Provides illustrations.

If a school did require its students to pray, it would also, obviously, violate the second provision, the free exercise clause, which allows us to choose *not* to worship if that's what we desire. But, some might ask, doesn't the free exercise clause also give us the right to freely express our religious views? In other words, shouldn't the students themselves be free to assemble to pray in the cafeteria, in the school yard or parking lot, or in the locker room, for example? This very position was taken by a school district in Sante Fe, Texas, where a student was chosen by her classmates, and therefore not a school official, to recite "an invocation and/or message" over the

Shows how school prayer violates the free exercise clause.

Considers opposing point of view: Shouldn't free exercise clause permit us to freely exercise our religious beliefs?

Evans 4

loudspeaker during home football games. The school was obviously aware that this practice was occurring and claimed that it was allowable considering the students' right to free exercise (Epstein 210–2). Unfortunately, the argument is flawed in two areas. Primarily, the activity of prayer itself continues to occur on school grounds, and regardless of whether or not a school official chose the speaker, simply allowing prayer on school property in this context could be interpreted as promoting the religion advocated by the student representative. Put more plainly, the school is not remaining neutral on issues of religion.

Responds to opposing argument: First, prayer is still taking place on school grounds in violation of establishment clause.

Second, such an argument overlooks the tension inherent in the establishment and free exercise provisions, a tension so strong that it may seem to be a contradiction: On the one hand, if the government allows prayer on public property, it promotes religion; if the government *prohibits* prayer, it is denying our freedom to exercise our religious beliefs. Since tension unquestionably exists, one clause must take precedence over the other in certain public locations such as schools. In a public school setting, the precedence of the establishment clause preserves the school's neutrality. Simultaneously, such a choice still allows for and encourages the free exercise of religion to occur elsewhere, namely in the privacy of one's home (or anywhere else not linked to a public school). Those who argue that the free exercise clause should prevail sometimes resort to emotional appeals, as does Armstrong William in "Supreme Court Quivers over Prayer Possibility." Mr. William suggests, in

Further response to opposing argument: Two clauses create a tension that can be resolved only by giving precedence to the establishment clause, not to the free exercise clause.

Considers one opposing argument—that if one clause should take precedence, it should be the free exercise clause.

Evans 5

the wake of recent Supreme Court decisions regarding school prayer, that the Supreme Court will eventually abolish Christmas and similar religious holidays. By overstating the case and playing on the fear of the public, he makes it seem as if all religious values are being questioned and that we are on the slippery slope toward a completely secular society. What the Court correctly questioned, however, was a school's *position* in perpetuating religious values. Upholding the establishment clause ensures that schools do not promote religion while allowing personal religious practices to continue without restriction.

Responds to the opposing argument.

What if a school's officials, however, are unaware of and therefore unable to stop attempts to pray collectively and publicly on school grounds? Couldn't we simply ignore the small prayer groups formed, sometimes spontaneously, by students who pray aloud in hallways and during assemblies? Couldn't we somehow get around the First Amendment and let students who want to pray gather with one another the way some NFL players do on the field after a game? After all, what harm is done?

Introduces second premise with questions . . .

. . . and with an analogy.

Actually, the potential exists for much harm. All of us have felt in grade school and high school (and, yes, even in college) pressure to conform to the wishes of the group around us. It's often better to laugh at a friend's unfunny joke simply to be accepted by that friend. The same can and does hold true for young adults who practice a religion other than that of their classmates. If public prayer is allowed, we are creating an extremely tense and stressful situation

Second premise: One effect of school prayer is that it creates a stressful situation for some students.

for students who might fear that their choice of a "different" religion, or no religion, could divide them from classmates and friends, resulting, possibly, in their being ostracized or ridiculed.

Premise supported through illustrations.

Their fear is warranted. At around the time that the school district in Sante Fe, Texas, was arguing to allow student-led prayers, several stories appeared in the popular press describing incidents of coercion or retribution aimed at those who refused to participate in majority prayer. At a school in Maryland, one young man, refusing to participate in a spontaneous prayer begun by audience members at commencement, left the auditorium as a way of expressing his disapproval of the intended religious message. Security guards refused to allow the student back into the proceedings, and school officials subsequently barred him from a school party occurring on the same evening (Chavez). Consider the case of Greg Thomas. A former teacher in Hamilton High School, Thomas suddenly lost the support of his once-friendly neighbors after complaining about the predominance of Christian teachings in the schools. Fellow teachers, previous supporters of the community art program, stopped bringing their students to plays produced by Thomas, leading eventually to the cutting of the program and loss of Thomas's job. The consensus seemed to be that the community feared Thomas's attempts at turning the Christian school into "the Jewish league" (Reeves). Without a doubt, if adults are willing to treat fellow adults with such disdain over a difference of religion, it sends the message to students of minority faiths to keep quiet. We should

Evans 7

not be placing children, or even young adults, in a situation where they must choose between their faith and their friends. Students are learning that choosing the former may result in ridicule, while choosing the latter is a denial of oneself. Simply keeping public, collective prayer out of school eliminates any such dilemma.

A final reason to reject school prayer is to prevent influencing individuals whose religious beliefs have not been completely forged. Schools that permit or ignore even spontaneous prayer are in effect robbing parents of the right to instruct their children on religious matters if their children are hearing beliefs in school contrary to those being taught at home.

Some proponents of school prayer argue that morality must be injected into our classrooms. In the 2000 case involving the use of "In God We Trust," advocates for prayer feared a replay of the tragic events at Columbine, contending that such a phrase might help "reinforce the precepts of moral rectitude" throughout our schools (Janofsky). Although no one denies the hideous nature of the events at Columbine, it is conceivable that some parents do not define "morality" on the basis of any established religious teachings and may wish to inculcate moral values through a process that does not involve religion. Religion must remain a private family issue. This is not a question of shared responsibility among parents, community and schools. Realistically, that type of cooperation is beneficial when used to encourage student involvement in school sports teams, clubs or community

Third premise: School prayer interferes with parents' right to instruct children on religious matters.

Considers opposing view that morality must be injected into schools.

Responds to opposing argument: Parents will not all agree on how morality should be taught.

Development through contrasts: Some shared goals, such as helping students make friends, can be achieved, but we do not all share the same religious beliefs.

Evans 8

programs. We can identify a unified goal for this type of cooperation, such as helping children make friends. On the contrary, it is nearly impossible to find one religious absolute that would cover all students in a school. And not only do we hold beliefs different from those held in another denomination, but even within our own faith what we accept and do not accept may vary widely among members of the same church or synagogue. Therefore, worrying about what should be and should not be included when designing a prayer is an overwhelmingly difficult task. The task is much easier when religion is not addressed in public schools at all, but remains a subject dealt with at home.

The solution would appear to be what many teenagers apparently want: a scheduled period of silence in which students could pray voluntarily. In fact, the same Gallup poll that showed more than half of all teenagers supporting a spoken prayer revealed that the great majority of teens (84 percent) would be satisfied with a scheduled moment of silence (Ott). But even this proposal is fraught with problems. In 1985, the Supreme Court struck down an Alabama law that authorized a moment of silence allowing students to meditate or pray, agreeing with opponents of the law who contended that it had no secular purpose and appeared to be a roundabout way to restore prayer to public schools. Nonetheless, school districts across the country have included mandatory moments of silence at the start of the school day, but this may again come before the Supreme Court. In November 2007 a federal judge in Chicago ordered school boards in Illinois to stop enforcing a

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one-month-old state law mandating a moment of silence (Keen). Whether such scheduled, public periods of silent meditation or prayer violate the First Amendment may be determined by the highest court in the years to come.

For many of us, prayer is a vital part of our lives; it can help us cope with and understand our earthly existence. No doubt a bit more religion in our lives could help curb our violent tendencies. But prayer does not belong in schools. Schools should teach subjects that are beneficial to all students, while refraining from getting involved in subjects certain to increase tension between classmates and within individual students. Surely much could be done in our schools to decrease the overwhelming tension that already exists between factions or to provide a more secure and safe environment. But while we might pray at home for providential guidance for ourselves, our teachers and our classmates, praying together in school can only cause more harm than good.

Satisfying conclusion: Shows sensitivity to audience and . . .

. . . comes back to issues addressed in the opening paragraph.

Evans 10

Note

[1]There is much debate, even among past and current Supreme Court justices, over the meaning of the phrase "establishment of religion" in the First Amendment. In a 1971 case *(Lemon v. Kurtzman)*, the Court created a three-pronged test, now called the Lemon test, to determine whether a government action violated the establishment clause. My argument relies on the second

Evans 11

prong of the test: A government action should not have the primary effect of advancing or inhibiting religion. The usefulness and legitimacy of the Lemon test itself is also a matter of debate among justices and constitutional scholars, but it continues to influence court decisions. For an explanation of the Lemon test and a more developed discussion of the First Amendment, see firstamendementcenter.org (http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/rel_liberty/establishment/index.aspx).

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SUMMARY

1. An argument is not a fight. Although your objective might be to win, your success in an argument should be measured by how well you defend your claim and how fair, accurate, and honest you are in presenting your case. Whether your opponent agrees or disagrees with you in the end, you should strive to put forward the most rational and evenhanded presentation you can muster.
2. Before writing an argument, know yourself, your audience, and your topic. Present yourself as a humane and generous person. Don't try to write an argument on an issue you know nothing about even though you might have strong opinions concerning it. Know your topic well, even if you have to conduct research. Speak to your audience; don't lecture, antagonize, or bully them. Expect your readers to be fair but skeptical. Try to foresee your readers' reactions and objections.
3. To get started, focus your topic so that you can cover the issue in the number of pages assigned. Brainstorm for ideas and organize your thoughts.
4. When writing the argument, provide a single statement of your central claim and organize your material in a manner that will allow your readers to easily recognize your premises. You can organize your argument in any number of ways. Try organizing according to your premises, both stated and unstated, or around any of the standard developmental patterns for writing essays (illustration, comparison/contrast, cause-and-effect, classification, definition). Depending on the topic, a problem-solution or evaluative pattern might work well. You might use your opponent's claims to help organize your own argument. Give your argument a conclusion that your readers will find satisfying.
5. Defend your central claim with factual evidence, expert opinion, examples, and, when appropriate, analogies. Don't hesitate to research your topic to provide the best support possible.
6. After you have written your argument, read what you have written. Be certain that you have defended your premises and any assumptions on which your argument is based. Before you write your final, edited draft, seek the advice of your professor, a tutor, or a peer who might alert you to any shortcomings in the argument you may have failed to notice.