chapter one

Everything Is an Argument





"Best Breakfast Anywhere!" proclaims a sign in the window of a diner.

A professor interrupts a lecture to urge her students to spend less time on Instant Messaging and more in the company of thick, old books.

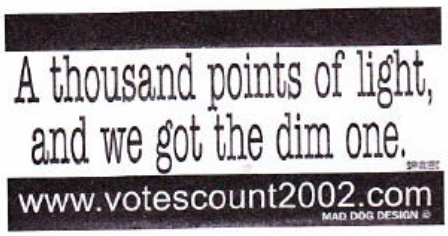
A senator tells a C-SPAN caller that recent legislation, such as the Homeland Security Bill, does not reduce citizens' constitutional rights or their privacy.

A nurse assures a youngster eyeing an approaching needle, "This won't hurt one bit."

A sports columnist blasts a football coach for passing on fourth down and two in a close game—even though the play produces a touchdown.

Sign found on a teenager's bedroom door:

Bumper sticker sighted in November 2002:



"Please let me make it through this chem exam!" a student silently prays.

These visual and verbal messages all contain arguments. In fact, it's hard to go more than a few minutes without encountering some form of argument in our culture. From the clothes you wear to the foods you choose to eat to the groups you decide to join—all of these everyday activities make nuanced, sometimes implicit, arguments about who you are and what you value. Thus an argument can be any text—whether written, spoken, or visual—that expresses a point of view. Sometimes arguments can be aggressive, composed deliberately to change what readers believe, think, or do. At other times your goals may be more subtle, and your writing may be designed to convince yourself or others that specific facts are reliable or that certain views should be considered or at least tolerated.

In fact, some theorists claim that language is itself inherently persuasive (even when you say "hi, how's it going?" for instance, you are in one sense arguing that your hello deserves a response) and hence *every* text is also an argument, designed to influence readers. For example, a poem that observes what little girls do in church may indirectly critique the role religion plays in women's lives, for good or ill:

I worry for the girls.
I once had braids,
and wore lace that made me suffer.

I had not yet done the things
that would need forgiving.
–Kathleen Norris, "Little Girls in Church"

To take another example, observations about family life among the poor in India may suddenly illuminate the writer's life and the reader's experience, forcing comparisons that quietly argue for change:

I have learned from Jagat and his family a kind of commitment, a form of friendship that is not always available in the West, where we have become cynical and instrumental in so many of our relationships to others.

–Jeremy Seabrook, "Family Values"

Even humor makes an argument when it causes readers to become aware—through bursts of laughter or just a faint smile—of the way things are and how they might be different. Take a look, for example, at an excerpt from the introduction to Dave Barry's latest book, *Dave Barry Hits Below the Beltway,* along with its cover, which also makes a humorous argument:

> **To do even a halfway decent book on a subject as complex as the United States government, you have to spend a lot of time in Washington, D.C. So the first thing I decided, when I was getting ready to write this book, was that it would not be even halfway decent.**

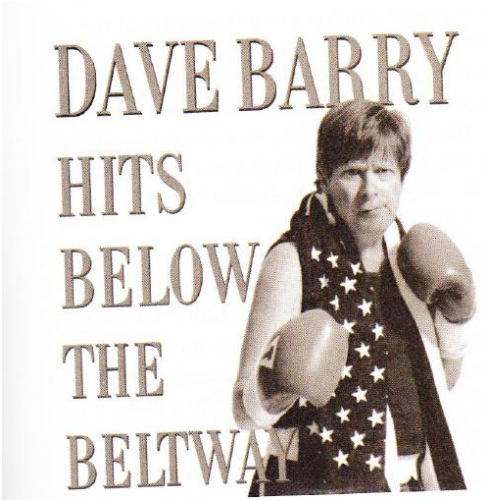


FIGURE 1.1 DAVE BARRY'S HUMOROUS ARGUMENT BEGINS ON HIS BOOK'S COVER.

More obvious as arguments are those that make a claim and present evidence to support it. Such writing often moves readers to recognize problems and to consider solutions. Suasion of this kind is usually easy to recognize:

> **Discrimination against Hispanics, or any other group, should be fought and there are laws and a massive apparatus to do so. But the way to eliminate such discrimination is not to classify all Hispanics as victims.**
>
> **–Linda Chavez, "Towards a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation"**

> **[W]omen unhappy in their marriages often enter full-time employment as an escape. But although a woman's entrance into the workplace does tend to increase the stability of her marriage, it does not increase her happiness.**
>
> **–The Popular Research Institute, Penn State University**

> **Resistance to science is born of fear. Fear, in turn, is bred by ignorance. And it is ignorance that is our deepest malady.**
>
> **–J. Michael Bishop, "Enemies of Promise"**

ARGUMENT ISN'T JUST ABOUT WINNING

If in some ways all language has an argumentative edge that aims to make a point, not all language use aims to win out over others. In contrast to the traditional Western concept of argument as being about fighting or combat, communication theorists such as Sonja Foss, Cindy Griffin, and Josina Makau describe an *invitational* argument, which aims not to win over another person or group but to invite others to enter a space of mutual regard and exploration. In fact, as you'll see, writers and speakers have as many purposes for arguing as for using language, including—in addition to winning—to inform, to convince, to explore, to make decisions, even to meditate or pray.

Of course, many arguments *are* aimed at winning. Such is the traditional purpose of much writing and speaking in the political arena, in the business world, and in the law courts. Two candidates for office, for example, try to win out over each other in appealing for votes; the makers of one soft drink try to outsell their competitors by appealing to public tastes; and two lawyers try to defeat each other in pleading to a judge and jury. In your college writing, you may also be called on to make an argument that appeals to a "judge" and/or "jury" (your instructor and classmates). You might, for instance, argue that peer-to-peer file-sharing is protected under the doctrine of fair use. In doing so, you may need to defeat your unseen opponents—those who oppose such file-sharing.

At this point, it may be helpful to acknowledge a common academic distinction between argument and persuasion. In this view, the point of argument is to discover some version of the truth, using evidence and reasons. Argument of this sort leads audiences toward conviction, an agreement that a claim is true or reasonable, or that a course of action is desirable. The aim of persuasion is to change a point of view or to move others from conviction to action. In other words, writers or speakers argue to find some truth; they persuade when they think they already know it.

Argument (discover a truth) → conviction

Persuasion (know a truth) → action

In practice, this distinction between argument and persuasion can be hard to sustain. It is unnatural for writers or readers to imagine their minds divided between a part that pursues truth and a part that seeks to persuade. And yet, you may want to reserve the term *persuasion* for writing that is aggressively designed to change opinions through the use of both reason and other appropriate techniques. For writing that sets out to persuade at all costs, abandoning reason, fairness, and truth altogether, the term *propaganda*, with all its negative connotations, seems to fit. Some would suggest that *advertising* often works just as well.

But, as we have already suggested, arguing isn't always about winning or even about changing others' views. In addition to invitational argument, another school of argument—called Rogerian argument, after the psychotherapist Carl Rogers—is based on finding common ground and establishing trust among those who disagree about issues, and on approaching audiences in nonthreatening ways. Writers who follow Rogerian approaches seek to understand the perspectives of those with whom they disagree, looking for "both/and" or "win/win" solutions (rather than "either/or" or "win/lose" ones) whenever possible. Much successful argument today follows such principles, consciously or not.

Some other purposes or goals of argument are worth considering in more detail.

Arguments to Inform

You may want or need to argue with friends or colleagues over the merits of different academic majors. But your purpose in doing so may well be to inform and to be informed, for only in such detailed arguments can you come to the best choice. Consider how Joan Didion uses argument to inform readers about the artist Georgia O'Keeffe:

> **This is a woman who in 1939 could advise her admirers that they were missing her point, that their appreciation of her famous flowers was merely sentimental. "When I paint a red hill," she observed coolly in the catalogue for an exhibition that year, "you say it is too bad that I don't always paint flowers. A flower touches almost everyone's heart. A red hill doesn't touch everyone's heart."**
>
> **–Joan Didion, "Georgia O'Keeffe"**

FIGURE 1.2 GEORGIA O'KEEFFE'S *WHITE FLOWER ON RED EARTH, #1* (1943)

By giving specific information about O'Keeffe and her own ideas about her art, Didion in this passage argues that readers should pay closer attention to the work of this artist.

Less subtle and more common as informative arguments are political posters featuring the smiling faces of candidates and the offices they are seeking: "Honda in 2002," "Lujan for Mayor." Of course, these visual texts are usually also aimed at winning out over an unmentioned opponent. But on the surface at least, they announce who is running for a specific office.

Arguments to Convince

If you are writing a report that attempts to identify the causes of changes in global temperatures, you would likely be trying not to conquer opponents but to satisfy readers that you've thoroughly examined those causes and that they merit serious attention. As a form of writing, reports typically aim to persuade readers rather than win out over opponents. Yet the presence of those who might disagree is always implied, and it shapes a writer's strategies. In the following passage, for example, Paul Osterman argues to convince readers of the urgency surrounding jobs for all citizens:

> Among employed 19- to 31-year-old high school graduates who did not go to college, more than 30 percent had not been in their position for even a year. Another 12 percent had only one year of tenure. The pattern was much the same for women who had remained in the labor force for the four years prior to the survey. These are adults who, for a variety of reasons—a lack of skills, training, or disposition—have not managed to secure "adult" jobs.
>
> –Paul Osterman, "Getting Started"

Osterman uses facts to report a seemingly objective conclusion about the stability of employment among certain groups, but he is also arguing against those who find that the current job situation is tolerable and not worthy of concern or action.

Arguments to Explore

Many important subjects call for arguments that take the form of exploration, either on your own or with others. If there's an "opponent" in such a situation at all (often there is not), it is likely the status quo or a current trend that—for one reason or another—is puzzling. Exploratory arguments may be deeply personal, such as E. B. White's often-reprinted essay "Once More to the Lake." Or the exploration may be aimed at addressing serious problems in society. James Fallows opens such an argument by explaining the process of exploration he went through:

> Over the past few months I interviewed several dozen people about what could be expected in Iraq after the United States dislodged Saddam Hussein. . . . The people I asked were spies, Arabists, oil-company officials, diplomats, scholars, policy experts, and many active-duty and retired soldiers. They were from the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. Some firmly supported a pre-emptive war against Iraq; more were opposed. As of late summer, before the serious domestic debate had begun, most of the people I spoke with expected a war to occur.
>
> –James Fallows, "The Fifty-First State?"

Perhaps the essential argument in any such piece is the writer's assertion that a problem exists (in this case, whether or not to go to war with Iraq) and that the writer or reader needs to solve it. Some exploratory pieces present and defend solutions. Others remain more open-ended, as is the case with Fallows's essay, which concludes with a form of meditation:

> It has become a cliché in popular writing about the natural world that small disturbances to complex systems can have unpredictably large effects. The world of nations is perhaps not quite as intricate as the natural world, but it certainly holds the potential for great surprise. Merely itemizing the foreseeable effects of a war with Iraq suggests reverberations that would be felt for decades. If we can judge from past wars, the effects we can't imagine when the fighting begins will prove to be the ones that matter most.

Arguments to Make Decisions

Closely allied to argument that explores is that which aims at making good, sound decisions. In fact, the result of many exploratory arguments may be to argue for a particular decision, whether that decision relates to the best computer for you to buy or to the "right" person for you to choose as your life partner. For college students, choosing a major is a major decision, and one way to go about making that decision is to argue your way through several alternatives. By the time you have examined the pros and cons of each alternative, you should be at least one step closer to a good decision. In the following paragraphs, history major Jessica Cohen reasons her way toward a momentous decision, asking should she, or should she not, become an egg donor for a wealthy couple:

> Early in the spring of last year a classified ad ran for two weeks in the *Yale Daily News*: "EGG DONOR NEEDED." The couple [Michelle and David] that placed the ad was picky, and for that reason was offering $25,000 for an egg from the right donor. . . .

I kept dreaming about all the things I could do with $25,000. I had gone into the correspondence [with David and Michelle] on a whim. But soon, despite David's casual tone and the optimistic attitude of all the classifieds and information I read, I decided that this process was something I didn't want to be part of. I understand the desire for a child who will resemble and fit in with the family. But once a couple starts choosing a few characteristics, shooting for perfection is too easy—especially if they can afford it. The money might have changed my life for a while, but it would have led to the creation of a child encumbered with too many expectations.

–Jessica Cohen, "Grade A: The Market for a Yale Woman's Eggs"

Arguments to Meditate or Pray

Sometimes arguments can take the form of intense meditations on a theme, or of prayer. In such cases, the writer or speaker is most often hoping to transform something in him- or herself or to reach a state of equilibrium or peace of mind. If you know a familiar prayer or mantra, think for a moment of what it "argues" for and of how it uses quiet meditation to accomplish that goal. Such meditations do not have to be formal prayers, however. Look, for example, at the ways in which Michael Lassell's poetry uses a kind of meditative language to reach understanding for himself and to evoke meditative thought in others:

Feel how it feels to
hold a man in your arms
whose arms are used to holding men.
Offer God anything to bring your brother back.
Know you have nothing God could possibly want.
Curse God, but do not
abandon Him.

–Michael Lassell, "How to Watch Your Brother Die"

Another sort of meditative argument can be found in the stained-glass windows of churches and other public buildings. Dazzled by a spectacle of light, people pause to consider a window's message longer than they might were the same idea conveyed on paper. The window engages viewers with a power not unlike that of poetry. (See Figure 1.3.)

As these examples suggest, the effectiveness of argument depends not only on the purposes of the writer but also on the context surrounding the plea and the people it seeks most directly to reach. Though we'll examine arguments of all types in this book, we'll focus chiefly on the kinds made in professional and academic situations.

OCCASIONS FOR ARGUMENT

Another way of thinking about arguments is to consider the public occasions that call for them. In an ancient textbook of rhetoric, or the art of persuasion, the philosopher Aristotle provides an elegant scheme for classifying the purposes of arguments, one based on issues of time—past, future, and present. His formula is easy to remember and helpful in suggesting strategies for making convincing cases. But because all classifications overlap with others to a certain extent, don't be surprised to encounter many arguments that span more than one category—arguments about the past with implications for the future, arguments about the future with bearings on the present, and so on.

Arguments about the Past

Debates about what has happened in the past are called forensic arguments; such controversies are common in business, government, and academia. For example, in many criminal and civil cases, lawyers interrogate witnesses to establish exactly what happened at an earlier time: *Did the defendant sexually harass her employee? Did the company deliberately ignore evidence that its product was deficient? Was the contract properly enforced?*

The contentious nature of some forensic arguments is evident in this brief excerpt from a letter to the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*:

> **Kenneth Brower's review of "Ansel Adams at 100," in your July/August issue, is misguided and inaccurate. . . . [In fact, Adams] worked seven days a week, never taking vacations, until he was eighty. It is impossible to imagine such activity in a person of "compromised health." Ditto for the notion of "delicate since childhood."**
>
> **–William A. Turnage**

In replying to this letter, the author of the review, Kenneth Brower, disputes Turnage's statements, introducing more evidence in support of his original claim. Obviously, then, forensic arguments rely on evidence and testimony to re-create what can be known about events that have already occurred.

Forensic arguments also rely heavily on precedents—actions or decisions in the past that influence policies or decisions in the present—and on analyses of cause and effect. Consider the ongoing controversy over Christopher Columbus: Are his expeditions to the Americas events worth celebrating, or are they unhappy chapters in human history? No simple exchange of evidence will suffice to still this debate; the effects of Columbus's actions beginning in 1492 may be studied and debated for the next five hundred years. As you might suspect from this example, arguments about history are typically forensic.

Forensic cases may also be arguments about character, such as when someone's reputation is studied in a historical context to enrich current perspectives on the person. Allusions to the past can make present arguments more vivid, as in the following text about Ward Connerly, head of an organization that aims to dismantle affirmative action programs:

> **Despite the fact that Connerly's message seems clearly opposed to the Civil Rights Movement, some people are fond of pointing out that the man is black. But as far as politics goes, that is irrelevant. Before black suffrage, there were African Americans who publicly argued against their own right to vote.**
>
> **–Carl Villarreal, "Connerly Is an Enemy of Civil Rights"**

Such writing can be exploratory and open-ended, the point of argument being to enhance and sharpen knowledge, not just to generate heat or score points.

Arguments about the Future

Debates about the future are a form of deliberative argument. Legislatures, congresses, and parliaments are called deliberative bodies because they establish policies for the future: *Should Social Security be privatized? Should the United States build a defense against ballistic missiles?*

Because what has happened in the past influences the future, deliberative judgments often rely on prior forensic arguments. Thus, deliberative arguments often draw on evidence and testimony, as in this passage:

> The labor market is sending a clear signal. While the American way of moving youngsters from high school to the labor market may be imperfect, the chief problem is that, for many, even getting a job no longer guarantees a decent standard of living. More than ever, getting ahead, or even keeping up, means staying in school longer.
>
> –Paul Osterman, "Getting Started"

But since no one has a blueprint for what is to come, deliberative arguments also advance by means of projections, extrapolations, and reasoned guesses—*if X is true, Y may be true; if X happens, so may Y; if X continues, then Y may occur:*

> In 2000, according to a World Health Organization assessment, 1.1 billion people worldwide had no regular access to safe drinking water, and 2.4 billion had no regular access to sanitation systems. Lack of access to clean water leads to four billion cases of diarrhea each year. Peter Gleick, an expert on global freshwater resources, reveals that even if we reach the United Nations' stated goal of halving the number of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015, as many as 76 million people will die from water-borne diseases before 2020.
>
> –Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security

Arguments about the Present

Arguments about the present are often arguments about contemporary values—the ethical premises and assumptions that are widely held (or contested) within a society. Sometimes called epideictic arguments or ceremonial arguments because they tend to be heard at public occasions, they include inaugural addresses, sermons, eulogies, graduation speeches, and civic remarks of all kinds. Ceremonial arguments can be passionate and eloquent, rich in anecdotes and examples. Martin Luther King Jr. was a master of ceremonial discourse, and he was particularly adept at finding affirmation in the depths of despair:

> Three nights later, our home was bombed. Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly. My experience with God had given me a new strength and trust. I know now that God is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of life.
>
> –Martin Luther King Jr., "Our God Is Able"

King argues here that the arbiter of good and evil in society is, ultimately, God. But not all ceremonial arguments reach quite so far.

More typical are values arguments that explore contemporary culture, praising what is admirable and blaming what is not. Andrew Sullivan, for example, examines what he considers a national craving for often-unjustified self-esteem. Yet he concludes by arguing that achieving a strong self-image is still "surely worth the effort":

> **Self-esteem isn't all that it's cracked up to be. In fact . . . it can be a huge part of the problem. New research has found that self-esteem can be just as high among D students, drunk drivers and former Presidents from Arkansas as it is among Nobel laureates, nuns and New York City fire fighters. In fact, according to research performed by Brad Bushman of Iowa State University and Roy Baumeister of Case Western Reserve University, people with high self-esteem can engage in far more antisocial behavior than those with low self-worth. . . . Racists, street thugs and school bullies all polled high on the self-esteem charts. And you can see why. If you think you're God's gift, you're particularly offended if other people don't treat you that way. So you lash out or commit crimes or cut ethical corners to reassert your preeminence. After all, who are your moral inferiors to suggest that you could be doing something, er, wrong? What do they know? . . . Of course, in these therapized days, reality can be a touchy subject. It's hard to accept that we may not be the best at something or that we genuinely screwed up or that low self-esteem can sometimes be fully justified. But maintaining a robust self-image while being able to absorb difficult criticism is surely worth the effort.**
>
> **–Andrew Sullivan, "Lacking in Self-Esteem: Good for You!"**

As in many ceremonial arguments, Sullivan here reinforces common values of modesty and fair play.

KINDS OF ARGUMENT

Yet another way of categorizing arguments is to consider their status or stasis—that is, the kinds of issues they address. This categorization system is called stasis theory. In ancient Greek and Roman civilizations,

rhetoricians defined a series of questions by which to examine legal cases. The questions would be posed in sequence, because each depended on the question(s) preceding it. Together, the questions helped determine the point of contention in an argument, the place where disputants could focus their energy and hence what kind of an argument to make. A modern version of those questions might look like the following:

- Did something happen?
- What is its nature?
- What is its quality?
- What actions should be taken?

Here's how the questions might be used to explore a "crime."

Did Something Happen?

Yes. A young man kissed a young woman against her will. The act was witnessed by a teacher and friends and acquaintances of both parties. The facts suggest clearly that something happened. If you were going to write an argument about this event, this first stasis question proves not very helpful, since there's no debate about whether the act occurred. If the event were debatable, however, you could develop an argument of fact.

What Is Its Nature?

The act might be construed as "sexual harassment," defined as the imposition of unwanted or unsolicited sexual attention or activity on a person. The young man kissed the young woman on the lips. Kissing people who aren't relatives on the lips is generally considered a sexual activity. The young woman did not want to be kissed and complained to her teacher. The young man's act meets the definition of "sexual harassment." Careful analysis of this stasis question could lead to an argument of definition.

What Is Its Quality?

Both the young man and young woman involved in the action are six years old. They were playing in a schoolyard. The boy didn't realize that kissing girls against their will was a violation of school policy; school sexual harassment policies had not in the past been enforced against first-graders. Most people don't regard six-year-olds as sexually culpable. Moreover, the girl wants to play with the boy again and apparently doesn't resent his action. Were you to decide on this focus, you would be developing an argument of evaluation.

What Actions Should Be Taken?

The case has raised a ruckus among parents, the general public, and some feminists and anti-feminists. The consensus seems to be that the school overreacted in seeking to brand the boy a sexual harasser. Yet it is important that the issue of sexual harassment not be dismissed as trivial. Consequently, the boy should be warned not to kiss girls against their will. The teachers should be warned not to make federal cases out of schoolyard spats. And with this stasis question as your focus, you would be developing a proposal argument.

As you can see, each of the stasis questions explores different aspects of a problem and uses different evidence or techniques to reach conclusions. You can use stasis theory to help you explore the aspects of any topic you are considering. In addition, studying the results of your exploration of the stasis questions can help you determine the major point you want to make and thus identify the type of argument that will be most effective.

Arguments of Fact—Did Something Happen?

An argument of fact usually involves a statement that can be proved or disproved with specific evidence or testimony. Although relatively simple to define, such arguments are often quite subtle, involving layers of complexity not apparent when the question is initially posed.

For example, the question of pollution of our oceans—Is it really occurring?—would seem relatively easy to settle. Either scientific data prove that the oceans are being polluted as a result of human activity, or they don't. But to settle the matter, writers and readers would first have to agree on a number of points, each of which would have to be examined and debated: *What constitutes pollution? How will such pollution be measured? Over what period of time? Are any current deviations in water quality unprecedented? How can one be certain that deviations are attributable to human action?*

Nevertheless, questions of this sort can be disputed primarily on the facts, complicated and contentious as they may be. But should you choose to develop an argument of fact, be aware of how difficult it can sometimes be to establish "facts."

Arguments of Definition—What Is the Nature of the Thing?

Just as contentious as arguments based on facts are questions of definition. An argument of definition often involves determining whether one known object or action belongs in a second—and more highly contested—category. One of the most hotly debated issues in American life today involves a question of definition: *Is a human fetus a human being?* If one argues that it is, then a second issue of definition arises: *Is abortion murder?* As you can see, issues of definition can have mighty consequences—and decades of debate may leave the matter unresolved.

Writer Jan Morris defines a condition, homesickness, she assumes is familiar to almost everyone, but she works with shades of meaning to explain what homesickness is for her:

> **Homesickness is the most delicious form of nostalgia, if only because, generally speaking, it really can be gratified. We cannot return to the past, but we can go home again. In my case homesickness is related to something the Welsh language calls *hiraeth*. This over-worked word (the Welsh are big on emotions) means literally "longing," "nostalgia," or sometimes plain "grief." It has come to signify, however, something even less exact: longing, yes, but for nothing definite; nostalgia, but for an indeterminate past; grief without cause or explanation. *Hiraeth!*—an insidious summation of all that is most poetical, most musical, most regretful, most opaque, most evasive, most extinguishable, in the character of Wales.**
>
> **–Jan Morris, "Home Thoughts from Abroad"**

Bob Costas, eulogizing Mickey Mantle, a great baseball player who had many universally human faults, advances his assessment by means of an important definitional distinction:

> **In the last year, Mickey Mantle, always so hard upon himself, finally came to accept and appreciate the distinction between a role model and a hero. The first he often was not, the second he always will be.**
>
> **–Bob Costas, "Eulogy for Mickey Mantle"**

But arguments of definition can be less weighty than these, though still hotly contested: *Is video game playing a sport? Is Madonna an artist? Is ketchup a vegetable?* To argue such cases, one would first have to put forth definitions, and then those definitions would have to become the foci of debates themselves. (For more about arguments of definition, see Chapter 9.)

Arguments of Evaluation—What Is the Quality of the Thing?

Arguments of definition lead naturally into arguments of quality—that is, to questions about quality. Most auto enthusiasts, for example, would not be content merely to inquire whether the Corvette is a sports car. They'd prefer to argue whether it is a *good* sports car or a better sports car than, say, the Viper. Or they might wish to assert that it is the best sports car in the world, perhaps qualifying their claim with the caveat *for the price*. Arguments of evaluation are so common that writers sometimes take them for granted, ignoring their complexity and importance in establishing people's values and priorities. The stasis question "what is the quality of the thing" is at the heart of attempts to understand the nuclear capability of North Korea. Those working to develop U.S. policy toward North Korea need to use this stasis question to develop a compelling argument of evaluation.

Consider how Rosa Parks assesses Martin Luther King Jr. in the following passage. Though she seems to be defining the concept of "leader," she is measuring King against criteria she has set for "*true* leader," an important distinction:

Dr. King was a true leader. I never sensed fear in him. I just felt he knew what had to be done and took the leading role without regard to consequences. I knew he was destined to do great things. He had an elegance about him and a speaking style that let you know where you stood and inspired you to do the best you could. He truly is a role model for us all. The sacrifice of his life should never be forgotten, and his dream must live on.

–Rosa Parks, "Role Models"

Parks's comments represent a type of informal evaluation that is common in ceremonial arguments; because King is so well known, she doesn't have to burnish every claim with specific evidence. (See p. 14 for more on ceremonial arguments.) In contrast, Molly Ivins in praising Barbara Jordan makes quite explicit the connections between her claim and the evidence:

Barbara Jordan, whose name was so often preceded by the words "the first black woman to . . ." that they seemed like a permanent title, died Wednesday in Austin. A great spirit is gone.

The first black woman to serve in the Texas Senate, the first black woman in Congress (she and Yvonne Brathwaite Burke of California were both elected in 1972, but Jordan had no Republican opposition), the first black elected to Congress from the South since Reconstruction, the first black woman to sit on major corporate boards, and so on. Were it not for the disease that slowly crippled her, she probably would have been the first black woman on the Supreme Court—it is known that Jimmy Carter had her on his short list.

And long before she became "the first and only black woman to . . ." there was that astounding string of achievements going back to high school valedictorian, honors at Texas Southern University, law degree from Boston University. Both her famous diction and her enormous dignity were present from the beginning, her high school teachers recalled. Her precise enunciation was a legacy from her father, a Baptist minister, and characteristic of educated blacks of his day. Her great baritone voice was so impressive that her colleagues in the Legislature used to joke that if Hollywood ever needed someone to be the voice of the Lord Almighty, only Jordan would do.

–Molly Ivins, "Barbara Jordan: A Great Spirit"

An argument of evaluation advances by presenting criteria and then measuring individual people, ideas, or things against those standards. Both the standards and the measurement can be explored argumentatively. And that's an important way to think of arguments—as ways to expand what is known, not just to settle differences. (For more about arguments of evaluation, see Chapter 10.)

Proposal Arguments—What Actions Should Be Taken?

Arguments may lead to proposals for action when writers have succeeded in presenting problems in such a compelling way that readers ask: *What can we do?* A proposal argument often begins with the presentation of research to document existing conditions. Thus if you are developing an argument about rising tuition costs at your college, you could use all of the stasis questions to explore the issue and to establish that costs are indeed rising. But the last question—"What actions should be taken?"—will probably be the most important, since it will lead you to develop concrete proposals to address the rise in fees. Knowing and explaining the status quo enable writers to explore appropriate and viable alternatives and then to recommend one preferable course of action. In examining a nationwide move to eliminate remedial education in colleges, John Cloud considers one possible proposal to avoid such action:

> **Students age 22 and over account for 43% of those in remedial classrooms, according to the National Center for Developmental Education. [. . . But] 55% of those needing remediation must take just one course. Is it too much to ask them to pay extra for that class or take it at a community college?**
>
> **–John Cloud, "Who's Ready for College?"**

Where a need is already obvious, writers may spend most of their energies describing and defending the solution. John Henry Newman, for example, assumes the need for strong higher learning in proposing a new form of liberal education in the nineteenth century. Here, he enumerates the benefits his preferred solution will bring to society:

> **[A] university education is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life.**
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> **–John Henry Newman, "The Idea of a University"**

Americans in particular tend to see the world in terms of problems and solutions; indeed, many Americans expect that any difficulty can be overcome by the proper infusion of technology and money. So proposal arguments seem especially appealing, even when quick-fix attitudes may themselves constitute a problem. (For more about proposal arguments,

IS EVERYTHING AN ARGUMENT?

In a world where argument is as abundant as fast food, everyone has a role to play in shaping and responding to arguments. Debate and discussion are, after all, key components of the never-ending conversation about our lives and the world that is sometimes called academic inquiry. Its standards are rigorous: Take no claim at face value, examine all evidence thoroughly, and study the implications of your own and others' beliefs. Developing an inquiring turn of mind like this can serve you well now and into the future. It might even lead you to wonder, with healthy suspicion, whether *everything* really is an argument.