

Audiences and Fields of Argument

Arguments are created for many different reasons, including attempts to change an opinion, influence someone's behavior, or justify one's own beliefs or actions. All arguments, however, regardless of their purpose, should be developed with an audience in mind. This is not to suggest that arguers are always aware of their audiences. The exchange of arguments, like many other human activities, sometimes becomes so reflexive that we do not take the time to think carefully through our argument strategies. One of the goals for this book is to help you to become more strategic in the arguments you choose to develop. To achieve this goal and to enhance the effectiveness of your arguments you need to think about the people who compose the audiences you want to influence with your arguments.

We have already established that people reason by assessing the quality of the competing claims they hear in rival stories. Some stories hold together better than others. Their plots are more compelling, their characters are given clear and distinctive roles to play, and they play them in accordance with our expectations. These stories are judged to have met the test of narrative probability. Likewise, some stories are especially believable and credible to us because they seem to confirm and explain the experiences we have had in our lives. These stories ring true to us, and because they correspond with our prior experiences they lend a sense of predictability to our lives. When confronted with such a story we know how to respond, because we have seen how such stories can be expected to turn out. These stories are judged to have narrative fidelity.

While we believe all people reason by testing the quality of the stories they encounter in their daily lives, we also know that alternative stories appeal to different people. An arguer who seeks to prove that a story is credible must find a way to appeal to the values, experiences, and beliefs of his or her audience. Arguers should seek to construct stories that are coherent, complete, and satisfying. They should also attempt to tell stories that are similar in both content and form to other stories that the people whom they are trying to convince have already heard and experienced. Stories are much more likely to be accepted as believable if they seem somewhat familiar to us.

Arguers should also attempt to find ways to tell their stories so these narratives affirm the self-concept and self-interest of the person(s) whom they are trying to convince.

■ Knowing Your Audience

One of the first challenges that you face as an arguer is to identify the *audience* for your arguments. Sometimes this is easy. If, for example, you are having an argument with a close friend about how the two of you should spend your evening together, the target for your arguments is obvious. In other argument situations, however, identifying your audience is much more difficult. A salesman who is showing a new car to a married couple, for example, might direct his arguments about the car's features primarily to the husband on the assumption that men may be more knowledgeable about and interested in automotive features. If the car is going to be driven primarily by the wife and she is going to be responsible for making the decision about what type of car is purchased, however, it might be a big mistake for the salesman to focus on persuading the husband of the car's benefits. Not only might the salesman not be fully responsive to the wife's questions or concerns about the car, but his misdirected arguments, and of course, the sexist attitudes that they reveal, could alienate the couple and result in a lost sale.

In complex argument situations, even identifying the appropriate audience for your arguments can be more difficult. In a political campaign candidates conduct expensive, complicated, and time-consuming public opinion polls in order to identify the values, beliefs, and interests of potential voters. Candidates must address the issues that voters believe are most important. Yet, there may be times in a campaign when a candidate's personal political convictions and/or the ideology of his or her party might prompt him or her to advance arguments that may not continue to resonate very well with potential voters. There are also many instances, of course, where audience opinions are deeply divided and may rapidly shift as the situation or circumstances change. For example, opposition to the Affordable Care Act, which many Republicans came to identify as "Obamacare" was a staple of conservative political discourse during the 2010 and 2012 electoral campaigns. As of this writing, 19 states controlled by Republican governors and Republican-dominated legislatures have chosen not to participate and have rejected the expansion of federally funded Medicaid for poor residents in their states.¹

When these states declined to establish their own state-controlled health exchanges to provide such care the federal government stepped in to provide federal exchanges to make such care possible. The federal investments were, however, challenged in the courts as an unlawful extension of federal authority over state sovereignty. The Supreme Court, however, ruled on June 25, 2015, that President Obama's health care law does allow the federal government to provide nationwide tax subsidies to help millions of poor Americans in these states, because the loss of subsidies would mean these people would be priced out of the insurance market. This ruling should mean that the cost of providing care in these states will not increase.² Clearly this Supreme Court case illustrates a situation where audiences with deeply divided opinions about an issue had to turn to the highest Court to resolve it.

It was much easier for politicians who oppose health care reform in the abstract to explain their position to their constituents than it was to actually begin taking away subsidies that many of their citizens had gotten used to and pricing them out of the insurance market. The lack of subsidies would have resulted in a situation where not only access to health care but health outcomes would be significantly different in those states that chose to develop their own state-controlled health exchanges than in those that declined to participate. This result would be even more noteworthy because many of the states that chose not to participate are in the South and are home to many of the nation's poorest and medically at-risk citizens.³

Another challenge that political candidates often face is that they must simultaneously address arguments to political partisans who already share their ideology as well as to undecided voters who may not share these opinions. To win the nomination of a political party, for instance, candidates seek to appeal to voters who are highly partisan and already committed to the values that shape the agenda of their particular party. Such voters tend to make up their minds fairly early in a campaign season. Once having made their decision about which candidate they will vote for they tend not to be very open to appeals from other candidates. In most closely contested general elections, however, candidates also attempt to appeal to voters who are far less committed to a particular viewpoint or to a particular candidate. These undecided, independent, and crossover voters actually determine the outcome of most closely contested elections. These voters tend not to be very partisan, are often not very interested in politics and do not pay very much attention to the campaigns or issues, and tend to make their decisions about how they will vote, or even if they will vote, very late in a campaign. A vital part of the campaign process for a candidate then is identifying precisely who these undecided voters are and what issues are most likely to provoke them to vote for him or her (or to discourage them from voting for the opponent).

The techniques of modern public opinion polling permit political candidates to target their appeals toward very unique and specific clusters of potential voters. A candidate seeking to win the votes of suburbanites working in white-collar jobs will want to make very different arguments than a candidate seeking to win support from blue-collar residents of big cities. Candidates sometimes develop such sophisticated knowledge about their audiences that they construct appeals that are explicitly targeted toward very narrow audience segments. In local elections, for example, candidates may focus on winning the votes of teachers or public employees. Even if such voters might represent only a small portion of the total electorate, their votes can swing an election. Candidates will also emphasize issues that cut across economic or social class issues to reach out to voters who might share certain views or concerns. For example, a candidate might emphasize child-care issues because he or she understands that a substantial number of potential voters are single parents who must worry daily about balancing their responsibilities as wage earners with their responsibility to provide care for their children.

■ Assessing Your Audience

Although you will not likely know as much about the values and opinions of the audience you are trying to convince with your arguments as will a politician who has

consulted a public opinion researcher, you should try to understand your audience as well as you can. One way to begin assessing your audience is by considering its demographic characteristics. Demographic characteristics are, of course, far from reliable predictors of the attitudes and values people hold. Indeed, these attributes may sometimes even serve to mislead arguers. Nonetheless, this is at least an appropriate place to start thinking about the characteristics of your likely audience. Knowing demographic characteristics—age, social affiliations, gender, education and knowledge, background and experience, and culture—can be potentially useful for assessing your audience.

Age

In his book, *The Rhetoric*, written in the fourth century B.C.E., Aristotle discussed the differences between trying to persuade the young, the elderly, and those in the prime of life. Aristotle observed that young people were more likely to have volatile tempers, and they were also more concerned with pursuing victory and with proving their superiority over others. In contrast, he noted that old people were far less likely to have the emotional volatility of youth, but they were far more likely to be stubborn and set in their ways. Persons of middle age, however, those whom Aristotle described as being in their prime, typically did not have the extreme characteristics of those either younger or older than themselves.⁴ One can surmise that Aristotle probably made these statements while he was himself in the prime of life! While Aristotle's notions of how the attitudes and values of people may change as they age might seem a bit simplistic and stereotypical today, his comments continue to have some validity.

Common wisdom suggests that age might have significant influence on the values that people hold and on how open they are to arguments suggesting alternative views. An audience composed of older persons may, for example, be more likely to hold conservative views on social issues than might an audience composed of younger persons. For example, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center, compared to their parents, Millennials (18–33 year olds) are relatively unattached to the dominant institutions of society such as organized religion and political parties. They make much greater use of social media, and they are not in a hurry to marry. They are also much more likely to support same-sex marriage and the legalization of marijuana.⁵ In another research study Millennials were asked the best way to address the challenges facing the country. By a margin of two to one, Millennials chose “through a collective social movement” over all other options. They also believe it is their generation that must take action, even if that means significant sacrifices in their own lives.⁶

Also, because audiences are most likely to be concerned about issues that directly affect them, young persons might be especially concerned with issues such as the availability of federal funds to help them finance their education or finding a job after they have completed school. Middle-aged persons might be especially concerned with issues such as access to quality day-care programs for their children or the condition of local parks and recreational facilities. Older persons might be more concerned about issues such as the cost of medical care, the sufficiency of their pensions or Social Security checks, and the level of their property taxes.

An especially interesting example of an issue that has different impacts on people depending upon their age is interest rates. The young are delighted when interest rates

are low. Lower rates make it easier to borrow money to attend college, buy a car, or purchase or furnish a home. Older people are less likely to be negotiating new loans to buy property. Indeed, many retired citizens seek to live off the income from their investments. Extended periods of time with low interest rates means elderly investors will get a much smaller return on their investments. Thus, economic conditions that greatly benefit one age group can pose serious problems for another.

American political candidates seem to spend significantly more time discussing issues that are of concern to elderly and middle-aged voters than to issues that are of concern to young people. This is because these politicians have learned that young people are far less likely to vote than older citizens. Yet, many studies have suggested that the avoidance of issues that might interest, concern, and motivate young voters has the effect of further discouraging their political participation, diminishing their interest in politics, and decreasing their sense of political empowerment.⁷ Neglecting any segment of your audience when advancing arguments can thus have consequences that may go beyond your likelihood of achieving a successful outcome in any single situation. It may leave behind a residue of attitudes and opinions that inhibit your ability to be effective in future situations.

The 2008 campaign that pitted Senator Barack Obama against Senator John McCain marked an election in which age proved to be a very important factor in the outcome. Older voters were far more likely to support Senator McCain than were younger voters. These citizens especially resonated with his status as a war hero and former Vietnam POW. Younger voters, on the other hand, were far more likely to support Senator Obama. His relative youth, hip-style, young and attractive family, and the opportunity to be a part of a history-making event by helping to elect the nation's first African American president had strong appeal to younger voters. In addition, Senator McCain admitted to being largely unfamiliar with the Internet and social media. Senator Obama, in contrast, admitted that he was addicted to his Blackberry and his campaign had a strong and dynamic Web presence. For younger voters who, especially in 2008, were far more likely than their parents' generation to live their lives online, this became a significant factor in determining their support.⁸

Social Affiliations

People belong to a variety of groups, and these memberships may give you some insight into their attitudes and values. People select their affiliations because they are interested in certain topics, issues, and problems; because they enjoy certain types of interactions or recreational activities; because the group reflects their cultural or occupational interests; and so forth. Most people are socialized to acquire many of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of those with whom they spend their time and engage in conversations; people often become more like those with whom they interact.

Obviously, you can learn something about people if you determine what political party they belong to; if they are religious or not; what church they might attend; and what civic, occupational, or recreational groups they belong to. A member of the National Rifle Association probably would have very different values than would a member of the Sierra Club, even though both groups may have an interest in the preservation of wetlands. People who are drawn to membership in the Jaycees or the local

Chamber of Commerce will likely acquire attitudes about their communities, about the importance of civic identity, and about the political issues that concern these associations. Membership in a union, a professional association, or a veteran's organization might also influence people's public attitudes and opinions.

Knowledge about the specific group affiliations of your audience will help you to construct your arguments to be maximally effective. Such knowledge might also reveal that you are attempting to appeal to an audience who either already agrees with you or is beyond persuasion, regardless of the best arguments that you can muster.

Gender

While it might be difficult to ascertain people's values on the basis of their gender, gender often influences our values and attitudes and the degree to which certain arguments appeal to us. For example, an audience composed primarily of men might be more receptive to football examples than might an audience composed of women. On the other hand, an audience of women might be expected to be more interested in arguments focused on women's rights.

Women are more likely than men to have experienced gender discrimination, and consequently we can expect that they would be more sensitive to it. While male attitudes on issues such as acquaintance rape, sexual harassment, and domestic spousal abuse are no doubt changing, it is likely that these issues will still be more compelling for an audience of women than for an audience of men. The 1991 confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas provided one of the most contested examples of gender difference in the evaluation of argumentative claims. While the Senate was conducting hearings to determine whether or not Justice Thomas should be confirmed, Anita Hill, a law professor from the University of Oklahoma and a former law clerk for Justice Thomas, came forward and charged him with sexual harassment. The charge was investigated by the Senate Judiciary Committee, which at the time was composed entirely of men.

Ultimately the committee held televised public hearings where Hill was called to testify. Others were then called to testify both to buttress and to refute her statements. Thomas, who like Hill is an African American, appeared before the committee and sought to frame the episode as an expression of American racism. He protested that the charges made against him were tantamount to a "high-tech lynching." Many women, especially feminist activists, expressed outrage that the committee seemed to turn on the alleged victim rather than the accused perpetrator. After Thomas was confirmed and sworn into office the issue was kept alive in public arguments that lambasted the Senate as a "boys club" and declared that women could not expect a fair and impartial hearing by such a group of men.

Although this example happened many years ago, it is clear that gender differences in the evaluation of arguments persist. For example, in 2012 Missouri Congressman Todd Akin, a candidate for the US Senate, declared: "First of all, from what I understand from doctors, pregnancy [from rape] is really rare. . . . If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down."⁹ The comments produced a firestorm of controversy. While many were critical of Akin's knowledge of the science of contraception, women seemed to especially take exception to his poor

choice of terms in talking about some rape as "legitimate." The comment proved so embarrassing that leaders of his own party encouraged him to leave the race. Akin refused to quite, however, and ended up losing the election by a wide margin to a rival that many had believed would be easy to defeat.¹⁰

The so-called "gender gap" has persisted in American politics for many years. Public opinion polls have revealed with some consistency that women are more concerned with social issues such as education, health, retirement security, the environment, and public welfare. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be concerned about the state of the economy, crime, and foreign policy. Likewise, in recent years women have been more inclined to favor moderate and/or liberal candidates while men have more likely favored conservative candidates. Indeed, the victories by the Democrats in 1992 and 1996 were frequently cited as resulting from the strong "gender gap" that advantaged Bill Clinton over both George Herbert Walker Bush and Robert Dole. Although the Republicans captured the White House in 2000, the Bush-Cheney ticket lost the popular vote in large part because the significant "gender gap" persisted.¹¹ In 2008 female Democrats were more likely to favor Hillary Clinton during the primary race than Barack Obama, but once Obama won the nomination they supported Obama in the race against John McCain and also stayed with him in the 2012 campaign against Mitt Romney.

Education and Knowledge

Arguers must seek to adapt their arguments to the educational and intellectual level of their audiences. Not only might persons of different educational backgrounds harbor different attitudes and values, they might process arguments differently. The more sophisticated and educated an audience is, the more likely its members will be able to follow and to evaluate complex argument forms. In fact, more sophisticated and educated audiences are more likely to demand such arguments and are less likely to be swayed by emotional appeals.

Those who share knowledge about a subject also share the ability to communicate in the jargon of that discipline. Thus, an audience composed of physicians will argue about alternative treatments for patients with AIDS using more sophisticated terms than the general public would use. Arguers should also recognize the fact that certain educational experiences might predispose people toward certain beliefs. An audience composed of scientists, for example, would be more inclined to place their faith in science as a means to solve social problems than might an audience composed of musicians. Even a shared appreciation of the scientific method might not be sufficient to facilitate shared understanding, however. For example, an audience of nuclear engineers is more likely to favor the continued development of nuclear power than would be an audience composed of biologists. The current controversy over climate change provides a very real example of a gap in understanding between scientists and many members of the public regarding whether human activities might be responsible for global warming. A recent study conducted at Yale University reported that 97 percent of scientists believed humans were responsible for climate change yet only 41 percent of the US public agreed.¹² It is interesting to note that a similar, although less significant, gap in public and scientific opinion may exist with regard to the safety of geneti-

cally modified foods (which are commonly referred to as GMOs). Scientists are far less likely to see these products as risky to human health than is the general public.¹³

Background and Experience

The background and experience of audience members will have tremendous influence on their attitudes and values. An audience member who has had a friend or family member killed by a drunk driver, for example, may have far stronger opinions about the need to tighten controls on those who drink and drive than might someone else. Likewise, a parent who is raising a rebellious teenager might be more sympathetic to the parents of a gang member than might the parents of a docile and well-adjusted teenager.

People screen the arguments and the stories they hear through their own experiences, and the more knowledge you have about the experiences of your audience members the more effective you can be in adjusting your ideas to them. People seem naturally to favor stories that elevate their own personal sense of importance and worth. We have a natural resistance to stories that make us personally responsible for negative consequences or outcomes if we can find a story that credibly affixes the responsibility on others or on external factors beyond our control. In a previous research study, for example, Hollihan and Riley discovered that the parents of delinquent children were resistant to arguments that blamed their own parenting practices or personal failings (e.g., their alcoholism or failed marriages) for the behavior of their children. They were, on the other hand, quite willing to blame their children's delinquency on the inadequacy of the public schools, on their children's friends, on the images of youth conveyed by the mass media, on the police, or even on their own children's intrinsically evil nature.¹⁴ Therefore, in addition to knowing about the experiences of audience members you need to consider how they see themselves as actors in their own life stories.

Culture

One especially important factor that influences how people evaluate arguments is their culture. People are socialized into their culture in myriad different ways, and their cultures can unknowingly influence their opinions, values, and actions. For instance, people raised in the US culture generally have very different values, attitudes, and opinions from those raised in the Middle East, Asia, or even Europe. We often see the effects of cultural differences when immigrants come to the United States. People from different cultures may clash with their neighbors over such issues as child rearing, religious practices, style of dress, and so forth. Sometimes there are also tensions between generations. Parents who have come to the United States from abroad bring their cultural traditions with them. However, their children, who are exposed to US culture at school, through interactions with peers, and through the media, see the world very differently than they do. Given the tremendous differences in their native environments, religious beliefs, forms of government, family traditions, and political systems, it should come as no surprise that people from these different cultures experience and evaluate arguments differently.

Research has suggested, for example, that Chinese arguers use very different strategies and argumentation styles than do Westerners. Chinese arguers are more likely to

mask their emotions; they are more likely to use silences to punctuate their differences; and they are far less likely to display their disagreements or negative feelings.¹⁵ Westerners frequently misunderstand what Chinese arguers are actually communicating. Westerners assume that the absence of direct disagreement or the lengthy silences means the Chinese arguers agree with them, when in fact they may not. Chinese cultural and communication practices have been heavily influenced by the Confucian principles. As Nancy Pine argued, Confucius celebrated a way of life that emphasizes: "Everyone is expected to behave with respect and kindness. Individuality and striving for uniqueness are not high on the list of prized attributes. People are viewed in relation to how they treat others, not for their independent ideas."¹⁶ Bringing attention to yourself by openly disagreeing with or vociferously arguing with others, or even by directly stating your opinions may therefore be inconsistent with Chinese cultural norms and ideals.

Arguers should be aware that in our world people from different cultures are more and more frequently coming into contact with each other. The great cities of the world—for instance, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Rome, Hong Kong, New York, and Los Angeles—are becoming increasingly diverse. In addition, new global economic forces are changing the way nations and their citizens must conduct business. People can no longer live in isolation. The management of our social and political life and the public policies that must be designed to maintain social harmony increasingly demand that arguers be sensitive to differences in culture.

■ People Evaluate Arguments Differently

We have already asserted our claim that people evaluate arguments in accordance with the principles of storytelling. It is understandable that people evaluate these stories based upon their own unique backgrounds, experiences, age, interests, affiliations, and culture. If arguments must appeal to such a wide range of viewpoints, what is an arguer to do? How can you ever learn enough about your audience to be able to tailor your arguments to suit them? Furthermore, how can you avoid alienating some people in an effort to appeal to others? The Belgian philosopher and legal theorist, Chaim Perelman and his colleague L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, observed:

Argumentation aimed exclusively at a particular audience has the drawback that the speaker, by the very fact of adapting to the values of his [sic] listeners, might rely on arguments that are foreign or even directly opposed to what is acceptable to persons other than those he is presently addressing.¹⁷

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggested that arguers direct their appeals to a *universal audience*. This universal audience is not an actual, existing one but is instead created in the mind of the arguer. They believed by using this abstract audience as a reference point for evaluating arguments, one can better tailor arguments to a broad range of potential audience members. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca stressed that "argumentation addressed to a universal audience must convince the reader that the reasons adduced are of a compelling character, that they are self-evident, and possess an absolute and timeless validity, independent of local or historical contingencies."¹⁸ To create arguments for this universal audience, one should seek to create claims that

will appeal to all reasoning persons. Although not an easy task, this is an appropriate goal for arguers to pursue. So how should an arguer proceed?

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasized that one should seek to develop arguments that make use of *objective facts* that are knowable and uncontested. Such objective facts can then be used to assert *obvious truths*, generalizations that are commonly shared and understood. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca acknowledged the difficulty in finding such readily agreed upon “facts” and “truths” when they observed that there are significant differences among people in this regard. They argued, “Everyone constitutes the universal audience from what he [sic] knows of his fellow men, in such a way as to transcend the few oppositions he is aware of. Each individual, each culture, has thus its own conception of the universal audience.”¹⁹ Consequently, the universal audience is a construction of the arguer—a self-conscious test that the arguer should submit any argument to in order to make it as strong as possible. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also recognized that, on rare occasions, there might be audience members who do not recognize the “objective facts” or “obvious truths” present in the arguments you create. To some extent they felt it would be legitimate to dismiss these recalcitrant few as stupid or abnormal. The danger in this is you may find yourself making arguments designed to persuade fewer and fewer people, because you have castigated as stupid all those who do not agree with you and see the world as you see it.

Although the conception of the universal audience does not eliminate all challenges in adapting arguments to different viewpoints, it does lead to the creation of arguments that appeal to the largest number of people. Arguers should therefore be aware of the need to create arguments that will convince the broader universal audience in addition to the unique interests, concerns, and beliefs of their particular audiences. Arguers need to search continually for objective facts and obvious truths, because the very process of argumentative investigation can strengthen arguments and help create stronger cases.

■ The Principle of Presence

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also proposed that arguers consider the notion of *presence*. In using this term, they stressed how arguers should take steps in order that the arguments they create will be seen as especially important to their audience. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggested that the simplest way to give an argument presence is through repetition. If a particular argument is important to your overall case it should be stated repeatedly, either in the same speech or essay or in several speeches or essays. For example, President Barack Obama emphasized his desire to enact health care reform in virtually every speech he gave after he was elected to office in 2008. Access to health care for all Americans had been a primary plank in his platform during the campaign, and it was declared to be his most pressing priority once he was inaugurated. By trying to sell his plan for health care reform to the public at every opportunity he sought to create such a groundswell of support that he could overwhelm all opposition in Congress. As noted above, however, in the highly polarized political culture that defines our era Obama's emphasis on passing his legislation

served instead to deepen conservative opposition and made it easier for his Republican opponents to link him to the reforms and to label the Affordable Care Act “Obamacare.” Of course by consistently emphasizing their opposition to Obamacare the congressional Republicans were also demonstrating the principle of presence.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also observed that an arguer can further accentuate important arguments or passages in oral presentations by the tone of voice that is used, by increasing one's volume, or by pausing just before uttering them.²⁰ Successful speakers often find they can increase the presence that a particular argument may have by the use of gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues.

Even if you have created your arguments with the notion of a universal audience in mind, it is helpful if you can find a way to make your arguments uniquely appealing to the particular audience you are addressing. We have already detailed the ways in which different people might be expected to have different responses to the arguments they encounter. How then do you accomplish this task? How do you create arguments that have universal appeal but that also elicit your particular audience's attention to and concern for the issues you are presenting?

To a certain extent, the notion of presence suggests concern for the stylistic dimensions of creating and communicating your arguments. It is typically helpful to try to communicate with your audience, rather than to adopt a preachy or highly judgmental tone. You should also be sensitive to the feedback your audience is providing by watching for signs of confusion or misunderstanding, nods of agreement, head shakes, frowns, or other responses that might signal a failure in communicating your message.

Arguers should also seek to pique the interests of their audiences, to provoke their sympathy or their feelings of empathy, to construct arguments so audiences really feel them. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca illustrated the concept of presence with a Chinese proverb: “A king sees an ox on its way to sacrifice. He is moved to pity for it and orders that a sheep be used in its place. He confesses he did so because he could see the ox, but not the sheep.”²¹

A rescue mission that provides assistance to the homeless in Los Angeles sends out mailings to potential donors to raise funds to support their efforts. Even though most of the recipients of the aid, and indeed most homeless people in Los Angeles, are men who suffer from mental illness or who abuse and have become dependent on alcohol or drugs, the mission's solicitations often emphasize the plight of homeless children. In this way, the mission creates greater presence as to the problem of homelessness in the city and probably gains more donations. It is much easier to provoke concern for the plight of the homeless when the emphasis is on victims who did not make choices that led to their own suffering.²²

As an arguer, your goal should be to develop arguments and a style of presentation that will make the issues you raise seem uniquely important to your audience so they will choose to devote their attention to them. During the 2012 presidential campaign, for example, President Obama sought to convince voters that even though the recovery from the 2008 financial crisis might have been slower than one would have hoped, the recovery had been steady and sustained and the economy was indeed improving, and he was entitled to a second term. Challenger Mitt Romney, on the other hand, told a rival story that emphasized the persistently high rates of unemployment as evidence that a more free-enterprise approach to the economy would better

spur economic growth. Obama and the Democrats countered that the Republican strategy favored the wealthy and would leave the middle class behind. It is arguable that the Obama story prevailed with a majority of voters when Romney seemed to confirm the Democratic story about him as someone attuned to the needs of the wealthy and insensitive to the plight of the poor or middle class. During a private reception with wealthy donors Romney was filmed giving a statement when he did not know he was being recorded; he declared that 47 percent of Americans are dependent upon government because they pay no income tax but believe they are "entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you name it."²³

Identifying which arguments will have presence for your audience, and finding ways to present your arguments in a style that maximizes their importance, requires knowledge of your audience and of the techniques for presenting arguments. In contemporary election campaigns candidates will make extensive use of public opinion polls to learn more about their audiences. In addition, they will then frequently test their argument strategies through the use of focus groups. Although such discovery strategies are not likely available to most arguers, they demonstrate the importance of adjusting ideas and arguments to listeners.

■ Argument Fields

Philosopher Stephen Toulmin developed another view of how people construct and evaluate arguments. Trained as a logician, Toulmin became increasingly frustrated with the limitations of formal logic. He felt that the principles of formal logic were useful but did not reflect how people actually reasoned when making everyday decisions. Toulmin's colleagues believed logical models were the most appropriate means for rationally arriving at conclusions and that the requirements for a rational argument did not change from one context to another. Toulmin argued, however, that different situations or contexts—which he came to refer to, as *fields*—demanded different standards for arguments. As Toulmin and his coauthors Richard Rieke and Alan Janik declared:

The trains of reasoning that it is appropriate to use vary from situation to situation. As we move from the lunch counter to the executive conference table, from the science laboratory to the law courts, the "forum" of discussion changes profoundly. The kind of involvement that the participants have with the outcome of the reasoning is entirely different in the different situations and so also will be the ways in which possible outcomes of the argument are tested and judged.²⁴

Arguments can be considered to be in the same field when the data and conclusions are of essentially the same logical type. They will be in different fields when the data and conclusions are markedly different or in a case where the same data lead to different conclusions.²⁵

To understand Toulmin's view of argumentation theory it is important to determine what he meant by *fields*. Toulmin viewed the term *fields* and the term *disciplines* as roughly synonymous. His claim was that physicists argue similarly because they share training in physics. Likewise, attorneys argue in a similar fashion, members of the clergy share an argument style, as do historians, physicians, engineers, and so on. These

disciplinary boundaries are not always formal or predictive. For example, physicists might be expected to argue in a similar fashion to engineers, biologists, chemists, and perhaps even physicians, because the scientific method underlies their shared fields.

Still other complications can occur because people are often members of several different argument fields simultaneously. Someone may be, for example, both a fundamentalist Christian and a scientist. As a Christian, this person might accept the biblical account of the creation of the universe as outlined in the Book of Genesis. As a scientist, on the other hand, this person might be inclined to accept Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. In such a situation the person who belongs to the incompatible fields is continually forced to reconcile the tensions that may occur between them, and also to decide from situation to situation which field's argument standards to apply.

Other argumentation theorists have suggested it would be useful to consider argument fields from a broader perspective than that of disciplines. Charles Arthur Willard suggested fields should be seen as sociological entities. Willard said fields encompass terms such as "groups," "organizations," "frameworks," and "relationships," particularly when these entities come to share a "constellation of practices."²⁶

Willard claimed that the practices of any field are consensually developed as its members come to agreements regarding how their day-to-day work proceeds. Thus, chemists forge appropriate techniques for resolving disputes in the field of chemistry as they conduct their daily work. Likewise, accountants discuss their daily challenges and responsibilities, and then they propose appropriate means for addressing the problems they share, so they continually hone the standards and practices of their profession. There may be times as well when there are arguments within a field and even across fields about what should be the appropriate standards of a field.

One illustration of such a confrontation of conflicting standards might be the 2001 controversy involving the Enron Corporation and its accounting practices. Arthur Anderson, the accounting firm whose accountants conducted the audit of Enron, argued that it was "normal accounting practice" to destroy the records of the audit and to shred documents. The attorneys, representing both the government and private investors, argued that the destruction of the audit records were tantamount to the destruction of evidence in a court action and therefore constituted a criminal act. The dispute that resulted concerned whether or not the destruction of such records did indeed constitute accepted practice within the field of accounting (an intra-field dispute); then, assuming it did, the dispute would focus on whether or not the practices of the legal field should be given primary consideration over those of accounting once a court action had been filed (an inter-field dispute).

Willard acknowledged that although some fields may simply take a body of knowledge for granted, most fields actively attempt to perfect and improve the knowledge in the field.²⁷ Thus, for example, chefs argue about the best way to prepare a soufflé, orthopedic surgeons about the best way to treat a ruptured disc, hairdressers about the best way to color hair so it looks natural, accountants about the best ways to conduct audits, and so forth. Willard also stressed that even the decision to participate in a particular field (which may on some occasions be an unconscious choice) may end up constraining the participant's ways of thinking about and approaching problems. To participate in the discussions within a field usually entails surrendering a certain amount of personal freedom, because one will now begin to see the world from

the perspective of that field. Consequently, the attorney is always seeing problems from the perspective of questions of law, the scientist from the perspective of scientific inquiry, and the artist from an aesthetic perspective.²⁸

Just as their audiences are composed of persons who represent fields or perspectives, arguers themselves represent particular fields or perspectives. Awareness of the implications of field theory should help you to become more aware of the degree to which your own experiences, beliefs, training, and membership in certain groups or organizations influences your argumentative techniques.

A few arguments may be so compelling that they meet the requirements for argumentative proof in all fields. Toulmin called these arguments *field-invariant*.²⁹ For example, most of us would accept as true the claim that parents who love their children naturally want to protect them from harm. This claim could be called field-invariant. Even a claim that seems as clear-cut as this one, however, may not indeed always be true. As an illustration, let us recall the religious cult called the Branch Davidians.

In 1993, members of the Branch Davidians, including many parents and children ranging in age from infants to teenagers, holed up in a compound outside of Waco, Texas. When agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms tried to serve a search warrant on them to investigate claims that the group was dealing in illegal guns, the cultists opened fire on the federal agents, killing several of them. The FBI then surrounded the compound and for 51 days sought to convince the cultists to surrender, or at least to send the children out of the compound so they would not be hurt. Finally, the government decided to fire tear gas into the compound to try to force the occupants to leave. Suddenly the building burst into flames. It is still under dispute whether the federal agents somehow inadvertently sparked the fire, or if the people inside deliberately set fire to the compound. What is known, however, is the flames consumed almost 100 persons, including 24 children, 17 of whom were under the age of ten.³⁰

It was extremely difficult for the rest of the world to understand how parents could intentionally put their children at such risk, or perhaps even cause their death, especially in such a terrible manner. Those of us who do not share these parents' beliefs and who did not participate in the Branch Davidians's field, may feel these parents did not love their children enough to try to save them.³¹ To members of this religious community, however, the decision to perish in the fire may have seemed very rational, and the taking of their children's lives might have been an expression of their love for them. In their minds, the fiery end to this siege may have confirmed a biblical prophecy that fire would consume the earth and that the true believers in Christ would find their way to heaven.³² Thus, for the Branch Davidians, fiery Armageddon represented not the end of their children's lives, but the promise of a new beginning in heaven.

Sadly, this situation of parents putting their children to death to secure them a place in the afterlife has become even more common today as suicide bombers sometimes sacrifice themselves and their children in order to punish "nonbelievers" and create a sense of public terror to achieve their political objectives. Even the argument that parents who love their children want to protect them, which seems to be field-invariant, is found to be *field-dependent*.³³

Arguers should try to be sensitive to the requirements for establishing claims in the argument field in which they are participating and create arguments that will sat-

isfy the audience by appealing to their identification with a particular field. When dealing with people from different argument fields, or when it is difficult to determine what field's standards should be applied, it is desirable to create arguments that will appeal to people in as many different fields as possible. In a sense, this is the pursuit of arguments that appeal to the universal audience.

Another task that arguers sometimes face is the need to translate arguments from one field to another. Frequently this process means creating stories that appeal to people from different fields. As an illustration of this process we might cite the case of a scientist who is attempting to find scientific explanations for biblical stories. For example, an astronomer might speculate on any events in the heavens on the night Christ was born that could explain the story about the three wise men following the path of a star to find the newborn baby.

SUMMARY

If possible, arguers should carefully consider the values and attitudes of their audiences in forming their arguments. The audience's demographic factors may provide insight into their interests, needs, and experiences. Arguers should also attempt to emphasize and give greater presence to those aspects of their arguments that are most likely to appeal to their listeners. In addition, arguers should recognize that people respond differently to arguments and often use different standards for evaluating arguments based on the fields to which they belong. Although it may be impossible to convince all your listeners, your goal should be the creation of arguments that will appeal to a universal audience of reasoning persons.

KEY TERMS

audience	objective facts
field-dependent	obvious truths
field-invariant	presence
fields	universal audience

ACTIVITIES

1. To practice analyzing an audience, conduct a demographic analysis of your class.
 - a. What is the age span of your class? What is the average age of your class?
 - b. What are the social affiliations of the class members?
 - c. What is the educational background of the class?
 - d. What are the cultural perspectives of your classmates?
2. Select a recent public controversy. Based on the information gleaned above, assume that your classmates compose your audience for arguments that you would make about this controversy. How will your classmates view the controversy? Answer the following questions:
 - a. Would your classmates' views change if they were older? Were their views different when they were younger?

- b. Would your classmates' views change if they had different social affiliations?
 - c. Would your classmates' views change if they were better educated? Would their views be different if they were less well educated?
 - d. Would your classmates' views change if they were part of a different culture?
3. Take a position on the public controversy identified in the preceding exercise. Now imagine supporting your position with two different audiences. If the only difference you know about the two audiences is that they differ in age, how might you adapt your argument to gain the adherence of each of these two audiences? Repeat this for each of the audience variables identified in this chapter.
4. Listen to an argument interaction by, for instance, listening to a radio talk show, watching a talk show on television or online, attending a public meeting of local or student government, or observing your friends engaging in argument. Now analyze the interaction.
 - a. List the objective facts (those facts that are knowable and uncontested by the disputants).
 - b. List the obvious truths (those generalizations that are commonly shared and understood).
 - c. What facts and truths were contested? Were these points of disagreement resolved? If so how were they resolved? If not, how might they have been resolved?
5. To learn more about the nature of argument fields, attend a meeting of your local city council and observe a criminal trial proceeding.
 - a. What are the differences, if any, in what constitutes acceptable evidence in the two fields of argument?
 - b. How do the participants introduce facts?
 - c. How do the participants challenge the facts introduced by another participant?
 - d. Are there controls on who may speak or on what they can say?

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- ²² We are not suggesting there are not significant numbers of homeless children and families in Lost Angeles, or in any other large US city. Nor are we suggesting that the homeless missions in Los Angeles do not provide assistance to such families. We also are not arguing that their appeals for donations are in any way deceptive. Instead, we see these appeals as conscious decisions to try to capitalize on the public's understandable sympathies and concern for disadvantaged children.
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The Language of Argument

Cities across the Middle East have been subjected to repeated attacks by suicide bombers. Ordinary public spaces, including restaurants, bars, billiards parlors, markets, buses, schools, and universities, have been rocked by explosions. Hundreds of persons, including men, women, and children, have been killed or injured. The rhythms of daily life have been destroyed as even the most mundane tasks now expose people to risk. Such wanton and unpredictable acts of violence create palpable feelings of anxiety, damaging people's psyches and undermining the economy.

The suicide bombers have ranged in age from the early teens to the 40s and have included both males and females. Most of these bombers have come from conditions of dire poverty, and many have spent their entire lives in teeming refugee camps or ghettos. In a few cases, however, the bombers have come from educated and middle-class families. Some of these bombers have been highly religious; others are said to have been more secular in their beliefs. Some were married, others were engaged to be married, a few had children, and almost all of them left behind parents and/or siblings. In many instances, close friends and family members actually assisted them by helping them build the bombs or by strapping the bombs to their bodies. How does one make sense of such a situation? What would motivate people to strap bombs to their bodies so they simultaneously end their own lives and those of strangers? Why would families and/or friends help their loved ones in such a gruesome and deadly task?

To most of us these suicide bombers are vile terrorists and their actions represent a core capacity for unthinkable evil. No political objectives and no experienced injustices could warrant such inhumane and despicable actions as the slaughter of innocent civilian lives. Yet, to many in the region, and increasingly beyond the region, who also feel they have experienced poverty and oppression, these suicide bombers are considered heroic freedom fighters and are celebrated as martyrs to a cause whose significance and purpose justifies such sacrifice. From this perspective, the victims in these killings are not innocent civilians, but they are instead representatives of the unjust political regimes that have perpetuated these conditions of poverty and oppression and prevented the full embrace of religious law and authority. Those who sym-