Argument

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Four Core Types of Argument
(see Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor’s “rhetorical generative” approach, 1983)

1. Categorical propositions (What is this thing?)
2. Causal statements (What caused it or what effects does it have?)
3. Evaluations (Is it good or bad?)
4. Proposals (What should be done about it?)

- Thesis of any argument falls into these four categories.
- 1 & 2 demand their own forms of argument with distinctive structure, and 3 & 4 combine the first two
(1) Categorical Proposition (CP) uses *definition* (and/or *examples*)

e.g. “America is a class society.”

If writer defines “class society” as “people living in different sized towns,” he or she could produce plenty of evidence.

If writer defines “class society” as “structured into ranks from peasantry to nobility,” where could he/she find an actual American Duke or serf?

- Hence, writer must construct a *definition* that is acceptable to the *audience*.

- *Definition and specific examples* are structural requirements of CP argument
(1) Categorical Proposition (cont’d) uses definition and/or examples

e.g. “My roommate is generous.”

Writer will bypass definition and move straight to specific examples of roommate’s generosity (lending money, clothes, time…)

Writer moves straight to examples because she has clear definition of “generous” in mind and cannot imagine any audience having a different one.

Still, whether or not articulated, a definition of “generous” controls the choice of examples.

It was not roommate’s behavior which led to the label “generous,” but a definition of “generous” which led to the categorization of the behavior

- Because we tend to forget the controlling power of definition, we delude ourselves into thinking that the examples come first and lead inductively to the thesis when in fact the process goes the other way.
(1) Categorical Proposition (cont’d)  
Organizational Options

1. definition can sit at top  
2. can emerge at end  
3. or have its elements dispersed

   e.g. “Wilkie Collins’s *Armadale* is a sensation novel.”
   
   - multi-part definition of sensation novel would supply structure of paper
   - E.g. “sensation novel is characterized by its ominous setting, grotesque characters, suspenseful plot, and concern with the occult”
   - Each element from this definition becomes predicate of its own CP and topic sentence of paragraph

   ➢ These fundamentals of CP argument tool equips writer with the tools to support *compare/contrast* essays
C&A assertions appeal to our shared beliefs about the way human nature and the world work (e.g. happiness is not an acceptable cause for murder)

- Relies on an assumption about *agency*, about what can cause what
- Adds dimension of *time*
- Whether or not we articulate *agency* depends largely on *audience*

*Definition* and *agency* = warrants behind categorical and causal arguments (see Toulmin model)
(2) Cause and Effect Assertion (cont’d)

E.g. “A significant cause of teenage vandalism is violence on TV.”

- Agency = imitation; most audiences will accept imitation as a human behavior

E.g. “Wearing a mouthpiece improves athletic performance.”

- We have to explain agency, as it will not be familiar to all audiences
(2) Cause and Effect Assertion (cont’d)

Two essential skills for successful C&A arguments:

1. The ability to recognize the complex interaction of factors, conditions, and influences that yield an effect
   - Causes can be necessary and sufficient, remote and proximate, or conditions and influences acted on by precipitating cause
   - Promote awareness that linear model of causality may be falsification, and that causes can be reciprocal (e.g. inflation urges pay raises, and higher wages fuel inflation)
   - Consideration of causes raises question of responsibility

2. Convincing an audience that a particular cause did in fact operate
   - e.g. proving remote effect by revealing chain of causes
   - Time sequence, causal analogy (e.g. X causes cancer in humans because it causes cancer in animals)
(3) Evaluation Argument
makes a value judgment and rests on criteria/assumptions of value

E.g. “The San Diego Padres are a bad team.”

E.g. “Jane Eyre is a great novel.”

E.g. “The open classroom is a poor learning environment.”

- Evaluation arguments are genuinely arguable, not just a matter of personal taste
- Key challenge: finding and defending shareable assumptions or criteria on which the evaluation is made
(3) Evaluation Argument
makes a value judgment and rests on criteria/assumptions of value

E.g. “*Jane Eyre* is a great novel.”

- First construct plausible *definition* or set of criteria for “great novel” which *fits the evidence* of the book

E.g. “It was good to bring the Shah to the US for medical treatment.”

- We could use a CP (1) and classify the decision as “humanitarian”
- Or, we could argue the decision was wrong by exploring its consequences in a cause and effect assertion (2)
(3) Evaluation Argument
makes a value judgment and rests on criteria/assumptions of value

Different *types of subjects* for evaluation arguments (e.g. practical and aesthetic objects, people in professional and social roles, actions, policies, events, decisions, …) call for discussion of different *sets of criteria* (e.g. practical, formal, ethical…)

In form, an evaluation argument looks like a CP, but the criteria for evaluation can include good or bad consequences and thus also require causal arguments.
(4) Proposal

makes a call to action

Requires a combination of smaller CPs (1) and causal arguments (2)
Sources