

Review of Argument

Directions: Read the quotes below, and then complete the freewriting activity on the second page.

From Joe Harris's "Countering"

"Countering looks at other views and texts not as wrong but as *partial*—in the sense of being interesting and incomplete. In countering you bring a different set of interests to bear upon a subject, look to notice what others have not. Your aim is not to refute what has been said before, to bring the discussion to an end, but to respond to prior views in ways that move the conversation in new directions" (56).

"In arguing for civility, then, I'm not pressing for mere politeness, but for a style of countering that doesn't stop at disagreement but instead pushes for something more—that rewrites the work of others in order to say something new" (71).

From *Writing Analytically*, 5th ed.

"...debate-style argument produces a frame of mind in which defending positions matters more than taking the necessary time to develop ideas worth defending... We are not saying that people should forget about making value and policy decisions and avoid the task of persuading others. We are saying that too many of the arguments we all read, hear, and participate in every day are based on insufficient analysis" (85).

From *A Rhetoric of Argument*, 3rd ed.

"...argument is an activity that helps us form our beliefs and determine our actions. While we are making up our minds about what to think or do, we ought to hear whatever can be said on an issue, from every possible perspective...Argument is thus more a process of discussion and deliberation than a contest of opposites" (8).

From "Introduction to the Argument Unit" (a Writing Program document)

"Whether talking in class or in the hallway, selecting books for a course, or publishing academic articles, those of us in the academy are always saying, 'this is how I see the world and I'd like you to see it that way too.' This is not the Jerry Springer version of argument, where everyone yells and screams and calls each other names in order to win at all costs (well, typically the academy is not like that, and it's certainly not supposed to be). Argument, instead, is a way of making claims about a topic of inquiry in the hopes of creating knowledge, testing the waters, persuading others, solving problems, and acting in the world. Academic argument, ideally, is not afraid of contradictory evidence—even when it threatens the whole structure of the argument—because it is those very tensions that make research worthwhile.

Academic argument assumes multiple perspectives on 'truth,' and starts from the premise that we have only partial knowledge. It also assumes that there are significant differences among us that need to be taken into account, that some 'facts' are more significant than others, that some 'experts' carry more weight than others, that some claims are more likely to be true or right or more feasible than others – and overall, that we want to reach fair and equitable decisions about how the world is and should be.

Academic argument also assumes we'll make an initial claim, do more research and thinking and reading, and alter or reject that claim as part of the process of thinking and acting in the world. In WRT 205 we mostly use argument to inquire – to learn more about the world, about others' ideas,

about our own ideas – and, ultimately, to construct writings that will persuade others to see those ideas the same way(s) we do” (2).

Freewrite:

1. Considering the definitions above, generate a list of key words and concepts that help you to define and resituate argument as a genre and a practice. That is, what are the key words and concepts that now come to mind when you think of academic argument?
2. Go back into any of the reading you've done for this semester (Bush, Bond-Graham, Ebert, etc), and locate places in the texts that illustrate argumentative moves—moves that are consistent with or that contradict the definitions above. Share a few of those moments. How does this revisiting of texts help solidify your understanding of what scholarly argument should be?
3. As you prepare to write your paper, what is one important thing you are going to keep in mind as you create your argument?