# Rhetoric, Debate

***Rhetorics hail us, position us, subject us, put us in our places and not others... Rhetorics are temporary, historical, local...provisionary rules of order and disorder...made to be broken. We need new rhetorics (not a new rhetoric)... that search for their margins, silences, denials...that acknowledge their own compliance in the impositions of discursive dominions...that give us new voices, new listeners, new words, new languages.***

James Berlin

## Contents

# FACULTY INTENSIVE
# Day Two

We spent the second day of our intensives exploring the Western traditions of rhetoric, argument, and debate. The practices of the Academy have been deeply informed by these traditions. They form the foundation of many writing and communication courses, adapt easily to a wide range of content, and translate effectively across a wide range of disciplines. They are, as English Professor Daniel Kline suggests in Chapter 4, the "scientific method" of the humanities: time-honored and highly structured ways to disagree about complicated issues.

We have several experts amongst us, and we've drawn heavily on them to remind the rest of us what the ancient Greeks were on to. English Professor Kerri Morris and Academic Dean Marilyn Barry explain the rhetorical principles behind a classroom exercise and a series of writing assignments. Professor Steven Johnson introduces the parameters and formats of structured debate. Professor Jacqueline Cason describes a collaborative research and performance assignment modeled after the format of a favorite public radio program.

There are numerous technical terms in this chapter, and some of them (ethos, pathos, logos, stasis) sound suspiciously like ancient history. But the considerations they suggest are as relevant as this morning's news.

- What questions can be productively discussed?
- When can we agree to disagree?
- How do we consider multiple sides of a complicated issue?
- What kinds of evidence, argument, and testimony will move an audience?

## Sample Agenda

- Debrief from previous day: comments from Critical Incident Questionnaire.
- Exercise: Questions and Categories
- Presentation: Lessons from the Greeks
- Reflection and Discussion
- Presentation: Debate as a Tool for Engaging Controversy
- Reflection and Discussion

What's to be learned from these venerable old strategies? As it turns out, quite a lot.

# SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

## What are Rhetorics and Why Do They Matter?

If you rely on a dictionary to define rhetoric, you will probably understand it as the effective use of language to persuade. You will think of it as a singular term and you will imagine that those who teach it are mostly concerned with elements of style and structure in speaking and writing. By most simple dictionary accounts, rhetoric is a technique or skill.

But if you look further, to the numerous books, articles, Internet blogs, and postings from scholars in the field, you will begin to understand that rhetoric is not a simple thing to define at all. In fact, the nature of rhetoric has been argued about since its inception as a field of study in the fifth century BCE. As great thinkers have attempted to define and clarify it, rhetoric has been referred to variously as a knack, a skill, a technique, an art, a method, a theory, a form of mental and emotional energy, and a way to make meaning. As you dig deeper and read the works of great thinkers such as the Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Augustine, Boethius, de Pizan, Erasmus, Bacon, Locke, Hume, Nietzsche, Toulmin, and Cixous to name a few, you may come to agree with the authors of *The Rhetorical Tradition* who say that rhetoric is "a complex discipline with a long history: It is less helpful to try to define it once and for all than to look at the many definitions it has accumulated over the years and to attempt to understand how each arose and how each still inhabits and shapes the field."[1]

### Classical Views

Let rhetoric be defined as an ability in each particular case to see the available means of persuasion.

Aristotle

...because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts...

Isocrates

1 Bizzell and Herzberg, p.1

Definitions and conceptions differ primarily because of their scope. Some define rhetoric in relatively limited terms as a theorized system that provides practical guidelines for composing and delivering persuasive discourse. At the other extreme are those for whom rhetoric includes all forms of communication, textual and visual. Virtually all conceptions share certain features as well, including the search for knowledge and a concern with political action.[2]

For the purposes of this handbook on bringing difficult dialogues into the classroom, we ask that you understand rhetoric as an academic discipline or field of study—a branch of knowledge or learning—concerned with discourse, knowledge production and consumption, textual and symbolic communication and their effects, and the complexities of language and experience. We ask that you understand rhetoric as a form of inquiry rather than a fixed body of knowledge that only prescribes guidelines.

Practicing rhetoric means applying rhetorical theory, and understanding theory begins with understanding its terms. We invite you to become acquainted with a few of these terms.


For a more expanded discussion of key rhetorical terms as they apply to an extended composition assignment, see also page 73.

**Speaking the Language**

**Dissoi Logoi:** an ancient pedagogy that insists upon active and performed engagement with multiple perspectives.

**Ethos**: arguments provided by a person's reputation or through the person's words that appeal to the listener's or reader's sense of fair-mindedness and good will.

**Invention**: the process of finding available arguments.

**Kairos**: the right time and place to do something.

**Logos:** arguments found by examining the issue at hand. Typically, they are based on premises that lead to a conclusion, thus appealing to the listener's or reader's sense of things "adding up" or seeming reasonable.

**Pathos:** arguments found by considering common human experiences. Typically, they appeal to the listener's or reader's emotions.

**Rhetoric:** ancient art used to make decisions, resolve disputes, and mediate public discussions of important issues.

**Stasis:** a point of contention between sides engaged in a conflict or dispute.

2 Bizzell and Herzberg, p.16

# RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

This exercise invites students to uncover the hidden categories upon which their opinions may be based. As they identify and group the underlying issues by category, they may come to recognize the inevitable conflicts among their own values. As they discuss with a partner, they may discover how others define the same issues differently.

## Question Yourself

**Directions**:

For the following list of questions, you should first decide whether you want to answer "yes" or "no," and then evaluate how sure you are about your answer:

**1 = confident; 2 = fairly sure; 3 = less sure; 4 = quite ambivalent**

Example:

Should students in public schools be required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance?
Yes____ No__1__

If you responded this way, it would mean that you do not think students should be required to recite the Pledge and that you are confident about your answer.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Should politicians, who often have inside information, be allowed to withhold that information when they believe it is for the public good? Yes_____ No_____

2. Should students in public schools be required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance?
Yes_____ No_____

3. If a doctor learns that one of her patients has a communicable disease, should she be required to tell the patient's spouse? Yes_____ No_____

4. Should employees of a public institution be allowed to hold religious meetings on site during their lunch hour? Yes_____ No_____

5. Should a college professor have the right to assign students to attend a lecture by a particular politician? Yes_____ No_____

6. Should the wolf population be controlled (via aerial shooting, for instance) to preserve moose and caribou for sports and subsistence hunters? Yes_____ No_____

7. Should a man be required to pay child support for his biological child if the woman failed to inform him of her pregnancy? Yes_____ No_____

8. Should persons with a criminal record be required to reveal that record on a job application? Yes_____ No_____

9. Should newspaper reporters be required to reveal their sources of information when government or law enforcement agencies believe it is in the public interest for them to do so? Yes_____ No_____

10. Should a priest be required to inform the police when a parishioner reveals an intention to commit a murder or other serious crime? Yes_____ No_____

11. Should wives be required to inform their husbands before terminating a pregnancy? Yes_____ No_____

12. Should students be allowed to tape a lecture without informing the professor? Yes_____ No_____

13. Should businesses be allowed to solicit individuals over the telephone? Yes_____ No_____

14. Should a professor be allowed to discuss his personal, political or religious preferences in class? Yes_____ No_____

15. Should governments be allowed to keep secrets from the people? Yes_____ No_____

16. Should sex offenders' names be posted publicly on a Web site? Yes_____ No_____

17. Should companies be allowed to test employees for drugs, even if the employee is not involved in a hazardous job? Yes_____ No_____

18. Should a girl be punished as severely for hitting a boy as a boy would be for hitting a girl, assuming both children were between ages 14 and 17? Yes_____ No_____

19. Should a woman be given preference for a job over a man if all other qualifications are equal? Yes_____ No_____

20. Should some U.S. citizens be exempt from fighting in a war because they do not agree with the issues being fought for? Yes_____ No_____

21. Should Southern states, Alabama for instance, be allowed to fly the Confederate flag from official state buildings? Yes_____ No_____

22. Should cameras be allowed in court during trials? Yes_____ No_____

23. Should businesses be expected to preserve natural resources even if it costs them money? Yes_____ No_____

24. Should smokers be allowed to smoke in public outdoor places? Yes_____ No_____

25. Should professors at public institutions be required to adhere to ethics policies that prohibit sexual relationships with students? Yes_____ No_____


Physics professor Dr. Travis Rector adapted this technique to accompany a class research project that gives students a chance to learn about the nature of scientific research, the importance of perspective, and the difference between what we want to be true and what is actually true. See page 144.

## Questions and Categories

*An exercise that reveals the categories of thinking behind our opinions on specific issues.*

**Question Yourself**
Distribute your questionnaire and allow 10 minutes for students to respond according to the instructions (answering yes or no for each item, with a confidence scale of 1-4).

**Make Categories**
Have students work alone to develop several categories (at least four, no more than six or seven) among which the questions could be sorted. Then have them place each of the questions in one category (one only).

**Notice Disagreements**
Have students compare their answers with a partner. Note every question with different answers and notice the intensity of the disagreement. On which question did they have the strongest disagreement?

**Start Talking**
Have students discuss the questions where they had the most disagreement. What categories did each create for this question? Why did they argue the way they did?

**Change your Mind**
Allow students to change their answers and then ask them to explain why. How did their partner's answers or categories influence them?

This exercise was developed by Professor Kerri Morris and her associates in graduate school at Texas Christian University.

This essay links the Questions and Categories exercise to the rhetorical principles of invention and kairos. Invention helps us clarify our own thinking and discover how others think about a topic. Kairos refers to the specific situation in need of deliberation. Both are necessary elements for developing effective arguments and making effective decisions in a democracy.

# Rhetoric and the Method of Democracy

**Dr. Kerri Morris**
*Associate Professor of English*
*University of Alaska Anchorage*

Should governments keep secrets? Should professors discuss their political preferences in class? Should we kill wolves so there will be more caribou and moose to hunt?

The Questions and Categories exercise invites us to think about these and other potentially controversial issues from a rhetorical perspective that involves two important concepts: invention (the discovery and development of effective arguments) and kairos (specific situations that would benefit from deliberation at this point in time).

Invention is the word Aristotle uses to describe the rational strategies we use to develop and to discover arguments. Said differently, invention is the process we use to build good arguments before we deliberate about them. The list below is not exhaustive, but it provides some examples of the sort of thought that rhetorical arguments require and the kinds of information invention can lead us to:

- Discovery of our opponents' arguments.
- Awareness of the historical background about our issue.
- Understanding of the implications and effects that our arguments will have.

This knowledge prepares us to shape our arguments appropriately for the occasions, audiences, and purposes that we encounter.

Rhetoric deals in specifics. Rhetorical arguments find their homes in the public spaces of democracies, where citizens with diverse values and beliefs gather to shape public policies. Citizenship demands that we allow competing versions of the truth to inform our laws and policies, without requiring that individuals surrender their beliefs about truth. We can, consequently, provide space for individuals to believe that abortion is immoral while at the same time produce a law that allows sixteen-year-old girls to have an abortion without notifying a parent.

The Questions and Categories exercise presents a series of situations and asks students to engage in the process of invention to discover how they and others think about them. The act of grouping issues systematically by category helps to distance students from their first—and perhaps easiest—answers. In order to complete this task, students must define issues, and through conversation with a partner find out how differently another person defines those same issues. The discussion encourages participants to think about the values upon which their own opinions may be based, to consider that values are sometimes in conflict, and to discuss those conflicts with others.

In practice, my students have frequently discovered that their own values conflict. One question asks: should tobacco companies be free to advertise their products in the newspaper? This question

can be viewed through the lens of public safety, free speech, economics, and no doubt many others as well. It's possible to believe, for example, both that public safety should be protected and also that tobacco companies should have the freedom to advertise their product. The key is to decide which value is more important in this instance: public safety or freedom of speech.

Through discussion in pairs and as a large group, the class will have an opportunity to grapple with the concept of gray areas and the inevitable conflicts between and among our values. In addition, over the years students have consistently resisted answering general questions without filling in some details. They move almost immediately into specific examples, illustrating through their own experience the nature of rhetoric. Thus, the project is one model through which students can engage in invention and learn to focus on specific issues rather than on general principles or truths.

**Rhetorical Background**

Almost every student I meet is new to the field of rhetoric, so a brief theoretical background is helpful for them to understand why I ask them to write arguments about particular topics, to use certain forms of arrangement, and to prepare their research-based inquiry in certain ways. Rhetoric is, ultimately, the art of arguing for specific policies or judgments based upon deliberation with others and with awareness that our arguments and our judgments are not final. Rhetorical argument is ongoing and is one method for making decisions in a democracy.

**Invention**

- Discover arguments to use
- Uncover arguments your opponents might use
- Know the history of the problem
- Understand the implications of your argument

The five principles below are good places to start for rhetorical background.

**Rhetoric requires that we establish a need for the argument.** Rhetoric is called for when a conflict or problem needs deliberation and thought; we might even call a good argument a "rhetorical intervention." During a time of peace, for example, it would be entirely theoretical (and not rhetorical) to discuss the validity of going to war. However, our involvement in Iraq, a specific conflict with a specific historical and political context, needs deliberation. The disciplinary term is kairos, which literally means the opportune moment. While some critics have considered this as an example of rhetoric's manipulative character, rhetoricians understand kairos as a moment in which deliberation and rhetorical argument are helpful, called for, and necessary. Rhetoricians do not advocate arguing because of its inherent benefits—although many of us believe that arguments are inherently beneficial—but rather because of its instrumental benefits. Rhetorical argument helps us accomplish the decision-making tasks that deliberative situations demand.

**Rhetoric demands that we understand our audience.** Those who hear our arguments are as important to the rhetorical situation as are the facts and details about the case. We have to be familiar with the background, knowledge, and worldview of our listeners, in order to make our argument sensible to them, and in order to deliberate with them about specific issues. We must know as much about our audience as possible in order to participate in deliberation helpfully. For instance, if everyone in the room supports the policy we are advocating, we need not dwell on our argument; we may, in fact, not need to argue at all. However, if many audience members are new to the situation or to the group, we may need to provide essential background information in order to help them understand what's at stake. If the audience isn't aware that a problem exists, they may not be motivated to listen to proposed solutions.

**Rhetoric argues about the practical and the particular.** This is a principle with ancient history. Aristotle grouped rhetoric, ethics, and politics as arts that dealt with the practical and the particular, while philosophy dealt with more general matters. So in order to argue from the rhetorical tradition, we need to consider situations and contexts. I encourage students to start with case studies and then move to a more general level of argument. Thus, a student might begin with a specific case argument such as, "Susan should sue Toyota because her car exploded when she backed into another car, and Toyota knew that this vehicle was flawed in such a way that explosions could happen." From there, the student could progress to the more general "Companies must take responsibility for their design flaws and should be considered criminally negligent if they have prior knowledge of dangerous problems."

**Rhetoric needs support and evidence**. We cannot make a good argument without support for our perspective. It is not enough to simply state "Well, that's my opinion." Opinions need information to support them. If we want to argue that indoor smoking should be banned in the interest of public safety, then we must have evidence and support for the claim that secondhand smoke is harmful. We are obligated to know as much about our concerns and about their potential impact as we can. Whether we use analogies, cause and effect arguments, or statistics, we must provide reasons that our audiences can find credible.

An ethical practice of rhetoric requires that our arguments and deliberations always be ongoing, invite response, encourage listening, and limit harm.

**Rhetoric is more beneficial when many sides of an argument are voiced.** Our arguments should invite a response, and all parties should be able to participate in the discussion. Rhetoric flourishes in democracies, especially when minority voices are given opportunities to speak, and when majority voices are willing to hear arguments that conflict. We are more likely to make good decisions if we hear many relevant perspectives, reasons, and strategies.

**Ethical Rhetoric**

The term "rhetoric" has had negative connotations at least since Plato. It has been called empty and manipulative and false. Many believe that rhetoric seeks to exploit the weak, to empower the mob, and to distract society from important issues. Certainly, many people have used arguments and public platforms to accomplish all of these. The discipline of rhetoric, however, has (also since Plato's time) been evolving into a complex method upon which democracies depend.

Scholar Kathryn M. Olson argues that an ethical practice of rhetoric should combine Aristotelian notions of effective rhetorical practice with Henry Johnstone's "ethical imperative."

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Duty to Self | Resoluteness | Openness |
| Duty to Others | Compassion | Gentleness |

In this matrix, resoluteness and compassion mean:

- We have a duty to make an argument and to not be dissuaded from doing so by intimidation or by the power of another rhetorical argument; and
- We have a further duty to listen to others' arguments for the sake of the opponents making that argument (rather than for the instrumental value to our own argument).

Openness and gentleness mean:

- We should always invite a response from our opponents; and
- We should make our own arguments only as powerful as they need be. In other words, we should not use argument to metaphorically destroy an opponent.

From this perspective (which I share), we should make effective arguments and always be committed to our duties to self and others. An ethical practice of rhetoric requires that our arguments and deliberations always be ongoing, invite response, encourage listening, and limit harm. We have an obligation both to make arguments and to invite others to make arguments. The Questions and Categories exercise extends a similar invitation.

**FACULTY INTENSIVES**

I presented this material three times to three different cohorts. The content was essentially the same, but each group of "students" took it in their own direction.

The first group wanted to discuss the key concepts of invention and kairos and to better understand the practical application of these disciplinary terms. The second group was intrigued by my observations about an ethical rhetoric and wanted to talk theoretically about deliberation itself. The third group wanted to talk more deeply about the topics on the questionnaire.

These experiences taught me a lot about presenting to an audience of peers. For the first cohort, I started out with a lecture and discussion on rhetoric and finished with a shortened hands-on experience with the questionnaire. Because we ran out of time, this group only got a taste of the exercise. I realized afterwards that participants would have preferred to have more time to answer the questions, assign their own categories, and talk with each other about the underlying issues: in other words, to participate. The next time, we began with the questions and finished with a shortened version of the lecture, which turned out to be a much better arrangement.

Kerri Morris
English

# RHETORICAL PURPOSES

Writing teachers can use argument as a rich tool for training students to engage productively in civil discourse. This essay describes a series of short writing assignments that encourage students to address the same issue or problem in five different ways. Each approach achieves a different result; together they introduce students to rhetorical considerations and strategies that underlie the construction of effective arguments.

## Approaching Argument: Different Voices, Different Perspectives

**Dr. Marilyn Barry**
*Academic Dean*
*Alaska Pacific University*

The most civilized tool in the Western tradition for resolving disagreements is argument, a complex set of principles and conventions for engaging in intellectual and civil discourse. Argument belongs to the discipline of rhetoric, which seeks to describe how humans can communicate effectively with one another without recourse to violence. Rhetoric is at the heart of the Liberal Arts.

Classically defined, rhetoric is the art of discovering in a particular case what will likely be effective means of persuasion. It provides strategies for discovering defensible claims and for constructing effective arguments to convince a particular audience of the worthiness of those claims. To this end, the writer is well advised to consider a topic from multiple perspectives.

The students who enter our classrooms have already had years of practice in writing for teachers. They have learned that their target audience is the teacher who grades the paper; the reason for writing an essay is to fulfill an assignment and earn a grade. If we are going to pry them loose from such narrow expectations, we need to engage them early in discussions about audience. The more convinced they are that writing can be personally and professionally useful, reaching actual audiences and discourse communities, the more likely they are to learn and adopt rhetorical strategies that make for effective written communication.

I have been involved for decades in teaching students how to engage in difficult dialogues of the written variety. Argumentative writing is the kind of teaching assignment that can wear one down by sheer dint of workload. But, next to teaching Chaucer, I have come to relish Argument most of all because it's the course in which I can most openly profess the values of a liberal arts education. Ideas matter. Perspective matters. How we deal with and learn from differences in perspective, this also matters.

Marilyn Barry
Academic Dean

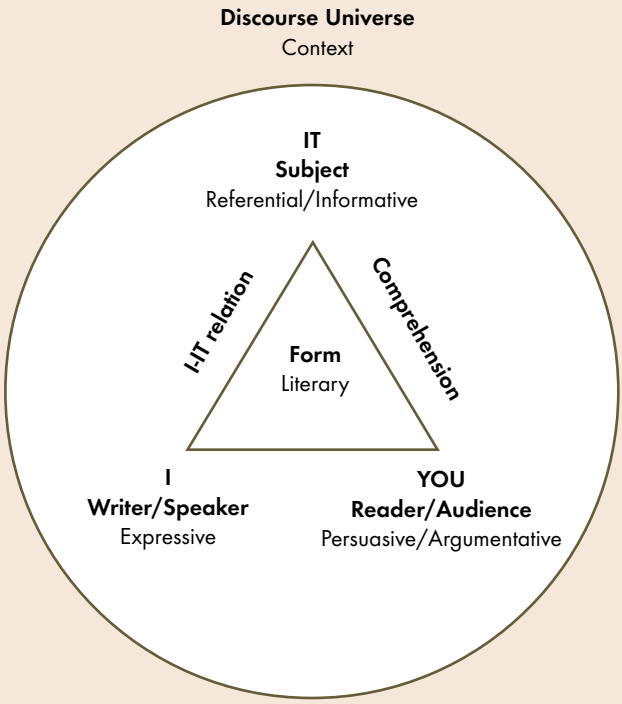
### The Communication Triangle

Early in the term I draw on the board a Communication Triangle: that elegantly simple representation communication theorists have extrapolated from Aristotle. Each angle represents a facet of the constructed world as we express it in our pronoun system, with the total being greater than the sum of its parts:
**I, the writer/speaker** (for Aristotle, who the writer was and how he presented himself constituted the *ethos*; we connect this to the notion of *credibility);*
**You, the reader/listener** (for the Greek, the point of empathic response was called *pathos*); and
**It, the topic that engages us** (the *logos* implies a right relationship between the "world" under discussion and the words used to describe it).

The **literary form** itself constitutes a fourth entity; when one gives primary focus to the *form* (alternately called *message*) we may say that the author highlights the *literary* aspects of communication. Encircling the triangle is a circle: **the context**—the discourse universe—in which the particular piece of communication occurs.

Okay, so it's a static representation of a discursive process that necessarily involves time and process, but it does lay out relationships that can be dramatized in the form a given piece of communication takes. As a visual model, it can get students thinking about the dialectic that two-way communication involves.

Marilyn's version of the communication triangle corresponds closely with a systematic framework for teaching composition described by James Kinneavy in his 1971 book *A Theory of Discourse*. Kinneavy used the terms *decoder*, *encoder*, and *reality* where Marilyn uses *I*, *You*, and *It*, but the idea is the same. In this framework, examples of discourse are classified into four types: expressive, referential, persuasive, and literary. Each is linked to one aspect of the communication triangle.




Adapted from James Moffett (*Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading)* and Erika Lindemann (*A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*)

**Rhetorical Purposes**

Rhetoricians have sliced and diced kinds of communication in many different ways; the communication triangle reflects only one timeworn division. Still, it's a useful model, because it allows us to classify types of communication based on their intended purpose.

Where the focus of the writing/speaking event is on the writer or speaker as an individual, we call this personal or expressive writing. The forms it takes include journal writing and the personal essay, among others. When the primary interest is on an objective topic, the purpose of the writing may be termed informative or referential, because it points to something other than the writer and the reader; whether a narrative of an event, a description of flora in a biology text, or analysis of cause and effect in thermodynamics, the goal is accuracy in matching up the description to the described. If primary intent is to affect the reader, causing him or her to consider the topic under discussion differently, the purpose may be called persuasive.

When the primary intent is to persuade, the writer must produce an argument that observes a set of civilized expectations and verbal conventions with the goal of addressing and negotiating human conflict through language, our most intrinsically human capability. Effective arguments rely on a full array of rhetorical strategies. Aristotle went to the Forum to observe what worked and what didn't in spoken communication. The principles he codified are applicable to both spoken and written discourse and have been refined over time by other careful observers, whose theoretical and pragmatic suggestions have influenced those of us who care about or teach writing. Like Aristotle, we are always looking for what works and what doesn't.

**Argument is a uniquely important sub-category of persuasion, one that observes a set of civilized expectations and verbal conventions with the goal of addressing and negotiating human conflict through language, our most intrinsically human capability.**

**Classroom Strategy**

A strategy that I have used for many years to introduce argumentative writing is a riff on William Coles' exercise from *The Plural I*. A series of assignments asks students to think of a problem they'd like to resolve (an experience or situation that involves at least one other person) and moves them through a series of rhetorical tasks. The full exercise consists of five assignments, spread out over several days or class periods. Each assignment corresponds to a point of emphasis in the model triangle: personal expression; informative or referential writing (in the form of a narrative); argument (a letter written in the form of an argument); literary writing; and reflection and assessment.

The first assignment asks students to choose a situation and write about it as if it were a journal entry, allowing full play to their feelings. They know I'll read the piece, but also that they can consider it to be relatively risk-free, not subject to ordinary constraints on composition.

The second step requires the student to construct a chronological narrative of the problem, including relevant background information and circumstances. The writer is invited to describe (and thus acknowledge) the context in which the misunderstanding occurred. The focus is to produce an

objective and accurate description of IT, the complicated situation that has occasioned the distress. Emotions expressed in the journal assignment should be included as objective facts in the narrative assignment. The aim is for the writer to come into a fuller understanding of the I-IT relationship.

The third assignment asks the student to think about what it is he or she wants from the reader or can persuade the reader to accept: the claim, of sorts. Then the student constructs the letter, deciding what details or lines of reasoning will be most persuasive to the reader, the YOU.

The fourth assignment asks the student to write a poem about the situation, to choose and submit to some kind of formal requirements that require a different kind of attention. Students are challenged to match the form they have chosen with the meaning they wish to convey. One may choose haiku, another rhyme. Some choose an image to explore. Others set up lists. What they have in common is the directive—and the permission—to play with language. Quite often this leads writers to arrive at new insights about their topics.

Finally, the last assignment calls for the student to reflect on the project and to try to locate his or her "voice" in these writings. The writer is asked, too, to assess the usefulness of the exercise in the context of the learning environment. What have they learned about their topic from viewing it in so many different ways?

### Five Ways to Look at It

*A series of assignments that explore a single problem from five different rhetorical stances.*

**Personal expression**
Write a journal entry about it, knowing it will be read but giving free vent to personal and emotional response.

**Narrative (Informative)**
Construct a chronological narrative describing the problem, with relevant background information and circumstances.

**Argument (Persuasive)**
Construct an argument that is likely to gain some measure of acceptance by the other party.

**Literary**
Write a poem about the situation.

**Reflective**
Write a short essay reflecting on the project and where your voice is.

This exercise was adapted from William Coles, *The Plural I*.

**How Students Respond**

Through the years, I've noted common observations from students' self-assessments. Almost everyone remarks positively on the chance to indulge their feelings in the journal assignment. Narrating their emotional reactions as points of fact and speculating about the feelings of others in the second assignment helps to distance students from the immediacy of their first feelings and leads them to explore solutions that might resolve the conflict. Unsurprisingly, they often find it difficult to state succinctly what it is they want from the reader when they begin to compose the argumentative letter; some acknowledge that it is harder to argue their own position reasonably while at the same time trying to imagine the reader's response and make appropriate adaptations. More than one student has concluded that the assignment served as "an exorcism" of negative feelings that he hadn't previously confronted.

Narrating their emotional reactions as points of fact and speculating about the feelings of others helps to distance students from the immediacy of their feelings and leads them to explore solutions that might resolve the conflict.

Few object to writing a poem, and I'm surprised again and again by how seriously students take this opportunity to focus on literary qualities of form as a way to think creatively about what started for most of them as an emotional rant. Some talk of how this allows them to give their feelings expression, but differently from the way they did in the journal assignment. Perceptive students have observed that focusing on form actually gives them a new flexibility, lets them express new feelings and make new connections, and makes them feel more in control. Interestingly enough, in over 25 years of using this assignment, no student has asked how to write a poem.

Where do they locate their own voice in all this? Initially they may expect it to be the journal exercise that reflects their real, authentic voice. But one hopes that they will find other voices—different, but no less authentic—in each of the five assignments and that through this exercise they will discover the value of holding different perspectives (their own and others) in tension.

**The Rhetoric of Argument**

This may seem a time-consuming detour to a more direct encounter with the rhetoric of argument, but I've found this experiential exercise to be an effective, economical heuristic for introducing students to rhetorical considerations and strategies that underlie the construction of any effective argument. The writer must:

- Confront and name his or her values and biases;
- Identify the values in conflict;

- Invest time in collecting, understanding, and organizing information;
- Articulate as precisely as possible relationships among the parts;
- Try to understand the problem and possible solutions from the point of view of the other, assuming the reader to be rational and fair-minded;
- Conclude what the desirable solution might be—with whatever restrictions on the claim the evidence requires in the interests of logic and fairness; and
- Craft the evidence, examples, and underlying premises in ways that will convey one's thinking and convictions to the reader.

**Student Response:**

Writing in these different forms makes a writer look not just twice but at least five times at his or her work. You don't just write down the event that happened, but you also have to consider how it happened and why it happened. It makes you wonder: if it happened all over again, would you act the same way? This process of writing in multiple forms and methods allows writers to see different views and makes them really think twice (or five times) about a situation. Maybe the next time they get in a similar conflict, they will remember this process and act differently.

Claire Agni
Liberal Studies Major

The exercise, while but an introductory one, allows students to experience firsthand the extraordinarily complex communication challenges involved in constructing an argument; more importantly, it gives them a handful of strategies for examining and deconstructing conflict and for beginning to construct solutions. The lengthy process of writing gives students time to wrestle with the discipline of argument and inculcates habits of thinking about conflict and resolution. These skills and insights are then at least partially transportable to more highly charged situations, where the luxuries of time and detached reflection are not so evident, where strong feelings and the immediacy of heated verbal exchanges might otherwise rout respectful and useful dialogue.

# DEBATE

Like rhetoric, the debate tradition focuses on functional exchanges and frames questions in specific ways that encourage productive civil discourse. Classroom debates can be effective for covering content in courses throughout the curriculum. Students are typically asked to research arguments for both sides of a question, and in doing so they may come to a greater understanding of the complexity of the underlying issues. The highly structured format and the goal of illuminating a controversy for an audience encourage strategic thinking and thorough research. Because participants do not necessarily represent their own personal views, the issue itself is emphasized. These features tend to depersonalize the exchange and make the debate space a safer place for exploring a difficult dialogue than an exchange of personal opinion might be. There is less room for distracting *ad hominem* arguments and more room for considering the substance of an argument.

## Debate as a Pedagogical Tool

**Steven L. Johnson**
*Associate Professor of Communication and Discourse Studies*
*Director of Debate*
*University of Alaska Anchorage*

The ancient art of public debate offers many advantages to university professors outside the traditional communication department. Debate promotes critical thinking, develops communication skills, and provides a safe space for encountering controversial issues. The requirements of collaboration and competition provide incentives to thoroughly research evidence and arguments on both sides of the question, and the conventions of the format allow students to argue for positions that may or may not be their own, preserving the privacy of their personal views.

Of course, there are disadvantages as well. The technique requires public speaking, something many students wish to avoid for personal and cultural reasons. And certain formats, especially of competitive debate, employ a distributive model of conflict resolution in which one side is declared the victor, leaving little space for compromise.

When these shortcomings are accounted for, however, debate can be a powerful medium in which to unpack controversial issues. Successful classroom debates result from paying attention to the format, carefully phrasing the proposition, and teaching students to identify and structure their arguments around explicit issues. By offering a safe, structured venue for exploring varying perspectives and by allowing students to represent positions that they may not otherwise advocate, debate is a powerful tool for encountering and engaging in controversy.

**Identifying Clash: Stasis Theory**

The arguments exchanged in a debate don't have physical form, but when students work with them—that is, when they construct their own arguments, deconstruct those of their opponents, or attempt to compare positions of the two sides—they will benefit by first fixing those arguments to some set point. This point—this imagined place of clash in the imagined space of a debate—allows the debaters to identify, understand, and evaluate competing arguments most effectively.

These fixed points are known as points of stasis. Stasis, first discussed by the ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians, refers to an imagined place where competing arguments meet. In a debate, points of stasis are those places where one side's arguments clash with the other side's. For example, I might argue that Permanent Fund Dividends (PFDs) for Alaskans under the age of 18 should be placed in a trust for them to access once they reach adulthood. You argue that they should not. The point of stasis for this argument is whether to place the PFD proceeds for minors in a trust.

Two general points of stasis are relevant to debating: those that function as propositions and those that are issues.

**Debate is a form of structured conflict, with clear expectations about roles and obligations. It is built around an explicit proposition, or clearly defined point of controversy. It includes a specified mode of resolution, or clear end point for the dispute. And it is audience-centered; the focus of persuasive effort is the audience, not the opposition.**

**Propositions**

The proposition is the major point of contention of the topic under debate. It is phrased as a declarative statement, and it serves to focus the topic and narrow the range of potential arguments. Successful propositions generally have four features:

- **Controversiality**: The issue should actually be in dispute and should engage the audience.
- **Clarity**: The proposition should be focused appropriately and should express a single concept as a declarative claim to be proved or disproved.
- **Balance:** The proposition should be phrased in a way that presents opportunities for both positive and negative arguments.
- **Challenge:** The proposition should be framed in a way that confronts the prevailing presumption.

For example, one of the many contentious topics in Alaska involves oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). A simple proposition for debate might be phrased as follows:

"The U.S. federal government should open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve to commercial oil companies for the purposes of exploration and development."

### Issues

Other more specific points of stasis—known as issues—are the meeting points of the particular arguments that must be explored to illuminate the proposition. Issues are similar to propositions in that they represent the place where the arguments of two opposing sides collide. They are different, however, in scale and focus.

In debates over the ANWR proposition stated above, the pro and con sides will likely disagree over a series of related issues. They may disagree over an economic issue, with the pro arguing that opening ANWR will lead to the creation of jobs and increased state revenues and the con denying these presumed economic benefits. They may clash over an environmental issue, with the con arguing that oil extraction may threaten a sensitive ecosystem and the pro arguing that technological advances have reduced environmental threats to negligible levels. Finally, the two sides may exchange arguments about a security issue, with the pro arguing that development of domestic oil supplies will ultimately make the United States less dependent on foreign sources of energy and, therefore, more secure. The con may counter that the horizon for ANWR oil production is so far off that present threats will have long since played themselves out by the time any ANWR oil becomes available.

**Components**

**Framing the Question**

Proposition: an agreed-on point of dispute, phrased as a declarative statement.

**Defining the issues**

Stases: issues around which arguments can come together.

**Building the Arguments**

Research: Identifying the major arguments both for and against the proposition and gathering evidence to support and refute them.

### Designing a Debate

Debates can be mounted in a variety of formats, so long as participants have the opportunity to engage in four distinct activities:

- **Development:** Complete arguments (claim and support) offered in support of or in opposition to an agreed-upon point of dispute (the proposition).

- **Clash**: Engagement of the opposing side's constructive material (refutation) on issues relevant to the proposition (stases).

- **Extension:** Defense of arguments against refutation (rebuttal).

- **Perspective**: Individual arguments of both/either side related to the support of or opposition to the proposition.

If these elements are present, the interaction may accurately be termed a "debate." The likelihood of these interactions occurring is increased if the debate attends to a few principles of effective formatting.

### Designing a Format

The format should provide equal time for students to exchange ideas and arguments while staggering those opportunities to promote exchange between the opposing sides. In general, debates feature three types of speaking times:

**Constructive speeches**: At least one speaker per side will give a constructive speech that introduces their side's case, establishes the arguments for their position, and establishes the evidence for those arguments. The strongest constructive speeches satisfy both the burden of proof (to introduce positive matter on behalf of your position) and the burden of rejoinder (to engage the arguments of the opposing side). These are typically the longest speeches and may be a combination of prepared material and spontaneous argument developed during the round.

**Rebuttal speeches**: Rebuttals are shorter than constructive speeches and serve to focus, rather than expand, the information under consideration. They can provide perspective and place arguments in context, but they should not introduce new lines of argument.

**Exchange:** Each format should feature an opportunity for the debaters to interact directly. The most familiar type of exchange is cross examination, where a speaker who has just articulated his or her argument submits to questions from the opposing side. During these designated times, one side is responsible for asking questions and the other for answering. An alternative, most often found in competitive parliamentary debating, is the use of "points of information." During the constructive speeches, the opposing side may request the opportunity to make a point of information, ask a question, or make a brief observation. It is up to the speaker holding the floor to permit this exchange or not.

#### Formats

**FOR 2 DEBATERS**

One debater speaks **for** the proposition (pro side); the other speaks **against** it (con side).

Pro side: Prepared speech, 7 minutes
Con side: Cross examination of pro side, 2 minutes
Con side: Prepared speech, 7 minutes
Pro side: Cross examination of con side, 2 minutes

Pro side: Rebuttal speech, 3 minutes
Con side: Rebuttal speech, 3 minutes

Optional preparation time for each side (typically 2-3 minutes) to be used at each side's discretion.

**FOR 4 DEBATERS**

Two debaters speak for each side. Points of information allowed after the first minute and before the last minute of each constructive speech.

Pro side: 1st constructive speech, 7 minutes
Con side: 1st constructive speech, 7 minutes
Pro side: 2nd constructive speech, 7 minutes
Con side: 2nd constructive speech, 7 minutes

Pro side: Rebuttal speech, 4 minutes
Con side: Rebuttal speech, 4 minutes

Optional preparation time for each side (typically 2-3 minutes) to be used at each side's discretion.

Typically, each speaker in a debate is permitted a constructive speech, beginning with the pro side, the team responsible for supporting the proposition. These are the longest speeches in the round, typically lasting around six to ten minutes. Between (or during) the constructive speeches, debaters have an opportunity for exchange. Points of information may be raised after the first and before the last minute of the constructive speeches; cross-examination time typically follows them. Finally, each team is accorded a rebuttal speech during which one of the team's speakers is

responsible for summarizing major arguments and comparing the teams' positions.

These building blocks may be assembled in a variety of ways to meet the needs of a particular class or assignment. But all formats, regardless of their specific progression, should give equal time to both teams, alternate between the opposing sides, and provide opportunities for each debater to discharge his or her responsibilities.

**Responsibilities: Preparing Students to Debate**

Debaters' responsibilities should be limited in explicit ways. Especially with inexperienced students, it is best to present the exercise with expository goals rather than competitive goals. Participants should be charged with using the format to unpack arguments that illuminate the controversy and provide the audience with insight into the issues. Students on opposing sides may work together to agree on the issues to be explored.

Each debater has three duties to perform: construction, deconstruction, and framing. While the time spent on these duties varies from speech to speech, debaters should keep these three priorities in mind when preparing their remarks.

- **Construction** refers to the debater's obligation to bring new substantive matter to the round, i.e. each debater should develop arguments to support his or her team's position. This responsibility is also known as developing and advancing a case. Debaters are evaluated in part on their ability to introduce and build arguments that prove their position.

- **Deconstruction** is the obligation to address the other side's constructive matter; debaters should discuss the weakness and shortcomings in their opponents' arguments. Also known as refutation, deconstruction is what most people think of when they imagine a debate. Here is where debaters test and critique the constructive arguments made by the other side.

- **Framing** refers to the duty to place the debater's constructive and deconstructive arguments into context. While framing, debaters should tell the audience about the relevance of the arguments made, how each team's position should be considered relative to others, and why, ultimately, their team's arguments prove the motion. The purpose of framing is to explain how listeners should perceive the arguments and how those arguments are relevant to the question.

### Classroom Debate

*A highly structured way to engage students in research and oral argument.*

**Choose a format:** objective rules that will keep the debate balanced and allow both sides equal chance to make their case.

**Construct a proposition:** a declarative sentence that is genuinely controversial, clear, balanced, and challenging in some way to the status quo.

**Prepare your students:** with understanding of the purpose of the debate (not to win but to illuminate), the type of research you expect (substantive and utilizing multiple sources), and your grading policy (quality of research, not persuasion of audience).

**Hold the debate:** in class, by the rules, allowing time for class discussion afterwards.

**Classroom Example: Public Policy Debate**

Public policy debating is a way to link course contents to issues in the world around us. Virtually every discipline has available issues that lend themselves to this exercise.

Public policy controversies erupt over what our society should or should not do and what policies we should or should not implement. They concern what laws we'll make, what direction our government will take, what freedoms we'll protect, what actions we'll prohibit. The ANWR proposition lends itself to a public policy debate: we'll make decisions about this question through our representative, democratic process after debating the merits and shortcomings of the proposal. On the other hand, arguments over who gets custody of Anna Nicole Smith's baby do not constitute a public policy controversy; ultimately the outcome of that decision does not dictate a course of action for the entire nation.

A public policy proposition is phrased as a proposed change to the way things are now; the debate is engaged by two sides referred to as the "pro" and "con." The pro side argues in favor of enacting the proposed policy or course of action; the con argues against it. In the ANWR example, the pro side is composed of those people and groups who argue in favor of exploration and oil extraction in ANWR; the con side includes those people and groups who argue against that development.

By convention, those who propose the policy bear the burden of proof and those who oppose the policy have presumption against change. This means that the pro side (those proposing a policy change) must prove two things: 1) that a problem exists; and 2) that the proposed policy will solve that problem. Failing in either one of those burdens means that the policy should not be adopted. The con side (those opposing the policy) need only demonstrate a single proof: either that a problem does not exist or that the proposed policy will not solve it.

**Points of stasis (issues) in public policy debates**

**Economic:** What are the financial consequences of this decision?
**Security:** How will this decision affect our safety and defense?
**Social:** Will this decision affect people's relationships with one another?
**Cultural:** How does this decision affect the culture and values of the participants?
**Environmental:** What are the consequences of this decision for the environment?
**Political:** Are the political actors and institutions capable of making this decision?
**Rights:** How is this decision constrained by the claims to rights of those involved?
**Moral:** What are the moral consequences of this decision? Is it "right?"
**Legal:** Does the law allow this decision to be made?
**Principle:** Is there a broad value or standard that influences this decision?
**Feasibility:** Do we have the ability to undertake the action proposed?
**Significance:** Is this a problem that is worth our time and attention?
**Solvency:** Will the proposed action solve or significantly reduce the problem?

**SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT**
**Public Policy Debate**

**Instructions to students:**
As members of a functioning democracy, we are frequently called upon to voice our opinions on issues of public policy. From socialized medicine to euthanasia, policy issues demand our attention and have the potential to affect us all. These debates provide you with an opportunity to explore an issue of public policy in a format designed to expose an audience to the major arguments for and against an issue.

With your partner, you will select a public policy issue, conduct research to uncover the relevant arguments advanced by your respective sides, and present your side's position to the class in a policy debate format.

There are actually two speeches for this assignment. You will be required to present a 7-minute prepared argument (speech) with an outline and bibliography for your side of the issue. You will also ask and answer questions in a cross-examination period and give a three-minute impromptu rebuttal that addresses your partner's argument. The speeches will alternate as follows:

1) 7-minute prepared speech by the pro side
2) 2-minute cross examination of pro side by con side
3) 7-minute prepared speech by the con side
4) 2-minute cross examination of con side by pro side
5) 3-minute rebuttal speech by the pro side
6) 3-minute rebuttal speech by the con side

(optional) 1-minute preparation time per speaker prior to rebuttal

The prepared speech must represent your side of the controversy. It should be organized and substantiated with extensive research. Cross examination allows you to ask clarifying questions of your partner and to preview the arguments you'll introduce. The rebuttal speech should be an impromptu speech that addresses the arguments presented by your partner while defending your position. The preparation time is to be used prior to the rebuttal speech to organize your ideas.

Keep in mind that this is an intellectual exercise, the purpose of which is to learn about analytical and communicative strategies. It is therefore possible that you will argue a position that you do not personally espouse. Should that be the case, think of it as playing "devil's advocate." The material in this handout or in lecture may refer to winning and losing debates for the purpose of illustrating the nature of type of format, but this will not be an issue in your presentations. While the audience may be persuaded as a result of one argument or another, the goal of your cooperation with your partner is not to persuade the audience to take a particular course of action, but to illuminate the controversy surrounding the issue and the various means by which social problems may be solved.

In other words, I will not grade you or your partner more favorably because one of you has won the debate. Rather, the purpose is for you and your partner to engage in a dialogue on an issue of public importance.

**Letting Students Choose their Own Topics**

We discovered that students aren't always the best judges of what is controversial. In any field, there are some matters that are more or less resolved, though this may be known mainly by those who are knowledgeable in the field. Newcomers, such as the typical undergraduate student, may think things are controversial and worthy of debate largely because of their ignorance of the issues.

We asked our students to suggest controversial topics that they wanted to see debated in the classroom, then made a list of every suggested topic and let them vote for their top four. This method, while allowing a great deal of student decision-making, resulted in debates that were generally quite dull. The topics chosen by the students were in fact not very controversial, and there was very little ground for debate.

The second time around, the professor edited the list of student-suggested topics, eliminating those that were not especially controversial. The edited list was then presented to the students for class ranking. This strategy seemed to result in debates with more substance.

Sharon Chamard and Ronald Everett
Justice

**Preparing for your debate**

1. When you have been assigned a partner, a topic, and a side, you should begin your preliminary research on the topic. You should collect and read no fewer than 10 articles on your topic.

2. You and your partner should agree upon and write the proposition for your debate. Remember that the proposition for your debate should specify the policy being debated and should be written in a way that proposes a change to the status quo.

3. You and your partner should agree on the specific policy proposal (the "plan") about which you'll debate. This policy proposal should be outlined and submitted with your proposition for instructor approval.

4. After you and your partner have submitted your proposition, you should identify approximately five of the most significant issues for your side of the debate. These issues will become evident as you read the arguments made by those who speak for your side. In addition to identifying the issues, you should briefly outline the arguments relevant to each of those issues.

5. You and your partner should then meet again to negotiate the issues to be addressed in your debate round. Remember, your goal is to agree on the points of stasis (issues) so that you may anticipate the arguments the other side intends to make. You should attempt to agree on two to four shared issues. You and your partner may each have no more than one issue not agreed to by the other side.

6. You should develop a formal, full-sentence outline for your prepared speech. This will require more specific research than your initial effort to develop and substantiate the arguments relevant to the issues you have identified. Each main point of your prepared speech should address one of the issues. The outline should include a bibliography of all sources cited in the argument.

7. You and your partner should disclose the arguments you intend to make. Remember, the goal of this debate is expository, not competitive. You will earn a better grade if you cooperate with your partner and share information than if you compete with your partner and attempt to gain the advantage over him or her. You needn't tell him or her everything you plan to say, nor should you script your rebuttal speech (it should be impromptu!), but you should have an idea of the areas in which he or she will make arguments.

Steve Johnson
Communication and Discourse Studies

**Logistics Can Be Challenging**

Classroom debates have the potential to improve students' abilities to make reasoned arguments and respond to challenges. They also allow for more thorough explorations of issues than is usually possible in unstructured classroom discussions. However, be prepared to devote a major amount of your own time to planning and logistics, and understand that it may take several tries before you find a style that works for you and your discipline.

After two semesters of experimentation with this technique in the Justice curriculum, we offer the following tips:

- Hold debates near the end of the semester so all students have roughly the same amount of preparation time.
- Allow students to choose their own teams and to participate in choosing topics.
- Have students in the audience act as judges, thus increasing their participation and involvement.
- Share your grading rubric clearly, and grade at least partially for participation.

After the debate, it can be useful to continue the discussion in a more open format, with the rest of the class encouraged to participate. In our second-year criminology class, the quality of this post-debate discussion was quite high. Students talked about the merit of different arguments, noting both the strength of the evidence and the logic of the argument. This dialogue, it seemed, had moved beyond simple expressions of personal opinions to a substantive discussion of the issues and arguments presented.

Sharon Chamard and Ronald Everett
Justice

Using an example from the field of information security, this essay illustrates the power of debate to highlight multiple technological, economic, social justice, and management practice issues at the same time, and to move students beyond the original question into issues of civic responsibility and personal choice as well.

# The Power to Choose

**Dr. Bogdan Hoanca**
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*University of Alaska Anchorage*

### Background: The Point of Contention

A current point of contention in information security circles revolves around the idea of key escrow. Widely available encryption software can be used to conceal information even from the most powerful computers of the most powerful governments and organizations. Most of this encryption software is "open source," meaning that the computer code is freely available for all to download, modify, and use as they see fit. Anybody with a computer and an internet connection has free access to this powerful technology.

The privacy of the encryption scheme lies not in hiding the mechanism (software) but in hiding the so-called encryption key. The key is a lengthy string of bits, difficult or impossible to guess, that allows the user to lock and unlock information using encryption software. Just like a door lock, the encryption software is the same for everybody, but the design of the key is unique, meaning each user is secure in using it. Unlike with door locks, however, anybody can download the open source encryption software, create a unique key, and then lock any information.

Elements in the U.S. government (in particular the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation) have been advocating key escrow as a mechanism for counterbalancing the destabilizing force of open source encryption software. These advocates contend that terrorist groups are able to use encryption to communicate securely over public networks. They propose laws that would require all encryption keys to be deposited with an escrow agency that allows law enforcement agencies to retrieve the escrowed keys with a court warrant. Even more demanding requirements would be to force loopholes in the actual encryption software so that the government can access the information even without encryption keys.

### Classroom Exercise

Encryption is one of the more technical topics discussed in my Management Information Systems class. Although we do not delve into the mathematics of it, we talk about the power of the technology, about the wide availability of encryption software, and about the government pressure to implement key escrow. We debate whether encryption keys should be placed in escrow, and whether government and law enforcement agencies should be allowed access to the escrowed keys with a court order.

Teams of two students are asked to research both sides of the question and to prepare to defend either side. The students do not actually have to work as a team, and in the debate they will end up

on opposite sides. Working together is a way for them to exchange arguments and to develop a joint strategy if they so desire. On the day of the debate, they toss a coin to decide which side each will defend. At that time, knowing something about the other side's arguments could be useful.

As with some of the other debate topics in the class, most students start out by admitting they did not even know this was an issue and they started their research to first learn about the topic itself. Most students discover rather quickly that they have a side they lean toward, even with a brand-new topic they are just learning about.

A topic like key escrow involves research in technological issues such as how keys would be generated, how they would be stored, how they are to be sent securely to the escrow agency, and how and when they will be destroyed (if ever). Other issues are economic (who would have to pay for the costs of managing the keys), managerial (how the process would be managed), and even social (how to ensure that all social groups are treated fairly by law enforcement agencies).

Last fall, I witnessed further social justice and civic responsibility issues extending beyond the debate itself. The following dialogue ensued between two members of the audience: neither of whom were themselves participants in the debate.[1]

**Anne:** I do not trust the government to handle key escrow fairly. I can see this as just another way for them to chip away at our rights.

**Bill:** That might happen, but remember that law enforce ment needs a court warrant to access keys in escrow.

**Anne:** Law enforcement agencies already have their way with anything they want. They can search offices and private homes and target groups as they please. Judges are corrupt and working with law enforcement, and they never side with the people.

**Bill:** You are describing a problem with the players, not with the process. Judges are supposed to protect people and to balance the needs of law enforcement and those of private citizens. Would you agree that the problem is with the judges and not with the process?

**Anne:** Yes, I see your point.

**Bill:** Moreover, who decides who gets to be a judge? We decide. We elect judges, and we can select those who are fair and just, and not those who just do the bidding of law enforcement agencies.

**Anne:** We should indeed do that.

**Bill:** The right to vote is one of our fundamental rights. Yet many of us do not take the time nor the responsibility seriously. If you are truly concerned with your privacy and your rights, you need to vote, and you need to be an informed voter.

On the day of the debate, they toss a coin to decide which side each student will defend. At that time, knowing something about the other side's arguments could be useful.

The timing was just perfect, because this discussion happened right before the November elections. Listening to the exchange, it struck me how powerful debate can be, leading students to research the issues, to consider and understand both sides, and to be able to defend either one. Debate can also lead the discussion into new learning areas and deliver a powerful message when you least expect it.

1 Names have been changed to protect the students' identities. Both are white and around 30 years of age.

# COMBINING ELEMENTS: THE *JUSTICE TALKING* FORMAT

This essay describes a collaborative project in which three English professors created multi-perspective research assignments based on the format of National Public Radio's *Justice Talking* radio program. The classes they involved included a graduate course in composition theory and practice; a fourth-year course in public science writing; and a first-year course in composition. Each class composed a slightly different version of the project.

## Composing Controversy: Moving from Debate to Dialogue with a *Justice Talking* Radio Program

**Dr. Jacqueline Cason**
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*University of Alaska Anchorage*

Last year, three of us who teach composition courses constructed a collaborative research assignment based on *Justice Talking*, National Public Radio's award-winning weekly show. The *Justice Talking* format creates a deliberate composition that situates controversial issues in particular times, places, and communities. We designed the project both to engage students in the discussion of controversy and to teach them the principles of rhetoric valued in our discipline.

For those unfamiliar with the format, each *Justice Talking* program explores a single issue using a mix of discrete pieces that include anecdotes, current-event reports, debate, commentary, interviews, and expert testimony. The first segment sets up the issue, usually with an interview that outlines why it is important, how it has been or is being treated in the policy arena, and perhaps some voices of those affected by it. The middle segments include a structured debate between two or more competing points of view. The last segment brings in additional voices and explores the topic from

### Radio Program: *Justice Talking* Format

*The* Justice Talking *broadcast format can be adapted for use in small group collaborations and full class projects, with and without actual recording technology.*

The first segment sets up the issue, usually with an interview that outlines why it is important, how it has been or is being treated in the policy arena, and perhaps some voices of those affected.

The middle segments include a structured debate between two or more competing points of view.

The last segment brings in additional voices and explores the topic from other viewpoints not covered by the debate.

other viewpoints not covered by the debate. Together, the various pieces provide facts, relevant experiences, strengths and weaknesses, positions, and overviews of conversations in places where policy decisions are made.

Our idea was that students would use the *Justice Talking* format to compose their own broadcast on an issue we assigned them or on one of their choice. We wanted an assignment that could accomplish both disciplinary and civic goals, that could be used in a variety of writing courses, and that would also serve broader societal goals. At a disciplinary level, oppositional debate and the integration of contrasting perspectives both embody the spirit of ancient rhetoric. At a civic level, the assignment encourages students as citizens to make judgments about an issue, individually and collectively, after reproducing, understanding, and critiquing various points of view. In other words, the *Justice Talking* format offered us a process that would invite students to discover multiple perspectives and contrasting arguments on an issue, to weigh them critically, and to perform that process for their audience.

**Educational Concerns: Teaching the Research and Writing Process**

Students are required to write many research papers over the course of their college careers. Typically, these assignments focus on how students select and gather secondary sources and how they arrange their findings without plagiarizing. These practices are fine as far as they go, but they don't really teach students the art of synthesis and the rhetorical moves for joining an intellectual conversation. Unintentionally, typical research assignments often create the impression that conducting and writing from research is a static process rather than a dynamic engagement on a specific issue within an identifiable community. When students perceive sources as static references to objective and authoritative knowledge, divorced from the conventions, commonplaces, languages, and histories of the community, writing a research paper becomes less an act of engagement and participation and more an act of compiling and sequencing a series of citations.

**The format creates a deliberate composition that situates controversial issues in particular times, places, and communities.**

A common problem with compiling static sources of information is that student writers tend not to examine the strongest arguments from contrasting perspectives but to create straw arguments instead. They tend to ignore negative sources and to seek affirmative advocacy sources without recognizing the interests and purpose of such advocacy. Such filtering prematurely limits their perspective on the issue as a whole.

Though the project employs audio technology, writing remains a significant part of the assignment, both in preparation, written composition, and later reflection. Furthermore, these assignments support our efforts to teach the writing process rather than only the writing product. The students' projects are driven by a purpose—the need to answer questions about a topic—and not strictly by the textual concerns of thesis statements and supporting evidence. As an experience in systematic inquiry, the project models the ancient rhetorical canon of invention, a term which refers to the process of finding available arguments. In the process of finding available arguments, students must locate and examine positions held by others; in so doing, they make knowledge that allows them to participate in discussions and to extend those discussions in novel ways. Along the way, they must discover what is truly at issue: that point of stasis upon which participants agree to focus their

attention for the sake of having a more productive argument. This process presents current knowledge as the product of ongoing negotiation within a community, open to continual challenge and revision from antagonistic perspectives.

**Civic Concerns: Teaching the Values of Collective Wisdom and Democracy**

The *Justice Talking* format requires students to present multiple sides of a contentious public issue within a historical context, an engagement that is fundamental to citizenship in a democracy. In the Sophistic spirit of *dissoi logoi*, the format promotes both civil argument and a civic education. It helps clarify differences between expert sources, advocacy sources, and experiential case studies without discounting any type of testimony or the emotions and artistry intrinsic to persuasive arguments. The format calls upon students to:

- identify central issues;
- listen to the voices of opposing views;
- restate the ideas of others;
- scrutinize their own ideas, making clear connections between their ideas and those of others;
- search beneath the issues to locate the assumptions and consequences of specific claims;
- make concessions in the interests of finding common ground; and
- treat colleagues' work as significant—to the point of defending it as their own.[1]

The project requires students to present multiple sides of a contentious public issue within a historical context, an engagement that is fundamental to citizenship in a democracy.

As students consider the multitude of perspectives, opinions, and individual voices, they also learn something about the value of and the possibility for collective wisdom. This contrasts with traditional notions of the research paper that tend to privilege facts and statistics and to dismiss opinion as if it were idiosyncratic or individual. A common question students ask—"Can I put my opinion in the paper?"—reveals the individualistic and objectivist bias in students' minds. The collaborative and performative experience of the *Justice Talking* format can help to loosen the close tie between individuals and their personal opinions and to bind those opinions more publicly to a community's ideology and its characteristic ways of interpreting raw facts and data. Students can begin to explore the links between their opinions, the characteristic terms used to express those opinions, and their membership in communities. Not only may students feel less personally threatened by controversial challenges to their opinions, but they may also be more willing to explore what counts as evidence and knowledge within different disciplinary areas and to accept multiple ways of knowing about a given issue.

Finally, the project echoes our understanding of the purposes of discussion, as articulated by Brookfield and Preskill, as a means for informed understanding, enhanced awareness, appreciation, and taking action. Experiencing discussion this way helps students understand that "[d]iscussion and democracy are inseparable."[2]

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1 Benton, 2003; Wallen, 2003; Olbrys, 2006
2 Brookfield, Discussion as a Way of Teaching

**Disciplinary Concerns: Teaching Core Knowledge in Composition and Rhetoric**

In addition to teaching students about the social dimensions of research and the dramatic nature of argument, the *Justice Talking* format can introduce students to core disciplinary concepts in the field of composition and rhetoric, concepts that will assist them not only in civil discourse, but also when they invent arguments and write papers for other occasions across the curriculum. By learning core concepts in rhetoric, as bulleted below and expanded on page 73, students can become more deliberate about identifying an issue, positioning themselves in time and place, building credibility, empathizing with others, and providing logical reasons for their claims.

By learning core concepts in rhetoric, students can become more deliberate about identifying an issue, positioning themselves in time and place, building credibility, empathizing with others, and providing logical reasons for their claim.

- **Identifying an issue.** For starters, the performative aspect of the broadcast and the need to shape many disparate pieces into a coherent whole teaches students how to identify the central issue under dispute (see stasis theory);
- **Positioning oneself in time and place.** Continuing on a holistic level, the local and current nature of the broadcast framed within a historical background demonstrates the significance of time and place in calling for a rhetorical response (see kairos);
- **Building credibility.** In an academic context in which students are usually encouraged to be objective and to avoid first-person pronouns, *Justice Talking's* relative openness to narrative and experiential knowledge combined with an emphasis on expert research and testimony teach students about the importance of a speaker's character in building trust and credibility (see ethos);
- **Empathizing with others.** In a setting where students often consider their professor the sole audience, this dramatic format invites students to become and to listen to real voices and to recognize the values and emotions these voices communicate (see pathos);
- **Providing logical arguments.** Finally, the debate segment gives students rigorous practice in developing a limited set of claims, supporting them with reasons and evidence, and rebutting the arguments, reasons, and evidence of others (see logos).

**Recommendations**

**Find ways to orient students to the format.** The novelty of recording and performing were challenging to those who are more familiar with writing a paper. Therefore, we strongly recommend that students be required to listen to archived shows on their own outside of class and then to generate a set of evaluation criteria as part of a collaborative in-class activity. Student-generated criteria will be more authentic, and the exercise will increase their familiarity with the format and genre. Faculty can use those criteria for later evaluation of the student-produced show.

**Build technology into early semester activities.** We chose audio technology partly because it is a low-threshold technology with low equipments costs, ease of use, and access to free audio editing software. However, many students have no experience with it, which makes it important to familiarize students with the tools early. Therefore, we suggest integrating the technology into other class activities such as weekly audio letters, mini-podcasts on course topics, or peer-review activities.

**Emphasize and allow time for revision.** Initial practice with the technology would also empower students to make more use of editing tools. Because the *Justice Talking* format is a composition more than a live program, we encourage professors to allow a minimum of three to four weeks for the project and to require revision from students so that they integrate each segment into a coherent whole. Younger students with frequent access to audio technology are entering our courses as well, so we will likely encounter students already quite familiar with recording and editing.

**Consider options for requirements, scope, and grouping.** Composing a *Justice Talking* episode qualifies as a major course assignment, and even though we tend to lower the stakes when experimenting with a new assignment, we think that treating it as a major assignment will increase student perception of its value and produce more serious engagement. Because of its scope and the level of collaboration it requires, it will likely gain fuller engagement as a culminating semester assignment than it does as an icebreaker activity, and will likely need more time in proportion to the size of collaborative groups. Finally, though we recommend that the final composition be in audio format, we also recommend that writing remain a significant part of the assignment, both in preparation, written composition, and later reflection.

We need to recognize that some students prefer not to challenge opposing views directly or competitively.

**Conclusion: Ethics of a Classroom Argument Culture**

The *Justice Talking* format allows students to compose a controversy for the benefit of an audience and to perform the process of critical thinking without the pressure of needing to annihilate an opponent. Agonistic argument can be hurtful and corrosive to the human spirit and may undermine efforts to conciliate or to reach common ground on an issue.[3] We need to be mindful that we foster healthy, community-minded ways of resolving conflicts and disputes, recognizing that some students prefer not to challenge opposing views directly or competitively. The *Justice Talking* format is therefore not intended to be a showcase for individual voices or competitive debate but rather a densely textured exchange of ideas. For students inexperienced in this kind of intellectual exchange, the archive provides an opportunity to spectate first and generate their own criteria or goals to strive for in their own practice.

Finally, the notion that there are always two equally valid sides to every argument is steeped in a worthy ethic of intellectual fairness and balance. However, we argue that the notion of "fair and balanced" alone may lead to divisiveness and political enclaves. We think it worthwhile to encourage students to weigh the sides more critically and to weigh the relative merits of different perspectives. Unlike the language of intellectual freedom expressed in David Horowitz's Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR), a rhetoric of *dissoi logoi* asks students to discover their positions through apprenticeship rather than indoctrination. In the ABOR view, the idea of balance implies that for every liberal left

3 Tannen, 1998; Tompkins, 2003

view there must be a conservative right view. A *dissoi logoi* rhetoric, however, is concerned with engagement rather than opposition; it allows us to teach students to maintain an intellectual equilibrium through a deep understanding of their own footing. The aim of practice is not simply the awareness of other ideas—often shorthand in consumer society for paying attention only to opinions one wishes to hear—but rather the ability to reproduce them, to understand them, and to critique them all. Such pedagogy, as communications professor Stephen Olbrys explains, potentially turns the classroom into "a site for lively disputation over public virtues and the impetus for fostering relationships predicated on respect and understanding."[4]

In closing, we anticipate and wish to answer the charge of relativism. Our discipline is inclined to embrace a pedagogy that emphasizes a diversity and pluralism of ideas and beliefs. While it is true that a thorough education in the conventions, commonplaces, languages, and histories of the community was fundamental to ancient rhetorical training, it would be overly simplistic to conclude that we encourage our students to find all perspectives to be equally valid. Our faith in rhetorical strategies grows out of the process of searching for, articulating, and challenging plural truths in order to determine an ethical course of action. As Kenneth Burke acknowledges in *On Symbols and Society* (1989), it is easy to confuse the dialectic with the relativistic, because "any term can be seen from the point of view of another term." When we look at the process as a whole from the standpoint of participation, we witness a "perspective of perspectives" or a "resultant certainty" that emerges from a contributing series of provisional certainties.[5] And it is from that summative standpoint, modified by multiple terms and incongruous perspectives that we invite our students to discover the confidence to act in the world with conviction.

**Our faith in rhetorical strategies grows out of the process of searching for, articulating, and challenging plural truths in order to determine an ethical course of action.**

LINK page 170

LINK page 206

For more on academia's perceived liberal bias, see Politics, pages 170-193. For more on Horowitz and the ABOR, see Speaking the Language, pages 206-207.

Stephen Olbrys defines *dissoi logoi* as an ancient pedagogy that insists upon active and performed engagement with multiple perspectives rather than mere awareness of, limited exposure to, and eventual isolation from oppositional perspectives. He recommends this approach in response to recent accusations of liberal bias in academia and as a good faith effort to respond to David Horowitz's Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR).

4 Olbrys, p. 367.
5 Burke, p. 256.

**CASE STUDY: PUBLIC SCIENCE WRITING**
***Science Today***

We began the semester with the historical "two cultures" debate over whether colleges should privilege a scientific education over a humanities education. I used this assignment as an ice-breaker: one large collaborative activity that would 1) introduce conflicts between scientific ways of knowing and the policy issues they inform; and 2) address the role of public deliberation in resolving controversies that require scientific understanding. We called our show *Science Today* instead of *Justice Talking*. The collaborative episode was prepared in parts outside of class and performed in a single class period.

The episode began with an interactive timeline of key events in the history of the two cultures debate, followed by a graphic display of the history of science in a series of images set to music. The segment emphasized the driving curiosity in poets and chemists alike, along with issues of social stratification, differing employment opportunities in the sciences and humanities, increasing levels of international competition in global economies, and the aims of education in helping individuals and communities address economic and moral challenges.

The overview and historical background segment was followed by a current event news report of the recent groundbreaking for UAA's new science facility. The segment featured an interview with James Liszka, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, a philosophy professor dressed in a long white lab coat. The student newscasters described the dedication in ritualistic terms as an expression of values, joined with a performance of indigenous music and the Alaska Flag song.

The debate portion underscored the common values shared by both the sciences and the humanities. The person advocating for scientific education described science as systematized knowledge or a system for organizing complexities, and claimed that it would carry the humanities into the future with momentum and shared values. She spoke metaphorically, calling upon the class to witness how the ink of her math homework had bled through the page and intermingled with her history notes. The spokesperson advocating for a humanities education also spoke metaphorically of foundational knowledge with an emphasis on civic engagement. In short, the debate centered on questions of emphasis and priority, with the "science" student emphasizing knowledge and the "humanities" student emphasizing civic engagement.

Following the debate, the moderator focused class attention with four key questions:

- Should all students have to take courses in the humanities and fine arts, even if they plan to pursue a science-based career?
- Which is more important: how much one knows or how well one can express it publicly? Why?
- How important it is for a person with a very high level of technical expertise to be able to communicate specialized knowledge to the general public? This question was addressed to the science advocate.
- How important it is for a person who is a competent and eloquent communicator to be able to maintain a high level of scientific knowledge and literacy? This question he posed to the humanities advocate.

The episode concluded with two commentators who delivered personal essays. The first spoke from the perspective of a Bristol Bay salmon fisherman who works under a system of quotas set by fisheries biologists whose job it is to manage the harvest of a renewable resource. He spoke about the limitations and unpredictable nature of an imperfect science and the biologists' responsibility to communicate with fishermen in both technical and lay terms. He supported an educational system that prepares students with marketable skills but also helps them experience an affinity to society instead of existing in separate communities that cannot communicate or understand one another.

The second commentator spoke from the perspective of a Chinese exchange student who has witnessed this debate in her home country. She described the high-stakes single standardized college entrance examination as "cruel" and the time it occurs as "Black June" or "Black July." She told the story of one award-winning eighteen-year-old who wrote a book on the topic, a book that claimed high school science courses were meaningless in preparing students for the exam and thereby functioned to maker higher education off limits to very talented students in the arts. The commentator advocated a more flexible system that would play to the strengths of diverse students without limiting their future educational opportunities.

Jacqueline Cason
English

**CASE STUDY: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC**
**Grammatical Correctness: Die Hard Standards v. Bleeding Heart Revisionists**

I introduced this assignment to a group of graduate students who were scheduled to be teaching assistants the next semester and instructors of record the semester after that. The intent of using *Justice Talking* in this class was twofold. First, it was an assignment that they could turn around and use in their own classrooms the following semester. Second, they would get to fully investigate and debate a difficult issue of their own. One concern about graduate students is that they tend to be very similar and seem to form a homogenous group. However, with this exercise it became apparent that homogeneity was only a surface characteristic, at least for this particular group.

It was initially challenging for the students to decide on a topic. They explored several possibilities, from the opening of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay. I tried to steer them toward an issue that arose out of their course material, which at first seemed like it might be too esoteric. Reassuringly, however, controversy seems to be a naturally occurring quality of engaged groups.

From the very beginning, these students had found themselves in disagreement about how much they should weigh correctness and idiomatic usage when evaluating student writing. In the Writing Center, where each of them works, they were being introduced to our deeply held disciplinary belief that correctness is overemphasized and that teaching "grammar" (as they incorrectly term it) is only tangential to good writing. Yet many of them, having been taught these fundamentals all their lives, could not agree. The discussion culminated in a full-fledged debate after an expert in Teaching English as a Second Language proposed that ESL students

be evaluated on a different scale from native speakers. A native speaker can reasonably be expected to use prepositions in idiomatic ways, but it is nearly impossible for people who do not have prepositions in their native language to use English prepositions correctly. Except through deep acculturation and practice—and sometimes not even then—ESL students cannot learn "rules" for the use of prepositions, if such rules can even be articulated. It seems nonsensical to evaluate a person on failing to learn what is impossible to learn.

This debate irritates our assumptions about learning and asks us to examine some of our most deeply held beliefs about fairness, both of which tend to be largely unexamined by new writing teachers. It proved to be an ideal topic that was genuinely contested within the group, with members tending to fall either into the "diehard standards" group or the "bleeding heart revisionists" group. The beauty of the *Justice Talking* format, however, is that both groups—indeed, everyone in the class—had to work together to assemble the hour-long performance.

This was not a "gather your sources and then debate" sort of exercise. Rather, it was a composing exercise, in which students had to step back and observe their contributions from the perspective of a listener. Their goal was to construct a program that fairly and thoroughly discussed the issues, that allowed important voices to speak and that made room for listeners to contemplate the issues.

The class composed and designed several program segments:

- Introduction, in which the importance of the issue was explained;
- Historical background, in which the audience was acquainted with the history of the debate;
- Interviews, in which experts representing multiple perspectives were allowed to speak;
- Interviews with laypersons, in which a group of non-experts offered opinions;
- And finally a debate, in which two perspectives were argued in calm, respectful tones, supported by evidence.

The students quickly discovered that it was nearly impossible to find a "diehard standards" expert; most composition experts reject the standards approach. Laypersons, however, overwhelmingly advocated for it, especially ESL students themselves. The process of producing a "show" together, as opposed to participating only in a debate, caused both sides to engage with their opponent in unfamiliar ways. How do I make your argument sound good? Students on one side provided information to students on the other side for the good of the final product.

Although few participants changed their minds about the question, many found problems with their earlier perspectives and came to terms with the notion of a spectrum upon which this debate exists. We all learned how challenging it can be to hold an extreme view in the presence of a sympathetic opponent. For us as teachers, the experience also demonstrated how much orchestration is required to have a meaningful difficult dialogue.

Kerri Morris
English

### The *Justice Talking* Assignment in Disciplinary Terms

**Kairos.** By identifying the issue's background, history, and current significance, and by including voices of those affected by it, the introductory segments reveal kairos, which can be defined as the right, proper, or opportune time and place to do something. The *Justice Talking* format requires students to invent and establish a strong sense of kairos within their overview and current event segments as well as within their own arguments.

**Stasis Theory.** The debate segment strives to bring the controversy into *stasis,* focused on an agreed-upon point of contention. Stasis theory offers a questioning process that helps students identify what is at issue, where stakeholders stand, and how they might stand together in their disagreement. For example, if a pro-choice advocate is arguing about the value of a woman's right to self-determination and a pro-life advocate is arguing about the definition of human life, the two parties are not in stasis. They do not even agree what the issue is, and therefore cannot have a productive argument on it. Systematic questions of conjecture, definition, quality, and action can facilitate stasis. Debate participants can be expected to discover and disclose their arguments ahead of time in an effort to begin the debate with stasis.

**Ethos.** The format presents a number of voices in character and does not immediately filter those characters through a single writer's voice and perspective, thus allowing audience members to sense where each character's interests lie. The term ethos refers to character and credibility, both of which are fundamental to the art and science of persuasive argument. Throughout the assignment, students are expected to invent their own ethos rather than pretend to be objective non-characters. They are also expected to locate disinterested experts with an established or situated ethos on the issue. An audience is more inclined to trust a character who is well-informed, demonstrates good will toward others, and refrains from fallacious arguments. A conscious focus on ethos also encourages students to weigh the quality of various sources and to recognize that some sources are more credible than others.

**Pathos.** *Justice Talking* episodes frequently include interviews with people who have experienced directly the consequences of an issue or policy, and students are expected to do the same. The term pathos refers to the emotions and values of the audience and to efforts to evoke those emotions and acknowledge those values. The voices of real people in real places can evoke much greater emotion than research sources cited in parentheses only. Emotion and commitment are closely aligned with our sense of character and motivation. Appeals to pathos are based on the assumption that emotions are communal and that human beings share similar kinds of emotional experience. Because emotions are sometimes perceived as irrational, it is valuable for students to understand the role they play in the reasoning process and in moving people to action. Emotion also increases engagement. Adopting only an objective distance may blind students to the role that proximity and interest play in the deliberative process. An appreciation for pathos encourages students to observe and reflect on the relative proximity and interest of their own positions and those of their sources.

**Logos.** The debate segment emphasizes logical argument. Participants are expected to affirm and refute and to offer clear reasons and compelling evidence for their claims and counter claims. Advocates have the opportunity to question each other, and the moderator may ask questions to tease out ideological commonplaces that inform the debaters' positions. The term we most commonly associate with argument is *logos*; it refers to the orderly presentation of claims, reasons, and evidence, as well as counter claims, reasons, and evidence. Though argument need not be equated exclusively with logos, it would obviously suffer without it.

# DIFFICULT DIALOGUE
# MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES

We deliberately designed our faculty intensive curriculum to focus early in the week on teaching approaches and traditions that originated in the dominant western culture. Our goal was to start with what we knew to be familiar territory to the majority of our participants, and then gradually introduce some less familiar (and perhaps less comfortable) strategies later in the week. Combined with our focus on disruptive students on Day One, however, the focus on western traditions during Day Two helped bring to the surface some of the differences between our two universities and our various cultural perspectives.

That UAA participants and project leaders would be in the majority was never really in doubt. UAA greatly outnumbers APU—in students, in faculty, and in resources. Of the thirty faculty members selected for inclusion that first year, twenty-five were from UAA and five were from APU, a rough approximation of our relative sizes. UAA had a faculty development center that could organize and facilitate the intensives and a partnership office that could provide staff support and backup. It was a partnership, to be sure. But one partner was a lot bigger than the other.

As in all majority/minority populations, there are cultural differences, and they matter.

- UAA is a large public university with a dual mission of access and excellence. Open access translates into a greater range of students and of student behaviors, including, inevitably, many more problematic behaviors.
- APU is a small private university with selective admissions and a focus on active learning, which translates into a somewhat more elite atmosphere and a significantly more individualized approach to instruction.
- UAA operates under a tenure system; by and large, its faculty accept (or are at least resigned to) traditional methods of teaching and evaluation.
- APU does not practice tenure; its faculty receive multi-year, rolling contracts connected to periodic reviews that assess, among other criteria, evidence of commitment to experiential and active learning.

In addition, our planning committees and faculty cohorts included large majorities of white people, many of whom had a significant investment in traditional modes of academic discourse, and a tendency to see the traditional values and methods of the academy as the standard to which all should aspire. From this perspective, a major goal is to help students assimilate to the culture and requirements of higher education and rise to the standards of the university. While concurring with these standards and also wishing to help students negotiate the culture, a smaller number, including some faculty members of color, wanted to emphasize a few other things as well, such as preserving the dignity and value of non-traditional cultures in the face of the dominant cultural juggernaut and opening the university to the perspectives and concerns of its minority populations.

By the end of the second day, these cultural differences were beginning to be felt. Many of the APU faculty members had become disappointed and alarmed by the first day's activities. Some of them, and others, were equally alarmed by the second day's activities. Rhetoric? Debate? Didn't we have anything more progressive to share with them than that?

At this point, our very project name became a point of debate. In the original grant proposal, we had called our project *Encountering Controversy*. The grant writers had selected the title under deadline pressure and without giving it a great deal of thought. Now several participants pointed to the verb and voiced their opinion that it was too passive, too reactive, too expected, too safe. They signaled their active stance and intentionality by renaming it *Engaging Controversy* instead. It was just a word change, but it was a good one.

Cultural differences would continue to play a role on Days Three and Four.

For many years now, I've wanted to live less reactively and more proactively, and I've felt that a well-balanced way of working in the world is one that keeps these two dynamics in tension. Some of my effort is directed toward holding the line against what I see as harmful or wrong, but some is also devoted toward celebrating the good and creating what I consider healing or constructive responses for our world and its many human and more-than-human communities.

It might seem like mere semantics to change the word from 'encounter' to 'engage,' but in effect we were signaling our intention not just to react to instances of controversy in our classrooms and academic lives but to go out of our way to use difficult dialogues as an opportunity for mutual learning.

Mei Mei Evans
English

## START TALKING

**Questions for Discussion:**

How does your discipline establish the credibility of sources of knowledge?

What questions in your field are particularly in need of discussion or rhetorical intervention at this point in time?

What place do shared human values and emotions have in the way your discipline makes arguments?

Which perspectives does your discipline embrace almost without questioning? Which ones does it ignore or reject?

How do you get students to step outside of those perspectives and discover other arguments and points of view?