

## Chapter Summary

The Toulmin model of argument is valuable because it emphasizes careful reasoning without the constraints of formal logic, the subject matter being too filled with probabilities to be resolved by logic alone. Toulmin argument is tied to the realities of social interaction, particularly of legal courts. This mode of argument recognizes that a claim, whether objective (based on scientific or logical issues) or subjective (based on aesthetic, ethical, or moral issues), must be supported by data (hard facts plus reasoned analysis), which in turn must rest on a warrant (a trustworthy foundation that gives validity to the data). Finally, the warrant must have backing—assurance that the warrant is sound.

## Checklist

1. Do I state my claim clearly enough for public scrutiny, making sure that it is arguable?
2. Do I qualify my claim, if necessary?
3. Do I have enough data to support my claim convincingly?
4. Are my data reliable, timely, accurate, and sufficient for demonstrating the validity and truthfulness of my claim?
5. Do my data rest on a trustworthy warrant which, in turn, has sound and legitimate backing?

## Writing Projects

1. Prepare an argumentative essay on a topic of your own or your instructor's choosing that follows the Toulmin model. Include a preliminary synopsis of your argument, divided into five sections: (1) your claim; (2) a qualifier to your claim; (3) your data, subdivided into hard facts and reason-based evidence, both objective and subjective; (4) your warrant, which renders your data trustworthy; (5) your backing, which reinforces and legitimizes the warrant.
2. Write a Toulmin-based argument in which you defend or challenge the view that anyone elected to public office (mayor, governor, secretary of state, president of the United States, and so on) is obliged to live a morally exemplary life. Be sure to define "morally exemplary."

# 5

## Using the Rogerian Model in Your Arguments

The relationship which I have found helpful is characterized by . . . an acceptance of [the] other person as a separate person with value in his own right, and by a deep empathic understanding which enables me to see his private world through his eyes.

—Carl Rogers

In the last two chapters we have examined the art of effective argumentation as it has been practiced in Western culture since ancient times. Classical argument continues to function as a versatile basis for presenting and defending a point of view. Toulmin argument has enhanced the dynamics of Classical argument to meet the complexities of contemporary situations, adding, as you'll recall from Chapter 4, an ethical emphasis (by way of warrants and their backing) to the presentation of evidence, an emphasis that is not explicitly included in Classical argument. Toulmin argument also embraces the complexity of a claim: It must often be qualified, even refuted in certain contexts, by the arguer. This last feature might be regarded as a precursor to the method of modern argument we consider in this chapter, Rogerian argument.

Carl Rogers (1902–1987) was a psychologist of the "humanist" school, seeing cooperative interpersonal relationships as the key to a healthy society. As a therapist, Rogers urged self-realization and believed that to function fully as a person in society, one must be open to new experiences. Rigidity of thought and defensiveness breed intolerance. One way such openness is cultivated is through cooperative methods of communication.

## The Rogerian Model of Argument

From Rogers's view, the Classical model of argument and even the more flexible Toulmin model tend to divide people into two camps: proponents and opponents, "good guys" versus "bad guys." The traditional language of argument, for example, is filled with militaristic metaphors: We *win* or *lose* arguments rather than resolve them. We *attack* someone's thesis rather than work to build

consensus for resolving points of disagreement. We *marshal* evidence as if gathering troops. Even the seemingly neutral term *debate* is of military origin (from *battle*, to do battle). For Rogers, this combative approach to argument does more harm than good; it generates ill will and antagonism between discussants rather than cooperation.

### Finding Common Ground

But, you ask, how can people cooperate or interact harmoniously if they hold diametrically opposed views about an issue? Rogers's answer is that you find a common ground and start from there. Returning to the rhetorical rhombus (see Figure 1.2), we see the emphasis here on *audience*. A paper in the Rogerian mode assumes that readers firmly hold differing views and therefore will resist hearing others' positions. Yet no matter how debatable or controversial a view is, one can locate views on the issue that both can agree on. It might take a while to find them, but they are there. Consider the controversy for and against capital punishment, for example:

- Both sides consider human life to be sacred and precious.
- Both sides feel that capital crimes must be deterred as effectively as possible.
- Both sides agree that someone convicted of a capital crime is a threat to society.

The virtue of finding common ground is that one can isolate and resolve the points of opposition more effectively after identifying the points of agreement because one can reduce any hostility the audience has by demonstrating a true understanding of the audience's perspective.

The Rogerian model modifies the Classical model by emphasizing common ground (points of agreement) *before* calling attention to points of disagreement. The writer's goal is not to win or to prove wrong; it is to work together cooperatively to arrive at an agreed-on truth. From its opening sentence, a Rogerian argument communicates a desire for harmonious interaction rather than combative opposition.

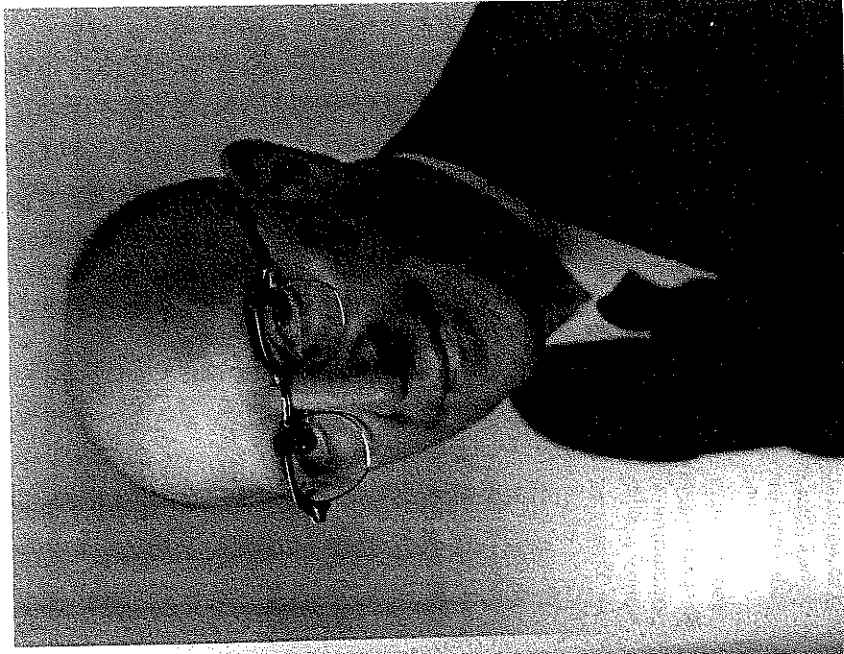
I. Introduction: What is our shared problem? Let's see if we can work together to resolve it.

II. What we agree on.

III. Where we differ: misunderstandings, such as drawbacks or limited application to others' solutions, and the possible reasons behind these drawbacks or limitations.

IV. Possible drawbacks or limitations to writers' solutions, followed by greater benefits of writers' solutions.

Carl Rogers (1902–1987) was known for his “humanist” client-centered approach to therapy. He advocated nonthreatening methods of interpersonal communication.



V. How we can resolve our differences; or, an exhortation to resolving differences together.

### Developing Multiple Perspectives

Rogerian persuasion requires writers to work hard at developing multiple perspectives toward issues. You must be tolerant and respectful enough of differing viewpoints to take the time to fathom the value systems that underlie them. The first step toward achieving this goal, according to Rogers, is deceptively simple: *It is to listen with understanding.*

Listening with understanding is a skill that takes time to develop. You may think you are listening with understanding when you permit challengers to speak their minds, but you may be only allowing them their say rather than genuinely paying close attention to what they are telling you.

Here are some suggestions for listening with understanding, in Rogers's sense of the phrase, that also can be applied to reading with understanding:

- Be as attentive as possible. Assume that the speaker's remarks have value.
- Suspend your own judgments while listening, keeping an open mind so as not to run the risk of prematurely judging the speaker's views before you have the chance to consider them carefully.
- If anything is unclear to you or you find yourself disagreeing with anything, ask questions—but only after the person has finished speaking.
- Try to see the speaker's claims in terms of his or her warrants (underlying values or ideology on which the claims are based). One better understands and appreciates a speaker's position if one is aware of these warrants.
- Think of ways in which the speaker's point of view and your own can somehow work together, despite seeming contradictory. Even if you oppose capital punishment and the speaker supports it, both of you could approach a common ground by thinking of extreme situations on either side that would discourage an inflexible stance.

Using Rogerian argument in conversation is one thing; using it in writing is another. When writing, you do not have your audience in front of you to give you immediate feedback. Instead you have to anticipate questions and counter-responses that challengers would have for you (in other words, automatically consider the needs of your audience). By considering the audience's needs and values and the merits of their beliefs, you will be more inclined to take a cooperative stance rather than a defensive or combative one.

Arguing cooperatively also means including in your Rogerian essay specific instances in which the differing views are logically sound. That way, you show yourself to have listened well to those perspectives. This in turn prepares your audience for listening more carefully and sympathetically to *your* side of things. You also demonstrate your awareness of the limitations to your proposal—no position is perfect, after all—even while you show how your position works in more varied or complex or more frequent occurrences of the common problem. You and your audience both become receptive to “give and take.”

## Organizing Your Argument Using the Rogerian Model

To write an argument based on the Rogerian ideals of cooperation, find common ground with your audience regardless of their views about your claim. You need to become especially sensitive to attitudes and values other than your own. You should focus on the *issue* and the best way to resolve it, not on “winning” the argument over your “opposition.”

As with the Classical and Toulmin models, begin thinking about your essay with questions about your audience, the similarities between your views and your audience's (insofar as you are aware of them), and the points at which you differ most, along with possible strategies for resolving those differences.

Consider these questions:

1. Can I be objective enough to represent views and evaluate evidence fairly?
2. How much sense do the points of difference make? Do they make more sense than some of my views? If so, do I have the courage to adopt them, or at least modify them to accommodate my views?
3. Am I genuinely interested in establishing a common ground with my audience? What else can I include that could better facilitate this goal?

When constructing an outline for a Rogerian argument, think in terms of thesis, support of thesis, and concluding judgments based on that support—just as you do when using the Classical and Toulmin models. But with the Rogerian model, you are more concerned with establishing common ground with readers who otherwise would reject the thesis. Here is how an argument using the Rogerian approach might take shape:

- I. Introduction to the problem
  - A. First scenario: A vignette that illustrates the problem, for example
  - B. Second scenario: Another vignette that illustrates the problem, but one with greater complexity that some solutions wouldn't handle well
  - C. Thesis
- II. Alternative views worth sharing with the target audience, and why these views are worth considering
- III. Points of difference, along with reflection on how to resolve them
- IV. Conclusion: The implications of finding a solution in light of the evidence presented, that would benefit everyone, plus discussion of the great benefits derived from the solution that all audience members would most likely find to their liking

### Exercise 5.1

Read the following essay in which the author uses the Rogerian method to tackle the difficult issue of sexual harassment in the early teen years. Then answer the questions that follow.

## Let's Talk About Sexual Harassment in Middle School

Kimberly Shearer Palmer

**L**ike every new employee at the *Washington Post*, I was given a "Codes of Conduct" packet—the company's policies on everything from smoking to taking medical leave.<sup>1</sup> It was the section on sexual harassment that startled me most. Perhaps it shouldn't have. But the prohibition against vulgar jokes and "brushing up against another's body" brought home to me the stark contrast between the informal codes of conduct my friends and I had learned to live by in middle school and what's permissible in the working world today. The situations are very different, of course. There aren't the same sort of power relationships in school that make harassment such a complex problem in the working world. But, looking back, I'm still left wondering why so many teenagers I knew put up with unwelcome sexual behavior. And why adults consistently turned a blind eye. Twelve years ago, when I was in middle school, overt sexual advances were everyday events and usually overlooked by teachers. Boys grabbed girls' breasts in the stairwells and cafeteria as casually as they would say "hello," and our daily routines were punctuated by unwelcome slaps on the behind.

As it turns out, my experience wasn't unusual. According to the American Association of University Women, 65 percent of girls in public school, grades eight to eleven, say they experience "touching, grabbing, and/or pinching in a sexual way."<sup>2</sup> My friends and I used to let boys touch, grab, and pinch us, and I don't think things have gotten all that much better. Sure, there's greater awareness: today, the districts have a sexual harassment policy that schools rely on and teachers can refer to. But the issue doesn't always reach administrators, much less the students. My recent conversations with today's teenagers suggest that it wasn't just my grade; it wasn't just my school, and it wasn't just back then. Many kids think—as my friends and I did—that the unwelcome touching is just flirtation.

I have since learned to fight back when men harass me. In Paris a few years ago, when a guy grabbed my breasts, I shoved him away from me and yelled at him. After that, he

The shared sexual harassment problems children in grades 8–11 have faced

Source: Kimberly Shearer Palmer, "Let's Talk About Sexual Harassment in Middle School," *Social Education* 67.4 (2003): M2.

left me alone. Now, when I think back to all the times in middle school when I didn't make guys leave me alone, I feel angry. So I decided to go back and find boys from my class and ask them why. I got out my old phone directory and called the same boys who would have been too cool for me to call in middle school. Most had moved, and the listed numbers were no longer valid. The ones I found shared my memories of unwanted touching in the hallways. They are, as far as I can tell, good boyfriend material. They are by all accounts sensitive and perceptive; my younger sister knows one well, and my close friend at college dated another. I found out they were just as confused as we girls were in those adolescent years.

One old classmate remembers the casual touching. "Even good guys did that," he said. "It wasn't sexual. . . . I don't know what it was. I can't think it's a good thing." He also recalled walking girls to class because they felt threatened. We didn't speak in terms of apologies, but wondered. It seemed so very strange that touching someone's breasts or bottom in the hallways was considered friendly behavior. Another one of my classmates told me that he remembered the same sorts of things. "Not until tenth grade would guys . . . realize it was not the best way to get a girl to like you," he said. Grabbing girls was normal behavior, we both agreed. It happened in public, in front of teachers. No one told us it was wrong. No one even seemed worried about the possibility of lawsuits, despite the 1992 Supreme Court decision that warned schools they could be held responsible for harassment.<sup>3</sup> Maybe the teachers looked at our sometimes giggly and embarrassed reactions and thought there wouldn't be a problem.

One male graduate told me that boys bothered girls back then because they didn't know what else to do. "No one knows how to act [at that age]. . . . You're self-conscious, no one has self-esteem." Boys, I realized, were just as insecure as I remember feeling. We were blindly following what we assumed was routine social conduct—grabbing, pinching, being pinched. Who knew there was another way to flirt? Boys, he told me, were just trying to bridge the gap between girls and guys. "It wasn't meant to hurt," he said.

Looking back now, he knows that what some boys did probably bothered some girls. But the girls didn't show it. "They probably didn't want to seem snobby or stuck up," he remembered. As I spoke to these men, I realized how different they were from the guy who bothered me in Paris. The

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rules were so blurry to both girls and boys in middle school that neither gender really knew when lines were crossed. For example, when my crotch was grabbed on a school bus one afternoon, it wasn't okay with me, but I didn't even tell my parents because at some level it seemed so similar to what happened every day in school. I still feel mad, but I could hardly blame my former classmates when they were just acting out of friendship or flirtation—however misguided that was. And the more I talked with my female friends, the more I realized how often we gave the wrong signals. Some girls remembered enjoying the attention, sometimes laughing along. One recalled two boys dragging her into the boys' bathroom, as she tried to kick her way free. But she didn't remember being angry. "It was the only way to express ourselves," she now says. But something else gave her further pause. She said she thought that "teachers let it slide" like the other dumb behavior that happens among adolescents.

They shouldn't have. I remember only one teacher who stood in the front of her class and yelled at the boys for grabbing girls. Finally a teacher noticed, I remember thinking. Why was she the only one? And if the teacher noticed, why didn't she inform the principal, and start a school-wide discussion? My annoyance with my former classmates redirected itself as I realized that adults who could have explained and enforced the differences between right and wrong behavior—our teachers—often did not. The fact is, no one taught us the right way to act. But as Peggy Orenstein, author of *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, says, "It still must stop."<sup>4</sup> For me, it stopped as soon as I emerged from the achingly self-conscious early teenage years. Assertiveness came from the natural confidence that comes with getting rid of braces and glasses.

Shouldn't we have been helped to learn those lessons earlier? An insecure seventh-grade girl shouldn't have to deal with aggressive boys grabbing her. But I keep asking myself: What would I have wanted my parents to tell me? What could they have possibly told me? "Don't let boys touch you"? "Tell me if anyone's bothering you"? I'm sure they told me those things. I'm sure I dismissed them, way too embarrassed to talk to them about anything dealing with boy-girl relationships. How can you help a shy seventh-grade girl who doesn't even know whether to feel grateful for the attention or angry at the violation?

There are no easy solutions. Zero-tolerance policies make no sense, considering the level of confusion surrounding so-

cial behavior. Parents can try to teach their daughters to be tough; teachers can integrate into class discussions of what distinguishes flirtation from harassment. There's plenty of inspiration in anything from the writings of Shakespeare to Maya Angelou, as Wellesley College sexual harassment scholar Nan Stein suggests in *Flirting or Hurting? A Teacher's Guide on Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment in Schools*.<sup>5</sup> And adults can talk to boys about limits.

The fact is, my former classmates did not turn into bad men. They don't bother women at work or college. And the women I knew in school have also learned where to draw the line. But we should all have learned the rules earlier, well before it comes time to sign those company policies. ■

## Notes

1. This essay first appeared in the *Washington Post* on August 20, 2000. Reprinted by permission.
  2. American Association of University Women, *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School* (Washington: AAUW, 2001).
  3. Office of Civil Rights, "Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance" (Washington: U.S. Department of Education, 2001), <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/slguide/index.html>>.
  4. Peggy Orenstein, *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (Landover Hills: Anchor, 1995).
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1. What rhetorical devices—phrases, words, tone, details—suggest that Palmer is using the Rogerian method of argument?
  2. What is most Rogerian about Palmer's approach to her topic? Least Rogerian? Briefly, what is Palmer's position on the matter of sexual harassment in middle school?
  3. Critics sometimes say that Rogerian argument is "wishy-washy." Is Palmer being wishy-washy about her middle school experiences with sexual harassment? Why or why not?
  5. What, if anything, would you suggest to Palmer to strengthen her argument?

Fault lay with the teachers who avoided dealing with the problem.

And yet would early lessons have done much good?

Admission that solutions are difficult



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