

Preface

Argument in Composition is addressed to all teachers, including some who may not in fact be teachers of composition, who might wish to incorporate the teaching of argument into their courses. In designing the book, we have aimed at a level of generality somewhere between that of a textbook on argument and a theory of argument. Or, in the language of Kenneth Burke, our approach is pitched to the level of “talk about” argument as opposed to “talking” argument or “talking about the talk about” argument. Those of our readers who wish straight argument talk should consult any of the numerous fine textbooks devoted to the subject. Those who wish a narrower but deeper understanding of argument should consult the many primary sources we refer to throughout this book. Our emphasis on this mid-level of generality derives from our purpose: to help teachers translate theory into pedagogy and to make informed choices about which argument textbooks (if any) make best sense for their courses. We hope the first three chapters of *Argument in Composition* equip our readers to formulate their own classroom approach to argument and to read more critically the materials catalogued in the rest of the book.

As the above allusion to Kenneth Burke might suggest, *Argument in Composition* is heavily influenced by Burke’s approach to rhetoric. While Burke’s theory receives little if any explicit attention in most argument textbooks (beyond the often oversimplified treatment of his pentad), we believe it to be the most cogent and comprehensive framework available for unifying the sundry approaches to argument—Toulmin’s schema, stasis theory, informal fallacies, the rhetorical situation, and so forth—that form the backbone of most contemporary argument textbooks. Because Burke serves as the primary lens or “terministic screen” through which we view argument, some commonly used terms are not featured in the main body of our text. In some cases such terms, through no fault of their own, are incongruent with or peripheral to our approach. We do not, for example, give extensive attention

to the enthymeme. We do cite it in our glossary of argument terms and more importantly, we cite John Gage's thoughtful analysis of the term. Certainly we recognize the important place of the enthymeme within the history of argument instruction and its potential usefulness for some contemporary classroom teachers. We just have trouble making it fit our own approach. Other terms are not discussed primarily because we feel that they are already included under different names within our own rubric. In the case of the rhetorical situation, for example, we discuss Lloyd Bitzer's notion of exigence because we believe it uniquely describes a concept critical to students of argument. We do not, however, mention another element of the Bitzer's rhetorical situation, "constraints," in the belief some of the other argument tools that we discuss, notably stasis theory, more clearly and usefully fulfill the role filled by constraints in Bitzer's theory.

Argument in Composition is, inevitably, itself an argument as much as it is a compendium of approaches to argument. We have tried to present our argument without being too argumentative. At the same time, we would be the first to acknowledge that our field, "rhetoric and composition," is a far from settled one. There are indeed arguments to be made for and against the inclusion of expressive writing in an argument class (we try to make an argument for inclusion). There are also arguments for and against the inclusion of visual argument in such a class. In the case of visual argument, our position is more complex. We applaud the goal and recognize the importance of visual argument. We cite work being done in the area. But we decry the lack of useable tools—or a common vocabulary for that matter—that might make such work accessible for undergraduates. For now, we would probably advise teachers either to wait until better tools are available or to get to work developing their own tools. In the meantime, we view visual argument to be something like those intriguing websites one eagerly hunts down only to be greeted by a screen announcing that they remain "Under Construction."