Fundamentals of Rhetoric & Argument
What is Rhetoric?

- **Purposeful** use of written and spoken language

- Images and designs also contain rhetorical content.
What is Argument?

- Argument is not necessarily disagreement, though formal arguments do take sides.

- It is not about being “right” or making the other side “wrong.”

- It is reasoned discourse using rhetoric for the purpose of persuasion.
What is Argument (Cont’d)

• Argument happens when a person takes a stance on an idea or issue. It is about making your case and defending it from an informed position.

• For every opinion, a counter-argument or different opinion exists.

• Argument is communication.

• It takes two (or more) to make an argument.
Aristotle called dialectic the counterpart to rhetoric.

It is a dialogue in which each side presents its case in order to come to some kind of understanding.

Diagram:

- Thesis
- Antithesis
- Synthesis
Where Did It Come From?

• Ancient Greek tradition

• The democratic city-state of Athens

• Citizens could participate in the decisions of the ruling body through participating in the process of creating policy/laws for Athens

• Critical thinking skills were highly prized

• Young men were taught argumentative techniques to develop rhetorical skills to prepare them to be good citizens
Socrates

Importance

• Greek Athenian rhetorician and philosopher (469-399 BCE)

• Credited with being the main founder of Western philosophy

• Taught using the method of answering questions with questions to encourage critical thinking

• This became known as the Socratic method and is still in use today

What Happened?

• We know of Socrates chiefly through the writings of others because he did not write down his ideas.

• He was known as the ‘gadfly’ of Athens and a critic of Athenian democracy.

• He was tried and found guilty of corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens and ‘impiety’ for not revering state gods.
What Happened to Him?

- He was tried and found guilty of corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens and ‘impiety’ for not revering state gods.
- His punishment was exile or death, and Socrates chose death by hemlock poisoning.
Who was Aristotle?

• Greek rhetorician (384-322 BCE) who codified and explained the art of rhetoric

• He was one of many well-known orators of his time, but he is remembered because he is the one who wrote it all down and created a taxonomy.

• Most famous for his definition of the “proofs” or tools of rhetorical persuasion
Aristotle’s Proofs/Rhetorical Triangle

Ethos

Logos

Pathos
Tactics of Persuasion

**Ethos**: character, values, ethics

**Logos**: reason, logic, left-brain thinking

**Pathos**: feeling, emotion, empathy
Ethos

• Argument should reflect the character and values of the arguer.

• Ethos establishes credibility.

• Aristotle thought this was the most important component of rhetoric.
Logos

• Arguments should be supported by facts, statistics, and evidence and examined through the lens of reason.
Pathos

- Appeals to emotion, though they should not cross the line into propaganda (pathos without ethos or logos).

- The arguer uses appeals to emotion to persuade his/her opponent/reader to see things from another perspective.
A Good Argument:

- Aristotle thought that a good argument should contain a balance of the 3 proofs and that the ethos of the rhetorician should be the driving force in the argument.
Aristotle’s Taxonomy

• Everything can be divided into 3 categories:
  • Theoretical
  • Practical
  • Productive

  OR

• Knowing
• Doing
• Making
Arts & Sciences

• **Necessary**: science/knowledge (episteme) is invariable.

• **Contingent**: art (techne) is probable and practical but cannot exist without knowledge.
Where do we use rhetoric?

- Aside from the college classroom, we see rhetoric in action in our society in our legal and political systems.

- Politicians use rhetoric when determining policy and making new laws or re-defining existing laws.

- Our judicial system uses rhetoric when prosecuting/defending clients in the courts.
Rogerian Argument

• American psychotherapist & communication theorist Carl R. Rogers is famous for his promotion of empathetic listening and consensus-building dialogue.

• Rogers says that constructive dialogue is more likely if both parties understand both sides of the argument and approach issues as a way to solve mutual problems.
For Example:

• **A:** I think using animals for medical research and lab testing is unethical and should be banned.

• **B:** Well, what if your child or parent would benefit by that research? And wouldn’t it be better to test on animals?

• **A:** Animals have a right to live, too. In fact, they may be more deserving than humans.

• **B:** You are a fanatic. Human life is more valuable.
What’s Wrong with This Picture?

• What did the previous exchange accomplish?

• How is Rogerian argument different?
  • Uses non-confrontational dialogue & a consensus building tone by seeking common ground

• Replaces traditional argument structure of claim, support, counterargument, restating claim with: question, alternatives, consideration, and advocacy of compromise
An Outline for Aristotelian Argument

I. Introduction (paragraph 1):
   a. Lead in hook sentences
   b. brief overview of context
   c. your explicit thesis statement

II. Opposition (counter-argument):
   a. summary of opposing view
   b. concession of legitimacy of said view
   c. counterargument to weak points of view
III. Supporting Argument (your evidence):
   a. Specific proof
   b. Evidence grouped under key points/reasons
   c. Strongest point presented last

IV. Conclusion (final paragraph):
   a. Restatement of claim
   b. Resolution, compromise, or call to action
Outlining a Rogerian Argument

I. Introduction:
Similar to Aristotelian intro, but a softer claim statement that opens the issue for questioning

II. Body:
Examine key points for alternative positions
Use signal sentences to demonstrate common ground when presenting evidence:
“on the other hand,”
“critics argue,”
“despite these arguments,”
• Frame each counter-argument in a way that demonstrates possible solutions, point by point.

III. Conclusion:

Agree to disagree
Re-framing

• **Re-visit** the argument between A & B on animal

• Regardless of your own personal position, **re-frame** it as a Rogerian argument
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