Chapter 1

Starting an Argument

IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL LEARN—

1.1 How argument has changed recently
1.2 About two approaches to argument: the generative approach (power with) and persuasive approach (power over)
1.3 How to start inventing an argument by identifying the five elements of the rhetorical situation: topic, angle, purpose, audience, and context
1.4 Strategies for developing a main claim or working thesis
1.5 How genres are used to invent, organize, draft, design, and edit arguments

Often, people associate the word argument with winning, as in “winning the argument” or “losing the argument.” For this reason, when taking a course on argument, they hope to learn how to argue better because they want to win and they don’t like to lose.

The word argue, though, originates from the Latin word, arguere, which means to “make clear.” The ability to make your ideas clear and support them with good evidence is the essence of successful argumentation, not winning or losing. In fact, the vast majority of arguments don’t determine who wins or who loses. Instead, most arguments involve people striving to reach a common understanding or consensus.

Arguing Today

The way people argue has been changing during your lifetime. Not long ago, argument primarily relied on a person’s ability to persuade others to agree with a particular point. These kinds of arguments were typically one directional: A writer or speaker would argue for a specific position, and the readers or audience would
decide whether they agreed with it. These one-directional arguments happened in essays, editorials, political speeches, closing arguments, advertisements, and business proposals. The ability to make these kinds of arguments is still important, but now arguments are much more complex and dynamic.

Today, we live in a world in which arguments are multidirectional. Arguments flow in real time through networks such as e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, blogs, chat rooms, conference calls, and video conferencing, as well as virtual and in-person meetings. Mobile phones and electronic networks allow us to stay in constant communication, so you will be expected to work effectively with others in teams while participating in ongoing conversations (Figure 1.1). These real-time arguments flow, evolve, and shift directions, so you need to stay light on your feet. You need to know how to manage the flow of conversations and generate new ideas as events are happening.

In college, your professors will expect you to learn and interact with others through these kinds of networks. College courses are becoming increasingly collaborative and team-centered. Likewise, in your career, you will also need to work in these kinds of networks. Today, employers consistently report that they are looking for people who know how to work in teams and who communicate effectively. Your ability to argue in person and through a variety of media will help you succeed in today’s networked workplaces. Meanwhile, as a citizen, you need to engage in the important conversations happening all around you. That’s what arguing today is about.
Generative Arguments and Persuasive Arguments

To help you succeed in college, in your career, and as a citizen, this book will teach you two fundamental approaches to argument: the *generative approach* and the *persuasive approach*.

Generative Approach (Power With)

Generative arguments are conversations that happen within groups, teams, or networks, both large and small. In generative arguments, people discuss issues, generate new ideas, share experiences, and strive toward consensus in an open-ended way. These kinds of arguments include discussions, team projects, negotiations, brainstorming sessions, planning meetings, and social networking. They happen in meeting rooms, in cafes, through e-mail or blogs, on Facebook or Twitter, and other places where people gather to talk about issues. Generative arguments are sometimes called “power with” arguments because the people involved are working together to build a mutual understanding and sort out their differences.

Persuasive Approach (Power Over)

Persuasive arguments happen when an individual, a team, or an organization is trying to influence other people to believe something or take specific actions. Persuasive arguments include advertisements, opinion essays, legal cases, political speeches, sales pitches, business proposals, recommendation reports, and sermons. These arguments happen in political events, news websites, law courts, legislatures, corporate boardrooms, and on television. They are sometimes called “power over” arguments because the writer or speaker is attempting to exert power over others with words and images.

These two approaches are basically two ends of the same argument spectrum (Figure 1.2). In any argument, you will need to use both generative and persuasive strategies to achieve your purpose.

However, you might also find it helpful to view generative arguments and persuasive arguments as different, because they pursue different goals:

- In a generative argument, you and others are sharing opinions and information in an open-ended way, striving toward consensus. You’re having a conversation because your minds aren’t made up yet. Your common goal is to reach an understanding on the issue being discussed.

- When making a persuasive argument, you have mostly decided what you believe and what you want to do. You are trying to persuade others to agree with your opinions. You want to win them over to your side.

When you get into an argument, you first need to figure out whether you are in a generative (*power with*) or persuasive (*power over*) situation (Figure 1.3). This decision will help you figure out the best way to argue in that particular moment.¹

¹This division is an ancient one, but William Covino created this vocabulary for distinguishing between the “generative” approach and “arresting” approach in his book *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy* (1994).
Generative Arguments and Persuasive Arguments

**FIGURE 1.2**
Two Types of Argument: Generative and Persuasive
Almost all arguments fall somewhere between having a generative conversation and trying to win people over with persuasion.

**FIGURE 1.3** Arguing in Generative and Persuasive Ways
Generative arguments tend to happen in groups or teams, where people are striving toward consensus. Persuasive arguments usually involve one person or a team trying to influence others to think or act a particular way.
Throughout this book, you will learn how to argue in both generative and persuasive ways. Specifically, Chapter 2 will show you how to use generative argument strategies to be successful in conversations and work more effectively in groups and teams. Then Chapter 3 will show you how to persuade others by using good reasoning, establishing your authority on a topic, and making effective use of emotions.

Starting an Argument

All right, let’s say you’re in an argument or you’re getting ready for one. Where should you start? You should begin by answering five basic questions:

- **Topic:** What exactly am I arguing about?
- **Angle:** What new perspective can I bring to this issue?
- **Purpose:** What am I trying to achieve?
- **Audience:** Who is reading or listening to my argument?
- **Context:** How will place, time, and medium shape my argument?

Experts in argument call these five elements the “rhetorical situation.” These elements give you a starting place for inventing your argument. They help you figure out what you are arguing about and what you are trying to achieve (Figure 1.4). Let’s look at these elements individually.

**FIGURE 1.4** The Five Elements of the Rhetorical Situation
When you are preparing for an argument, you should consider these five elements.
Topic: What Exactly Am I Arguing About?
Your first task is to figure out what exactly you are arguing about. In college and the workplace, your professors and supervisors will usually assign you topics to write or speak about. If you are able to pick your own topic, make sure it’s something that interests you.

Once you figure out your topic, you should explore it and narrow the topic down to something you can handle in a brief argument.

Exploring Your Topic
To explore your topic, you should begin with some prewriting, such as freewriting, making a brainstorming list, or creating a concept map. Prewriting will help you figure out what you already know about the issue.

**Freewriting**—Spend about five minutes writing everything you know about your topic. Don’t stop to correct or change anything. Just keep typing or writing. Sometimes it helps to not look at the screen as you are typing. You might even turn off or darken your screen so you can write without revising. Then, when you turn on your screen, you will find that you have written quite a bit about your topic already.

**Brainstorming List**—Put your topic at the top of your screen or piece of paper. Then, for about three minutes, make a list of everything you know about that topic. Keep typing or writing everything that comes to mind and don’t cross out or delete anything.

**Concept Map**—Write your topic in the center of a piece of paper or your screen. Circle it. Then, for about three minutes, write down everything you can think of on your sheet or screen. Circle each item and connect them to other items.

Figure 1.5 shows how you might use a concept map or a brainstorming list to explore the same topic (minimum age for drinking alcohol). Whether you prefer freewriting, brainstorming, or mapping depends on you. All three of these invention tools are useful for getting your ideas out on your screen or a piece of paper.

Narrowing Your Topic
After freewriting, brainstorming, or drawing a concept map, you should look for ways to narrow your topic. Underline or put stars next to the few items that seem most interesting to you in your freewrite, brainstorming list, or concept map. Then spend a few minutes creating a second freewrite, brainstorming list, or concept map around those starred issues.

A second pre-writing activity is the secret to finding a great topic. It will help you focus your topic to an issue you can handle in a college-length paper or presentation. Similarly, in the workplace, narrowing your topic will help you pinpoint exactly what your supervisors or clients need to know about the issue.
Figure 1.5

Brainstorm: Minimum Age for Alcohol

- Full citizen at 18
- Drinking and driving
- Alcoholism
- Drinking in high school
- Binge drinking increasing
- Prohibition doesn’t work
- Discrimination is wrong
- Force drinking outside
- Canada’s drinking age is 18
- People drink and drive more!
- Bars and homes are safer
- Age 21 makes alcohol more desirable
- We’re adults. Treat us that way.
- Forbidden fruit
- Fight in wars but not have beer?
- Alcohol and illegal drugs not same
- Drinking in controlled environments
- People learn to break laws
- Flaunting of laws sets bad precedent
- Would be less social pressure to drink
- Statistics don’t back up 21 age limit
- Drinking becomes a right of passage
- Makes drinking an underground activity
- College presidents support lower drinking age
- Much advertising pitched at college students
- Drink too much when you have it
- Other countries have lower age limits

Angle: What New Perspective Can I Bring to This Issue?

Mistakenly, people often assume they need to find a new topic. They waste hours looking for something “new” that they can write an argument about. Truth is, new topics are rare because almost all topics have been argued about before. However—and this is important—you can always find new angles on existing topics.
A new angle is a fresh perspective that allows you to see an established topic in a new light. To find your angle, answer the following two questions:

What has happened recently that makes this topic especially interesting or important right now?

What new perspective can I personally bring to this topic?

**What Has Happened Recently?**

For example, the topic of underage drinking has been around for decades, so it’s not a new topic. If you want to write about this topic, you should first ask yourself, “What’s new about this topic that makes it interesting or important right now?” Here are a few possible answers:

**Possible Angle 1:** The recent fad of combining energy drinks and alcohol is increasing the number of people who are binge drinking, because the caffeine makes people feel more sober than they are.

**Possible Angle 2:** Binge drinking has become entrenched in some parts of the 18- to 20-year-old culture because my generation has now grown up with the 21-year minimum age limit. College students are still drinking alcohol, but they have changed their drinking practices to skirt and even rebel against the law. Binge drinking is one of those changes.

**Possible Angle 3:** Last Saturday, two underage college students drowned in Tennessee because they were drinking near a river when a flash flood happened. They were drinking in this remote area because it’s an “illegal” activity even though the product is legal.

**Possible Angle 4:** In August, the government reported that binge drinking among 18- to 20-year-olds has actually increased over the three decades since the 21-year minimum age law passed.

Each of these new angles puts this “old” topic in a new light. They all refer to something that happened recently, which makes this topic interesting or important.

**What Has Happened to Me Personally with This Topic?**

You can also find a new angle by reflecting on your own experiences with an issue. Has something happened to you that caused you to change your mind or see your topic from a new perspective? You could use your own experiences as a basis for discussing your topic in a new and interesting way. For example,

**Possible Angle 1:** Within 48 hours of stepping onto this campus, I was offered my first beer even though I was only 18 years old. That night, I went to my first college party, where people were binge drinking. Needless to say, the 21-year-old minimum age was not a deterrent. To be honest, nobody even thought about it. What I thought I learned that night was that some laws could be ignored by college students. That was a bad lesson to learn.

**Possible Angle 2:** Mike Hampton was a kid who grew up with me in Franklin, Georgia. We didn’t hang out together much, but we played football and had mutual friends.
He liked to party a bit more than me, but I did my share. Last month, Mike was out drinking with his college roommates. He ran a stop sign at a rural intersection and smashed into another car, killing one person and injuring two others. Mike’s now out of jail on bail, awaiting trial for vehicular homicide. Since then, I keep thinking about how that could have been me. An age limit hadn’t kept Mike from driving drunk, and it hadn’t kept those people from getting hurt. Surely, I keep thinking, there must be a better way to stop young people from drinking and driving.

Here’s a hint: Even if your professor asks you to write about a traditional college essay topic, you should look for new angles on that topic. Don’t just offer the same predictable response to the assignment prompt. That’s what the others in your class will do. Your argument will stand out if you respond to the assigned topic in a way that reflects current issues or your own experiences.

The same is true in the workplace. The innovators and entrepreneurs are the people who are always looking for new angles or perspectives on existing problems. Completely new products and services are rare, but there are always new ways to innovate on existing products and services. Your colleagues and supervisors will appreciate your efforts to be creative and solve problems in new ways.

**Purpose: What Am I Trying to Achieve?**

Your purpose is what you want your argument to accomplish. Any time you make an argument, you should have a clear sense of why you are arguing and what you want to achieve. You should be able to state your purpose in one sentence.

**Writing a Purpose Statement**

Your purpose needs to be focused, and it needs to be clear about what you are trying to do. For example, an initial purpose statement might be something like, “I’m trying to get the drinking age reduced from 21 to 18 years old.” That may be your long-term goal, but is that really the purpose of the argument? Could a single argument really accomplish that? No, of course not.

You need to focus your purpose statement on something that could be actually achieved. It’s fine to start with a broad purpose statement, but then you need to sharpen it. For example,

**Broad Purpose Statement:** In this paper, I am arguing that the minimum drinking age should be reduced from 21 to 18 years old.

**More Focused Purpose Statement:** In this paper, I am arguing that the minimum drinking age does not decrease incidents of binge drinking or drunk driving; therefore, it is an unnecessary law.

**Even More Focused:** In this paper, I am arguing that the rights of adult citizens between the ages of 18 and 21 are being infringed upon by a minimum drinking age law that does not decrease incidents of binge drinking or drunk driving; therefore, as full citizens who are being discriminated against, we should work toward overturning this unnecessary law.
The “Even More Focused” purpose statement is a bit long, but it sets an achievable and specific purpose for the argument.

Try to boil your purpose statement down to one sentence. This will help you keep your argument narrow enough to be handled in a college-length paper.

**Audience: Who Is Reading or Listening to My Argument?**

Your audience includes the people who are discussing an issue with you or reading or listening to your argument. Obviously, different people will react to your argument in different ways. Think about your audience’s needs, values, and attitudes (Figure 1.6). Doing so will help you select information that is most important to them and present it in ways that they will find most helpful or persuasive.

**FIGURE 1.6  Analyzing Your Audience**

Each audience is different and will respond to your ideas in a different way. Before writing or speaking, you should analyze their needs, values, and attitudes.

**What Do They Need?**

Make a list of the information your audience needs in order to understand your topic, make a decision, or take action. Meanwhile, think about which of these “needs” will motivate them. At a basic level, people need material things like food, security, health, money, and shelter. At a more complex level, they need immaterial things like friendship, respect, self-esteem, confidence, dignity, and love.

**What Do They Value?**

Make a list of your audience’s values and the things they value. In other words, try to figure out what your audience values and where those values come from. On a social level, their values might be based on their experiences, personalities, faiths, social expectations, or cultures. On a personal level, one person might value creativity while someone else values predictability. Another person prefers an emotional attachment to an issue, while someone else prefers a logical approach. Making a list of your audience’s social and personal values will help you determine how to appeal to them.
What Is Their Attitude?

Try to figure out your audience’s attitude toward you and your topic. Are they positive, wary, hopeful, careful, concerned, skeptical, or excited about what you have to say? If they have a positive attitude toward you and your topic, you will probably find it easier to reach consensus or persuade them. But if they have a negative attitude toward your topic or you, you are going to need to work around their negative attitude to present your ideas in ways that appeal to them.

This thorough audience analysis might seem like additional work, but it really only takes a few minutes. You can even use Internet search engines like Google, Bing, or Yahoo to help you learn more about your audience and their needs, values, and attitudes.

Context: How Will the Place, Time, and Medium Shape This Argument?

The context is the place, time, and medium in which your argument will be accessed by your audience. An argument that works in one place and time might not work in a different place and time. Likewise, an argument that works in one medium, such as a website, a blog, paper document, or podcast, might not work as well in another medium.

You need to shape your argument to the context in which your audience will experience it. Here are some factors to consider:

What Is the Physical Context?

Think about the physical places in which people will most likely read or hear your argument. Are they at home or in a meeting? Are they in a café or in a classroom? Could they be reading on a bus or airplane? Each of these physical contexts would require adjustments to the content, organization, style, and design of the argument.

How Does the Medium Affect the Message?

Today, most arguments happen in electronic media, not on paper. Obviously, an argument uploaded to YouTube will have a different effect on the audience than a traditional 1-inch-margin, double-spaced college essay (Figure 1.7). Each medium has its strengths and weaknesses, so you should find out how the medium you choose will influence how your audience interprets and understands your argument.

What Is the Economic Context?

Think about how monetary concerns and other financial issues impact your audience’s decision making. Even the best ideas won’t be accepted if there isn’t money or resources to put them into action. So consider the costs involved with your ideas.

What Is the Political Context?

Consider the ways in which your argument changes the political landscape on a personal level. When people make decisions, their choices affect their relationships with others in both positive and negative ways. Even the best ideas won’t be accepted if they dramatically alter a person’s relationships in an overly negative way.
As with audience analysis, this deep thinking about your argument’s context probably seems like extra work. But it only takes a couple minutes to identify the contextual forces that shape how your audience thinks about your topic or makes decisions. You want to make sure you are aware of all the factors that might influence the direction of the argument and how people react to what you are arguing.

Developing Your Main Claim (Working Thesis)

The heart of an argument is its main claim, which usually begins as a working thesis. Once you have figured out your topic, angle, purpose, audience, and context, you can begin to develop the working thesis that will guide your research. There are four major types of thesis statements for an argument:

Generative Thesis—A generative thesis statement tells your audience, “Here’s what I believe right now, but I’m open to hearing what others believe and modifying my views.” A generative thesis usually highlights the common values, beliefs, and experiences that will help people reach a common understanding or consensus. For example,

Working Thesis: As college students, we see first hand the negative consequences of the under-21 age restriction on alcohol consumption. By working with legislators, administrators, the public, and other students, we can work toward developing a solution to this problem.
**Working Thesis:** Human-caused climate change is something that will impact our generation, but we need to keep an open mind about the many pathways available to achieving sustainability.

These generative thesis statements are seeking common understanding and consensus with the audience.

**Persuasive Thesis**—A persuasive thesis statement tells your audience, “Here’s what I believe, and I’m going to try to persuade you to believe it, too.” A persuasive thesis presents an argumentative claim that the readers or audience can choose to agree or disagree with. This kind of thesis typically has two parts, an **assertion** and **support**.

**Working Thesis:** Politicians won’t lower the drinking age as long as students stay silent; therefore, we need to become much more active in the political system by registering to vote, getting our message out there, and rallying for laws that benefit us.

**Working Thesis:** In this proposal, we argue that Knapp University should convert completely to sustainable energy sources and end its dependence on fossil fuels. That way, we can do our share to minimize human-caused climate change while making Knapp into a forward-thinking, elite university that attracts top faculty and students.

An effective persuasion thesis needs to be **reasonable**, meaning at least two defensible sides are available and your audience should feel able to agree or disagree with your claim.

**Question Thesis**—In some arguments, you might want to hold off stating your thesis until the conclusion, especially if you are making a controversial argument or your audience might be resistant to your views. In these situations, you might pose your thesis as a question:

**Working Thesis:** Is the current under-21 drinking age reducing the amount of alcohol that young people consume, or is it really causing more harm than good?

**Working Thesis:** Would the benefits of converting to sustainable energy sources be worth the costs for Knapp University?

If you use a question thesis in your introduction, you need to include a generative or persuasive thesis statement in the conclusion of your argument. For example, the following thesis statements could appear in the conclusion.

**Concluding Thesis:** The current under-21 drinking age causes more harm than good, so it is vital that we work toward changing laws and attitudes in ways that promote a lower age and a healthier relationship between young people and alcohol.

**Concluding Thesis:** The costs of fossil-fuel energy will soon rise dramatically, so a conversion to sustainable energy, though seemingly expensive now, will eventually save Knapp University a great amount of money and make it more competitive for top faculty and students.
These kinds of concluding thesis statements answer in a definitive way the thesis questions that were posed in the introduction.

**Implied Thesis**—In some kinds of arguments, you may choose to not state your thesis explicitly. An implied thesis lets the readers or audience figure out the meaning of your argument for themselves. This kind of thesis is especially common in a narrative argument, because you want the audience to figure out the meaning of your story without explicitly telling them.

An implied thesis can be tricky, though, so you should use this kind of thesis only in special situations. After all, if you don’t explicitly state a thesis in your argument, your audience could interpret what you write or say in ways you didn’t expect. So, if you choose to use an implied thesis, you need to make sure the main point of your argument comes through clearly for the audience, even though you aren’t stating that main point directly.

**Using Genres to Argue Effectively**

In this book, you will also learn how to use *genres* to argue clearly and compellingly. You may have learned how to use genres in a previous writing or public speaking course. If so, in this book you will learn a new “genre set” that is especially useful for developing arguments.

If the concept of genres is new to you, you are about to learn a very useful tool for writing and speaking. Genres are helpful for generating, organizing, editing, and designing arguments. Knowing how to use genres will save you time while helping you write and speak more effectively in almost any situation.

**What Is a Genre?**

That’s not an easy question to answer. Traditionally, the concept of genres has been used to sort literary texts into categories (e.g., novels, poems, dramas, comedies, tragedies, biographies, epics). Genres can be used to sort other things like movies (e.g., horror, romantic comedy, buddy flick, science fiction), video games (e.g., shooter, adventure, role-playing, racing, strategy, trivia), or music (e.g., hip-hop, country, bluegrass, heavy metal, jazz, classical).

More recently, though, genres have been used to understand how people use familiar patterns to communicate in recurring situations. For example, a movie review is a common argument genre. Let’s imagine you are looking for reviews of a recently released movie on Rotten Tomatoes (rottentomatoes.com). Before you begin reading a review, you already have expectations about its content, organization, style, and design. Both you and the review writer are already familiar with the movie review genre, so you are both able to use this genre to make meaning together.

In other words, a movie review is a genre because it is a familiar social pattern that occurs over and over. You, as the reader, know what to expect. If one of the reviewers decides to ignore the genre, you’re going to be confused or annoyed. For instance, let’s say one of the reviewers on Rotten Tomatoes spends most of her time
complaining about her “dull” weekend while offering only a few comments about the movie she was supposed to be reviewing. You’re going to be irritated. She just wasted your time because she didn’t use the genre properly.

Genres are more than organizational structures. They do provide helpful patterns for organizing arguments, but they also offer much more. Instead, genres should be understood as *meeting places where people make meaning together* (Figure 1.8). You, as a writer or speaker, supply the words and images that support your argument. Meanwhile, your audience is responsible for interpreting those words and images to figure out your meaning. The genre is a familiar space in which you and your audience create this common understanding together.

**OK, Got It. So, What Is a Genre?**

Here’s a bottom-line definition of genre: *Genres reflect recurring social activities and the ways people in communities and cultures get things done*. Genres help you make choices about the following:

- the information you should include in your argument
- how the information in your argument should be organized
- what style would be appropriate for your argument
- how the argument should look
- what medium would work best for the argument

You already use genres every day. They are the familiar patterns you use when you communicate with others, whether you are talking on the phone, ordering coffee at a café, or debating politics with your friends. Even more than that, though, genres
Using Genres to Argue Effectively

also reflect the common values, practices, beliefs, and expectations of the groups and cultures to which you belong.

So, when you need to write or present an argument, you should first figure out which genre would be best for achieving your purpose and getting your message across to your audience. Once you figure out which genre is appropriate, writing your paper or creating your presentation becomes much easier. Similarly, when you are analyzing or responding to someone else's argument, you should figure out which genre the writer or speaker is using. Once you recognize the genre, you can better understand, challenge, or respond to that person's argument.

Choosing the Best Argument Genre

Choosing the right genre for an argument depends on what you are trying to achieve. Figure 1.9 lists the most common argument genres you will use in college, the workplace, and public life.

When you know your purpose, you can then figure out which genre or genres would be appropriate for that kind of argument. Keep in mind, though, that more than one genre might be available to help you accomplish your goals. So you should consider a couple possible genres before settling on one that will work.

Fortunately, your professors and supervisors will usually signal to you which genre they want you to use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you need to do?</th>
<th>Try this genre.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe a person, object, place, or event from a specific perspective.</td>
<td>Description (Chapter 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare two or more similar people, places, or objects.</td>
<td>Comparison (Chapter 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain what caused something else to happen.</td>
<td>Causal Analysis (Chapter 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use images and graphics to explain something.</td>
<td>Visual Essay (Chapter 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell a story that argues a point.</td>
<td>Narrative (Chapter 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review or critique something.</td>
<td>Review (Chapter 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express an opinion on a current event.</td>
<td>Commentary (Chapter 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate or review someone or something.</td>
<td>Evaluation (Chapter 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge an argument made by someone else.</td>
<td>Refutation (Chapter 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propose a new idea, product, or plan.</td>
<td>Proposal (Chapter 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research an issue and explain my findings.</td>
<td>Research Paper or Report (Chapter 15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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FIGURE 1.9
Figuring Out the Appropriate Genre
The best genre for your paper or presentation depends on what you need to do.
For this assignment, *compare and contrast* going to college in the 1950s with going to college today.

Write a *proposal* in which you develop some innovative strategies for handling the binge drinking problems on our campus.

Tell a *story* about a personal experience that frightened you in some way but led to an important realization about your life and your future.

Your professors won’t always name a specific genre, but if you look closely at the assignment sheet, you will usually find that the assignment itself will signal which argument genre you need to use. Similarly, at your job, your supervisor may or may not signal the genre that he or she wants you to use:

I need you to figure out what’s *causing* the sudden rise in applications for government-funded lunches in our school district.

Your task this week is to *evaluate* which industrial robot is best for spot-welding the bodies of our tractors.

Again, if you look closely at what your supervisor is asking you to do, you can usually figure out which genre will help you get the project done.

**Using Genres and the Five Elements of the Rhetorical Situation**

We threw quite a bit at you in this chapter, so let’s wrap up with a simple takeaway. You need to learn how to argue in both generative and persuasive situations. The five elements of the rhetorical situation will help you figure out your topic, angle, purpose, audience, and context. Then choosing the right genre will help you invent your ideas, organize them, create the appropriate style, design your argument, and pick the best medium.

This is one of those “work smarter, not harder” kinds of situations. You are going to save time and argue more effectively if you spend a few minutes thinking about the elements of the rhetorical situation, developing a working thesis, and choosing the appropriate genre.

Yes, this kind of preparation takes time, and your time is valuable. Try out what you learned in this chapter. You will find that the ten minutes you spend preparing to argue will save you a great amount of time and effort, because you won’t waste your time going down dead ends. Meanwhile, this kind of preparation will make you a much more effective writer and presenter, which will help you succeed in your classes and your career. The extra time you spend on preparation will be worth it.
Are you ready to get going right now? Here are some basic ideas to help you prepare for an argument:

1. There are two approaches to argument: generative arguments (power with) and persuasive arguments (power over).
2. The differences between these approaches to argument are not clear cut. Persuasive arguments sometimes happen in groups, and generative arguments can be persuasive.
3. Generative arguments happen when people discuss issues and strive toward consensus in groups. People work together to build common ground and decide what to do.
4. Persuasive arguments happen when one side is trying to convince others to take action or believe something.
5. The five elements of the rhetorical situation include topic, angle, purpose, audience, and context.
6. Genres reflect recurring social activities and ways people in communities and cultures get things done.
7. A genre is a place where people—both the writer/speaker and the audience—meet to make meaning together.
8. Genres help you make choices about the information you should include, how that information should be organized, what style would be appropriate, and how the document or presentation should look.
9. In most cases, your professors or supervisors will signal directly or indirectly which genre would be suitable for an assignment.
10. Genres and the five elements of the rhetorical situation work together in both generative and persuasive arguments to help you develop an effective argument.
1. With your group, look over the list of genres that are included in Figure 1.9. Ask each member of your group to choose one of these genres and find three examples of that genre. The Internet is a good place to start searching, but you will also find examples in newspapers, magazines, and other print sources. Then have each member compare and contrast the three examples, explaining their content, organization, style, and design.

2. Ask each member of your group to find an example of a document or presentation that was not appropriate for its audience or context. How did the writer or speaker misunderstand his or her audience? What were some of the problems created by this misunderstanding? How, if possible, could the writer or speaker have adjusted the argument to fit this audience?

3. Think of two advertising campaigns aimed at college students, one effective and one ineffective, that you have seen on television or on the Internet. How did the effective advertising campaign target you or people like you in a persuasive way? Did the advertising agency properly anticipate your needs, values, and attitude? Why did the ineffective campaign fail? What did the advertisers not understand about people like you that led them to design an ineffective campaign?

1. Choose a contentious issue that is in the news right now. Write one page in which you describe how people could use a generative approach to talk about this contentious issue. Then write one page that describes how someone might use a persuasive approach to influence the opinions of others. Write a reflection in which you talk about the differences and similarities between these two approaches to argument.

2. Make a list of five topics that interest you personally. Then come up with a new angle for each of these five topics. Your new angle should refer to something that has happened recently or a personal experience that gives you a unique insight into this topic. Choose the best topic and narrow it down to something very specific. Then develop a thesis statement that would give you the basis of an interesting argument. Hand in your thesis statement with notes to your professor.

3. Choose a topic that interests you. Come up with a new angle on this topic. Then develop a thesis statement that you could support or prove. Look through the table of genres in Figure 1.9. Which genres on this list could be used to make an argument that supports your thesis statement? Why do you believe some genres would work better than others? Now choose a genre that would not be appropriate for your topic. Why would this genre not work well? In a brief e-mail to your instructor, explain why you believe some genres would work better than others to help you make the argument you have in mind.