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For the ancient Greeks, persuasion—Peitho—was a god, revered for her role in at least two spheres of human life.¹ In one aspect, she was handmaid to Aphrodite, the god of love, beauty, and pleasure, and thus possessed of an undeniable *erotic* charge: on ancient vases, Peitho is often shown in scenes of seduction and betrothal (e.g., North 409). But she also had a more *political* function, one to which Athens seems to have been especially devoted: the city made annual sacrifices to the god (Isocrates, *Antidosis* 250), and a statue of her was the focus of a cult there (Pausanias 1.22.3). This Peitho was honored because of the role she played in governance, in the contentious but largely peaceful operation of democratic courts, assemblies, and councils, practices that needed to be protected from their opposites, coercion and violence. For the Athenians, Peitho may even have been linked to the founding of their *polis*, to the myth of Theseus unifying the different parts of Attica into one state (Pausanias 1.22.3). An echo of this myth can be heard in Cicero’s story of that “great and wise” man who, with eloquent speech, first brought people together into cities (*De Inv.* I.ii.2). Originally scattered, suspicious of one another, and at the mercy of nature, humans had to be persuaded to adopt persuasion as their means of collective decision-making. Paying tribute to Peitho was thus a way for the Athenians to honor their “civilized” selves (Buxton 58).

The twin aspects of divine Peitho suggest something about secular peitho as well. Linked on the one hand to eros, beauty, and seduction and, on the other, to

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logos, speech, and reason, persuasion was, for the Greeks, indispensable to the consensual union of individuals and groups. We can communicate, compromise, combine, but it takes work: our natural state is selfishness and isolation. Divine intervention helps, but persuasion invariably involves *design* and thus shades easily into practices that deserve censure as much as gratitude. Perhaps this is ultimately why Peitho was honored by the Greeks—because her beneficence needed both tribute and monitoring.

The Romans worshiped persuasion too. In fact, their word *persuadere* connoted in its very form, as the English still does, sweetness, suavity, and assuagement. And in the New Testament, as faith (*pistis*), “being persuaded” of God’s message is the highest form of knowledge there is (Burke, *Rhetoric* 52): a belief in Him “[w]hom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing [*pisteuontes*], ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (*King James Version*, 1 Peter 1.8; cf. Hebrews 11.1: “Now faith [*pistis*] is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”).

Of course, there were those in antiquity who did not regard persuasion so highly, at least not secular peitho. Philosophers of the Socratic circle, for example, were suspicious of the role of persuasion in political affairs, especially as practiced in democratic Athens. In the *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates define *rhêtorikê* as “*peithous dêmiourgôs*” (453a), the worker of persuasion, a skill that he disparages as a mere knack for moving crowds of uneducated listeners, a tool of flattery and manipulation that can give one momentary power regardless of the merits of one’s case. Against this undisciplined, unethical practice, Plato proposed *dialektikê*, a method of question-and-answer dialogue conducted in out-of-the-way places by small groups of philosophers, oriented to truth and goodness rather than applause (Vlastos).

The *agon* of rhetoric and philosophy, inaugurated in Plato’s dialogues, pitted these two practices against one another (Kimball). In fourth century BCE Athens, the *agon* was personified by the contest between Plato and Isocrates and their respective schools. If, as Henri Marrou once argued, Plato seems the more formidable to us now, it was Isocrates “who educated fourth-century Greece and subsequently the Hellenistic and Roman worlds” (120), inaugurating a pedagogical tradition centered on language, literature, and the arts of social influence, rather than mathematics, dialectic, and truth seeking. Unfortunately, we often draw the line between these traditions too sharply: just as Plato eventually allowed a role for rhetoric (or “soul-influencing”) in philosophy (*Phaedrus* 261a), Isocrates’ art of persuasion, which he sometimes called “*philosophia*” (e.g., *Against the Sophists* 62), was tamed by canons of civic virtue—love of country, respect for common sense, and devotion to the rules of good speech.

Quintilian was exemplary in this latter, Isocratean regard: in the *Institutio Oratoria*, he wrote that rhetoric's function was traditionally tied to its effects in the world, its most common definition, "the power of persuading" (*vim persuadendi*) (2.15.3). He defined it instead as "the science of speaking well" (*bene dicendi scientiam*) (2.15.34), thus making rhetoric an art that "depends on the activity, not the outcome" (*in actu posita, non in effectu*) (2.17.25), an activity judged ultimately by the criterion of honor (e.g., 11.1.9). But if, for Quintilian, actually persuading one's audience was not the only or even highest standard of rhetorical art, it was nonetheless always one's goal: "The speaker certainly aims to win; but when he has spoken well, even if he does not win, he has fulfilled the demands of his art" (2.17.23). As Eugene Garver would later put it in his study of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, although persuasion is the "given" end of artful rhetoric, arguing well is its "guiding" end (24). This bifocal attitude—in which the art of persuasion needs discipline both to achieve its aims and to tame its vices, an educational process worth the effort and risk because the art is so valuable to individuals and states—lasted until the end of the European Renaissance.

Under modernity, however, persuasion lost its central place in rhetorical art and education. Although argument enjoyed a late-twentieth century revival in US postsecondary English language arts, with persuasion sometimes coming along for the ride, the movement did not last. Since the mid-1990s, as I try to show in this essay, "persuasion" has largely disappeared from the vocabulary of composition-rhetoric. The loss has been most felt, however, at the secondary level, where the Common Core State Standards, the framework for preK–12 English language arts in most of the United States, explicitly disparage "persuasion" and extol "logical argument." Including also the denigration of "opinion" and proscriptions against the first person in student writing, this new pedagogical regime claims to promote objectivity in public discourse but may only be encouraging further social division. As educators, preK–16, we need to revitalize, not banish, the arts of persuasion.

PERSUASION AND MODERNITY

Before exploring the fear of persuasion in the contemporary English language arts, I want to trace that fear in the rise of modern philosophy, which coincided with the turn against rhetoric itself. Proponents of the new rationality of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries objected to the contingency, discord, and passion of rhetoric. Since persuasion, in their view, exploited such phenomena, it not only produced an inferior sort of belief but threatened peace and virtue as well. For the advancement of reliable knowledge, the establishment of legitimate government, and the inculcation of secular morality, reason needed a method

more objective, transparent, and universal than persuasion. Modern philosophers set about to develop that method.

The key figure here was René Descartes, whose first rule in *The Discourse on the Method* was to “take well nigh for false everything which was only plausible,” making self-evidence the mark of reason and seeing disagreement as a sign of error: “Whenever two men come to opposite decisions about the same matter,” Descartes wrote, “one of them at least must certainly be in the wrong” (qtd. in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1–2). It’s hard to imagine an attitude less congenial to rhetorical modes of decision-making. John Locke too sought a break from rhetoric, writing in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that “[A]ll the art of rhetoric . . . are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment” (qtd. in Verene 37). Similarly, Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, contrasted “persuasion” (*Überredung*) with “conviction” (*Überzeugung*), the former, a subjective judgment that “has only private validity,” the latter, something that can be communicated to and known by all (II.ii.iii) (cf. O’Keefe; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca; Walzer).

According to John Bender and David Wellbery, every aspect of modernization “exploded the hegemony of the classical rhetorical tradition” (5). Enlightenment science, for example, adopted “a mode of discourse conceived as neutral, nonpositional, and transparent” (7–8); and its rise implicated other developments, most notably, the emergence of the idea of a “free public sphere” where discourse could be exchanged independent of “the particularist interests and pressures of political and religious institutions and authority” (14). And “[w]hat the Enlightenment accomplished in the domains of theoretical and practical discourse, Romanticism achieved in the aesthetic domain” (15). With astonishing speed, rhetoric lost its centrality in the realm of imaginative expression, replaced by “literature,” now defined by notions of originality rather than *tradition*, with subjectivity, not genre, giving identity to works of art (16–7).

Still, the demise of rhetoric and decentering of persuasion in European and North American education would take another two centuries to accomplish. Rhetoricians of the late-eighteenth-century British Enlightenment, for example, accommodated the new cultural and philosophical conditions by simply expanding rhetoric’s purview, a tactic that was especially influential in US higher education. Following Francis Bacon, both George Campbell and Hugh Blair described the human mind as an organ with multiple faculties, some rational, some emotional, each susceptible to a different kind of discourse. Thus, Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* defines eloquence as “[t]hat art or talent by which the discourse is adapted to its end” (1); and since there are four ends of discourse—“to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will” (1)—rhetoric encompasses multiple aims and modes.

And yet, in the new rhetorics of the British Enlightenment, persuasion retained a place of prestige. Campbell's four aims of discourse, for example, formed a kind of ladder, the knowledge produced by understanding furnishing material for "the fancy," which "disposes these materials so as to affect the passions," which are then the "spurs" to action (2). The final kind of discourse, aiming at persuasion, was "the most complex of all," a mix of judgment and passion, logic and emotion (4). Campbell thus reversed Kant's ranking of conviction over persuasion, giving the latter term higher status than the former, at least in certain spheres of human life. After all, for Campbell, a clergyman, one's audience could be *convinced* of some truth but not *persuaded* of it, in which case the understanding is subdued but not the will—and one might as well not have spoken at all. "The operation of conviction is merely on the understanding, that of persuasion, is on the will and resolution" (*Lectures* 239)—that "merely" highlighting the difference with Kant on this point.

Similarly, in Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, the most widely used rhetoric in nineteenth-century American colleges (Carr), there are many valid rhetorical aims, but *persuasion* turns out to be the most important. In Lecture XXV, Blair argues,

Whenever a man speaks or writes, he is supposed, as a rational being, to have some end in view; either to inform, or to amuse, or to persuade . . . But, as the most important subject of discourse is Action, or Conduct, the power of Eloquence chiefly appears when it is employed to influence Conduct, and persuade to Action." (Vol. II, 2–3)

Regarding the difference between convincing and persuading, Blair writes, "Conviction affects the understanding only; persuasion, the will and the practice" (3). The orator should always first gain the understanding of his audience; but, in order to persuade, he "must go farther" (4), the highest degree of eloquence being that

wherein a greater power is exerted over the human mind; by which we are not only convinced, but are interested, agitated, and carried along with the Speaker; our passions are made to rise together with his; we enter into all his emotions; we love, we detest, we resent, according as he inspires us; and are prompted to resolve, or to act, with vigour and warmth. (6)

Persuasion here, as in Campbell, takes precedence over conviction.

This attitude lasted in US educational circles up to the end of the nineteenth century. In his influential 1886 textbook *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric*, Amherst College professor John Franklin Genung offered an explicitly multi-aim, multimodal approach to the art of discourse but accorded persuasion a privileged place. For Genung, "Rhetoric is the art of adapting discourse, in harmony with

its subject and occasion, to the requirements of a reader or hearer" (1), and such an art has wide application. Invention, for example, takes different forms depending on the materials it treats: when dealing with objects, it is description; with events, narration; with generalizations, exposition; with truths, argumentation; and with issues, persuasion (325).² But persuasion, for Genung, is "sovereign" over the other aims. With it,

we reach the very centre and sum of the art of rhetoric. If in general rhetoric means adaptation to the requirements of a reader or hearer, here it means such adaptation in its highest and most intimate sense. For it must be adaptation to the whole man,—not to his mind alone, but to mind and heart and will. (448)

Yes, argumentation deals with "truths," but so does persuasion, though its truths are of a particular kind: "Practical truths, such as have a definite *issue* in character and action, personal truths, that come home to men's business and bosoms" (447, emphasis in original).

In fact, through the nineteenth century, long after rhetoric had supposedly been dealt a fatal blow at the hands of modernity, an "oratorical culture," devoted to persuasive speaking and writing, flourished in the United States (Clark and Halloran). From Lyman Beecher to Frederick Douglass to Elizabeth Cady Stanton to William Jennings Bryan, charismatic public speakers mesmerized audiences and encouraged all forms of speech-making: lectures, chautauquas, lyceums, debates, camp meetings. This vibrant oratorical culture was set against the backdrop of momentous social issues: abolition, civil war, religious revival, women's rights, temperance, progressive political reform. Oratorical enthusiasm was evident in higher education as well: literary societies and debating clubs ruled the "extracurriculum" for most of the nineteenth century, even as rhetoric retained its central place in the course of study, often taught as a year-long sophomore subject, between the grammar of the first year and the logic of the third, with the senior year given over to integrated preparation for civic and moral leadership, culminating in the orations and disputations of commencement.³

Alas, by the turn of the twentieth century, rhetoric had largely lost its place in the academy. New secular institutions of higher education promoted scientific, technical, and commercial pursuits, and even the old colleges began to allow students to choose which subjects they studied, a setback for the traditional arts. The faculty, meanwhile, became increasingly specialized; and the senior year lost its "liberal" end. At the same time, writing rose as the key medium of higher education, displacing recitations, disputations, and orations. Finally, the rhetoric course itself was demoted, from a sophomore- or junior-level liberal art to freshman composition, a gateway between high school and college, increasingly seen as mechanical and basic.

Of course, however marginalized, required writing and speaking courses, as well as the “general education” programs that persisted in the US context, kept alive a civic purpose for higher education, though this had to assert itself constantly against increasingly powerful vocational and disciplinary aims. Indeed, science, specialization, technical expertise—all grew apace in the new century. And, as societal institutions and mass communication technologies became more powerful, persuasion itself became more pervasive, impersonal, and manipulative (see Lipmann). Unfortunately, with the decline of rhetoric in school, a central space for *disciplining* persuasion was lost, even as the activity was taken up by new fields, such as advertising, marketing, and public relations. As for politics, it was riven by ideological conflict, heated battles between rich and poor, capital and labor, ethnically minded nationalists and liberal cosmopolitans, colonizer and colonized. Persuasion was weaponized not just for profit but for mass indoctrination. By the mid-twentieth century, educators at all levels could be forgiven for seeing persuasion as part of a deeply divisive, increasingly mercenary communication realm and wanting therefore more *irenic* ends for the language arts.

Kenneth Burke is a transitional figure here. A veteran of the ideological conflicts of the 1930s, Burke knew the dangers of persuasion, but also of trying to rid the world of it. As he hinted in his epigraph to *A Grammar of Motives*, “*ad bellum purificandum*,” conflict is something we need better to *appreciate*, not suppress, reminding us that every act of division is also an act of identification (and vice versa) and that the best way to contain conflict may be to give it space, albeit well-monitored, to flourish symbolically. Thus Burke celebrated “parliamentary wrangling” (Ramage et al. 129) in a way that surprises, even today. And in *The Rhetoric of Motives*, he kept persuasion at the center of social life by widening its scope, unmasking it when in disguise, including in it not just “inducement to action” but also “to attitude,” treating subconscious as well as overt forms, and seeing it as a means to both advantage *and* affiliation (on the latter term, cf. Plantin). Persuasion becomes for Burke synonymous with communication itself (77): “something of the rhetorical motive comes to lurk in every ‘meaning,’ however purely ‘scientific’ its pretensions. Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is ‘meaning,’ there is ‘persuasion’” (172).

But other strands of the postwar “New Rhetoric” sought to turn the field *away* from persuasion. For psychotherapist Carl Rogers, the tendency “to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other” (284–5) is the major barrier to interpersonal communication; what we need is “empathic understanding” (286), a project that had wide influence in late-twentieth-century composition circles. In the field itself, Richard Ohmann wrote in 1964 of “weariness” regarding rhetoric’s traditional focus on persuasion: “A new rhetoric,” he said, “is in the offing” (17). Soon, communication scholar Herbert Simons would write,

“The emphasis of the new rhetoric is on problem-solving or problem-reduction rather than persuasion; on mutually satisfactory resolutions of differences rather than victory for one party” (58).

Feminist rhetoricians of the 1970s and 80s were especially vigorous in trying to free rhetoric of the impulse to change others. In a much-cited 1979 paper, Sally Gearhart wrote, “My indictment of our discipline of rhetoric springs from my belief that any intent to persuade is an act of violence” (195). Citing Gearhart, Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin later proposed an “invitational” rhetoric, one not based on a “conquest and conversion” model of human interaction (2). Similarly, Catherine Lamb wrote of teaching students how to manage conflict outside the “male mode” of persuasion (157).

It is important to remember, however, that well into the second half of the twentieth century, persuasion retained a secure place in mainstream “comp-rhet.” Many US colleges and universities up to the 1970s still had a full year of required composition at the freshman level, the second semester usually devoted to argument and persuasion (Fleming, *From Form to Meaning*). It was Genung’s old modes of discourse arranged across a year-long course, with the most challenging modes at the end (where they were increasingly hemmed in, however, by the formal and conceptual constraints of the “research paper”). The loss of that second semester during the 1960s and 70s—sometimes outright eliminated, other times transferred to an upper level writing-in-the-disciplines course—along with the rise of expressivism and basic writing, further shifted the field away from persuasion.

A last gasp for persuasion came in the 1980s and 90s with the revival of classical rhetoric, renewed collaboration among communication and English department rhetoricians, and increased ideological conflict in the wider culture. Argument became a rallying cry for many in the field, and persuasion benefitted from the attention.⁴ But the trend didn’t last. Since the mid-1990s, persuasion’s fortunes in “comp-rhet” have fallen dramatically. A 2014 analysis by Jillian Clark indicated that “over the past 25 years, scholarship on argument has emphasized inquiry and cooperation over traditional persuasion” (8): “After the 1980s,” she writes, “the terms ‘traditional argument’ and ‘persuasion’ are often treated with suspicion and implicit hostility” (22). Such suspicion is on full display in Abby Knoblach’s 2011 analysis of composition textbooks, where she uses the word “persuasion” or its cognates 109 times, almost always with negative connotations, associating it with domination and control. “Let me state quite clearly,” she writes, “that I believe an intent to persuade is, in itself, unproblematic.” But she then goes on to praise the trend in the field “toward defining argument not in terms of opposition and persuasion . . . but as inquiry, discovery, or communication” (247).

Today, as a term, *persuasion* has largely fallen out of the discipline. In a year-by-year search of the database CompPile (Haswell, Blalock, and Murphy)—which indexes journal articles, dissertations, and other items in postsecondary writing studies from 1939 on—I found steadily rising use of the term *persuasion* and its cognates (*persuade*, *persuasive*, etc.) across the twentieth century, peaking in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Figure 1). But then, use of those terms declines precipitously to the present.⁵

The word *argument* at first seemed immune to this development. As we saw earlier with Genung's textbook, it had long been a part of college composition, although in the religious context of nineteenth-century US higher education, its truth-seeking function ranked lower than the more consequential aim of persuasion. Further, argument was long linked, at least pedagogically, with debate and the syllogism, neither of which was especially congenial to the new breed of postsecondary writing instructors emerging in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century university.

The decisive turn came with Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*, published in 1958. Although it took nearly two decades to take firm hold in comp-rhet, having to wait until the revival of Aristotelian rhetoric refocused the field's pedagogical energy on argument, it eventually found an audience among postsecondary writing teachers. Under Toulmin, argument is a practice that uses informal rather than formal logic, adopts a jurisprudential rather than a mathematical model of rationality, and is oriented to practical reasoning for everyday affairs rather than abstract reasoning in pursuit of the truth. All of this appealed to college writing instructors in the United States, as did Toulmin's visual layout, which encouraged them to see arguments, like essays, as things you put together and took apart, not something you engaged in with others.⁶

Importantly, the book had nothing to say about persuasion; it was all about justification, the relationship of statements, not of people. The popularity of Toulmin, in other words, tacitly encouraged compositionists in the 1980s and 90s to see argument and persuasion as independent rhetorical modes—a prelude, unfortunately, to seeing them as *opposed*, with *argument* the “good” form of reason-giving discourse and *persuasion*, the “bad.” In the rhetorical tradition, of course, there had been no such dichotomy; in fact, the terms were usually aligned as means to end, argument one way of *achieving* persuasion. In Aristotelian terms, *argument* referred to those aspects of a speech that appealed to the *logos* of the case at hand, a case that could only be won, however, by also appealing to the *ethos* of the speaker and the *pathé* of the audience (*On Rhetoric* 1.2.3). But in US college composition, by the end of the twentieth century, *argument* and *persuasion* had become decoupled, *argument* rising in estimation—an inquisitive, critical, intellectual activity, centered on making and testing knowledge

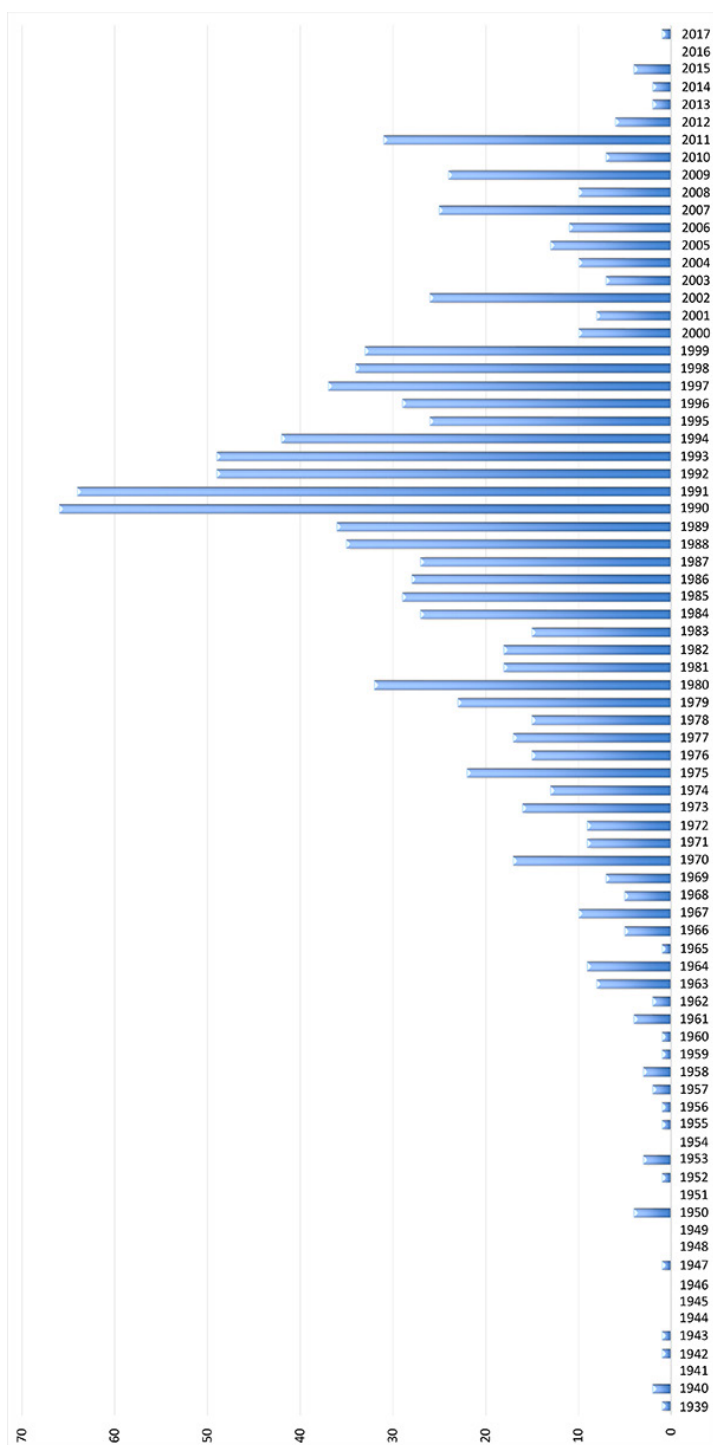


Figure 1: Incidence of *persua?* in CompPile database, 1939–2017.

claims—while *persuasion* was increasingly shunted to the side, something for communication departments or business schools to deal with—or for students to be explicitly warned against.

Ironically, *argument* has suffered its own decline in our field over the last twenty years or so, though not as devastating as what happened to *persuasion*. I have suggested elsewhere that the high point for argument studies among compositionists may have been around 1996, when four books on the topic were published in a single year (Fleming, “Rhetoric and Argumentation” 258).⁷ There has been little of comparable importance published in the twenty years since. Why? Perhaps because argument has come to seem, like persuasion, too much part of a culture that, in Deborah Tannen’s words, encourages us to “approach issues and each other in an adversarial spirit” (177). Or because argument is thought to rely on a disembodied form of rationalism that subjects public controversies to the canons of logic, truth, and validity, all now deeply questioned by postmodern and postcolonial theory. In any case, the kind of public discourse taught in college composition today often seems less like arguing and more like “rendering” (Crosswhite 204), the disclosing of differences that cannot be understood except through a kind of deferential listening.⁸ There are also, of course, vibrant rhetorics of *resistance* in our pedagogy today (e.g., Welch) that, like the Occupy movement, are highly embodied, often nondiscursive, focused on confronting, not engaging, one’s opponents (cf. DeStigter: “[T]he most effective forms of democratic participation emerge not from rational argumentation but from identity and class-based solidarity” [23]). Finally, we’re seeing, especially since 2016, the rise of explicitly *ethical* rhetorics (e.g., Duffy), which respond thoughtfully to real and growing problems in our public discourse but which I worry lean so far on the side of virtue that they fail to help our students responsibly seek their advantage in situations of disagreement and debate, an activity that requires both artistic skill *and* moral principle and that was the central goal of the Isocratean rhetorical project.

As for Toulmin, his place in US postsecondary writing pedagogy has declined in recent years (Bizup). The model, it turns out, was unable to deal with the issues of identity, affect, and difference that have characterized writing and rhetoric studies in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Now, one could claim that precisely what was needed in that moment was a vibrant theory and pedagogy of persuasion, but that word, as we’ve seen, had become largely unavailable, at least in a technical sense.

In secondary English, meanwhile, *argument* has emerged as a god term, associated explicitly with college writing and tightly linked, in the minds of its advocates, with logic and objectivity. As for *persuasion*, it has become a source of acute anxiety. But before I look more closely at that, I want to lay out why,

today, just a few years after an election that seemed to confirm our worst fears about rhetoric, we should bemoan the loss of *persuasion* from our intellectual vocabulary.

IN DEFENSE OF PERSUASION

In *Saving Persuasion*, political scientist Bryan Garsten locates at the heart of the modern liberal project an attempt to alienate ordinary individuals from their situated capacity to judge controversial matters and center that power in a sovereign public authority of some kind: a monarch, the general will, reason itself. Garsten traces this project in the work of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant, who took different approaches to the intense religious conflicts of their times but came to the same political solution: a unified sovereign external to and above “the people.” But, as Garsten shows, efforts to banish rhetoric and demonize persuasion are always themselves attempts at persuasion and, thus, subject to the same critique modern philosophers leveled at the “unreasonable” orators and preachers of their day. Worse, such efforts breed resentment among citizens by disrespecting the unavoidably partisan and passionate grounds of their ordinary judgments. To correct these mistakes, we need to learn to appreciate something we have been taught to distrust.

“Persuasion,” writes Garsten, is important for democracy

because it requires us to pay attention to our fellow citizens and to display a certain respect for their points of view and their judgments. The effort to persuade requires us to engage with others wherever they stand and to begin our argument there, as opposed to simply asserting that they would adopt our opinion if they were more reasonable. (3)

In other words, to deliberate “reasonably” with others, “we cannot help but begin by appealing to them as we find them—opinionated, self-interested, sentimental, partial to their friends and family, and often unreasonable” (4–5). This process, Garsten acknowledges, is very different from “justification,” the mode of discourse featured in liberal political theory, which assumes the possibility of universal agreement and thus advocates that we treat “different audiences similarly,” whereas rhetoricians assume the inevitability of disagreement and advocate treating “different audiences differently” (5).

Garsten recognizes, of course, that close to persuasion are two vices that threaten rather than support democracy: namely, manipulation and pandering. “In our desire to change [our listeners’] minds,” he writes, “lies the danger of manipulating, and in the effort to attend to their existing opinions lies the risk of pandering” (2). But, persuasion strictly speaking is neither manipulation nor pandering:

The speaker who manipulates his audience so as to bring them to a belief or action without their consent . . . has not persuaded but coerced. In contrast, the speaker who merely finds out where his audience itches and then scratches there . . . has not managed to change his listeners' minds at all. To truly persuade people is to induce them to change their own beliefs and desires in light of what has been said . . . [T]he difference between being persuaded and being indoctrinated . . . lies in the active independence that is preserved when we are persuaded. (7)

Burke made a similar claim in *The Rhetoric of Motives*: "Persuasion," he wrote, "is directed to a man only insofar as he is *free*" (50, emphasis in original).

It may be helpful here to conceive of persuasion anew. Our usual image of persuasion is something on the order of selling a used car to a stranger. A different image is invoked by trying to influence a friend or loved one, attempting to change that person even as, paradoxically, one accepts them just as they are. Imagine trying to persuade your parents to leave their home of fifty years for a retirement community. This is clearly and even uncomfortably an attempt at influence—you are trying, without hiding the fact, to move your parents in the direction you wish them to go—but that motive is accompanied by the belief that doing so is in their best interest. In trying to persuade them, you appeal to those interests. At the same time, you recognize their complete right not to be moved by you, their unquestioned independence in this matter. Both sides of this equation—the attempt to move one's audience, the respect for them as they are—feel, to me, not like manipulation or pandering but like love. You want your parents to move because you want them to be safe; you also recognize their affection for their home and their desire to stay there—in fact, you love them for just such things!

It is this duality of persuasion, of ruling and being ruled in turn, of trying to change one's audience while also respecting them, at least to some degree (cf. Burke, *Rhetoric* 56), that Garsten associates with democratic citizenship itself. As he describes it, in attempting to persuade, we are simultaneously trying to influence others *and* honoring their autonomy. It seems important, therefore, that we protect space for such *ethical* influence-seeking in our public sphere, even as we acknowledge that the line dividing ethical and unethical forms of influence-seeking is always blurry and shifting. The stakes for drawing that line responsibly could not be higher: as Garsten puts it, "[T]he presumption . . . that there is such a thing as persuasion that lies between manipulation and pandering . . . is the presumption of democratic politics" (7).

What we might see therefore as unattractive aspects of human behavior—the passions and partisanship with which we operate in the world—are redefined by Garsten as inescapable aspects of who we are as social (and cognitive—see Mercier and Sperber) beings. That's not to say that these traits don't need to

be tamed; it's to say that there are limits to how completely our educational system can eradicate such "errors," and there are limits to how far we can take the position that they are even errors.

PERSUASION AND THE COMMON CORE

If persuasion has been largely elided from the vocabulary of college composition, the situation is worse at the primary and secondary levels. That's because of an explicit bias against persuasion in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the current basis for primary and secondary English language arts (ELA) in most of the United States.⁹ A decade old now, the CCSS was the first nationwide set of preK–12 education standards in US history; it emerged out of concerns, stretching back to the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, that American public schools were falling behind in the global economy. Its more proximate motivation, however, was the education accountability movement of the late twentieth century, which scored its first big victory with President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind program in 2001. That initiative was limited, however, by the fact that each state still had its own standards, a problem solved in 2009 when the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers produced uniform preK–12 standards for English and math, adoption of which was *de facto* required by President Barack Obama's Race to the Top program. Today, forty or so states have signed on to the CCSS in one form or another. (On the history of the CCSS/ELA, see Applebee; Kaestle; McDonnell and Weatherford.)

The CCSS is not actually a curriculum; that's still left up to states and school districts. It's a set of uniform, internationally benchmarked "anchor standards" and grade-specific goals for student attainment in English and math, oriented to "college and career readiness," and linked to accountability requirements that have been more rocky in their roll out. If not a curriculum, the Standards nonetheless have concrete implications for what is taught and how in our schools. The ELA Standards, for example, involve two important shifts in preK–12 literacy instruction in this country, both laid out in Appendix A of the CCSS/ELA.¹⁰ First, in terms of reading, schools have been urged to substantially increase "text complexity" across the grades and ensure that students by graduation can read independently and proficiently the kinds of complex texts found in today's colleges and careers: "[W]hile reading demands in college, workforce training programs, and life in general have held steady or increased over the last half century, K–12 texts have actually declined in sophistication" (Appendix A 2). Second, in terms of writing, the Standards elevate argument above both informational/explanatory and narrative texts: "While all three text types are

important, the Standards put particular emphasis on students' ability to write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues, as this ability is critical to college and career readiness"; according to the CCSS, the university in particular is an "argument culture" where writers "evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of multiple perspectives" (Appendix A 24).

Many writing researchers have applauded these shifts. They have predicted, for example, that the Common Core will lead to more writing (and, importantly, more *composing*) in high school English classes (Sundeen; Taylor and Brockman), and they have praised the new emphasis on argument (Fletcher; Newell et al.). In fact, several prominent voices in postsecondary English studies have come out strongly in support of the CCSS precisely because of the shift toward argument (Graff, "Clarifying"; Lazere).¹¹ But there's also been criticism: not enough teachers were involved in drafting the Standards, there was insufficient reliance on writing research (Joliffe; O'Neill et al.; Scherff and Rush), and "educational entrepreneurs" like the Gates Foundation exerted too much influence (McDonnell and Weatherford). Critics have also complained that at-risk students and under-resourced schools are neglected in the CCSS (Bomer et al.) and that the ELA Standards suffer from excessive formalism (Applebee). Above all, there remain worries about how the Standards will be assessed.

But it is the Common Core's treatment of argument that concerns me here. The problems are not immediately apparent: the very first standard for writing, grades 6–12, seems unobjectionable: "Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics and texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence" (CCSS/ELA 41). Online materials present this shift as simply a new emphasis on "evidence-based writing" (NGA & CCSO, "Key Shifts"). But, curiously, "argument" is absent from the reading standards, still organized along a traditional binary opposition of narrative and informational texts. And there is little sense of how argument skills are to be *developed*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the CCSS's formal definition of *argument* as "a reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer's position, belief, or conclusion is valid" (Appendix A 23) betrays the project's reliance on a *logical* approach to argument, in which the text type is valued mainly as a way of building and testing knowledge claims, not as a means of social action. And even if one were to accept this orientation, there's no treatment of logic in any of the CCSS materials (Joliffe).

As for "persuasion" and its cognates, they do not show up in the reading and writing standards at all (though they are present in the speaking standards). One finds out why in Appendix A, which provides the research underlying the ELA Standards. There, in a call-out box titled "'Argument' and 'Persuasion,'" the authors write:

When writing to persuade, writers employ a variety of persuasive strategies. One common strategy is an appeal to the credibility, character, or authority of the writer (or speaker). When writers establish that they are knowledgeable and trustworthy, audiences are more likely to believe what they say. Another is an appeal to the audience's self-interest, sense of identity, or emotions, any of which can sway an audience. A logical argument, on the other hand, convinces the audience because of the perceived merit and reasonableness of the claims and proofs offered rather than either the emotions the writing evokes in the audience or the character or credentials of the writer. The Standards place special emphasis on writing logical arguments as a particularly important form of college- and career-ready writing. (24)

This paragraph, which has caused, I believe, untold mischief in preK–12 ELA across the United States, starts off well enough. But with that “on the other hand” midway through, it takes a dramatic—I think bewildering—turn. In one stroke, the key insight of Aristotelian rhetorical theory, that persuasive argument is a matter of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, is overturned, making argument in US schools an exclusively “logical” affair and practically banishing writing that appeals to “emotions” or “character.”

If my concerns about that paragraph seem overstated, we should remind ourselves that the internet has a way of amplifying even the most obscure statement. In fact, an online search turned up hundreds of resources, written for ELA teachers, that adopt the position laid out above. Thus, if you type <argument versus persuasion> into Google, most of the results relate to the CCSS.¹² The top hit, in fact, is a 2014 handout (Figure 2) from ReadWriteThink.org, a website cosponsored by the ILA and NCTE.

Note here the rigid binary presentation and highly biased descriptions: persuasive writing is “emotion-based,” “ignores counter claims,” “only presents one side,” and is “emotionally charged and more aggressive.” Argumentative writing, by contrast, is “logic-based,” “acknowledges opposing claims,” and has a “calmer tone.”

The second hit (Figure 3), a resource from Smekens Education Solutions, positions “persuasive writing” *between* “opinion writing” and “argumentative writing”; but even in the middle, it fares worst, being a text type in which the writer looks for an audience “who can give him what he wants,” uses the second and first person rather than the more objective third, “go[es] after” readers aggressively, and relies “almost solely on opinions and feelings.” Argumentative writing, by contrast, is fair, reasonable, and logical.

A 2012 resource from Eye on Education (Figure 4) notes that persuasion uses techniques such as “bandwagon, plain folks, glittering generalities, name calling, and snob appeal,” while argument relies on “thesis/claim, evidence, concession/refutation, and a more formal style.” According to the text, “The

**What Is the Difference Between
Persuasive and Argumentative Writing?**

Persuasive Writing	Argumentative Writing
Starting Point: Identify your topic and choose your side.	Starting Point: Identify your topic, research your topic, and decide which side to support.
Purpose: Get the reader to agree with your opinion.	Purpose: Get the reader to recognize your side of the argument is valid.
Techniques: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Combines facts with emotions to convince the reader that the author is “right”2. Emotion-based3. Ignores counter claims4. Presents only ideas that help establish a position5. Only presents only one side: the author’s side6. Makes claims without evidence	Techniques: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Offers facts, reasons, and evidence to show the author has valid points2. Logic-based3. Acknowledges the opposing claims4. May compare ideas to establish a position5. Presents multiple sides but it is clear which is the author’s side6. Always provides evidence with claims
Tone: The tone is emotionally charged and more aggressive.	Tone: There is a calmer tone of just trying to get the reader to acknowledge the author’s side is worthy of consideration.

Figure 2: What Is the Difference Between Persuasive and Argumentative Writing? (ReadWriteThink.org)

CCSS favor argument over persuasion because it requires more logic and reason, and is more in line with the kind of writing that students will be expected to do in college” (Davis 4).

There are similar resources in other genres—PowerPoint presentations, YouTube videos, student worksheets—from consultants, school districts, and teacher groups across the country. What they share is a hierarchical ordering of argumentative and persuasive writing, with the latter always and essentially

TEACHING THE ARGUMENTATIVE STANDARD

2012 SMEKENS EDUCATION SOLUTIONS, INC.




	 Opinion Writing	 Persuasive Writing	 Argumentative Writing
PURPOSE	The writer aims to share his opinion or preference.	The writer aims to get the reader to agree with him/his perspective.	The writer aims to get the reader to accept his perspective/his side as truth.
GENERAL TECHNIQUE	The writer states what he thinks and why he thinks it.	Opinions are blended with facts, all in an attempt to convince the reader that the writer is "right."	Relevant reasons and credible data are blended to demonstrate the writer's argument as valid.
AUDIENCE	The writer seeks to be heard and wants to share his ideas/opinions. He is not concerned with getting something; he wants to voice his thoughts.	The writer needs an intended audience to address his request or need to. <i>Who can give him what he wants?</i>	To write an argument, the writer doesn't need an intended audience. The writer is satisfied with simply "putting the truth out there."
POINT OF VIEW	Because the writer is predominantly concerned with stating his opinion, first-person (i.e., I) is always used.	Since the writer is communicating directly to a person, group, or organization, it's common to use first-person (i.e., I) and second-person (i.e., you) point of view.	With no specific audience in mind, this more formal writing addresses the multiple sides of an issue using the more objective third-person point of view.
ATTITUDE	Opinion writers are excited about their own ideas and eager to share them with whomever will listen.	Persuasive writers "go after" their readers more aggressively. They consider the emotional strategy that will work best on their audience (e.g., manipulation, motivation, inspiration, etc.). <i>Persuasive writing is personal, passionate, and emotional.</i>	Argumentative writers maintain a tone of fairness and reasonableness. Their attitude is respectful, tactful, and formal.
PERSPECTIVES PRESENTED	Opinion has a single-minded goal—Tell the reader what you think. (See the one-sided scale above.)	Persuasion has a single-minded goal—Get what the writer wants. It is based on the writer's personal conviction that his way of thinking is the best. Consequently, the writer's viewpoint is typically the only one presented. (See the lopsided scales above.)	Argumentative writing acknowledges opposing views within a pro/con piece. (See the more balanced scales above.) This demonstrates the writer as a fair-minded person and gives him the opportunity to counter these perspectives with more logic, reasoning, and proof.
STARTING POINT	1. Pick a topic. 2. Decide what you think. 3. Write, draw, or talk about it.	1. Pick a topic of interest. (<i>What do you want?</i>) 2. Choose a side to "fight" for. 3. Start writing.	1. Conduct initial research on a debatable topic. 2. Align with the strongest side. 3. Continue gathering facts and research.
SUPPORT	Opinion pieces rely solely on opinion and feelings.	Persuasive pieces rely almost solely on opinions and feelings. The writer uses his own passion and/or plays off reader emotions to get what he wants. The audience agrees with the writer because of strong emotional appeals.	Arguments rely on logical reasons that are all substantiated by facts, data, expert quotes, and evidence. The audience agrees with the writer because of the strong logical appeals.

Figure 3: Teaching the Argumentative Standard. (Smekens)

5 Things Every Teacher Should be Doing to Meet the Common Core State Standards

Persuasion vs. Argument

Genre	Definition	Common Features
Persuasion	Appeals to the emotions of the audience	Uses techniques such as bandwagon, plain folks, glittering generalities, name calling, and snob appeal
Argument	Appeals to logic and reason	Consists of a thesis/claim, evidence, concession/refutation, and a more formal style

The CCSS favor argument over persuasion because it requires more logic and reason, and is more in line with the kind of writing that students will be expected to do in college. Teachers may wish to rethink the kinds of prompts they assign. For example, instead of asking students to persuade the principal to extend recess, have students write a research-based argument about the importance of recess and physical activity. Teach students how to marshal facts for their argument (Davis, *Common Core Literacy Lesson Plans*, 9-12, p. 66). This is not to say that there isn't a place for persuasion in the classroom. Teaching persuasive techniques such as bandwagon can be useful when doing a media literacy unit and having students analyze advertisements, for example. However, the CCSS ask that teachers make argument a higher priority in the classroom.

Figure 4: Persuasion vs. Argument: from *5 Things Every Teacher Should Be Doing to Meet the Common Core State Standards* (Davis 4). © 2012 Eye On Education, Inc. Larchmont, NY. All rights reserved. www.eyoneducation.com

bad: biased (partial, partisan, instrumental), emotional (manipulative, irrational), and personal (subjective, aggressive)—the opposite of writing that is rational, objective, and impersonal.

There is no sense here that persuasion is an important, potentially ethical activity based on inescapable human motivations. The trend in the schools to demonize persuasion is, I worry, reductive and dangerous: it treats all persuasion as illegitimate, ruling out of bounds uses of emotion and personal experience, including combinations of such appeals with *logos*; it glorifies “argument” as disembodied, rational, and objective and encourages students to claim those traits, whether their reasoning is “logical” or not; and, finally, it treats argument and persuasion as opposites, rather than imagining that argument might *serve* persuasion or that emotion and character could *further* reason. (According to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, “certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality. At their best, feelings point us in the proper direction, take us to the appropriate place in a decision-making space, where we may put the instruments of logic to good use” [xvii].) Most troubling of all, with the internet storing such resources forever and the Common Core now a national language arts framework, literally stretching across the continent, the emergence of this anti-persuasion regime has far-reaching implications. We may be distorting the rhetorical attitudes and practices of a generation.

Where did the Common Core’s opposition of argument and persuasion come from? Appendix A of the ELA Standards cites several *college* writing teachers and scholars, including Gerald Graff, Joseph Williams and Lawrence McEnerney, and Richard Fulkerson (24–5). But nowhere in their work can one find a rigid binary opposition of argument and persuasion. Graff, in fact, writes specifically about “*persuasive* argument” (emphasis added; see *Clueless in Academe*, 11, 22, 23, 246), though the adjective gets dropped when the CCSS refers to the university, quoting Graff, as an “argument culture” (24). It’s true that the others (Fulkerson; Williams and McEnerney), unabashed apologists for written argument, do not talk much in their work about persuasion, but they also don’t seem to harbor any animosity toward it. Admittedly, all these scholars valorize argument more than persuasion, but that may simply be a function of their shared history in the rhetoric revival of the 1980s and 90s, with its rediscovery of Aristotelian (rather than Ciceronian) rhetorical theory, the rise of Toulmin-style pedagogy, and the heightening of ideological conflict in the academy and wider culture, all of which raised the status of *argument* in US college English. It’s also undeniable that the Common Core emerged out of a highly polarized society; reformers can’t be blamed for wanting to shift the focus in ELA from winning to problem-solving, partisanship to inquiry, manipulation and pandering to

truth-seeking. But, as Garsten shows us, persuasion needn't be equated with the "bad" term in those pairs; it can be the end of good argument, not its opposite!

What's really behind the CCSS's rejection of persuasive writing, I believe, is the role persuasion played in the timed, impromptu writing tests, like the SAT and state "exit" exams, which became so prominent in US schooling in the 1980s, 90s, and 00s and which have now been largely discredited by the ELA disciplines. In such writing tests, students are asked to write a "persuasive" essay on some assigned topic in, say, 50 minutes, without meaningful opportunities to read, plan, think, discuss, research, or revise—a task that by its very nature forces them to rely solely on personal experience and personal feelings (to say nothing of "bullshit" [Frankfurt]). Take, for example, this grade eight persuasive writing task from the 2011 NAEP Writing Test:

Some of your friends perform community service. For example, some tutor elementary school children and others clean up litter. They think helping the community is very important. But other friends of yours think community service takes too much time away from what they need or want to do. Your principal is deciding whether to require all students to perform community service.

Write a letter to your principal in which you take a position on whether students should be required to perform community service. Support your position with examples. (2011-8W16 #1)

One can see why reformers, including the authors of the CCSS, might want to turn the ELA away from such writing and toward something more like "argument," exploiting reason and inquiry rather than feelings and experience alone. Thus, we have "next gen" testing regimes, like that developed by the Council for Aid to Education, which give students rich problems, relevant resources, and *time* to negotiate, resolve, and "argue" their way to new insights ("Sample"). But once students have been given a chance to read, inquire, and argue about the problems before them, shouldn't they be given a chance to be *persuasive* about them, too? In other words, the problem with high school writing before the CCSS wasn't persuasion; it was the way persuasion was situated in poorly designed writing tests that divorced it from thinking, research, and argument.

I believe it is this reductive notion of persuasion that's behind a much-cited 2010 article by George Hillocks Jr. that criticizes secondary English textbooks and state exams for their focus on "persuasive writing" and neglect of "argument." The latter Hillocks calls "the heart of critical thinking and academic discourse, the kind of writing students need to know for success in college" (24–5). For that, Hillocks argues, persuasive writing "will not suffice" (25).¹³ Interestingly, Hillocks turns here to Toulmin, urging teachers to begin, not with thesis statements, but with data, thus making argumentation a process

of inquiry. So, for a class of ninth graders, Hillocks begins a writing unit with evidence from a fictional crime scene and asks students to argue the case using Toulmin's phases: from data, through backing and warrants, to claims, with qualifications and refutations. It's an appealing approach and, without question, a better prompt for student writing (and thinking) than the NAEP test example. But such "argument" need not be the opposite of "persuasion"—in fact, inquiry of this type (investigating a crime) needs persuasion at some point to be of use in the world (e.g., to persuade a jury to reach a verdict!), just as "persuasion" is dangerous if divorced from thinking, research, and debate.

Curiously, the Common Core's opposition of argument and persuasion has generated little commentary in the field of composition-rhetoric. There's a brief 2016 essay by Notre Dame English professors John Duffy and Patrick Clauss, originally on a password-protected online NCTE forum for teachers but later posted to WPA-L, as well as a 2013 blog post by Cal Poly Pomona English professor John Edlund. And there have been at least two email threads devoted to the topic on WPA-L: September 13, 2011: "is writing an argument different from writing persuasion?" and August 2, 2014: "argument vs. persuasion." In the midst of the latter discussion, John Edlund wrote, "I am not particularly against Common Core, but I think that this particular [framing of the issue] will produce a decade or more of massive rhetorical confusion."

Why has there been so little critical attention to this issue in comp-rhet? For one thing, there's been so much other controversy surrounding the Common Core that this particular problem may have seemed minor—that is, if scholars were even aware of it: the key statement, after all, is buried in an Appendix and not thematized explicitly in the Standards themselves. In addition, postsecondary champions of argument who have applauded the Common Core (e.g., Graff, "Clarifying"; Lazere) don't seem to be aware that the word is being framed there in a hyperlogical way. For some, like Jolliffe, when the CCSS/ELA talk about "argument" as a discourse aim, they must mean persuasion—a simple confusion of mode and purpose (142–3).

As for preK–12 ELA teachers, I don't blame them for the view of argument and persuasion described here. They're getting it, obviously, from official channels like the CCSS, which is getting it, at least in part, from *college* teachers and scholars. In any case, as I've tried to show, there's a long history of anxiety about persuasion in philosophical, educational, and even rhetorical circles, and if that has been heightened lately given the increased demagoguery and deception in our political discourse, it's entirely understandable. Still, I worry that the bias against persuasion we're seeing in ELA today signals to our students a deep distrust of how *all* human beings reason as much through passion and

partisanship as through “logic,” a fact that schools, preK–16, need to deal with in more effective ways than simply wishing it weren’t so.

A CLASSROOM EXAMPLE

The denigration of persuasion is especially dangerous when combined with two other ideological tendencies in contemporary ELA: the opposition of “facts” and “opinions” and the proscription against the first person in student writing. Regarding the former, the word *opinion* seems to have taken on increasingly dismissive meaning in recent years—students say, “It’s just my opinion;” “That’s just your opinion;” “Everybody’s entitled to their opinion.” Yes, philosophers have long contrasted *opinion* unfavorably with *truth*, but *opinion* was never so empty as it is today: something merely personal, entirely subjective, wholly inaccessible to rational inquiry or intersubjective understanding (cf. McBrayer). In fact, in common parlance, *opinion* is often used now to *avoid* an argument rather than to engage in one, something that would have been incomprehensible to the ancient Greeks. What’s more surprising, though, is how the *schools* have taken up this new meaning: one college-level “study skills” website tells students that “A fact is a statement that can be proven true or false. An opinion is an expression of a person’s feelings that cannot be proven” (Borough of Manhattan).

Recent research in writing studies has confirmed the prevalence of a “fact vs. opinion” binary in contemporary US schooling. In his year-long study of twelfth grade writers in an urban high school, Jon-Philip Imbrenda found that a conceptual schema regarding “facts and opinions” was “a recurring barrier to [students’] evaluation and generation of effective academic arguments.” He summarizes the schema as follows:

1. Written texts come in two varieties: enumerated facts and elaborated opinions.
2. Facts are facts. They belong to no one in particular, and they are more or less irrefutable.
3. Opinions are completely subjective and belong only to their authors.
4. Everyone is entitled to an opinion. Regardless of the underlying reasoning behind an opinion, no opinion is more important or valid than any other.
5. In order to be convincing, a written text must enumerate relevant facts. Written texts that elaborate opinions, on the other hand, can be dismissed if the reader disagrees with them. (336)

If my earlier evidence for the denigration of persuasion in contemporary schooling came mostly from official educational discourses and resources linked to them, here is research from an actual classroom that shows how rhetorical attitudes and practices harmful to a genuinely civic culture are being propagated.

The final tendency of contemporary ELA I want to mention here, linked to the two previously discussed, is the proscription against the first person in student writing, still widely practiced, as I'll show, in preK–12 schools in the United States (cf. Maddalena). This is obviously a complicated issue: avoiding phrases like *I think*, *I feel*, and *In my opinion* in classroom discussions has become something of a feminist mantra for many students, a refusal to apologize for or qualify one's intellectual contributions. Avoiding the first person is also, of course, an accepted way to deflect attention from the self, related to the scientific preference for the passive voice and third person. But classroom bans on using the first person in argumentative writing, like the one we'll see below, too often serve simply to devalue students' personal experiences and passions and overstate the "objectivity" of beliefs that don't deserve that label.

One can see all three of these tendencies come together in a 2014 story from National Public Radio (Vevea). On August 2 of that year, *Weekend Edition* reported on a Chicago sixth grade classroom where students were being taught ELA using the CCSS. The story demonstrates what happens when young people are asked to argue about controversial matters but denied an art of persuasion to do so. Below I quote the relevant part of that report in full, leaving out some identifying information.

Standard 1: Sixth-Grade English

One of the Common Core State Standards for sixth-grade English says kids should be able to "write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence."

At [an elementary school] on Chicago's North Side last year, the sixth-graders in [one] class worked all year on one key skill: writing an argument.

"So the article you're reading today is 'Cell Phones at School,'" [the teacher] tells her students. Then she makes clear to them that the difference between argument and persuasive writing boils down to facts and opinion.

"So remember, when we talk about a claim sentence, if you're doing an argument, what can you never start with?" [The teacher calls on a student.]

"I or I think," [the student] says.

[The teacher] then turns to the question at hand: Should students be allowed to have cell phones at school? She divides the class into small groups and hands them two nonfiction articles. One is a study from 2010 that found more than three-quarters of American teens own a cell phone and makes the case for allowing them in school.

[A different student] runs through the evidence in the text.

“Banning cell phones in school would not only limit students’ learning, but also their preparation for life,” she says, based on what she’s just read.

But the other article, also a 2010 study, found that 71 percent of students with cell phones had sent or received text messages during classroom time. [The] 30 sixth-graders fill out charts to help them organize the two arguments before they begin writing their own. [Two students] sit at a table near the back of the room discussing both sides.

As for evidence for cell phones in schools, [one] says parents “want to know they can reach their children anytime.” And for the evidence against, [the other] points to the section of the study that found students using their phones to cheat on tests.

So why should they know how to write an argument? “We might want to become a lawyer or something. It’s good practice for us to learn how to make a claim and tell what we think on paper,” [the first student] says.

Her classmate’s theory: “Let’s say someday you want to become president, and then you become a president and you want to make a law. But then other people go against it. You have to, like, be able to fight against it and say your way is better than their way.”

And if you don’t want to be the president or a lawyer? They say it’s still good to know how to argue in a respectful way, using facts instead of opinions.

So, we have here a public elementary school on Chicago’s North Side with thirty students in it, engaged in learning to “write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.” That’s a tall order, and the pedagogy described deserves praise: the question the students are asked is interesting and timely; the materials they’re provided are rich and balanced; and the teacher has scaffolded students’ work effectively, through a mix of individual, small-group, and whole-class activities.

But the students are given a task that is, ultimately, I believe, impossible to do. They’ve been asked to answer a complex “political” question without the intellectual, social, and discursive resources—namely, the first person, opinions, and persuasion—needed to make an answer to that question anything other than a school exercise. My point here is not to criticize this teacher or these students; rather, it’s to show where the fear of persuasion leads in our schools and why we should be concerned about it.

Let’s look more closely at the assignment, at least as it can be reconstructed from this brief news report. The class has been asked a question, “Should students be allowed to have cell phones at school?” and told to answer it *without* using persuasion, opinions, or the first person. What they *can* use are two studies which provide, according to the report, four pieces of evidence: two seeming to support one side of the debate and two, the other. The four “facts” can be represented as follows:

1. “more than three-quarters of American teens own a cell phone”;
2. “71 percent of students with cell phones had sent or received text messages during classroom time”;
3. parents “want to know they can reach their children anytime”; and
4. “students us[e] their phones to cheat on tests.”

It is these “facts,” and these alone, with which the students are to argue and thus answer the teacher’s question.

The assignment raises at least three ideological questions *in my opinion*. First, are these “facts” really “facts”? Aren’t they the debatable conclusions of *prior* arguments put forward by particular individuals and groups, those prior arguments based on other “facts” constructed in particular circumstances in particular ways, and thus open to interrogation and critique? Let’s take the first “fact”: “more than three-quarters of American teens own a cell phone.” Is this really a “fact” in the sense of Imbrenda’s conceptual scheme: “Facts are facts. They belong to no one in particular and they are more or less irrefutable”? Doesn’t this particular “fact” very much “belong” to the study that produced it, and isn’t it, then, refutable to the extent that that study, like all studies, is limited, contingent, even flawed? Who, after all, is an “American teen” in that study, and what does it mean to “own” a “cell phone”? And even if we could agree on those matters, what evidence is there that “three-quarters” of such individuals fall into that category? And even if we accept that general figure, doesn’t it hide variation in teen cell phone ownership by geography, race, class, gender, age? How many sixth graders own a cell phone? What about sixth graders on Chicago’s North Side in 2014?

Rather than teaching students to reify as “facts” the apparently “irrefutable” reasons behind their claims, we should help them see that their arguments are always based on evidence that is itself always constructed, contingent, and debatable. The teacher may have made this point—we don’t know—certainly the report doesn’t mention it. And I can imagine, as a teacher in this situation, stipulating that these *are* “facts” for the purpose of answering the question before us. But I can also imagine helping students see these “facts” as dependent on the contexts of their production and thus neither objective nor irrefutable. I can even imagine encouraging students to conduct their *own* studies of cell phone use, perhaps focused on their own classroom, referring to their results as “evidence” rather than “facts.” My point is that simply saying that argument relies on facts, not opinions, assumes the existence of “facts” that are free of “opinion,” an assumption rarely warranted.

The second question I have about the ideological framing of this exercise is, I believe, more serious. Even assuming the “facts” above, how do students

get from there to an answer to the question at hand—from evidence about student cell phone use to a classroom policy governing that use? And how do they do that without using persuasion, opinions, or the first person? To say, for example, that because cell phones are prevalent in society, banning them limits students' "preparation for life" involves a leap that is not itself "factual." As two cognitive scientists have recently put it: "That a given conclusion follows from a given premise is . . . an intuitive judgment, one with an evaluative component" (Mercier and Sperber 59). The situation is even more complicated here because the students not only need to determine whether a particular conclusion (allowing cell phones in the classroom) is warranted by a particular "fact" (most teens own one), they also need to determine *which* fact-conclusion combination is better, stronger, more apt. After all, the "facts" provided support diametrically opposed answers to the question at hand! What if all those argument chains are equally (un)reasonable? How do we determine which will guide us? Nowhere in this pedagogy, as far as I can tell, is attention given to perhaps the most difficult issue in teaching argument: what if both sides are, to some degree, both right *and* wrong? How can students acknowledge that possibility and still be good governors, together, of their world?

Now, normally, we make determinations about such disputes by using a phrase like *in my opinion*: for example, "In my opinion, the problems with student cell phone use outweigh their benefits." But we've been told that we can't use either opinions or the first person! Of course, maybe *opinion*, like *fact*, isn't the right word anymore for teaching and participating in public discourse. Garsten, for example, recommends *judgment*, which he defines as "the mental activity of responding to particular situations in a way that draws upon our sensations, beliefs, and emotions" (7). Such activity, he writes, is "not wholly reasonable . . . judgment emerges from and draws upon a whole complex of emotions, dispositions, and tacit knowledge" (9).¹⁴ These students have clearly been taught about the role of "facts" in argument; have they also been taught about the role of "emotions, dispositions, and tacit knowledge"?

The third and final question I have about this exercise is this: assuming the students have interrogated the evidence before them and judged the meaning and implications of that evidence for the question at hand, how do they then make *their* answer to the question other people's answer too? Here, I'm taking the teacher's question, "Should students be allowed to have cell phones at school?" seriously. That is, I'm assuming she asked this question because the students are actually going to answer it—they will actually develop together a policy on cell phone use for their classroom.¹⁵ And if the students are going to answer, together, that question, they not only have to decide which "facts" they think credible, if

any, and then make judgments regarding the implication of those facts, they also have to try to persuade one another that *their* judgment—their opinion!—on this issue is the right one. And they need to do that as all effective persuaders do in situations like this, by making not only logical appeals (whatever they are in this case) but personal and emotional ones as well: This is what I believe the class should do regarding cell phones: Are you with me?

So, we are now back to the old rhetorical principle that understanding is not enough when one is talking about human action and interaction. We are back in the realm of Genung's "Practical truths, such as have a definite *issue* in character and action, personal truths, that come home to men's business and bosoms" (447, emphasis in original). As Burke once put it, the "opinion" with which rhetoric is concerned "is not opinion *as contrasted with truth*"; it's "opinion in the moral order of *action*" (*Rhetoric* 54, emphasis in original) (cf. Muckelbauer 239).

I'm not arguing here that the teacher should have asked the students to *persuade* instead of *argue*, use *opinions* instead of facts, rely on *subjective* rather than objective reasons. I'm arguing that the very opposition of these things is unhelpful. Students need practice arguing *and* persuading—or, better, arguing for the *purpose* of persuading. But under the new ELA regime, they're only permitted to go halfway, as if they could solve the problems before them by simply adjudicating "facts." Take the Eye on Education resource cited above: because of the CCSS's preference for argument over persuasion, "Teachers may wish to rethink the kinds of prompts they assign. For example, instead of asking students to persuade the principal to extend recess, have students write a research-based argument about the importance of recess and physical activity" (Davis 4). But why not have students do *both* of those things—write a research-based argument *and* persuade the principal that their argument is the best one?¹⁶

I'm evoking here, of course, the old dream of uniting rhetoric and philosophy, eloquence and wisdom. In *De Oratore*, Cicero blamed Socrates for "separat[ing] the science of wise thinking from that of elegant speaking," severing "the tongue and the brain, [and] leading to our having one set of professors to teach us to think and another to speak" (III.xvi.60–1). His remedy was for orators to study philosophy; after all, if wisdom without eloquence is mute and ineffective (*De Inv.* I.ii.3), eloquence without wisdom is akin to "put[ting] weapons into the hands of madmen" (*De Or.* III.xiv.55). Cicero was trying to rescue philosophy for rhetoric; *we* need to rescue rhetoric (or "persuasion") for philosophy (or "argument"). But the ultimate goal is the same: a truly humane (and human) education, one that promotes knowledge, eloquence, *and* virtue.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

The US presidential election of 2016 was a deeply disturbing display of rhetoric's worst tendencies: demagoguery, dog whistles, outright lying. It represented a massive retreat from reason and common sense in US public life. It was also, of course, a humiliating failure of rhetoric for those on the left. The election and its aftermath have led some in the academy, as well as many out of it, to double down on truth, logic, and facts. I've been urging here a different response. The solution to the failures and perversions of *persuasion* in our society is not to banish the word and warn our students away from it, but rather to recognize the importance of persuasion and try to channel it in ways that we think positive. This was Burke's great insight: appreciating, even protecting, the "Scramble" of the "Human Barnyard," with all its bickering and lies, may be the only way to keep physical violence at bay because it *humanizes* conflict rather than tries to suppress or cleanse it.

From that standpoint, I see attempts to purify the language arts of partisanship, passion, and self-interest as a mistake for at least three reasons. First, if we exile persuasion and try to engage politics from the standpoint of truth and reason alone, we leave the field of public discourse to others less abashed about its impure aspects. Second, if we identify persuasion with manipulation and pandering only, we fail to recognize a realm of influence-seeking that is neither of those, that tries to move others while still respecting their autonomy, that appreciates the legitimate role of character and emotion in human judgment and action. Third, if we claim that our position in debate is always the position of truth, we deceive ourselves into thinking that we alone are on the side of reason and that those who disagree with us are on the side of error, even evil—an arrogance that we don't deserve and an attitude that makes us dismissive of those different from us. Though we often think of persuasion as manipulative, it's arguing from the standpoint of truth that may be more ethically dangerous. As Garsten puts it, persuasion "actually affords more respect to the opinions of one's audience than the discourse of justification does" (198).

For these reasons, I believe we need to welcome persuasion back into the language arts: to help our students become not only practically effective in civic contests, but also wise about human nature and sympathetic in their engagements with difference—fighting error, ignorance, and demagoguery where they find them but wary of arrogating to themselves the whole of truth and virtue.

NOTES

1. I take this reading of *peitho*—simultaneously divine and secular, erotic and political—from Buxton (see also Kirby; Marsh; and North).

2. According to Connors, Genung's final two modes, argumentation and persuasion, were eventually collapsed into one, giving us by 1910 the standard four-mode program of "current-traditional rhetoric": narration, description, exposition, and argument ("Rise and Fall" 447).

3. My summary of nineteenth- and twentieth-century rhetorical education in the United States, here and in the following paragraph, relies on Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric*; Fleming, *From Form to Meaning*; Halloran; Kitzhaber; and Rudolph.

4. Into the 1990s, *persuasion* was still showing up without negative connotations in the titles of composition-rhetoric journal articles (see, e.g., Kantz; Walker).

5. Searched were all indexed journal articles, dissertations, etc., from 1939 to 2017, in which *persuasion* or any of its cognates (*persuade*, *persuasive*, etc.) appeared in any field. In the Advanced Search box for Any Field, I entered the truncated word *persua* (wildcard symbols not needed in CompFile) and in the second line, for Publication Year, the years 1939 to 2017, one by one. I then recorded the number of results per year.

6. Toulmin's notion of field *independence* in argument's unfolding but field *dependence* in its standards of evaluation was also perfectly adapted to the new two-tier model of late-twentieth-century college composition, with a course in general writing skills in the first year and discipline-specific writing courses later on.

7. The books are Berrill; Crosswhite; Emmel, Resch, and Tenney; and Fulkerson.

8. Cf. Lazere's critique of first-year writing pedagogies that see the classroom "as a 'safe house,' a 'comfort zone,' a small community whose members are encouraged to feel good about themselves in sharing their common or diverse stories" (5).

9. For the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, see National Governors Association in Works Cited, hereafter cited as CCSS/ELA.

10. For Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the [ELA] Standards, see National Governors Association in Works Cited, hereafter cited as Appendix A.

11. Rich Lane argued in 2004 that the curriculum of secondary English in this country "remains deeply entrenched in chronological, nationalistic and aesthetic content—in other words, canonical literature and literary analysis" (87). But there have been signs of a new approach emerging. The Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition course, for example, begun in the 1980s as the "junior" AP English course, had become by the early 2000s the AP's "rhetoric" course. According to former AP chief reader David Jolliffe, three lessons from *college* composition had by then begun to filter down to high school: "First, and most generally, college composition is increasingly a course in the theory and practice of rhetoric"; second, writing in college is linked to knowledge creation and dissemination, and thus reading in college writing courses is mainly nonfiction; and third, rhetoric is about civic engagement, so students should have a chance to take on real-world rhetorical situations (Puhr 4–6). Of course, there have also been critics of this shift in secondary English away from literature (e.g., Pollock-Moore; Simmons).

12. The last time I tried this was January 16, 2019.

13. Cf. Deane and Song: "[I]n the context of college and career readiness, the goal is to develop the ability to conduct rational argument, which invokes very different norms than the aim (e.g., in advertising) of making the message appealing to the audience so as to induce changes in behavior, using all available means" (3).

14. In the CCSS Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12 and Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects 6–12, something called "reasoned judgment" is distinguished from both "fact" and "opinion" (or "speculation") (see RH.6–8.8 and RST.6–8.8, pp. 61–2 of the CCSS/ELA), but the term appears only twice in the whole CCSS/ELA, it's not mentioned in the NPR story, and one wonders whether it is commonly used in classrooms.

15. A big assumption, I know.

16. Similarly, regarding DeStigter's proposal to a high school student that, instead of writing a "carefully reasoned letter to a principal objecting to the dismissal of an inspiring teacher . . . what if that student were to organize a lunchtime walkout?" (24), I can't help but ask: why not encourage the student to do *both* things, use embodied action *and* careful reasoning?

17. Cf. Scott: "The point of view that holds that man cannot be certain but must act in the face of uncertainty to create situational truth entails three ethical guidelines: toleration, will, and responsibility" (16).

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