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Rogerian Argument

Introduction

The Rogerian argument (or Rogerian rhetoric) is a form of argumentative reasoning that aims to establish a middle ground between parties with opposing viewpoints or goals. Developed by psychotherapist Carl Rogers and adapted to rhetoric by writing scholars Young, Becker, and Pike, the speaker seeks compromise, acknowledging positive aspects of each party's argument to arrive at a mutually-beneficial solution to an issue.

You may already use Rogerian argument in your everyday life to negotiate with your friends, family, and/or romantic partners. For example, if you wanted to watch a comedy and your friend wanted to watch a romance, you might compromise by offering to watch a rom-com, as this offers each of you a bit of what you are looking for in that particular moment. Note, however, that this style of argument is decidedly less common in academic settings, where various empirical or theoretical notions of truth are often prized above the practical advantages of the Rogerian method.

While Aristotelian styles of argument are often seen as eristic (concerned primarily with winning), the Rogerian argument can be viewed as more dialectic in nature. In other words, it takes the form of a conversation between two or more parties with the goal of arriving at some mutually-satisfying solution. Thus, practicing the Rogerian argument will enhance your ability to understand the complex relations of opposing viewpoints and provide tools for addressing such discrepancies sympathetically. It's also great for day-to-day conflict resolution at home or in the workplace.

However, Rogerian argument does come with disadvantages. For example, because Rogerian argument relies on compromise between opposing parties, it may not work well when your opponents are unwilling or unable to compromise, or if they are arguing in bad faith (e.g., they care only about winning). It may also lead to sub-optimal solutions if your opponent's position is demonstrably wrong, since in this case you may nevertheless be forced to sacrifice some of your (ostensibly superior) goals order to accommodate your opponent's (inferior) ones.

Objectives

In "Rhetoric: Discovery and Change" (1970), Young, Becker, and Pike describe the primary aims of the Rogerian argument as follows:

1. to convey to the reader that he is understood,
2. to delineate the area within which he believes the reader's position to be valid, and
3. to induce him to believe that he and the writer share similar moral qualities (honesty, integrity, and good will) and aspirations (the desire to discover a mutually acceptable solution).

The first aim shows the reader that you understand the complexities of the argument and that you have listened sympathetically to what it is they have to say. This is important, because the success of the Rogerian arguments relies on cooperation and collaboration. The second aim puts this understanding into practice by seeking a symbiotic solution. The third aim builds ethos and rapport between the parties. If audiences believe they share a value system with a speaker or writer, they are more likely to agree to the terms of whatever solution is presented.

While each of these aims is important, Young, Becker, and Pike stress that they are just that: aims, not steps. You should not necessarily view these aims as occurring in a linear, step-by-step process. The authors present a synthesized discussion of what a successful Rogerian argument should contain, but they eschew any formalized structure. The structure of the argument should instead be determined by the speaker, and it should be modified and adapted according to the rhetorical situation at hand.

Structure

Again, there is no formalized structure for the Rogerian argument, though the following example provides a foundation for considering how you might structure your own argument.

A successful Rogerian argument will likely include the following:

1. Introduction (addressing the topic to be discussed and/or the problem to be solved)
2. Opposing position (showing that you understand your opposition's viewpoints/goals)
3. Context for opposing position (showing that you understand the situations in which their viewpoint is valid)
4. Your position (introducing/addressing your viewpoint as it differs from the reader's)
5. Context for your position (objectively showing the reader the context(s) under which your position is valid)
6. Benefits (appeal to the opposition by showing how they would benefit by adopting elements of your position)

Example

Below, we've provided an example Rogerian argument that follows the formula above. In this example, we will take the position that technology (e.g., laptops and tablets) should be allowed in writing classes while also considering the opinion of the opposition, who argue that such technology is more of a distraction than a helpful tool. In so doing, we should be able to arrive at a solution that considers both arguments and develops a solution that benefits both parties while still achieving our goal of allowing technology in the classroom.

1. **Introduction:** Here, we would introduce the topic and briefly discuss why it is a matter of contention. We would lay out the differing perspectives, briefly mention the merits of each argument, and discuss the implications closely considering all perspectives to arrive at a solution that works for everyone.
2. **Opposing position:** Here, we would introduce the opposing position that digital technology should not be allowed in the writing classroom. We would also list and discuss their objections to the proposition of technology in the classroom. These might include the notions that it's distracting for the individual, the class, and the instructor, and is often used to avoid the lesson and instead play games or go on social media.
3. **Context for opposing position:** Here we might provide specific details that lend merit to their argument. We want to show that we are fully considering their claims and not just giving lip service, in the hope that that they will give similar value to our opinions. We could include statistics, testimony from instructors and students, or even examples from media that support their theory that digital technology can indeed be a distraction during instruction.
4. **Your position:** Here, we would introduce our claim that digital technology should be allowed in the writing classroom. We would still want to speak as objectively as possible in order to establish our ethos as concerned but unbiased speaker. We might even qualify our position by acknowledging that there are, of course, situations in which technology should be put away, but reiterate that, generally speaking, the presence of digital technology is a positive.
5. **Context for your position:** Here, we can provide examples that run contrary to the ones we used for the context of our opposition's position. For example, we could gather testimony from students who claim that using these technologies in

class has been beneficial. We could include research and scholarship that supports our position and even quote instructors who have developed pedagogy around these technologies. We might even subtly demonstrate that our opposition has failed to account for all possibilities by choosing our examples carefully. For instance, we could easily include accounts of students with learning disabilities who might otherwise have a difficult time succeeding in class without the help of assistive technologies.

6. **Benefits:** Here, we would use the points we've established throughout the argument to appeal to our opposition and find some productive middle ground that benefits both parties. We would acknowledge that some instructors do not want digital technologies present in the classroom, as they believe they distract from paying attention during lectures. We would maintain, however, that these technologies can indeed be productive tools for learning—in some cases, they can even be a virtual requirement for learning. We could then offer a solution: that these digital technologies should be kept aside during lecture portions of a lesson except in the case of students with documented disabilities. This way, students will likely be paying attention, taking notes by hand which they can transcribe later if they so wish. However, once a class moves from lecture to activity (whether group or individual), students should be allowed to access these technologies to more effectively engage with the activity, organize their thoughts, and access information. Now that the instructor is no longer lecturing, it should be easier to monitor student progress and engagement and the use of technology for these activities will lead to more developed and better organized results from the students.

Welcome to the Purdue OWL

Toulmin Argument

What is the Toulmin Method?

Developed by philosopher Stephen E. Toulmin, the Toulmin method is a style of argumentation that breaks arguments down into six component parts: **claim, grounds, warrant, qualifier, rebuttal,** and **backing**. In Toulmin's method, every argument begins with three fundamental parts: the claim, the grounds, and the warrant.

A **claim** is the assertion that authors would like to prove to their audience. It is, in other words, the main argument.

The **grounds** of an argument are the evidence and facts that help support the claim.

Finally, the **warrant**, which is either implied or stated explicitly, is the assumption that links the grounds to the claim.

For example, if you argue that there are dogs nearby:

In this example, in order to assert the claim that a dog is nearby, we provide evidence and specific facts—or the grounds—by acknowledging that we hear barking and howling. Since we know that dogs bark and howl (i.e., since we have a warrant) we can assume that a dog is nearby.

Now, let's try a more academic approach. Let's say that you are writing a paper on how more research needs to be done on the way that computer-mediated communication influences online and offline relationships (a paper, in other words, very much **like the OWL's APA Sample paper (../../../research_and_citation/apa6_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_sample_paper.html)**).

In this case, to assert the claim that additional research needs to be made on how online communication affects relationships, the author shows how the original article needs to account for technological, demographic, and modality limitations in the study. Since we know that when a study lacks a perspective, it would be beneficial to do more research (i.e., we have a warrant), it would be safe to assume that more research should be conducted (i.e. the claim).
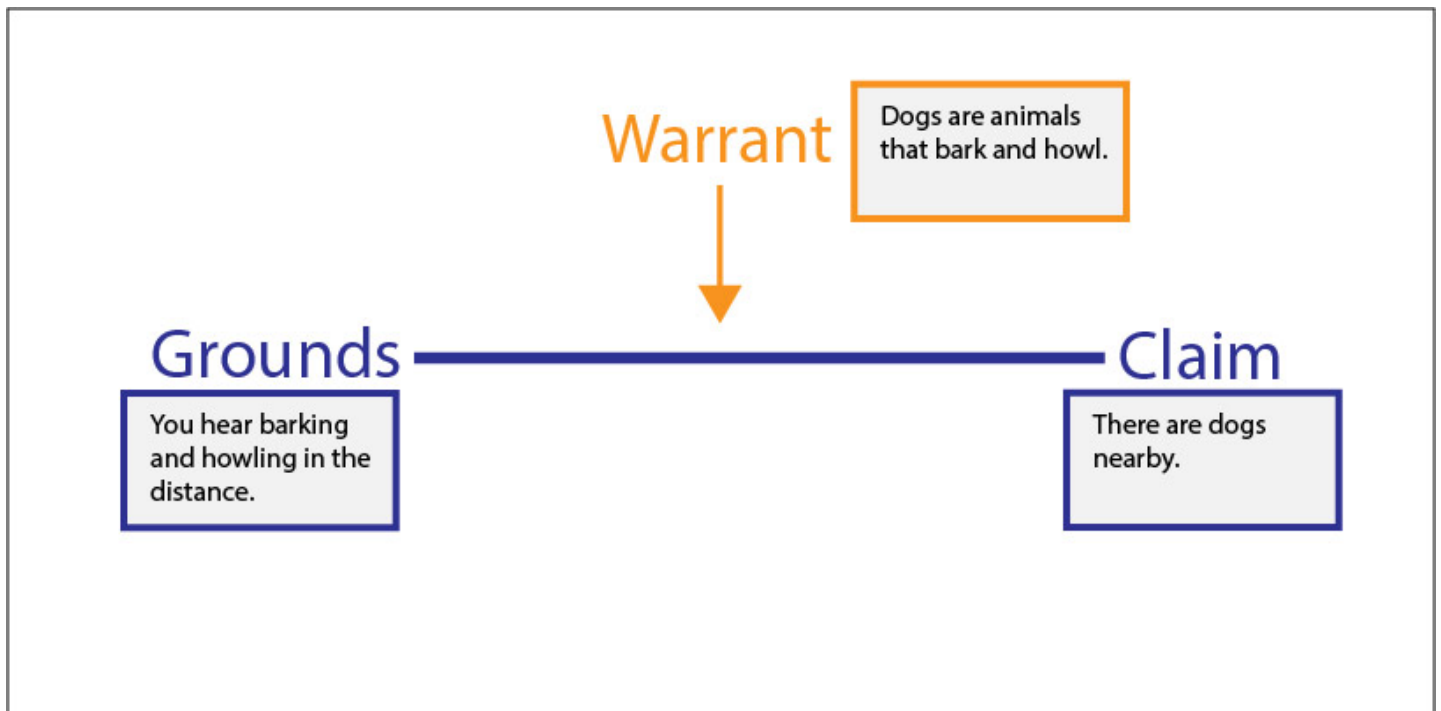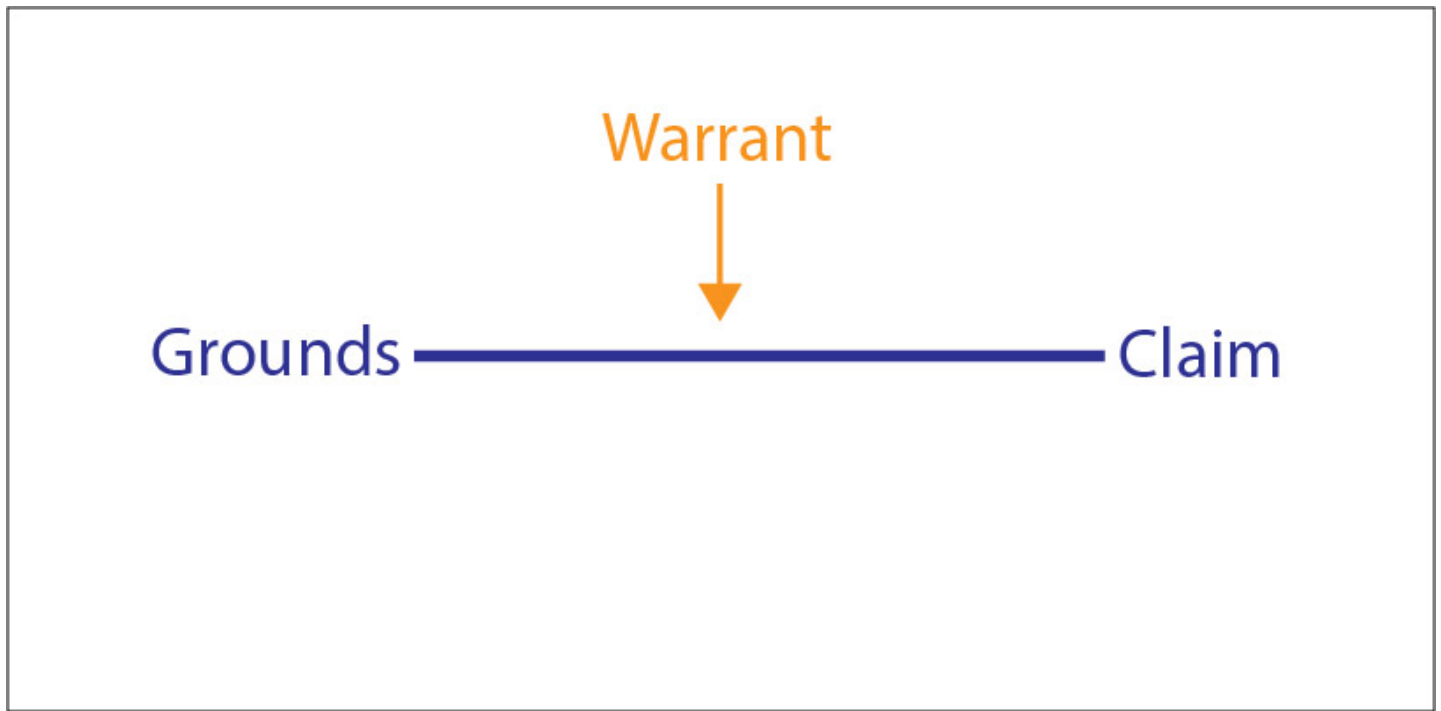
The other three elements—backing, qualifier, and rebuttal—are not fundamental to a Toulmin argument, but may be added as necessary. Using these elements wisely can help writers construct full, nuanced arguments.

Backing refers to any additional support of the warrant. In many cases, the warrant is implied, and therefore the backing provides support for the warrant by giving a specific example that justifies the warrant.

The **qualifier** shows that a claim may not be true in all circumstances. Words like "presumably," "some," and "many" help your audience understand that you know there are instances where your claim may not be correct.

The **rebuttal** is an acknowledgement of another valid view of the situation.

Including a qualifier or a rebuttal in an argument helps build your ethos, or credibility. When you acknowledge that your view isn't always true or when you provide multiple views of a situation, you build an image of a careful, unbiased thinker, rather than of someone blindly pushing for a single interpretation of the situation.
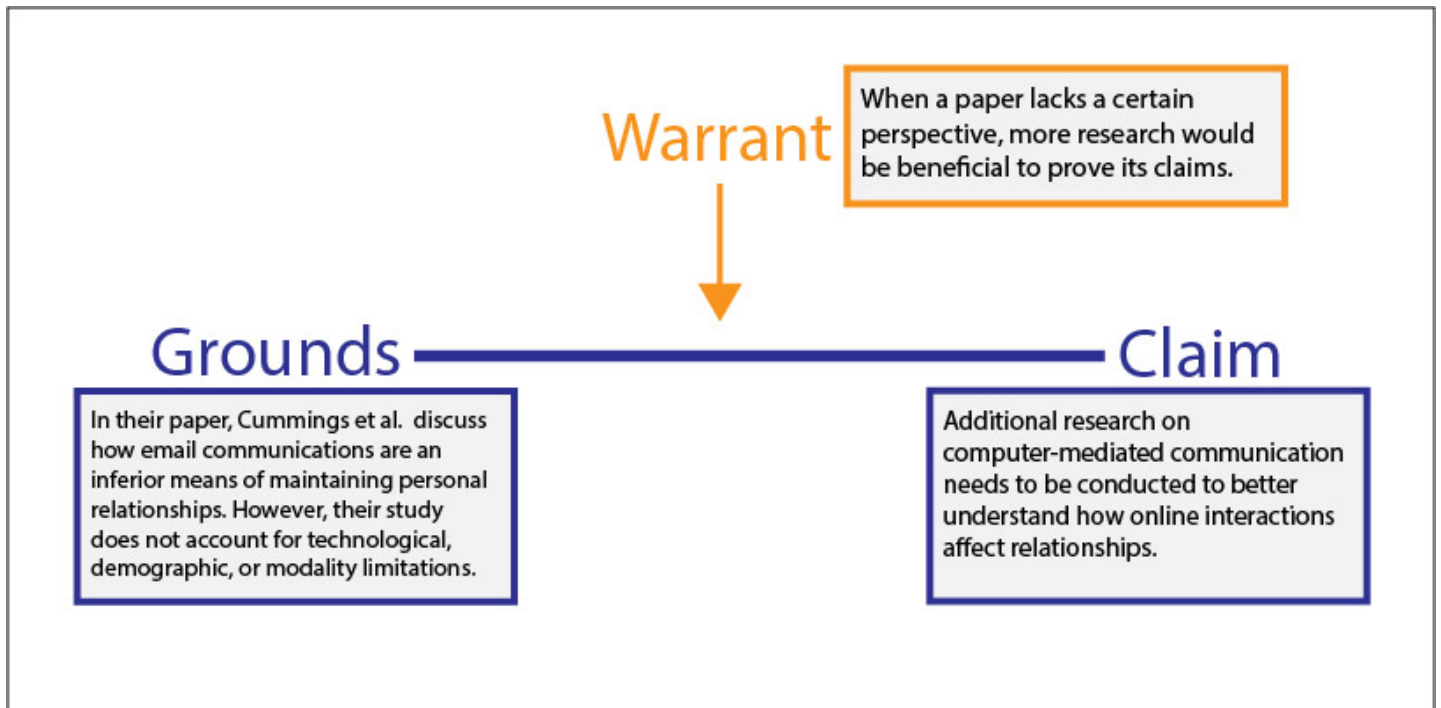
For example:

We can also add these components to our academic paper example:

Note that, in addition to Stephen Toulmin's *Uses of Argument*, students and instructors may find it useful to consult the article "Using Toulmin's Model of Argumentation" by Joan Karbach for more information.

Backing

You know that your neighbor Tom has two large German Shepherds.

Warrant

Dogs are animals that bark and howl.

Grounds — **Qualifier** — **Claim**

Grounds

You hear barking and howling in the distance.

Qualifier

So, chances are...

Claim

There are dogs nearby.

Rebuttal

(Unless there are wolves or coyotes nearby).

Backing

A thorough review of the literature has shown you that no further research has been done to clarify the effects CMCs can have in personal relationships.

Warrant

When a paper lacks a certain perspective, more research would be beneficial to prove its claims.

Grounds ——— **Qualifier** ———— **Claim**

In their paper, Cummings et al. discuss how email communications are an inferior means of maintaining personal relationships. However, their study does not account for technological, demographic, or modality limitations.

So, in all likelihood...

Additional research on computer-mediated communication needs to be conducted to better understand how online interactions affect relationships.

Rebuttal

(Unless there is new research on this topic that has yet to be published).

Classical Argument

A (Very) Brief History of Rhetoric

The study of rhetoric has existed for thousands of years, predating even Socrates, Plato and the other ancient Greek philosophers that we often credit as the founders of Western philosophy. Although ancient rhetoric is most commonly associated with the ancient Greeks and Romans, early examples of rhetoric date all the way back to ancient Akkadian writings in Mesopotamia.

In ancient Greece and Rome, rhetoric was most often considered to be the art of persuasion and was primarily described as a spoken skill. In these societies, discourse occurred almost exclusively in the public sphere, so learning the art of effective, convincing speaking was essential for public orators, legal experts, politicians, philosophers, generals, and educators. To prepare for the speeches they would need to make in these roles, students engaged in written exercises called *progymnasmata*. Today, rhetorical scholars still use strategies from the classical era to conceptualize argument. However, whereas oral discourse was the main focus of the classical rhetoricians, modern scholars also study the peculiarities of written argument.

Aristotle provides a crucial point of reference for ancient and modern scholars alike. Over 2000 years ago, Aristotle literally wrote the book on rhetoric. His text *Rhētorikḗ*(*On Rhetoric*) explores the techniques and purposes of persuasion in ancient Greece, laying the foundation for the study and implementation of rhetoric in future generations. Though the ways we communicate and conceptualize rhetoric have changed, many of the principles in this book are still used today. And this is for good reason: Aristotle's strategies can provide a great guide for organizing your thoughts as well as writing effective arguments, essays, and speeches.

Below, you will find a brief guide to some of the most fundamental concepts in classical rhetoric, most of which originate in *On Rhetoric.*

The Rhetorical Appeals

To understand how argument works in *On Rhetoric*, you must first understand the major appeals associated with rhetoric. Aristotle identifies four major rhetorical appeals: ethos (credibility), logos (logic), pathos (emotion), and Kairos(time).

- **Ethos** – an appeal to credibility. This is the way a speaker (or writer) presents herself to the audience. You can build credibility by citing professional sources, using content-specific language, and by showing evidence of your ethical, knowledgeable background.

- **Logos** – an appeal to logic. This is the way a speaker appeals to the audience through practicality and hard evidence. You can develop logos by presenting data and statistics, and by crafting a clear claim with a logically-sequenced argument.
- **Pathos** – an appeal to emotion. This is the way a speaker appeals to the audience through emotion, pity, or passions. The idea is usually to evoke and strengthen feelings already present within the audience. This can be achieved through story-telling, vivid imagery, and an impassioned voice.
- **Kairos** – an appeal made through the adept use of time. This is the way a speaker appeals to the audience through notions of time. It is also considered to be the appropriate or opportune time for a speaker to insert herself into a conversation or discourse, using the three appeals listed above. A Kairotic appeal can be made through calls to immediate action, presenting an opportunity as temporary, and by describing a specific moment as propitious or ideal.

An easy way to conceptualize the rhetorical appeals is through advertisements, particularly infomercials or commercials. We are constantly being exposed to the types of rhetoric above, whether it be while watching television or movies, browsing the internet, or watching videos on YouTube.

Imagine a commercial for a new car. The commercial opens with images of a family driving a brand-new car through rugged, forested terrain, over large rocks, past waterfalls, and finally to a serene camping spot near a tranquil lake surrounded by giant redwood trees. The scene cuts to shots of the interior of the car, showing off its technological capacities and its impressive spaciousness. A voiceover announces that not only has this car won numerous awards over its competitors but that it is also priced considerably lower than comparable models, while getting better gas mileage. "But don't wait," the voiceover says excitedly, "current lessees pay 0% APR financing for 12 months."

In just a few moments, this commercial has shown masterful use of all four appeals. The commercial utilizes pathos by appealing to our romantic notions of family, escape, and the great outdoors. The commercial develops ethos by listing its awards, and it appeals to our logical tendencies by pointing out we will save money immediately because the car is priced lower than its competitors, as well as in the long run because of its higher MPG rate. Finally, the commercial provides an opportune and propitious moment for its targeted audience to purchase a car immediately.

Depending on the nature of the text, argument, or conversation, one appeal will likely become most dominant, but rhetoric is generally most effective when the speaker or writer draws on multiple appeals to work in conjunction with one another. **To learn more about Aristotle's rhetorical appeals, click here.**

Components and Structure

The classical argument is made up of five components, which are most commonly composed in the following order:

- **Exordium –** The introduction, opening, or hook.
- **Narratio –** The context or background of the topic.
- **Proposito and Partitio –** The claim/stance and the argument.
- **Confirmatio and/or Refutatio –** positive proofs and negative proofs of support.
- **Peroratio –** The conclusion and call to action.

Exordium

Think of the exordium as your introduction or "hook." In your exordium, you have an opportunity to gain the interest of your reader, but you also have the responsibility of situating the argument and setting the tone of your writing. That is, you should find a way to appeal to the audience's interest while also introducing the topic and its importance in a professional and considerate manner. Something to include in this section is the significance of discussing the topic in this given moment (Kairos). This provides the issue a sense of urgency that can validate your argument.

This is also a good opportunity to consider who your intended audience is and to address their concerns within the context of the argument. For example, if you were writing an argument on the importance of technology in the English classroom and your intended audience was the board of a local high school, you might consider the following:

- New learning possibilities for students (General Audience Concerns)
- The necessity of modern technology in finding new, up-to-date information (Hook/Kairos)
- Detailed narrative of how technology in one school vastly improved student literacy (Hook/Pathos)
- Statistics showing a link between exposure to technology and rising trends in literacy (Hook/Logos)
- Quotes from education and technology professors expressing an urgency for technology in English classrooms (Hook/Ethos)

Of course, you probably should not include all of these types of appeals in the opening section of your argument—if you do, you may end up with a boring, overlong introduction that doesn't function well as a hook. Instead, consider using some of these points as evidence later on. Ask yourself: *What will be most important to my audience? What information will most likely result in the action I want to bring about?* Think about which appeal will work best to gain the attention of your intended audience and start there.

Narratio

The narratio provides relevant foundational information and describes the social context in which your topic exists. This might include information on the historical background, including recent changes or updates to the topic, social perception, important events, and

other academic research. This helps to establish the rhetorical situation for the argument: that is, the situation the argument is currently in, as impacted by events, people, opinion, and urgency of some kind. For your argument on technology in the English classroom, you might include:

- Advances in education-related technology over the centuries
- Recent trends in education technology
- A description of the importance of digital literacy
- Statistics documenting the lack of home technology for many students
- A selection of expert opinions on the usefulness of technology in all classrooms

Providing this type of information creates the setting for your argument. In other words, it provides the place and purpose for the argument to take place. By situating your argument within in a viable context, you create an opportunity to assert yourself into the discussion, as well as to give your reader a genuine understanding of your topic's importance.

Propositio and Partitio

These two concepts function together to help set up your argument. You can think of them functioning together to form a single thesis. The propositio informs your audience of your stance, and the partitio lays out your argument. In other words, the propositio tells your audience what you think about a topic, and the partitio briefly explains why you think that way and how you will prove your point.

Because this section helps to set up the rest of your argument, you should place it near the beginning of your paper. Keep in mind, however, that you should not give away all of your information or evidence in your partitio. This section should be fairly short: perhaps 3-4 sentences at most for most academic essays. You can think of this section of your argument like the trailer for a new film: it should be concise, should entice the audience, and should give them a good example of what they are going to experience, but it shouldn't include every detail. Just as a filmgoer must see an entire film to gain an understanding of its significance or quality, so too must your audience read the rest of your argument to truly understand its depth and scope.

In the case of your argument on implementing technology in the English classroom, it's important to think not only of your own motivations for pursuing this technology in the classroom, but also of what will motivate or persuade your respective audience(s). Some writing contexts call for an audience of one. Some require consideration of multiple audiences, in which case you must find ways to craft an argument which appeals to each member of your audience. For example, if your audience included a school board as well as parents andteachers, your propositio might look something like this:

"The introduction of newer digital technology in the English classroom would be beneficial for all parties involved. Students are already engaged in all kinds of technological spaces, and it is important to implement teaching practices that invest students' interests and prior

knowledge. Not only would the marriage of English studies and technology extend pedagogical opportunities, it would also create an ease of instruction for teachers, engage students in creative learning environments, and familiarize students with the creation and sharing technologies that they will be expected to use at their future colleges and careers. Plus, recent studies suggest a correlation between exposure to technology and higher literacy rates, a trend many education professionals say isn't going to change."

Note how the above paragraph considers the concerns and motivations of all three audience members, takes a stance, and provides support for the stance in a way that allows for the rest of the argument to grow from its ideas. Keep in mind that whatever you promise in your propositio and partitio (in this case the new teaching practices, literacy statistics, and professional opinion) must appear in the body of your argument. Don't make any claims here that you cannot prove later in your argument.

Confirmatio and Refutatio

These two represent different types of proofs that you will need to consider when crafting your argument. The confirmatio and refutatio work in opposite ways, but are both very effective in strengthening your claims. Luckily, both words are cognates—words that sound/look in similar in multiple languages—and are therefore are easy to keep straight. Confirmatio is a way to confirm your claims and is considered a positive proof; refutatio is a way to acknowledge and refute a counterclaim and is considered a negative proof.

The confirmatio is your argument's support: the evidence that helps to support your claims. For your argument on technology in the English classroom, you might include the following:

- Students grades drastically increase when technology is inserted into academics
- Teachers widely agree that students are more engaged in classroom activities that involve technology
- Students who accepted to elite colleges generally possess strong technological skills

The refutatio provides negative proofs. This is an opportunity for you to acknowledge that other opinions exist and have merit, while also showing why those claims do not warrant rejecting your argument.

If you feel strange including information that seems to undermine or weaken your own claims, ask yourself this: have you ever been in a debate with someone who entirely disregarded every point you tried to make without considering the credibility of what you said? Did this make their argument less convincing? That's what your paper can look like if you don't acknowledge that other opinions indeed exist and warrant attention.

After acknowledging an opposing viewpoint, you have two options. You can either concede the point (that is, admit that the point is valid and you can find no fault with their reasoning), or you can refute their claim by pointing out the flaws in your opponent's

argument. For example, if your opponent were to argue that technology is likely to distract students more than help them (an argument you'd be sure to include in your argument so as not to seem ignorant of opposing views) you'd have two options:

- Concession: You might concede this point by saying "Despite all of the potential for positive learning provided by technology, proponents of more traditional classroom materials point out the distractive possibilities that such technology would introduce into the classroom. They argue that distractions such as computer games, social media, and music-streaming services would only get in the way of learning."

In your concession of the argument, you acknowledge the merit of the opposing argument, but you should still try to flip the evidence in a positive way. Note how before conceding we include "despite all of the potential for positive learning." This reminds your reader that, although you are conceding a single point, there are still many reasons to side with you.

- Refutation: To refute this same point you might say something like, "While proponents of more traditional English classrooms express concerns about student distraction, it's important to realize that in modern times, students are already distracted by the technology they carry around in their pockets. By redirecting student attention to the technology administered by the school, this distraction is shifted to class content. Plus, with website and app blocking resources available to schools, it is simple for an institution to simply decide which websites and apps to ban and block, thereby ensuring students are on task."

Note how we acknowledged the opposing argument, but immediately pointed out its flaws using straightforward logic and a counterexample. In so doing, we effectively strengthen our argument and move forward with our proposal.

Peroratio

Your peroratio is your conclusion. This is your final opportunity to make an impact in your essay and leave an impression on your audience. In this section, you are expected to summarize and re-evaluate everything you have proven throughout your argument. However, there are multiple ways of doing this. Depending on the topic of your essay, you might employ one or more of the following in your closing:

- Call to action (encourage your audience to do something that will change the situation or topic you have been discussing).
- Discuss the implications for the future. What might happen if things continue the way they are going? Is this good or bad? Try to be impactful without being overly dramatic.
- Discuss other related topics that warrant further research and discussion.
- Make a historical parallel regarding a similar issue that can help to strengthen your argument.
- Urge a continued conversation of the topic for the future.

Remember that your peroratio is the last impression your audience will have of your argument. Be sure to consider carefully which rhetorical appeals to employ to gain a desirable effect. Make sure also to summarize your findings, including the most effective and emphatic pieces of evidence from your argument, reassert your major claim, and end on a compelling, memorable note. Good luck and happy arguing!