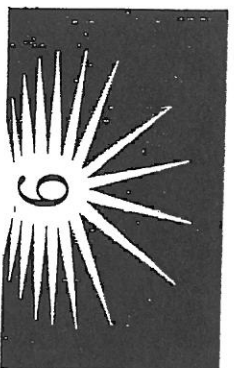


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To think about thermonuclear war in the abstract is obscene. To think about any kind of warfare with less than the whole of our mind and imagination is obscene. This is the worst treason.

— Kildare Dobbs, "The Scar"



Argumentation and Persuasion

Therefore...

So far the essays in this book have taken many paths in developing their subject. They have narrated events, they have described, they have explained, and some have entertained. But you have surely realized that in one way or another, whatever else they do, almost all the selections have tried to make a point. After all, an essay without a point is "pointless." The very use of a thesis statement implies a main idea or opinion. In this final chapter, we now focus more closely on how the writer makes that point. The process takes two complementary forms: *argumentation* and *persuasion*.

ARGUMENTATION

This word has a broad set of meanings, but here we will consider it the writer's attempt to convince the reader *through logic*. This stance implies respect: it considers the reader a mature individual capable of independent thought. It assumes the reader will also respect the thoughts

of the writer, if those thoughts are presented in a logical way. In summary, the writer and reader are *partners*: since the writer does not play on the reader's emotions, the reader considers the argument with a more open mind. If the logic makes sense, the reader may be convinced. Argumentation through logic takes two opposite forms, *deduction* and *induction*. Let's look at each.

Deduction

Deduction accepts a general principle as true, then applies it to specific cases. For over two thousand years logicians have expressed this process in a formula called the *syllogism*. Here's a well-known example:

Major premise: All men are mortal.

Minor premise: Socrates is a man.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

This chain of reasoning is about as foolproof as any: since no human in the history of the world has yet lived much longer than a century, we feel safe in assuming that no one ever will; therefore "all men are mortal." And since all historical records about Socrates portray him as a man — not, say, as a rock or horse or tree — we accept the minor premise as well. Logic tells us that if both the major and minor premises are true, then the conclusion will inevitably be true as well.

But now let's look at a syllogism whose logic is not as clear:

Major premise: Progress is good.

Minor premise: The automobile represents progress.

Conclusion: The automobile is good.

At first glance the argument may seem all right: it certainly reflects values common in our society. But let's examine the major premise, the foundation on which all the rest is built: is it true that "progress is good"? Well, how do we know until we define "progress"? Is it more jobs? More production? More cars? Higher sales? More consumption? A rising stock market? Or are all these the opposite of "progress" because our natural resources are dwindling, our highways are choked with traffic, our lakes and forests are dying of acid rain, the greenhouse effect is already disrupting our climate, and around the world two species of life per hour are becoming extinct? Our values will determine our response.

If we cannot agree on what "progress" is, how can we say that it is "good"? And how could we go on to our minor premise, saying that "the automobile represents progress"? How could we build even further on this shaky foundation, claiming in our conclusion that "the automobile is good"? Within its own framework the argument may be "valid" (or

logical). But only those who accept the original premise will view the conclusion as true. Those who do not will reject it as false.

And that is the problem with deduction: not always can we agree on premises. Five hundred years ago society ran on deduction: the King or the Church or our parents told us what to believe, and we simply applied those principles to any case that came up. But in the 20th century many of us dislike being told what to think. Not only do many people now question systems of belief such as Marxism or codes of religion, but scientists even question the previously accepted "laws" of nature. How is a person to know what is true? It is therefore no coincidence that most contemporary essays argue not through deduction but through induction.

Induction

We have discussed how deduction applies a general rule to explain particular cases. Induction is the opposite: it first observes particular cases, then from them formulates a general rule. This is the basis of the scientific way, the procedure that enables humans to conquer disease, multiply food production, and travel to the moon. It can produce faulty results, just like deduction, but the open mind required to use it appeals to our modern sensibilities. Let's take an example.

After a summer in the factory Joan thought she could afford a car, so the week before school began she bought a sporty red three-year-old Japanese model. Speeding around town with the stereo turned up was so much fun that she didn't mind the \$500-a-month payments. But when the insurance company hit her for \$2500 as a new driver, her savings took a dive. Each month she found herself paying \$100 for gas and \$150 for parking. A fall tuneup set her back \$200, and new tires \$400. Then came the repairs: \$250 for brakes, \$350 for a clutch, and \$225 for an exhaust system. In desperation Joan took a part-time job selling shoes. That helped her bankbook but took her study time. Two weeks after exams, holding a sickly grade report in her hand, Joan decided to sell the car. Nobody could have told her to, since, like most people, she likes to make up her own mind. But the long string of evidence did the teaching: now Joan knows, through *induction*, that as a student she cannot afford a car.

Induction is not infallible. Conceivably Joan's next car might never need a repair. Next year insurance might somehow drop from \$2500 to, say, \$75. Gas stations might sell premium for 10¢ a litre, and on Boxing Day a good tire might cost \$1.99. Anything is possible. But Joan feels that the consistency of her results — the steady high cost of her car ownership — will *probably* not change. Likewise, the scientist believes that her or his years of research have yielded results that will not be disproven by the very next

experiment. But in all humility both writer and scientist must consider the new principle not a fact, not an unchangeable law, but simply an idea with a very high probability of being true.

Finally, suppose that Joan analyzes her experience in an essay. If she sets up her paper as most essayists do, we will read her thesis statement near the beginning — even though the principle it states is the *result* of the evidence to come next. This tactic is not a flaw of logic: Joan simply *introduces* the main idea so we can see where we are going, then tells us how she arrived at it, letting her evidence lead inductively toward the main point which will be restated at the end. You will find this pattern at work in several of this chapter's inductive essays, for example the one by Margaret Atwood.

You will also find that, although deduction and induction represent opposite methods of logic, sometimes both are used in the same argument — as in the essay by Wendy Dennis. This does not necessarily mean weakness in logic either. Another link between these opposites is that most principles which we accept as true, and upon which we base our own deductions, originated in someone else's induction. (Newton arrived inductively at his theory of gravity, through evidence such as the famous apple that fell on his head; almost all of us now believe Newton and his theory without waiting for an apple, or anything else, to fall on our own heads.) Similarly, a conclusion we derive from our own induction could become the premise of someone else's deduction — a link in an ongoing chain of logic. To keep this chain from breaking, the individual has a double task: to check over any links provided by others, then to make his or her own link as strong as possible.

PERSUASION

We have just seen how *argumentation* seeks to convince through logic. But, whether deductive or inductive, is logic enough? Now let's look at the complementary approach of persuasion, which attempts to convince through emotion. A century of inductive research into psychology has shown that we humans are seldom rational. Even when we think we are "reasoning," we are often building arguments merely to justify what we thought or felt already. It is possible to write an argumentative essay with enough restraint to be almost purely logical. But to most people the effort is difficult and unnatural, requiring a great deal of revision, and the result may seem cold and uninviting to those who have not spent years reading the pure argumentation of scholarly journals. Most professional writers would say that a little feeling and a little colour can help an essay. But how do we take this approach without slipping into dishonesty? Let's look now at the major techniques of *persuasion* — both their uses and abuses.

Word choice: Is a person "slim," "thin," or "skinny"? Is a governmental expenditure an "investment," a "cost," a "waste," or a "boondoggle"? Is an oil spill an "incident," an "accident," a "mistake," a "crime," or an "environmental tragedy"? Essayists tend to choose the term that reflects their feeling and the feeling they hope to encourage in the readers. While deliberate choice of words is one of the central tasks of all writers, including essayists, let's not abuse the process. Bertrand Russell once quipped, "I am firm; you are stubborn; he is pig-headed." If too many of your word choices follow the model of "pig-headed," you will alarm an alert reader and unfairly overwhelm a careless one.

Example: Although examples form the basis of logical induction, they can also add colour and feeling to a persuasive essay. Choose vivid ones. An attempt to show old people as active may be helped by the example of your grandmother who skis. But avoid dubious cases like that of the man in Azerbaijan who is said to have ridden a horse at age 155.

Repetition: Although we try to cut accidental repetition from our writing (as in the case of one student who used the word "tire" 55 times in an essay about, you guessed it, tires), intentional repetition can build feeling. Stephen Leacock builds emphasis by using the word "eat" over and over in paragraph 25 of his essay (see p. 243), and in paragraphs 14–17 of her selection (see p. 324) Joy Kogawa builds feeling by starting a whole string of sentences with the contraction "it's."

Hyperbole (exaggeration): If your essay is objective in tone, stay strictly with the truth. For example, in her factual investigation of child abuse, Michele Landsberg writes that Brazil has 30 million street children; if she had stretched that figure to 50 million, we would perceive it as a lie. But when in his satirical essay Charles Gordon describes an Ottawa High school as having 15,000 students, we "feel" his exaggeration as an ironic jab at the rulers of his "Cutback World."

Analogy and figures of speech: You have seen in Chapter 6 how we can suggest a point by comparing one thing with another from a different category: prose with music, clothing with housing, or a house with a ship at sea. Analogies, and their shorter cousins similes and metaphors, are powerful tools of persuasion; avoid abusing them through name-calling. Think twice before casting a political party as a dinosaur, entrepreneurs as piranhas, or police officers as gorillas. Remember, above all, that neither analogies nor figures of speech are logical proof of anything.

Irony: When in Chapter 4 Franklin Russell shows the capelin's multitude of population as the reason for its population crash, when in Chapter 8 Judy Stoffman shows us the once-young athlete dying of old age, and when in this chapter Pierre Berton shows us the gold he had so painfully

extracted from the earth being returned underground at Fort Knox, we feel the power of irony. A writer can use this device for a lifetime without exhausting its emotional power; yet irony lends itself less easily to abuses than do many tools of persuasion, for both its use and its appreciation demand a certain exercise of intelligence.

Appeal to authority or prestige: Campaigners against nuclear weapons love to quote Albert Einstein on their dangers; after all, since his discoveries made this hardware possible, he should know. We also invite our reader to believe what a famous economist says about money, what a judge says about law, or what an educator says about education. This approach appeals to our reader's ethical sense: he or she believes these people know the facts and tell the truth. But avoid the common abuse of quoting people on matters outside their competence — Wayne Gretzky on baseball, Hulk Hogan on communism, a disgraced politician on honesty, or a convicted murderer on religion.

Fright: You can be sure that a frightened reader is an interested reader, for fright is personal: what you say in your essay could be important! Avoid cheap effects, though. Frighten a reader only with facts that really are scary (such as the number of times computer error has nearly launched a Third World War).

Climax: Whatever your argument, don't trail off from strong to weak. After a good introduction, drop to your least important or least dramatic point, then progress upward to your strongest. This very rise produces an emotion in the reader, like that of the concertgoer who thrills to the final chords of the "Hallelujah Chorus."

PLAYING FAIR IN ARGUMENTATION AND PERSUASION

We have looked at some abuses both of argumentation and of persuasion. Now read the following communication, an actual chain letter that arrived one day in the mail. What attempts does it make at *deduction* or *induction*? Are they logical? What attempts does it make at *persuasion*? Are they fair? (For your information, the person who received this letter did not send it on. So far he has not died or lost his job — but then, neither has he won a lottery!)

KISS SOMEONE YOU LOVE WHEN YOU GET THIS LETTER AND
MAKE SOME MAGIC

This paper has been sent to you for good luck. The original copy is in New England. It has been around the world nine times. The luck has

sent it to you. You will receive good luck within four days of receiving this letter, provided you send it back out. THIS IS NO JOKE. You will receive it in the mail. Send copies to people that you think need good luck. Don't send money as fate has no price. Do not keep this letter. It must leave your hands within 96 hours. An R.A.F. officer became a hero. Joe Elliot received \$40,000, and lost it because he broke the chain. While in the Philippines, Gene Welch lost his wife six days after receiving this letter. He failed to circulate the letter. However, before her death she had won \$50,000.00 in a lottery. The money was transferred to him four days after he decided to mail out this letter. Please send twenty copies of this letter and see what happens in four days. The chain came from Venezuela and was written in South America. Since the copy must make a tour of the world you must make copies and send them to your friends and associates. After a few days you will get a surprise. This is true even if you are not superstitious. Do note the following: Constantine Dias received the chain in 1953. He asked his secretary to type twenty copies and send them out. A few days later he won a lottery of \$2,000,000. Aria Daddit, an office employee, received the letter and forgot that it had to leave his hands within 96 hours. He lost his job. Later, finding the letter again, he mailed out twenty copies. A few days later he got a better job. Dalen Fairchild received the letter and not believing, threw it away. Nine days later he died.

PLEASE SEND NO MONEY. PLEASE DON'T IGNORE THIS.
IT WORKS!

Note: No essay in this chapter adopts a stance of pure logic to the exclusion of emotion, or of pure emotion to the exclusion of logic. The eight essays represent different proportions of both elements, and are arranged in approximate order from most argumentative to most persuasive.

For more examples of argumentation and persuasion, see these essays in other chapters:

Edgar Rousset, "Letter from Prison," p. 205

Doris Anderson, "The 51-Per-Cent Minority," p. 138

David Suzuki,

"Hidden Lessons," p. 98

"Native Peoples Liken Ruination of Nature to Church

Destruction," p. 157

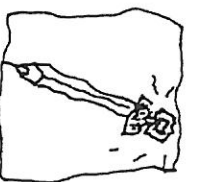
B. W. Powe, "Book Ends?" p. 112

Margaret Laurence, "Where the World Began," p. 162

5. How much did Berton learn from his experience in the gold fields? How large a part of your own education has come from summer or part-time work?
6. "It will make a man out of you!" people said of young Berton's job. Define what you think they meant by "man." Do we still hear this expression? Identify any STEREOTYPES you sense behind these words.
7. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** Think of a job you have had. Write a page of rough notes about it, then, looking these over, decide how socially useful, or useless the job was. Now write an inductive argument showing the evidence for your conclusion. After a rapid first draft, examine what you have said: Do the examples support your THESIS? If not, change your thesis to reflect what you have discovered while writing. Are your examples fully enough explained to make sense to the reader? If not, elaborate. Or is there deadwood? Trim it out. Read your second-to-last version aloud to help fine-tune its style. Read the final version aloud to the class.

Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.

Bonnie Laing



An Ode to the User-Friendly Pencil

"Anyone can write," says Bonnie Laing, "it's the rewrites that kill you." She gave her own essay three drafts, on the very computer whose behaviour she describes below. Laing is a freelance advertising copywriter who also publishes essays and fiction (her short stories have appeared in *Fiddlehead*, *Quarry*, and *Montreal*, and her humorous articles in *Toronto Life*, the *Toronto Star*, and *Canadian Living*). Originally from *Montreal*, Laing did an Honours B.A. in English at *Queen's*, then, as she states, was a hippie for two years in England. But once arrived in *Toronto*, she quickly entered advertising. As a "social marketer" of food and other "lifestyle products," Laing needs a keener sense of audience than even the essayist, in producing "target-specific" text, she says, you have to keep asking yourself "Who is this person I'm writing for?" Although she did have publication in mind, the audience of "An Ode to the User-Friendly Pencil" was herself: she vented her frustrations, felt better, then found that others liked the piece too. The *Toronto Globe* and *Mail* had already published three of her essays in its "Mermaid Inn" column. It published this fourth on April 29, 1989.

Recently I acquired a computer. Or perhaps I should say it acquired me. My therapist claims that acknowledging the superior partner in a destructive relationship is the first step toward recovery. I should point out that prior to this acquisition, my idea of modern technology at its best was frozen waffles. My mastery of business machines had advanced only as far as the stapler.

I was persuaded to make this investment by well-meaning friends who said the word-processing capacity of a computer would (a) make me a better writer (b) make me a more productive writer and (c) make me a richer writer. I pointed out that Chaucer was a pretty good writer even though he used a quill, and Dickens managed to produce 15 novels and numerous collections of short stories without so much as a typewriter. But I have to admit that option C got to me, even if I couldn't figure out how spending \$3,000 on a piece of molded plastic was going to make me wealthier.

To date, my association with the computer has not been too successful. It has proved to be very sensitive to everything but my needs. At the last breakdown (his, not mine) the service man commented that it should have been called an Edsel, not an Epson, and suggested an exorcist be consulted. Needless to say, I am not yet in a position to open a numbered Swiss bank account.

But they say hardship teaches you who your friends are. And so, my computer experience has forced me to spend a lot more time with an old friend, the pencil. Its directness and simplicity have proven to be refreshing. In fact, the more I wrestled with my microchips (whatever they are), the more convinced I became that the pencil is superior to the computer. Allow me to cite a few examples.

To start with the purchase decision, you don't have to ask for a bank loan to buy a pencil. Since most pencils are not manufactured in Japan, you don't feel you're upsetting the nation's balance of trade by buying one.

In fact, pencils are constructed in part from that most Canadian of natural resources — wood. By buying pencils you create employment and prosperity for dozens of people in British Columbia. Well, a few anyway.

Of course, like most people I rarely *buy* a pencil, preferring to pick them up free from various places of employment, in the mistaken belief that they are a legitimate fringe benefit. It's best not to make that assumption about office computers.

Operationally, the pencil wins over the computer hands down. You can learn to use a pencil in less than 10 seconds. Personally, at the age of 2, I mastered the technology in 3.2 seconds. To be fair, erasing did take a further 2.4 seconds. I've never had to boot a pencil, interface with it or program it. I just write with it.

Compared to a computer, a pencil takes up far less space on a desk and it can be utilized in a car, bathroom or a telephone booth without the aid of batteries. You can even use one during an electrical storm. Pencils don't cause eye strain and no one has ever screamed, after four hours of creative endeavor, "The . . . pencil ate my story!"

Pencils are wonderfully singleminded. They aren't used to open car doors, make the morning coffee or remind you that your Visa payment is overdue. They're user-friendly. (For the uninitiated, see comments on vocabulary.)

Of course, the technologically addicted among you will argue that the options of a pencil are rather limited. But the software of a pencil is both cheap and simple, consisting of a small rubber tip located at one end of the unit. A pencil is capable of producing more fonts or typefaces than any word processor depending on the operator's skill.

Its graphic capability is limited only by the operator's talent, an element referred to as the Dürer or Da Vinci Factor. Backup to a pencil can usually be found in your purse or pocket. Although a pencil has no memory, many of us who write badly consider that to be an advantage.

But it's in the area of maintenance that the pencil really proves its superiority. Should a pencil break down, all you have to do to render it operational again, is buy a small plastic device enclosing a sharp metal strip, a purchase that can be made for under a dollar. A paring knife, a piece of broken glass or even your teeth can be used in an emergency. For the more technically advanced, an electronic pencil sharpener can be obtained, but I should point out that these devices don't run on electrical power but by devouring one-third of the pencil.

You never have to take a pencil to a service department located on an industrial site on the outskirts of Moose Factory. Neither do you have to do without them for two weeks before discovering that the malfunction is not covered by the warranty and that the replacement part is on a boat from Korea.

What finally won me over to the pencil was its lack of social pretension. For instance, very few people suffer the nagging doubt that their intelligence is below that of a pencil. No one has ever claimed that a pencil put them out of a job. And the pencil has not created a whole new class of workers who consider themselves superior to, let's say, crayon operators. At parties, you meet very few people who will discuss pencils with a fervor normally found only at student rallies in Tehran. Fewer people boast about being 'pencil literate.'

Of course, the pencil is not without its flaws. It has a nasty habit of hiding when most needed. If located beside a telephone, it will break spontaneously if a caller wishes to leave a message. Those aspiring to be professional writers should note that editors are unreasonably prejudiced against submissions in pencil.

But a pencil won't argue with you if you wish to write more than 50 lines to the page. It won't insist on correcting your whimsical use of grammar, and it won't be obsolete 10 seconds after you mortgage your first-born to buy one. Just in case you remain unconvinced, I ask you, can you imagine chewing on a computer while balancing your cheque book? And what do computer operators use to scratch that place in the middle of the back where they can't reach? The defence rests.
 AAA

Further Reading:

Heather Menzies, *Women and the Chip*
 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Structure:

1. Bonnie Laing begins her whole essay of *contrast* with a series of shorter contrasts. Identify each in paragraph 1, and tell how it prepares us for the argument that follows.
2. Identify Laing's THESIS STATEMENT.
3. Identify the sentence of TRANSITION that moves us from Laing's introduction to the body of her argument.
4. Laing's argument in favour of the "user-friendly pencil" is an exceptionally clear example of *comparison and contrast*. Does she proceed "point by point" or by "halves"?
5. The body of Laing's argument has four parts (par. 5-7, 8-12, 13-14, and 15). To organize her first draft she gave each part a heading, then later removed it. Restore those headings, labelling each division of her argument.
6. What techniques of closing does Laing use in her final two paragraphs?

Style:

1. In paragraph 2 Laing dismisses her computer as a \$3000 "piece of molded plastic." Point out five other IMAGES calculated to further her point of view.
2. In paragraph 4 Laing spends "a lot more time with an old friend, the pencil." Point out three other examples of PERSONIFICATION in her essay.
3. In paragraph 11 the pencil's "software" is its eraser. What device of humour has Laing used here?
4. In paragraph 8 Laing states, "I've never had to boot a pencil, interface with it or program it. I just write with it." Point out all the elements of repetition in this passage, and their effects. Are these effects accidental or deliberate?

Argumentation and Persuasion:

1. Laing's essay is a *comparison and contrast* as clearly organized and developed as any in the "Comparison and Contrast" chapter of this book. How well does the pattern lend itself to her *argumentative* and *persuasive* purpose? Are essayists free to use any pattern that supports their purpose?
2. Is Laing's argument *deductive* or *inductive*? If it is deductive, point out its major and minor premises. If it is inductive, point out five major pieces of evidence that lead to the author's conclusion.

3. To what extent is Laing's essay based on *argumentation*? To what extent on *persuasion*? Defend your answer with examples.
4. Laing's TONE is rich in IRONY. As an example, point out every irony of paragraph 15. What is the overall effect?

Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

1. Are you a technophobe, like Laing? Or do you rejoice in high technology? Defend your answers with examples.
2. Do you write with a word processor? If so, tell all the contrasts you have personally experienced between "high-tech" and "low-tech" writing. Give specific examples.
3. The American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau, who left town life for his cabin by Walden Pond, wrote, "Our life is frittered away by detail. . . . Simplify, simplify." In your opinion, has high technology simplified or complicated our lives? Defend your answer with personal examples.
4. PROCESS IN WRITING: Choose one high-tech invention that you have used, and write an inductive essay that praises or condemns it. First *freewrite on your subject for at least five minutes — automatically, never letting your user-friendly pencil stop — then look over what you have produced in order to learn your point of view. Now take more notes, gathering examples. Arrange these in order from least to most important, and from this rough outline write a draft. In the second draft adjust your tone: Is your whole argument serious and objective? Is it argumentative? Or is it more like Laing's essay: humorous, subjective, and therefore persuasive? Whichever it is, be consistent. Now read your argument aloud to family members or classmates, revise any part that fails to work on your audience, then write the final version.*

Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.

