

Exercises for Tutorial 33. Understanding Arguments: Rhetoric

Notes

Instructions: Write notes to answer the following questions. *Type or write in the answer boxes.*

1. What is an argument? In your own words, give as many definitions of "argument" as you can.

2. In your own words, explain what we mean by "rhetoric" and why it is important for effective persuasion.

3. In your own words, explain how understanding rhetoric can help you become a better critical thinker, both as a reader and a writer.

4. In your own words, explain what a **refutation** is, and how you can use it to develop your own argument.

5. In your own words, explain what a concession is, and how it can strengthen your arguments.

6. Why should you include counter-arguments in your own writings?

7. Explain the difference between a concession and a refutation.

8. What is **Rogerian strategy**, and what purpose does it serve?

9. In your own words, define a **rhetorical question** and explain why writers should avoid them.

10. Explain the terms: **rhetoric, counter-argument, concession, refutation, Rogerian Strategy** and **rhetorical questions**.

Exercise 1

Instructions: Identify the rhetorical element in each sentence, and decide its purpose

Type, write, or copy-paste the rhetorical element into the answer box and identify its type. Then describe its purpose. When finished, check the "Answer Key" at the end of this file.

1. Frank is a really arrogant man. I know you like him, but he never even acknowledges my presence. In fact, he's rude and offhand to everyone so far as I can tell.

2. This document, a diary that is supposed to be by the famous serial killer Jack the Ripper, can't be authentic. It's not written in his handwriting and it sounds phony. Who could believe this drivel?

3. Thank you for your interest in our company. We were very interested in your application, and you have a very impressive resume. However, after consideration, we are unable to offer you the job because you do not have sufficient qualifications.

4. Television gives us wall-to-wall coverage of violent crime, and this has led us to believe that violence is spiraling out of control. But in fact, this is not the case. Violent crime has been steadily dropping for over ten years; and in any case, violence correlates most closely with the percentage of men between the ages of 15 and 35. When this age group increases in number, violent crime goes up; when it decreases, as it has been doing, violent crime goes down.

5. I can see why you feel discouraged about getting a D in this class--it's depressing to work hard and not get the result you want. But you really have made a lot of progress, and you should feel confident about passing next time around.

6. The suspect has been identified by two eyewitnesses and has a strong motive for the murder. I mean, how much evidence does it take to convince you? Of course he's guilty.

7. This restaurant is very noisy and the service isn't so great, but their clam chowder is so good, it's worth putting up with almost anything.

8. Sure, gangsta rap has got energy and there are plenty of talented people working in the field. But in the end, it's crummy music. The few melodies mostly come from other songs, and are not remarkable; the controversial "hard-core" depictions of street life are just the usual dimwitted macho posturing about street life. It's all been done before, by blues and folk singers, and done much better.

9. Gangsta rap can be nasty. It can be crude, violent, boastful. It can even be boring. But that's true of all music. So what? Rap, at its best, has an energy you don't hear anywhere else. It tells stories that no one else wants to tell. You don't have to like it, but you have to admit that it's real art.

10. Come out of the water! Ocean Beach looks calm enough, and I know you're dying to go swimming, but trust me: it's much more dangerous than it looks. It kills several people every year.

[Click here to check the answer key.](#)

Exercise 2

Instructions: Read the following short essay. Identify the following elements:

- refutations
- concessions
- rhetorical questions
- Rogerian strategy

Type, write, or copy-paste the essay below into the answer box. Then change the text style to identify the elements in this way:

- *Italicize rhetorical questions.*
- **Make Concessions bold.**
- Underline Rogerian elements.
- Make refutations subscript.

[If you are using a computer and pasting the essay, you can select the text then right-click to change the text style.] When finished, check the "Answer Key" at the end of this file.

[Click here to check the answer key.](#)

[Essay]

The Off-Switch Belongs to Parents

With so much junk on television today, it's important that we make sure our children are watching programs that won't do them any harm. So we need to decide who is responsible for monitoring what our children watch on television. Those who support censorship of sex and violence in network broadcasting would argue that television just shouldn't show programs that contain material unsuitable for children. These people believe that the networks themselves should monitor children's viewing habits. Their position is understandable; it would be ideal if we only ever saw the kinds of things we liked. But do you really want to have some stranger decide these things for you? I believe that it is parents, not the TV network executives, who should decide what their children should or shouldn't see. Rather than ask executives to make such choices on our behalf by censoring "unsuitable" programs, parents should exercise this control themselves by hitting the "Off" switch.

In the first place, parents should control children's viewing because they are the only people who can make such moral choices on behalf of their own families. We can't ask network executives to make those choices for everyone. There is no consensus on what makes a program "good" or "bad." As a fairly conservative Christian, I'd probably make very different choices from a progressive or agnostic parent. But I don't mind my kids watching "Sabrina the Teenage Witch," while my neighbor, a fundamentalist Christian, objects to that program as suspiciously Satanic. Nor do I mind "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers," which my liberal friends have banned in their households because it is too violent. We both have the right to bring up our children in a way that accords with our individual morals. So we should be allowed to make such choices for ourselves, and not have them imposed on us by other people--namely, a network censor.

What's more, there really isn't much evidence that violence and sex on television causes criminal behavior. To be sure, a lot of studies have been published showing that children do indeed imitate what they see on screen, and if that includes a lot of punching and kicking, they'll punch and kick. But it's a mistake to suppose that this means that the punching and kicking children will become violent. Those children whose parents tell them to stop it, and who are taught that movie behavior is not the same as real-life behavior, quickly settle down and learn the difference between action heroics and good manners. Would you want your child labeled as a future "criminal," just because he did kung-fu kicks around the living room?

In the third place, maybe we do children no favors by protecting them from every ugly thing we see. We shouldn't sanitize too much. Much of life really is ugly and violent. Children should see some of these things themselves, first-hand, to learn how to cope with them. Children who only see what is pleasant and safe are likely to grow into adulthood too naïve and innocent to cope with the world as it really is. This may sound like a terrible thing to say. Of course we all want our children to be shielded from harm, but do you really want your kids to be weak and unable to deal with the world? What kind of a society will we have then?

Ultimately, the family is always the first and most important influence a child has. Parents teach children to walk and talk; they also teach them what is right and wrong, what is unacceptable and acceptable behavior. It is certainly true that some parents fail in this duty, and fail terribly. But that doesn't mean that no parents can be trusted. Most of us are dedicated and sensible, and we should make choices for our children ourselves--and that includes television programming.

Answer Key for Exercise 1

1. Frank is a really arrogant man. I know you like him, but he never even acknowledges my presence. In fact, he's rude and offhand to everyone so far as I can tell.

I know you like him = Rogerian/concession. The speaker acknowledges another person's point of view, and perhaps implies that Frank has good qualities, then focuses on what Frank does wrong.

2. This document, a diary that is supposed to be by the famous serial killer Jack the Ripper, can't be authentic. It's not written in his handwriting and it sounds phony. Who could believe this drivel?

Who could believe this drivel? = Rhetorical question. As you can see, this observation would likely annoy someone who *did* believe it!

3. Thank you for your interest in our company. We were very interested in your application, and you have a very impressive resume. However, after consideration, we are unable to offer you the job because you do not have sufficient qualifications.

We were very interested in your application = Rogerian. This shows the reader that you took an interest!

You have a very impressive resume = concession / Rogerian. This indicates that despite your not being hired, they do recognize your good qualities.

4. Television gives us wall-to-wall coverage of violent crime, and this has led us to believe that violence is spiralling out of control. But in fact, this is not the case. Violent crime has been steadily dropping for over ten years; and in any case, violence correlates most closely with the percentage of men between the ages of 15 and 35. When this age group increases in number, violent crime goes up; when it decreases, as it has been doing, violent crime goes down.

This is not the case. Violent crime has been steadily dropping for over ten years = Refutation. The speaker brings up a common misconception, then explains why it isn't true.

5. I can see why you feel discouraged about getting a D in this class--it's depressing to work hard and not get the result you want. But you really have made a lot of progress, and you should feel confident about passing next time around.

I can see why you feel discouraged ... It's depressing ... not to get the result you want = Rogerian. The speaker shows that he understands how the other person feels.

6. The suspect has been identified by two eye-witnesses and has a strong motive for the murder. I mean, how much evidence does it take to convince you? Of course he's guilty.

How much evidence does it take to convince you? = Rhetorical question. Again, this shows how annoying rhetorical questions can be. This one implies that if you aren't convinced, you're unreasonable.

7. This restaurant is very noisy and the service isn't so great, but their clam chowder is so good, it's worth putting up with almost anything.

The restaurant is very noisy and the service isn't so great = concession. The speaker identifies potential arguments against the restaurant that he agrees with, but then uses the concession to explain what really matters to him (clam chowder, mmmm!)

8. Sure, gangsta rap has got energy and there are plenty of talented people working in the field. But in the end, it's crummy music. The few melodies mostly come from other songs, and are not remarkable; the controversial "hard-core" depictions of street life are just the usual dimwitted macho posturing about street life. It's all been done before, by blues and folk singers, and done much better.

Sure, gangsta rap has got energy and there are plenty of talented people working in the field = Concession. The speaker identifies qualities about rap that he admires, before explaining why he doesn't admire it all that much.

9. Gangsta rap can be nasty. It can be crude, violent, boastful. It can even be boring. But that's true of all music. So what? Rap, at its best, has an energy you don't hear anywhere else. It tells stories that no one else wants to tell. You don't have to like it, but you have to admit that it's real art.

Gangsta rap can be nasty. It can be crude, violent, boastful. It can even be boring. = Concession. Just as in the previous example, the speaker identifies criticisms of rap that she agrees with, then goes on to explain why she nevertheless enjoys and admires rap music.

10. Come out of the water! Ocean Beach looks calm enough, and I know you're dying to go swimming, but trust me: it's much more dangerous than it looks. It kills several people every year.

Ocean Beach looks calm enough, and I know you're dying to go swimming = Concession / Rogerian. The speaker agrees that the beach doesn't look dangerous, and shows that he understands how the other person feels.

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Answer Key for Exercise 2

Here is an analysis of the logical and rhetorical elements of the essay.

- *Rhetorical questions are italicized.*
- **Concessions are bolded.**
- Rogerian elements are underlined.
- REFUTATIONS ARE CAPITALIZED.

This is not completely cut-and-dried--you'll notice that there is some overlap--but your analysis should look something like this:

The Off-Switch Belongs to Parents

With so much junk on television today, it's important that we make sure our children are watching programs that won't do them any harm. So we need to decide who is responsible for monitoring what our children watch on television. Those who support censorship of sex and violence in network broadcasting

would argue that television just shouldn't show programs that contain material unsuitable for children. These people believe that the networks themselves should monitor children's viewing habits. Their position is understandable; it would be ideal if we only ever saw the kinds of things we liked. *But do you really want to have some stranger decide these things for you?* I believe that it is parents, not the TV network executives, who should decide what their children should or shouldn't see. Rather than ask executives to make such choices on our behalf by censoring "unsuitable" programs, parents should exercise this control themselves by hitting the "Off" switch.

In the first place, parents should control children's viewing because they are the only people who can make such moral choices on behalf of their own families. MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT NETWORKS ARE ABLE TO EXERCISE THIS JUDGMENT, BUT IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY, IT'S NO LONGER POSSIBLE FOR A SINGLE GROUP OF PEOPLE TO MAKE MORAL CHOICES ON EVERYONE'S BEHALF. We can't ask network executives to make those choices for everyone. There is no consensus on what makes a program "good" or "bad." As a fairly conservative Christian, I'd probably make very different choices from a progressive or agnostic parent. But I don't mind my kids watching "Sabrina the Teenage Witch," while my neighbor, a fundamentalist Christian, objects to that program as suspiciously Satanic. Nor do I mind "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers," which my liberal friends have banned in their households because it is too violent. We both have the right to bring up our children in a way that accords with our individual morals. So we should be allowed to make such choices for ourselves, and not have them imposed on us by other people namely, a network censor.

What's more, despite the widely-held belief that violent television provokes violence in children, the evidence just isn't there. STUDY AFTER STUDY HAS FAILED TO ASSERT A CLEAR, CAUSAL CONNECTION BETWEEN WHAT CHILDREN WATCH AND HOW THEY EVENTUALLY TURN OUT. **To be sure, a lot of studies have been published showing that children do indeed imitate what they see on screen, and if that includes a lot of punching and kicking, they'll punch and kick.** But it's a mistake to suppose that this means that the punching kicking children will become violent. Those children whose parents tell them to stop it, and who are taught that movie behavior is not the same as real-life behavior, quickly settle down and learn the difference between action heroics and good manners. *Would you want your child labelled as a future "criminal," just because he did kung-fu kicks around the living room?*

In the third place, maybe we do children no favors by protecting them from every ugly thing we see. We shouldn't sanitize too much. Much of life really is ugly and violent. Children should see some of these things themselves, first-hand, to learn how to cope with them. Children who only see what is pleasant and safe are likely to grow into adulthood too naïve and innocent to cope with the world as it really is. This may sound like a terrible thing to say. **Of course we all want our children to be shielded from harm,** but *do you really want your kids to be weak and unable to deal with the world? What kind of a society will we have then?*

Ultimately, the family is always the first and most important influence a child has. Parents teach children to walk and talk; they also teach them what is right and wrong, what is unacceptable and acceptable behavior. **It is certainly true that some parents fail in this duty, and fail terribly.** But that doesn't mean that no parents can be trusted. Most of us are dedicated and sensible, and we should make choices for our children ourselves--and that includes television programming.

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