

Here are the framing techniques:

First, find audience **commonplace words** that favor you.

Next, define the issue in the **broadest context**—one that appeals to the values of the widest audience.

Then, **deal with the specific problem** or choice, making sure you speak in the **future tense**.

The definition tools fall under the strategy of **stance**, the position you take at the beginning of an argument. If the facts don't work for you, define (or redefine) the issue. If that won't work, belittle the importance of what's being debated. If that fails, claim the whole argument is irrelevant. In sum, stance comes down (in descending order) to

Facts

Definition

Quality

Relevance.

FROM JAY HEINRICHS,
THANK YOU FOR ARGUING
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13. Control the Argument



HOMER SIMPSON'S CANONS OF LOGIC

Logos, inside out

A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks.

— BEN JONSON

Enough with the care and feeding of your audience. You made it think you're a Boy Scout, insinuated yourself into its mood, put it in an ingenuous state, offered it the rich rewards of its own advantage, and plucked the beliefs and desires from its mind. Now let's use that audience to your own advantage. It's time to apply some *logos* and win our own goals.

The commonplace gives us our starting point. Homer Simpson employs a pair of them—the value of safe streets and his audience's presumed affection for the weak and nerdy—in a speech he gives to a group of Australians.

In America we stopped using corporal punishment and things have never been better. The streets are safe. Old people strut confidently through the darkest alleys. And the weak and nerdy are admired for their computer programming abilities. So, like us, let your children run wild and free, because as the saying goes, "Let your children run wild and free."

► **Persuasion Alert**
 I bring in Homer Simpson so often because *The Simpsons* satirizes America's social fallacies; its humor relies on twists of logic. You couldn't find a better set of examples in Plato.

The passage is doubly notable, for its logical use of commonplaces and its bold unconcern for the facts. If you want your streets to be safe and your nerds to be cherished, Homer says, don't hit your kids. (Whether Australians actually want their nerds to be cherished, and whether safe streets are an outcome of unhit kids, lie beyond our discussion at the moment.) Homer dangles before them the Advantageous Prize that every rational persuader should offer, and he struts confidently through the dark alley of his own ignorance.

For many of us, the most frustrating thing about an argument is the feeling that we don't know enough about an issue. That happens to be where *logos* shines, because it allows us to skip the facts when we have to, focusing instead on rational strategy, definition, and subtle tactics of manipulation.

Logos also works well in defense, since you don't have time to fact-check every argument. What do you say to a kid who swears she has finished her homework? How should you respond to a television commercial that attacks a candidate's war record? Is there any way to listen to talk radio and separate fact from fiction? The nastiest political ads, the most underhanded sales pitches, and the stupidest human mistakes all rely on our ignorance of logic.

Bad logic wastes time, and it ruins our health and our budgets. Children use it to torture their parents ("All the other kids get to"). Parents respond with bad logic ("If your friends told you to go jump in a lake . . ."). Doctors kill patients with it ("There's nothing wrong with you; the tests came back negative"). It can make you fat ("Eat all of it—children are starving in Africa"). Candidates base their campaigns on it (John Kerry: "Every American family has to live within their means. Their government should, too"). We even wage wars over bad logic ("If we pull out now, our soldiers will have died in vain"). Push polls—fake surveys with loaded questions—are bad logic ("Do you support government-financed abortions and a woman's right to choose?"). These are no mere logical punctilios. We're talking credit lines and waistlines, life and death, the future of human existence!

Excuse the hyperbole—which, by the way, is not necessarily illogical, despite what you learned in school or on *Star Trek*. My own logical education before college consisted entirely of Mr. Spock, who led me to believe that anything tainted by emotion or values was "illogical" and that my status as an Earthling got me off the hook. Vulcans could be logical; the rest of us were hopeless. This was fine with me, because his kind of logic was a one-man date repellent. But in rhetoric—and among some branches of formal logic—emotions do not a fallacy make. Mr. Spock, it turns out, was no philosopher. He was just a stiff.

The elementary logic taught in school is a step up from *Star Trek*, but it

fails to apply to many real-life situations. One reason is that, while rhetoric helps us understand how humans communicate, formal logic has little use on this planet. Strictly logical argument, called *dialectic*, is mathematical and formulaic. While it trains the mind and can help you learn to spot fallacies, dialectic is too rule-bound to help you in daily conversation. In fact, some arguments that count as fallacies in formal logic are perfectly kosher in rhetoric.

In this chapter, we'll deal with formal logic—not formulaically, but in a way you can actually use. In the next two chapters, we'll get into specific fallacies and rhetorical fouls that bollix up our arguments.

Socrates and Sports Cars

You can already see that *logos* means more than just logic. Bible translators interpret it as "word." But the Greeks also applied *logos* to logic, conversation, delivering a speech, and all the words and strategy that go into an argument. The tools of *logos* let you apply facts (if you have them), values, and attitudes to a particular problem.

Rhetorical logic works differently than the logic taught in philosophy classes, thank God. Rhetoric is much less boring, for one thing, and far, far more persuasive. While philosophy scorns public opinion, in rhetoric, the audience's beliefs are at least as important as the facts. For persuasive purposes, the opinion of your audience is as good as what it knows; and what it *thinks* is true counts the same as the truth.

To show you how rhetorical logic works, I have to give you a brief—very brief—summary of the philosophical kind of logic, starting with that torturous device, the *sylllogism*. You may have suffered from syllogisms sometime during your education. They're a widely used introduction to logic, and almost entirely useless in day-to-day conversation. Aristotle himself seemed committed to make the syllogism as boring as possible. Here's an example he himself used to illustrate it:

► Meanings

The gospel of John, written in Greek, begins, "In the beginning was *logos*"—in the beginning was the *word*. You could also translate the sentence as, "In the beginning was the *plan*." The early Renaissance philosopher and rhetorician Desiderius Erasmus chose, "In the beginning was the *speech*." Erasmus, who uncovered many of Cicero's writings in old libraries and monasteries, thought it perfectly natural for the Creator to talk, or even persuade, the world

All men are mortal.
Socrates is a man.
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Many syllogisms have this “Well, duh” quality to them, but they make more sense if you see them thrown up on a screen. Marketers use a kind of syllogism all the time in Venn diagrams—those interlocking circles in PowerPoint presentations. Suppose the automotive designers at Ford came out with a new muscle car called the Priapic, designed to appeal to testosterone-challenged men aged twenty-five to forty. What’s the size of the potential market? The Priapic marketing team pulls the stats and projects them as circles at the next managers’ meeting. The biggest circle contains the annual number of car buyers; the second circle contains all twenty-five-to forty-year-old men; and the third shows the number of households with incomes that can afford a Priapic. The target is the overlap between youngish men and affluent households. The three circles form a syllogism: things slotted into categories to reach a conclusion.

Similarly, you could convert Aristotle’s syllogism about Socrates into a Venn diagram. Make a big circle representing all mortals, place the circle for men inside it, and then a dot for Socrates within the men’s circle. The market size of male mortals named Socrates totals one. Logicians call this sort of reasoning “categorical” thinking. Most political labeling falls under this kind of logic, with candidates trying to shove one another like sumo wrestlers into unflattering Venn circles. All Democrats are tax-and-spend liberals; my opponent is a Democrat; therefore, my opponent is a tax-and-spend liberal.

A second kind of syllogism comes from “if-then” thinking:

If most men aged twenty-five to forty read “lad” magazines, and
If ads in these magazines sell lots of cars,
Then we should advertise the Priapic in lad mags.

That’s formal logic. Start with something true, follow it with another truth, and you reach a conclusion that also must be true. The rhetorical version works a little differently, since it concerns decisions instead of “the truth.” Assumptions or beliefs—commonplaces—work just as well as facts. Our Priapic marketers could use the commonplace “Babes go for guys with the newest sports cars.”

If babes go for Priapic drivers, and
If you go for babes,
Then you should buy a Priapic.

But that ad copy would appeal only to philosophy majors. Even the Greeks found syllogisms boring, because the middle line tends to be painfully obvious. One already assumes that the Priapic market is babe-prone.

Aristotle made rhetorical logic zippier by streamlining the syllogism, ditching the middle line and leaving out the “if-then” part. The result is a neat little argument packet called the **enthymeme**. It takes a commonplace—a belief, value, or attitude—and uses it as a first step in convincing the audience.

Let’s apply Aristotle’s enthymeme to the Priapic.

Babes go for Priapic owners.
You should buy a Priapic.

When a car ad portrays a pouty young woman, in other words, it simply employs Aristotle’s enthymeme. The car ad, the enthymeme, and the tired old syllogism all fall under **deductive logic**. It starts with a **premise**—a fact or commonplace—and applies it to a specific case to reach a conclusion. “All men are mortal” is a general concept. “Socrates is mortal”—that’s the specific case. Conclusion: “Socrates is mortal.”

Inductive logic works the opposite way, taking specific cases and using them to prove a premise or conclusion:

Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, and anyone else
born more than a century and a half ago
are dead.

[The enthymeme would skip the obvious line “All of them were human.”]

Therefore, all humans are mortal.

Sherlock Holmes made deduction a household word when he applied commonsense principles—commonplaces—to his detective-story observations. In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Holmes guesses that poor ingenious

► **Argument Tool**
THE ENTHYMEME
(EN-THIH-MEEM):
A logic sandwich that slaps a commonplace and a conclusion together. “Enthymeme” means “something in the mind.” It uses a commonplace—something in the audience’s mind—to support a choice.

TRY THIS WITH A PAPER OR MEMO
Use an enthymeme to nail down your central argument. Choose a commonplace or commonly accepted axiom and link it to your conclusion. “To gain more point-of-purchase awareness, we should simplify our logo.” Now use that as an abstract on your title page.

Dr. Watson had been out in the rain (in London? No way!) and that he had an incompetent servant girl:

SHERLOCK HOLMES: It is simplicity itself . . . my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting specimen of the London slavey.

Leaving aside that passage's fetishistic tone, you can see Sherlockian deduction working the way the Aristotelian enthymeme does:

If a shoe sole with scoring marks means
careless scraping,
And if such careless scraping must be done
by an incompetent serving girl,
Then a gentleman with a carelessly scraped
shoe has an incompetent serving girl.

Like Aristotle, Holmes skips the middle line—careless scraping equals incompetent servant—because his snooty Victorian audience already knows that.

Similarly, Annie could have used an enthymeme's deductive logic to talk Kathy into voting for a Democrat.

ANNIE: All politicians are alike when it comes to taxes; the only difference is that the Republicans won't admit it. Given two politicians, I'd vote for the more honest one.

Put it in a pair of syllogisms, and the logic works like this:

If all politicians are alike on taxes, and
If taxes are bad,
Then all politicians are equally bad.

► **Useful Figure**

The *paralipsis* ("leaving aside") mentions something by saying you're not going to mention it. It's the not-to-mention figure, as in, "Not to mention the fact that you snore like a buzz saw in bed." It makes you sound fairer than you are—denying you'll kick a man when he's down while digging a boot into his ribs.

But:

If the Republicans lie about raising taxes, and
If lying is bad,
Then the Republicans are worse than the Democrats.

Since Kathy presumably hates both taxes and lying, Annie can skip the middle line in each syllogism. Deduction is really quite elementary, as our smug detective would say. Take something the audience believes—a fact or commonplace—and apply that premise to a choice or conclusion that you want the audience to accept. Skip the part that goes without saying—taxes are bad, lying is bad—and voilà! An enthymeme.

Deductive logic starts with a general premise and works toward the specific, applying a fact or commonplace (all politicians are alike) to a situation (the election). The premise is the **proof**. The choice you want your audience to make is the **conclusion**. Every logical argument has a proof and a conclusion.

In deliberative argument, the conclusion is a *choice*—you can take your umbrella, or you can take your chances. The persuader bears the burden of proof; it's up to her to back up the choice she wants you to make. She can prove her point in two ways:

Examples In this kind of argument, the evidence leads to either a premise or a conclusion. This is *inductive logic*. "Nine out of ten dentists recommend Dazzle toothpaste." The dentists are the examples. They comprise the proof. If they think it works, you probably will, too. On the other hand, if the ad said, "Nine out of ten toothless convicts recommend Dazzle toothpaste," you probably wouldn't buy it. The proof wouldn't stand up.

Premise This is part of *deductive logic*. A premise is something the audience knows or believes.

So much for the proof. The conclusion in deliberative argument is a choice—what you want the audience to decide. Sometimes, though, you may find it hard to distinguish an argument's proof from its conclusion. Here are two ways to spot the proof.

If you already accept part of the argument, it probably constitutes the proof.

Eat your peas because they're good for you.

You already know that peas are good for you, so that's the proof. The choice is between eating your peas and not eating them. If you already planned to eat them, then you don't have an argument in the first place.

Another way to spot the proof is to look for the word "because." It usually heads up the reason: eat your peas "because they're good for you." Arguments often imply "because" without actually stating it.

Vote Republican and keep taxes down.

If you have trouble finding the reason in this argument, restate it with "because" in the middle. If the sentence makes no sense with "because" in it, then someone may be pitching you a fallacy. In this case, though, it works fine: "Vote Republican, because Republicans will keep taxes down."

I think I'll use the "because" technique to abuse a pollster.

POLLSTER: Do you plan to vote Democratic and protect the middle class?

This is a classic example of a push poll, that sleazy argument disguised as a survey.

ME: You mean I should vote Democratic *because* that'll help the middle class?

POLLSTER: I'm not supposed to answer questions.

ME: I *only* answer questions. You didn't ask one.

POLLSTER: Yes, sir, I did. I said . . .

ME: You're right. Actually, you asked two questions. Do I plan to vote Democratic, and do I want to help the middle class? Now, which would you like me to answer?

POLLSTER: [*Click.*]

I had a deductive exchange recently with a subscriber to my blog. The woman, named Martha, objected to my accusing intelligent design advocates of "kidnapping God and forcing him to teach biology."

MARTHA: What issue do you have exactly with teaching *both* approaches, intelligent design *and* evolution, in school? Isn't this hijacking Darwin and forcing him to teach biology? Since when does being balanced mean believing in only ONE approach, belief, theory, etc.?

ME: Oh, I'm certainly for teaching both sides, whenever there are two of them. But in this case—creationism and biology—we're dealing with a logical fallacy: if intelligent design people refuse to name the designer, then they have an effect without a cause, a disconnect that Aristotle, pagan as he was, abhorred. If they *can* name the designer, then they're in the realm of faith, not science.

Martha had offered a good enthymeme: her premise—there are two sides to every issue—is a commonplace that she and I both hold. Her conclusion is that classes in evolution should teach the other side. I replied agreeably, conceding her point that students should learn two sides. But then I used deduction to prove that there *aren't* two sides—just two separate arguments, about science and faith. I gave her a pair of enthymemes—syllogisms with the goes-without-saying middle line left out.

If intelligent design people won't name the designer,
[And if every effect in a logical argument must have a cause,]
Then intelligent design isn't a logical argument.
If intelligent design people do name the designer,
[And if such a metaphysical designer must be outside the realm
of science,]
Then intelligent design isn't science.

Did Martha see the error of her ways and become an ardent foe of intelligent design? I doubt it. She is way too smart for that. But I wasn't trying to convince her; my audience was the readership of my blog, a proudly geeky crowd that gets ecstatic at the sight of an exposed fallacy. The strange thing is, though, I *did* convince her—not about intelligent design, but about my

TRY THIS IN YOUR OWN ARGUMENTS
Your opponent will often begin her argument with a commonplace, as Martha did. Try using concession, as I did. See if you can agree with her commonplace, then show how it fails to suit her conclusion. Teaching both sides is good, agreed. But creationism and biology are not two sides. They're the side of an apple and the side of an orange.

► **Argument Tool**
PROOF SPOTTER:
A proof consists of examples or a premise. A premise usually begins with "because," or implies it.

blog. She had originally asked to unsubscribe, but changed her mind after reading my reply.

MARTHA: That's a good argument. I do like to hear both sides . . . Please reinstate my membership.

Then she seduced me—rhetorically, I mean—through a little flattery.

MARTHA: I laugh more than I am irritated when I receive your daily figure actually . . . Come to think of it I laugh very hard, and then my boss thinks I am really loving my job.

You could almost say that Martha beat me. While I won her back as a subscriber, she won me over, making me think twice before I trash the intelligent design people's intelligence again. See what a little agreeability can get you? And I think to myself, what a wonderful rhetorical world—at least until I read the next comment on my blog, which calls me a "Godless bastard."

I am *not* godless.

Mozart Induces Hell

Rhetorical deduction goes like this: *premise, therefore conclusion*. You believe this, so you should do that. That is an enthymeme. In Annie's case, I'm afraid that her enthymeme about all politicians being alike may not work. It has a problem with its commonplace: Kathy probably does not believe that all politicians are alike. She thinks that Democrats and Republicans are very different species. Annie will have to come up with some serious proof before she can sew doubts in Kathy's mind.

Once again, Aristotle comes to the rescue, with deduction's fraternal twin, induction. In rhetoric, inductive logic uses examples for its proof instead of commonplaces. Induction is great for when the audience's commonplaces don't work for you.

Induction would look like this in Annie's argument:

ANNIE: I live in a Republican state, and my taxes keep going up. Your own mayor is Republican, and look how much taxes have increased in your city. Plus, Congress keeps borrowing money. How do you think they'll pay for the deficit? It just shows that both parties raise taxes. The Democrats are simply honest about it. And given two politicians, I'll vote for the honest one.

That's inductive logic. Annie's examples prove that Republicans raise taxes. Therefore you should vote for the party that will not lie about it. Of course, Annie doesn't prove that the Republicans raise taxes as much as Democrats do. But that's for Kathy to argue.

You can combine deduction and induction to make an especially strong argument. In this case, your proof has two parts: examples and premise. Once again, we can observe Homer Simpson's logical pyrotechnics for illustration.

HOMER: I'm not a bad guy! I work hard, and I love my kids. So why should I spend half my Sunday hearing about how I'm going to hell?

A splendid instance of logical induction as argument. Homer's examples—works hard, loves his kids—show he is not such a bad guy. Having established his nice-guy premise, he heads straight to his conclusion: church wastes his time. Whether the examples actually do prove his case is up to the audience. And God. But the logic works.

Homer recites **facts**, sort of. That's one kind of example. But his examples are really more **comparison** than fact. Comparisons are the second kind of example. He works harder and loves his kids more than the average churchgoer.

► Meanings

If you have trouble remembering the difference between inductive and deductive logic, consider their roots. Induction comes from Latin for "to induce" or "to lead." *Inductive* logic follows a trail, picking up clues that lead to the end of an argument. *Deduction* (both in rhetoric and expense accounts) means "to take away." Deduction uses a commonplace to pull you away from your current opinion. If that still doesn't work, skip the terms altogether and just use the argument tools you like.

► Meanings

The point you prove with examples is technically called a *paradigm*—a rule that you apply to the choice you want your audience to make.

► Argument Tool
THE RHETORICAL
EXAMPLE: Fact,
comparison, or
story.

Then there's a third kind of example, the **story**—jokes, fiction, fables, and pop culture. Most of the examples I use in this book fall in the story category.

Let's use all the logic we gained in this chapter. Suppose I want to persuade you to go to a poker game instead of the Mozart concert you had planned to attend. I start with an enthymeme:

ME: You want to relax, right? Then there's no choice. You're going to play poker.

That's deductive logic. You want to relax. Therefore, let's play poker. I skip what would have been the middle line of a syllogism: poker is more relaxing than Mozart. You already knew that. But then again, maybe you didn't. Maybe I should use inductive logic—facts, comparisons, and stories—to shore up our premise that poker relaxes more than Mozart.

Fact:

ME: You yourself said nothing's more soothing than a good cigar and a full house.

Comparison:

ME: Do they let you drink beer during a Mozart concert? Huh? Do they?

Story:

ME: I knew a guy who went to see *Don Giovanni* a few years ago. He suffers through the whole thing until right at the end, when he clutches his heart and slumps over dead. The last thing he sees before he dies is Don Giovanni getting sucked into Hell.

I suggest you try a similar argument on your significant other before

TRY THIS IN A PRESENTATION

Work up a logical outline. First, construct an enthymeme that uses something your audience believes in. It sums up your entire talk. The rest of the outline rests on inductive logic. List the facts, compare your argument with an opposing one, and include at least one anecdote that illustrates your point on the micro level. Go back and read Reagan's speeches, and you'll find that most of them use exactly this logical method. Or skip ahead to Chapter 23, where Cicero shows you how to outline a speech.

your next night out. Scope out your partner's commonplaces: do you hear the word "relax" a lot when you plan a date, or does the word "boring" repeat itself?

Now apply the commonplace to an argument packet: "Since [commonplace], then we should [your choice]."

Throw in a few examples: fact, comparison, story, or all three.

Now button your lip, baby. Button your coat.

The Tools

The historian Colyer Meriwether says the American founders were masters at rhetorical *logos*: "They knew how to build an argument, to construct a logical fortress; that had been their pastime since youth. They could marshal words, they could explore the past . . . they had been doing that for years."

You now have the foundation to build your own logical fortress. Actually, it should be more like a logical mansion; the best persuaders are comfortable within their logic, and not afraid to let people in. Don't worry; we'll cover many more tools to make you feel more at home with logic.

We started with the basic tools of *logos*.

Deduction: Deductive logic applies a general principle to a particular matter. Rhetorical deduction uses a commonplace to reach a conclusion, interpreting the circumstances through a lens of beliefs and values.

Enthymeme: The logical sandwich that contains deductive logic. "We should [choice], because [commonplace]." Aristotle took formal logic's syllogism, stripped it down, and based it on a commonplace instead of a universal truth.

Induction: In rhetoric, induction is argument by example. This kind of logic starts with the specific and moves to the general. Whereas deductive logic interprets the circumstances through an existing belief—a commonplace—inductive logic uses the circumstances to *form* a belief. It works best when you're not sure your audience shares a commonplace.

Fact, Comparison, Story: These are the three kinds of example to use in inductive logic.