CHAPTER FIVE

THE TOOLS OF PERSUASION: MESSAGE FUNCTION AND STRUCTURE

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this chapter, you should

1. Understand how goals in persuasive situations give rise to the structure of messages.
2. Understand the nature of proof.
3. Understand how persuaders use argument forms to structure their messages for greatest effectiveness.
4. Be able to analyze an argument using a simplified Toulmin model.
CHAPTER FIVE

MESSAGE CONTENT, FORM, FUNCTION, AND STRUCTURE: AN INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP

In the last chapter we began to examine persuasive messages by looking at the way in which we construct meaning from them and the means by which we apprehend messages. Content, form, function, and structure of messages are all interdependent: The goals that persuaders seek to fulfill create the message function, which in turn affects the choice of language, the form of the message, and the way in which the message is put together. It is not a linear process; choices occur simultaneously and interactively. Separating these elements of the message is an artificial process at best, yet dissecting messages can give us the greatest information about their impact on others. In this chapter we turn our attention to the goals persuaders seek and the structure of the messages they create.

THE FUNCTION OF PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

Clearly, the primary function of any persuasive message is to bring about change in the participants of the persuasive situation. But bringing about change is only one communicative goal. You will recall from Chapter Three that three personal goals affect people's behavior in communication situations: the need to be effective, the need to be appropriate, and the need to act consistently with their image of themselves. 1

A number of authors have addressed the notion of multiple goals within a communication situation. Although most of the discussion has focused on interpersonal settings, we will look at the ways persuasion happens in the process of pursuing other goals in alternative communication contexts. For purposes of our discussion here, we will use the terms "goal" and "message function" interchangeably; our concern is with the purpose the message serves as communicators attempt to achieve desired outcomes from persuasive encounters.

Appropriateness, consistency, and effectiveness are only one way of conceptualizing the goals people have in communicative situations. Table 5.1 lists various approaches to message function or goals. Traditional approaches to the study of public speaking, for instance, categorize goals as the ends communicators seek: informing, persuading, entertaining. Dance and Larson have postulated that the purposes of communication are to (1) link an individual to his or her environment through information processing; (2) regulate one's own behavior or that of others; and (3) develop higher
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Allen and Brown conceptualize communicative outcomes as informing, controlling, imagining, feeling, or ritualizing.3

It is most important to understand, as Clark and Delia have argued, that people may pursue multiple goals simultaneously within a communication situation:1 They classify communication goals as instrumental (seeking a response from the listener), interpersonal (establishing/maintaining a relationship with the listener), and identity (presenting a desired "self-image"). Along the same lines, O'Keefe examines how messages are formulated in response to situational demands for consideration, resolution of conflicting wants, and elaboration of feelings and perspectives on the situation.5

Perhaps one reason why so many discussions of message function exist without apparent reconciliation is the failure to separate goals that arise from the participants' personal desires, goals that arise from consideration of the situation, and goals that are concerned with the specific task the communicator wants to accomplish. As we are considering persuasion situations in this text, the specific task any communicator wants is change—change in behaviors, cognitions, and so on. We also recognize, however, that persuasion may occur as a byproduct of other tasks being accomplished. Table 5.2 categorizes the various communicative goals that will affect the production of messages within persuasion situations.

The point of our discussion of message function is this: Messages may serve a variety of functions as they fulfill interpersonal needs, meet the demands of the situation, and lead communicators toward accomplishment of various tasks. In addition, we must understand that messages may be focused primarily on concerns that we typically do not think of as "persuasive" and yet operate persuasively at a secondary level. Let's look at four situations in which the primary communicative goal is not persuasion and yet persuasion is possible.

1. **Persuasion in the Guise of Conveying Information.** Newspapers and news programs are supposed to report what is happening, right? Is it possible to report everything? Of course not. In making judgments about what constitutes newsworthy items, newspapers and news shows subtly persuade us that those things are important. This process was dubbed "agenda setting" in early research.6 According to this view, the mass media don't tell us what to think, but they do tell us what to think about.

Of course, the mainline newspapers are fairly subtle about it. When they express opinions, they usually do this on the editorial page, or they make it clear that they are reporting a variety of opinions about a given subject. We trust newspapers such as the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Chicago Tribune to tell us the truth. In trust-
## Table 5.2

### Various Goals in the Persuasion Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals Arising from Personal Needs</th>
<th>Goals Arising from the Situation</th>
<th>Task to be Accomplished</th>
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| Presenting a desired self-image (identity objectives):  
- appropriateness  
- consistency  
Instrumental objectives:  
- effectiveness  
- process  
- information  
Interpersonal objectives:  
- relational needs | Consideration of the other  
Resolution of conflicting wants  
Elaboration of feelings and perspectives on the situation | Create, alter, or restore:  
- behaviors  
- interpersonal impressions  
- cognitions  
- relationship  
Alternatively:  
- convey information  
- entertain |

...ing them, we forget that they are making the decisions about what should compel our interest.

2. Persuasion in the Guise of Identity Management. As we will see in Chapter Six, everyone either consciously or unconsciously creates images of themselves for other people. The conscious manipulation of our impressions is a form of persuasion. Some occasions seem to be more legitimate for doing this than others. In a job interview, for example, you are trying to create an impression of competence and suitability for the job. To do so, you wear the appropriate clothes, type your resume in a way suited to the employer, and emphasize the skills relevant to the position. As long as the cues are consistent and believable, the other person is likely to accept the impression you put forward. At other times we are persuading people to accept our impression of ourselves because it has been damaged by events beyond our control. Whatever the motivation for conscious impression management, a persuasive function is at work within the communicative behavior.

3. Persuasion in the Guise of Task Accomplishment. Anyone who has ever worked in a fast-food restaurant knows that task accomplishment entails more than simply telling people what to do. The work is repetitive. It's usually hot and humid if you're cooking. And if you're taking orders from customers you deal with people who are frequently less than polite. A manager who aloofly stands back and issues orders gets little respect from the crew. The manager who demonstrates that he or she is willing to do the same dirty work you have to...
do is one the workers most likely admire. The process of getting people to do jobs that are distasteful is more than issuing orders; it's convincing them that they should do it.

4. Persuasion in the Guise of Entertainment. Sometimes what we see as entertainment also serves to convince us of the necessity of action. Movies such as *The China Syndrome* and *Silkwood* weren't just stories about people who worked in high-technology businesses. These movies are polemics against the hazards of nuclear power and radioactive materials. *Robocop* presented a number of messages about the ability of technology to rescue us from ourselves; even a cyborg is ineffective unless his human side is allowed to predominate over the mechanical side.

Movies are not the only entertainment form that contains subtle persuasion. Gospel music is openly persuasive while it entertains, and John Wesley saw the hymn as a major form of persuasion within the church. A content analysis of Barbara Cartland's romantic novels revealed a strong persuasive theme running through them: Women should rely on a strong protector, chastity is rewarded, love is forever, and so on. Disneyland offers us a Magical Kingdom, the happiest place on earth, and we are invited to share in Walt Disney's vision.

I would not argue that all entertainment is ultimately persuasive. But when the entertainment we enjoy also seeks to change who we are or what we believe, a persuasive function is at work within the message.

**The Relationship of Message Function to Structure**

The way in which people choose their goals in persuasive situations will affect the way in which they formulate their messages. O'Keefe argues that two factors affect how people reason from goals to messages. One problem is that a goal that is relevant to the situation may or may not be relevant to the people in the situation. Suppose, for example, that you want to persuade a professor to change a grade. Obviously, that's one goal, but it can be accomplished in several ways: You can be straightforward and ask, you can hint, you can be accusatory. You can give consideration to the impression you are making and your response to the professor's role, or you can ignore impression management concerns altogether. So the way in which goals are judged as relevant will affect how people structure their messages.

A second problem is that, even if people understand and recognize the various goals to be met, their individual understanding of situational constraints may differ from conventional understanding. Contrast, for example, two reconstructed grade change encounters:
Scene One
Student: What did I get in the class?
Professor: C+.
Student: (loud and angry) Why did I get that?
Professor: Primarily because you received a D on your term paper.
Student: I shouldn't have even bothered to write it!

Scene Two
Student: May I ask you about my grade? I don't understand why I got a D+ in your class.
Professor: Because you earned less than 50 percent of the points possible on your written work in the class.
Student: But my speech grades and test scores bring my points up into the C range.
Professor: Yes, but it's my policy that you need to earn a passing percentage in all three parts of the course to earn a C, and you didn't.
Student: Can you tell me why that's your policy?

The first scene ended when the student left in a huff. The second scene continued for some time while the student politely badgered me. Neither was successful, although both felt they were adapting to the situational constraints. What is interesting is that the first encounter was with a student who had just completed a course in conflict management!

O'Keefe argues that people employ three different ways of reasoning from goals to messages: expressive, conventional, and rhetorical. These methods of reasoning affect the way they structure messages in communication situations.

1. An expressive design logic is founded on the assumption that:

   Language is a medium for expressing thoughts and feelings. . . . Persons operating with the Expressive premise will give an overall impression of being very literal in message production and comprehension for two reasons: (1) They fail to appreciate that communication, in the process of expression, can be made to serve other goals; and (2) they interpret messages as independent units rather than as threads in an interactional fabric, and so seem to disregard context.11

2. A conventional design logic is based on the underlying assumption that "communication is a game played cooperatively, according to socially conventional rules and procedures."12 For a person who interprets communication situations in this way, messages are considered useful when they are designed to achieve goals.
3. The rhetorical design approach is based on the assumption that "communication is the creation and negotiation of social selves and situations." For this person, meaning does not arise from the form of messages and the context in which they are exchanged but, rather, the context is enacted from the messages that are created.

O'Keefe offers an intriguing model that connects the idea of message function, or communicator goals, with the way a message is structured. Two related studies have examined the effect a goal of deception has on the message production of the liar.

In job interviewing situations, people who were not qualified for the job used more vague credibility-building statements than those who were qualified for the job. Differences between honest and dishonest interviewees were even more evident when the interviewer expected that the interviewee would be suspicious of claims being made. In a different study, researchers found that people who lied used fewer words, made fewer past-tense references, answered more quickly, and used a smaller variety of words overall. Some evidence does exist, then, that the communicator's goal affects the way messages are structured. More traditionally, researchers examine the structure of persuasive messages apart from goals and their impact on persuasive outcomes.

THE STRUCTURE OF MESSAGES

The order in which messages are presented and the choice of language will affect the impact of a message. Most often, these factors have been studied in isolation.

Cantor, for example, examined how the format of a fund-raising solicitation affects compliance with the request. In her study, men and women went door-to-door to raise money for the American Cancer Society. Requests were phrased in one of four ways: (1) polite imperative ("Please contribute to our fund"); (2) agreement-question ("Won't you please contribute to our fund?"); (3) information question ("Would you like to contribute to our fund?"); and (4) statement ("We are asking you to contribute to our fund"). The polite imperative was the most effective means of raising funds, and the information question was the least effective. In addition, people perceived the information question as the weakest appeal. Some differences in solicitation success were found related to gender (females tended to be more successful), but the differences weren't statistically significant. Cantor's work is important because it was completed in a real setting, concerning real issues, rather than set in a laboratory with contrived ones.
Message-sidedness, or whether a persuasive message tells only one side of the issue or both, was the focus of some research emerging from the Yale group. Classical experiments revealed that one-sided messages worked better for people with lower levels of education, or with those who initially favored the argument. Two-sided messages were more effective with people who initially were opposed to the issue at hand. Bettinghaus and Cody argue that "the best advice [concerning message-sidedness] is to be willing to acknowledge to your audience that there are opposing arguments." More recent research on message-sidedness is concerned with comparison advertising and its effectiveness. Comparison advertising, or showing both the brand being advertised and its competitor in the ad, produces better immediate and later recall of the brands being advertised. Comparison advertising, however, may not help people remember anything about the brand. Although in one study the people rated comparison advertisements as more informative, the people exposed to comparisons did not remember any more of the product's features later than did people who saw a one-sided advertisement. In addition, using comparison advertising may backfire for a company that currently controls the market. Such advertising increases perceptions of similarity between the products and gives free publicity to the competitor. In a case such as the comparison of Diet Coke to Diet Pepsi, the effect is negligible, but if Gerber Foods takes on a brand-new gourmet baby food in comparison advertisements, the new product is more likely to benefit than Gerber is.

Comparison advertising is only one means of increasing brand recall. Another aspect of persuasive message structure involves variables that make the message vivid or memorable. This second technique involves the use of graphic and pictorial images. Advertising, regardless of its type, can use images in various ways to increase retention of information. A public service announcement by Partnership for a Drug-Free America shows a hot frying pan with an egg dropped in it, while a voice intones, "This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs." The image of a frying egg is vivid. This public service announcement also generated irreverent humor; one college comic strip showed eggs in a number of places, with captions reading, "This is your brain on the sidewalk," "This is your brain in the street," and so on.

Models, female models in particular, have long been used in selling everything from cars to cigarettes. One study compared the effectiveness of differing degrees of undress in advertisements on recall of the brands advertised. Five levels, ranging from nonsexual illustrations of outdoor scenes (e.g., mountains or forest scenes) through a full frontal view of a nude female model, were combined with various advertisements. Results indicated that recall of brands was significantly better for those paired with
the nonsexual scenes than for those with a nude female, although recall did not decrease significantly as the degree of undress increased.22

A different study sought to determine what images are associated with attention to magazine ads, compared to images that don't compel anything further than a glance. Researchers examined the effects of using a female model alone, a male model alone, female and male models together, or the brand pictured without models, on whether men noticed the ad. The presence of a female model alone in the ad produced much higher "noting" scores than did other formats. The presence of a male model alone produced the lowest "noting" scores.23

Given the results of these two studies, one might argue that a female model will generate attention or interest for men reading an advertisement but may not do much to actually sell the product. Other research seems to bear out this point. The picture an ad uses might gain our attention but may do little to effect persuasion and may actually hinder it.24 In offering advice to potential persuaders based on a review of the literature, McLachlan offers none concerning the use of visual images; research on increasing recall of brands and intention to purchase products has demonstrated effects only for the type of language and appeals used.25

Of course, the language used in persuasive communication, particularly that in advertising, has long been suspect by consumers. Although Wrighter argued that he could sell us anything using weasel words (e.g., virtually, as much as) and deceptive claims, the buying public has become more aware of "puffery" in advertising and reacts to it negatively. One study indicated that overstating a product's character resulted in negative eval-
ms of the advertisement and the sponsoring company, negative eval-
>ns of the message's credibility, and a lower likelihood of purchasing
product. Understating a product's value, on the other hand, produced
itive effect on evaluations of the product and on the advertisement
the product was used. Z7

interesting study examined the attempt of comparison advertising
a "fair comparison" between products through the use of neutral
s. Most of us remember the "Pepsi Challenge," in which ordinary
le tasted Pepsi and Coke, labeled only with the letters "S" or "L." Umers
expressing a preference were always surprised to find that they
ered Pepsi in this experiment when they usually drank Coke. In the
examining the effects of comparisons, researchers put the same drink
Pepsi or Coke) in two cups, labeling them "S" or "L." Regardless
product in the cup, people said the cup labeled "S" contained the
product. People drinking from bottles labeled Pepsi or Coke (with
opposite product in them) continued to be influenced by the label
rather than by the product itself.28

Perhaps one reason why the order of a message, the use of images, ls,
and so on affect the way a persuasive message is perceived has to with
the way in which these things "frame" a persuasive message. ers
argues that the way in which people respond to messages is in- heed
by the way in which the message is styled, and that influence
be independent of the information the message provides. He notes
stylistic options constrain the options people take in a communicative
ition, but more important:

Certain stylistic options ... represent the communicator's definition of the
situation, or the frame within which the constituent parts of the text or trans-
action are connected. ... It is possible just by certain choices of phrasing
and syntax to "presuppose" a frame, or definition of a situation. And by thus
"presupposing" the frame or definition, respondents are unable to challenge
r or depart from it without a substantial risk that their messages will be misin-
erpreted and that negative inductions about their character will be fostered.29

To understand how this framing process might happen in a persuasive
ounter, consider the example of a couple looking at cars at a lot. When
lesperson approaches, several openings are possible:

"May I help you find something?"
"We have a special on the new Leopard."
"How are you today?"
and so on.

Statement 1 allows the prospective buyers the most opportunity to trol the conversation. If they respond, "No, we're just looking," the
salesperson must retreat if he or she wants to maintain an image of interpersonal competence. Statement 2 offers more control in the conversation, presupposing that the couple is there to buy something. If the reply is, "We're just looking," the couple risks being the brunt of negative conclusions. Statement 3 is the most ambiguous and therefore has the most potential for mutual control of the interaction between the prospective buyers and the salesperson. Interestingly, one study indicated that when people deny having any intent to persuade, they may produce more favorable responses from the other person. So, for example, if the car salesperson were to transform Statement 2 and say, "I'm not here to be pushy, but I would like you to know we're running a special on our new Leopards," the prospective buyers are put in the position of having to respond at face value to the salesperson's statement or risk denying the salesperson's definition of the situation.

So far in this section, we have looked at the way in which messages are constructed. Let's turn our attention now to the effect language choice has in persuasive situations.

Bradac, Bowers, and Courtright argue that three language variables—intensity, immediacy, and diversity—affect receivers' reactions to sources of persuasive messages in empirical studies. Intensity in language indicates the speaker's attitude toward the topic, and the extent to which the attitude deviates from neutrality. Immediacy is the degree to which the speaker associates himself or herself with the topic (e.g., "I think it's a good idea" versus "It's a good idea"). Diversity has to do with the range of vocabulary the speaker demonstrates. Drawing on a large body of research, Bradac et al. offer twenty-six generalizations about the three variables, of which fourteen are:

1. The more obscenity is used, the less attitude change will occur when the speaker is male.
2. The more obscenity a source uses, the lower will be ratings of source competence.
3. Nonobscene language intensity in messages that are discrepant from audience attitudes is inversely related to ratings of source competence.
4. When the audience is emotionally aroused, more language intensity will produce less attitude change.
5. Language intensity will enhance the effect of attitudinally congruent messages but inhibit the effect of attitudinally discrepant messages.
6. Language intensity enhances the effect of high-credibility speakers but diminishes the effect of low-credibility speakers.
7. Nonobscene intensity enhances the effect of male speakers but inhibits the effect of female speakers.

8. Language intensity will enhance audience perceptions of similarity between themselves and the speaker when the message is attitude-congruent but will diminish perceptions of similarity when the message is discrepant.

9. Verbal immediacy is directly related to how the audience judges the speaker's affect toward the topic, the speaker's competence, and the speaker's character.

10. Verbal immediacy will enhance audience perceptions of similarity between themselves and the speaker when the message is attitude-congruent but will diminish perceptions of similarity when the message is discrepant.

11. Language diversity is directly related to how the audience judges the speaker's competence, socioeconomic status, and similarity to themselves.

12. Language diversity is directly related to audience judgments of the message's effectiveness.

13. Language diversity is inversely related to audience judgments of the speaker's anxiety.

14. The effects of language diversity are strengthened when the audience considers a speaker to be high in status.

One limitation of our knowledge concerning the effects of language choice on outcomes in persuasive situations is that it is limited largely to public speaking situations. How these variables may operate on an interpersonal level (e.g., using intense language or obscenity) has yet to be determined empirically.

In looking at message structure, we also may consider the reasoning reflected in the persuasive message. In the final portions of this chapter, we will examine a model for understanding the reasoning in a persuasive argument, the effects various types of appeals may obtain, and the usefulness of evidence in persuasive appeals.

**THE NATURE OF REASONING**

Reasoning is the way in which we connect claims (or the things we want people to believe) to the evidence we offer supporting those claims. We reason through the use of arguments: claims that are coupled with some evidence in support of them.33 Through our reasoning, we
structure arguments into a message which we hope will persuade another person.

To understand the nature of arguments, we need some sort of model for analysis. One of the most useful for examining arguments is the Toulmin model.34 It is a method of analyzing arguments, which helps us to understand both the overt and covert means persuaders use to influence us.

Any argument has both explicitly expressed and implicitly implied reasons for the claim that is offered. In American Express commercials, for instance, the company hopes you will identify Karl Malden with his television image as a police officer. Police officers know what things are safe and what things are unsafe. If a (television) police officer tells you that American Express traveler's checks are the safest ones to carry, American Express is hoping you're going to believe it. Of course, they are also hoping that you won't really analyze why you should accept the word of some actor simply because he played the role of a police officer on television for a number of years.

Toulmin's model consists of six parts:

1. The **claim**: any belief the persuader wants the audience to accept.
2. The **grounds (or data)**: evidence offered in support of the claim.
3. The **warrant**: makes the connection between the data and the claim possible; justifies using the grounds/data as a basis for the claim.
4. The **backing**: evidence (statistics, testimony, and so on.) offered in support of either the grounds/data or the warrant.
5. The **qualifier**: a statement that tells the audience the force of an argument.
6. The **rebuttal (or reservation)**: tells the audience the conditions under which the argument will be true.

The technical terms can seem a little confusing at first, but through an extended example they should become clear. Let's start with the most basic elements: The claim, the grounds/data, and the warrant. Suppose you have worked very hard throughout your college years, accumulating a high GPA while participating in a number of extracurricular activities. You want a reward for your efforts, so you go to your parents and say something like: "You know, I've really worked hard on my classes. It took a lot of time, and I didn't hold down a part-time job, because I wanted to do well. I've got this job lined up after graduation, but I'm going to
need transportation to it. I think it would be really neat if you would give me a car for a graduation present."

Within your argument you have presented a claim: You think your parents should reward you. Why? Because you worked hard, and you got honors, which also reflect on your parents. The explanation of why you deserve the car constitutes the grounds for the claim. And the grounds and the claim are connected because of a warrant—a belief that hard work should be rewarded.

Now we have the outline of an argument. Using Toulmin's model, we chart out the elements so far:

**Grounds:**
I worked hard in college.

**Claim:**
You should reward me with a car.

**Warrant:**
Hard work should be rewarded.

But this argument includes more than these elements. Your parents are unlikely to simply agree and say, "Sure, we'll buy you a car for graduation." You need to supply more proof. To do so, you could tell your parents how hard you worked in college (backing for the grounds). You can remind them that they once promised you a car if you did well, or you can remind them of the times in the past that they have rewarded you for your scholastic efforts (backing for the warrant). If you think you're unlikely to get them to spring for the entire car, you could hedge your bets and ask them to at least provide the down payment and make payments until you get settled in your new job (a reservation to the warrant). You probably won't want to decrease the certainty of your claim because you want them to give you something for your efforts. All together, the argument would look like Figure 5.1.

Is this argument likely to work? It might, if your parents really have made promises concerning a car for graduation, or if you have some precedents concerning rewards for your efforts in school. Without those elements, you probably would need a great deal more evidence to convince them that a car is an appropriate graduation gift.

In analyzing the arguments persuaders use, the hardest thing is to realize that most of them won't expressly state all the various parts. For instance, most of you who would use the car argument aren't likely to include the warrant in your request, because you will assume that your parents will accept it. The notion that hard work should be rewarded is embedded in the American value system, as noted in Chapter Three.

Let's look at one more example: Wendy's "Where's the Beet?" commercial. A little old lady stands at the counter of a fast-food restaurant, obviously ignored by the personel. Actually, this commercial has several claims in it: "Wendy's is the fast-food restaurant that cares," "Wendy's has
more beef on its hamburger," "Wendy's is a better bargain for people on a limited budget," and so on. We'll diagram only one, illustrated in Figure 5.2. The thing that makes the Wendy's commercial so effective is that it communicates a number of different claims, few of which are expressly stated. In the argument illustrated in Figure 5.2, none of the parts is overtly stated within the commercial, and yet the action played out within the commercial does lead the viewer to the claim that "Wendy's cares."

Our analysis of the Wendy's commercial points to an effective tool in persuasion: the *unstated assumption*. Aristotle was the first writer to note that the more the audience participates in the persuasion experience by helping to provide arguments along with the persuader, the more moved it will be in favor of the persuader, and the more moved it will be in favor of the persuader's arguments. If you sit there and help provide reasons why you should accept the persuader's claim, you are likely to be more persuaded than if you passively take in what the persuader has to say. This is what commercials do all the time: They don't overtly state all of their argument. They may not verbally state any of it. They invite the receiver to participate in the experience by providing his or her own reasons for believing in the claim.

The arguments used in persuasion can be terribly complex or extremely simple. You may feel a little overwhelmed by the Toulmin model, but it is one of the few argumentative models that allow us to examine...
FIGURE 5.2
ELABORATION OF AN ARGUMENT USING THE TOULMIN MODEL (SECOND)

Grounds

Wendy’s listens to its customers.

Backing for the Grounds

Nonverbal-Elderly woman talks into echo chamber elsewhere, to a person at Wendy’s.

Warrant

Restaurants that care listen to their customers.

Qualifier (Implied certainty)

Wendy’s is the fast-food restaurant that cares.

ReservaUon (Rebuttal)

None

The implications of the various arguments we hear. The model essentially asks: What’s really going on here?

The model is especially useful for determining the type of reasoning the persuader is using. Aristotle claimed that a persuader could use three types of proof to gain the adherence of an audience: appeals based on the speaker’s credibility (ethos), appeals based on some logical relationship between the grounds and the claim (logos), and appeals based on the emotions a persuader could evoke in the audience (pathos). How do we know what kind of proof is being used? McCroskey shows that we can determine the type of proof by examining the warrant, because the warrant allows us to relate the grounds to the claim.35 If the warrant is rejected, so is the argument. Let’s examine each of the types of appeals. In these examples, we will look only at the claim-grounds-warrant relationship. You might try to provide the other parts of the argument, based on your understanding of the Toulmin model.

Credibility as a Reason for Action

One means of building an argument is to base an appeal on the speaker’s credibility. Essentially, this argument asks you to accept the relationship between the grounds and the claim because of the belief you have in the
person providing the information. You will recall that credibility has several dimensions—among them, knowledge, trustworthiness, and goodwill. So arguments can be based on the belief we have in the expertise of the person making the claim, the trust we have in the person making the claim, or knowing that the person making the claim has our best interests at heart. The specific effects of source credibility are discussed in Chapter Six.

The Relationship of Ideas as a Reason for Action

The second category of persuasive appeals is based on a substantive relationship between the grounds and the claim, which exists beyond the communicator's "say-so." It is in the area of logical appeals in which most people err in their reasoning. Jackson notes that although people will recognize an error in reasoning when it is pointed out to them, they still continue to make errors in reasoning from the premises of an argument to the conclusions those premises support. She provides empirical evidence that these errors stem from an "atmosphere" effect; the way in which the premises are phrased can determine our response to them. If they are positive; we'll draw a positive conclusion, if negative, a negative conclusion, and so on. This is why we have to look at the reasons people use to gain our acceptance of their arguments. It's easy to think a logical conclusion has been drawn when it has not. Logical appeals may take the form of deduction, induction, reasoning by sign, causal reasoning, reasoning by criteria, and reasoning by comparison.

Deduction

Deduction is a reasoning process in which a general principle, which is known to be true, is applied to a specific case. The specific case then is treated according to the general principle. In a way, the reasoning is a bit circular, and this type of appeal works best when additional evidence (e.g., backing, reservation) is provided. The argument is dependent upon the persuader's ability to prove that the case in question can be treated according to the general principle. The logical form of the argument is:

1. There is a general principle that most people accept.
2. This is an instance of the general principle.
3. Therefore, this case should be treated according to the general principle.
Induction

The opposite of deduction is induction. Induction is the process of taking a number of pieces of information, then extracting a general principle from them. Sherlock Holmes, by the way, engaged in induction, not deduction, as he claimed, because he would develop a theory based on the facts of the case. The relationship between induction and deduction is:

**Deduction**

General PrincipleTreatment of this case according to principle

**Induction**

Observations of a number of cases---. A general conclusion which relates them to one another

The logical form of induction takes place in three steps:

1. I observe a number of cases-
2. I conclude that the cases are related in some way.
3. I conclude that I have observed enough cases to make the claim.

When making inductions, you should try not to jump to conclusions and you should look for the times other people are overstating their case. If you are a reader of mysteries, you know that the behavior that creates the most difficulty for private detectives is reaching a conclusion prematurely.

Reasoning by sign

Most of us engage in reasoning by sign several times a day. We reason by sign when we base a conclusion on clues that we observe in others, which we know in the past have been indicators of some condition. Physicians use sign reasoning when they conclude that you have a certain illness based on the symptoms observed; the symptoms are signs of your illness. You may say, "I think it's going to rain today, because you see clouds in the sky." Or you conclude that your friend is angry with you because he didn't speak to you in the cafeteria. The pitfall of sign reasoning is that we may read the signs incorrectly, and others may use incorrect relationships between signs and conclusions to mislead us.

Causal reasoning

We use causal reasoning when we have reason to believe that one event is the result of another. The causal relationship can be inferred only under the condition that the effect always follows the cause and that there are no other competing explanations for the cause of the effect. Cause-effect
relationships are extremely hard to prove. Unfortunately, that doesn't deter a lot of persuaders. For example, some opinion columnists have been writing recently that illicit drugs such as cocaine should be legalized because that will eliminate the organized crime structures that exist to sell the drugs. They use a causal type of argument, but it is fallacious, as they cannot prove that eliminating the illegality of drugs will automatically result in eliminating organized crime. At best, the argument has the force of reasoning by sign.

Reasoning by criteria

Three young women walk along the street. One asks, "Where should we go for lunch?" We hear, "I don't want fast food," "I don't want to spend a lot of money," "I don't have a lot of time." The answer: Sizzler. The claim and the grounds are connected because the young women have set up a number of specifications for selection and have shown that Sizzler meets those specifications.

Reasoning by comparison

When we reason by comparison, we use a resemblance between two events or objects as a basis for an argument. One interesting radio commercial I heard recently claimed that most people think a return of 10 percent on an investment is good, 20 percent is excellent, and 30 percent might get the SEC interested in the legalities of the investment. But the listener could achieve a return of 40 percent on investment by shopping at a suit sale. The commercial used criteria for a different kind of decision and implied that the same criteria were applicable in this case. This kind of false comparison can easily lull the listener into thinking that he or she is making an investment, when in fact buying a suit is not an investment in the traditional sense. An investment increases in value; a suit will not.

Reasoning by comparison can be extremely effective. It is a way of taking something familiar to the audience, showing its resemblance to something unfamiliar, and drawing conclusions about the latter. Its strength lies in the persuader's ability to draw a comparison that is understandable and acceptable to the audience.

Emotions as a Reason for Action

Emotional appeals depend upon the persuader's ability to evoke a responsive chord in the listener. They work because the listener already has the beliefs and values in place which agree with the emotional appeal. Consequently,
emotional appeals may not so much produce lasting change as strengthen existing attitudes, beliefs, and values. Although a persuader who uses emo-
tional appeals may reap an immediate benefit, the change will likely be short-
lived without reinforcemenL Persuaders can appeal to a number of emotions, but five are the most common: fear, humor, anger, pity, and love.

Fear
The effects of fear appeals on the behaviors of those hearing them have been studied for quite a while. Generally, it was assumed that fear appeals would be most successful if the recipient perceived that a negative outcome would occur if the recommended action wasn't taken, and if the recommended action was available to the person hearing the fear appeal.37 Researchers have offered a number of explanations for the way fear appeals best worked: (1) as the level of fear increases, more attitude change will occur; (2) as the level of fear decreases, more attitude change will occur; (3) a moderate amount of fear produces the most attitude change; or (4) attitude change resulting from fear appeals is moderated by other variables such as the listener's age, and so on. Recent research by Boster and Mongeau discounted the first three explanations and pointed to a number of problems in fear appeals research.38

One problem is that the arguments researchers think are high in fear-producing potential are not perceived by audiences as very frightening. Thus, much of the research that has established links between fear appeals and attitude change is suspect; the researchers weren't actually producing high fear appeal manipulations. A second problem is that no theory of the way fear appeals work has enough empirical support to warrant it. Thus, we are left with a dilemma: Fear appeals work sometimes, but we don't really know why or under what conditions. Boster and Mongeau offer a model of fear appeals to guide future research. The model assumes that fear manipulation on the persuader's part leads to some level of perceived fear in the persuadee. Perceived fear interacts with persuader age and anxiety levels, affecting the amount of attitude change that may occur, and thus affecting changes in behavior.

Humor
Most of the research on the effects of humorous appeals has linked the use of such appeals to perceptions of the speaker's credibility. That research will be discussed in Chapter Six. Three studies examining the persuasiveness of humorous appeals will be briefly discussed here.

One study compared humorous appeals to fear appeals to see how they affected perceptions of different products. The researchers found that
using mild humor was more effective than using mild fear in developing favorable responses to the products (toothbrushes and vaccines) featured in the study.39

A different study compared the effect of serious appeals and humorous appeals on recall of the advertisement. Researchers had people listen to advertisements as they were waiting to participate in a different study. The people listening to the ad thought they were listening to a normal radio broadcast. The researchers varied both the content of the ad (as a serious or as a humorous appeal) and the context in which it was presented. The results indicated that people remembered more of the ad when they heard the serious version rather than the humorous one. The context of the ad made no difference in recalling the ad. In addition, neither the appeals nor the context affected how people evaluated the product the advertisement was promoting.40

In another study, no difference was found between people's ability to recall an ad and the use of humorous appeals. The authors suggested that humor may be useful in attracting a person's attention but does not aid in actually recalling the content of the message.41

Anger

Sometimes persuaders take the anger an audience feels about a particular issue and focus it so the anger results in the action they want the audience to take. Political arguments frequently tap into the anger of the electorate. Voters don't like high taxes, so they can express their anger by voting out of office the person who generated the taxes. We don't like injustice, so we'll vote against something that seems to promote it.

Pity

Appeals to pity are especially common in the fund-raising efforts of charitable organizations. From the organizations who ask you to adopt a Third-World child to the Jerry Lewis telethon, there are people out there who know how to pull at your heartstrings. Appeals to pity run the risk of overdoing it and turning off the audience. We can stand only so much hurt and pain—any more than our tolerance level, and we pull back to protect ourselves. If these appeals are used in a heavy-handed way, they can backfire, by causing people to laugh instead of feel sorrow along with you.

Love

Appeals to love are another side of appeals to pity. Appeals to pity evoke the feelings of love you already have and want share with others; appeals to love strike at your need to feel it from others. Like appeals to pity, it's
easy to go overboard and be seen as "schmaltzy"-stickyly sentimental, cloying, maudlin, corny, and so on. And, as with everything else in communication, it is a matter of perception. What one person sees as love, another person sees as schmaltz.

Emotional appeals may serve to gain our attention when used in a persuasive argument. Overall, though, their effectiveness seems limited, at best.

THE NATURE OF EVIDENCE

So far, we have looked at the various ways people can construct persuasive messages, drawing on different bases (emotion, logic, credibility) for the connection between claims and the grounds offered in support of the claims. Reasoning, however, doesn't often take place without resort to information from other sources: evidence.

We've all been in an argument at some time or another with someone who said, "Where's your proof? How do you know?" For some people, telling them you read it in the National Enquirer or some other tabloid might be sufficient proof. For others, nothing less than the New York Times will do. Still another person might be satisfied with the reasoning you provide for your conclusion.

In this section we discuss various means of supplementing reasoning-evidence. Evidence is the supporting materials used to supplement reasoning in an argument, or as McCroskey puts it:

\[ \ldots \text{factual statements originating from a source other than the speaker, objects not created by the speaker, and opinions of persons other than the speaker that are offered in support of the speaker's claims.} \]

Actually, to speak of arguments without "evidence" doesn't make much sense. Even when an argument lacks any clear external means of support, receivers tend to fill in the implied evidence, much as we showed how unspoken or unwritten parts of the Toulmin model could be inferred from the explicit argument given. Let's first look at the various forms evidence can take, and then summarize research on the effect of evidence use on argument persuasiveness.

Forms of Evidence

Evidence can take a number of forms: definition, testimony, anecdotes and narratives, examples, statistics, and personal knowledge.
Definitions

Definitions offer starting places for arguments. When we want to persuade another person to do something, we have to make sure that the meanings we have for the terms we are using are congruent with the meanings the other person has. For example, in the debate between the pro-choice and pro-life advocates regarding abortion, the pro-life advocates define "abortion" as anything that prevents the growth of a fertilized egg. Thus, IUDs have come to be seen as abortive devices, even though pro-choice advocates classify them as a form of birth control. Likewise, the development of a new oral birth control pill, which can prevent the implantation of a fertilized egg, is seen as an abortive device by pro-life groups, because they have defined "life" as something that begins at conception. The definitions we assign to different terms can affect the way in which persuasion occurs.

Testimony

Skim through a tabloid such as the National Enquirer, and you'll find at least a dozen advertisements for quick weight-loss diet plans. All offer dramatic visual evidence of people who have used the plan and lost weight. Pictures of now-slender men and women, holding the large clothes they used to wear in front of them, serve as proof that the plan works. The ads usually contain some form of written testimony, too—for example, "I couldn't believe my eyes. The pounds just melted off of me, no matter how much I ate."

Testimony can serve a dramatic purpose in persuasion. Giving us someone we can relate to personalizes the message. If the testimony comes from someone with authority and expertise, we are likely to believe it. Likewise, we believe the testimony of a person who was at the event in question. Several years ago Ray Singleton raped a young woman, hacked off her forearms, and left her for dead. But she didn't die. In a dramatic moment in the courtroom, she stood and identified her assailant, pointing to him with the stub of her arm. He was convicted and spent his years in prison as a model prisoner. When paroled in early 1987, he had to be evacuated from his hotel room by sheriffs, wearing bullet-proof vests, because citizens of the city had learned of his presence and were ready to forcibly remove him themselves. The testimony of that young woman, combined with the brutality of the attack, has made his parole a more public matter than the parole of most other people who have served their time in prison.

Anecdotes and narratives

An anecdote is a short story that proves a point without requiring the communicator to say "and the moral is..." The quips in features such
as "Life in These United States" in the Reader's Digest are anecdotes. A narrative is a longer story that invites the listener to enter into the experience with you. By the time you get to the point of a narrative, the audience is participating with you in the drama. It's as though a movie unfolds before the audience, compelling them to be caught up in it as it comes to a climax. Narratives are memorable and may persist in the audience's memory after the rest of the speech has faded.

Examples

We can use examples to prove our point in persuasive situations. Throughout this book, examples are used to illustrate various concepts. Persuaders do the same. If you want to persuade your parents that you should be rewarded for having helped around the house, you will give them examples of what you have done. Examples can lay the foundation for a generalization about some aspect of life. You probably, at least once, used the "everyone else has one" approach to getting something you wanted from your parents. You listed your friends who already had the thing you desired, in the hopes of convincing your parents that you, too, should have that object. Sometimes it worked; sometimes it didn't. Examples are generally good to illustrate points, but knowing when you have enough examples to prove a generalization is difficult.

Statistics

Statistics are numbers that represent information about groups of people. Depending on the way in which statistics are generated, and who generates them, they can be useful sources of information, or they can be misleading. Two commonly used statistics are the average and percentages.

The average score is used when we want to represent some attribute of a group. For instance, we know that the average SAT scores of graduating high-school seniors have declined over the past fifteen years. An average is calculated by adding all the scores of the group and dividing by the total number of scores. In some cases this can be misleading. Suppose, for example, that a class got the following scores on a 50-point test:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person 1</th>
<th>48</th>
<th>Person 6</th>
<th>28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person 2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Person 7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Person 8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Person 9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Person 10</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average score in the class is 32.5, even though six of the scores are below 30 points. We could also say that the mode, or the most fre-
quently occurring score, is 28 points. The midpoint of the distribution, or the *median*, is about 28 points also. The problem with averages is that they sometimes obscure the real situation.

Percentages can also present a problem. In the example, 20% of the people taking the test got *As*, 10% got Cs, 10% got Ds, and 60% failed the test. If we use percentages to represent small numbers, they can look far more impressive than the actual information.

A discussion of the various uses of statistics is clearly beyond the scope of the discussion here. What we can say, however, is that in using statistics, we must make sure that the numbers used truly represent the situation. When listening to others using statistics, ask yourself: Who generated the numbers? Were they generated fairly? Do they really represent the situation properly? Numbers can be impressive. It's important to carefully scrutinize them.

Personal knowledge

Sometimes we can use the knowledge that we know people already possess as a means of evidence. In *The Music Man*, for instance, Professor Harold Hill uses the values and beliefs of his audience to convince them that a boy's band will keep their children away from the pool hall—the "Devil's tool." By drawing upon what they already believe to be true, he convinces them that there is "trouble in River City," which can be alleviated only through his methods. Ambiguous empirical statements are most likely to trigger these knowledges. Although the use of personal knowledge creates no new beliefs, it does deepen the commitment to beliefs already held.44

The Usefulness of Evidence

How much evidence is enough? When is it most useful? We should remember that what serves as evidence for one person may not serve as evidence for another. One person may be thoroughly convinced by a friend's testimony; another person may require statistics and evidence of scientific study to be convinced.

An interesting demonstration of the ways in which people interpret evidence was revealed by examining the 1976 Ford-Carter debates. In the first of the debates between the presidential candidates, Carter used ninety-nine pieces of evidence, whereas Ford used only seventy-six. Ford committed more errors in the use of his evidence than Carter did. Even so, Ford was considered the winner. If someone who uses less evidence and does so incorrectly can be considered the winner of a debate, doubt is cast upon how people in general audiences view the use of evidence.45
Two other studies cast doubt on our belief in the ability of people to judge the use of evidence well. One study examined the effect of availability of evidence on produce claims in advertisements. In general, knowing that documentation existed that would substantiate the claims advertisers offered made a small difference in people's attitudes toward the product. Attitudes were slightly more favorable, however, when documentation was available from the product manufacturer (presumably a biased source) than from the Federal Trade Commission (presumably an unbiased source). A related study indicated that the kind of statistical evidence that audiences in general found believable is the kind that experts would consider suspect. Small samples and qualitative claims were more believable than large samples and quantitative claims, and evidence from an "objective" third party was seen as no more believable than evidence from a biased source.

Although these studies, in and of themselves, are not enough to sway our generalizations concerning the effects of evidence on the acceptance of persuasive appeals, we should be cautious in assuming that people can distinguish between evidence generated "properly" versus evidence generated in suspect ways. Reinard argues that the way in which people understand and are persuaded by the use of evidence is best explained through Petty and Cacioppo's elaboration likelihood model. You will recall from Chapter Two that the model presents two routes to persuasion: the central and the peripheral. When people aren't involved in the subject matter, they tend to choose the peripheral route to persuasion. They respond without any active thinking about the matter under consideration and tend to be influenced by things such as the credibility of the source and source attractiveness. When people are interested in the subject matter, they are more likely to be influenced by good arguments. Thus, Reinard argues that evidence will have the most effect on decision making when people are centrally involved in the persuasion process. The studies revealing poor judgments concerning evidence could very well be the result of low involvement with the topics under consideration. Reinard further argues that, in general, evidence appears to increase the persuasiveness of a message, particularly in testimonial evidence when a source is cited and the source is qualified to provide the evidence.

In a review of the literature, Reynolds and Burgoon concluded that "reasoning by receivers is not always logical in nature, or else people use different logics to arrive at conclusions." Keeping this idiosyncratic reasoning in mind, however, the authors generated eighteen propositions, based on previous research, linking the use of evidence to the persuasiveness of the appeal and perceptions of source credibility:

1. Using evidence produces more attitude change than using no evidence.
2. Using evidence produces more attitude change than using simple source assertions.

3. Use of irrelevant evidence from poorly qualified sources will produce counter-to-advocated attitude change, regardless of the credibility of the advocate.

4. Failure to use relevant evidence from qualified sources may produce counter-to-advocated attitude change for low-to-moderately credible advocates.

5. Failure to include evidence citations in a message following an evidence message expressing opposing views will result in lowered credibility ratings for an advocate.

6. Use of evidence citations produces more attitude change when the evidence source and the evidence source's qualifications are provided, or when evidence is presented without a source citation, than when evidence is presented with just the source identification.

7. Clear citation of evidence by an advocate with a moderate-to-low credibility will increase the advocate's credibility and success in persuasion.

8. Using evidence from highly credible sources will, over time, increase an advocate's credibility.

9. Placing citations of less credible evidence sources after the evidence improves the acceptance of a message in contrast to presenting the less credible source citation before evidence.

10. Persuasive effects from the use of evidence citations by a low-to-moderately credible advocate is reduced by very poor delivery.

11. Use of evidence results in attitude change when receivers have no prior knowledge of the evidence.

12. Use of evidence increases attitude change over time, regardless of the advocate's credibility.

13. Use of evidence results in attitude change over time only when receivers hold extreme attitudes on the issue.

14. Credibility of an advocate is positively related to the evaluation of message attributes.

15. Clarity of evidence citations is related positively to evaluations of the evidence and the advocate.


17. People tend to evaluate evidence consistent with their own attitudes, regardless of the quality of the evidence.
18. Evidence that is inconsistent with the major propositions being advanced is more difficult to detect accurately than is irrelevant evidence or evidence from unqualified sources.

**PROOF IN PERSPECTIVE**

Where did we begin? By saying that proof is the combination of evidence and reasoning that makes sense to the receiver. Proof is a perceptual process; it differs from person to person, topic to topic, place to place. How much evidence a person needs will depend on who is doing the persuading and the topic at hand. For others, certain kinds of reasoning will be more effective than other kinds. The important thing to realize is that the persuasive message can be structured in a great variety of ways. The choices we make with respect to message construction must ultimately depend upon our analysis of our audience and what we think it requires as proof of our claim.

**CONSIDER**

1. What is proof? When do we need it? What source of information constitute sufficient proof for you?

2. Analyze a television commercial or a magazine advertisement, using the Toulmin model to identify various parts of the argument.

**DISCOVER**

Try to persuade a friend to accept your thinking about some issue with which you are both familiar—e.g., the presidential elections, school policies. At what points does your friend require that you offer proof for the way you think? What does he or she accept as proof? Would another person require more or less proof regarding the issue? Why?

**ALTERNATIVES**

In Chapter One, you analyzed several magazine advertisements to determine the emotions they evoked. Using the same ads, or new ones, analyze how the color and design elements of the mes-
sage create meaning, fulfill secondary functions of communication, and constitute proof for the advertiser's claim.

ENDNOTES

10. O'Keefe, "Logic of Message Design:"
11. Ibid., 84.
12. Ibid., 87.
13. Ibid.


