

CHAPTER 5

Junctions: Responding to Alternative Paths



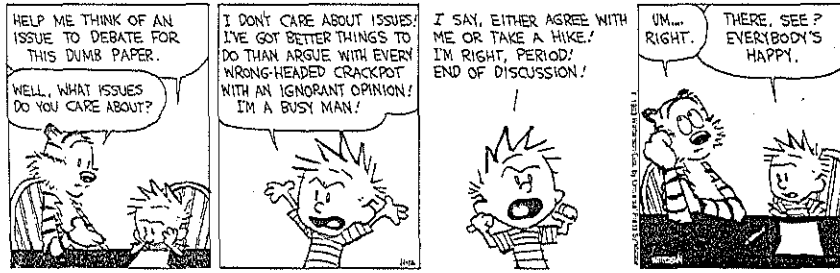
He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion. (John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*)

So far, you have learned how authors set out a line of argument from seeing the issue to defining the problem to choosing a solution (Chapter 2); how they make claims about the existence, nature, cause, and value of the problem; how they make claims about the existence, nature, effects, value, and implementation of solutions (Chapter 3); and how authors support these claims with appeals to logic and observation (logos), authority (ethos), and emotion (pathos) (Chapter 4).

But it is not enough for authors to set out their own line of argument and support it. It is not a conversation if one person does all the talking. To have a say in an ongoing conversation, an author has to respond to earlier turns and think ahead to future responses. In this way, an author's line of argument crosses, joins, and parts from other lines of arguments.

An author expects people to raise objections, to see problems in a different way, and to propose different solutions. Exchanging views in a group produces more and better ideas. But exchanges would take forever if authors had to wait for an opponent's response to be published before writing the next article. Instead, authors search out published arguments, predict what objections the authors would have, and build responses into their line of argument.

In this chapter, you will learn some strategies for considering opponents' arguments, making concessions, and disagreeing.



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The Purpose of Disagreeing

In academic writing and in the best public arguments, authors treat disagreement as an opportunity for further inquiry rather than as a personal attack. An opponent is not an enemy to be vanquished, but a fellow explorer whose trip into the same terrain led to a very different map.

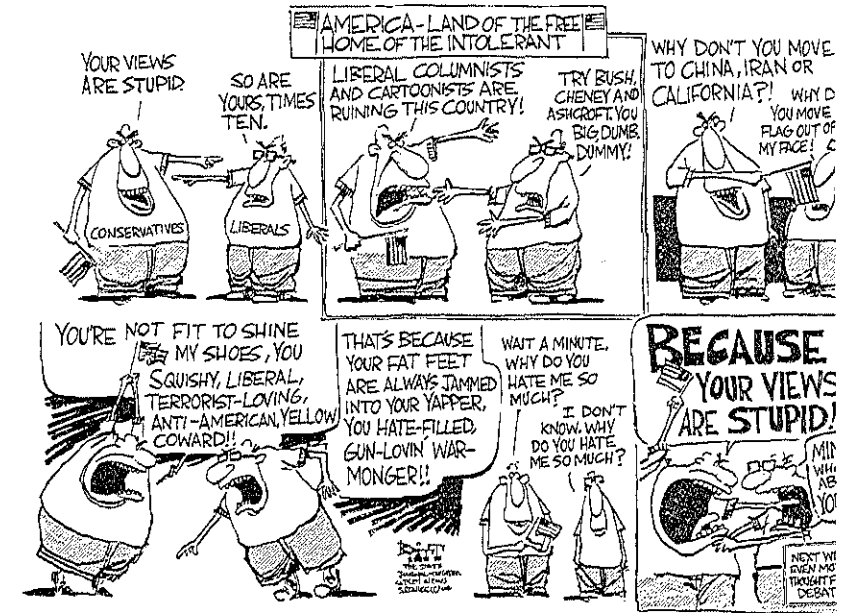
When an explorer realizes that her map conflicts with those of other explorers, she tries to find out why. She identifies the places where the divergences really matter. She may decide that her own map needs to be adjusted, or she may try to persuade others that their route goes in the wrong direction.

To describe constructive ways of disagreeing, we will refer to people with different views as **opponents**. By opponent, we simply mean someone whose position offers an alternative to the author's. An opponent is different from a rival, a competitor whose victory means another's defeat. An opponent is also different from an enemy or adversary, someone who seeks to injure or overthrow another. Opponents are capable of responding to a convincing argument; they can have good intentions toward each other and form alliances.

For an argument to take place, areas of agreement and dispute are both needed. You can agree with an opponent about the existence of a problem, but disagree about its cause or its severity. You can agree at the problem span, but diverge on the effectiveness or costs of a proposed solution.

The amount of space devoted to alternative paths varies quite a bit. Some authors, such as Shapiro and Robinson, say little about alternative positions, even though they risk seeming uninformed or closed-minded. For other authors, such as Kleck and Easterbrook, the entire purpose of writing is to bring up someone else's line of argument and refute it in whole or in part.

Seeing how an author treats opponents is one of the best ways to judge the quality of the argument. If authors ignore opponents or treat them with contempt, they come across as closed-minded and even untrustworthy.



Adversaries do not consider others' views seriously. Courtesy of Copley News Service.

The Main Path and Alternative Paths

Imagine driving on a highway and seeing signs that you are approaching a junction with another road. The road toward the junction is marked by signs, telling you the distance to the exit, some destinations you could reach, and some attractions or services. The signs make you alert in plenty of time so that you decide whether to exit or not. The signs give you a glimpse of a different path that might seem attractive. If there is more than one way to get to the destination, you may even see signs telling you which path to follow.

The spans and stases can be thought of as the **main path** that the author wants you to follow; opposing claims are sidetracks or crossroads that invite to turn in a different direction, onto a path that, according to the author, will lead you astray.

It is dangerous for an author to ignore sidetracks and crossroads because good readers are active and curious explorers. Active readers notice alternative paths and wonder whether they can get to the same destination along a different route or whether they should go to a different destination altogether. If

author does not give you reasons for rejecting these claims, you might take off in another direction. So like a highway crew, authors label the alternative routes clearly and describe them accurately. They also provide reasons for staying on the main path, just as a friend might say, "You might think that taking I-29 would be just as fast, but the traffic is bad there, so wait and turn at 32nd instead."

Developing a Disagreement

Developing a fair and effective disagreement takes several steps. An author has to identify the opponents, summarize the alternative path, make concessions, state the rebuttal, and return to the main path. These steps will be illustrated with articles that challenge opponents with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Before reading on, read one of these articles:

- **Environment.** Gregg Easterbrook's critique of environmental advocates in "They Kept the Sky from Falling."
- **Crime.** Gary Kleck's critique of responses to the shootings in Columbine, "There Are No Lessons to be Learned from Littleton."

"Spans and Stases" provides an overview of how to divide these articles into spans (Chapter 2) and the spans into stasis passages (Chapter 3).

SPANS AND STASES

Environment: Easterbrook

Easterbrook approves of dams that produce energy and protect the environment as much as possible. The issue for him is that environmentalists don't see these dams the same way he does; they protest against the dams and try to stop their construction. At his **issue** span (par. 1-6), Easterbrook appeals to general readers to see one particular dam at James Bay in the same way he does and to feel as surprised as he is that environmentalists disapprove.

The James Bay dam is the **paradigm case** (or **epitome**) of the larger **problem** (par. 7-34). For Easterbrook, environmentalists are addicted to doomsaying, painting all problems as crises with horrifying outcomes. Doomsaying was needed when environmental problems were ignored, but Easterbrook believes that environmentalists no longer need such tactics. He argues that doomsaying is hurting the environmentalist cause.

His **solution** (par. 35-38) is ecorealism, a willingness to use environmental resources when technology is designed to minimize harms.



Crime: Kleck

Kleck opens by describing a set of murderous school shootings. For Kleck, the **issue** (par. 1-4) is how the cases have been analyzed in the media, especially theories about why they happened. By offering a very long list of very diverse causes, all lumped together, he wants readers to view them all as somewhat ridiculous. He states his purpose as challenging the idea that lessons can be drawn from cases like Littleton.

In his **problem** section (par. 5-23), Kleck criticizes how opponents treat school shootings at several stases. He challenges the way opponents describe the set of school shootings as a phenomenon, using statistics to argue against the **existence** of a trend. Then he challenges his opponents' analysis of the **causes** of the shootings, describing most of them as unrelated to the actual events. He devotes the most space to challenging the opponents' proposed **actions** for preventing future shootings.

In his own very brief **solution** (par. 24), Kleck names a few factors that he does consider relevant to mass-murders at schools, issues that he says the media should focus on. He also recommends closer analysis of the **causes** of "ordinary" crime.

Identifying Opponents

Opponents care about the same issue as the author but make claims or take actions that the author disagrees with, such as experts and eyewitnesses whose testimony weakens the author's point. The first step to a fair response is for the author to acknowledge that there are opponents and identify them.

Naming Opponents

Authors treat opponents fairly by calling them by name or at least by giving the name of an agency, a company, or activist group that opponents belong to. Naming names shows that the author has paid attention to what the opponent said, takes it seriously enough to respond, and is treating the opponent as a real person. When naming opponents, an author usually includes brief phrases about their credentials to establish the opponents' ethos. Just as authors benefit from calling on important, well-trained allies to support their points, so they gain credit for responding to powerful opponents rather than weak ones. "Naming Real Opponents" illustrates how Easterbrook and Kleck name their opponents.

NAMING REAL OPPONENTS



Environment: How Easterbrook Names Opponents

Easterbrook's named opponents include the National Audubon Society, Greenpeace, activist Jeremy Rifkin, Al Gore, and novelist and environmentalist activist Wallace Stegner. He also names opponents in the anti-environment camp, Rush Limbaugh, Newt

Gingrich, and Bob Dole. In most cases, he assumes these people are so well known to readers of *Washington Monthly* that he need not give their job titles.



Crime: How Kleck Names Opponents

Kleck names few specific opponents, apart from Congress and the Mississippi legislature. By naming so few opponents and giving so few specific examples, Kleck risks coming across as too distant and abstract in his argument.

Inventing a Group

Authors often speak of groups of opponents using a common descriptive term ("singles" or "college students") or making up a new term ("Baby Boomers" or "Generation X"). The act of inventing a group is like making a claim that a category exists and has a specific set of members.

By inventing group names, authors can talk about hypothetical opponents as well as real ones. For example, Castleman might anticipate objections from car alarm manufacturers; Chivers might prepare responses to dredge operators. Responding to hypothetical opponents can be persuasive, but only if the arguments attributed to them are powerful and worth refuting. Creating a weak hypothetical opponent is called "setting up a strawman." Knocking down a strawman is not an impressive feat, so refuting a strawman's argument does not help an author come across as fair and open to challenge.

"Inventing Groups" illustrates how Easterbrook and Kleck invent groups.

INVENTING GROUPS

Environment: Easterbrook

Easterbrook often describes opponents with the term "environmentalists" or "the green movement." Later, he begins calling them "enviros" and ends up calling them "doomsayers." He invents the term "unviros" for anti-environmentalists, whom he also calls "naysayers." These more casual and colorful terms convey some disrespect for extreme members of both sides. Readers may react by questioning Easterbrook's fairness. But in many cases, Easterbrook quotes specific individuals in these groups to provide evidence that at least some of these opponents really do take the positions he ascribes to the whole group. Finally, he invents a name, "ecorealists," for a group that he would like readers to join.



Crime: Kleck

Kleck often names opponents with general group terms such as "news media," "analysts," "journalists and other writers of every ideological stripe," "pro-gun people," "pro-control people," and "those who propose preventive measures." He does not quote specific opponents in these groups; instead, he sets up hypothetical arguments. In par. 21, he writes: "One might justify drawing lessons from high-profile tragedies by arguing that . . ." He uses "One" for an unnamed hypothetical opponent. The hypothetical opponent makes a strong point, however, so Kleck is not setting up a strawman. Heavy use of hypotheticals creates a detached and philosophical tone that is acceptable for the journal *Criminal Justice Ethics*, but would not work well in a popular magazine.

Summarizing the Alternative Path

After naming opponents, authors summarize the claim that they want to challenge. Whether the summary is brief or lengthy, a fair author states it in a way that the opponent would agree captures the essence of his or her position.

An author who wants to solve a problem, rather than make opponents look bad, has to win over neutral readers and even those who agree with the opponent. Ridiculing or exaggerating an opponent's position might make an author and his allies feel triumphant, but it is ultimately self-defeating; it will not widen the author's base of supporters. Any fair-minded reader will see that the author has succeeded only at the easy task of wrestling a strawman to the ground and has failed to touch the real opponent.


"Summarizing Opponents' Positions" illustrates how Easterbrook and Kleck sum up opposing views.

SUMMARIZING OPPONENTS' POSITIONS

Environment: Easterbrook

Yet many environmentalists think that in order to be pro-conservation, they must be anti-production. Orthodoxy has grown so conflicted on the subject of energy production that a few greens have pronounced that, even if an entirely benign energy source is invented, it should be withheld, since people would use that energy to commit the primal sin of altering the ecology. During the period when it briefly seemed "cold fusion" might offer zero-pollution energy from seawater, activist Jeremy Rifkin declared that clean, unlimited energy would be "the worst thing that could happen to our planet."

Easterbrook claims in par. 9 that many environmentalists think they must oppose energy production. For support, he quotes Jeremy Rifkin rejecting a promising form of energy production. Easterbrook uses the phrase "a few greens" to avoid claiming that all environmentalists are as extreme as Rifkin. However Rifkin's position is key to Easterbrook's argument; he is similar to the environmentalists who protested against the hydroelectric dam in James Bay. Is Easterbrook fair? How many environmentalists actually hold that view? To challenge Easterbrook, a reader could find articles by environmentalists who support clean energy production.



Crime: Kleck

A partial list of the problems that have been blamed for the recent mass killings in schools would include: guns, "assault weapons," large-capacity ammunition magazines, lax regulation of gun shows; . . . excessively large high schools; inadequate monitoring of potentially violent students by schools; lazy, uninvolved Baby Boomer parents and correspondingly inadequate supervision of their children; . . . "Goth" culture among adolescents; and Southern culture.

Kleck argues that policies should not be based on improbable causes for unusual events like mass killings in schools. His very long, but still "partial," list of causes in par. 3 represents the positions of his opponents in the media and elsewhere who believe that such diagnoses are plausible. He does not quote any individuals making these diagnoses, but he seems to describe each individual case fairly. To check on Kleck, a reader would have to look up articles about individual school shootings to see if all of these diagnoses were actually proposed.

As a reader, you deserve some sign that authors you disagree with have paid attention to alternative positions. If you see your position stated fairly, you should credit the author for taking the trouble to understand your viewpoint and treat it seriously. This in turn may inspire you to consider the author's point of view more seriously, even if you remain skeptical.

Making Concessions

A concession describes a point where an author and an opponent agree. If the opponent has already made an effective argument for a claim that the author agrees with, it makes sense for the author to point it out rather than repeating it. A concession of this kind saves time, space, and energy.

Concessions are important for several other reasons as well. They establish shared ground from which opponents can negotiate. They allow authors to narrow in on the important areas of disagreement. They also appeal to truly undecided

readers, who agree with some points on each side of a debate. These readers may be turned off by authors who claim exclusive access to the truth.

Authors may go further and praise opponents, crediting them with good intentions. But beware of authors who praise opponents merely as a show of their fairness and open-mindedness. Praise is insincere and even hypocritical if it is a mere formality.

"Conceding to an Opponent" illustrates Easterbrook's and Meares and Kahan's passages with these moves.



CONCEDING TO AN OPPONENT

Environment: Easterbrook

"Institutional environmentalism is correct about the need to propel society beyond its fixation on fossil fuels."

"Environmentalists are well ahead of the historical curve in sensing that materialist culture has lost its way."

"This portion of [Gore's] *Earth in the Balance* is measured, thoughtful and possessed of enduring significance."



Crime: Meares and Kahan

"Given its historical context . . . , the 1960s conception of rights deserves admiration."

Stating the Rebuttal

For a few authors, the best part of arguing is telling people that they are wrong. But for most people, that is the hardest part. They would rather avoid conflict; they don't want to make anyone feel bad, even people they disagree with.

Seeing argument as exploration can make it easier to disagree. The goal of participants in the best scholarly and public debates is not to be right all the time; it is to find the most accurate, useful, and enlightening views of the world. So if an opponent is heading for a ditch that you tripped over a while back, she won't feel bad if you point it out.

Signaling Disagreement

Authors have to signal their disagreement clearly to make sure readers can distinguish between the main path and the summary of an opponent's alternative path. Some authors are very direct in saying that they disagree with an opponent



Pundits are paid to point out flaws in one another's arguments. © Harley Schwadron.

They describe opponents in negative terms, but the summary of the opponent's position is fair. "Signaling Disagreement Fairly" illustrates passages in which authors disagree.

SIGNALING DISAGREEMENT FAIRLY

Environment: Easterbrook

Yet many environmentalists think that in order to be pro-conservation, they must be anti-production. Orthodoxy has grown so conflicted on the subject of energy production that a few greens have pronounced that, even if an entirely benign energy source is invented, it should be withheld, since people would use that energy to commit the primal sin of altering the ecology The notion of energy production as antithetical to nature evinces a myopic view of natural history.

In par. 9, Easterbrook uses the connective "yet" to signal disagreement. He also uses parody, using religious terms like "sin" and "orthodoxy" to make environmentalism seem like a self-righteous dogma. In par. 10, he uses the faultfinding adjective "myopic," to signal that this view is defective and shortsighted.



Crime: Kleck and Castleman

. . . Rather, my main point is that it is generally a mistake to diagnose the causes of violence and crime, or to identify effective ways to reduce violence and crime, via a focus on unusual, heavily publicized violent events (Kleck)

. . . [A]nyone who calls Noe Valley "safe" is living in a daydream Many leftists I know pooh-pooh neighborhood watch programs because they smack of Big Brother, involve cooperation with the police and don't do anything about poverty and racism. (Castleman)

Kleck is very direct in calling the opponents' view a "mistake." Castleman uses fault-finding language, "living in a daydream," and scare quotes around "safe" to dispute the apparent tranquility of his neighborhood. Later, he uses parody terms "pooh-pooh" and "smack" to make the objections seem less serious.

Sometimes authors signal disagreement using language that is so negative that it becomes unfair or pejorative, language that insults the opponent. Using pejorative language for disagreement is just as unfair as an inaccurate or exaggerate summary of an opponent's position. "Using Unfair or Pejorative Language" illustrates these forms of disagreement.



USING UNFAIR OR PEJORATIVE LANGUAGE

Environment: Easterbrook

Damophobia reflects the fallacy of Stop-in-Place. (Easterbrook)

In this sentence from par. 14, two terms, "damophobia" and "Stop-in-Place," are Easterbrook's inventions. "Damophobia" implies that environmentalists have irrational fears. Easterbrook describes "Stop-in-Place" as a naive philosophy. The third main term, "fallacy," is a position so logically flawed that no reasonable person could hold it. Easterbrook is leaving himself open to charges that he is being insulting and distorting the opposing position. No environmentalist would consider this a fair description of their philosophy.



Crime: DiIulio

When it comes to the search for rational, workable crime policies, it's time to admit that the brain-dead law-and-order right is no better than the soft-in-the-head anti-incarceration left. (DiIulio)

John J. DiIulio, Jr., a professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton, wrote this in the online journal *Slate*. The terms “brain-dead” and “soft-in-the head” are equal and opposite insults being applied without qualification. DiIulio may assume that insulting both sides equally makes him seem fair and independent or that it allies him with the broad middle between these extremes. However, this pejorative language could simply turn off readers across the entire political spectrum.

Challenging the Claim

It is not enough for an author simply to disagree with an opponent. She must specify what is wrong with the opposing position. As a reader, when you are confronted with two conflicting claims, you need reasons for accepting one and rejecting the other. This section will describe how authors challenge an opponent’s claim; the next section will describe challenging the support for the claim.

The first step in challenging an opponent’s claim is to recognize its stasis, whether it is a claim of existence, definition, value, cause, or action (Chapter 2). Then the author can provide counterclaims at the same stasis. For example, if an opponent claims that a solution will **cause** undesirable side effects, then the author can argue that it does not always produce those effects. Or the author can modify the solution to prevent the side effects. An author can also shift to a different stasis, for example, conceding that undesirable side effects will occur, but arguing (at the stasis of **value**) that they are mild and outweighed by the solution’s other benefits. “Challenging the Claim” illustrates passages with such challenges.

CHALLENGING THE CLAIM

Environment: Easterbrook

Hydropower requires flooding lands from reservoirs, a practice environmentalists speak of in tones of deep horror, as though it wipes out life. Plants and animals do die when the reservoir water rises, and some wild-river ecology is lost. But what then exists? A lake ecology, brimming with living things Why such change should dismay humans would be difficult for nature to fathom Through glacial advances and retreats, nature has made and unmade uncountable rivers, lakes, and dams in what people now call Quebec. Why is it strange for women and men to do the same, especially if they can learn to do it in ways calculated to minimize harm?

Easterbrook is not challenging the causal argument that dams destroy habitat in par. 11-13. He concedes “plants and animals do die.” Instead Easterbrook responds at the stasis of value: the destruction is not as bad as it seems. First, a lake ecology is equal in value to a wild-river ecology. Second, changes by humans are equal in harm to those made by natural forces. Easterbrook’s use of questions rather than assertions makes this response appealing to general readers.



Crime: Kleck

After it was found that such transfers were involved in the Littleton case, some analysts proposed restricting sales at gun shows. Gun show sales, however, had nothing at all to do with any of the other high-profile school shootings. The most common modes of acquisition of guns by shooters were theft . . . , while the Springfield shooter was given his guns by his father. Further, even in the Littleton case the three longguns . . . were purchased on the killers’ behalf by [an] eighteen-year-old . . . [who was] eligible to purchase the same guns from any gun store. Further, one of the two killers turned eighteen before the shootings and was likewise eligible to buy longguns from any gun store.

In par. 15, Kleck summarizes the opponents’ causal claim that regulating sales at gun shows would prevent school killings. Kleck makes two causal counterclaims. First, gun shows were not a causal factor in other cases, so restricting them will not prevent all school shootings. Second, regulations would not have prevented Littleton because the killers obtained the guns legally from a store.

Challenging the Support

Authors can challenge the way an opponent has supported a claim, rather than the claim itself. If the opponent lacks evidence, it is fair to ask readers to give the claim less credence or reject it. Authors can challenge all three types of support: logos, ethos, and pathos (Chapter 4).

Using logos, an author can challenge observational evidence, questioning whether the data are up-to-date and whether the observations were carefully made. An author can supply good evidence that contradicts the opponent’s claim or point out inconsistencies in the opponent’s reasoning to show that it is illogical or conflicts with common sense.

Using ethos, an author can bring in experts and witnesses who testify against the opponent’s claim. Or an author can challenge the credibility of the opponent’s authorities.

Using pathos, an author can challenge the appropriateness of the opponent’s emotional appeals or appeal to different emotions. For example, if the opponent appeals to fear, the author can appeal to pride; if the opponent evokes rage, the author can appeal for calmness.

Authors can also challenge the certainty level of an opponent’s claims. If an opponent claims that some principle is always true, an author can supply counterexamples; if an opponent admits exceptions to the rule, an author can ask whether the exceptional cases are more representative than the other cases. “Challenging the Support” illustrates these strategies.




CHALLENGING THE SUPPORT

Environment: Easterbrook

... Enviro lobbyists understood about compliance cushions. They simply declined to mention this factor in congressional testimony and media interviews, sensing a chance to create a jolt of bad news. "The advocacy campaign against the provision was illogical unless the motive was to take a positive development and make it seem depressing," says [EPA Administrator William] Reilly, himself once an environmental lobbyist as head of the World Wildlife Fund.

In par. 29, Easterbrook challenges the logic of environmentalists in opposing new standards for car emissions in 1990. After conceding that the standards appeared lax, he argues that they would still lead to cleaner cars, so it would be logical for environmentalists to support them. But they didn't. Easterbrook then accuses environmentalists of omitting evidence that undermined their position. He supports this charge through ethos, by enlisting William Reilly as an ally. If readers doubt that Easterbrook's interpretation of the events is fair, they may be impressed that it is shared by Reilly, who was directly involved in the case and who has environmentalist credentials.

In response, environmentalists could challenge Easterbrook's version of this incident. Maybe they believed the new standard would not lower emissions at all or not enough to matter. Or they might concede a mistake in this case but deny that such mistakes occur in all their public positions.



Crime: Kleck

Those who propose preventative measures ... can plausibly assert that the irrelevance of their proposals to these incidents does not matter because the proposals are meritorious with respect to more common sorts of violence. If that is the case, however, honest advocates should ... not coast dishonestly on the emotional momentum created by extraordinary violent events that their policies could not prevent. It would, however, be naive to expect those playing hardball politics to follow the intellectually honest path since they will be loathe to forego exploiting the emotional power that comes from tying their recommendations to the most horrific and frightening crimes.


In par. 20, Kleck challenges the character (ethos) of his opponents; he accuses them of dishonesty in claiming that their solution would have prevented a high-profile shooting case, when they are really hoping to prevent everyday violence. Kleck also criticizes them for appealing to emotion (pathos) about Littleton in order to prevent cases that the public would not care about as much.

Is Kleck's accusation of dishonesty fair? Dishonesty is such a harsh accusation that he should have strong evidence that it happened. But Kleck only describes general

groups of opponents and hypothetical positions that they might take. Kleck's opponents could reasonably challenge him to cite specific cases of dishonesty and to show that dishonesty is typical of proposals concerning school shootings.

Returning to the Main Path

After a lengthy challenge to an opponent, an author often restates his or her point on the main path, so that readers can tell that the detour is finished and remember where the author is heading. "Reinstating the Main Path Claim" illustrates passages with these moves.




REINSTATING THE MAIN PATH CLAIM

Environment: Easterbrook

Current ecological law is hardly perfect, but by any reasoned judgment it is far stronger than in the seventies.

After conceding in par. 21 that environmental laws are still not perfect, Easterbrook restates his view that they are strong enough that the environmentalists' dire assessments are not warranted.



Crime: Kleck

While some of these facts were mentioned occasionally in news stories ... many writers nevertheless offered explanations for the non-existent "trend" in youth/school/gun violence.

Consequently, regulation of gun shows was totally irrelevant to preventing any of these massacres.

Kleck often finishes his refutation with a restatement of his main path point, as in these examples from par. 6 and par. 16.

Clues to Spotting Disagreements

This chapter has identified five parts of a disagreement passage: identifying opponents, summarizing an alternative position, making concessions, stating the rebuttal, and returning to the main path. You can recognize the parts by looking for some key terms.

WORDS TO WATCH FOR: DISAGREEMENT

Identifying Opponents

Names and credentials of opponents.

Summarizing Alternative Positions

Direct quotes or paraphrases from opponents framed with verbs of attribution (see next section).

Making Concessions

Agreement Terms To my opponent's credit, he/she does admit, he/she does acknowledge, we agree, we share

Truth Terms Granted, of course, it is true that, my opponent is right that, my opponent has a point

Stating the Rebuttal

Contrastives On the other hand, but, even though, yet, despite, though, nevertheless, however, contrary to, in contrast, while, although, unfortunately

Doubt Terms It may appear, at first glance, allegedly, supposedly

Disapproval We reject this notion, this is wrong, I disagree, not so

Faultfinding Terms Wrongheaded, naive, risky, short-sighted, insufficient

Returning to the Main Path

Conclusion In short, consequently, this brings us back to, finally, therefore, as a result

Replacement Instead, rather than, not simply, after due consideration, a careful look shows

Asserting Truth Actually, really, ultimately, in fact, in reality, after all

Verbs of Attribution

An important signal of an author's degree of agreement with other authors is the use of verbs of attribution. These are the verbs that come immediately before a quote or paraphrase of another author's claim.

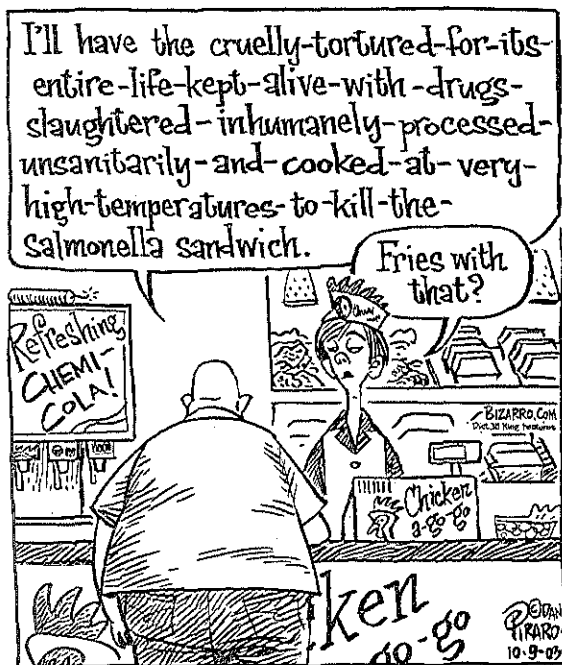
English has a large number of these verbs, including:

accepts	hypothesizes
accounts	illustrates
adds	implies
addresses	indicates
admits	insinuates
affirms	insists
agrees	introduces
alleges	is silent on
argues	mentions
asks	points out
asserts	promotes
assumes	proposes
categorizes	questions
challenges	realizes
cites	refutes
claims	retorts
concedes	reveals
confesses	says
confirms	sees
decides	states
defines	suggests
denies	thinks
disagrees	uses
discovers	verifies
emphasizes	wants
exclaims	whines
explains	

The simplest, most popular, and least informative verbs of attribution are "says" and "states." These convey only that language was used. But the other verbs provide clues to the beliefs of the author and of the source being quoted. Compare the versions in Table 5.1 of an outlandish claim that differ only in the verb.

TABLE 5.1 How Verbs of Attribution Convey Attitudes and Beliefs

Summary Sentence with Varied Verbs	Beliefs Conveyed by Verbs
Thomas said/stated that the earth is flat.	Thomas expressed a claim.
Thomas thought/believed that the earth is flat.	Thomas took the claim as true.
Thomas assumed/asserted/contended that the earth is flat.	Thomas took the claim as true but offered no reasons.
Thomas claimed/argued/reasoned that the earth is flat.	Thomas took the claim as true and provided reasons.
Thomas concluded/proved/showed that the earth is flat.	Thomas took the claim as true after some investigation.
Thomas agreed/admitted/realized that the earth is flat.	Thomas took the claim as true and so does the author.
Thomas denied/won't admit that the earth is flat.	Thomas took the claim as false but the author takes it as true.



Some opponents know all about your objections.

© Dan Piraro.

Each group of verbs says something about what Thomas thinks and about how he came to his view. But some of these verbs also signal whether Thomas and the author believe the same thing. When authors cite allies, they use verbs that signal belief on both sides, such as “discovers,” “agrees,” “realizes,” “understands.” But when they want to signal disagreement with an opponent, they will use verbs such as “asserts,” “insists,” “contends,” or “alleges.”

Verbs of attribution convey attitudes of many shades. Paying close attention to what they mean and how they are used will give you important clues about the author’s position.

EXERCISES

Backtalk: What Do You Say?

Some research suggests that men and women differ in how they express disagreement and how they respond to rebuttals. Do you agree? Why or why not? What do you find difficult about expressing disagreement? How do you feel when someone disagrees with you on an important point? How do you respond? How much are you willing to argue back?

Recognize/Evaluate

A. Environment

Following is a passage from a book by nature writer and activist Edward Abbey and three responses written by students who disagree with Abbey. Which one is fairest and most accurate in summarizing Abbey’s position? Which one gives the best rebuttal? Give your reasons.

Edward Abbey: From *Beyond the Wall* What about the “human impact” of the motorized use of [boats] of the Glen Canyon [reservoir]? We can visualize the floor of the reservoir gradually accumulating not only silt, mud, waterlogged trees and drowned cattle but also the usual debris that is left behind when the urban industrial style of recreation is carried into the open country. There is also the problem of human wastes. The waters of the wild river were good to drink but no one in his right senses would drink from Lake Powell. Eventually, as is already sometimes the case at Lake Mead, the stagnant waters will become too foul even for swimming. The trouble is that while some boats have what are called “self-contained” heads, the majority do not; most sewage is disposed of simply by pumping it into the water. It will take a while, but long before it becomes a solid mass of mud Lake Powell will enjoy a passing fame as the biggest sewage lagoon in the American Southwest. Most tourists will never be able to afford a boat trip on this reservoir, but everybody within 50 miles will be able to smell it.

All the foregoing would be nothing but a futile exercise in nostalgia (so much water over the dam) if I had nothing constructive and concrete to offer. But I do. As alternate methods of power generation are developed, such as solar, and as the nation establishes a way of life adapted to actual resources and basic needs, so that