Textbook Review for *inReview*
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For many years, *The Aims of Argument* (henceforth *Aims*) has served admirably as a multipurpose textbook, useful for nearly any rhetoric-based undergraduate composition course. It is accessible enough for first-year students, focusing on practical strategies rather than Classical terminology (syllogism, enthymeme, exordium, etc.) and contemporary issues. However, it is also provides far more in-depth sections on appeals, stasis, briefs, logic, and other sophisticated rhetorical concepts than most first-year texts; as a result, it is also quite suitable for advanced composition courses designed for second and third year students.

I began using *Aims* (the first edition, with readings) in the mid-1990’s for a 200-level course titled “Persuasive Writing on Public Issues.” The course is one of several 200 and 300-level writing-intensive courses from which Arizona State University students must choose to meet “literacy” requirements. Some college advisors, such as those from journalism and justice studies, suggest the course for its obvious relevance to their own curricula; however, many students enter the course with no special knowledge of or interest in rhetoric (or “public issues” for that matter). I selected *Aims* and stuck with it for many years because of its user-friendliness for these students.

Overall, my experience was good. With some classroom practice, students were able to understand the “simplified” Toulmin method, which is the heart of *Aims*’s approach, and apply it to both the arguments we analyzed and to their own and each other’s drafts. The sample arguments were effective and engaging, and the general focus
on process and context consistent with my own approaches. The chapter on negotiation and mediation provided a suitable finale to the semester, as we explored the possibility of an alternative, non-agonistic, rhetoric (a la Carl Rogers).

**Convincing vs. Persuading**

My main quarrel with *Aims* had to do with what I consider to be a rather forced distinction that drives the organization of the book: Crusius and Channell’s differentiation between “convincing” (arguing to secure agreement or “making a case”) and “persuading” (arguing to influence behavior). Each variety is occupies its own chapter (two remaining chapters cover other aims – inquiry and negotiation), with case structure introduced as a means to describe the intellectual activity of informal logic in the “convincing” chapter, and the appeals (*ethos, pathos, logos*) introduced as a means for “influencing the whole person” to action in the “persuading” chapter. The division is referred to frequently in other areas of the book as well, making it quite difficult to avoid.

I found that while some students buy the distinction, others point out that, in many ways, changing your mind through reasoning is indeed an “action,” and they wonder how “convincing” could ever possibly be “pure,” i.e. bereft of appeals to anything besides *logos*. To their credit, the authors do note in chapter one that the aims do “converge and diverge” and “overlap and interact.” In the new fourth edition, this qualification is, happily, somewhat more noticeable, as it is highlighted in a blue “concept close-up” box. The distinction is further elaborated upon in the preface (which few if any students read), where Crusius and Channell note that their “motivation for separating convincing from persuading is not so much theoretical as pedagogical,” which makes perhaps the most sense, since if the book’s sequence is followed, students get practice with basic case-
making (claim plus reasons) before dealing with the oft-times “unspoken” features of arguments, like appeal to emotion. While I understand this pedagogical reasoning, I still had some trouble maintaining the simplification when students, who are, after all, pretty sophisticated about “school” and “media” rhetoric, would locate subtle intention and manipulation in even the driest, most carefully formal arguments.

**Inquiry and Negotiation**

As previously mentioned, the remaining “aims” described in *Aims* are “inquiry” and “negotiation and mediation,” the latter combined into a single chapter. This convenient four-chapter structure suggests a four unit, four-paper semester syllabus, with the sequence beginning, logically enough, with inquiry. The inquiry chapter, both in the current and previous editions, contains much useful material on invention and problematizing, presented in an engaging fashion. When I taught from earlier editions, however, I had considerable difficulty creating an “exploratory paper” assignment that would act as a suitable capstone to this unit. Inquiry was correctly described as dialogue, and students found the list of “questions for inquiry” useful (this list, by the way, has the only direct discussion of warrants in the book, encapsulated in the questions “ask about the assumptions on which the thesis and reasons are based” and “ask about the values expressed or implied in the argument”). However, writing a paper consisting of open-ended dialogue seemed highly stilted and artificial; the “open-ended,” exploratory features overshadowed by students’ legitimate concerns about how to structure such a thing and how to avoid arriving at conclusions until a suitable number of appropriate interrogations had taken place. The text provided little help with these practical concerns, mainly emphasizing that one’s own position should come at the end.
The fourth edition has made some useful improvements in this area. It outlines more specifically a suggested sequence for writing, providing more explicit directions about chronicling the inquiry process; for example, the authors suggest that “part two could be organized as a discussion of ideas that were strengthened by your research versus those you have reconsidered because of it.” Some might legitimately accuse this approach of being overly prescriptive and logocentric. However, in my experience, students appreciate this level of guidance when tackling assignments that diverge from the “claim-reasons” structure they are most familiar with. I will enjoy using this chapter much more in the future.

On the other hand, a chapter I have always enjoyed using is the final in the sequence of “aims” chapters: the chapter on negotiation and mediation. After a semester of analyzing and practicing rhetorical moves for winning arguments, it’s fun to engage students in examining ways to resolve disputes. Many have experience in mediation due to their participation in “peer mediation” activities in high school and junior high, and their insights can enrich class discussion. Likewise, professional mediators, referred by local courts and police departments, can bring a welcome “real world” perspective; they tend to add credibility to the argument that traditional forms of argumentation can fall short in situations where disputants must continue to interact, such as in workplace or custody conflicts. Without mentioning his name, Aims invokes Carl Rogers’ mediation strategies as a method of evaluating and preparing to address disputes: analyzing opposing viewpoints, discovering the nature of the dispute (i.e. “difference over ends or means”), and proposing compromise solutions. The text then provides examples of
mediatory essays, and discusses how students might go about writing one. I have also found that using case scenarios works well.

Unlike the somewhat problematic “inquiry” and “convincing” arguments students are asked to write, where they must suppress tendencies to use their full range of rhetorical tools, the mediatory essays calls upon both their analytical and problem solving skills while at the same time allowing them to take advantage of many appeals in order to convince the disputants that the compromise is a good one. This last point, the idea that the mediator has a rhetorical role, provokes interesting discussions about exactly what sorts of language are non-rhetorical; by this point in the semester students are quite willing to debate “daring” postmodern ideas about the role of the signifier, if you are willing to sponsor them.

Research-Based and Visual Arguments

In the fourth edition, the authors have changed the sequence of chapters considerably. Edition three began with introductory material, followed by an overview of rhetorical reading strategies. This was followed by the four “aims” units, and the end of the book contained two “appendix”-like chapters on visual rhetoric and researched argument. This sequence reminded me of many composition “big books” which try to accommodate all varieties of curricula by appending chapters on literary analysis, creative non-fiction, and essay exams, as well as a handbook and brief guide to MLA and APA documentation. Since students seem to really enjoy analyzing visual arguments, and Aims contained some excellent examples of advertisements and editorial cartoons, I felt it was a shame that the chapter seemed like an afterthought. Likewise, since most arguments require some sort of research in order to be credible, the position of the
“researched arguments” chapter at the back of the book meant that my students and I had to be flipping back and forth as we discussed creating viable evidence and including it in arguments.

Now, however, these chapters have gained a more favorable position in the text (chapters four and five), following the introductory material and the argument analysis section. Later, “aims” sections refer to them, which creates a more holistic effect. Since these features (particularly visual rhetoric) are increasingly central to any contemporary view of the scope of persuasion, it seems appropriate that they take a prominent place in a textbook dedicated to that subject.

Final Thoughts

Though I have some quibbles with the “inquiry” and “convincing” chapters that have persisted through several editions, I still feel that The Aims of Argument is a fine textbook that provides an accessible yet thorough course in rhetoric for college students. It occupies a useful middle ground between first-year writing texts and more advanced works that introduce rhetorical concepts in their historical and philosophical contexts, such as James A. Herrick’s The History and Theory of Rhetoric or Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee’s Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students.

The fourth edition contains some welcome improvements, those I mention above as well as useful format changes; for example, important concepts are highlighted in convenient, bright blue “Concept Close-up” boxes. In the “visual arguments” chapter, the sample advertisements are printed on lovely, glossy, heavy card stock that more accurately reproduces the “feel” of the magazines in which they were originally published.
Overall, I recommend *Aims* as a rhetoric textbook, and plan to use it again myself next year when I teach “Persuasive Writing on Public Issues.” It is compact, user-friendly, and adaptable to a variety of curricula. It does not, as the authors note in the preface, attempt to “dodge or gloss over the genuine complexities and special challenges of argumentation”; yet it avoids archaic terminology and lengthy overviews of logical systems best reserved for those with a more developed interest in rhetoric. As one of my students noted, it uses “understandable language without talking down to you.”