Textbook Review for *inReview*
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Overview/Philosophy

The quotes that open Sheila Cooper’s and Rosemary Patton’s textbook *Writing Logically, Thinking Critically with Readings* encapsulate their philosophy:

*He who will not reason, is a bigot; he who cannot, is a fool; and he who dares not, is a slave.*
—Lord Byron

*A mind that is stretched to a new idea never returns to its original dimension.*
—Oliver Wendell Holmes

*The vital habits of democracy: the ability to follow an argument, grasp the point of view of another; expand the boundaries of understanding, debate the alternative purposes that might be pursued.*
—John Dewey

While Byron represents Cooper and Patton’s feelings about the purpose of teaching students to learn to read and write logically, the second two quotations emphasize their underlying belief in the democratic power of critical thinking. Though Byron can not be categorized as an American pragmatist, Louis Menand argues that both Holmes and Dewey form part of the group of scholars that described the philosophy (or anti-philosophy) of pragmatism. American pragmatism represents a way of acting in the world based on questioning belief, problem solving, looking toward future consequences, and most importantly on the act of communicating. All three of the quotations circle around a similar principle: that the act of thinking critically can offer participation in the freedom of mind associated with democracy. To offer this skill and this consequence is a lofty and laudable goal for a textbook.
Many instructors and WPA’s searching for a textbook for the second course in the Freshman composition sequence, seek a book about how to write arguments. However, Cooper and Patton view their work as a “text designed for a course devoted to writing and critical thinking with an emphasis on argument” (xix). This is slightly different from a book like *Everything’s An Argument* that offers a practical guide to kinds and categories of argument. Cooper and Patton instead offer a more focused approach to “argument” courses by emphasizing the act of critical thinking and writing rather than attempting to label and define the diverse perspectives and components of formal or classical argument. Cooper and Patton take students on a journey of thinking that begins with understanding their own “world view,” travels through a dialectical approach to argument, and ends with a discussion of the “language” of argument. This approach appears to stem from an overall vision of argument as the act of ethical conversation rather than the act of persuasion or winning.

A theme that is not explicitly expressed but forms an underlying motif in this book concerns the authors’ desire to alter common views of argument and persuasion. Though many texts mention Rogerian argument, Cooper and Patton hold up psychologist Carl Rogers’ approach to communication as a major strategy. This perspective advocates a “deeper appreciation of concession” and a philosophy of communication as “dialogue” rather than as a meeting of “hostile adversaries” (99). This desire to view critical thinking as part of a larger strategy of creating dialogue can be found throughout the book as well as in the readings. The final chapter contains a section from George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s book *Metaphors We Live By*. Cooper and Patton particularly choose an excerpt that discusses the pervasiveness of the “argument is war”
metaphor in American culture. Following this is an excerpt from sociolinguist Deborah Tannen that demonstrates the harm of this metaphor as it influences our current institutions and social relationships. The end of her excerpt from *Fighting for Our Lives* offers alternative approaches to conversation and argument in general. By continually making apparent the combative metaphors through which we currently understand the nature of argument, Cooper and Patton seem to hope that instructors and students will explore others ways to offer their opinions. They describe through their prose, reading selections, and creative writing assignment clear and viable alternatives as they emphasize the ethics of critical thinking and community building instead of persuading or winning. If you agree with this perspective on teaching argument, as I do, then the book will work well in your course. However, the authors admit that most arguments are meant to persuade (both ethically and unethically) rather than initiate dialogue, therefore the ability to think and write “critically” is an imperative. Their section titled “Critical Thinking as Self-Defense” demonstrates an understanding of power of persuasion language in our current culture.

This approach to argument is certainly nothing new, but its emphasis in a college textbook does offer an alternative to more common approaches. The ethical imperative underlying this approach clearly reflects their pragmatic desire to ask students to question belief and transform simple persuasion into the possibility of continued dialogue. Instructors are given enough options in the book to decide whether or not to take up this approach with their students.

**Organization and Design**
The text is divided into two parts, “The Rhetoric” and “The Readings.” The readings are a new edition to this text which can still be purchased as a shorter version including only “The Rhetoric.” Chapters 1-9 form the basis of the book while Chapters 10-14 comprise reading selections with the following headings: “The First Amendments-Freedom of Speech and Censorship,” “Bioethics in a Changing World,” “Sexual Harassment,” “Love and Marriage,” and “Language and Meaning.” The language of the text is usually clear and easy to follow and the comic strips on every other page give the concepts a visual presence.

Instead of taking students through the steps of argumentation, they approach argument through questioning its purpose and applicability to different contexts. Each chapter in “The Rhetoric” section begins with explanations of some component of critical thinking and argument and ends by examining some aspect of writing. The writing sections, for the most part, offer compelling practical writing exercises that act out the components described early in the chapter. The writing exercises ask students to form their own definition of argument over the course of the book and explore topics and questions, simply, through the act of writing. Despite this, there are more typical sections like Chapter 6 on argument fallacies that may seem more familiar to instructors (though not to students). Following the writing assignments are “Key Terms” from the chapter that offer a quick glance at the ideas discussed. The most useful element of this text is that authors remember the book is designed for a writing course and not a course solely devoted to discovering rhetorical principles and reading texts. The following includes brief discussions of “The Rhetoric” section of the text followed by a brief overview of the readings chapters.
Chapters 1 Thinking and Writing—A Critical Connection and Chapter 2 Inference—Critical Thought

Chapters 1 and 2 form an overview of the authors’ beliefs about the importance of critical thinking and the value of understanding argument. The assignments and discussion questions in Chapter 1 attempt to “make thinking visible.” Exercise 1C literally requires students to create “Your Own World View.” They touch on many different ideas from the relationship between “reason, intuition, and imagination” to “audience.” Chapter 2 traces the differences (and similarities) between inferring, offering facts, and judging. I especially appreciate this chapter for its discussion of the idea that our reading texts, images, even people is something that can be faulty. To infer is to draw a “conclusion about something we don’t know based on what we do know” (54). This means that our reading and writing of texts is usually based on our wealth of experience. What we teach students is to broaden their experience through research and careful reading. Following the assignment that asks students to describe their own “world view,” this chapter on inference marks out a space to help students see that the judgments they make in the “thesis” of their papers are not about finding one Truth about the topic but instead about finding one inferred thesis within multiple possibilities.

Though this idea is not necessarily explicit and stated in a subheading of the text, the assignments (ranging from describing a “lost tribe” based on a few facts to interpreting fiction) have the potential to show students that different people make different inferences about the same topics—that is if instructors ask students to share their work with the rest of class.
Chapter 2 begins the discussion of audience awareness that weaves throughout the text. As is typical in this text, the lesson about audience (rather than through explicit discussion by the authors) comes in the form of a writing assignment. Rather than simply giving examples about the importance of creating different writing voices for different audiences (see page 12), the authors offer the assignment “Considering Your Audience” that takes students through the steps of choosing one topic and deliberately writing two distinct versions to two distinct audiences. Later in Chapter 4, the authors offer additional writing assignments that teach students to navigate different audiences and genres (assignments 9, 10, and 11).

Studying Argument—Chapter 3, 4, and 5

Chapter 3 begins the direct discussion of argument that makes up the remainder of “The Rhetoric” section until the final research and documentation chapter. The focus is on premises and conclusions and argument is distinguished from explanation in terms of “showing the wisdom of your position” rather than simply “clarifying” an idea. The remainder of the chapter applies these ideas to writing by discussing the value of good summaries and using “joining words” well as a means to write clear and precise points.

Chapter 4 serves as the centerpiece of the book and takes students through the process of writing an argument. This process, however, does not follow typical notions of “process” pedagogy. This turns out to be a good thing. The authors cover what I find to be the major difficulties students face in creating their own arguments: discovering a good question to address, viewing a thesis as having more than one form, understanding
the rhetorical importance of the introduction and conclusion, and viewing argument as
dialectical rather than merely as a one-sided position.

For me, Chapter 5, titled “The Language of Argument—Definition,” is an
interesting chapter that emphasizes word choice and the importance of carefully defining
terms when creating persuasive prose. I feel it is important to teach students that
different communities define terms in different ways and that they should come to some
consistent naming of terms in their own work. One assignment in this chapter asks
students to free write and then reflect on the meaning of abstract terms like “education”
or “trend.” Eventually, the students flesh out their definitions and then share with the
class exposing the multiple meanings of seemingly simple terms. There is a section of
the chapter that discusses Saussuere’s “signified” and “signifier,” Stanley’s Fish’s ideas
about “interpretive communities,” and S.I. Hayakawa’s ladder of abstraction. Instructors
trained or interested in semiotics and discourse studies will see this as a welcome
reminder to teach students about language and culture and as a clever set of exercises to
expedite instruction. However, I think this section may be difficult for a new instructor
in terms of finding a concrete way to answer possible questions about these ideas in class.
The exercises themselves are very interesting as they ask students to think about the
precision of terms used in argument. The end of the chapter includes three definitions of
the word “man” by Plato, Shakespeare, and Ambrose Bierce and follows this with Alice
Walker’s definition of “womanist.” I have found this a very useful example.

Chapter 6-Fallacious Arguments
The chapter on the fallacies of argument that can be found in nearly every textbook devoted to or discussing argument is both typical and unique. The chapter is typical in offering the standard list of fallacies and examples for students to contemplate. It is unique in its excellent real world examples and humorous cartoons depicting the various fallacies. I have always had difficulties teaching this part of an “argument” course and find it a bit boring. However, the approach of this book makes discovering fallacies both a game and serious activity requiring critical thinking. Also convenient is that the “key terms” section includes a short list of the fallacies in column form with a description and short example for easy viewing. Within the overall context of this textbook, the understanding the fallacies becomes yet another ethical imperative in reading and writing critically.

Chapter 7-Deductive and Inductive Argument

True to their claim in the opening of the book, Cooper and Patton emphasize logic in this textbook as Chapter 7 covers deduction and induction. They offer a clear and compelling discussion of these two methods of argument emphasizing their relationship rather than their differences. Many textbooks cover these ideas in only a few paragraphs. Though the emphasis here may seem unwarranted, this chapter asks students and instructors to go beyond just doing research and taking a position as the ultimate goal of a composition course. This chapter is especially useful when teaching students how to carefully evaluate the sources they use in supporting their arguments. The end of the chapter that begins with “Criteria for Evaluating Statistical Generalizations” offers a clear discussion of evaluating statistics and the source of particular statistics. Since many
second semester composition courses require “the research paper,” this is an important chapter. The chapter discusses the consequences of “hasty” generalizations and arguments that simply appear sound because they are interesting, fulfill common stereotypes, or have numbers. In my experience, student papers often stumble when they uncritically use statistics or cultural assumptions from their sources. Despite this, the chapter is the most difficult in terms of what it asks students to undertake and consider. To make the whole chapter useful would require considerable class time on the part of an instructor who finds value in teaching students principles of sound logic.

Chapter 8-The Language of Argument—Style

For an instructor who particularly likes the idea of showing students how style relates to meaning, Chapter 8 will be a welcome addition to a composition course and another example of the way Cooper and Patton emphasize writing. Many instructors spend some time talking to students about active and passive verbs or parallel structure. Cooper and Patton have taken some common elements of style and put them in the context of writing good, clear arguments. For example, they demonstrate how using appositives can help students emphasize points and how the use of active and passive verbs can change the tone of an argument. Certainly, this chapter could go on for pages and pages. However, it is a short chapter and offers only a few clearly elucidated points of style. Some instructors may find their favorite element of style missing, but overall the chapter works to focus students’ attention on individual sentences and their relationship to one’s overall point.
Chapter 9-Research and Documentation

With all of the excellent guides to research now being published, a chapter on research and documentation usually forms an obligatory roll in an argument textbook rather than a true guide. Cooper and Patton admit as much in their introduction. However, this chapter does touch on the major highlights and serves as a reminder of the most teachable issues including selecting sources and documenting properly (they cover MLA and APA styles).

Readings

The remainder of the book includes five chapters of readings on the various topics mentioned above. As with all readers, only a few of the readings will be utilized in a course devoted to writing. The topics are provocative and offer students a wide range of perspectives and writing approaches on the various topics. The essays range from a Newsweek article addressing morality issues to essays by accessible humanities professors (Henry Louis Gates Jr. for example) to a David Mamet play. It is important to note that Cooper and Patton include fiction, poetry, visual images, and non-fiction in their text. Additionally, there are many humorous selections. The topics within each themed chapter clearly offer a broad spectrum of opinions and genres. This allows students to experience contemporary topics as “conversations” rather than as one-sided arguments. Each reading selection complicates the reading before and after it. The variety offered in the reading chapters attempts to make tangible the hope for dialogue that Cooper and Patton express in “The Rhetoric.”
**Practical Use**

We chose this textbook for our second in a series of two Freshman composition courses which most instructors and students simply call “Rhetoric.” Though a “rhetoric” course can take innumerable forms, our course description labels it as a course in argument. We began using this text in the Fall semester of 2003 and it is used by the part-time and graduate student instructors and many professors. Spring 2004 is my first semester with the text and I have found it quite accessible to students. For my own purposes, the text has given me provocative ways to envision the sequence of papers for my students that lead up to the always dreaded “research” paper which we use as a method of assessment in our program. The language of the text changed the philosophy of my course from understanding *argument* to using writing to think critically. *Argument* has become a broader term in my course as we engage the ideas in the book. My students seem to appreciate the comics in the book and generally seem to find the prose and ideas easy to follow.

I believe the text could easily be used in a composition sequence as either the first or second course. For those who emphasize literature in the second course, this could be used, easily, as the text for the initial course. The very best aspect of this book is the writing assignments that range from simple in-class discussion prompts to more elaborate collaborative writing projects. I find the assignments provocative with prompts that should call forth interesting writing from students. Just as the authors value collaboration in their prose, the writing assignments clearly offer instructors strategies for initiating quality group dialogue as a model for writing. One example can be found in the sequence in Chapter 4 (Writing Assignments 9, 10, and 11) that teaches students to view
topics from multiple perspectives and through the lens of varying audiences. In addition to the many creative in-class exercises (create and define your own word on page 140 or create your own political handout on page 63), there are several detailed collaborative projects (“Conducting a Survey” 201) that a new instructor could easily follow and manage.

**Recommendation(s)**

The primary thing I would recommend would be more attention to a paper on rhetorical analysis. In the fallacies chapter, there is an assignment for “extended analysis” of an argument. With the emphasis on critical thinking, I had hoped for more a more explicit assignment about reading arguments. Many new instructors have difficulties developing this kind of assignment and a clear example would be helpful. Other than this, I happily recommend this book for composition courses and especially those that emphasize argument or critical thinking skills. Though I have been teaching composition for many years, Cooper and Patton offered me new and interesting perspectives on teaching argument and getting students to think through their writing. For many experienced instructors, choosing a textbook is more about finding an appropriate guide for new and part-time instructors that reflects program goals rather than as a guide for their own teaching. However, I think this book does offer a new perspective on teaching argument for both new and experienced instructors. Though the text does not offer copious details or step by step instructions for teaching a course, I do think there is sufficient material to guide a new teacher in a course focusing on argument, critical thinking, and especially on writing. Finally, I especially appreciate the inventive
reading selections and emphasis on communication and dialogue. I believe John Dewey
would be happy to see a textbook that values using collaborative thinking to solve
problems and to understand the cultural implications of argument.
Works Cited