Two areas where professionals encounter problems with their writing includes:

- Developing Arguments
- Grammar rules
Developing Arguments

• The essential elements of arguments are:
  ◦ Arguments are academic in nature – anger has no place in argument.
  ◦ Claims are made about issues:
    • Facts can’t be argued.
    • Matters of taste can’t be argued.
    • Matters of faith can’t be argued.
  ◦ Those claims are supported through the use of evidence.
If facts, taste, and faith can’t be argued, what can?
- Informed opinions;
- Unresolved issues;
- Debatable ideas

Arguments require subjects with more than one side, and rational people can adopt differing sides on the issue.
Argument and Persuasion

- Argument and persuasion are not the same – but work together in harmony.
- The purpose of your argument is to persuade on at least a minimum level:
  - You attempt to persuade the audience that your side of the issue is valid – even if the audience never adopts your viewpoint.
  - At least, not yet!
Argument and Persuasion

- Aristotle claims three sources of persuasion (and argument):
  - Logos
  - Ethos
  - Pathos

- A good argument appeals to all three – but in varying proportions.
Argument and Persuasion

- To argue persuasively, one has to consider the audience:
  - What are the characteristics of my audience?
    - Age range
    - Socio-economic status
    - Professional status
    - Educational level
  - Knowing the audience characteristics will aid in knowing what evidence will be persuasive.
    - (Logos-Ethos-Pathos balance)
Planning Your Argument

• Assuming one knows the topic, and has generated a claim about the topic, one must next begin gathering evidence for the argument.

• Evidence can include (in order of strength):
  ◦ Facts
  ◦ Statistics
  ◦ Examples
  ◦ Expert testimony
  ◦ Personal experience
  ◦ Anecdotes
The argument is made up of three basic parts – the claim, the support (evidence), and the conclusion.

Basic design:

- State your claim clearly in the introduction;
- Use the body of your paper to provide support for the claim.
- In the conclusion, restate your claim and recap how the main points prove the claim.
Drafting the Argument

- Stating the claim:
  - The claim must be narrow enough to allow construction of a logical argument.
  - A narrow claim will reduce the opposition’s ability to retort.
  - “Swimming pools are more dangerous to children than guns.”
Drafting the Argument

- Your evidence allows you to reason logically.
- Two types of logical reasoning:
  - Inductive and Deductive
  - Inductive:
    - Reason from a limited number of cases to a general conclusion.
    - The quality of the sample has a major influence in inductive reasoning.
Deductive Reasoning:

- Move from general principles to specific conclusions.
- Deductive reasoning is often relayed in syllogisms that feature a major and minor premise:
  - Major premise: All unguarded swimming pools can be dangerous.
  - Minor: My swimming pool is unguarded during the day.
  - Conclusion: My swimming pool may be dangerous during the day.
Deductive Reasoning – beware of faulty syllogisms.

A good syllogism links elements of the major and minor premises (Dangerous pool – my pool).

A faulty syllogism does not link these elements, it merely repeats traits.
Faulty Syllogism – A Literary Example

- **Epigram**
- **By Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

Sir, I admit your general rule,
That every poet is a fool,
But you yourself may serve to show it,
That every fool is not a poet.
Faulty Syllogism:
 ◦ Major premise: All planets are round
 ◦ Minor premise: My head is round
 ◦ Conclusion: My head is a planet!

Correct Syllogism:
 ◦ Major premise: All planets are round
 ◦ Minor Premise: The Earth is a planet
 ◦ Conclusion: The Earth is round.

What other things are round?
Beware of faulty premises – the advertisers’ best friend:

- Major premise: Only cool, successful people drive the BMW E 46 Series 3.
- Minor premise: You want to be cool and successful.
- Conclusion: Drive the BMW E 46 Series 3 and you will be cool and successful.
Drafting the Argument

Cool and Successful!
Other Logical Fallacies

- **Post hoc, ergo propter hoc:**
  - “After this, then because of this.”
  - Because of one event occurred, the second event was caused by the first.
  - Example – a Native American rain dance in May brings rain in June.

- **Non sequitur**
  - “Does not follow.”
  - Example – Albert Einstein was a brilliant physicist, therefore he should have been named Secretary of State.
Other Logical Fallacies

- Appeal to doubtful authority:
  - Cite expert testimony from someone who is not really an expert.
  - Example: Actor Alec Baldwin says the war in Iraq is illegal and we should remove troops from the country by July 16.

- Ad hominem:
  - “Against the person.”
  - Example: She’s a crazy hypocrite – I’ve seen her swim in a pool so you can’t believe her so-called research about swimming pools and children’s injuries.
Other Logical Fallacies

- False dilemma – Either/Or.
  - Indicating there are only two choices in an issue – A reasonable one (yours) or an unreasonable one (theirs).
  - Example – You are either for the President’s economic plan or you want to see the economy fail.

- False analogy
  - Drawing comparisons between two very different things.
  - Example – Kids are like dogs; train them well and they will not ever cause problems.
Constructing Your Argument

- How you lay out your argument depends on a number of factors:
  - Strength of your claim and the supporting evidence;
  - The amount of evidence;
  - Your own writing skill;
  - The characteristics of your audience;
  - The demands of your publication.
Constructing Your Argument

• Typical layout:
  ◦ Title
  ◦ Introduction, featuring your claim
  ◦ Main point #1
    • Supporting evidence for point #1
  ◦ Main Point #2
    • Supporting evidence for point #2 – etc.
  ◦ Response to potential counter-arguments
  ◦ Conclusion – restated claim and proof.
Ethos and Pathos

- Ethos and Pathos – Credibility and emotion – are largely based on the writer’s skill.
- Ethos comes from a well-written and well constructed argument.
- Pathos comes from the ability to choose the right word in the right situation.
Academic publications tend to reject emotional appeals, but careful word choices do make a difference:

- “Unintentional drownings cause the death of thousands of children each year.”
- “Unintentional drownings steal the lives of thousands of children each year.”

Which version has more emotional appeal?
Ethos

- Ethos is based on your credibility as a source of information on the topic.
- The easiest way to reduce one’s credibility is to submit an argument full of spelling, grammar and logic errors.
- Correct spelling and grammar is the minimum standard in setting forth an argument.
Common Writing Mistakes

- Incorrect number of words
  - If the abstract has a maximum number of words of 1,000 – that doesn’t mean 1,200!
- Not following guidelines
- Not having a clear statement (thesis) to bind all the elements together.
- Weak introductions and conclusions.
Common Grammar Mistakes

- Agreement:
  - Singular/plural
  - Antecedent/pronoun
- Verb tenses
- Mistaken punctuation
  - Commas
  - Semicolons
  - Apostrophes
Common Usage Mistakes

- Who’s – Whose
- Its – It’s
- There – Their
- To – Too – Two
- Where – Were
- A – An
- Who – Whom
- Then – Than
Improving Your Writing

- Get a good reference guide – use it often.
- Read, read, and read more – good writers are good readers.
- How do you get to Carnegie Hall?
  ◦ Practice!

10,000 hours of solitary practice spent before the age of 20 characterized the most expert performers. They spent time in highly focused, mindful practice, noting through constant self-evaluation how they could improve to even higher levels. - Sherri Fisher, MAPP, M.Ed., CPBS
References