CHAPTER 10

Argumentation in Groups

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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WHY ARGUE?

One of the advantages of working in groups is that members can share and discuss a variety of ideas and opinions. At the same time, a group must be able to agree on a particular position or action if it hopes to achieve its common goal. In order to balance the value and consequences of diverse opinions, group members must be able to advance their own viewpoints and discuss the views of others objectively. Successful groups encourage independent thinking and the exploration of ideas to discover the best solution. "This search for a common solution is often the result of a continuous exchange of arguments and counterarguments among participants."[1] In other words, group members must be able to argue.

Brashers, Adkins, and Meyers claim that "central to group discussion . . . is the process of argumentation."[2] Whether a group meets to share information or to reach a decision, members should be able to advance and evaluate different ideas, information, and opinions.

Arguments and Argumentation

We often think of an argument as a disagreement or hostile confrontation between two people. In communication studies, we define an **argument** as a claim supported by evidence or reasons for accepting it. An argument is more than an opinion: "The Latino Heritage Club should be given more funds next year." An argument is an idea or opinion *supported* by evidence and reasoning: "The Latino Heritage Club should be given more funds next year because it has doubled in size and cannot provide the same number or quality of programs without an increase in funding." When viewed this way, an argument does not have to involve conflict or even disagreement.

Argumentation is the way in which group members advocate their own positions, examine competing ideas, and influence other members. The following example illustrates a situation in which argumentation is an important group function:

> A college's Student Finance Board is made up of elected students who are responsible for distributing funds to campus clubs and organizations. The board meets throughout the academic year to consider funding requests. Clubs usually request more money than is available. Board members evaluate all requests and argue about the significance of each club's activities and the reasonableness of its funding request. Finally, the board decides how the funds should be distributed and submits those recommendations to the vice president for student services.

In such a decision-making group, members must read funding requests and listen to oral presentations by club members who argue that their organization should receive increased funding. Then, board members share their own positions

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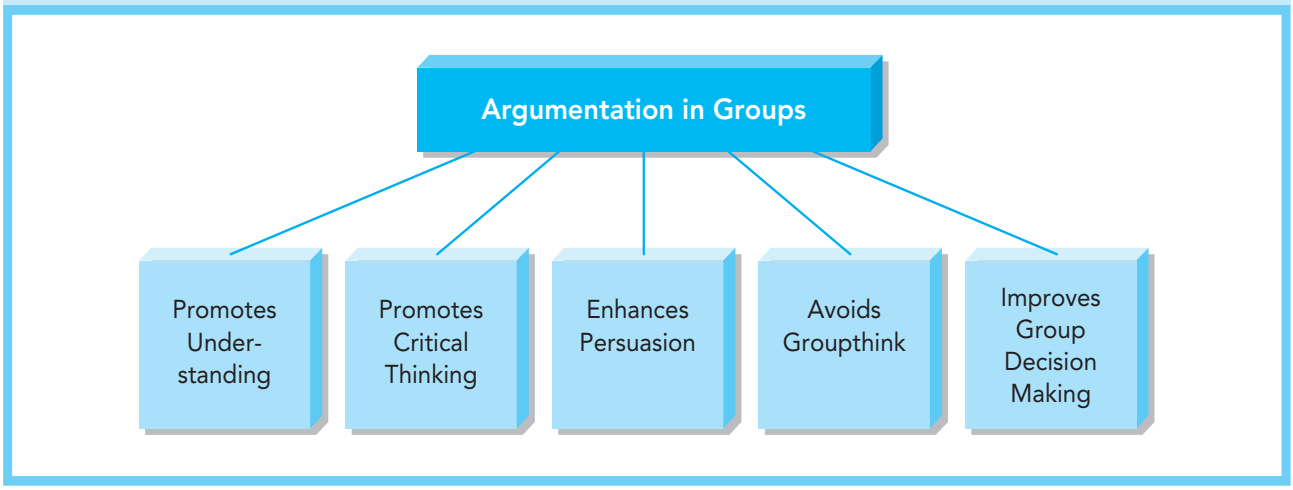
FIGURE 10.1 **Argumentation in Groups**



and, in many cases, find it necessary to argue for or against proposed funding levels for particular organizations. After a period of discussion and argumentation, the group makes its final decision—even though it knows that some club officers and advisors will argue that the decision was unfair or unjust.

The Value of Argumentation in Groups

Effective argumentation helps a group understand and analyze ideas, influence members, make informed and critical decisions, and achieve its goal. Thus, argumentation is a significant factor in determining how group communication influences decision making.

Promotes Understanding. Through the process of argumentation, you may discover that not all members reason in the same way. Some members may seek group goals; others may seek personal goals. Some may argue logically; others, emotionally. For example, as a member of the Student Finance Board, Charles argues in favor of funding the Philosophy Club because he is a club member. Karen supports the funding request because the club sponsored a successful forum last semester. Although both members support the same position, they do so for different reasons. Understanding how other group members reason and feel about individual issues can help you adapt your arguments to their perspectives.

Promotes Critical Thinking. Effective argumentation helps group members analyze issues and critically examine ideas. When you present your position on an issue, you may be challenged to justify that position to the rest of the group. You will need to provide strong evidence or sound reasons to support your conclusions. The process of argumentation often causes us to rethink our own positions and beliefs. Thus, the evaluation of arguments in groups encourages group members to think critically and flexibly.

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Enhances Persuasion. Persuasion is communication that influences the beliefs or actions of others. Argumentation is a specific means of persuasion. As group members are exposed to different arguments, they can decide which ones are better supported and make more sense. Group members who are skilled at argumentation are often the most influential and persuasive.

Avoids Groupthink. Groupthink occurs when, as a result of an effort to discourage conflict and maintain group cohesion, a group makes flawed decisions. On the other hand, "unlike groups that engage in groupthink, groups trained to employ cooperative argumentation are able to form constructive forms of cohesion."[3] Constructive argumentation encourages the critical examination of opposing ideas without impairing group cohesion. As Chapter 7, "Conflict and Cohesion in Groups," explains, groupthink can be avoided if members ask questions, offer reasons for their positions, and seek justifications from others.

Improves Group Decision Making. As a group considers alternative ideas, argumentation helps the members examine the consequences of a potential action before making a final decision. Errors in reasoning are exposed, and weaknesses in evidence are uncovered. Argumentation in groups can also improve decision making because, unlike in one-on-one argumentation, several group members may work together to develop the same argument. In this "tag team" situation, other group members build upon the argument presented by one member by providing additional evidence or reasons to support a particular position. The result is a single comprehensive argument constructed cooperatively within the group.

Although there is strong evidence that argumentation can improve group decision making,[4] this conclusion is based on the underlying assumption that group members know how to develop and use arguments that will promote the group's goal. If argumentation is to be a constructive process, group members must know how to develop valid arguments and how to engage in cooperative argumentation with other group members.

ARGUMENTATIVENESS

In Chapter 4, "Confidence in Groups," the concept of communication apprehension is used to explain why some group members lack confidence in their ability to interact in a group. Similarly, researchers have suggested that individuals vary in how comfortable they feel about engaging in argumentation. This characteristic is referred to as **argumentativeness,** or the willingness to argue controversial issues with others.[5] Argumentativeness is a particularly constructive trait when it does not promote hostility or personal attacks. The argumentative person focuses on a discussion of the issues rather than on attacking personalities.

At the end of this chapter, there is a self-test called the Argumentativeness Scale. This questionnaire will help you identify your own level of argumentativeness.

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You might want to complete the questionnaire and calculate your results before continuing with this chapter. Your score will help you understand how comfortable you are with arguing in groups.

Argumentativeness and Group Decision Making

An individual group member's level of argumentativeness provides some insight into how that group member will approach a discussion. Group members with lower levels of argumentativeness generally avoid conflict. These individuals are often viewed as not only nonconfrontational but also unskilled in argumentation. Because they are unwilling to engage in argumentation during group discussions, they have less influence in group decision making.

Group members who are highly argumentative welcome constructive conflict. They enjoy the intellectual challenge of an argument and show genuine interest in the discussion. Highly argumentative members defend their own positions confidently and challenge the arguments of others. Groups usually view their most argumentative members as dynamic and skillful arguers with high levels of credibility and influence. Argumentative members are frequently chosen as group leaders. On the other hand, they are less likely to be persuaded by others' arguments and may be perceived as inflexible and overly talkative.

Argumentative members are very influential in group decision making. In fact, argumentative group members create more arguments on *both* sides of a position.[6] When the number of choices a group can consider is thus expanded, the group is less likely to come to a biased decision or succumb to groupthink.

Learning to Be Argumentative

You can learn to argue. By practicing the skills in this chapter, you should become better able to argue your ideas and analyze the arguments of other group members. Learning to argue can also make you more influential in group decision making.

It is important to know how to achieve a balanced level of argumentativeness. Arguing too little can diminish your influence. On the other hand, members who are *extremely* argumentative can disrupt a group and its decision-making process. Effective group members know when to argue and when to acknowledge that someone else has made a good point.

THE STRUCTURE OF AN ARGUMENT

In the beginning—that is, during the time of Aristotle in ancient Greece—arguments were described as syllogisms, which have three parts:

Major premise: All men are mortal.

Minor premise: Socrates is a man.

Conclusion: So Socrates is mortal.

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Stephen Toulmin, an English philosopher, believes that real-world arguments are less formal and more complex than this. He compares an argument to a living organism, with its own anatomical structure and specific physiological functions.[7] The **Toulmin Model of Argument** provides a way of both building strong arguments and refuting the arguments of others.

Components of the Toulmin Model

Before you can build or refute an argument, you need to understand the components of a complete argument. In his layout of an argument, Toulmin identifies six components: claim, data, warrant, backing, reservation, and qualifier.[8] The first three are essential in all arguments; the second three help clarify the nature and power of an argument's warrant.

Claim, Data, and Warrant.

The **claim** is the conclusion or position you are advocating. The **data** constitute the evidence you use to support your claim. For example, the statement "My group will do well on our class project" is a claim. The data for this claim might be the fact that during the first meeting, all members of the group said that they would work hard on the project. Data answer a challenger's questions: "What makes you say that?" or "What do you have to go on?"

Rather than answering the question "What have you got to go on?" a **warrant** answers the question "How did you get there?"[9] It explains how the data support and prove the claim. For example, the warrant might say that when group members are willing to work hard, a successful outcome is usually the result. The definition of the word *warrant* may help you understand this concept. A warrant can mean "justification for an action or belief" as in "Under the circumstances, the actions were warranted." A warrant is also something that provides assurance or confirmation, as in a *warrant of authenticity* or a *product warranty*. In legal terms, a warrant gives an officer the right to make a search, seizure, or arrest.[10] In argumentation, a warrant justifies your claim based on evidence. Also, as the definitions suggest, it authorizes or confirms the validity of a conclusion and gives you the right to make your claim. Here's an example of an unwarranted argument:

> Girlfriend to boyfriend: "You saw me walking to my car with your friend Dale, and you jumped to the conclusion that we were seeing each other behind your back. That inference is *unwarranted!*" In this argument, the evidence (she is walking to her car with Dale) is insufficient to make the claim (she's seeing Dale behind her boyfriend's back) because the warrant is unreasonable (if a woman is seen talking to a man, she must be dating him or having an affair with him).[11]

The relationship among these three components of the Toulmin Model is illustrated in Figure 10.2.

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FIGURE 10.2 "Basic T" of the Toulmin Model

The argument in Figure 10.2 would sound like this: "All group members said that they would work hard. Because hard work usually results in success, the group will do well on the class project." The combined data, claim, and warrant make up the "basic T" of the Toulmin Model.

Backing, Reservation, and Qualifier. Beyond the "basic T," there are three additional components: backing, reservation, and qualifier. The **backing** provides support for the argument's warrant. In the preceding example, backing for the warrant might be the fact that the group that worked the hardest on the last assignment received the best grade.

Not all claims are true all the time. The **reservation** is the component of the Toulmin Model that recognizes exceptions to an argument or indications that a claim may not be true under certain circumstances. At the first meeting, group members said that they would work hard. If, however, they do not attend important meetings, the group is unlikely to do well.

The final component of the model is the qualifier. The **qualifier** states the degree to which the claim appears to be true. Qualifiers are usually words or phrases such as *likely, possibly, certainly, unlikely,* or *probably.* A claim with a qualifier might be "The group will *probably* do well on the class project." The way this entire argument would look is shown in Figure 10.3.

Applying the Toulmin Model

The Toulmin Model is a way to diagram and evaluate arguments. You do not need to state each component of the argument when advancing your position. In fact, often only the claim is stated. However, understanding the model lets you know what questions to ask about an argument. If only the claim is stated, you may ask for evidence or data to support that claim. If the warrant is questionable, you may ask for backing to support it. Recognizing that situations may alter the certainty of your claim helps you advocate more reasonable positions. When you are developing your own arguments, the Toulmin Model can help you test the strength of those arguments. When you are analyzing someone else's argument, using the model helps reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the position.

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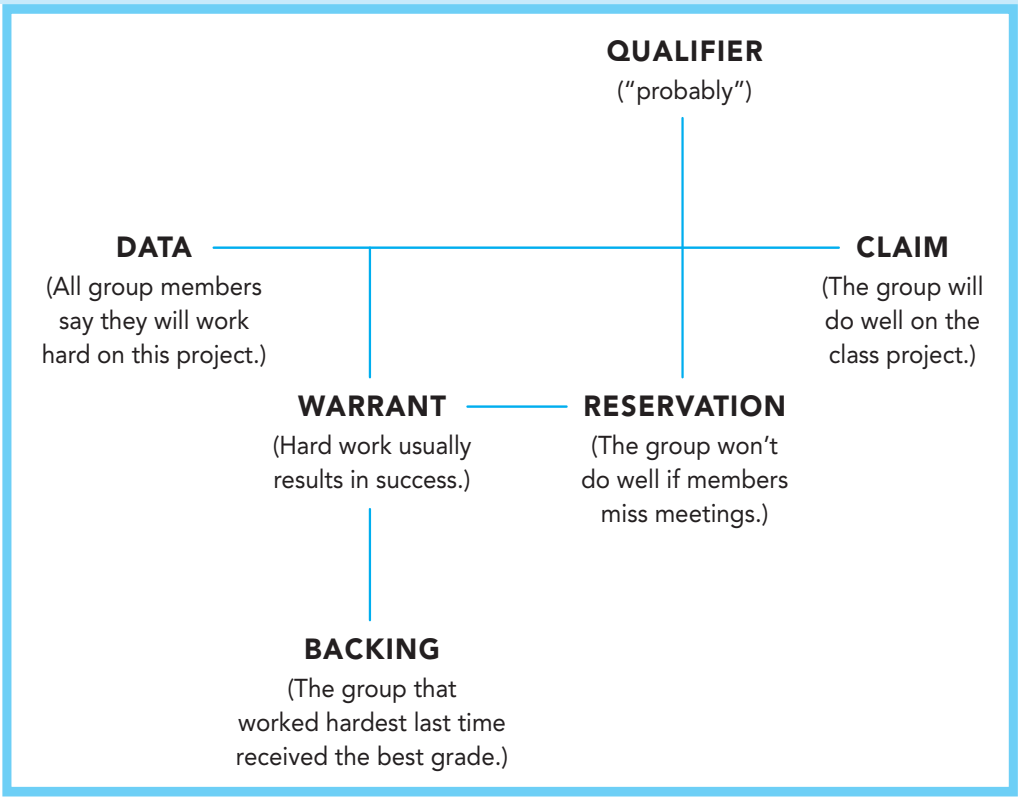
FIGURE 10.3 The Toulmin Model of an Argument



TOOLBOX 10.1

Warrants Change Claims

Warrants are the most difficult of Toulmin's components to understand and appreciate because they may not be expressed out loud. Warrants give you permission to make a claim based on evidence. They change claims in significant ways. Look at the following two arguments:[1]

Argument 1: Given that our reserves of fossil fuels are limited and will be used up in a few generations and that satisfactory alternative sources of energy are not yet available, industries must be allowed to continue using up the reserves of fossil fuel.

Argument 2: Given that our reserves of fossil fuels are limited and will be used up in a few generations and that satisfactory alternative sources of energy are not yet available, *industries may continue using up reserves of fossil fuel only if they accept their share of responsibility for developing alternative sources of energy.*

What warrants the conclusion indicated in *italics* in Argument 2? Look at the way in which different warrants justify the claims in the two arguments:

Warrant for Argument 1: Because industry cannot function without fuel and society is dependent on industry, we must let industry go on doing what it has to do in order to keep society functioning.

Warrant for Argument 2: Because industry and society are jointly involved in a common venture, industry must adapt its activities to the broader needs of society.

[1] Based on an example in Stephen Toulmin, Richard Rieke, and Allan Janik, *An Introduction to Reasoning* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), p. 303.

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Supporting Evidence

Arguments fall apart if the data used to support the claim and back the warrant are insufficient or flawed. All arguments gain strength when you research your position and use appropriate types of evidence to make your case. Data or evidence is listed first as an essential component of Toulmin's model of an argument. Evidence takes many forms: (1) facts and opinions, (2) definitions and descriptions, (3) examples and illustrations, and (4) statistics.

Facts and Opinions. Make sure that you and your group understand the differences between facts and opinions. A **fact** is a verifiable observation, experience, or event, something that is known to be true. An **opinion** is a personal conclusion regarding the meaning or implications of facts. Here is an example of a fact: In 1876, Colonel Henry M. Robert used the British Parliament's procedures and Thomas Jefferson's code of congressional rules as a basis for *Robert's Rules of Order.* Here are two disparate opinions:

- *Robert's Rules of Order* is outdated and makes a meeting more complicated than necessary.
- *Robert's Rules of Order* is time tested and ensures fair and objective decision making.

Unlike opinions, facts can usually be proved true or false. Group members should not mistake their opinions for facts.

When used as evidence, opinions usually express an authority's judgment or interpretation of facts. For example, "According to James C. McCroskey and Virginia Richmond, communication apprehension 'may be the single most important factor in predicting communication behavior in a small group.'" Keep in mind that different experts may not reach the same conclusions. Look for a variety of opinions rather than relying too heavily on claims that represent only one perspective.

Definitions and Descriptions. **Definitions** clarify the meaning of a word, phrase, or concept. A definition can be as simple as explaining what you mean by a word or as complex as an encyclopedia or unabridged dictionary entry. Here is an example:

> According to Warren Bennis and Bruce Nanus, "There is a profound difference between management and leadership, and both are important. 'To manage' means 'to bring about, to accomplish, to have charge of or responsibility for, to conduct.' 'Leading' is 'influencing, guiding in direction, course, action, opinion.'"

During an initial meeting, a group should define key terms. For example, a group dealing with sexual harassment policies should gather several definitions of sexual harassment. Groups negotiating legal contracts must carefully define their terms before an understanding can be reached between the parties.

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Descriptions go a step beyond definitions. Rather than clarifying the meaning of a word or concept, they create a mental image of a person, event, place, or object. Descriptions are more detailed than definitions. Causes, effects, historical contexts, characteristics, and operations can all be included in a description. Here is the beginning of a description of extroverts from Chapter 3: "Extroverts are outgoing, talkative, and enthusiastic; they enjoy interaction with others. Extroverts get their energy by being with people. They enjoy solving problems in groups and like to involve others in projects. . . ."

Examples and Illustrations. An **example** refers to a specific case or instance. Examples are usually brief. **Illustrations** are longer, extended examples that can take up an entire paragraph or tell a lengthy story. Here's a series of examples from the beginning of Chapter 1: "*Working in Groups* focuses on learning how to work effectively with others in many different group settings and circumstances—at school and at work, with family members and with friends, and in highly diverse arenas ranging from sports and science to courtrooms and classrooms." That same chapter opens with two illustrations—one about Dr. Peter Agre, winner of the 2003 Nobel Prize for Chemistry; the other about the Detroit Pistons winning the N.B.A. championship in 2004.

It is important to remember that the examples and extended illustrations selected may not be typical of an entire category, situation, or group of people. If examples and illustrations are used as evidence to support a claim, you should make sure that they represent similar situations and results.

Statistics. Information presented in a numerical form is the basis for **statistics.** Statistics take various forms, including averages, percentages, rates, rankings, and so on. For example, in this textbook, you have read that according to James McCroskey and Virginia Richmond, "about 20 percent of the general population experiences very high levels of communication apprehension." You've also learned that according to the U.S. Census Bureau, "During the 1990s, the Hispanic population increased 58 percent, and the Asian population increased 48 percent."

Many of us believe statistics, particularly when they're published by reputable sources. However, it is important to evaluate statistical findings carefully. The source and form of a statistic can result in different interpretations of the same numbers. Misinterpreting statistical information can jeopardize a group's effectiveness and success. For example, in 2005, the number of miles driven by Americans grew by just 1 percent, the smallest increase since the 1991 recession.[12] Here are some interpretations that could be claimed: (1) Health-conscious Americans are walking more and driving less, (2) Americans concerned about the environmental effects of automobile exhaust decreased their driving, and (3) record-high gas prices encouraged people to cut down on optional trips and use mass transit. Expert analysts identify the third reason as the correct interpretation.

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PRESENTING YOUR ARGUMENTS

If your ideas are to be taken seriously by your group, your arguments must be well presented. Skilled arguers follow a four-step procedure for presenting arguments: state your claim, present evidence, provide reasons, and summarize.[13] This process is illustrated in Figure 10.4.

In some cases, you may not need to complete every step of the process when you present an argument. Often the evidence is sufficiently clear, and so you do not need to provide additional reasons for supporting your claim. If your argument is very brief, a summary may not be necessary. However, you should be prepared to complete all the steps if group members want further justification for your arguments.

State the Claim

The first step in the presentation of an argument is a clear statement of your claim. In Chapter 9, "Structured and Creative Problem Solving in Groups," we identify four types of discussion questions—fact, conjecture, value, and policy. Discussion questions help a group focus on its goal. Claims for arguments can be divided into the same four categories. However, when presenting arguments, group members rarely state their claims in the form of questions. A claim is a statement that identifies your position on a particular issue.

What strategies can help this union member make his argument clear and persuasive?
(© Susie Fitzhugh)

Arguments involving a **claim of fact** attempt to prove that something is true, that an event occurred, or that a cause can be identified. For example, "Sex education in schools promotes teenage promiscuity" is a claim of fact. Whether this claim is true or not depends on further analysis of the data and the warrant. A **claim of conjecture** suggests that something will or will not happen. For example, you could say, "Our profits will decrease by 10 percent by next quarter." Although your group cannot predict the future, it can make well-informed decisions

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FIGURE 10.4 **Procedure for Presenting Arguments**

based on the best information available. **Claims of value** assert that something is worthwhile—good or bad; right or wrong; best, average, or worst. "My instructor is the best professor at the college" is a claim that places a value on someone. Arguments involving claims of value can be very difficult to resolve because each group member brings personal opinions and beliefs to the discussion. **Claims of policy** are arguments that recommend a particular course of action. "Our company should develop guidelines for dealing with inquiries from the press and the electronic media" is an example of a claim of policy.

Support the Claim with Valid Evidence

The fact that a claim is stated does not mean that it is true. In order to be convincing, you must support your claim with data. In the Toulmin Model, this means supplying the group with strong and valid evidence. Regardless of whether that evidence takes the form of facts, opinions, definitions, descriptions, examples, illustrations, or statistics, groups should continuously evaluate the quality of any evidence presented by asking several general questions:

- Is the source of the evidence reputable and credible?
- Is the evidence recent or dated?
- Does the evidence contain all the facts, or does it hide unfavorable information?
- Is it consistent with other evidence?
- Is there enough evidence?

Provide Reasons for the Claim

Sometimes it is not clear to others why a particular piece of evidence proves your claim. In such cases, reasons are needed to demonstrate the link between your evidence and your claim. In the Toulmin Model, this link is the warrant and the backing—statements that explain why the evidence is sufficient to prove the claim.

A prosecutor might argue that one of the reasons a jury should convict a murder suspect is that he lied about knowing the victim. At first, it may not be clear why or how evidence that the suspect lied is linked to his being a murderer. The prosecutor might then provide the argument's warrant by stating that unlike guilty people, the innocent have nothing to hide. Evidence of lying may weaken the defendant's claim of innocence.

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TOOLBOX 10.2

Test the Validity of Statistics

Determining the validity of statistics generally requires answers to three questions. First, what is the source of the statistics? Knowing who or what organization collected and published the statistical information may alert a group to biases. For example, when tobacco company studies found no relationship between cigarette smoking and cancer rates, their results were treated with great skepticism.

Second, are the statistics accurate? Often statistics are generated by surveying or observing people. Statistical research that includes too few people or subjects who are not representative of the studied population may be invalid. For example, one study examined the effects of diet on breast cancer by studying only men.[1] Clearly, the exclusion of women from the study makes any results or conclusions suspect.

Third, how are the statistics reported? The way in which the source chooses to report the statistic can conceal or distort information. For example, group members who have been told that customer complaints have increased 100 percent over the past year may believe that they have a serious issue to address. Upon closer examination of the statistic, though, they may discover that last year only two customers complained, and this year four complaints were reported. The problem no longer appears to be as serious.

[1] Carol Tavris, *The Mismeasure of Woman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 94.

Summarize Your Argument

A good summary restates the original claim and summarizes the evidence supporting it. Be brief. Do not repeat all your evidence and reasons. When the presentation of the claim and the evidence has been brief and clear, the summary can be omitted. However, lengthy and complicated arguments often need to be summarized to ensure that all members understand your argument.

REFUTING ARGUMENTS

Refutation is the process of proving that an argument is false and/or lacks sufficient support. Refutation is used to question, minimize, and deny the validity or strength of someone else's argument. Group members should be willing and able to refute claims that are unsupported or untrue. A group that is not willing to evaluate arguments risks the perils of groupthink. Six guidelines can help you refute another member's argument:

- Listen to the argument.
- State the claim you oppose.
- Give an overview of your objections.
- Assess the evidence.
- Assess the reasoning.
- Summarize your refutation.

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GROUPTECH

Argumentation in Virtual Groups

The process of argumentation is the same in face-to-face and virtual groups. However, virtual groups may find that the nature of some technologies can improve the quality of their argumentation, while other forms of technology may inhibit constructive and cooperative argumentation.

In face-to-face meetings and in real-time audioconferences and videoconferences, arguments may arise spontaneously and require members to "think on their feet," with little time for thought or preparation. In online, text-based settings—email, electronic bulletin boards, and chat rooms—members of virtual groups usually have more time to develop and support their arguments. When communication is asynchronous, group members may have hours or even days to construct or respond to arguments in writing. Having more time also allows members to search for and share the best supporting evidence they can find.

There are, however, some precautions to heed when virtual groups engage in argumentation. Poorly prepared arguments, unfounded claims, and insensitive or rude criticism can become part of a permanent record. Online arguments can be saved, stored, and shared at a later date. Audioconferences and videoconferences can be recorded on tape. Thus, a thoughtless remark or foolish argument can be quoted exactly for years to come or shared with nongroup members.

As is the case in face-to-face interaction, argumentation that is characterized by personal attacks, sarcasm, or demeaning remarks has no place in virtual group discussions. Fear of rejection, personal attacks, and ridicule can inhibit interaction and group effectiveness. Fortunately, in text-based virtual groups, members can take the time to ensure that their arguments are constructive, respectful, and effective.

Listen to the Argument

First, listen for comprehension. You must fully understand an argument before you can respond to it effectively. Ask questions and take notes. Once you have comprehended the meaning of an argument, you can shift to critical listening. What type of claim is being made? Is evidence supplied to support the claim? How well does the evidence support the claim? Is the claim qualified in any way? Analyzing the argument as you listen will help you formulate a response.

State the Claim You Oppose

Different group members may have made a number of claims during an argumentative discussion. Don't try to respond to all of them at once. When you are ready, state the claim that you are opposing. Clearly stating the claim that you oppose gives you an opportunity to make sure that you understand the argument. You may think the claim was "employees are stealing supplies from the company." Instead, the claim was "the company should identify ways to use supplies more

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efficiently." If you have misunderstood a claim, other group members can clarify their arguments for you.

Give an Overview of Your Objections

Provide a brief overview of your objections or concerns. Letting the group know the general direction of your arguments is particularly important when your refutation will be lengthy or complicated, such as "I don't believe we should raise funds for a carnival for three reasons: the high cost, the unpredictable weather, and the undesirable location." If they have a general idea of the reasons for your refutation, group members will be better prepared to listen to and understand your objections and concerns.

Assess the Evidence

When refuting a claim, you may be able to show that the evidence supporting the claim is faulty. One way to do this is to present contradictory evidence. For example, if a group member contends that the college's tuition is high, you may present evidence from a survey showing that the college's tuition is one of the lowest in the state. You can also question the quality of the person's evidence. For example, an outdated statistic or a quotation by a discredited source can be reason enough to reject an arguer's evidence. Proving that the evidence is of poor quality does not mean that the claim is untrue, but it does show that the claim has potential weaknesses.

Assess the Reasoning

Assess reasoning by identifying fallacies. A **fallacy** is an argument that is based on false or invalid reasoning. It is not always necessary to identify the fallacy by name, particularly if group members are not familiar with the different types of fallacies. It is much more important to clearly explain why the reasoning in the argument is flawed. Figure 10.5 lists some of the most common fallacies of an argument, which are described further here.

- ***Ad hominem* attack.** In Latin, this phrase means "to the person." An *ad hominem* argument makes irrelevant attacks about a person's character rather than responding to the argument. Responding to a claim that children should attend school year-round with "What would you know? You don't have kids" is an attack on the person rather than on the real argument. Unfortunately, negative political campaigns have become little more than a series of *ad hominem* attacks that often prove false when fully investigated.
- **Appeal to authority.** Expert opinion is often used to support arguments. However, when the supposed expert has no relevant expertise on the issues being discussed, the fallacy of appeal to authority occurs. The argument that "according to a talk show host, most men cheat on their wives" commits this

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FIGURE 10.5 **Fallacies of an Argument**

Fallacy	Description
AD HOMINEM ATTACK	Attacks the person rather than the argument made by that person.
APPEAL TO AUTHORITY	Relies on biased or unqualified expert opinion to support a claim.
APPEAL TO POPULARITY	Justifies an action because many others do the same thing or share the same opinion. "Everyone's doing it."
APPEAL TO TRADITION	Resists changes to traditional behavior and opinions. "We have always done it this way."
FAULTY ANALOGY	Compares two items that are not similar or comparable. "Comparing apples and oranges."
FAULTY CAUSE	Claims that an effect is caused by something that has little or no relationship to the effect.
HASTY GENERALIZATION	Uses isolated or too few examples to draw a conclusion.

fallacy. Unless the talk show host has expert credentials on issues of fidelity and marriage, the argument is vulnerable.

- **Appeal to popularity.** An argument of this nature claims that an action is acceptable or excusable because many people are doing it. During the Los Angeles riots following the Rodney King trial and the looting of stores after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, some people justified their actions by claiming that everyone else was doing it. Just because a lot of people engage in an action does not make it right. Instead, it may mean that a lot of people are wrong.
- **Appeal to tradition.** Claiming that people should continue a certain course of action because they have always done so in the past is an appeal to tradition, as illustrated in the argument that "the group must meet on Monday afternoons because that is when the group has always met." Just because a course of action has been followed for a long period of time does not mean that it is the superior choice.
- **Faulty analogy.** Claiming that two things are similar when they differ on relevant characteristics is a faulty analogy. During Operation Desert Storm

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(the conflict before the war in Iraq), critics claimed that the United States was involving itself in another Vietnam. However, the argument was frequently refuted by pointing out critical differences between these two engagements, particularly the fact that the U.S. military action in Operation Desert Storm had a specific objective and was over in a relatively short time. Faulty analogies are often referred to as the comparison of "apples and oranges." Both are fruits, but beyond that they are very different.

- **Faulty cause.** Claiming that a particular event is the cause of another event before ruling out other possible causes is a faulty-cause fallacy. The claim that "increases in tuition have caused enrollment to decline" may overlook other explanations, such as the possibility that a decline in enrollment could be a result of fewer eligible high school graduates.
- **Hasty generalization.** An argument flawed by a hasty generalization uses too few examples or experiences to support its conclusion. This fallacy argues that if it is true for some, it must be true for all. "A Volvo is an unreliable car because I once owned one that was always breaking down" is a hasty generalization. The experience of a single car owner does not prove that all cars produced by that manufacturer are unreliable.

Summarize Your Refutation

The final step in refuting a group member's argument is to summarize your response. If your refutation has been lengthy or complex, it is helpful to restate the major points of your response. It is not necessary to review all your arguments in detail because doing so wastes valuable group discussion time. If your refutation has been short and to the point, it may not be necessary to summarize your argument.

ADAPTING TO ARGUMENTATIVE STYLES

Research suggests that men and women argue differently. There also are argumentation differences among people from different cultures. These differences appear to be a function of how we learn to argue and what values we believe are important. Effective group members recognize and try to adapt to others' ways of arguing.

Gender Differences

In a study of sex differences in group argumentation, researchers found that women and men argue differently in small group decision-making interactions.[14] Men tend to be competitive arguers; women, on the other hand, are more likely to seek consensus within a group. Men tend to view issues as only two-sided—for or against, right or wrong. Women are more likely to search out many different

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ETHICAL GROUPS

Ethical Arguments in Groups

Regardless of how persuasively an argument is presented, group members should also strive to be ethical arguers. Group members have four ethical responsibilities when they engage in argumentation: research responsibility, common good responsibility, reasoning responsibility, and social code responsibility.[1]

Research responsibility means that group members are expected to come to the discussion informed and prepared to discuss the issues. Information must be used honestly. To fulfill this responsibility, follow these guidelines:

- Do not distort information.
- Do not suppress important information.
- Never fabricate or make up information.
- Reveal the sources of information so that others can evaluate them.

The common good responsibility requires that ethical arguers look beyond their own needs and consider the circumstances of others. Members of a group should be committed to achieving the group goal rather than merely winning an argument. The following two principles are important for fulfilling the common good responsibility:

- Consider the interests of those affected by the decision.
- Promote the group's goal as more important than winning an argument.

The reasoning responsibility requires members to avoid presenting faulty arguments. Understanding the structure of an argument, methods of building a persuasive argument, and ways to recognize fallacies will help you fulfill this ethical responsibility, as will following these rules:

- Do not misrepresent the views of others.
- Use sound reasoning supported by evidence.
- Avoid making arguments containing fallacies.

The final ethical consideration is the social code responsibility. This requires that group members promote an open and supportive climate for argumentation. Follow these guidelines for fulfilling the social code responsibility:

- Treat other group members as equals.
- Give everyone, including those who disagree, the opportunity to respond to an argument.
- Do not insult or attack the character of a group member.
- Give the group an opportunity to review the evidence.
- Respect established group norms.

[1] Karyn Charles Rybacki and Donald Jay Rybacki, *Advocacy and Opposition: An Introduction to Argumentation,* 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1966), pp. 10–13. Subsequent editions of Rybacki and Rybacki do not include these four responsibilities, but do discuss ethical standards for argumentation. See Karyn Charles Rybacki and Donald Jay Rybacki, *Advocacy and Opposition: An Introduction to Argumentation,* 5th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2004), pp. 14–21.

perspectives on a subject as well as ask questions. However, there were no differences in men's and women's production of facts, opinions, or evidence. In addition, men and women were relatively equal in their voicing of objections to others' statements. Of course, many women enjoy a direct and competitive debate. In fact, when women make up the majority of group members, they become more comfortable stating and supporting their opinions and disagreeing with others.

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"In such situations, women may feel more empowered to forego communicative stereotypes, and take on interactive roles that are typically reserved for men."[15]

Although research provides generalizations about gender differences in argumentation, there are always exceptions. In her book *The Argument Culture,* Deborah Tannen cautions that "the forces of gender are far more complex than a simple male-female dichotomy suggests. Many variations exist, shaped by culture, geography, class, sexual orientation, and individual personality."[16] At the same time, it is useful to recognize that men and women may come to a group with different argumentation styles. Groups should create an environment in which everyone feels comfortable arguing.

We caution you against stereotyping the way men and women argue. Don't assume that the women in your group are more submissive and the men are more assertive. Instead we prefer a dialectic approach. Groups benefit when members value both competition and cooperation. When group members argue, they must balance "the tension between the need to agree and disagree, to challenge and reach convergence, to ask questions and make statements." Although these "tasks may be divided along gender lines . . . there is nothing inherently superior or inferior about either men's or women's communication. They may be different, but they are both necessary and equally important to the group's success in argument."[17]

Cultural Differences

Approaches to argumentation are often influenced by members' cultures. Cultural perspectives can influence the level of argumentativeness, the values that form the basis for arguments, and the approaches to evidence and reasoning. Some cultures are not as argumentative as others. For example, Asians and Asian Americans are generally less comfortable engaging in an argument. Asians may go to great lengths to preserve the harmony of a group, preferring to avoid an argument because it could jeopardize that harmony.[18] It is important, however, not to overgeneralize about the characteristics of any culture. There are significant differences among Asian cultures. For instance, in some Indian subcultures, argumentation is encouraged.

Culture also may dictate who should argue. Many cultures give enormous respect to their elders. In these cultures, a young person arguing with an older adult is viewed as disrespectful. Among several American Indian and African cultures, the elderly are viewed as wiser and more knowledgeable. The young are taught that the views of the elderly are to be accepted rather than challenged.

One of the most significant cultural differences in argumentation is the way in which people use evidence to support a claim. According to Myron Lustig and Jolene Koester,

> There are no universally accepted standards about what constitutes evidence. Among many devout Muslims and Christians, for instance, parables or stories—particularly from the Koran or bible—are a powerful form of evidence. . . . The European American culture prefers physical evidence and eyewitness

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> testimony, and members of that culture see "facts" as the supreme kind of evidence . . . [whereas] in certain portions of Chinese culture . . . physical evidence is discounted because no connection is seen between . . . the physical world and human actions. . . . In certain African cultures, the words of a witness would be discounted and even totally disregarded because the people believe that if you speak up about seeing something, you must have a particular agenda in mind; in other words, no one is regarded as objective.[19]

Given such different perspectives about the value of evidence, the data used to support a claim in one culture may seem irrational in another.

Argumentation and Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, defines **emotional intelligence** as the "capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships."[20] At first, it may seem as though emotional intelligence has nothing to do with group argumentation. Yet, in many ways, emotional intelligence represents a significant aspect of effective argumentation. Think of it this way: The role of emotions in argumentation can take two forms: (1) curbing inappropriate emotions and (2) expressing appropriate emotions. Effective group members understand the need for both and learn how to balance their use. We have adapted Goleman's list of the five basic competencies of emotionally intelligent people to groups and their members:[21]

- *Self-awareness.* Group members recognize how they are feeling at the moment and use that knowledge to guide the way they communicate and make decisions. If you are aware, for example, that your voice is getting louder and you are becoming increasingly angry with someone, you may decide to lower your voice, defuse your anger, and respond to the other person with respect.
- *Self-regulation.* Group members handle their emotions responsibly, delay personal gratification to pursue group goals, and recover well from emotional distress. This does not mean suppressing your emotions; instead, self-regulation means understanding your emotions and using that understanding to deal with situations effectively.
- *Self-motivation.* Group members tap their emotional needs as sources of motivation. These feelings often enable members to be resourceful, take initiative, strive to improve group performance, and persevere in the face of setbacks and frustrations. When emotions cloud your ability to move ahead, motivation provides the energy to continue.
- *Empathy.* Group members with emotional intelligence accurately sense what other members are feeling and are able to understand and establish rapport with diverse group members. Such members analyze their relationships and emotions objectively and then have the sensitivity to respond appropriately and helpfully.

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- *Social skills.* Communication skills are the foundation of social skills. Emotionally intelligent group members can read social situations and choose effective communication strategies that help them cooperate, persuade, negotiate, and lead others. These strategies require a variety of communication skills, including openness, assertiveness, listening, constructive criticism, and group communication competencies.

When group members argue about the wisdom of adopting a controversial proposal, whether to hire an unconventional applicant for an important job, or how to break bad news to colleagues, they may need emotional intelligence to help them achieve their goal. In some cases, members will have to cool down and curb their emotions. In other circumstances, they can exert more influence by heating up a discussing and displaying strong emotions.

If group members become highly emotional or aggressive during a group discussion, you may be able to cool things down by suppressing your own emotions and using the following tactics (all of which relate to a characteristic of emotional intelligence):

- *Self-awareness:* Calm down, tune in to your own feelings, and be willing to share those feelings with group members.
- *Self-confidence:* Show that you are willing to work things out by talking over the issue rather than escalating it.
- *Self-control:* State your own point of view in neutral language rather than in a combative tone.
- *Empathy:* Look for an equitable way to resolve the dispute by working with those who disagree to find a resolution that both sides can embrace.[22]

If you care about your group and its goal, you may want to express your emotions openly as a way of intensifying what you say. If, for example, your group needs motivation, you may enlist your emotions to express "infectious" enthusiasm and passion. If, however, your group is considering a decision that you see as unethical or potentially disastrous, an appropriate burst of anger and sorrow may help to underscore your arguments. Emotions are attention grabbers, operating as warnings, alarms, and motivators. They generate powerful messages by conveying crucial information without putting those data into words.[23]

BALANCED ARGUMENTATION

Effective arguers balance their own need to win an argument with the need of the group to solve a problem or make a decision. Argumentation in groups should be cooperative rather than competitive.

Josina Makau and Debian Marty define **cooperative argumentation** as "a process of reasoned interaction . . . intended to help participants and audiences

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TOOLBOX 10.3

The Origins of Emotional Intelligence

Many people mistakenly believe that Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, created the concept of emotional intelligence. Goleman, who has a Ph.D. in psychology and previously reported behavioral and brain science news for the *New York Times*, does not claim this honor for himself. He fully acknowledges that fact in his books. Here's what he writes about the origins of emotional intelligence:

> A comprehensive theory of emotional intelligence was proposed in 1990 by two psychologists, Peter Salovey and John Mayer. Another pioneering model of emotional intelligence was proposed in the 1980s by Reuven Bar-On, an Israeli psychologist. . . . Salovey and Mayer defined emotional intelligence in terms of being able to monitor and regulate one's own feelings and to use feeling to guide thought and action.[1]

In addition to those whom Goleman credits, we recommend the works of Dr. Antonio Damasio, a neurosurgeon who links emotions to human consciousness and—most important for the study of communication—decision-making ability.[2] Damasio is concerned with what happens when people cannot make emotions work for them. He began his investigation by studying patients with damage to the emotional center of their brains. He notes that these patients make terrible decisions even though their IQ scores stay the same. So even though they test as "smart," they "make disastrous choices in business and their personal lives, and can even obsess endlessly over a decision so simple as when to make an appointment." Their decision-making skills are poor because they have lost access to their emotions. Damasio concludes that feelings are *indispensable* for rational decision making.[3]

Consider whether you could answer any of these questions without taking emotions into account: "Whom should I marry?" "What career should I pursue? "Should I buy this house?" Now put these kinds of questions into a group context: "What are the human consequences of our decision or solution?" "Should I let the others in my group know how uncomfortable I am with their proposed actions?" "What should I say to a bereaved colleague?"

[1] Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Book, 1995), p. 42.
[2] Goleman, pp. 27–28. Also see Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Quill, 2000).
[3] See Damasio, *Descartes' Error*; Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt, 1999).

make the best assessments or the best decisions in any given situation."[24] Cooperative arguers focus on the group's shared goal of solving a problem or making the best decision. They recognize that the group will be better informed if there is an open exchange of ideas. Those who disagree should be viewed as resources, not rivals. Although cooperative arguers want to win arguments, they do not want to do so at the expense of the group goal.

Certainly you should present your best arguments in the hopes of persuading others. However, keep in mind that winning is not as important as helping the group make the best possible decision, which may not happen to include your ideas. Effective arguers are willing to share their views at the risk of losing the argument. Cooperative group members adhere to ethical guidelines and recognize

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that the arguments of all group members are potentially valid and should receive a fair hearing. "Balancing the tension between the need to agree and disagree, to challenge and reach convergence, to ask questions and make statements, is the central paradox of effective argument in decision-making groups."[25]

GroupWork

Got Water?

Goal: To recognize, analyze, and evaluate argumentation

Participants: Groups of five to seven members

Procedure:

1. After reading the *Got Water?* passage, each group should answer the following questions about Standage's arguments:
   a. List at least three claims made in the argument.
   b. What specific types of evidence does Standage use to support his claims?
   c. What are the implied warrants in his argument?
   d. Does he provide backing for the warrants, reservations, or qualifiers of his argument?
   e. Are there any other claims that could be added to make this argument even more persuasive?
   f. What claims would you use to refute part or all of his argument?
   g. Overall, how effective are Standage's arguments?
2. Time permitting, each group should share its answers and conclusions with the class to create a composite list of answers.

Got Water?

In the August 12, 2005, edition of the *New York Times*, Tom Standage writes that Americans squander billions of dollars on bottled water. Americans drink, on average, 24 gallons of bottled water a year; among beverages, only soda outsells it. And it's not a bargain. In fact, a gallon of Evian or Poland Spring costs more than a gallon of gasoline—which explains how we're spending $10 billion a year on the stuff. But why do we do it? Not for the taste. In blind tastings between bottled water and tap water from major municipal systems, "most people cannot tell the difference." Tests show that bottled water is just as likely as tap water to contain contaminants, while offering no nutritional advantage. And whereas tap water is nearly free, plentiful, and has no negative impact on the environment, shipping and refrigerating bottled water consumes a lot of energy and creates serious disposal problems.

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GroupAssessment

Argumentativeness Scale

Directions. This questionnaire contains statements about arguing over controversial issues. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by placing the appropriate number in the blank. Use the following ratings to respond to each statement:

1 = almost never true
2 = rarely true
3 = occasionally true
4 = often true
5 = almost always true

_____ 1. While in an argument, I worry that the person I am arguing with will form a negative impression of me.
_____ 2. Arguing over controversial issues improves my intelligence.
_____ 3. I enjoy avoiding arguments.
_____ 4. I am energetic and enthusiastic when I argue.
_____ 5. Once I finish an argument, I promise myself that I will not get into another.
_____ 6. Arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves.
_____ 7. I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a point in an argument.
_____ 8. When I finish arguing with someone, I feel nervous and upset.
_____ 9. I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue.
_____ 10. I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I am about to get into an argument.
_____ 11. I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue.
_____ 12. I am happy when I keep an argument from happening.
_____ 13. I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue about a controversial issue.
_____ 14. I prefer being with people who rarely disagree with me.
_____ 15. I consider an argument an exciting intellectual exchange.
_____ 16. I find myself unable to think of effective points during an argument.
_____ 17. I feel refreshed after an argument on a controversial issue.
_____ 18. I have the ability to do well in an argument.
_____ 19. I try to avoid getting into arguments.
_____ 20. I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument.

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Scoring Instructions

1. Add your scores on items 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, and 20.
2. Add 60 to the sum obtained in step 1.
3. Add your scores on items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 19.
4. To compute your argumentativeness score, subtract the total obtained in step 3 from the total obtained in step 2.

Interpretation of Scores

73–100 = high in argumentativeness
56–72 = moderate in argumentativeness
20–55 = low in argumentativeness

Source: "Argumentativeness Scale" by Dominic A. Infante and Andrew Rancer from *The Journal of Personality Assessment,* 1982. Reprinted by permission of Lawrence Erlbaum Associates and the authors.

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