

# Where Do I Begin in Argumentation?

In Chapter 1, we told you that argumentation is instrumental communication. It is used to influence the beliefs and behaviors of others. Principles of argumentation have evolved over time, and the practice of good argumentation requires that arguers maintain ethical standards appropriate to their society. This information alone, however, is not enough to begin the process of arguing. As with any rule-governed behavior, there are certain first principles, or conventions, you must know as a prerequisite to participating.

We want you to think of arguing as participating in a process that leads to ethical and effective uses of reasoning and proof. To understand how people get involved in the process, it is helpful to extend our characterization of argumentation as instrumental communication. Frans van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst, and Tjark Kruger (1987) offer such an extension by explaining common characteristics of the process:

- Argumentation is a social activity.
- Argumentation is an intellectual activity.
- Argumentation is a verbal activity.
- Argumentation is opinion stating, justifying, or refuting.
- Argumentation is directed toward an audience.

Social, intellectual, and verbal activity directed toward an audience suggest that argumentation takes place in a particular kind of context. Moreover, that argumentation involves intellectual and verbal activity suggests the content of communication may be influenced, even constrained, by the context in which it takes place. Opinion stating, justifying, and refuting suggest that behavior within this communication context involves people enacting fairly specific roles governed by expectations or rules.

If you have had other courses in communication, you probably found the three preceding statements fairly unremarkable. The existence of a context that influences the content of communication and involves role-bound, rule-bound

behavior on the part of communicators is hardly unique to argumentation. What is unique about argumentation is the way in which context, content, roles, and rules play out.

## FIELDS OF ARGUMENTATION

Argumentation takes place in the context of a field that contains the arguer, a subject of controversy, and an audience. A **field of argumentation** is a social or professional context in which people argue to make decisions or build a body of knowledge. Stephen Toulmin (1958) uses “field” as a metaphor for the figurative territory in which arguers and audiences function. A field of argumentation is much like an academic discipline such as history or biology. Theories, examples, and interpretations in each academic discipline have evolved over time as successive historians and biologists contributed to their field’s body of knowledge and formed opinions based on research about what something means in the historical or biological context.

Each field has certain elements that are *field dependent*. These elements are particular to that field alone. Definitions and terminology, a field’s jargon that may be incomprehensible to anyone outside the field, are field-dependent uses of language. Each field may also have its own standards for the rigor expected in proof and reasoning, for what constitutes “sound” argumentation, and for what “makes sense.” Standards for proof and reasoning can also be field dependent, because historians and biologists, for example, discover information and create knowledge in different ways.

To understand this aspect of field dependency, think about how the historian and the biologist approach doing research in their respective fields. A question that exists in many different fields, the answer to which is dependent on each field’s subject matter, is: What constitutes a sufficient number of cases upon which to base generalizations? (Lyne, 1990). A historian might be able to develop effective arguments using as few as a half dozen cases or instances of the impact of railroads on the development of the western frontier to draw a general conclusion about the importance of railroads. A biologist, on the other hand, would be considered irresponsible for drawing a conclusion about cell behavior based on the study of only six cells.

We cannot provide you with an all-purpose list of everything that might be dependent in every particular field because one does not exist. To participate in argumentation, you must be knowledgeable not only regarding a field’s subject matter but also about any special, field-dependent requirements for arguing in it. Through research you will discover information about subject matter directly and begin to discover, directly or indirectly, elements of a field that make arguing in it unique.

Not all elements of argumentation are dependent on a particular field’s subject matter. Some elements, such as the basic mental structures of human reasoning and the tests we apply to determine the quality of information used to prove arguments, do not typically change as we move from field to field. These elements of argumentation are *field invariant*.

The historian and the biologist both use the same understanding of the reasoning process—that a generalization, for example, is made by examining instances of something and drawing a conclusion based on what those instances have in common. Both

fields also share an understanding that good cases, on which a valid generalization can be based, are representative of all existing cases. The only substantive, field-dependent difference in how history and biology approach generalizing concerns how many cases are considered sufficient to support a generalization.

Why is it important to your understanding of argumentation to know the distinction between field-dependent and field-invariant elements? We all potentially participate in argumentation in several different fields. As a student, for example, you may be taking courses from four different departments, which means you must be able to function in the context of those fields. If each course requires you to write a term paper, analyze case studies, or make comparisons on essay tests, you will be participating in argumentation in four different fields. You must know the field-dependent requirements. Are any special terms or language used? What quality of proof is required? What unique restrictions or expectations exist in each field? You need to know the answers to be successful as an instrumental communicator in each of your classes.

To successfully participate in argumentation, it is also important to understand the field-invariant elements of argumentation. For instance, there are some field-invariant rules for language use. Whether you are writing for a history or a biology professor, both will expect you to know how to spell, use appropriate sentence structure, and organize a term paper according to a standard system for term paper writing. There are also field-invariant rules for the major forms of reasoning (Chapter 7) that apply across all disciplines, as suggested in our comparison of history and biology.

Fields are not static. A field is always in the process of evolving as new people and new ideas modify it and add to its body of knowledge. You should be alert for shifts that might have taken place. Something that was field invariant may become field dependent, as often happens in the sciences when new subspecialties emerge. Equally, some things that were field dependent in the past may become field invariant in the future. Once the province of the hard sciences, the scientific method has become ubiquitous with the emergence of the soft, or social, sciences.

Fields are inhabited by people whose ideas and experiences give them shape. We can characterize the roles of these participants in argumentation and the rules under which they participate. Those who favor change and those who oppose it assume roles that carry with them responsibilities that must be fulfilled during the process. We use the term **advocate** to refer to the person who communicates to encourage a change in belief or behavior. The term **opponent** identifies the person who acts to discourage the change supported by the advocate. The opponent plays the role of spokesperson for the existing beliefs and behaviors in a field. Using sports as an analogy, the advocate plays offense, the opponent plays defense. The conventions of presumption, burden of proof, and prima facie case development identify the playing field and obligate those who play on it to fulfill certain rule-based responsibilities.

## PRESUMPTION

To begin the process of argumentation, you must identify the beliefs and behaviors that a field presently favors. All argumentation takes place over a piece of figurative ground occupied by existing institutions, ideas, laws, policies, and customs.

This figurative ground represents the way things are at present. **Presumption** is the term that specifies who occupies this ground at the beginning of the controversy. Historically, the concept of presumption has reflected one of two viewpoints: artificial or natural.

The concept of **artificial presumption** in the legal system demonstrates how presumption is influenced by a field. In the American legal system, every defendant is presumed innocent until the probability of his or her guilt can be demonstrated by the state, in the case of criminal law, or by the plaintiff, in the case of civil law. This presumption of innocence is termed artificial because it is the result of argumentative ground having been assigned arbitrarily to one side in the dispute because of a field-accepted belief. The Constitution and the accumulated experience of those in the field of law create a field-dependent presumption in favor of “innocent until proven guilty.”

So powerful is this presumption in the American psyche that it often carries over into other fields, as when someone is accused of wrongdoing or malfeasance that is not necessarily a criminal or civil violation of the law. An assumption of innocence here is an artificial kind of presumption; law and custom could just as easily have assigned presumption as the French do: The accused is guilty until he or she proves the probability of innocence.

All fields have their own institutions, ideas, rules, policies, and customs that have been established as the field developed. These elements are often what defines one field as unique from others. We can say that these elements create an order for what is typical, or natural, for that field. Each field has its own natural order, and participants in that field usually consider its institutions, ideas, rules, policies, or customs effective and deserving of continuation until someone shows them good and sufficient reasons to change.

**Natural presumption** derives from the observation of the natural order of whatever field we find ourselves in at a given time. When an advocate challenges a belief or behavior that is the consequence of something in the natural order of a field—an institution, idea, rule, policy, common practice, custom, value, or interpretation of reality—presumption automatically rests with the belief or behavior being challenged. This presumption in favor of the natural order is automatic, because a field’s natural order is a product of the development over time of things that work for that field. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” is a bit of folk wisdom that neatly expresses the concept of natural presumption.

Our understanding of natural presumption is drawn from the work of Anglican Archbishop Richard Whately (1828/2010). In discussing presumption, he used the analogy of a company of soldiers inside a fortress. Change would require these troops to march out to meet the enemy; natural presumption would suggest that they remain secure inside their fortress rather than venture out onto an unknown battlefield. Because natural presumption reflects accepted practices in a given field, the natural order of things in the military field suggests that troops do not normally abandon a secure position in favor of an open field. They leave it up to the opposing force to attack their fortified position.

Pragmatically, presumption can serve as a decision rule for determining how the audience will respond to a proposal for change if its advocate fails to offer them good and sufficient reasons for making the change. Because presumption tells us what the audience presently views as adequate and deserving of continuation, if

good and sufficient reasons are not given, the audience will usually reject a proposal for change. Whately was particularly concerned that those who argue realize what presumption means in preparing an argumentative case. He urged arguers to begin by knowing where presumption lies and to point out who has the burden of proving the change is reasonable and who has the benefit of endorsing the accepted institutions, ideas, rules, policies, and customs in a field. Thus, the convention of presumption helps us understand the responsibilities of the advocate and opponent roles in argumentation.

Presumption is a communication convention with implications for audience analysis. Whately also identified that for which the audience holds deference as a source of presumption. The persons, practices, ideas, or sources of information the audience accepts can be regarded as presumptively occupying the figurative ground. Whether we think of a large field, such as the “American system of democracy,” or a narrower field, such as the “genre of horror fiction,” those who make up that field tend to favor the existing practices and ideas of the field. They defer to the field’s institutions, authorities, opinion leaders, and body of knowledge, all of which has evolved over time (Bruce, 1993).

The deference those in a field have for that which constitutes it is a natural presumption. People in a field compose the audience for a proposal to change belief or behavior in it. Knowing those things, especially those sources of information and expert opinion, that the audience has deference for is the best way to discover what will provide a basis for good and sufficient reasons for them to favor or oppose change. J. Michael Sproule (1976) suggests a series of questions to ask in using natural presumption as an audience analysis device.

The arguer is advised to ask such questions as: (1) to what groups do members of the audience belong? (2) to what sources of information (persons, books, groups) do audience members accord deference? (3) what is the popular and unpopular opinion on a particular subject? (4) what information on a subject might hold the advantage of novelty? Such queries would assist the [arguer] in selecting arguments and evidence best fitted to persuading persons on a given subject. (p. 128)

There is a final perspective from which we may consider the convention of presumption. Usually applied to argumentation as a process for seeking knowledge, presumption can be thought of as a hypothesis to be tested. When people engage in argumentation because their goal is to explore some new idea or reevaluate an old one, to define the boundaries of a concept, or to determine whether something is or is not accurate, they phrase a proposal and test it. The result is argumentation about whether to believe or not believe something (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1993; Walton, 1992).

Argumentation to test hypotheses uses an artificial presumption. “Presumption comes into play where there is an issue or question that is open in the sense that the relevant, available evidence does not resolve the issue one way or another with sufficient weight to close discussion of the issue” (Walton, 1992, p. 42). The issue or question is phrased as a hypothesis, although we will use the label *proposition* in Chapter 3. The hypothesis is given provisional, artificial acceptance, and then argumentation takes place to determine whether that acceptance should continue or should be rejected. Those who participate in such **hypothesis testing** argumentation may take the traditional roles of advocate and opponent, in which

one side supports the accuracy of the proposition and the other denies it. A hypothesis may also be tested by using a format for argumentation in which all participants play the roles of both advocate and opponent.

You may recognize this form of argumentation from your experience in science or social science courses. The scientific method is a logical system for testing a hypothesis, often through a study or an experiment. A social scientist proposes that the lyrics in country-western music are more likely to contain negative characterizations of marriage and fidelity than the lyrics of any other form of popular music. She states the hypothesis: country-western lyrics suggest negative images of marriage and fidelity to listeners. She then assembles evidence by studying the content of lyrics in country-western and non-country-western songs and publishes her research in a social science journal.

Our first social scientist has initiated an argument about the content, and likely impact on listeners, of the lyrics of country-western songs. Another social scientist reads the article and believes it misrepresents the meaning of these lyrics. He analyzes them and finds that the lyrics are more likely to suggest positive characterizations, and he publishes his findings. Both researchers may continue their debate over the hypothesis, analyzing more songs and publishing their findings. They may also choose to work together to determine whether the hypothesis is accurate by conducting a laboratory or field experiment to determine how country-western fans characterize these lyrics.

The debate tournaments that high school and college students participate in provide another venue for hypothesis testing. A debate topic is selected for the school year, and students participate in contests to advocate or oppose the hypothetical statement or proposition. The testing of the hypothesis occurs as affirmative (advocate) and negative (opponent) teams argue back and forth, with a judge (audience) evaluating the strength of arguments, quality of evidence, and soundness of reasoning. In tournament debate, testing the hypothesis of the debate topic relies on artificial presumption. Presumption is automatically granted to the negative team at the beginning of each debate, and the affirmative team has the burden of proving the presumption should be overturned. Whichever team is most successful in convincing the judge that its test of the hypothesis is most accurate “wins” the debate.

Whether artificial or natural, presumption grants initial possession of the figurative ground to the person fulfilling the role of opponent. The opponent represents an existing institution, idea, law or rule, policy, practice, or custom and is responsible for denying that good and sufficient reasons exist to change it. We assume that what exists should be maintained unless good reasons surface to change it. Presumption simply describes what exists without making any kind of judgment about its worth or effectiveness. Consider the following description:

The existing curriculum at Northern State University involves courses which are mostly worth four credit-hours, although a few one-, two-, and three-credit courses exist. Student schedules and faculty teaching loads are designed around the four-credit-hours-per-course system. Some faculty and students would like to have the system converted to a three-credit standard.

In this case, presumption states that a system of four-credit courses exists and functions at Northern State University. Presumption does not suggest this is necessarily good for learning or teaching, just that it is present and that in the field of



Northern State University no one presently sees any reason to change it. Controversy over the credit-hour system would revolve around the efforts of advocates to present a series of good reasons for changing the system and the efforts of opponents who, using the benefit of presumption that the four-credit standard has worked, defend the policy on the basis of its successful functioning.

In argumentation, the importance of the convention of presumption lies in the responsibility it places upon the advocate. Because advocates do not have the benefit of presumption, which favors no change, they must show good and sufficient reasons why we can no longer rely on those beliefs or behaviors that are afforded presumption because they presently exist. We may summarize presumption in the following principles:

1. The term *presumption* describes a situation that currently exists and points out a prevailing order.
2. The opponent initially occupies the figurative ground over which the argument will be contested.
3. Presumption is a decision rule that determines what the advocate must prove in testing the proposition as a hypothesis.
4. Presumption identifies what sources of information and expert opinion constitutes good and sufficient reasons for accepting or rejecting a proposed change in belief or behavior.
5. Presumption only describes; it does not judge the value or lack of value of the existing beliefs, institutions, ideas, laws or rule, policies, or customs presently occupying the ground.

## BURDEN OF PROOF

Once presumption has been determined, an advocate must discover and provide good and sufficient reasons to support a change in belief or behavior. It is the responsibility of the person performing the role of advocate to provide these reasons in order to fulfill the burden of proof.

Presumption describes the preoccupation of ground in argumentation by the opponent; the **burden of proof** is the obligation of the advocate to contest the ground by offering arguments that are logically sufficient to challenge presumption. The process of argumentation is much like a balancing scale. Arguing is a shifting or transferring of the weight of evidence and reasoning from one side to the other (Walton, 1988). The audience for argumentation is part of the balancing mechanism, as it may shift its support from opponent to advocate, or advocate to opponent as each side's arguments are presented. The scale is finally tipped when the audience decides to accept or reject the proposed change based on which side's evidence and reasoning ultimately have more weight.

To fully understand what the burden of proof involves, recall that presumption describes what exists without passing judgment on it. The advocate, in fulfilling the burden of proof, both passes judgment on and criticizes present belief or behavior and recommends a new belief or behavior. He or she begins by specifying or naming what it is that should not continue—the existing belief or behavior awarded preoccupation of the ground by presumption. To fulfill the obligation of burden of proof, the advocate must demonstrate why whatever presently occupies the disputed

figurative ground should not continue to do so. The content and scope of the burden of proof are specified by the statement of the proposition argued.

The burden of proof may be thought of as the obligation of the complaining party in a dispute. In civil law, this obligation would be identified with the responsibility of the plaintiff to proceed first and make a case against the defendant, proving the complaint by a preponderance of evidence. If you were dissatisfied with an automobile you had purchased and decided to sue the dealership, as the plaintiff you would have to demonstrate through the introduction of evidence and testimony that you had been harmed or damaged in some way as a result of the dealer's actions. In criminal law, the state acts as advocate and must prove beyond reasonable doubt that the accused is guilty of the crime. This constitutes the state's burden of proof.

In a controversy, the burden of proof always falls on the party who would lose if the complaint were rejected or if a settlement did not occur. In the case of your suing the auto dealer, as the person bringing the complaint, you would lose if you could not demonstrate that you had been harmed or if you could not prove the harm was a consequence of the dealer's actions. In the example of criminal law, the presumption of innocence means that if the prosecution was unable to demonstrate the guilt of the accused at a sufficiently high level of probability, the state's case would be lost.

In some fields, the requirements for the burden of proof may not always be as clear as they appear in legal argumentation. This is why audience analysis to determine presumption can be useful. It will help you discover exactly what your audience expects you to prove. If you were a student advocate addressing a Northern State University policy-making body made up of faculty and administrators, you might determine that their attitudes favored maintaining the four-credit-hour standard because faculty would be expected to undertake additional course preparation and demand a salary increase for the extra work load. You would have to show that the greater good to students, obtained from changing to a three-credit-hour standard, would justify the salary increase or the increased faculty workload.

Sometimes you have to make an educated guess regarding how much proof is sufficient to fulfill your burden to support change. Those who already support the change will require a simple affirmation of their beliefs; they require proof that confirms change is good and shows them how to change. An uncommitted audience may be open to the change but may require substantial reasoning and information to see that change is a good idea. An unbelieving audience may resist the change no matter what proof is presented but may sometimes be reached by your demonstrating that there are areas upon which agreement can be achieved. The latter is a common practice in labor-management negotiations and diplomatic relations. How many arguments are necessary and how much proof must support them depend on an audience's expectations and degree of commitment.

The burden of proof is the logical opposite of presumption. We may summarize the burden of proof in the following principles:

1. The advocate has the responsibility to make a case of good and sufficient reasons for change. This is the burden of proof.
2. In fulfilling the burden of proof, present beliefs and behaviors described by presumption are judged and evaluated on the basis of the available evidence, and an alternative pattern of thought or action is proposed.



How do you know when you have fulfilled your burden of proof? The advocate's responsibility to fulfill the burden of proof is discharged when a *prima facie* case is presented.

## THE PRIMA FACIE CASE

To overcome the presumption that a belief or behavior is adequate and deserving of continuation, the advocate must present a fully developed case strong enough to justify a change unless successfully challenged by countering arguments. Literally, a **prima facie case** is one that “at first sight” or “on the face of it” is sufficient to justify changing belief or behavior. A *prima facie* case causes us to suspend our reliance on presumption as a guide for belief or behavior. This suspension of presumption will either be temporary, if valid countering arguments are provided, or permanent, if the opponent is unable to establish a reason to continue to rely on the original presumption.

Because the dispute would be lost if a *prima facie* case were not presented to fulfill the burden of proof and suspend presumption, the advocate normally initiates the argument by speaking or writing first. This initial presentation must be *prima facie* and sufficient to support the proposal for a change in belief or behavior. The legal system once again provides an example to clarify the concept. To establish the guilt of a person accused of a felony, the prosecution must present an indictment of this individual that suspends the artificial presumption of innocence. This presentation must constitute a *prima facie* case.

Suppose Ralph is accused of auto theft. A *prima facie* case would consist, at the very least, of evidence and testimony supporting the following arguments:

An automobile was reported missing from the dealer's lot.

Subsequent to receiving this report, the city police apprehended Ralph with the vehicle in question in his possession.

Ralph's possession of the automobile was unlawful. He had not purchased it, nor had he received consent of any dealer representative to take it for a test drive.

Proving these three arguments would constitute a *prima facie* indictment of Ralph for grand theft auto. The presumption of Ralph's innocence would be suspended until his attorney had mounted a successful defense. The defense attorney would have the responsibility of attempting to reestablish the presumption of Ralph's innocence by attacking the truth of one or more of these arguments or by introducing argumentation that demonstrated extenuating circumstances mitigating Ralph's guilt.

The advocate is responsible for developing a *topical* *prima facie* case. In the field of an argumentation class or tournament debate, the advocate and her or his opponent agree to a proposition that identifies the broad, general topic to be argued. In ordinary conversations, and in the argumentation that takes place in some fields, it is easy to drift from topic to topic. When you want to make a specific case for or against some proposed change, this is not a desirable quality. Sticking to the topic you agreed to argue, the proposition, prevents the audience from becoming confused about the issues.

If you had agreed to argue about changing Northern State University's credit-hour system, the proposition might be stated as: Northern State University should

adopt the three-credit-hour course as the university standard. In providing a prima facie case, the advocate would not contest the amount a student pays per credit hour or the manner in which fees are collected, because these issues are clearly outside the bounds of the proposition. Tuition constitutes a different topic requiring a different proposition and has as much relevance to a discussion of the credit-hour system at Northern as unpaid parking tickets would have to Ralph's guilt or innocence on the auto theft charge.

In addition to being topical, a prima facie case for a proposition of value or policy must demonstrate **inherency**. Argumentation is used to decide whether change is justified. To justify change, the advocate must examine both the deficiencies in existing beliefs or behaviors and the reason for their existence. Inherency is concerned with the nature of cause. Advocates propose changes in belief or behavior to remedy problems or to fulfill the need for knowledge. They must identify what causes the problem or the need for knowledge and demonstrate that the nature of the cause is such that it can only be overcome by a change in belief or behavior.

We generally assume that if a problem's cause cannot be found, we cannot determine how best to remedy it, and if there is nothing to stimulate a quest for more knowledge, we will not pursue it. If an advocate cannot identify cause, he or she cannot develop a logically complete argument. Thus, inherency is a crucial part of an advocate's prima facie case. If the advocate fails to identify a cause for a problem or cause as a reason to seek knowledge, it will be impossible to determine if there is a good reason to change our belief or behavior. Inherency establishes that the problem exists as a direct result of existing belief or behavior. If cause is found in behaviors that operationalize these beliefs, inherency is termed **structural**. If the cause is found in the beliefs of a field, inherency is said to be **attitudinal**.

Finding the cause establishes that a problem or need exists as a direct result of existing belief or behavior. If the cause is found in the institutions, laws or rules, policies, and sometimes the customs of a field, inherency is structural. This is the easier type of inherency to find through research because structures are typically recorded or codified in constitutions, handbooks, court cases, legislation, and rules of conduct. But not all structures are recorded. Unwritten customs and standard practices may evolve in a field over time, and new members of the field must learn them through experience. For example, rituals and superstitions believed to bring good luck in the athletic field are seldom recorded or talked about, but they exist with a very potent force for those in athletics.

Structural inherency results when fields adopt formal or informal systems that operationalize a strong or widely held belief. Institutions, laws or rules, policies, practices, and customs are the fabric that allow members of a field to engage in the activities that typify it. Structural inherency argues that a problem's cause is found in the behavior these formal and informal systems require of people. In searching for inherent causes, the advocate examines institutions, laws or rules, policies, practices, and customs to see if their presence or absence is what has caused a problem or need.

Inherency is attitudinal when the cause of a problem or need results from beliefs, ideas, or values that are central to a field. Attitudinal inherency is usually found in the articulated opinions, feelings, or emotional reactions of the people who compose a field. Attitudinal inherency may be more difficult to find through research because we do not always verbalize beliefs, ideas, or values. More difficult

does not mean impossible to find. In meeting your ethical obligation to do research, you can find many of these beliefs, ideas, or values by examining published mission statements, ethical codes, or survey research results and by interviewing, or reading essays by, opinion leaders in a given field.

Attitudinal inherency can be a powerful barrier to changing belief or behavior, even when many in a field deem such a change necessary. To illustrate the power of attitudes, consider the following examples. The opinion that women are less capable of mastering mathematics than men can keep women from pursuing careers in many scientific fields. The view that college athletes are dumb jocks who receive preferential treatment can make them exiles in the classroom. Emotional reactions to the seeming unfairness of the tax system has led some to cheat on their taxes. Attitudes are often difficult to identify, but they play a powerful role in causing us to accept something as true or false, to value one thing over another, or to act or refuse to act in a certain way.

In our example of argumentation concerning Northern State University, if the principal reason we have for wanting to change Northern's credit-hour system is that the present system is (1) too restrictive of a student's options in choosing courses or (2) does not get maximum productivity from staff and facilities, we would be citing problems that are built-in features of the existing four-credit-hour system. Inherency in this case is structural; the problem is caused by the four-credit-hour policy. This policy has been in effect for a number of years and is considered deserving of continuation by Northern's policy makers.

Faculty members' belief that a three-credit-hour system would increase their workload also serves as an inherent barrier to change. If faculty members prefer the four-credit-hour system, they have little or no inclination to change it. The problems with the system perceived by student advocates could only be solved by implementing a change that the existing power structure is ambivalent toward putting in place.

The role of faculty attitude in preventing change illustrates that it is possible for structural and attitudinal inherency to be present at the same time. It is a characteristic of controversy that there may be several causes for a problem's existence. To solve a problem, however, it is necessary to remove its prime cause. The advocate and opponent, in examining existing beliefs and behaviors, frequently disagree over whose explanation most clearly represents the probable truth about what causes a problem or need to exist. Conceptually, inherency is important in determining whether a *prima facie* case has been presented because it forces arguers to examine the reasons why things exist and to explore whether they will correct themselves by the natural processes of change.

We may summarize the concept of *prima facie* argument with the following principles:

1. The advocate has the responsibility of presenting a *prima facie* case, which at face value justifies a change in belief or behavior.
2. The form and content of the arguments offered determine the face value of an advocate's case.
3. A *prima facie* case must be both topical and inherent.
4. Presentation of a *prima facie* case causes the suspension of presumption unless it is successfully challenged.

The question may still remain: How do you know when you have discharged your responsibilities as an advocate regarding the burden of proof? How will you know what to oppose if you are the opponent? The content and scope of the burden of proof are determined by the wording of the proposition that expresses the change in belief or behavior the advocate proposes.

Further, what constitutes a *prima facie* case can be determined by the use of certain field-invariant stock questions that can be applied to propositions in any field. Early theories of rhetoric developed a series of questions that were crucial in legal proceedings. These questions established the content and scope of the burden of proof for legal propositions. They are similar to the questions the prosecutor considered in preparing the case against Ralph. For fields of argument other than law, similar sets of questions exist. They are commonly referred to as *stock issues*, the questions that listeners or readers want answered before they will accept the advocate's arguments as sufficient to warrant a change in belief or behavior. These questions focus the controversy and are naturally derived from the proposition being argued.

This chapter has covered conventions, roles, rules, and responsibilities that shape participation in the process of argumentation. These conventions establish the figurative ground over which argumentation takes place and some of the rules arguers must follow for argumentation to be logically complete. An advocate, as the person seeking a change in belief or behavior, must prove the case to overcome presumption, which artificially or naturally favors no change. The playing field of argumentation is regulated by the rule that advocates and opponents must not deviate too far from the topic. In making a *prima facie* case for change, the advocate must prove that an inherent cause exists that serves as a good reason to make a change in belief or behavior. The opponent has the benefit of the presumption that existing elements in a field are considered adequate by the field and deserve continuation in the absence of a *prima facie* case for changing them. The next chapter examines the function and wording of argumentative propositions and expands on what you must do to enter the process of argumentation.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss what the three different views of presumption mean to the roles of advocate and opponent in argumentation. Should we always assign the roles before determining presumption? In which communication contexts might you use the view that presumption rests with existing institutions? In which would it be appropriate to discover the beliefs of an audience? Which fields make extensive use of hypothesis testing as a form of argumentation?
2. Choose an ongoing controversy such as the rights of smokers versus nonsmokers, abortion versus right to life, environmental protection versus the need for employment. Which side in the controversy has presumption? Which has the burden of proving that change should occur?
3. Scholars often argue over whether or not a proposed theory has accuracy or legitimacy in their field. Two theories of communication—fantasy theme analysis and the narrative paradigm—are examples of such argumentation. Choose one of the following debates for examination:
  - a. *Advocate*: Ernest G. Bormann (1972, December). Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58, 396–407.  
*Opponent*: G. P. Mohrman (1982, May). An Essay on Fantasy Theme Criticism. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 68, 109–132.