**Analyzing Your Refutation Audience--Sample**

**Topic Proposal—**[Note:I’m just adding this partsince so many of you either didn’t do it fully the first time or changed your topic without spelling out enough of your new idea. I’d strongly recommend that you type this up to clarify things in your own mind and bring it in with the rest for the peer review.]

1. My topic: Is college worth it?
2. The essay I’m refuting: “Why College is a Waste of Time and Money” by Porter Stansberry
3. My tentative grounds for refuting it:

* I believe that like many people who make this argument, Mr. Stansberry is defining the worth of college too narrowly—in terms of job training for a lucrative career. He seems to believe that his set of values is the only one that exists, or the only one that matters, and thus his value judgment on this question should apply to everyone.
* I also believe that Mr. Stansberry isn’t in a position to judge the value of college because, by his own admission, he wasn’t mature enough to take advantage of the opportunities college presented him with when he was a student.

Points of his that I will agree with: [Note: not all of you will have a section like this, but try to find at least some common ground with your opponent.]

* Many (maybe most) 18-year-olds aren’t ready to choose a profession that they will practice for the rest of their lives, so if that’s what they think college is for, they likely will be disappointed.
* Many (maybe most) students would benefit from a gap year to broaden their perspective and see how hard the “real world” can be.
* Most students would benefit from seeking work and/or an internship related to their major before they finish college, maybe even before they start college.
* People who aren’t mature enough to commit to a college level of study in their teens or early 20s should *not* go to college, especially if they are not paying for it themselves.

1. Research questions (in a bulleted list) that you need to answer to support your own thesis.

* How many young people are taking a “gap year” instead of starting college right after high school?
* How many students at SJSU change their majors at some point in their college careers?
* What percentage of SJSU students graduate in 6 years or less?
* What formal educational options for young people in the SF Bay Area exist besides college?
* How do employers in the SF Bay Area feel about hiring students who took a gap year or worked for a while before starting (and finishing) college?
* What do influential people in the world today think they gained from their own college education? (I’ll look for people in a variety of fields weighing in on this.)

1. Specific audience: People—particularly college students but also those who influence them, such as professors and parents--who are inclined, like this writer, to see college in purely job-training, monetary terms. I’d also like to address those who are tired of school, or tired of/unhappy with their major, or wondering if, for whatever reason, they should drop out of college and go see the world.
2. Forum: *The Spartan Daily*. I know this limits my audience to SJSU students and staff, but I think this school has a fairly large population of people who fit my specific audience profile.

**Audience’s Knowledge/Attitudes/Values**:

1. What is your audience likely to already **know** (or think they know) about your topic?

They will probably believe that college is the only way to stay in/climb into the middle class. They will probably not know much about the “gap year” idea or the many trade schools and certificate programs that exist, or if they do, they will think this is a less lucrative, less respectable option. They will probably also believe that people who don’t study majors that lead to a solid income (STEM fields or finance/business/law) are not smart enough for those majors. They probably think most people don’t change majors. They probably believe that a certain amount of goofing off in college is completely normal and acceptable, and that a mediocre amount of effort will be enough to get by (“C’s get degrees”), both in terms of graduating and in terms of getting/keeping a good job.

1. What **information are they lacking**, or what do they misunderstand that keeps them from agreeing with you?

I think many students who are ambivalent about college and who see it primarily in terms of a way to prepare for a well-paying job in a career they will keep for the rest of their lives lack information about their options (other ways to prepare for a career). I think they also don’t really understand how hard the world will be if they take college lightly—treat it essentially like high school. They don’t realize how competitive the job market is, or how much employers will expect them to know outside of the narrow technical knowledge offered in their major classes.

1. What **sources of information** are they most likely to be persuaded by? Why?

They will listen to testimony from people who have actual experience in the “real world,” especially employers and people who got an education (and achieved success) in some non-traditional, non-academic path. They will also likely believe in professionally designed surveys and other kinds of studies about trends in education and in hiring. I believe my target audience, being somewhat disillusioned (or just inherently skeptical) about the academic world will prefer and respect information from people outside of academia.

1. What are some **relevant beliefs** (religious, political, scientific, or whatever) that affect their stance on this issue?

I think my target audience is likely to have a variety of religious and/or political beliefs. Their “scientific” beliefs about what works in the job market are likely to be (as I said above) that getting a college degree to show employers is crucial to success. They might not believe that actually getting a college education is needed. Deep down, many believe they are already qualified for a good spot in the professional world, especially in terms of what they are meant to learn in gen. ed. classes, and they resent being made to pick up further information/skills in these classes.

1. **What values do they hold** that affect their stance on this issue?

SJSU students who are the most disaffected with the college experience tend to be those who have chosen a career path that is out of keeping with their true values and/or talents, often because they have chosen prudence over “following their bliss.” They value respectability and security more than personal fulfillment or “self-actualization.” Or they might be somewhat rebellious by nature and thus chafing at what they see as limits on their true wishes.

1. How will you **appeal to common values** (i.e. values you and they have in common) to help change their minds (if needed), or to overcome their objections and move them from agreement to action?

I will express my sincere belief that everyone has a contribution to make, whether they follow traditional educational paths or not, and that young people, in particular, need to be cherished for their potential and helped through the exciting but extremely difficult transition period they are in—from dependence to autonomy.

1. **Your ethos**: What is this audience’s attitude toward you likely to be? Why?

Once I identify myself as someone who teaches English here, they are likely to see me as someone who will be biased toward the college path. The more cynical ones are likely to assume I wasn’t smart enough to study something more lucrative than English.

1. How will you present yourself as credible and qualified to discuss this issue (good sense, good morals, and good will)?

Good sense: I will offer insights I’ve gleaned over 25 years of watching college students work through these difficult questions in my role as college instructor. I will acknowledge that I loved college and did very well academically but also that I had trouble picking an appropriate major and an appropriate career and that I still sometimes wish I’d chosen another one. I will discuss my experiences with the “real world” of work outside of academia, too. I will acknowledge that the working world is changing so fast that it is hard to know how to best prepare young people for it. I will acknowledge that it is reasonable to question conventional wisdom that says college is the only (or at least the safest) path to a secure spot in the middle class. I will use credible sources to support my claims, where that is appropriate, not just “wing it” with opinions.

Good morals: I will make some mention of my long commitment to the task of helping students reach their full potential. I will try to avoid sounding biased in favor of those who get college degrees (which should be easy, since some of my favorite people didn’t).

Good will: I will show respect for their disillusionment/uncertainty/fear of the unknown. I will sympathize with their restlessness and skepticism. I will refrain from scolding those who make college unpleasant for everyone else by their lack of commitment and/or immaturity/fraud/open hostility to those who are trying to help them develop their potential.