

Rogerian Model of Argument: Dialogue Day

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Timeframe: 60 minutes

Target Audience: This lesson is designed for second-level composition courses with research, logic, and argumentation components, but it is applicable to all students who have completed at least one college-level composition course and who are required to write a research-informed argumentative essays about a complex social issue.

Materials needed (including preparation): White board, markers, and eraser; three handouts—Pre-Dialogue Guidelines (distributed the previous lesson), Rogerian Dialogue: Student Guidelines, and Dialogue Chart (all three included in this lesson plan)

Objectives: After this lesson, students will be able to

- acknowledge an audience with a different view of the same issue.
- summarize this opposing viewpoint without judging it or changing it.
- integrate this opposing view into their own essay on the same issue.
- identify foundational principle(s) of an argument, which are often unstated, and see how they are used to 1) connect relevant premises, or reasons, 2) identify irrelevant premises, and 3) establish common ground with a partner arguing an opposing view.

Background: The Rogerian Argument is a *persuasive strategy* based on *collaboration* and *mutual understanding* that seeks *common ground*, the point at which two sides can agree, rather than victory. Hence, students are not opponents; they are partners in a dialogue *reaching inward* to question their own assumptions while *reaching outward* to understand the needs of the other side of an issue. A student's final Rogerian styled argument will include a statement and explanation of the opposing view in the introduction of their essay and a full explanation of this opposing view in an early paragraph, often the second, along with ways this view could be accommodated within the writer's argument. The present lesson is designed to help students write a position paper, which will eventually become the introduction of their essays.

Preparation: Students should have previously received the argumentative essay prompt, conducted preliminary research in their library database and online, and constructed a brief argument (claim + premises + factual support) using the **Pre-Dialogue Guidelines** (included in this lesson plan). Because the Rogerian Dialogue is an intensive, task-based session, students should have already been divided into research-dialogue teams of five (two sets of dialogue partners and one adjudicator). The two sets of advocates will eventually write essays arguing different sides of an issue, while the adjudicator writes an essay analyzing both sides of an issue and suggesting a compromise, or choosing a side much as a judge would.

Introduction to Lesson [3 minutes]:

The Rogerian Dialogue is designed to get you started writing your essay. The best way to begin a complex argumentative writing project, especially one that requires so much critical thinking, is to write a concise paragraph of your argument and then present this argument to someone writing on the same issue, but from the opposing perspective. This kind of collaboration is an excellent way to engage in a real dialogue with someone who understands your issue but doesn't agree. The Rogerian Dialogue will help you and your partner focus on the relevant premises and make sure you are communicating your intended message. By the time you complete the lesson today, you will have most of the components in place for writing the first draft of your essay.

Write agenda on board:

- A. The Rogerian Method of Argumentation
- B. Defining Terms Using a Sample Argument
- C. The Dialogue
 - 1. Engaging in dialogue – speaking and listening
 - 2. Deciding on the argument – identifying the foundational principle (FP)
 - 3. Recording our thoughts - filling in the chart
 - 4. Reaching common ground and adjudicator's summary

Procedures [55 minutes]:

Step 1: Preliminary Lecture—Definitions of the Rogerian Model using a Sample Argument on Pre-Dialogue Guidelines [15 minutes]

Carl Rogers, a psychotherapist, made the terrifying observation after WWII that our goal in argumentation should not be to win the argument, but to prevent ourselves from blowing each other up. So Rogers developed a *persuasive strategy* based on *collaboration* and *mutual understanding*. There are no opponents in the Rogerian Argument, only partners engaging in dialogue, and the dialogue is directed not towards winning a debate or convincing an opponent of the correctness of an argument, but toward solving a problem or resolving a conflict.

The **Rogerian Method** is the preferred strategy of diplomats around the world, and it works wonders when we use it to write our own arguments. The goal of the argument is to achieve *common ground*—the point at which both sides can agree, and from there to generate *compromise*. We accomplish this by identifying the stated or implied foundational principle upon which the premises of the argument are based. This involves critical thinking and is much more satisfying than ordinary debate because we end up

resolving an issue in the best of cases, or at least reaching common ground for further argument in the worst case scenario.

Please take out the **Pre-Dialogue Guidelines** distributed last lesson. Let's review key terms using a sample argument. [Use **Pre-Dialogue Guidelines** for reference. Students have seen this page, so this is a brief review of concepts.]

Sample argument – *the death penalty in California*

- **Claim:** *Capital punishment should be upheld (or abolished) in California.*
- **Foundational Principle** (major premise with which both sides can agree, e.g., a human right, constitutional amendment, or commonplace of the community):
 - **Arg. 1 FP based on social order** – *All crimes should be punished, and the severity of the punishment should fit the severity of the crime.*
 - **Arg. 2 FP based on ethics** – *The 8th amendment protects U.S. citizens from “cruel and unusual punishment.”*
- **Premises** (specific reasons that link the major premise to the conclusion):
 - **Arg. 1 Premises based on social order foundational principle:**
 - **P2** – *the death penalty fits (or does not) the murder it punishes.*
 - **P3** – *capital punishment functions as a deterrent (or not) as criminals know they will be punished.*
 - **P4** – *the death penalty offers closure (or not) to a victim's family.*
 - **Arg. 2 Premises based on ethical foundational principle:**
 - **P2** – *execution methods have been known to cause pain.*
 - **P3** – *mistakes and bias in the judicial system have resulted in wrongful executions of innocent people (or not).*
 - **P4** – *waiting for impending death on death row for decades constitutes cruel and usual punishment (or not).*
 - **P5** – *institutionalized retribution is cruel (or not).*
- **Common ground** (the point at which both sides agree, and from which we can achieve some kind of compromise):
 - **Arg. 1:** Both sides agree on **FP** – punishment, though not necessarily capital punishment, is necessary to maintain social order.
 - **Compromise** → only a special crime category in a limited context deserves capital punishment, e.g., crimes against humanity, treason that resulted in American deaths.

Step 2: Engaging in Dialogue – Speaking and Listening [15 minutes]

Now we are ready to proceed with our Dialogue. [Distribute **Rogierian Dialogue: Student Guidelines** and **Dialogue Chart**. Using the RD: Student **Guidelines** for reference, briefly review instructions].

- Decide who goes first. Sitting close to the team member who will be arguing the other side, state your argument. Begin with your claim and follow with your reasons. The listener repeats your argument, and you correct it, if necessary. The listener may request clarification of key terms.
- Repeat the process with the opposing side stating its argument.
- Adjudicators listen to both arguments from the side, making sure each argument is repeated accurately and identifying the phrases the listeners have trouble repeating.
- The challenge is to listen to the argument without judging it and to repeat it without changing it. Begin.

Step 3: Deciding on the Argument – Identifying the FP [10 minutes]

- Respond to the premises of the other’s argument.
- Identify a common foundational principle underlying each argument.
- Weed out irrelevant premises or premises that belong to a different foundational principle.

Step 4: Recording our Thoughts [5 minutes]

- Look at the **Dialogue Chart** you received with the **RD: Student Guidelines**. Spend five minutes filling it in with the information gathered from the dialogue.
- You might want to modify your own argument, so record these thoughts.

Step 5: Reaching Common Ground and Adjudicator’s Summary [10 minutes]

- If both sides agree to the foundational principle, you may have achieved common ground.
- If you achieved common ground, work on determining the point of difference. Adjudicators help locate the point at which the sides cannot agree.
- If you have not achieved common ground, continue searching with the adjudicator’s assistance for a foundational principle on which you both agree.
- If you still cannot agree, repeat the process, but this time with one person speaking to the whole team rather than a single listener.

Reaching common ground in diplomacy often takes weeks, even years. You have probably not reached common ground in this first round, but when you are writing your position paper tonight or tomorrow, take an intellectual risk and try to fill in box five on the form at least by stating when your partner’s position could be considered acceptable from your perspective.

Closure/Evaluation [2 minutes]:

Are there any questions or comments about the dialogue? Did it help you organize your thoughts and solidify your argument? What have we accomplished today using the Rogerian Method? [Write ideas on the board.]

1. Summarized an opposing viewpoint without judging it

2. Clarified our arguments
3. Recognized foundational principles
4. Engaged our audience rather than alienating them

For homework, revise your paragraph using the information on your chart. Now that the main points are in place, it will be easy to integrate the supporting quotes from the sources on your bibliography just as you have done in previous papers. Bring your draft to our next class for another round of Rogerian Dialogue and Peer Review. We will then begin writing the entire essay.

As you write your position paper, you may think of other questions. Please write at least one question about using the Rogerian Method, and we will discuss your questions at the beginning of next class.

Lesson Analysis:

There are many advantages to using the Rogerian Method of Argumentation.

- Students learn to listen to and summarize opposing viewpoints without judging them and to integrate these ideas into their own perspective and writing.
- Students realize that their own arguments do not exist in a vacuum but are in response to the arguments of others.
- Students begin to transfer this awareness to the articles they read, and they begin to recognize that the first argument stated in the introduction of an academic article is most likely the opposing view acknowledged by the author; this awareness eliminates misunderstandings about the main idea of an article.
- Students have a newly acquired sense of audience, which occurs when students argue with live counterparts sitting next to them and suddenly realize the need to build rapport with a real audience by acknowledging the views of other people.
- Students gain practice in identifying and using foundational principles, which are generally only implied or often invisible.
- Students learn to use critical thinking and creative problem solving when analyzing individual and community assumptions, making connections between general principles and the premises that support them, and identifying common ground and the possibility of compromise.
- Students also learn to recognize the multiplicity of world-views, as well as their freedom to choose among them and to change their minds.
- Students can build learning communities since they are encouraged to share ideas and resources, cooperate to achieve success, offer and accept constructive criticism, and develop leadership and follower skills.

My only concerns relate to timing and the critical thinking process; while stating and repeating claims and premises in a minute or two help clarify an argument, the short time allotments may give short shrift to the critical thinking process necessary for reaching common ground and

achieving conflict resolution. Thus, real achievement generally occurs on the second repetition day of the Rogerian Dialogue

PRE-DIALOGUE GUIDELINES and MODEL ARGUMENT: ORGANIZING RESEARCH TEAMS AND CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

Lesson 1

- In teams of 5, select an issue related to your topic.
- Research the issue in the library database and online to identify opposing views.

Lesson 2

- Divide into 2 sets of partners to argue opposing views on a particular aspect of an issue. An argument on the death penalty in California could be divided into 2 sub-issues:
 - *Social order effectiveness of the punishment*
 - *Morality of the punishment*
- Select one adjudicator who will listen, analyze, and suggest common ground at the end of the session. The adjudicator follows both sets of arguments.
- Continue research. Team members should share research discoveries with each other.

Lesson 3

- Each set of partners constructs a claim (an opinion) with opposing views. Each claim is supported by a foundational principle and relevant premises. Premises are supported by facts, statistics, and case studies.
- **Sample argument – *the death penalty in California***
 - **Claim:** *Capital punishment should be upheld (or abolished) in California.*
 - **Foundational Principle** (major premise with which both sides can agree, e.g. a human right, constitutional amendment, or commonplace of the community):
 - **Arg. 1 FP based on social order** – *All crimes should be punished, and the severity of the punishment should fit the severity of the crime.*
 - **Arg. 2 FP based on ethics** – *The 8th amendment protects U.S. citizens from “cruel and unusual punishment.”*
 - **Minor premises** (specific reasons that link the major premise to the conclusion):
 - **Arg. 1 Premises based on social order foundational principle:**
 - **P2** – *The death penalty fits (or does not) the murder it punishes.*
 - **P3** – *Capital punishment functions as a deterrent (or not) as criminals know they will be punished.*
 - **P4** – *The death penalty offers closure (or not) to victim’s family.*
 - **Arg. 2 Premises based on ethical foundational principle:**
 - **P2** – *Execution methods have been known to cause pain.*
 - **P3** – *Mistakes and bias in the judicial system have resulted in wrongful executions of innocent people (or not).*
 - **P4** – *Waiting for impending death on death row for decades constitutes cruel and usual punishment (or not).*
 - **P5** – *Institutionalized retribution is cruel (or not).*
 - **Common ground** (the FP with which both sides agree, and from which we can achieve some kind of compromise):
 - **Arg. 1:** Both sides agree on **FP** – punishment, though not necessarily capital punishment, is necessary to maintain social order. **Compromise** → only a special crime category in a limited context deserves capital punishment, e.g. crimes against humanity, treason that resulted in American deaths.

The Rogerian Dialogue: Student Guidelines

The Rogerian Argument is a *persuasive strategy* based on *collaboration* and *mutual understanding*. The goal of the argument is to achieve *common ground*, the point at which both sides can agree, and to generate *compromise* from that point onward. Rogerian persuasion is directed not toward winning a debate or convincing an opponent of the correctness of an argument, but toward solving a problem or resolving a conflict. Hence, participants are not opponents, but partners in a dialogue *reaching inward* to question their own assumptions while *reaching outward* to understand the needs of the other side.

Step 1 Review Rogerian Dialogue key terms: claim, premises, foundational principle.

Step 2 Speaking and Listening (15 minutes)

- Decide who goes first. Sitting close to the team member who will be arguing the other side, state your argument. Begin with your claim and follow with your reasons. The listener repeats your argument, and you correct it, if necessary. Listener may request clarification of key terms.
- Repeat the process with the opposing side stating its argument.
- Adjudicators listen to both arguments from the side, making sure each argument is repeated accurately and identifying the phrases the listeners have trouble repeating.

Step 3 Deciding on the Argument (10 minutes)

- Respond to the premises of the other's argument.
- Identify a common foundational principle underlying each argument.
- Weed out irrelevant premises, or premises that belong to a different foundational principle.

Step 4 Recording our Thoughts (5 minutes)

- Fill in your chart.

Step 5 Reaching Common Ground (10 minutes, Step 4 usually requires an additional session)

- If both sides agree to the foundational principle, you may have achieved common ground.
- If you achieved common ground, work on determining the point of difference. Adjudicators help locate the point at which the sides cannot agree.
- If you have not achieved common ground, continue searching with the adjudicator's assistance for a foundational principle on which you both agree.
- If you still cannot agree, repeat the process, but this time with one person speaking to the whole team rather than a single listener.

Step 6 Summary (5 minutes)

Adjudicators analyze the arguments, and share their perspective on the persuasiveness of each of the arguments.

Dialogue Chart

Fill in the chart below with the information gathered during the dialogue.

1. Nature of the problem. *Define the issue and its significance. What is the specific policy or law at issue? What are both sides of the issue? Who is affected by this issue? Why should your audience care? Define all key terms.*

2. Your partner's counterargument to your argument stated as a *claim because reasons*.
One reason must be a foundational principle.

3. Your original or revised claim and reasons (premises), including the foundational principle. *If you are quoting an amendment, quote only the relevant parts.*

4. Common ground. *This will be a **foundational principle** you both accept, as well as a context in which your partner's view could be valid or acceptable to you.*

For homework, write a one-paragraph position paper using the information on the chart. In this revision of your thoughts, cite and smoothly integrate into your argument at least two academic sources that have helped you formulate your argument, and quote, paraphrase, or summarize them wherever necessary to support your argument. Remember to introduce your sources so their authority and reliability on the subject is apparent to the reader. Cite these sources in the body of your position paper and include a works cited section at the end of your position paper. Due next lesson for peer review and workshop.