**Strategies for Arguments**

“argument” = [claim that something should be believed or done] +

[proof or good reasons for believing or doing it]

To make effective arguments, you must

1. Make sure that the claim is very clear

2. Find and recognize proof or good reasons

3. Present “enough” proof/reasons in an interesting way *in the time you have available*

How do you organize an argument?

The Greek philosopher Aristotle identified three basic strategies (strategy = plan of action)

1. **Logic and reason**

“My theory explains all of these facts.”

2. The **character** (honesty) **and credentials** (training, experience) of those who hold the position

“My extensive reading of ancient documents indicates to me that...”

“Experts throughout history have believed that...”

3. **Emotion**

“If we do not restore the ozone layer, cases of skin cancer will double.”

What strategies should a conference talk use?

[90%] Logic and reason: most popular for scientific arguments

[9%] Character and credentials: carries some weight in getting people to seriously consider it

“Current theory says...” “Experts say...”

[1%] Emotion: frowned upon by scientists but sometimes used to emphasize the importance of a result – e.g. a result in cancer research or the effects of pollution

**An Age‑Old, Effective, General Pattern for Arguments**

(Adapted from R.E. Young. *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*. Harcourt, Brace & World: New York, 1970.)

[The three strategies can be used in different parts of this pattern. **This pattern is too detailed for a typical conference talk**, but is shown here so you see the structure of a very convincing and complete argument.]

1. [Introduction] Problem/Introduction/Foreword

Direct the audience’s attention toward the problem or issue. (WHAT IS THIS TALK ABOUT?)

2. [Introduction] Credentials

If it is useful, give your credentials, i.e. explain why you can speak with authority on the subject, and establish common ground by pointing out shared beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. (WHY SHOULD THE AUDIENCE BELIEVE WHAT I SAY?)

3. [Introduction] Position/Solution/Summary

A. Briefly state your position or your proposed solution. (IN A NUTSHELL, WHAT DO I BELIEVE?)

B. Briefly state the major reasons for advocating your position or solution. (WHY DO I BELIEVE THIS?)

4. [Introduction] Background of the Problem

A. Point out the nature of the problem: (1) its historical background and (2) causes. (WHAT IS THE PROBLEM’S HISTORY?)

B. Explain how it concerns the audience. (WHY SHOULD THE AUDIENCE CARE?)

5. [Body] Argument for Position or Solution

A. State the criteria for judgment, i.e. the standards or characteristics any acceptable solution or position must meet. Include explanation where necessary. (HOW SHOULD WE JUDGE A GOOD SOLUTION?)

B. State your position or solution to the problem, along with any necessary clarification and explanation. (WHAT IS MY SOLUTION?)

C. Demonstrate the soundness of your position or solution by showing how it meets the criteria established in Section 5A. This step should be accompanied by ample evidence: facts (illustrations, statistics, examples of successful application of the solution) and statements of authority. Be sure to identify the authorities if they aren’t widely known. (WHY IS MY SOLUTION GOOD?)

D. If there are competing positions or solutions, demonstrate the superiority of yours by showing how the others fail to meet the criteria as completely as yours. (WHY IS MY SOLUTION BETTER THAN OTHERS?)

6. Conclusion

A. Explain briefly the benefits to be gained by accepting your position or solution or the dangers of rejecting it. (WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF WE ACCEPT/REJECT MY SOLUTION?)

B. Summarize your argument: (1) restate your position or solution (5B); (2) restate the reasons your position or solution should be accepted (5C). (WHAT DO I WANT MY AUDIENCE TO REMEMBER?)