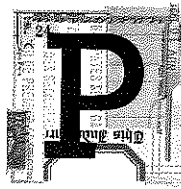


Thinking Rhetorically

The only real alternative to war is rhetoric.

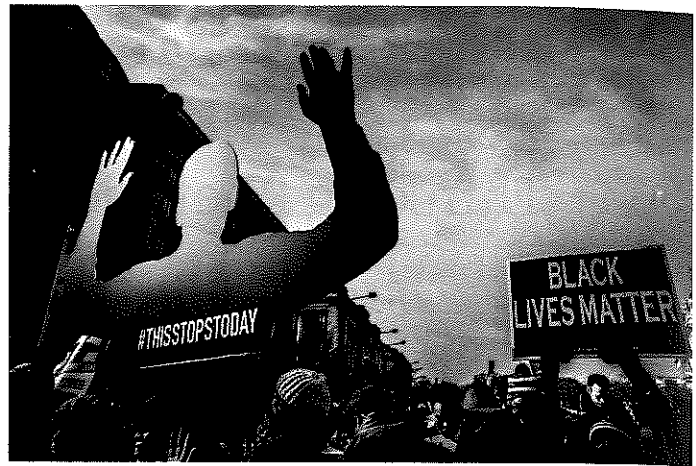
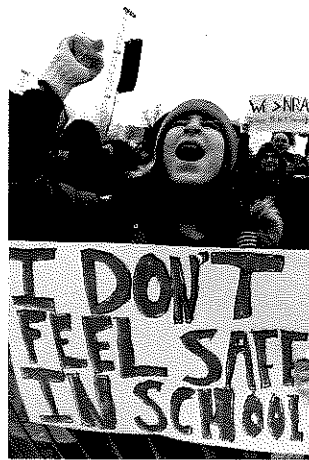
—WAYNE BOOTH



PROFESSOR WAYNE BOOTH made this statement at a conference of scholars and teachers of writing held only months after 9/11, and it quickly drew a range of responses. Just what did Booth mean by this stark statement? How could rhetoric—the art and practice of persuasion—act as a counter to war?

A noted critic and scholar, Booth explored these questions throughout his career, identifying rhetoric as an ethical art that begins with intense listening and that searches for mutual understanding and common ground as alternatives to violence and war. Put another way, two of the most potent tools we have for persuasion are language—and violence: when words fail us, violence often wins the day. Booth sees the careful and ethical use of language as our best approach to keeping violence and war at bay.

Over the past several years, Booth's words echoed again, as the Myanmar army renewed attacks that killed and maimed legions of Rohingyas, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee. In the United States, demonstrators used signs and chants—"Black Lives Matter!" and "3 shots to the back—how do you justify that?"—to demand justice for African Americans killed at the hands of police. Following the 2018 shooting in Parkland, Florida, young activists took to social media using #NeverAgain, held "March for Our Lives" protests, and founded a movement devoted to preventing gun violence. And as this book goes to press, people across the country are protesting the treatment of immigrant children and families. All these



Protesters use posters, raised fists, and more to communicate their positions.

We didn't burn
down buildings. . . .
You can do a lot
with a pen and pad.

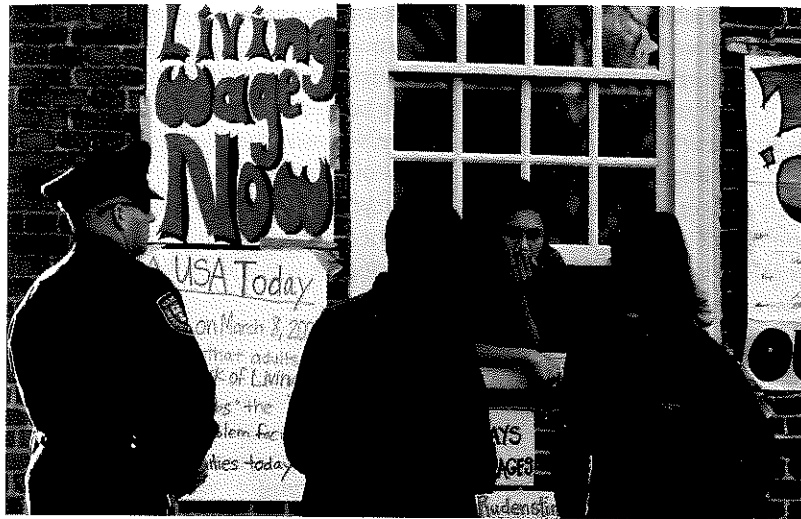
—ICE CUBE

groups are using dramatic, memorable statements as rhetorical strategies to capture and hold the attention of millions of people.

Note that while Booth speaks of rhetoric as an “ethical art,” rhetoric can also be used for unethical purposes, as Hitler and other dictators have done; in fact, rhetoric used in unethical ways can itself lead to violence. That’s why Aristotle cautioned that people need to understand rhetoric—both to get their own ethical messages across *and* to be able to recognize and resist unethical messages that others attempt to use against them. We take Aristotle’s point and focus in this book on how to think rhetorically both as readers and writers. In addition, we define rhetoric as the art, theory, and practice of ethical communication—the ethical language use that Booth speaks of.

So how can you go about developing your own careful, ethical use of language? Our short answer: by learning to think and act rhetorically, that is, by developing habits of mind that begin with listening and searching for understanding before you decide what you yourself think, and by thinking hard about your own beliefs before trying to persuade others to listen to and act on what you say.

Learning to think rhetorically can serve you well as you negotiate the complexities of life today. In many everyday situations, you’ll need to communicate successfully with others in order to get things done, and done in a responsible and ethical way. On the job, for example, you may need to bring coworkers to consensus on how best to raise productivity when there



Students use posters and conversation to protest the low wages paid to campus workers.

is little, if any, money for raises. Or in your college community, you may find yourself negotiating difficult waters.

When a group of students became aware of how little the temporary workers on their campus were paid, for example, they met with the workers and listened to gather information about the issue. They then mounted a campaign using flyers, speeches, and sit-ins—in other words, using the available means of persuasion—to win attention and convince the administration to raise the workers' pay. These students were thinking and acting rhetorically, and doing so responsibly and ethically. Note that these students, like the protesters from Parkland, worked together, both with the workers and with each other. In other words, none of us can manage such actions all by ourselves; we need to engage in conversation with others and listen hard to what they say. Perhaps that's what philosopher Kenneth Burke had in mind when he created his famous "parlor" metaphor:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar.

—KENNETH BURKE, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*

In this parable, each of us is the person arriving late to a room full of animated conversation; we don't understand what is going on. Yet instead of butting in or trying to take over, we listen closely until we catch on to what people are saying. Then we join in, using language and rhetorical strategies to engage with others as we add our own voices to the conversation.

This book aims to teach you to *think and act rhetorically*—to listen carefully and respectfully and then to “put in your oar,” join conversations about important issues, and develop strong critical and ethical habits of mind that will help you engage with others in responsible ways. This chapter will help you develop the habit of thinking rhetorically.

First, Listen

We have two ears
and one mouth so
we may listen more
and talk less.

—EPICTETUS

Thinking rhetorically begins with listening, with being willing to hear the words of others in an open and understanding way. It means paying attention to what others say before and even *as a way* of making your own contributions to a conversation. Think of the times you are grateful to others for listening closely to you: when you're talking through a conflict with a family member, for instance, or even when you're trying to explain to a salesperson what you're looking for. On those occasions, you want the person you're addressing to really *listen* to what you say.

This is a kind of listening that rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe dubs “rhetorical listening,” opening yourself to the thoughts of others and making the effort not only to hear their words but to take those words in and fully understand what people are saying. It means paying attention to what others say as a way of establishing good will and acknowledging the importance of their views. And yes, it means taking seriously and engaging with views that differ, sometimes radically, from your own.

Rhetorical listening is what middle school teacher Julia Blount asked for in a *Facebook* post following the 2015 riots in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray, who suffered fatal spinal injuries while in police custody:

Every comment or post I have read today voicing some version of disdain for the people of Baltimore—“I can't understand” or “They're destroying their own community”—tells me that many of you are not listening. I am not asking you to condone or agree with violence. I just need you

to listen. . . . If you are not listening, not exposing yourself to unfamiliar perspectives . . . not engaging in conversation, then you are perpetuating white privilege. . . . It is exactly your ability to *not* hear, to ignore the situation, that is a mark of your privilege.

—JULIA BLOUNT, "Dear White Facebook Friends: I Need You to Respect What Black America Is Feeling Right Now"

Hear What Others Are Saying—and Think about Why

When you enter any conversation, whether academic, professional, or personal, take the time to understand what is being said rather than rushing to a conclusion or a judgment. Listen carefully to what others are saying and consider what motivates them: where are they coming from?

Developing such habits of mind will be useful to you almost every day, whether you are participating in a class discussion, negotiating with friends over what movie is most worth watching, or studying a local ballot issue to decide how you'll vote. In each case, thinking rhetorically means being flexible and fair, able to hear and consider varying—and sometimes conflicting—points of view.


In ancient Rome, Cicero argued that considering alternative points of view and counterarguments was key to making a successful argument, and it is just as important today. Even when you disagree with a point of view—perhaps especially when you disagree with it—allow yourself to see the issue from the viewpoint of its advocates before you reject their positions. You may be skeptical that hydrogen fuel will be the solution to global warming—but don't reject the idea until you have thought hard about others' perspectives and carefully considered alternative solutions.

Thinking hard about others' views also includes considering the larger context and how it shapes what they are saying. This aspect of rhetorical thinking goes beyond the kind of reading you probably learned to do in high school literature classes, where you looked very closely at a particular text and interpreted it on its own terms, without looking at secondary sources. When you think rhetorically, you go one step further and put that close analysis into a larger context—historical, political, or cultural, for example—to recognize and consider where the analysis is "coming from."

In analyzing the issue of gun control, for instance, you would not merely consider your own thinking or do a close reading of texts that address the issue. In addition, you would look at the whole debate in context by

See how carefully Brent Staples considers the positions and reasoning that he is opposing on p. 1039.

considering its historical development over time, thinking about the broader political agendas of both those who advocate for and those who oppose stricter gun control, asking what economic ramifications adopting—or rejecting—new gun restrictions might have, examining the role of constitutional rights in the debate, and so on. In short, you would try to see the issue from as many different perspectives and in as broad a context as possible before you formulate your own stance. When you write, you draw on these sources—what others have said about the issue—to support your own position and to help you consider counterarguments to it.

 **REFLECT.** Go to everyonesanauthor.tumblr.com and read “The ‘Other Side’ Is Not Dumb” by blogger Sean Blanda, who warns that many of us gravitate on social media to those who think like we do, which often leads to the belief that we are right and that those with other worldviews are “dumb.” He argues that we need to “make an honest effort to understand those who are not like us” and to remember that “we might be wrong.” Look at some of your own recent posts. How many different perspectives do you see represented? What might you do to listen—and think—more rhetorically?

What Do You Think—and Why?

Examining all points of view on any issue will engage you in some tough thinking about your own stance—literally, where you are coming from on an issue—and why you think as you do. Such self-scrutiny can eventually clarify your stance or perhaps even change your mind; in either case, you stand to gain. Just as you need to think hard about the motivations of others, it’s important to examine your own motivations in detail, asking yourself what influences in your life lead you to think as you do or to take certain positions. Then you can reconsider your positions and reflect on how they relate to those of others, including your audience—those you wish to engage respectfully in conversation or debate.

In your college assignments, you probably have multiple motivations and purposes, one of which is to convince your instructor that you are a serious and hardworking student. But think about additional purposes as well: What could you learn from doing the assignment? How can doing it help you attain goals you have?

Examining your own stance and motivation is equally important outside the classroom. Suppose you are urging fellow members of a campus

group to lobby for a rigorous set of procedures to deal with accusations of sexual harassment. On one level, you're alarmed by the statistics showing a steep increase in cases of rape on college campuses and you want to do something about it. But when you think a bit more, you might find that you have additional motivations. Perhaps you've long wanted to become a leader of this group. You may have just seen *The Hunting Ground*, a documentary about rape on US college campuses, and found it deeply upsetting—and persuasive. These realizations shouldn't necessarily change your mind about what action you want your group to take, but examining what you think and why will help you to challenge your own position—and to make sure that it is fair and appropriate.

Do Your Homework

Rhetorical thinking calls on you to do some homework, to find out everything you can about what's been said about your topic, to **ANALYZE** what you find, and then to **SYNTHESIZE** that information to inform your own ideas. To put it another way, you want your own thinking to be aware and deeply informed, to reflect more than just your own opinion.

To take an everyday example, you should do some pretty serious thinking when deciding on a major purchase, such as a new car. You'll want to begin by considering the purchase in the larger context of your life. What motivates you to buy a car? Do you need one for work? Do you want it in part as a status symbol? Are you concerned about the environment and want to switch to an electric vehicle? Who besides you might be affected by this decision? A thoughtful analysis of the context and your specific motivations and purposes can guide you in drawing up a preliminary list of cars to consider.

Then you'll need to do some research, checking out product reviews and reports on safety records, efficiency, cost, and so on. Sometimes it can be hard to evaluate such sources: how much should you trust the mileage statistics provided by the carmaker, for example, or one particular reviewer's evaluation? For this reason, you should consult multiple sources and check them against one another.

You will also want to consider your findings in light of your priorities. Cost, for instance, may not be as high on your priority list as fuel efficiency. Such careful thinking will help you come to a sound decision, and then to explain it to others. If your parents, for instance, are helping you buy the car,

THINK
BEYOND
WORDS



☞ TAKE A LOOK at the 2011 Super Bowl Chrysler ad at everyonesanauthor.tumblr.com. You'll see many scenes from Detroit and hear a voiceover say, "What does this city know about luxury? What does a town that's been to hell and back know about the finer things in life? I'll tell you, more than most." What kind of rhetorical thinking did the ad writers do? Who was their target audience, and how did they go about appealing to them? This was an award-winning ad—but how successful do you think it was as an ad? In other words, do you think it sold a lot of cars? If you were looking to buy a car, what would this ad tell you about Chryslers—and what would you have to find out from other sources?

you'll want to consider what their responses to your decision will be, anticipating questions they may ask and how to respond.

Doing your homework also means taking an analytic approach, focusing on *how* various rhetorical strategies work to persuade you. You may have been won over by a funny car commercial you saw on Super Bowl Sunday. So what made that advertisement so memorable? To answer that question, you'll need to study the ad closely, determining just what qualities—a clever script? memorable music? celebrity actors? cute animals? a provocative message?—made the ad so persuasive. Once you've determined that, you'll want to consider whether the car will actually live up to the advertiser's promises. This is the kind of analysis and research you will do when you engage in rhetorical thinking.

Give Credit

As part of engaging with what others have thought and said, you'll want to give credit where credit is due. Acknowledging the work of others will help build your own ethos, or character, showing that you have not only done your homework but that you want to credit those who have influenced you. The great physicist Isaac Newton famously and graciously gave credit when he wrote to his rival Robert Hooke in 1676, saying:

What Descartes did was a good step. You have added much in several ways, and especially in taking the colours of thin plates into philosophical consideration. If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.

—ISAAC NEWTON, letter to Robert Hooke

In this letter, Newton acknowledges the work of Descartes as well as of Hooke before saying, with a fair amount of modesty, that his own advancements were made possible by their work. In doing so, he is thinking—and acting—rhetorically.

You can give credit informally, as Newton did in this letter, or you can do so formally with a full citation. Which method you choose will depend on your purpose and context. Academic writing, for instance, usually calls for formal citations, but if you are writing for a personal blog, you might embed a link that connects to another's work—or give an informal shout-out to a friend who contributed to your thinking. In each case, you'll want to be specific about what ideas or words you've drawn from others, as Newton does in referring to Hooke's consideration of the colors of thin plates. Such care in crediting your sources contributes to your credibility—and is an important part of ethical, careful rhetorical thinking.

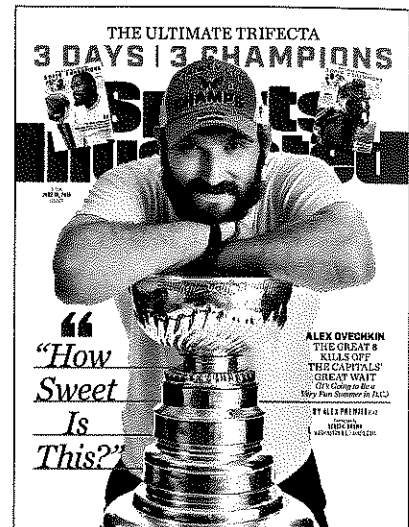
Be Imaginative

Remember that intuition and imagination can often lead to great insights. While you want to think carefully and analytically, don't be afraid to take chances. A little imagination can lead you to new ideas about a topic you're studying and suggest how to approach it in a way that will interest others. Such insights and intuitions can often pay off big-time. One student athlete we know was interested in how the mass media covered the Olympics, and he began doing research on the coverage in *Sports Illustrated* from different

periods. So far, so good: he was gathering information and would be able to write an essay showing that the magazine had been a major promoter of the Olympics.

While looking through old issues of *Sports Illustrated*, however, he kept feeling that something he was seeing in the early issues was different from what he saw in current issues of the magazine . . . something that felt important to him though he couldn't quite articulate it. This hunch led him to make an imaginative leap, to study that difference even though it was outside of the topic he had set out to examine. Excited that he was on to something, he returned to his chronological examination of the magazine. On closer inspection, he found that over the decades, *Sports Illustrated* had slowly but surely moved from focusing on teams to depicting *only* individual stars.

This discovery led him to make an argument he would never have made had he not followed his creative hunch—that the evolution of sports from a focus on the team to a focus on individual stars is perfectly captured



Two *Sports Illustrated* covers depicting hockey players. The cover on the left, from the 1980 Winter Olympics, showcases the US team's "miracle on ice" victory over the heavily favored USSR team. The one on the right, from 2018, pictures Washington Capitals captain Alexander Ovechkin, who was named MVP in the Stanley Cup playoffs for leading the team to victory against the Vegas Golden Knights.

in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*. It also helped him write a much more interesting—and more persuasive—essay, one that captured the attention not only of his instructor and classmates but of a local sports newsmagazine, which reprinted his essay. Like this student, you can benefit by using your imagination and listening to your intuition. You could stumble upon something exciting.

Put In Your Oar

So rhetorical thinking offers a way of entering any situation with a tool kit of strategies that will help you understand it and “put in your oar.” When you think rhetorically, you ask yourself certain questions:

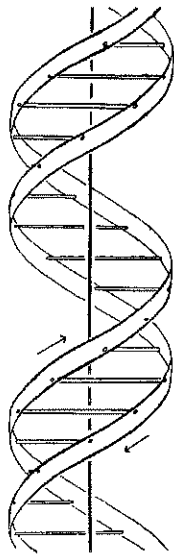
- How do you want to come across to your audience?
- What can you do to represent yourself as knowledgeable and credible?
- What can you do to show respect both for your audience and for those whose work and thinking you engage with?
- How can you show that you have your audience's best interests at heart?

This kind of rhetorical thinking will help ensure that your words will be listened to and taken seriously.

We can find examples of such a rhetorical approach in all fields of study. Take, for instance, the landmark essay by James Watson and Francis Crick on the discovery of DNA, published in *Nature* in 1953. This essay shows Watson and Crick to be thinking rhetorically throughout, acutely aware of their audience (major scientists throughout the world), including competitors who were simultaneously working on the same issue.

Here is Wayne Booth's analysis of Watson and Crick's use of rhetoric:

In [Watson and Crick's] report, what do we find? Actually scores of *rhetorical* choices that they made to strengthen the appeal of their scientific claim. (Biographies and autobiographies have by now revealed that they did a lot of conscientious revising, not of the data but of the mode of presentation; and their lives were filled, before and after the triumph, with a great deal of rhetoric-charged conflict.) We could easily compose a dozen different versions of their report, all proclaiming the



The original sketch showing the structure of DNA that appeared in Watson and Crick's article.

same scientific results. But most alternatives would prove less engaging to the intended audience. They open, for example, with

"We wish to suggest a structure" that has "novel features which are of considerable biological interest." (*My italics, of course*)

Why didn't they say, instead: "We shall here demonstrate a *startling, totally new structure* that will *shatter* everyone's conception of the biological world"? Well, obviously their rhetorical choice presents an ethos much more attractive to most cautious readers than does my exaggerated alternative. A bit later they say

"We have made the *usual chemical assumptions*, namely . . ."

Why didn't they say, "As we *all know*"? Both expressions acknowledge reliance on warrants, commonplaces within a given rhetorical domain. But their version sounds more thoughtful and authoritative, especially with the word "chemical." Referring to Pauling and Corey, they say

"They *kindly* have made their manuscript available."

Okay, guys, drop the rhetoric and just cut that word "kindly." What has that got to do with your scientific case? Well, it obviously strengthens the authors' ethos: we are nice guys dealing trustfully with other nice guys, in a rhetorical community.

And on they go, with "*In our opinion*" (rather than "We proclaim" or "We insist" or "We have miraculously discovered": again ethos—we're not dogmatic); and Fraser's "suggested" structure is "*rather ill-defined*" (rather than "his structure is stupid" or "obviously faulty"—we are nice guys, right?).

And on to scores of other such choices.

—WAYNE BOOTH, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*

Booth shows in each instance that Watson and Crick's exquisite understanding of their rhetorical situation—especially of their audience and of the stakes involved in making their claim—had a great deal to do with how that claim was received. (They won the Nobel Prize!)


As the example of Watson and Crick illustrates, rhetorical thinking involves certain habits of mind that can and should lead to something—often to an action, to making something happen. And when it comes to taking action, those who think rhetorically are in a very strong position. They have listened attentively, engaged with the words and ideas of others, viewed their topic from many alternate perspectives, and done their

homework. This kind of rhetorical thinking will set you up to contribute to conversations—and will increase the likelihood that your ideas will be heard and will inspire real action.

Indeed, the ability to think rhetorically is of great importance in today's global world, as professors Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein explain:

The ability to enter complex, many-sided conversations has taken on a special urgency in today's diverse, post-9/11 world, where the future for all of us may depend on our ability to put ourselves in the shoes of those who think very differently from us. Listening carefully to others, including those who disagree with us, and then engaging with them thoughtfully and respectfully . . . can help us see beyond our own pet beliefs, which may not be shared by everyone. The mere act of acknowledging that someone might disagree with us may not seem like a way to change the world; but it does have the potential to jog us out of our comfort zones, to get us thinking critically about our own beliefs, and perhaps even to change our minds. —GERALD GRAFF AND CATHY BIRKENSTEIN, *"They Say / I Say"*

In the long run, if enough of us learn to think rhetorically, we just might achieve Booth's goal—to use words (and images) in thoughtful and constructive ways as an alternative to violence and war.

 **REFLECT.** Read Margaret Mead's words below, and then think of at least one historical example in which a "small group of thoughtful citizens" has changed the world for the better. Then think about your own life and the ways in which you have worked with others to bring about some kind of change. In what ways were you called upon to think and act rhetorically in order to do so?

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful
committed citizens can change the world;
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

—MARGARET MEAD

T W O

Engaging Respectfully with Others



IN THE LATE spring of 2017, Oprah Winfrey, standing before a cheering crowd of graduating students at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, urged them to learn to engage respectfully with others. She told the assembled crowd that “two weeks after the election last year” she had invited a group of women voters—half on the right and half on the left, politically—to join her at a diner for “great croissants with jam.” But none of the women wanted to come, saying they’d “never sat this close” to someone from the other side and didn’t want to start now. Winfrey eventually prevailed and brought the women together, even though they came in “all tight and hardened.” As she goes on to tell it in her speech,

After two and a half hours . . . the women were sitting around the table, listening to each other’s stories, hearing both sides, and by the end they were holding hands, exchanging emails and phone numbers, and singing “Reach Out and Touch.” . . . Which means it’s possible; it can happen. So I want you to work in your own way to change the world in respectful conversations with others. And I want you to enter every situation aware of its context, open to hear the truths of others and most important open to letting the process of changing the world change you.

—OPRAH WINFREY, Agnes Scott College
Commencement Address, 2017

The goal of this chapter is to encourage and guide you as you engage with others: respectfully listening to their stories, their truths, and contributing to a process that may, indeed, change the world. Here are some steps you can take to realize this goal.

Get to Know People Different from You

It's a commonplace today to point out that we often live and act in "silos" where we encounter only people who think like we do, who hold the same values. While the internet has made the whole world available to us, we increasingly choose to interact with like-minded people—online and in person. We are in what some call "filter bubbles" or "echo chambers," where we hear our views echoed back to us from every direction. In such an atmosphere, it can be easy—and comforting—to think this is the real world, but it's not!



Beyond your own bubble of posts and tweets and conversations lie countless other people with different views and values.

So one of the big challenges we face today is finding ways to get out of our own echo chambers and get to know people who take different positions, hold different values. But simply encountering people who think differently is just the start. Breaking out of our bubbles calls for making the effort to understand those different perspectives, to listen with openness and empathy, and to hear where others are coming from. As Winfrey notes in her commencement address, even the first step is hard: she had to work to convince the women simply to meet one another, and then she had to persuade them to listen, as she says, with respect. Once they did, things changed: they realized that it's not as easy to dislike or dismiss someone when you are sitting face-to-face.

That's certainly what one Canadian student found when she spent a semester in Washington, DC. Shauna Vert had expected the highlights of her semester to be visiting places like the museums of the Smithsonian Institution or the Library of Congress, but her greatest experience, as she describes it in a blog post, turned out to be an "unexpected gift: While in DC, I became close, close friends with people I disagree with on almost everything." As she got to know these people, she found that they were:

funny, smart, and kind. We all really liked music. . . . We even lived together. We ate dinner together, every single night. So I couldn't look down on them. I couldn't even consider it. And when you can't look down on someone who fundamentally disagrees with you, when you're busy breaking bread, sharing your days, laughing about the weather . . . well.

—SHAUNA VERT, "Making Friends Who Disagree with You
(Is the Healthiest Thing in the World)"

➦ Read Shauna
Vert's blog by
visiting [everyonesan
author.tumblr.com](http://everyonesanauthor.tumblr.com).

During a conversation with one of her housemates, a deeply conservative Christian from Mississippi, Vert mentioned that she was "pro-choice," realizing as she did so that this was "dangerous territory." To her surprise, she met not resistance or rebuke but curiosity:

She wanted to know more. Her curiosity fueled my curiosity, and we talked. We didn't argue—we debated gently, very gently. . . . We

laughed at nuance, we self-deprecated, we trusted each other. And we liked each other. Before the conversation, and after the conversation. To recap: Left-wing Canadian meets Bible Belt Republican. Discusses controversial political issues for over an hour. Walks away with a new friend.

This kind of careful, responsible, respectful exchange seems hard in today's highly polarized society, where anger and hate are fueled by incendiary messages coming from social media and highly partisan news organizations. Just finding people outside our silos to talk with can be hard. But like Vert, some people have taken up the challenge of finding ways to bring people with different views together.

One group aiming to create conversation rather than conflict is the Living Room Conversations project, which offers guidelines for engaging in meaningful discussions on more than eighty specific topics—free speech on campus, the opportunity gap, privacy and security, climate change, and more. The founders want these conversations between people who disagree to “increase understanding, reveal common ground and allow us to discuss possible solutions.” Visit livingroomconversations.org to find the resources to start a “living room” conversation yourself.

The point is that it's worth making the time to try to find and engage with those who hold different ideas and values than you do. And this means becoming familiar with sources other people read, too. Get out of your comfort zone and look beyond the sources you know; look carefully at what the “the other side” is reading. Sites like *AllSides* can help. It's time to shut down the echo chambers and seek out people outside of our silos.

Practice Empathy

The examples in this chapter suggest the power of empathy, the ability to share the feelings of someone else. Dylan Marron is someone who directly addresses empathy and shows how it works. As the creator and host of several popular video series on controversial social issues, Marron has gained quite a bit of attention and, he says, “a lot of hate.” Early on, he tried to ignore hateful comments, but then he got interested and began visiting commenter profiles to learn about the people behind them. Doing so, he said, led him to realize “there was a human on the other side of the screen”—and prompted

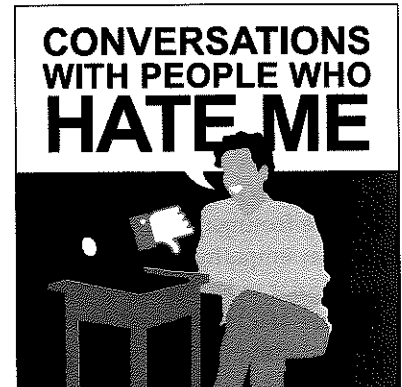
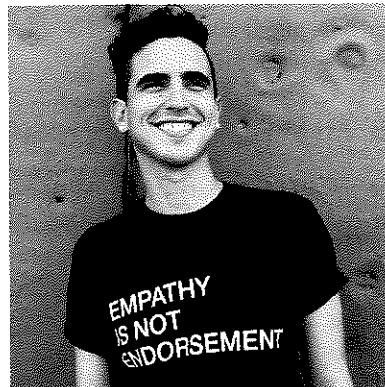
him to call some of these people on the phone, conversations he shares on his podcast *Conversations with People Who Hate Me*.

In one of these talks, Marron learned that Josh, who in a comment had called Marron a “moron” and said that being gay was a sin, had recently graduated from high school. When Marron asked him, “How was high school for you?” Josh replied that “it was hell” because he’d been bullied by kids who made fun of him for being “bigger.” Marron shared his own experiences of being bullied too, and as the conversation progressed, empathy laid the groundwork that helped them relate to each other.

At the end of another conversation, a man who had called Marron a “talentless hack” reflected on the ubiquitous comment fields where such statements are often made, saying “the comment sections are really a way to get your anger at the world out on random strangers”—an insight “that made me rethink the way I interact with people online.”

Marron’s work shows that comment sections are used to release anger—and often hate, the very opposite of the kind of empathy that can bring people together. More than that, his work demonstrates the power of practicing empathy and how it can help us to see one another as human, even in the most negative and nasty places. In a 2018 TED talk, Marron again stressed the importance of empathy, noting, however, that “empathy is not endorsement” and doesn’t require us to compromise our deeply held values but rather to acknowledge the views of “someone raised to think

➡ Watch Marron’s TED talk and listen to his podcast by visiting everyonesanauthor.tumblr.com.



Dylan Marron, creator and host of *Conversations with People Who Hate Me*, a podcast featuring conversations between people who disagree.

very differently” than we do. That’s the power and the promise of practicing empathy.

Demonstrate Respect

“R-E-S-P-E-C-T.” That spells respect. If you’ve never heard Aretha Franklin belt out these lyrics, take time to look her up on *YouTube*. Franklin added this now-famous line to her 1967 rendition of Otis Redding’s original song, inspiring millions to expect and to demand R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

Franklin’s message is still a timely one today, when *disrespect* seems common, especially between those who don’t agree. But respect is a two-way street: if we need to stand up and ask for the respect of others, we also need to respect them. Moreover, we need to invite (and deserve!) respect. Easy to say, but harder to do. So just how can you demonstrate respect for others? Not surprisingly, the first tip for showing respect is listening, open-mindedly and generously, without interrupting or making snap judgments. You should also strive to:



Aretha Franklin performs onstage in 1968.

- Be helpful and cooperative.
- Be sincere, and remember to say "thank you."
- Be on time: even something as simple as that is a sign of respect.
- Follow through and do what you say you'll do. Keep your promises!
- Be careful to represent other people's views fairly and generously—and acknowledge their accomplishments whenever you can.
- Ask questions rather than issuing orders or challenges.
- Apologize if you say or do something you regret. We all make mistakes.

If you respect others in these ways, you will invite their respect for you. As the French philosopher Voltaire is reported to have said, "I may disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Search for Common Ground

Coal miners and mine owners have often engaged in bitter struggles. Still, they have a lot in common, as Carolyne Whelan's report from West Virginia relates. Read it on p. 1086.

Even children learn early on that digging in to opposing positions doesn't usually get them far: "No you can't!" "Yes I can!" can go on forever, without going anywhere. Rhetoricians in the ancient world understood this very well and thus argued that for conversations to progress, it's necessary establish some **COMMON GROUND**, no matter how small. If "No you can't!" moves on to "Well, you can't do that in this particular situation," then maybe a conversation can begin.

This is a strategy musician Daryl Davis discovered in his high-stakes work researching the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group that's terrorized African Americans. Davis decided to try and meet some Klansmen, listen to them, and try to engage with what they said. As he says, finding common ground is essential:

Look for commonalities. You can find something in five minutes, even with your worst enemy. And build on those. Say I don't like you because you're white and I'm black. . . . And so our contention is based upon our races. But if you say "How do you feel about all these drugs on the street" and I say "I think the law needs to crack down on things that people can get addicted to very easily . . . and you say "Well, yeah, I agree with that" . . . You might even tell me your son started dabbling in drugs. So now I see



Daryl Davis with former KKK member Scott Sheperd. Because Davis was willing to listen to, respect, and talk with him, Sheperd listened, respected, and talked with Davis, a process that led to his leaving the KKK.

that you want what I want, that drugs are affecting your family the same way they affect my family. So let's focus on that. And as we focus more and more and find more things in common, things we have in contrast, such as skin color, matter less and less.

—DARYL DAVIS, "How to Argue"

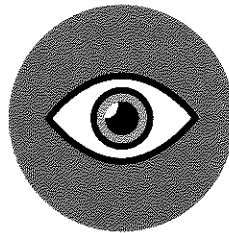
So Davis urges us to seek out areas of agreement and then areas of compromise, all the while listening carefully and respectfully to one another. He reminds us that argument doesn't need to be abusive, insulting, or condescending—stances that usually only make things worse. But he notes as well that looking for areas of compromise doesn't mean giving in to ideas you know are not right. As Davis says, "you're going to hear things that you know are absolutely wrong. You will also hear opinions put out as facts." In such cases, Davis suggests offering facts or other **EVIDENCE** that disprove the opinion being put forward. Then, if the other person still holds to the opinion, try saying something like "I believe you are wrong, but if you think you're right, then bring me the data." Such a response invites the person to supply information that may actually carry the conversation forward.

So when you hear things you believe to be wrong, try to respond in a civil way, showing data that refute what other people say or asking them to show you evidence that you are wrong—with the hope of continuing the conversation based on evidence.

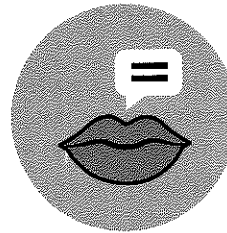
REFLECT. Some would say it's pointless or even wrong to try to find common ground with people whose views they find hateful or dangerous. Daryl Davis might disagree. Based on your own experiences, what do you think—and why?

Invite Response

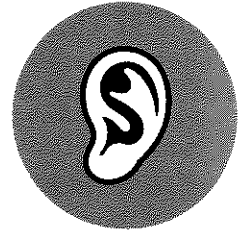
All the examples we've provided in this chapter feature dialogue and conversation: the road to understanding is never a one-way street. That's why long speeches often have little effect on anyone who doesn't already agree with you. But tuning out is a lot harder in "live" conversations. So if



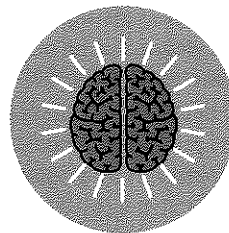
ATTENTIVE EYES



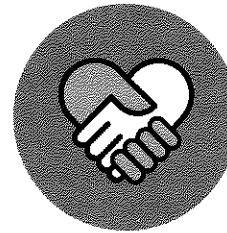
RESPECTFUL VOICE



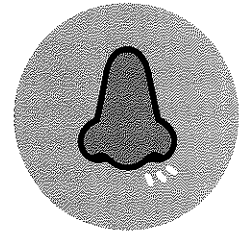
LISTENING



OPEN MIND



KIND HEART



PATIENCE

Graphic from a website devoted to helping children learn to communicate respectfully.


you want to engage successfully with people who think differently from you, then inviting them to respond, is a good way forward.

To invite response, you have to make time for it. Rather than rushing forward or talking over others, make a space for others to chime in: pause, make eye contact, even ask for response directly: "How do you feel about what I've just said?" You can also invite response online, turning commenting features on, for example, and even explicitly asking for responses to social media posts—and then responding respectfully to those who leave comments for you. In doing so, you are showing that you are open to what others think and that you really want to understand their views.

Join the Conversation: Collaborate! Engage! Participate!

Especially in times of deep societal divisions, it may be tempting to retreat, to put our heads in the sand and hope that, somehow, things will get better. But don't give in to that temptation. Your voice is important, your thoughts are important, and you can best make them heard if you engage and join with other people. That may mean working with groups of like-minded people to speak out—for or against—on issues such as immigration bans, gun control, or environmental policies. That kind of civic engagement and participation is important in a democracy. But there are smaller ways, too, like looking beyond those who think as you do, seeking to collaborate with them, listening with empathy, understanding their reasons for thinking as they do—and then looking hard for a shared goal that you can work toward together.

As a country, as a world, we have a lot riding on our willingness to reach across barriers, work together for the common good, and keep on trying even in the most difficult circumstances. And as writers, readers, and thinkers, we all have much to offer in this endeavor. So let's get going!

 **REFLECT.** Look back through the examples in this chapter of people working out disagreements or finding ways to empathize with one another. Then think about your own experiences interacting with people who think differently than you do or with whom you disagree. How did you handle those encounters? Were you satisfied with the results? What would you do differently if you could replay them? What will you try and do differently next time? How can you apply this advice when engaging with the ideas of others in writing?