

degree they believe in the evidence. Thus, reasoning, like evidence, is essential to the process of argument.

Reasoning in technical argument comes in specialized and frequently prescribed forms. The scientific method, for example, is a process all scientists must use as a test of the findings they assert to be true. This method dictates the necessary conditions for the proper form of reasoning in certain scientific and social-scientific arguments. Some scientific fields, including medical research, focus mainly on cause-and-effect reasoning. Medical research, for example, requires double-blind, placebo studies to support a claim that a particular drug is effective in treating a certain disease. Knowing that people who take a certain drug recover more frequently than people who do not is insufficient according to acceptable research procedures. The researcher must also determine that people who took an inert substance (placebo) did not recover as frequently as people taking the actual drug. This example is just one that illustrates how a technical field prescribes a certain form of reasoning as the best or only acceptable form of reasoning to answer questions within that field.

Rather than requiring specialized forms of reasoning, public argument uses a variety of argument forms, including informal logic, analogy, principle, metaphor, and narrative, as well as a variety of other argument forms. These argument forms, although not unheard of in the technical sphere, are more common and more accepted in the public sphere. Thus, public debates sometimes include forms of reasoning that are used in technical arenas, but frequently use reasoning processes that usually lie outside technical arguments.

LANGUAGE

Although all kinds of argument—personal, technical, and public—may occasionally have nonverbal dimensions, language is the medium whereby most arguments are communicated to audiences. Many technical fields have a precise language necessary for efficient communication between and among technicians. Frequently the language of a technical field is so obscure that persons outside of the field cannot understand it. As a result, the language of technical argument further insulates the members of the field from the general public. To attempt to use the language of some technical fields to communicate with general audiences would be like trying to speak to the audience in a language other than its native tongue.

Unlike technical argument where participants engage one another using a very precise vocabulary, in public argument settings ordinary citizens engage one another and their government representatives using ordinary language. Language in public debate must be inclusive. The public debater must speak a language that a general audience can understand and that seems natural, giving her the role of an insider rather than an outsider. Even using language associated with more technical forms of debate is counterproductive to debate in public forums.² Used in a public forum, debate jargon is exclusionary and distances the debater from the audience.

Thus, some of the important features of public debate include audience, evidence, reasoning, and language. Excellent debaters learn to understand the relationships among these features and develop skills for proper use of evidence, reason, and language to make persuasive claims to public audiences.