use those beliefs as a bridge to the writer's way of thinking. They support their claims through a combination of reasons and evidence.

For example, imagine a writer arguing for stricter gun control laws. This writer wants to root his argument in a belief or value that he and his readers already share, so he focuses on concerns for the safety of schoolchildren. The line of reasoning might go something like this: Because the ready availability of guns makes children no longer safe at school, we must pass strict gun control laws to limit access to guns. Of course, readers may or may not go along with this argument. Some readers, although they share the writer's concern for the safety of schoolchildren, might disagree at several points with the writer's logic: Is the availability of guns the main cause of gun violence at schools or are there other more compelling causes? Will stricter gun control laws really limit the availability of guns? If this same writer wished to use evidence to strengthen this argument, he might use statistics showing a correlation between the rise in the availability of guns and the rise in gun violence in schools. Here, the writer would be operating on the assumption that readers believe in facts and can be persuaded by these statistics that increased gun violence in schools is linked to the availability of firearms.

Experienced readers are alert to the logical strategies used by authors, and they have learned not to take what may appear as a "reasonable" argument at face value. In other words, they have learned to question or test this reasoning before assenting to the position the author wants them to take. To examine a writer's reasoning, think about two questions: (1) What perspective or position does the writer want me to take toward the topic? and (2) Do the writer's claims, reasons, and evidence convince me to take this perspective or position? Answering these questions requires you to examine the argument carefully. In Chapter 13, "Taking a Stand," we discuss the four elements of an argument—claims, reasons, evidence, and assumptions—in relation to the specific case of texts whose main purpose is persuasion. Here we briefly explain these four key elements as they generally apply to writers' use of reasoning for a range of rhetorical purposes.

Claims

The key points that a writer wants readers to accept are referred to as *claims*. For example, Anthony Weston's main claim in the passage on page 55 is this: "Ethical problems are seldom 'puzzles,' allowing specific and conclusive 'solutions.'" Or take another example. Early in her essay on page 65, MacFarquhar claims that "None of this [a series of beliefs about reading] is true." Once you have identified various claims in a text, then you can raise questions about them, especially about their wording and scope. Is the meaning of key words in the claim clear? Can particular words be interpreted in more than one way? Is the claim overstated? For example, one might ask of Weston's claim, "Aren't there some ethical problems that really *are* puzzles that have conclusive solutions?" Similarly, one could ask of MacFarquhar, "Are none of these beliefs true in any sense?"

Reasons

Reasons are subclaims that writers use to support a main claim. A reason can usually be linked to a claim with the subordinate conjunction "because." Consider the gun control argument mentioned earlier, which we can now restate as a claim with reason: "We must pass gun control laws that limit access to guns [claim] because doing so will make children safer at school [reason]." This argument has initial appeal because it ties into the audience's belief that it is good to make children safe at school, but as we have discussed earlier, the causal links in the argument are open to question. To take another example, Weston offers readers the following reasons for accepting his approach to ethical problems:

> It is better to treat ethical issues as multifaceted problems rather than as puzzles with correct answers [claim]
>
> - because doing so allows more options for action in the present and change in the future
> - because doing so will allow for more inventiveness and experimentation
> - because doing so can make problems seem more manageable.

Certainly action, change, creativity, and manageability will be valued by many readers when it comes to solving difficult problems. However, without further proof or evidence, how do we know that Weston's approach will result in these positive outcomes? Moreover, some readers might not consider these outcomes positive at all: They might distrust such flexibility and prefer more precise moral guidelines.

As these examples illustrate, once you've identified the reasons that the author offers for various claims, then you can proceed to examine the adequacy of these reasons. Do they really support the claim? Do they tie into values, assumptions, and beliefs that the audience shares?

Evidence

The facts, examples, statistics, personal experience, and expert testimony that an author offers to support his or her view of the topic are referred to as *evidence*. To examine the author's use of evidence, consider whether the evidence is reliable, timely, and adequate to make the case. Or ask whether there is more than one way the evidence can be interpreted. When MacFarquhar argues that none of the "truisms" many people believe about reading are true, she relies heavily on evidence. She offers facts, statistics, expert testimony, example, and so forth throughout the essay mainly to refute positions with which she disagrees. Readers skeptical of MacFarquhar's argument might question her interpretations of some facts and statistics: Couldn't people just be saying that they are reading a book because they're embarrassed to admit they're not? Couldn't people have learned the name of the author of *Huckleberry Finn* from television and not from reading? Similarly, in our gun control example, skeptics could question whether the statistical correlation between rising availability of guns and rising gun violence in schools is in fact a causal relationship. The fact that A and B happened at the same time does not mean that A caused B.

Assumptions

In an argument, the often unstated values or beliefs that the writer expects readers to accept without question are referred to as *assumptions*. You can interrogate

an argument by casting doubt on those assumptions. For example, when Weston argues that many issues don't have single right answers, he assumes the audience will value the flexibility of his approach. But many readers may fear that Weston's approach will lead to cultural relativism and the loss of absolute moral values. Similarly, part of the gun control argument is based on an assumption that gun control legislation will in fact limit the availability of guns. You can question this assumption by pointing to the existence of black markets.

EXAMINING A WRITER'S STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING READERS

The third of the classical rhetorical appeals is to an audience's interests and emotions—the process of engaging readers. How does a writer hook and keep your interest? How does a writer make you care about the subject? How does a writer tweak your emotions or connect an argument with ideas or beliefs that you value?

Rhetoricians have identified four basic ways that writers engage readers at an emotional or imaginative level: by urging the reader (1) to identify with the writer, (2) to identify with the topic or issue, (3) to identify with a certain group of fellow readers, or (4) to identify with certain interests, values, beliefs, and emotions. Let's look at each in turn.

In the first approach, writers wanting readers to identify with them might use an informal conversational tone to make a reader feel like the writer's buddy. Writers wanting to inspire respect and admiration might adopt a formal scholarly tone, choose intellectual words, or avoid "I" altogether by using the passive voice—"it was discovered that. . . ." In the second approach, writers wanting readers to identify with the topic or issue might explain the importance of the issue or try to engage readers' emotions. In urging community action against homelessness, for example, an author might present a wrenching anecdote about a homeless child. Other methods might be the use of vivid details, striking facts, emotion-laden terms and examples, or analogies that explain the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. In the third approach, writers try to get readers to identify with a certain in-group of people—fellow environmentalists or feminists or Republicans or even fellow intellectuals. Some writers seek to engage readers by creating a role for the reader to play in the text. For example, Weston invites readers to think of themselves as serious and intelligent, interested in tough ethical issues. In the fourth approach, writers appeal to readers' interests by getting them to identify with certain values and beliefs. For example, a politician arguing for changes in the way social security is funded might appeal to voters' desires to invest in high-yield stocks. If workers could pay lower social security taxes, they could invest the difference in the stock market. If you are aware of how these appeals work, you will be able to distance yourself from the argument in order to examine it more critically.

- ***For Writing and Discussion***

  Consider all of the ways in which Larissa MacFarquhar tries to engage readers of her text. What kind of a relationship does she try to establish with readers? How does she try to make you care about her topic? How does she try to engage and keep your interest? What interests and values does she assume her audience shares? Do you consider yourself part of her intended audience? Why or why not?

EXAMINING A WRITER'S LANGUAGE

Besides looking at a text's classical appeals, you can question a text by paying careful attention to its language and style. Diction (which includes tone, word choice, and level of formality), figurative language, sentence structure and length, and even punctuation are all techniques through which a writer tries to influence readers' view of a subject. Consider, for example, the connotation of words. It makes a difference whether a writer calls a person "decisive" rather than "bossy," or an act "bold" rather than "rash." Words like "decisive" and "rash" are not facts; rather they present the writer's interpretation of a phenomenon. You can question a text by recognizing how the writer makes interpretive words seem like facts.

At times, you might overlook features of the writer's language because they seem natural rather than chosen. You probably seldom stop to think about the significance of, say, the use of italics or a series of short sentences or a particular metaphor. Readers rarely ask what's gained or lost by a writer saying something one way rather than another—for example, calling clear-cut logging in the Northwest a "rape" rather than a "timber extraction process."

Take, for example, the first paragraph of the passage from Weston's *Toward Better Problems* (p. 55). He uses a form of the negative three times, the first time placing *not* in italics. Through this typographical cue as well as repetition, he emphasizes the distinction between what he is suggesting and the usual proposals of practical ethicists. If he were speaking this line, his tone of voice would emphasize the word "not." Or consider the last two sentences in the first paragraph of MacFarquhar's essay: "Once, the story goes—in the 1950s, say—we read much more than we do now, and read the good stuff, the classics. Now, we don't care about reading anymore, we're barely literate, and television and computers are rendering books obsolete." Try reading those sentences aloud, paying particular attention to the punctuation. It's hard to say them out loud in anything but a mock serious, singsong, sarcastic tone of voice. Her tone tells us that these are not her own sentiments but rather sentiments she is ascribing to others. To signal her distance from and disdain for these views, she makes the claims sound vague and baseless ("once . . . in the 1950s, say"), exaggerated ("we're barely literate"), and trite (classics are "the good stuff"). By contrast, the voice in the next paragraph is very businesslike—the sentences are short and clipped; the information is presented in listlike fashion. We know it is this voice we are supposed to listen to. Through language that creates particular tones of voice, MacFarquhar tries to get readers to think about the subject—commonplace beliefs about reading—in the same way she does.

Experienced readers have developed antennae for recognizing these subtle uses of language to manipulate responses. One way to develop this sensitivity is to ask why a writer made certain choices rather than others. For example, if

WITH YOUR CLASSMATES

Share your list of binaries and your analysis of Barcott's ideology. Try to reach consensus on both.

Exploring Your Responses to a Text

The previous section has explained five questioning strategies based on examining the details of a text. In this section we explain a different approach to interrogating a text, one that asks you simply to explore you own reactions to something you've read. This approach encourages you to record on paper your first gut reactions to a text and then, after reflection, your more sustained and considered responses. We describe in this section three easy-to-use strategies for helping you explore and articulate your own reaction to a text: (1) before/after reflections, (2) the believing and doubting game, and (3) interviewing the author.

BEFORE/AFTER REFLECTIONS

To consider how much a text has influenced your thinking, try writing out some before and after reflections by freewriting your responses to the following statements:

1. What effect is this text trying to have on me? What kind of change does the writer hope to make in my view of the subject?

Here is how Jenny answered this question after she first read Larissa MacFarquhar's article:

> MacFarquhar wants me to reject certain commonplaces about reading—that Americans don't read much any more, for example—and to question other common assumptions such as the assumption that reading is always a more worthwhile activity than watching TV or that reading the classics is better than reading romance fiction.

2. Before reading this text, I believed this about the topic: _____. But after reading the text, my view has changed in these ways: _____.
3. Although the text has persuaded me that _____, I still have the following doubts: _____.
4. The most significant questions this text raises for me are these: _____.
5. The most important insights I have gotten from reading this text are these: _____.

- ***For Writing and Discussion***

  We gave you an example of Jenny's before/after reflection responding to the question "What kind of change does the writer hope to make in my view of the subject?" Based on your own reading of the MacFarquhar article, write out your own before/after reflections for Exercises 2 through 5. Share your responses with classmates.

THE BELIEVING AND DOUBTING GAME

Playing the believing and doubting game with a text is a powerful strategy both for recording your reaction to a text and for stimulating further thinking. Developed by writing theorist Peter Elbow, the believing and doubting game will stretch your thinking in surprising ways. You begin the game by freewriting all the reasons why you believe the writer's argument. Then you freewrite all the reasons why you doubt the same argument. In the "believe" portion, you try to look at the world through the text's perspective, adopting its ideology, actively supporting its ideas and values. You search your mind for any life experiences or memories of reading and research that help you sympathize with and support the author's point of view or ideas. If you find the author's ideas upsetting, dangerous, or threatening, the believing game may challenge—even disturb—you. It takes courage to try to believe views that you feel are dead wrong or contrary to your most deeply held beliefs. Nevertheless, to be a strong rhetorical reader, you need to look at the world through perspectives different from your own.

According to Elbow, the believing game helps you grow intellectually by letting you take in new and challenging ideas. In contrast, the doubting game helps you solidify your present identity by protecting you from outside ideas. Like an antiballistic missile, the doubting game lets you shoot down ideas that you don't like. The "doubt" portion of this game thus reverses the believing process. Here you try to think of all of the problems, limitations, or weaknesses in the author's argument. You brainstorm for personal experiences or memories from reading and research that refute or call into question the author's view. (Of course, the doubting game can be threatening if you already agree with the author's views. In such a case, doubting causes you to take a stand against your own beliefs.)

In the following example, student writer Jenny plays the believing and doubting game with MacFarquhar's article. Note how this exercise promotes critical thinking that goes beyond just expressing her subjective opinions. The results of playing the believing and doubting game are nearly always a bit surprising.

Jenny's Believing-Doubting Game Freewrite

Believe

It's easy for me to believe what MacFarquhar has to say about how Americans are not reading less than they used to but actually more, especially