

Computers and Society

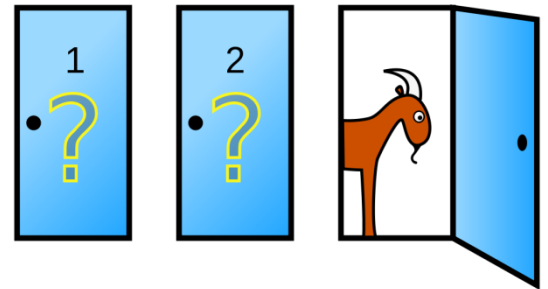
CPSC 430

Lecture 3 – Writing & Argumentation

<http://cs.ubc.ca/~kevinlb/teaching/cs430>

Participation Quiz

- You're on a game show.
- You'll get the prize behind one of 3 doors.
 - Behind 2 doors is a goat
 - Behind 1 door is a car
- You pick a door.
- The host (who knows what's where) opens a door containing a goat, and gives you the option of switching doors.
- At this point (clicker vote):
 - A. You should switch doors.
 - B. You should keep your original door.
 - C. It doesn't matter.



Our focus this week: writing & argumentation

“In an Age of Information, what most professionals do is research, think, and make arguments.

(And part of the value of doing your own thinking and writing is that it makes you much better at evaluating the thinking and writing of others.)”

*from “Writing in College,”
Williams and McEnerney,
University of Chicago Writing Program*

Mostly, making good arguments is something you
learn by doing.

That's why we'll focus all term on
essays, review and class discussions.

However, this week we'll focus on some of the basics,
to help you get as much as possible
from the rest of the course.

Today: Debate!

- You'll get into your original computer history group
- You'll get 20 minutes to prepare
 - determine one invention from your time period that you argue **"...constitutes the most important single contribution to the development of the information age."**
 - come up with arguments in support of this position
 - try to anticipate what other groups will do 😊
- How it will work:
 - Each group makes a 1-minute argument in favor of its position
 - We hold a free-form debate: each person speaks at most once (including opening, closing remarks), max 30 seconds
 - Each group makes 1-minute closing remarks
 - Clicker vote for the winner
 - votes for your own team will be discarded and publicly identified
 - all members of winning team will get bonus participation marks

Determining a thesis: generating ideas

- Easiest to generate ideas when you let them flow uncritically
 - freewriting
 - write without pausing, ignore grammar, set time limit
 - brainstorming
 - point form version of freewriting; again, don't be critical
 - clustering
 - organize ideas visually
- Consider more than one candidate topic to make sure you pick a good one

Finalizing your thesis

- easy to state in one sentence
- something you're passionate about and want to argue for
- In your essays:
 - make sure your thesis is narrow enough
 - make sure it's non-obvious
 - make sure it makes a claim rather than just stating a topic
- In the debate:
 - make sure you don't miss a better topic
 - make sure you pick something you're interested in and have arguments about

Outline your argument

- a simple point-form summary of what you want to say
 - this is the place to wrestle with how your argument will go, before you start getting caught up in sentences/details
- high level:
 - start by stating your thesis/main claim
 - two or three arguments in favor
 - some kind of conclusion; can be just a sentence or two
- Once you've settled the high level, work out the arguments in favor in more detail
- Someone who reads your outline wouldn't be surprised by anything in the essay

Anticipate & react to other arguments

- It doesn't weaken an argument to acknowledge that others will disagree with you
 - instead, it's better to anticipate arguments others will make
- In an essay, this is something you'll have to do explicitly
- In a debate, you'll actually hear other arguments
 - you'll need to adapt to what you hear
 - refute arguments made by others
 - claim that others' arguments actually support your point
 - add new evidence or arguments to reinforce your thesis

In the next 20 minutes...

Idea generation

- pick an invention that “...constitutes the most important single contribution to the development of the information age.”
- identify arguments for it

outlining

- make a point-form structure of your argument
- divide points among opening (1 min), closing (1 min), rebuttal (.5 min); you'll want to repeat some points

writing

- once you've outlined all of the pieces, work on them independently or in smaller groups
- if a new idea changes the outline, feed it back to your team!

Opening Arguments

- Random Order:
 - dawn of time - 1850
 - 2001 - present
 - 1851 - 1900
 - 1901 - 1947
 - 1968 - 1978
 - 1979 - 1989
 - 1990 - 2000
 - 1948 - 1967

Debate

- Remarks, max 30 seconds each
- Anyone can speak in any order
- Everyone can only speak once
 - Opening and closing remarks speakers can't speak at all

Closing Arguments

- Same Random Order, Reversed:
 - 1948 - 1967
 - 1990 - 2000
 - 1979 - 1989
 - 1968 - 1978
 - 1901 - 1947
 - 1851 - 1900
 - 2001 - present
 - dawn of time - 1850

Clicker vote

- We'll pick a winning group
- Everyone votes for only one group
 - we'll have two clicker votes; vote only once
 - don't vote for your own team
 - vote for the group that **made the most convincing arguments**, not the group you think had the best invention
- We'll announce a provisional winner today; we'll confirm after that everyone voted only once, not for themselves
 - I'll give a tally next class, identifying the groups of people who break the rules
- Every member of the winning group will receive participation credit equal to speaking 3 times in class

Professional Ethics

“A UBC CS sysadmin accidentally discovers pornography in a student’s private department file space, depicting a woman the sysadmin believes may be under 18. The sysadmin should inform the department head.”

Work and Wealth

“It is immoral for a corporation to pay its CEO 400 times as much as a production worker.”

Computer History

- You wrote an essay about a particular date range
- Three topics:
 - computing
 - networking
 - information storage and retrieval
- ...may not all be equally important for your range
- Prepare a presentation with others who got the same range
 - max 3 slides (PDF)
 - max 7 minute presentation
 - 1-3 presenters
 - we'll do this next class
- Your whole group will get in-class participation points /10%