



Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach us About the Art of Persuasion

[Jay Heinrichs](#)

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In *Thank you For Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can teach Us About the Art of Persuasion* publishing veteran Jay Heinrichs works deftly to coax Aristotle, Cicero, Socrates, St. Augustine and other big guns of the western rhetorical tradition off of their pedestals and into the living rooms, dormitory lounges, boardrooms, and classrooms of America to help us meet the challenge. Do not be fooled by a book cover that offers to teach “Eminem’s Rules of Decorum” and “The Eddie Haskell Play” for though the examples are popular and modern the underlying lesson is classic and grounded in rhetorical theory. Such modern tie-ins are an initial inducement. In the case of the Eminem lesson Heinrichs expands into a discussion of decorum for success in the workplace (i.e., the artifacts you keep at work can develop or deplete your decorum). The work breaks into four sections: offense (chs. 2-13), defense (chs. 14-17), advanced offense (chs. 18-22), and advanced agreement (chs. 23-25). The book concludes with a glossary, history, and reading tools for quick and easy reference.

Heinrichs argues that “ancient thought fell out of vogue” in the 1800’s as English literature replaced the classics and academia lost it’s faith in leaders (p. 5). The author ephasizes that ancient rhetorical argument tools are vital in a time of texting and e-mail by juxtaposing how even his own technologically stripped-down life exposes him to countless persuasive appeals. For example the mamalian (e.g., the cat persuades remarkably well for ten dumb pounds of fur) to the commercial (I wear a Timex Ironman ... The ancient Romans would call the Ironman’s appeal *argumentum a fortiori*, “arguemtn from strength”) (p. 7). In sum, Heinrich argues, we cannot escape persuasion, although we try to, and as a result we conflict unnecessarily. He

argues, “You may not like seduction’s manipulative aspects; still it beats fighting, which is what we usually mistake for an argument (p. 9).” Effective argument, as laid out by Heinrich, is a path to civil and rewarding exchange.

Jay Heinrichs engages the tools of argument with an array of modern communication goals in mind. The father who wants to quell a child’s obstinance, a lover seeking to woo another, an earnest employee seeking career advancement, or lifelong friends engaging political discussions. This wide scope of situations explored adds to the appeal of this work for embraces the reader who finds him/herself uncommitted to practicing rhetorical argument in a formal debate and academic settings without diluting the message. For instance, Heinrichs reveals the concept of backfire, calming an emotional response from an audience by overplaying it yourself, by showing how, as a young journalist, he buffered the response of his editor to a major typographical error (i.e., he placed Mt. St. Helen’s in Oregon state and was corrected by the then governor). The author’s willingness to play the the fall-guy here and elsewhere makes the reader feel more comfortable to attempt these techniques and risk the possibility of failure.

Occasionally, Heinrichs’ frequent attempts to rouse a smile from the reader’s lips can seem relentless. However, he is consistent to follow up humor with insight through the frequent use of terminology and sidebar panels in the pages that offer strategies for home and workplace. Also, the short, succinct chapters make the book an easy reference that can be picked up and set down to be read at short intervals. This makes the book well suited to readers with busy schedules or for those who commute via mass transit a lesson can be gleamed on a short trip to campus.

Jay Heinrichs’ blends a popular cultural savy with an equal opportunity approach to critiquing any political and/or cultural figure. Heinrichs rallies readers of varing political stripes by focusing on discecting what politicians and cultural figures are doing in terms of rhetorical technique versus embracing or rejecting their ideologies. The book is written in good humor as Heinrichs shares frequent winks and nods with readers as he shares how those around him regularly use his lessons against him. Undergraduates will respond to Heinrichs’s attempts to make accessible and manageable the techniques of rhetoric, a subject that novices can seem daunting, unapprachable, and stuffy. Graduate students and instructors will glean new popular cultural touchstones for use in approaching foundational content with new excitement and energy.