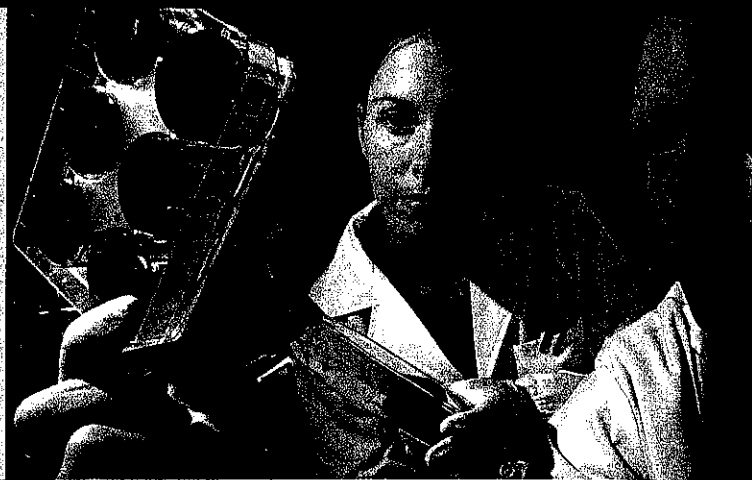


5



Finding Common Ground

IN COLLEGE COURSES For a course in science research ethics, a biology major writes a paper on the debate over stem cell research. She begins with a surprising quote: "Catholic and evangelical Christian leaders are welcoming the National Institute of Health's (NIH's) new draft guidelines for federal financing of embryonic stem cell research, in recognition of their common interest in establishing strong ethical parameters in scientific research." She explains that groups with seemingly irreconcilable views on these issues had found common ground in the NIH's guidelines, which provide that research be limited to stem cells from embryos that would have been destroyed because they are no longer needed for in vitro fertilization. In addition, the rules bar research on embryos created solely for stem cell research and require donors to give their consent.

The student points out that the NIH guidelines represent a compromise and that not everyone is happy. Some scientists argue that they will be a serious impediment because developing matched organs for transplantation would only be possible if banned techniques like therapeutic cloning or somatic cell nuclear transfer were allowed. Opponents of stem cell research such as the National Right to Life Committee make a slippery slope counterargument, claiming that the new guidelines are "part of an incremental strategy to desensitize the public to the concept of killing human embryos for research purposes." The student concludes by pointing out that, despite continuing points of disagreement, support for the guidelines among parties traditionally opposed to such research represents a step toward an eventual resolution of the issue.



IN THE COMMUNITY The chair of the School Uniform Committee of a middle school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) writes an e-mail to the members reporting on a recent meeting about whether to adopt school uniforms. She begins by summarizing outside research undertaken by the committee: anecdotal information, primarily from school administrators, supports the claim that school uniforms can have a positive effect on discipline, achievement, and safety; however, studies by sociologist David Brunzma, among others, have found no positive correlation between uniforms and school safety or academic achievement.

The committee chair then presents the arguments made at the meeting by those on both sides of the issue. She reports that those who support the adoption of uniforms argued that they encourage school spirit, eliminate unnecessary social tensions by obscuring differences in socioeconomic background, and forestall gang violence by eliminating the use of gang colors. Those opposed agreed that reducing class distinctions and forestalling gang violence are worthy goals, but expressed concern that school uniforms stifle individuality and are costly and wasteful because they would not be worn outside of school.

Proponents recommended a compromise — to substitute ordinary casual clothes (such as polo shirts and jeans) for expensive formal uniforms. Although this suggestion has appeal to some people, a few voiced the concern that wealthy students would still wear designer jeans. At the conclusion of the meeting, a subcommittee was formed to make specific recommendations for a dress code that would exclude gang colors and achieve a desirable degree of uniformity without incurring undue expense or inviting displays of privilege.

IN THE WORKPLACE Major population growth and haphazard development in a previously rural area in southwest Washington State threaten a watershed that supplies several local communities and supports endangered salmon species. Longtime residents, including Native Americans who live on tribal land adjacent to areas slated for development; developers; and county planning officials come together to discuss a plan for sustainable growth in the area. They agree to hire a consulting firm to write a report that analyzes the positions of the stakeholders and outlines a plan for development.

Whereas the residents' interest is in maintaining quality of life and protecting the environment, the developers want access to building sites, and the county officials need to build infrastructure to support the growing population. The consulting firm analyzes these competing needs and recommends changes to developers' original proposals, calling for higher-density development that would be situated further from tribal lands and from the endangered watershed but at the same time cost less to build and support with transportation and utilities. The plan also channels money from the economic growth enabled by development to environmental upkeep.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) nominates the plan for a National Award in Smart Growth Achievement. The consulting firm and the EPA co-present a session on the project for the 2009 New Partners for Smart Growth Conference. While the presenters encounter some skepticism, many audience members leave the presentation believing that public-private partnerships for sustainable growth can work.

No one is exempt from the call to find common ground.

— BARACK OBAMA, *The Audacity of Hope*

A debate is raging in Congress, on the airwaves, and in the blogosphere over the president's proposals for health-care reform. Many citizens are listening in, and some are participating in the discussion. Mostly, those who do tune in witness people with different points of view arguing, sometimes vehemently, but seldom listening to what others are saying. What is too often lacking is a fair and dispassionate overview of the issue, a careful sorting out of the main arguments on various sides, and ideas about where agreement might be possible — in other words, what is lacking is the search for common ground. In this chapter, you will be reading essays that seek common ground and, as you work through the chapter, you will be writing an essay of your own in which you analyze arguments on a controversial issue and suggest where they might find common ground.

Controversial issues are inevitable in any society, and many people shy away from entering public debate because it tends to be loud, raucous, and confusing. Reasoned argument, however, is the lifeblood of a democracy. Free and open discussion offers us insight into why people favor certain policies and resist others, and it helps us establish and refine informed positions of our own. Sometimes the disagreement is local and relatively trivial — whether, for example, traffic should flow two ways or one way on a busy city street. Sometimes the controversy has broader and longer-term implications — for example, whether to build a new campus for a state university system. Sometimes the debate takes on global significance — as, for example, in the question of whether to permit torture as a means of interrogation.

Essays that analyze arguments to find common ground aim to inform and educate readers. To write a common ground essay, you need to avoid thinking of argument as a zero-sum game in which one side wins and the other sides lose. Where values and concerns are shared, where interests and priorities overlap, win-win thinking takes the place of zero-sum thinking, and it becomes possible to find common ground.

For example, the opening scenario about stem cell research suggests that people may be able to come together over certain shared values and concerns even when they continue to disagree on some fundamental aspects of the issue. As long as the stem cells come from embryos that would be destroyed anyway, many pro-life advocates seem willing to accept their use for research designed to save human lives devastated by disease. The shared value of human life together with the common interest in curing diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's make agreement possible.

Similarly, the second scenario about school uniforms suggests that everyone at the PTA meeting agrees that instituting some policies on clothing makes sense; they share concerns about gang-related violence and about the negative effects of obvious socioeconomic differences among students. They have not yet figured out how to accomplish the shared goal of making students' lives safer and more harmonious, but they have agreed to try. Finding common ground is often just the beginning of the process, but it is a crucial and challenging first step.

Learning to write a clear and unbiased explanation of points of agreement and disagreement on a controversial issue can be especially helpful when you are embarking on a new research project and may be a required part of a prospectus or research proposal. Obviously, honing your ability to analyze arguments, understand differences, and find potential areas of agreement can also be helpful personally and professionally.

In this chapter, you will read student essays analyzing different positions on controversial issues: whether steroids should be banned from baseball, whether the United States should use torture as a means of interrogation, and whether the No Child Left Behind Act needs to be changed to improve public education. These readings illustrate the basic features and strategies writers typically use when analyzing opposing positions to find common ground among them. The questions and activities following the readings will help you consider what is particular to one writer's approach and what strategies you might want to try out in writing your own common ground essay.

The Guide to Writing that follows the readings will support you as you compose your own essay, showing you ways to use the basic features of the genre to write a probing and creative analysis of opposing positions on an issue that interests you.

Finally, the Appendix to this chapter offers seven readings taking positions on two different issues: torture and same-sex marriage. (Additional essays on different topics can be found at bedfordstmartins.com/theguide.) You might want to use the arguments presented in these readings as the basis of the essay you write for this chapter.

To get a sense of what is involved in trying to find common ground on a controversial issue, get together with two or three other students, and explore the possibilities for agreement among those who argue about the issue.

Part 1. Select an issue with which you are familiar. Here are a few possibilities to consider:

- Should there be a community service requirement for graduation from college?
 - Should sororities and fraternities be banned from college campuses?
 - Should college athletes be paid?
 - Should intelligent design be taught in science classes as an alternative theory to evolution?
 - Should oil drilling in places like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge be allowed?
 - Should private cars be taxed to support mass transit?
 - Should the drinking age be lowered?
 - Should marijuana be legalized?
- Identify the positions people have taken on the issue and the arguments they typically put forward to support their position. (You do not have to agree or disagree; you simply have to recall what others have said or written on the issue. Doing a quick Google search could be helpful here, though it would be best at this point to stick to arguments with which you are familiar.)

A Collaborative Activity: **Practice Finding Common Ground**

- Identify a couple of shared concerns, needs, priorities, values, or beliefs that you think could potentially be the basis for agreement among those who have taken a position on the issue.

Part 2. Discuss what you learned about analyzing arguments on a controversial issue and trying to find possible common ground.

- How would you try to convince people who argue about this particular issue that the potential points of agreement you have identified could be the basis for a productive discussion toward building common ground?
- Since debates over controversial issues normally emphasize points of disagreement rather than potential points of agreement, how did you go about finding areas of possible agreement?

Reading Essays That Seek Common Ground

Basic Features

Basic Features

As you read essays that analyze opposing positions to find common ground, you will see how different authors incorporate the basic features of the genre.

● An Informative Introduction to the Issue and Opposing Positions

Read first to see how the writer presents the issue. Look, for example, at whether the writer assumes that readers are already well informed or need background information, and whether they will be interested in the issue or will need to have their interest piqued. To inform and interest readers, writers may provide material such as the following:

- a political or historical context
- facts or statistics
- examples or anecdotes
- quotations from authorities

Consider also how the writer introduces the opposing positions and their authors. The writer usually provides the following information:

- the authors' names
- their professional affiliation or credentials
- the titles of the essays that are being analyzed

- * where and when the essays were originally published or posted
- * who sponsored the original publication

◆ A Probing Analysis

Read next to see how the writer analyzes the arguments. Keep in mind that the purpose of the common ground essay is not primarily to *summarize* the arguments, but to *analyze* them in order to discover ways of bridging significant differences.

Consider whether the writer's treatment of the arguments is both **analytical** and **constructive** — that is, whether it examines the arguments advanced by each side to understand the points of disagreement as well as the points of potential agreement (analytical) and whether it suggests ways to build common ground on shared values and concerns, needs and interests (constructive).

Think, too, about what the writer has chosen to focus on and what has been left out. Because of time and space constraints, essays finding common ground cannot be exhaustive: writers must select only two or three points of comparison, among which the following are perhaps most common:

- * values (for example, freedom, justice, equality)
- * moral, ethical, or religious principles (for example, the sense of right and wrong, "do unto others," social responsibility, stewardship of the natural environment)
- * ideology (a system of ideas and ideals — for example, the ideas in the Declaration of Independence that everyone is created equal and has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness)
- * needs and interests (for example, food, shelter, work, respect, privacy, choice)
- * fears and concerns (for example, regarding safety, socioeconomic status, power)
- * priorities or agendas about what is most important or urgent (for example, whether law and order is more important than securing justice and equality)

In reading the essay, try to decide whether the writer has selected points of comparison that are likely to be seen by readers as significant.

Look also at how the writer tries to frame (or reframe) the issue. A sincere attempt at finding common ground will frame the issue so that it can be perceived anew as potentially unifying and productive. For example, the opening scenario about stem cell research indicates how the issue was productively reframed in terms of the ethics of scientific research — an area where interests and concerns overlap — rather than as a pro-life/pro-choice issue, where values and priorities seem irreconcilable. Similarly, the scenario about school uniforms shows how people constructively framed the issue as an attempt to reduce tensions among students — a shared priority on which agreement could be forged. Finally, the scenario about sustainable development shows how some individuals are seeking a way out of the "either (we make money) or (we do good in the community)" binary thinking traditionally assumed by many to be the principle by which capitalism functions.

◆ A Fair and Impartial Presentation

Read carefully to see whether the writer comes across as fair and unbiased. A common ground essay is not a passive summary merely repeating what others have said. It is a probing examination seeking to understand not only on what points people agree and disagree, but *why* they agree and disagree and *how* they might come to an agreement on at least some points. Therefore, it is necessary for the writer to be perceived as unbiased, equitable, even impartial. To win and hold readers' confidence, the writer normally does the following:

- refrains from taking a position on the issue
- represents the opposing sides fairly and accurately
- avoids judging either side's arguments
- gives roughly equal attention to the opposing viewpoints

◆ A Readable Plan

Finally, read to see how the writer provides a readable plan by dividing the essay into clearly distinguishable points of agreement and disagreement. Examine the strategies the writer uses to make the essay easy to follow, such as:

- providing a clear thesis and forecasting statement
- using topic sentences for paragraphs or groups of paragraphs
- labeling the positions consistently (for example, with the authors' last names)
- repeating key words to identify the points of agreement and disagreement
- signaling similarities and differences with clear comparative transitional words and phrases

Purpose and Audience

As you read common ground essays, ask yourself what seems to be the writer's purpose. For example, does the writer seem to be writing for any of the following reasons:

- to inform readers about a controversial issue
- to explain the kinds of arguments particular writers have made and possibly the kinds of arguments that are typically made on the issue
- to clarify different points of view on the issue
- to examine ways in which people already agree on the issue
- to suggest where there may be potential for significant common ground between different points of view

As you read, also try to decide what the writer assumes about the audience. For example, does the writer

- expect the readers to be generally well informed but not knowledgeable about this particular issue;
- assume the readers may not be especially interested in the issue;
- anticipate readers will be unfamiliar with the issue, so that the essay will serve as an introduction;
- anticipate readers will know something about the arguments typically made on the issue, so that the essay may open new possibilities; or
- expect some readers will already have strong views about the issue?

Readings

JEREMY BERNARD is an avid baseball fan who has closely followed the many steroid scandals. He asked his instructor if he could write about the issue and use as his two main texts George Mitchell's report and a Web site written in response to it. Even though these two texts are too long and complex to cover in depth, his instructor gave Bernard permission to use them if he met two criteria he had to make sure his essay stayed within the page limit and he had to refrain from stating his own position on the issue. His instructor gave him the opportunity to write his next essay, a position paper, on the steroids issue. Moreover, he was told — as was the rest of the class — that he could use the research he did for the common ground essay for his position essay. He could even quote from his common ground essay in his position paper so long as he cited it correctly.

Bernard jumped at the chance to write two essays on baseball. As you read this essay, consider whether Bernard successfully kept his opinion to himself. (Bernard's sources are available online at bedfordstmartins.com/theguide/.)

Lost Innocence Jeremy Bernard

In a nation committed to better living through chemistry — where Viagra-enabled men pursue silicone-contoured women — the national pastime has a problem of illicit chemical enhancement.

— George Will

Many American writers have waxed poetic about baseball. Walt Whitman, the great nineteenth-century poet, sang its praises. "It's our game — the American game. More than anything," remarked Pete Hamill, the twentieth-century journalist and novelist.



Basic Features

- An Informative Introduction
- A Probing Analysis
- A Fair and Impartial Presentation
- A Readable Plan

Why does Bernard begin with the epigraph and quotes by Whitman and Hamill?

Why is this information worth presenting to readers?

How does Bernard frame the debate in pars. 2 and 3? How fair does he seem?

Skim the essay to see how Bernard uses these key terms to forecast his main points.

How do the repeated words and sentence structure help readers understand the two positions?

Where does Bernard choose to quote and paraphrase? Are these choices appropriate?

What do these highlighted transitions signal?

it's a game of innocence (Andrijeski). The age of innocence in baseball seems to have ended in the 1990s when "the Steroid Era" began and players from Mark McGwire to Roger Clemmons, Barry Bonds, and Alex Rodriguez were identified as using performance enhancing drugs (PEDs). Such substances as anabolic steroids and human growth hormone are a concern in other sports as well, but the steroid scandal has been especially painful in baseball, possibly because of its special status as America's national pastime.

In 2006, the concern was so great that George Mitchell, the former Senate Majority leader and peace negotiator, was enlisted to investigate. "The minority of players who used [performance enhancing] substances were wrong," the Mitchell Report concludes. "They violated federal law and baseball policy, and they distorted the fairness of competition by trying to gain an unfair advantage over the majority of players who followed the law and the rules" (310).

An opposing position has been presented by respected baseball authority Eric Walker on his Web site, *Steroids, Other Drugs, and Baseball*. Walker concedes that using PEDs is against the law and against the rules of baseball. But he argues that the real issue is whether PEDs ought to be "illegal and banned" by Major League Baseball (MLB). He addresses many of Mitchell's arguments, but will focus here on two of Mitchell's main reasons supporting the ban on PEDs: the health risk and fairness.

Should PEDs Be Banned from Baseball Because They Constitute a Significant Health Risk?

The health risks of using PEDs would seem to be a question of fact on which everyone should be able to agree. Mitchell and Walker do agree, but not on everything. They agree that the medical evidence is inconclusive. More importantly, they agree that there is a risk of side effects from PEDs. They agree that the medical risks to adolescents are, as Walker puts it, "substantial and potentially grave." But they disagree on the significance of the risks to adults, and they disagree on who should decide whether the risks are worth taking.

Mitchell and Walker consider the medical evidence for a variety of PEDs. They each cite reputable scientists and research studies. While Walker concludes that "PEDs are by no means guaranteed harmless," he argues that the side effects tend to be mild and reversible. Mitchell takes a more negative view, arguing that there is "sufficient data to conclude that there is an association between steroid abuse and significant adverse side effects" (6). Nevertheless, it is notable that when discussing each of the possible side effects, he is careful to use hedging words like *can* and *may* and to acknowledge that clinical trial data is limited. So it's possible that Mitchell and Walker are closer on the health risks than their arguments suggest.

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6 However, Mitchell and Walker seem to be miles apart when it comes to the question of who should decide whether the risks are worth taking. Walker argues that adults ought to have the responsibility to decide for themselves. To support this ethical argument, Walker cites authorities such as Dr. Norman Fost, Director of the Program in Medical Ethics at the University of Wisconsin. Fost asserts in "Steroid Hysteria: Unpacking the Claims" that "even if steroids did have . . . dire effects, it wouldn't follow that a competent adult should be prohibited from assuming those risks in exchange for the possible benefits. We allow adults to do things that are far riskier than even the most extreme claims about steroids, such as race car driving, and even playing football."

7 Although Mitchell does not address this ethical question directly, he clearly thinks Major League Baseball should make the decision for the players by banning PEDs. While Mitchell expresses other ethical concerns (discussed in the sections below), he seems not to have considered the ethics of who should decide whether the risks are worth taking. Perhaps he and Walker would be able to find common ground if they discussed this question directly and if the players themselves made their opinions known.

Should PEDs Be Banned from Baseball Because They Give an Unfair Advantage to Athletes Willing to Take the Risk?

8 You'd think anyone interested in sports would value fairness. But fairness turns out to be rather complicated, at least for Walker. For Mitchell, it's pretty straightforward. As I explained earlier, Mitchell claims performance enhancing substances are wrong simply because they give some players an "unfair advantage" over those who play by the rules (310). Walker concedes this point. In fact, he says "that is why PEDs are banned."

9 However, Walker disagrees with Mitchell's way of defining "a level playing field" as one where "success and advancement . . . is the result of ability and hard work" (Mitchell 5). According to Walker, Mitchell makes a false distinction between what is natural and unnatural. Whereas certain aids to performance — such as better bats, chemical-filled drinks like Gatorade, Tommy John and Lasik surgery — are considered natural and therefore allowable, other aids — particularly PEDs — are deemed unnatural and banned. To support his argument, Walker cites Fost again. "Here's what Fost wrote in 'Steroid Hysteria': 'There is no coherent argument to support the view that enhancing performance is unfair. If it were, we should ban coaching and training. Competition can be unfair if there is unequal access to such enhancements.'"

10 In other words, unequal access is the key to the unfairness argument. On this point, Mitchell and Walker seem to agree. The argument is really about making sure that there is a level playing field. Mitchell puts his finger on it when he explains that

How does citing Fost get at a potential basis for agreement between Walker and Mitchell?

How does Bernard avoid taking a position here?

How do the headings help you as a reader?

How effectively does Bernard transition to and introduce his second point?

How do the highlighted transitions help you as a reader?

Why does Bernard indent this quotation?

the illegal use of these substances by some players is unfair to the majority of players who do not use them. These players have a right to expect a level playing field where success and advancement to the major leagues is the result of ability and hard work. They should not be forced to choose between joining the ranks of those who illegally use these substances or falling short of their ambition to succeed at the major league level. (5)

How effectively does Bernard analyze the argument about fairness?

Ethicists call this a coercion argument. "Steroids are coercive," Fost explains, because "if your opponents use them, you have to" as well or you risk losing. Walker has a simple solution: allow PEDs to be "equally available to any who might want them."

He argues that there are lots of requirements or expectations that athletes regularly make choices about. He sees "no logical or ethical distinction between — just for example — killer workouts and PEDs." Therefore, Walker concludes, each athlete has to decide for him- or herself what's "appropriate or necessary."

Mitchell, on the other hand, assumes it should be the responsibility of Major League Baseball to set rules that protect the athletes and protect the sport. He acknowledges that players "are responsible for their actions" (311). But he insists that "Commissioners, club officials, the Players Association, and players" should share "responsibility for the steroids era" and "should join in" the "effort to bring the era of steroids and human growth hormone to an end" (311).

How effective is this way of ending the essay?

By saying that everyone involved in Major League Baseball shares some responsibility for its future well being, Mitchell appears also to be reaching out to critics like Walker who share a common love of the sport. It seems that they may not really be that far apart after all.

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What can you learn from these citations for your own essay?

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MELISSA MAE asked her instructor if she could analyze the controversy about the U.S. government's treatment of detainees under the Bush administration. She read two published essays on torture recommended by her instructor, one coauthored by law professor Mirko Bagaric and law lecturer Julie Clarke (reprinted in this chapter on pp. 233–34), the other by retired Army chaplain Kermit D. Johnson (pp. 235–38). Mae decided to focus her essay more on their commonalities than on the obvious differences between them.

As you read Mae's essay, consider how well she succeeds in finding areas of potential common ground between the authors she is analyzing.

Laying Claim to a Higher Morality

Melissa Mae

1 In 2004, when the abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib became known, many Americans became concerned that the government was using torture as part of its interrogation of war-on-terror detainees. Although the government denied a torture program existed, we now know that the Bush Administration did order what they called "enhanced interrogation techniques" such as waterboarding and sleep deprivation. The debate over whether these techniques constitute torture continues today.

2 In 2005 and 2006, when Kermit D. Johnson wrote "Inhuman Behavior" and Mirko Bagaric and Julie Clarke wrote "A Case for Torture," this debate was just heating up. Bagaric and Clarke, professor and lecturer, respectively, in the law faculty at Australia's Deakin University, argued that torture is necessary in extreme circumstances to save innocent lives. Major Johnson, a retired Army chaplain, wrote that torture should never be used for any reason whatsoever. Although their positions appear to be diametrically opposed, some common ground exists, because the authors of both essays share a goal — the preservation of human life — as well as a belief in the importance of morality.

3 The authors of both essays present their positions on torture as the surest way to save lives. Bagaric and Clarke write specifically about the lives of innocent victims threatened by hostage-takers or terrorists and claim that the use of torture in such cases to forestall the loss of innocent life is "universally accepted" as "self-defense." Whereas Bagaric and Clarke think saving lives justifies torture, however, Johnson believes renouncing torture saves lives. Johnson asserts: "A clear-cut repudiation of torture or abuse is . . . essential to the safety of the troops" (26), who need to be able to "claim the full protection of the Geneva Conventions . . . when they are captured, in this or any war" (27).

This underlying shared value — human life is precious — represents one important aspect of common ground between the two positions. In addition to this, however, the authors of both essays agree that torture is ultimately a moral issue, and that morality is worth arguing about. For Bagaric and Clarke, torture is morally defensible under certain, extreme circumstances when it “is the only means, due to the immediacy of the situation, to save the life of an innocent person”; in effect, Bagaric and Clarke argue that the end justifies the means. Johnson argues against this common claim, writing that “whenever we torture or mistreat prisoners, we are capitulating morally to the enemy — in fact, adopting the terrorist ethic that the end justifies the means” (26). Bagaric and Clarke, in their turn, anticipate Johnson’s argument and refute it by arguing that those who believe (as Johnson does) that “torture is always wrong” are “misguided.” Bagaric and Clarke label Johnson’s kind of thinking “absolutist,” and claim it is a “distorted” moral judgment.

It is not surprising that, as a chaplain, Johnson would adopt a religious perspective on morality. Likewise, it should not be surprising that, as faculty at a law school, Bagaric and Clarke would take a more pragmatic and legalistic perspective. It is hard to imagine how they could bridge their differences when their moral perspectives are so different, but perhaps the answer lies in the real-world application of their principles.

The authors of essays refer to the kind of situation typically raised when a justification for torture is debated: Bagaric and Clarke call it “the hostage scenario,” and Johnson refers to it as the “scenario about a ticking time bomb” (26). As the Parents

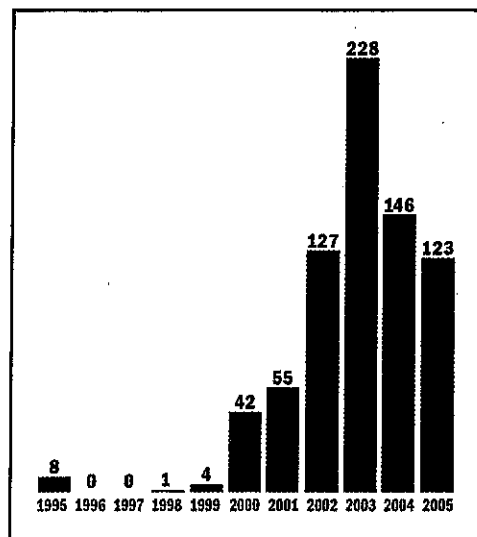


Fig. 1. Parents Television Council, “Scenes of Torture on Primetime Network TV”; rpt. in “Primetime Torture,” *Human Rights First* (Human Rights First, 2009; web; n. pag.).

Television Council has demonstrated (see Figure 1), scenes of torture dominated television in the period the authors were writing about, and may have had a profound influence on the persuasive power of the scenario.

7 Johnson rejects the scenario outright as an unrealistic "Hollywood drama" (26). Bagaric and Clarke's take on it is somewhat more complicated. First, Bagaric and Clarke ask the rhetorical question: "Will a real-life situation actually occur where the only option is between torturing a wrongdoer or saving an innocent person?" They initially answer, "Perhaps not." Then, however, they offer the real-life example of Douglas Wood, a 63-year-old engineer taken hostage in Iraq and held for six weeks until he was rescued by U.S. and Iraqi soldiers.

8 At first glance, they seem to offer this example to refute Johnson's claim that such scenarios don't occur in real life. However, a news report about the rescue of Wood published in the *Age*, where Bagaric and Clarke's essay was also published, says that the soldiers "effectively 'stumbled across Wood' during a 'routine' raid on a suspected insurgent weapons cache" ("Firefight"). The report's wording suggests that the Wood example does not really fit the Hollywood-style hostage scenario; Wood's rescuers appear to have acted on information they got from ordinary informants rather than through torture.

9 By using this example, rather than one that fits the ticking time bomb scenario, Bagaric and Clarke seem to be conceding that such scenarios are exceedingly rare. Indeed, they appear to prepare the way for a potentially productive common-ground-building discussion when they conclude: "Even if a real-life situation where torture is justifiable does not eventuate, the above argument in favour of torture in limited circumstances needs to be made because it will encourage the community to think more carefully about moral judgments. . . ."

10 Although Bagaric and Clarke continue to take a situational view of torture (considering the morality of an act in light of its particular situation) and Johnson does not waver in seeing torture in terms of moral absolutes, a discussion about real-world applications of their principles could allow them to find common ground. Because they all value the preservation of life, they already have a basis for mutual respect and might be motivated to work together to find ways of acting for the greatest good — to "lay claim to a higher morality" (26).

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LEARN ABOUT MAE'S WRITING PROCESS

To see how Melissa Mae developed her essay, take a look at the Writer at Work section on pp. 232–41, which shows her progress in moving from close analysis of each position essay to a draft of her finished paper.

MAKING CONNECTIONS: HOLLYWOOD AND THE TICKING TIME BOMB SCENARIO

The post-9/11 television series *24* brought the ticking time bomb scenario into our homes on a weekly basis. Other popular programs such as *Lost* and *Law & Order*, as well as many films, also sometimes show scenes of torture.

In her essay, Mae includes a bar graph she found on the Web site *Human Rights First* to show how prevalent scenes of torture became during the period her authors are writing about, and she asks us to think about whether the hostage and ticking time bomb scenarios so often used to justify torture are Hollywood dramas or real-life situations.

With two or three other students, discuss your views about torture. Begin by sharing memories of films and television shows you have seen where someone is tortured. Was the torturer the “good guy” or the “bad guy”? Was torture quick and effective? Was it depicted as justifiable, even patriotic?

Then, consider the following questions:

- Have your views on torture been influenced by the way torture has been portrayed on television and in film?
- How do you think torture should be portrayed, if at all?

ANALYZING WRITING STRATEGIES



Basic Features

● An Informative Introduction to the Issue and Opposing Positions

Common ground essays typically situate the issue in time, as Jeremy Bernard does when he locates the end of the “age of innocence” and the beginning of “the Steroid Era” (par. 1) in the 1990s and suggests that it came to a head in 2006 with the *Mitchell Report*. To engage readers’ interest, Bernard drops the names of star players who were involved in the steroid scandals — sluggers Mark McGwire and Barry Bonds, award-winning pitcher Roger Clemens, and Alex Rodriguez, considered one of the best all-around players. Baseball fans — indeed anyone interested in sports celebrities — would be likely to recognize these names and want to know more about the controversy surrounding them.

To analyze how Melissa Mae introduces her issue and opposing positions, try the following:

- Reread paragraph 1 to see how Mae situates the issue in time and tries to engage readers’ interest. Why do you think she chose to mention Abu Ghraib? What, if anything, do you know about it?
- Look also at how she introduces the two essays she analyzes. Underline the information she gives about each author in paragraph 2, and then skim paragraph 5 where she refers again to their backgrounds. How does Mae use the information to

introduce the authors and also to help readers understand their different points of view?

- Write a few sentences explaining how Mae introduces the issue and the opposing positions.

● A Probing Analysis

In analyzing an argument and attempting to find common ground, writers usually focus on just a few important areas of disagreement. Doing so gives them the space to unpack the arguments and identify underlying values and interests that could be used to bridge differences.

In his essay about the baseball steroid controversy, for example, Jeremy Bernard addresses two points of disagreement: health risks and fairness. He discovers that Walker and Mitchell basically agree on the risk of adverse side effects from using performance-enhancing drugs like steroids. But his analysis leads Bernard to pinpoint where they disagree, namely on the ethical question of responsibility: Should professional athletes make their own decisions about health risks, or should Major League Baseball decide for them? Clarifying the argument in this way may not resolve the disagreement, but it reframes the issue in a way that could lead to fruitful discussion.

To examine Mae's analysis of the argument about torture, try the following:

- Reread paragraphs 4–9 to think about how Mae analyzes the authors' arguments on the morality of torture and tries to see their disagreement in a constructive way. Focus especially on their different views of the hostage and time bomb scenarios.
- Write a couple of sentences explaining how Mae tries to reframe their debate and find a way to bridge their differences. Add another sentence or two assessing how effective you think Mae's efforts are likely to be for most readers.

● A Fair and Impartial Presentation

Writers try to adopt an impartial stance when analyzing opposing arguments. One method Bernard uses is to quote an authority to critique one of the authors he is analyzing, rather than doing so directly himself. We can see this strategy in paragraphs 9 and 10 of Bernard's essay, where Bernard quotes Dr. Norman Fost to provide a critical perspective on Mitchell's argument about unfairness: "There is no coherent argument to support the view that enhancing performance is unfair . . ." (par. 9). Bernard makes it clear that Walker also cites Fost, but Bernard found and quoted from Fost's original article in the American Medical Association's *Virtual Mentor*, a highly respected publication.

To examine whether Mae is fair and unbiased, try the following:

- Reread paragraphs 6–8, where Mae presents information on the Douglas Wood hostage situation. As you read, consider whether Mae's use of the

Wood example is comparable to Bernard's strategy. How does the Wood example help Mae remain impartial as she questions Bagaric and Clarke's argument?

- Write a sentence or two explaining how Mae tries to appear fair and impartial, and also assess how effective her strategy seems to be.

● A Readable Plan

Writers of common ground essays usually try to make the analysis clear and direct. Fairly early in the essay, they typically state the essay's thesis about the possibility of finding common ground and forecast the main points of disagreement and agreement. Bernard, for example, states his plan explicitly at the end of paragraph 3 when he explains, "I will focus here on two of Mitchell's main reasons supporting the ban on PEDs: the health risk and fairness." He organizes his essay around these two topics, introducing each of them with a heading in the form of a rhetorical question that he goes on to answer in some detail.

To analyze how Mae makes the plan of her essay visible to readers, try the following:

- Reread paragraph 2 and highlight her thesis statement. What are the two topics Mae plans to discuss in the essay?
- Skim the rest of the essay and note in the margin where these two topics are brought up and whether they are used in topic sentences that introduce the paragraph or set of paragraphs that follow.
- Write a few sentences assessing how well Mae orients readers and keeps them on track.

ANALYZING VISUALS

GRAPHICAL PRESENTATION OF DATA

Write a few sentences on Mae's use of the graph in her essay. Before you start, consider the following questions:

- When you initially read the essay, did you stop to study the visual, just glance at it in passing, go back to it after finishing the essay, or not look at it at all?
- What element(s) of Mae's subject does it illuminate?
- How does Mae's description of the graph in paragraph 6 help you read it? Is the information the graph conveys intelligible? If not, how might it have been improved?
- Is the information the graph conveys easier to understand in graph form, or could it have been conveyed just as well using words only?
- Do you think Mae's essay would have benefited from the addition of other visual elements? If so, what kind(s)?