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## Teaching the Enthymeme: Invention and Arrangement

Elsewhere, I have recommended that the enthymeme be taught as a way to bridge the gap that sometimes exists between invention and arrangement. The invention of a single enthymeme which provides the structural framework for a whole essay can encourage an organic sense of structure and at the same time involve students in a process of thinking through their own ideas in relation to the conclusions and reasons of a real audience. My recommendation has come, however, at the ends of essays which have criticized some other teaching methods for depending on a formulaic sense of structure and encouraging students to neglect to test their ideas against the reasons and conclusions of others.<sup>1</sup> Thus, I have not yet given an adequate account of how the enthymeme might perform the functions for which I have recommended it. I want, therefore, to be practical here, to describe how I think the enthymeme can be taught as an invention strategy leading to the control of structural choices. If, in this practical rationale for teaching the enthymeme, I also engage in some theory and polemics, the reason is this: The method I will describe is classical in origin, but its contemporary use can solve problems that seem to me to be created by more modern teaching methods. As such problems arise in relation to the enthymeme, I will discuss them briefly.

Misinterpretation of the role of the enthymeme in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* has led to its neglect in recent composition theory, and this may be the result of Aristotle's own use of the term in two senses. Most descriptions of the enthymeme found in composition texts—when it is mentioned at all—depend on one of Aristotle's meanings, but ignore another, more basic, one. The enthymeme is usually considered to be a logical strategic device at the sentence level, or any truncated syllogism. As such, it would be expected to appear in students' writing only here and there, if at all, and only when students are writing in a logical "mode." What such a definition ignores, however, is Aristotle's statement that the enthymeme is the "body" of all artistic rhetorical proof, inductive as well as deductive, *ethos* and *pathos* as well as *logos*. He used the enthymeme in this sense to emphasize that considerations about every aspect of rhetorical decisions are enthymematic. If the enthymeme is not

merely any shortened syllogism, but a syllogistic relationship with probable premises contributed or derived from the audience, then the conditions which apply to forming a strategic enthymeme at the sentence level also apply to other rhetorical choices: How is what I *do* say to make my point dependent on my unstated assumption of what my audience already knows or thinks? In Aristotle's view, it seems that all choices, including stylistic ones, must be based on a determination of what shared grounds exist for choosing some unshared thing to say that will have the potential to lead to new shared understanding.<sup>2</sup> This dynamic is represented in the structure of the enthymeme, which derives its function from the relationship between a writer's intended conclusions and an audience's pre-existing assumptions. As such, the enthymeme can stand for the rhetorical conditions underlying all compositional decisions.

Aristotle's description of arrangement is also enthymematic in this sense. Instead of prescribing the traditional divisions of an oration, which he calls "absurd," Aristotle says that all one need know is the question and the grounds for proving one's answer to it. In so saying, Aristotle implied, I think, that the structures of whole arguments can be seen to derive from a single enthymeme, one which produces both the essential logic of any argument as well as its essential structure.

Thus, from this more basic sense of enthymeme in Aristotle's treatise, we can derive invention procedures which aim at constructing the underlying enthymeme of a whole essay and which, once created, can provide terms to be used in arranging the parts of a composition strategically.<sup>3</sup> Those parts and their order cannot be known in advance of working out the enthymematic relation between one's own ideas and the assumptions held by one's audience—provided structure is perceived as deriving from one's ideas rather than as an *a priori* formula independent of them. No *a priori* structural formula, such as the five-part oration or the five-paragraph essay—or others presently in use—can have this necessary connection to the specific logic of one's ideas or the specific assumptions of one's audience. Such structural paradigms are indifferent to whether the ideas that fill them out are chosen for their credibility or otherwise tested against other available arguments, whether, in short, they are good or bad ideas. The practical use of the enthymeme that I will describe requires that the question of the quality of one's ideas and reasons be addressed throughout the invention and arrangement process. The enthymeme provides a basis for ensuring that quality of thought be measured by the potential assent of an audience understood to have equally good reasons for initially not accepting what a writer wishes to conclude. The enthymeme which students write as a first step

in composing is intended to put their conclusions into a logical relation with ideas which a dissenting audience contributes as assumptions.

The enthymeme can constitute a guide to such thinking if its parts derive from the essential variables of any rhetorical situation. These are:

1. questions at issue,
2. probable answers to those questions, or stances taken,
3. potential strategies for leading to those answers, and
4. assumptions which make the strategies work.

Among these variables, answers (2) and strategies (3) are what the *writer* is able to choose, on the basis of questions (1) and assumptions (4) shared by or derived from the writer's *audience*. (See fig. 1.) A student writer's rhetorical situation will be incomplete without all of these variables. The question at issue is defined by students' presence in a situation of disagreement which motivates the need to assert and defend their thoughts. It cannot therefore be a student's own invention, strictly speaking, but is discovered because it is the mutual invention of that student and his or her own audience. If all agree on some issue, that issue is not likely to recommend itself as a subject worth writing about. I should say here, then, that I am talking about a real audience in which students find themselves in real situations of disagreement. The process of enthymematic invention begins when students discuss ideas on which they can take stances and be confronted by questions that, to them, need answers.

The student's first compositional task, therefore, is to move from a discussion which has provoked disagreement to the formulation of a specific answer to a specific question at issue which that discussion has revealed. In discussions with a real audience, no matter what form they take, many potential issues arise, many potential answers are considered, and many potential reasons are offered to support them. From this intractable array, students should be encouraged to work toward finding an assertion which seems to need saying because articulate members of the class have demonstrated that they think otherwise. This assertion will become the first part of an enthymeme. All of the mental stages that will hereafter go into making a useful, structural enthymeme will be based on an inquiry into the student's own assertion as it conflicts with or is supported by known ideas from that student's audience—those members of the class who discussed the issue and held different stances.

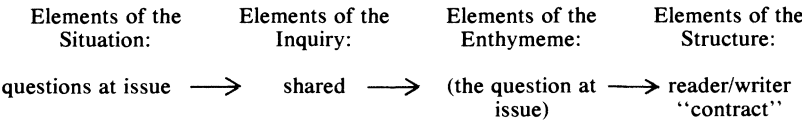
Needless to say, in the process of coming up with one enthymeme which represents a whole argument which can be made for that audience, every element of the enthymeme itself is subject to adjustment,

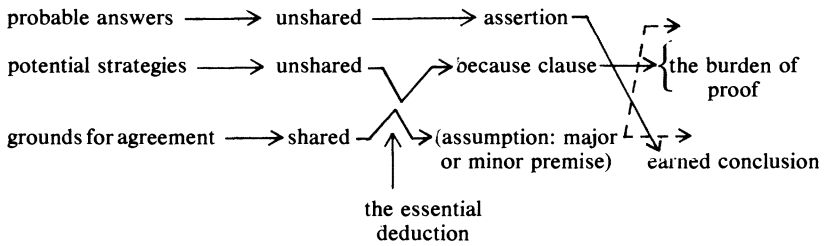
including the conclusion. The aim of composing the enthymeme is to encourage students to question their own positions until they can state them in such a way that they are no longer the pre-conditioned, un-examined responses with which they may have begun the discussions. The positions which students must take—if an enthymeme is to result—are such that they know they can defend to an audience that can be assumed to have good reasons of its own for answering the same question differently. They cannot be the conventional, or “knee jerk,” positions that students typically take when asked for “argumentative” writing and that often lead to illogical and undeveloped tirades. The object henceforth is for the student to *earn* his or her assertion.

The student’s next task is to complete the enthymeme by adding a premise, or “because clause,” to the assertion. The assertion will represent the student’s thesis. The because clause will represent the strategy, developed out of many potential strategies, which can form the basis of leading to that thesis most persuasively. By persuasively, however, I do not mean that the student is thinking about bullying or tricking the reader into a conclusion, but is thinking about how to earn that conclusion on the basis of understandings which are shared by the reader. So, in constructing the enthymeme, students are asked to write a syllogistic statement which relates two ideas and in so doing moves from an implied premise that is shared with the audience (the assumption) to a previously unshared conclusion. It is on the basis of this “essential deduction” that the specific strategy represented by the because clause is decided upon. (See fig. 1.)

Coming up with an enthymeme that creates this kind of logical connection to the audience will be the hardest part of the student’s task because, afterward, the composition of the paper itself will be guided by a process of thought that is already familiar and will hold few surprises. The enthymeme, then, cannot be seen as an end in itself; it must be evaluated according to the coherence of the paper it is capable of generating. The following diagram is intended to illustrate the relations between the elements of a student’s rhetorical situation, the enthymeme which results from it and the structure of the whole composition which results from the enthymeme.

Figure 1





The enthymeme stands in the middle of a process that begins with concern for a problem confronted in discussion and ends with the assertion of an earned conclusion to that problem at the end of a structurally coherent paper. I will describe the structural considerations in more detail shortly. Here I wish only to make the point that the enthymeme, consisting of an assertion and a because clause but implying a question at issue and an assumption, can be evaluated for its effectiveness from either direction: as an adequate response to the student's rhetorical situation and as a potential structure for generating an extended discussion in writing. Redrafting the enthymeme until it provides both of these functions is necessary, and this process can be aided by constantly applying certain criteria to trial efforts. Following discussions of issues and the students' initial efforts to respond to them with enthymemes, class time should be devoted to analyzing proposed enthymemes with their criteria as a guide, and rewriting the enthymemes accordingly.

First, the enthymeme must consist of two complete, declarative sentences, one of which is stated as the reason for the other. The assertion, as I have said, represents the thesis of the paper, although the nature of that assertion will invariably change from its first form as the student probes deeper. The assertion will always imply the question at issue to which it is an answer. The next criterion, therefore, is whether that question is in fact at issue. The assertion cannot propose to answer a question which the class (as the student's audience) did not discuss, even though they may have discussed the *subject* of the question. Nor can the assertion propose to answer a question which the class answered with one unanimous "yes" or "no." It must address, in other words, a real "stasis."<sup>4</sup> This criterion would rule out many of the theses that a student might *want* to argue but which would not result in the *need* to control the structural features of the argument. If no one shares the question, who cares *how* we get to the answer? Most of the theses that students argue when they are presented with predetermined structural paradigms, I'm afraid, would not pass this test because, in such cases,

the actual intention of the writing is to practice using a paradigm, rather than to earn a conclusion that needs earning.

Next, in order for the student to know the shared ground on which the logic of the enthymeme is built, the relations of the two parts of the enthymeme must be tested against the implied syllogism they create. Any relation between an assertion and a premise will imply a linking proposition, the logical assumption that makes the assertion “follow” from the stated premise. It is the implied premise which makes the enthymeme logical.<sup>5</sup> It must be assumable on the part of the writer’s audience, and to test this the student writer must be able to get it out in the open for examination. This requires knowing how a syllogism works and how to reconstruct, from any two stated propositions of a syllogism, the third unstated one. Syllogisms about Socrates illustrate this process as easily as statements such as this: “I know that Mary’s lamb was at the opera last night, *because* I saw Mary there.” The stated reason, of course, will seem logical only to those who already hold the (in this case obvious) unstated assumption. Student enthymemes will not be as simple as any concerning Mary or Socrates, but the principle of reconstructing the missing premise will be the same.

In order for this reconstruction to be possible, the assertion and the because clause must share one of the terms predicated by the assertion, even though those terms may be worded differently. (See fig. 3.) The implicit assumption always states the relationship between the predicated terms of the enthymeme that are not shared by the assertion and the because clause. Once it can be reconstructed as the assumption on which this particular logic depends, the question is whether the audience can be expected to agree to it without argument. This will depend entirely on the student’s knowledge of the audience; it is not the student’s prerogative to invent what is or isn’t assumable independent of what others have said on the same issue. If students find that they cannot ground what they originally intend to argue in a shared assumption, it might not be only the because clause that needs adjustment but the assertion itself. In such fashion, students are encouraged to discover that they must alter their positions under the pressure to find sharable reasons for what they believe. It is for this reason, I think, that Aristotle called rhetoric the counterpart of dialectic: its aim is the discovery of possible knowledge, not the use of knowledge for purposes of manipulation.<sup>6</sup>

Perceiving these logical relations is more difficult when the enthymeme is crowded with too many of the things that students might have to say about their ideas. Another criterion, therefore, is to make sure that the enthymeme is as precise as possible, which means that it

should not contain all of the possible qualifications, explanations, examples, definitions, and so forth that will no doubt find their place in the paper itself. The logical relations in an enthymeme will stand out if the statements are reduced to their fundamentals. Thus, the nouns should be precise and unambiguous. Imprecise terms in an enthymeme will not have been deliberated carefully by the student, and will lead to roadblocks in the paper when an assertion is suddenly made that has not been thought through to its consequences.

The verbs which predicate the terms of the two statements in the enthymeme are equally important and will make the difference between a structure which moves forward by logical stages and one which ends up repeating itself.<sup>7</sup> It is the predication in the enthymeme, more than its subject, that will determine the structural necessities of the composition. The verbs will also determine whether the enthymeme is sufficiently "narrow." As Josephine Miles has written, the "first need . . . is to talk about ideas as sentences, that is, predicating the subject, saying something about something, establishing relations. . . . There is no such thing as too large or unwieldy a subject; what the student wants to say about it is what needs estimation."<sup>8</sup> The enthymeme serves its generative function best if the verbs are transitive and dynamic. In the case of copulative verbs, the unshared terms too often produce a definition as the assumption, in which case the underlying syllogism will actually have two terms instead of three and the paper will end up going in circles. Intransitive verbs will provide no third term for the logic at all, and the student's composition will quickly run out of logical direction and resort to cataloging examples.

One final criterion for evaluating a useful enthymeme has to do with the nature of the question at issue and the kind of assertion that is constructed to argue it. We might, for the sake of simplicity, say that one can argue:

- questions of value—is it good?
- questions of policy—should it be done?
- questions of fact—what is true about it?

The answers to these questions will frequently depend on each other. If I want to argue a policy, for instance, I must already have answered, or assume the answer to, a question of value. The because clause of a "should" assertion will nearly always be a statement of fact or consequence, and the policy follows gratuitously from it on the assumption that "We should do whatever the factual condition is that doing it will lead to," on the further assumption that this condition is good. In such a

case, the argument would depend on the quality of my reasons for saying that the factual condition would result, yet I would not have included that reasoning in the enthymeme. To ensure that students take their reasoning far enough back to establish real rather than gratuitous grounds, they should address the question of fact that the other questions come down to. By conflating the assertion and the because clause, or by making the because clause the assertion and looking for a new strategy, students may have to push an initial enthymeme backwards any number of times. Policy and value statements sometimes work quite well. It is a matter of judgment, but it is generally most productive for students to revise their logic toward the facts and consequences of the issue and let the values and policies speak for themselves, as they always will. I should say here that by “statement of fact” I do not mean to imply a distinction between fact and opinion. By “fact” here I mean whatever is said to be the case and can be supported by answers to the question “What makes it true?” Thus, the assertion “Television viewing habits are responsible for declining literacy” is a statement of fact, even though it is also an opinion and only as good as the evidence that will be claimed to support it. It can be distinguished from assertions such as “Television viewing is bad for children,” or “Television should be abolished,” which are statements of value and policy, respectively, and much less likely to lead to workable enthymemes, and to structurally coherent compositions.

Figure 2

## CRITERIA FOR A STRUCTURAL ENTHYME

1. It has two parts, each of which is a declarative sentence: an *assertion* and a *because clause*.
2. The assertion proposes the *thesis* of the paper. It answers a *question at issue* for the audience.
3. The assertion and the because clause must share one predicated term. The relation between the unshared terms will provide the *assumption* on which the logic depends.
4. The implied assumption must be agreeable to the same audience who does not initially share the assertion.
5. The noun phrases should be precise and unambiguous. The grammatical relations should be direct.
6. the verbs should be transitive and dynamic.
7. The assertion should, ordinarily, answer a question of fact or consequence, rather than a question of value or policy.

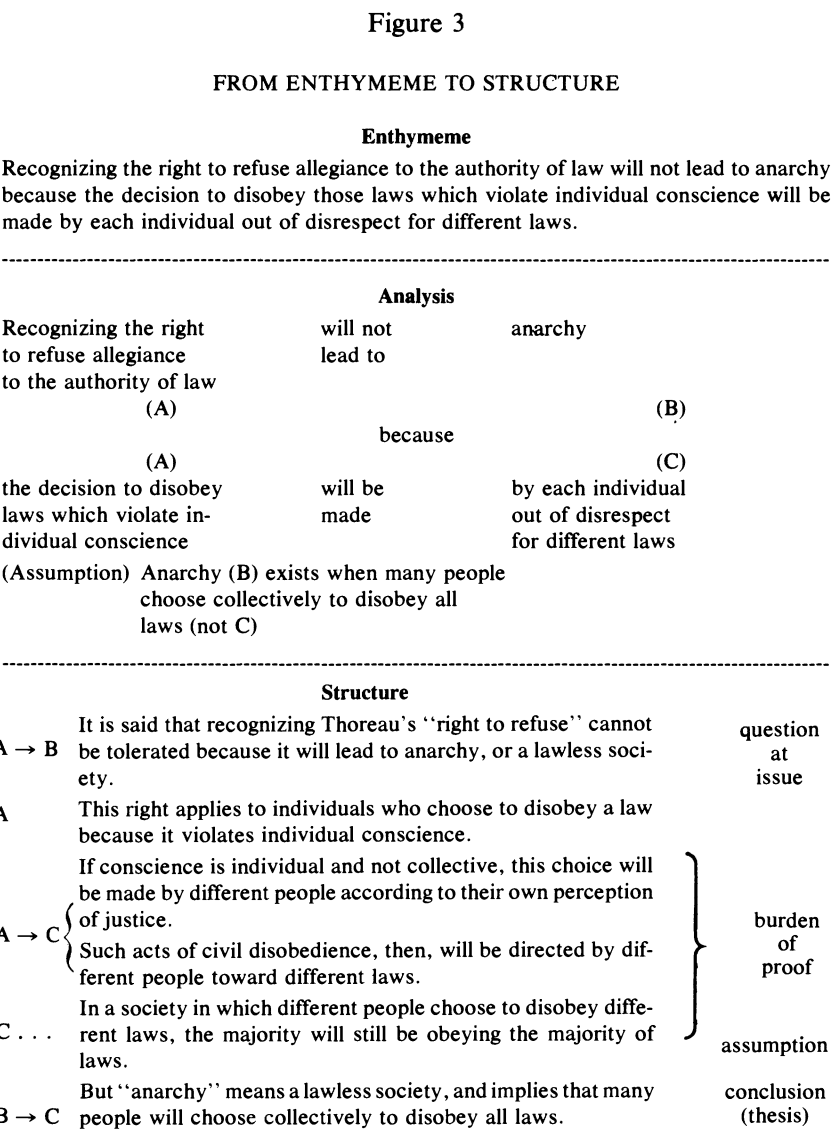


The enthymeme which fulfills all of these criteria will have been written after considerable thought about possible reasons and assumptions, and the student will have already considered valuable elements of an essay and rejected useless ones. In making such discriminations possible, no *a priori* formula can substitute, I think, for the pressure of having to find a conclusion and to earn it. Going from the enthymeme to the structure of the paper is now a matter of perceiving the structural implications of the terms in the enthymeme, and ordering them accordingly. The resulting paper will have an essentially deductive structure, but any number of amplifications, inductions, examples, citations, analogies, definitions or refutations may find a necessary place in the developing logic of that central deduction. The point of having labored over the construction of an enthymeme that satisfies the formal and rhetorical criteria we have placed on it, is so that the composition can be guided by the logical steps that are necessary and sufficient to lead up to an earned conclusion. Here again I must interject a quarrel with some methods of teaching invention and arrangement. Having discovered a thesis by various means, students are invariably told that it should be stated in the first paragraph. If many of them cannot thereafter control the structural relations and transitions in the rest of the paper, *control* them, that is, without falling back on some arbitrary paradigm, this advice may very well be the reason. Having stated their thesis at the beginning, they have no sense of destination against which to test the relevance and the order of each new thing they say. Once the thesis is stated, the pressure to earn it is off, and most students, without the artificial aid of a paradigm, will immediately digress or repeat themselves. The remedy is quite simple: save the thesis until you have earned it; consider the paper as developing by logical steps progressively *toward* it. When the thesis *can* be asserted, the paper is over. This sense of structure allows the introduction of the paper to function as a "reader/writer contract," by discussing the need for answering the question and thereby creating the particular kinds of expectations that the argument will fulfill.

Moving from an enthymeme to a structure is not simply a matter of stating and elaborating each of the three propositions of the implied syllogism. It is a matter of re-creating the relationships which hold the logic of the enthymeme together. Thus, students should consider the argument as progressing from term to term in the enthymeme according to the predications it asserts. There is no prescribed order in which the terms must be taken up; every enthymeme will suggest a different dynamic of ideas. But students who have worked through to a satisfactory enthymeme will perceive these relationships, better than they will

do if told by some formula how the parts must be arranged independent of the ideas.

The following figure illustrates how an enthymeme can be analyzed for the purpose of discovering the essential structure of the paper it is intended to generate.



Since this is not what the “right to refuse” means, it can still be recognized without leading to anarchy.

The predicated terms, marked A, B, and C, are the elements of the logic, and the structure which results is no more than the reassembly of these terms into a developing order. The result is an outline, but it is an outline of *ideas* and not an outline of subjects. Once a student has been able to think through all the parts of an enthymeme, the structure will develop as a natural consequence of it—even though working out the details will require perceiving its connections intuitively: no prescribed order of relating A, B, and C will suffice. Every enthymeme will imply its own structure of ideas. Writing the complete paper, then, is a matter of sticking to this plan, developing these ideas, and adding definitions, explanations, examples, quotations, and refutations as the need for them arises. Whatever the students might wish to say ought to “belong” somewhere in this structure. The structure is available to use as a guide and as a test for digressions: if each new part of the paper does not advance us toward the conclusion by this strategy, it does not belong in *this* essay.

The example above assumes, of course, that the rhetorical criteria for the enthymeme have been met. It cannot be judged a good or bad enthymeme apart from the particular rhetorical situation that prompted it. The class, as audience, has discussed the issue and come up with different stances, one of which has provided this student with her own position: someone has argued that civil disobedience cannot be tolerated because it will lead to anarchy in society. In wanting to defend civil disobedience, this student has had to discover a position and a strategy that will meet that audience half way considering what its reasons have been. Her paper does not pretend to take on the entire issue of civil disobedience, but tries to do justice to some small part of that issue which she can discuss rationally with that audience. Her paper will not be the end of the matter, for her or for her readers, but it is an attempt to think clearly and directly about it, rather than to remain content with the muddled thoughts that always attend real questions in dispute. The example illustrates also that in attempting to find the right structure for a paper, the student must continue to rethink the logic of the enthymeme: in the fifth statement of this “outline,” this student faces the problem of justifying a controversial statement, the probability of which is necessary to her logic. The enthymeme, treated as a logical and rhetorical roadmap, is not intended to solve all of the problems of thoughtful writing, but, in part, to disclose some of those problems to students who would otherwise skip over them mentally, as we all do. When the logic is

on paper, in this manipulable form, the problems come to our attention and we thereby learn, I hope, that thinking is not a rule bound enterprise but an open and imaginative one.

This method, as you have gathered, is anti-formulaic, even though the enthymeme itself is a form. It is a form of thought, however, and not a form of composition; it does not appear in the paper at all, as such. The actual structure of the paper cannot be prescribed in advance but must develop out of the logical necessities of the particular ideas measured against the ideas of a particular audience.

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates notes that Lysias' speech begins with its conclusion, and he asks whether Lysias has "a really congruent reason for stating his second point in the second place" or whether instead he "swam (on his back!) upstream against the current of his own discourse." Socrates asks instead for an organic arrangement between the parts of a composition—not "boldly setting down whatever happened to come into his head." This sense of structure seems to require two considerations, for Plato: first, it follows from a careful examination of one's knowledge to decide whether it is warranted. The second consideration is whether the purpose of the composition is, like Lysias' speech, to make an unwarranted idea go over with an audience who is a passive receptacle, or whether, as in the case of the dialectical rhetoric of Plato and Aristotle, one's ideas develop in relation to an active audience *with* whom one attempts to discover shared grounds for new knowledge that cannot be learned in any other way. The enthymeme, as I have tried to illustrate, can answer at least some of Plato's objections to sophistic rhetoric.

We must recognize, however, that the enthymeme can also be reduced to an empty formulaic exercise, just as can all other methods that may have been created to meet these same ideals. The enthymeme was used by Aristotle to address the human problem that truth is not available to us about all of the questions we deliberate, and it represented the dynamics of the search for real knowledge that can be shared without the systematic perfection of pure reason. With that in mind, the enthymeme can be a constant adventure for students and for teachers, both of whom must, in using it, acknowledge the uncertainty it entails. The knowledge that it requires us to search out is of the contingent, probable sort. Perhaps this means that by such a method we are also chancing to teach students something about what knowledge is: not a thing that is always necessarily all true or all false, or for which easy means of knowing can be counted on, but more, as Wayne Booth has said, a matter of degrees of conviction measured against the quality of the reasons that ask for assent.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

1. See, e.g., "Towards an Epistemology of Composition," *Journal of Advanced Composition* 2 (1982), 1-10; "Freshman English: In Whose Service?," *College English* 44 (September, 1982), 15-20.

2. For a discussion of the enthymeme from this perspective, in relation to the whole of Aristotle's philosophy of rhetoric, see William A. Grimaldi, S. J., *Studies in the Philosophy of Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1972), esp. chapter 2.

3. To my knowledge, the first use of the enthymeme as the structural basis for whole compositions was developed for the composition program of the Rhetoric Department, University of California at Berkeley, and subsequently made available in the textbook *The Craft of Writing* by William J. Brandt, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969). I am indebted to my mentors and colleagues in this program for prompting many of my thoughts in this essay.

4. See my "On the Difference Between Invention and Pre-Writing," *Freshman English News* 10 (Fall, 1981), 4-14.

5. "Assumption," as used here, may be either the major or the minor premise of the reconstructed syllogism, whichever is not stated in the enthymeme itself. It is related to what Stephen Toulmin has called the "backing." See his *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), esp. pp. 94-107.

6. See Grimaldi, chapter 1.

7. See Lawrence D. Green, "Enthymemic Invention and Structural Predication," *College English* 41 (February, 1980), 623-34. Green's sophisticated discussion of this method goes beyond my general purpose here; my essay could well be regarded as an introduction to his.

8. Josephine Miles, *Working Out Ideas: Predication and Other Uses of Language* (Berkeley: Bay Area Writing Project Curriculum Publication #5, 1979), 14-16.

9. See esp., "The Uncritical American: or, Nobody's From Missouri Any More," *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 63-75.



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