

WORKSHOP: ARGUMENTS

1. (4 minutes.) Carefully read the introduction. Underline:
 - (a) The topic: what is this paper about?
 - (b) The motive: what question or problem does the paper formulate?
 - (c) Any key terms: what words name important concepts for the argument?
 - (d) The thesis: what is the paper arguing?
2. (5 minutes; the writer should take listen and notes, rather than speak.) Discuss the proposed argument: How could the thesis be more clearly stated or more focused? Is the thesis arguable, or would any reader agree? What does making the argument allow us to understand about the text that we couldn't understand before? Use what you have noticed about motive and key terms.
3. (5 minutes; all speak.) Think about the *kinds of evidence* that the writer needs. How might the introduction best suggest the direction of the paper's analysis? Help the writer with your ideas for the strongest evidence—and the best revisions of their argument.

GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Focus your comments on how the writer's writing *works* and give specific suggestions about how to make it stronger. Try always to give a reason: "This term was unclear to me *because....*" General praise or criticism is not useful ("this was good" or "I didn't like it"). Pointing out typos or talking about style is not useful. Writers can do their own copy-editing, but they need readers to help them see whether their argument is clearly stated, surprising, and convincing. Readers should try to show the writer what parts of the introduction develop a focused interpretive claim. Do not hesitate to say: "I don't think this sentence adds anything here *because....*"

Writers: forbid yourself the statement "What I meant was...." Take your readers' comments as evidence of what your writing conveys. On the other hand, you are the writer: take what your readers tell you into account, then revise according to your own best sense of how to make your paper compelling.

(If you use specific phrasing or particular ideas from a classmate in your paper, cite them.)