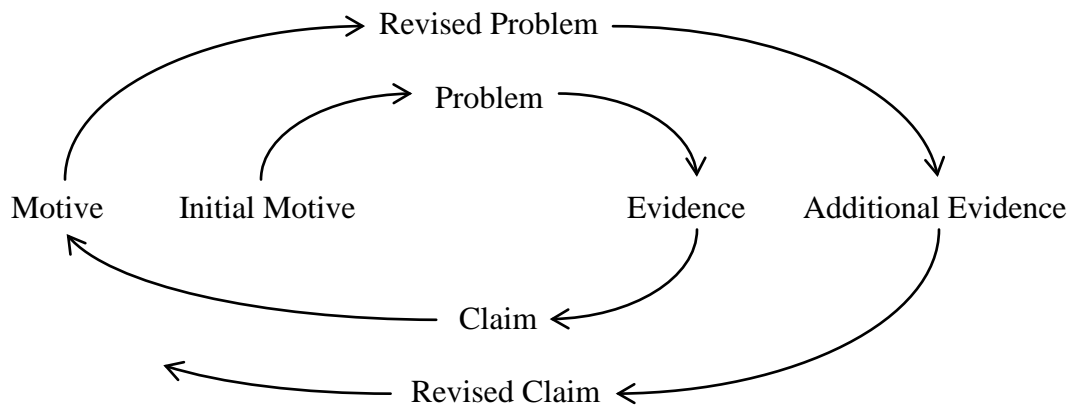


## RHETORICAL TERMS: THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENT



**Initial motive** – This is the reason why you first became interested in your topic, and the excitement and curiosity it generates should be deep enough to carry your writing to completion. Since the cause of this early interest may be idiosyncratic or deeply personal, it may not engage the members of your audience who could have different concerns. As you begin to compose your essay, your initial motive should be revised in a way that emphasizes how your topic appeals most broadly to members of your intended audience.

**Problem** – While a motive captures why we are interested in a topic as a whole, a problem is a specific question for which we don't yet know the answer. Attempting to resolve a problem gives direction to your writing process. Like the initial motive, the first expression of your writing problem will likely be personal or idiosyncratic and therefore require revision in order to interest the members of your intended audience.

**Evidence** – If your argument engages a genuine problem—one for which we do not yet know the answer—your evidence will help you produce an answer, thereby generating new knowledge. It is important to remember that the meaning of your evidence is not self-evident. The facts, concepts, theories, statistics, definitions, &c. that you cite will need to be interpreted and analyzed in order to show your reader *how* they provide a solution to your writing problem.

**Claim** – Careful analysis of your evidence should produce a claim or a stance that somehow resolves your initial writing problem. The strongest claims are contestable—meaning that someone could reasonably disagree with them—and surprising. The best way to produce a surprising claim is by beginning the writing process with a genuine problem. If your reader does not yet know the answer to the problem that frames your essay, then any persuasively argued solution will be a surprise.

**Motive** – While your initial motive for exploring your topic may be personal, the one that emerges in your writing needs to appeal as widely as possible to your intended readers. After all, the persuasiveness of your analysis won't matter much if you fail at the outset to convince your audience that reading on will be worth their time. Early in your essay you should take care to

suggest why the topic you will explore is important and valuable for the field in which you are writing.

**Revised Problem** – While a *question* may raise an issue that is of little consequence or that only you care about, a *problem* expresses an uncertainty that is broadly meaningful. When you revise your initial problem as you begin composing your essay, your primary focus should be on emphasizing how it is a problem not just for you, but for the members of your audience (or their discipline). Problems are most often expressed at the beginning of essays by articulating a stable belief or set of beliefs and then presenting complicating evidence which calls that established position into question, thereby alerting the reader to a problematic gap in his or her understanding. To emphasize the significance of the problem, the complicating evidence is often followed by a sentence that directly expresses what is at stake in its resolution.

**Additional Evidence** – Because your initial claim was likely based on only a small portion of the available evidence, you will want to consider additional facts and ideas in order to ensure that that claim withstands scrutiny from your audience. In examining more evidence you not only want to pay attention to reasons and data that support your position, but also to complicating evidence which calls that position into question. Accounting for counterevidence may force you to revise or qualify your main claim, but it is essential for bolstering your credibility and producing the most persuasive argument possible.

**Revised Claim** – To ensure that your main claim will hold up under the scrutiny of skeptical readers, you must become a skeptical reader of your own work. Considering potential objections and complicating evidence will allow you to revise or qualify the main claim of your argument in a way that fends off these challenges to your position before your readers get a chance to formulate them.