

# What to do with a ba in history

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The Value of a Liberal Arts Education When you see the word “college”, what comes to mind? For most of you, you probably immediately think of partying, drinking, and meeting new people. Those who choose to go to college will have the opportunity to experience the social life, but what you choose to study can control your future. In “How to Get a Real Education at College” by Scott Adams and “What Do You Do with a B. A. in History” by Ken Saxon, they agree that college is worth going to but they have different outlooks on what to do with that college education.

Scott Adams believes in the concept of “B students”, which are just average students, and thinks they should study entrepreneurship because he has personal experience in this major. He is against the idea of “B students” studying liberal arts and finds this major to be useless for them in the real world. Ken Saxon has completely opposite views. Saxon believes that a liberal arts education is very valuable because with this education, you can do anything you want. He also argues that the skills you learn in these classes will help you become a better person and will prepare you for whatever you decide to do.

Although both Adams and Saxon relate to their audiences and form strong ethos through their personal examples, Adams fails to be as convincing as Saxon because Saxon uses more objective evidence, is open-minded, and uses a more inspiring tone which establishes strong pathos. In “How to Get a Real Education at College”, Scott Adams does a fair job of establishing ethos. He uses his business experience in college as the basis of his evidence. For example, he worked at the Coffee House as the minister

offinance, designed a plan to become student manager of his dormitory, and even started a soccer club (Adams 528).

His anecdotes give him credibility because he has experience in the field of entrepreneurship, but he lacked objective evidence. If he included more statistics or expert testimonies, then it would make his argument more convincing and appealing to the readers. At the beginning of the article Adams stated, “ I speak from experience because I majored in entrepreneurship... ” (527). This makes him seem like he knows what he is talking about, but this statement also worked against him and makes him seem one-sided.

He is biased toward an education in entrepreneurship. This is evident when he wrote “ some of my peers were taking courses in art history so they’d be prepared to remember what art looked like just in case anyone asked” (528). This shows he thinks other majors, especially liberal arts, are a joke. He doesn’t think people need to study liberal arts because what you learn in these classes is common sense. Although Adams lacked objective evidence and came across as bias, he made his article very appropriate for his audience.

With his audience being college students, it is easy to persuade them because some of those students don’t really know what to study and entrepreneurship could seem more appealing after reading this article. Adams related to his audience but his sarcastic tone and snide comments were a turn off. He wrote many things that discredited the majority of students, or as he calls them, the “ B students” (527). For example, at the

end of the essay he said, “ Remember, children are our future, and the majority are B students. If that doesn’t scare you, it probably should” (529).

Adams said this to be humorous but it can be easily misinterpreted as rude and snide. He also talked about how easy it is to become an entrepreneur and how it doesn’t even take real knowledge to be successful. When he was talking about selecting a new leader for the Coffee House he stated, “ I pointed out that my friend-the soon-to-be fired bartender-was tall, good looking and so gifted at b. s. that he’d be a perfect leader” (528). This statement makes it seem like to be successful in business it’s all about being sly and tricky, making Adams appear less sincere.

Scott Adams was convincing in some ways but his sarcastic tone, lack of evidence, and bias hurt his overall appeal to his audience. Similar to Adams, in “ What Do You Do with a B. A. in History? ” Ken Saxon manages to appeal to his audience in his speech by using personal experiences. His speech is for freshman students at UCSB and the evidence he uses relates specifically to this audience. He gives lots of examples of liberal arts classes and how those classes helped him develop life skills.

For example, Saxon says, “ from studying philosophy, I learned that abstract theories were intellectually interesting to me, but not so satisfying. Turns out, I’m a doer, an entrepreneur” (525). Saxon also talks about qualities he looks for in people when hiring employees, these include, “ initiative and leadership, work ethic, communications skills, and emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills” (523). These are skills that you don’t necessarily learn in a certain major, but you learn by experience, and Saxon learned these qualities by taking liberal arts classes.

Unlike Adams, Saxon used a variety of evidence. He uses many personal experiences and also uses objective evidence. One piece of effective objective evidence is the commencement speech by Steve Jobs. In this speech to Stanford, Jobs stated that a calligraphy class helped him create “the first computer with beautiful typography” (524). This helps make Saxon’s argument convincing because Steve Jobs was a very successful man and this example reemphasizes Saxon’s claim that we cannot predict our future, so we should take some liberal arts classes.

If Steve Jobs never took this calligraphy class, who knows if Apple would be the same as it is today. He also uses the example of his friend who went to med school to later find out he hated what he was doing so he studied business instead (522). This example shows that not giving liberal arts classes a chance, can lead to you wasting your time because you haven’t discovered what you truly want to do for your career yet. Another way that Ken Saxon is convincing in his article is by being open-minded and by using an encouraging tone that establishes strong pathos.

He isn’t forceful with his claim even though he feels strongly about his argument. He is just saying that college is a time for experimentation so, what the heck, why not just take some liberal art classes? He even says, “there will likely be no other time in your life when it will be easier to try so many interesting things” (522). He is encouraging us to just take a few liberal art classes and give it a chance. Saxon also makes some good points when he discusses the expensive price of college and feeling the pressure to choose a major in which we will get repaid in the future (522).

Saxon's argument to this is " how can you be sure you know where the better paying fields are going to be in five years? " (523). The point he is trying to make is if you spend all your time in college focusing in one specific major, what happens if that area in your career field goes down the drain in a couple years? In the closing paragraph Saxon says, " Think forward. In 15 or 20 years, many of you will be buried in responsibilities- work, family...this opportunity will be gone before you know it" (527). Saxon is stressing the point that college is only a few years of our lives so we might as well make the most of it.

This " can do" attitude and inspiring tone made his article more convincing and more enjoyable to read than Adam's. All in all, Ken Saxon's argument that we should take liberal arts classes was more convincing than Scott Adams' claim that we should just study entrepreneurship. Both of them clearly understood their audience and use effective personal examples, but Saxon's use of objective evidence and an inspiring tone led to his speech being more persuasive. If a group of students were to choose what to study after reading these two articles, a large portion of them would choose to take some liberal arts classes.