

*They could do it because they believed they could.* Vergil 70 - 19 B.C. Roman

## A Brief Guide to Writing Argumentative Essays

The art of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire. Many people might think that if one simply has an opinion, one can argue it effectively, and these folks are always surprised when others don't agree with them because their logic seems so correct. Additionally, writers of argumentation often forget that their primary purpose in an argument is to "win" it--to sway the reader to accept their point of view. It is easy to name call, easy to ignore the point of view or research of others, and extremely easy to accept one's own opinion as gospel, even if the writer has not checked his or her premise in a couple of years, or, as is the case for many young writers, never questioned the beliefs inherited from others.

Want to know what you think about something? Then write an argumentative essay. To be fair, however, you'll find that one of the first things you must do is become an expert on the issue. When you pick a topic, you should avoid writing about issues that cannot be won, no matter how strongly you might feel about them. The five hottest topics of our time seem to be gun control, abortion, capital punishment, freedom of speech, and probably the most recent, euthanasia, or the right to die. If possible, avoid writing about these topics because they are either impossible to "win," or because your instructor is probably sick of reading about them and knows all the pros and cons by heart (this could put you at a serious disadvantage). The topics may be fine reading material, however, because most people are somewhat aware of the problems and can then concentrate on understanding the method of argument itself. But care should be taken that if you read one side, you also read the other. Far too many individuals only read the side that they already believe in. These issues cannot be won for good reason: each touches on matters of faith and beliefs that for many people are unshakable and deeply private.

### Features

1. So, what *do* you write about? Pick a well-defined, controversial issue. Readers should understand what the issue is and what is at stake. The issue must be arguable, as noted above. After stating your thesis, you will need to discuss the issue in depth so that your reader will understand the problem fully.
2. A clear position taken by the writer. In your thesis sentence, state what your position is. You do not need to say: "I believe that we should financially support the space station." Using the first person weakens your argument. Say "Funding for the space station is imperative to maintain America's competitive edge in the global economy." The thesis can be modified elsewhere in the essay if you need to qualify your position, but avoid hedging in your thesis.
3. A convincing argument. An argumentative essay does not merely assert an opinion; it presents an argument, and that argument must be backed up by data that persuades readers that the opinion is valid. This data consists of facts, statistics, the testimony of others through personal interviews and questionnaires or through articles and books, and examples. The writer of an argumentative essay should seek to use educated sources that

are nonbiased, and to use them fairly. It is therefore best to avoid using hate groups as a source, although you can use them briefly as an example of the seriousness of the problem. Talk shows fall into the same category as they are frequently opinionated or untrue.

4. A reasonable tone. Assume that your reader will disagree with you or be skeptical. It is important, therefore, that your tone be reasonable, professional, and trustworthy. By anticipating objections and making concessions, you inspire confidence and show your good will.

5. Write the outline, rough draft, and the final paper. Then rewrite it to make it sound as professional as possible.

To analyze something, divide it into parts. Since you are writing about a problem, the body of your paper might look something like this:

- I. General introduction of the problem. Thesis statement which states your opinion.**
- II. History of the problem (including, perhaps, past attempts at a solution).**
- III. Extent of the problem (who is affected; how bad is it, etc.). Sources needed**
- IV. Repercussion of the problem if not solved. Sources needed. You should have led up to a conclusion that your argument is sound. Pull it all together by connecting your argument with the facts. Anticipate objections and make concessions.**
- V. Conclusion: Restatement of thesis and summary of main ideas.**

#### **STRATEGIES:**

- **Think of the questions posed in the assignment** while you are reading and researching. Determine
  - facts
  - any sources that will help you determine their reliability (as well as for further reference)
  - what prejudices lie in the argument or values that color the facts or the issue
  - what you think of the author's argument
- **List out facts;** consider their importance: prioritize, edit, sequence, discard, etc. Ask yourself "What's missing?"
- **What are the "hot buttons"** of the issue?  
List possible emotions/emotional reactions and recognize them for later use

#### **Start writing a draft!**

Start as close as possible to your reading/research  
Do not concern yourself with grammar or spelling

- **Write your first paragraph**
  - Introduce the topic

- Inform the reader of your point of view!
- Entice the reader to continue with the rest of the paper!
- Focus on three main points to develop
- **Establish flow from paragraph to paragraph**
- **Keep your voice active**
- **Quote sources** to establish authority
- **Stay focused** on your point of view throughout the essay
- **Focus on logical arguments**
- **Don't lapse into summary**  
in the development--wait for the conclusion
- **Conclusion**
  - **Summarize, then conclude, your argument**
  - **Refer** to the first paragraph/opening statement as well as the main points
    - does the conclusion restate the main ideas?
    - reflect the succession and importance of the arguments
    - logically conclude their development?
- **Edit/rewrite the first paragraph**  
to better telegraph your development and conclusion.
- **Re-read your paper**  
with a fresh mind and a sharp pencil
  - **Ask yourself:**  
Does this make sense? Am I convinced?  
Will this convince a reader?  
Will they understand my values, and agree with my facts?
  - **Edit, correct, and re-write** as necessary
  - **Check spelling and grammar!**
  - **Have a friend read it** and respond to your argument.  
Were they convinced?
  - **Revise** if necessary
  - **Turn in the paper**
  - **Celebrate a job well done,**  
with the confidence that you have done your best.

#### **How to respond to criticism:**

Consider criticism as a test of developing your powers of persuasion.  
Try not to take it personally.

**If your facts are criticized,** double check them, and then cite your sources.

**If your values are criticized,** sometimes we need agree "to disagree". Remember: your success in persuading others assumes that the other person is open to being persuaded!

#### **Fear: If you are not used to communicating,**

especially in writing, you may need to overcome fear on several levels. Writing, unlike unrecorded speech, is a permanent record for all to see, and the "context" is not as important as in speech where context "colors" the words. For example: your readers do not see you, only your words. They do not know what you look like, where you live, who you are.

## **Hopefully in school, and class, we have a safe place**

to practice both the art of writing and of persuasion. Then later, when we are in our communities, whether work, church, neighborhoods, and even families, we can benefit from this practice.

### **Persuasion also has another dimension:**

it is built with facts, which illustrate conclusions. Of course, this means you need to know what you are talking about, and cannot be lazy with your facts, or you will not succeed in convincing anyone. This shows another level of fear: Fear of making a mistake that will make your argument or persuasion meaningless. Since you are writing, and the words are on paper for all to see, you need to work to make sure your facts are in order.

You now know how to write the body of an argumentative essay. In the next two sections of this unit you will learn how to write an introduction and a conclusion.

Introductions are very important. The introduction gives the reader his/her first impression of the text. The first impression that you are aiming to give the reader is of a high-quality argumentative text written in a professional, academic style.

### **Task 1: The four parts of an introduction**

A simple introduction to an argumentative assignment has four parts. Read the following description of the parts. Then circle the sentences in the introduction above which cover each part and write the number for each part in the margin next to it, e.g. for the first part draw a circle around the sentence(s) that introduce(s) the topic and write "1" in the margin next to it.

1. Introduces the topic
2. States why the topic is important
3. States that there is a difference of opinion about this topic
4. Describes how the assignment will be structured and clearly states the writer's main premise

### **Task 2: Ordering sentences in an introduction**

Now put the following sentences into the correct order. They make up the introduction to an argumentative essay about the issue of whether Australia should become a republic.

- a. As a result, the issue is a very controversial one and has attracted a lot of debate.
- b. It will then put forward a number of reasons why Australia should change to a republican form of government.
- c. The question of whether we maintain the monarchy is not merely a legal detail but is intrinsically linked to the way we perceive ourselves as a distinct nation of people with its own identity and culture.
- d. Since the time of federation, Australia has been a constitutional monarchy with the Queen of the United Kingdom as its head of state.
- e. This essay will consider some of the arguments for maintaining the monarch

as head of state and will outline some of the problems with this position.

- f. However, today many Australians are questioning whether this form of government is still relevant or appropriate and are suggesting that we move towards the establishment of a republic.

## CONCLUSIONS:

Conclusions are just as important as introductions. The conclusion closes the essay and tries to close the issue. The aim is to convince the reader that your essay has covered all the most important arguments about the issue and that your main premise is the best position on the issue. You should *not* present any new arguments in your conclusion.

Many students find it difficult to write a conclusion. By this time they may have done so much work on the body of the essay that they just want to finish the essay off as quickly as possible and so they write a rushed and badly written conclusion. But the conclusion is the last part of the essay that your reader will see. Spend some time on carefully writing the conclusion so that you give your reader a good final impression of your essay.

### Task 1: The three parts of a conclusion

A simple introduction to an argumentative assignment has three parts. Read the following description of the parts. Then circle the sentences in the conclusion above which cover each part and write the number for each part in the margin next to it, e.g. for the first part draw a circle around the sentence(s) that restate(s) the main premise and write "1" in the margin next to it.

The three parts to a conclusion:

1. Restates the main premise
2. Presents one or two general sentences which accurately summarize your arguments which support the main premise
3. Provides a general warning of the consequences of not following the premise that you put forward and/or a general statement of how the community will benefit from following that premise

### Task 2: Ordering sentences in a conclusion

Now, put the following sentences into the correct order. They make up the conclusion to another argumentative essay. The main premise of this essay is that the government should spend more money on childcare places for the children of parents who study or work.

- a. If we fail to meet our obligations in this area, we will be sacrificing our present and future well-being merely in order to appease out-dated notions of family life and to achieve short-term financial savings.
- b. In conclusion, it is essential that we support the nation's parents and children by funding more childcare places.
- c. Only in this way can we provide the valuable learning environments that

young Australians need while, at the same time, utilising the skills of all productive members of our society.

- d. The entire national community will then be enriched economically, socially and culturally.

### Task 3: The three parts of a conclusion (again)

Print out the [answer](#) to task 2. Then circle the sentences which cover each of the three parts of argumentative essay conclusions and write the number for each part in the margin next to it, just as you did for the conclusion to the marine parks essay in [Task 1](#).

## Structure your argument similarly to the following:

- I. **Introduction** - Give background or perhaps an illustrative example to show the significance of the subject or the nature of the controversy. Consider stating the conclusion of your argument here as the thesis of your essay.
- II. **Refutation** - Give a brief statement of a refutation of the opposing view(s) to make your reader aware that you have considered but rejected it (them) for good reasons. This refutation may be more appropriately placed last, just before your conclusion, or even interspersed at effective locations throughout the essay. You must choose the best location.
- III. **Presentation of your argument** - Throughout the body of your essay you should build your case one point at a time, perhaps devoting one paragraph to the defense of each of your premises, or setting forth your evidence in separate, meaningful categories.

**Conclusion** - After all your evidence has been presented and/or your premises defended, pull your whole argument together in the last paragraph by showing how the evidence you have presented provides sufficient grounds for accepting your conclusion. You may also add here some conventional device to finish your essay, such as a prediction, a new example, a reference to the example with which you began (now seen in a new light) etc.

## Debatable and non-debatable statements

An argumentative essay is built around a specific statement (or main premise) that is *debatable* within the field in which you are studying. In other words, at the centre of an argumentative essay is a statement with which your readers may disagree. Your essay will need to support that statement in a manner that convinces your readers of its truth.

To begin this unit of work on argumentative essays we will learn the difference between debatable and non-debatable statements

**Debatable statements** = Statements with which other people *might* or *might not* agree . These are sometimes called "arguments", "assertions", "propositions" or "premises".  
*eg. Solar energy is the best way of meeting Australia's energy needs in the 21st century*

**Non-debatable statements** = Statements with which *no-one* would normally disagree or argue. These are sometimes called "facts".  
*eg. Coal and oil are the main sources of energy in Australia in the 20th century*

### Task 1

Which of the following statements are debatable and which are non-debatable? If the statement is debatable, put a tick in the box next to the word "debatable". If the statement is non-debatable, put a tick in the box next to the word "non-debatable". You will need to print out the page.

1. Computers and automation increase unemployment  
 debatable  
 non-debatable
2. Smoking is harmful to people's health  
 debatable  
 non-debatable
3. Plants produce oxygen that the world needs to sustain life  
 debatable  
 non-debatable
4. Australia has some of the most venomous snakes in the world  
 debatable  
 non-debatable
5. A good education is necessary for a successful and happy life  
 debatable  
 non-debatable

### Task 2

Now write a debatable and a non-debatable statement about each of the following topics:

1. Alcohol

2. Television
3. Public transport
4. The Australian education system
5. The Prime Minister

## Providing support for debatable statements (or premises)

You now know that debatable statements are not statements of fact but are statements or premises with which other people may or may not agree. When you are writing an argumentative essay your aim is to make your readers agree with your debatable statements or premises. You need to convince your readers of the value or truth of your premises. But by themselves, they are not convincing - they need support.

In this section, you will learn how to provide supporting statements for your premises. (We will use the term "premise" from now on for any debatable statement or assertion in your argumentative essay). You will also learn how to use connectives to link these statements to each other and to the premise.

### Example 1

**Premise:** Marijuana should be legal.

**Supporting statement 1:** It is less harmful to people's health than alcohol.

**Supporting statement 2:** A very large percentage of the population uses it.

Both supporting statements provide information that helps prove or support the premise. We can use connectives to link these statements together:

### Example 2

**Premise:** Marijuana should be legal.

**Supporting statement 1:** *Firstly*, it is less harmful to people's health than alcohol.

**Supporting statement 2:** *In addition*, a very large percentage of the population uses it.

*Firstly* tells the reader that this is the first supporting statement. (There are no other formal connectives that can be used in this place. It is, however, acceptable

to have no connective here)

*In addition* tells the reader that this is an extra supporting statement. Other connectives that you could use here are *Furthermore*, *Moreover* and *Secondly*.

## Task 1

The following premises (P) have one supporting statement (SS1). Rewrite them adding a second supporting statement (SS2). Also use connectives for the first and second supporting statements

### **Immigration**

(P) A strong immigration program is necessary in Australia

(SS1) The population is too small for sustained economic growth

(SS2)

### **Smoking**

(P) Smoking should be banned in restaurants and pubs.

(SS1) It will help people to give up this unhealthy habit.

(SS2)

### **Freeways**

(P) The government should build more freeways instead of public transport.

(SS1) It keeps traffic off residential streets.

(SS2)

### **Public Transport**

(P) The government should build more public transport instead of freeways.

(SS1) It provides cheap transport to people who can't afford cars.

(SS2)

## **Using connectives and paragraphs in a larger argumentative text**

In this section you will learn how to organise supporting statements or arguments in a paragraph. You will learn that it is important to use connectives to list your arguments and to signal the relations between them.

Read the following text carefully

### **Childcare**

The government should provide more financial assistance to parents who use

childcare. Childcare centres may assist children in their early development. They give children an opportunity to mix with other children and to develop social skills at an early age. Parents and children need to spend some time apart. Children become less dependent on their parents and parents themselves are less stressed and more effective care-givers when there are periods of separation. Parents who cannot go to work because they don't have access to childcare facilities cannot contribute to the national economy. They are not able to utilise their productive skills and do not pay income tax. Government support for childcare services assists individual families and is important for the economic well-being of the whole nation.

**Task 1: The main thesis, supporting arguments and conclusion.**

This text consists of *1 main thesis*, *3 supporting arguments* and *1 conclusion*.

Print this page out and use a highlighter or pen to answer the following questions:

**a. What is the main thesis?**

Circle or highlight the main thesis. Then write "main thesis" in the margin next to it.

**b. What are the three supporting arguments?**

Circle or highlight each of the three supporting arguments. Then write "argument 1", "argument 2" and "argument 3" next to each one. (Note: each of these consists of more than one sentence)

**c. What is the conclusion?**

Circle or highlight the conclusion and write "conclusion" in the margin next to it

**Task 2: Adding information to relevant arguments**

The following three sentences each add further information to the three supporting arguments. Your task is to add the sentences to the text. You will first need to work out which of the three supporting arguments they relate to.

- a. Recent studies indicate that the parent-child relationship can be improved by the use of high-quality childcare facilities.
- b. A whole range of learning occurs in childcare centres.
- c. Non-working parents can become a drain on the tax system through dependent spouse and other rebates.

**Task 3: Connectives for listing arguments.**

You have seen that we can use different connectives to list the supporting arguments in the text. These listing connectives are:

<b>Firstly</b>	This can be used for the first supporting argument
<b>Secondly</b>	These can be used for any further supporting arguments (except, of course, for "Secondly" which can only be used for the second)
<b>Furthermore</b>	

<b>Moreover</b>	
<b>In addition</b>	
<b>Finally</b>	This can be used for the last supporting argument. Note: this is not a concluding connective and also you can use "Furthermore", "Moreover" or "In addition" for the last argument if you wish

Mark the beginning of the three supporting arguments with connectives from the above list

#### Task 4: Concluding connectives

Three common concluding connectives are:

<b>In conclusion</b>	These all carry roughly the same meaning. They should be used to indicate that you are making final statements that cover all the supporting arguments in a very general way
<b>In summary</b>	
<b>Thus</b>	

Mark the conclusion of your argument with a concluding connective.

#### Task 5: In fact / Indeed

These connectives have almost the same meaning and both can be used in the following situations:

- To connect a more detailed statement with a preceding general statement  
**Example:** Today is very warm. *In fact* (or *Indeed*) it is 35 degrees Celsius
- To connect a statement which is more factual and exact with a preceding statement that is more debatable and general  
**Example:** The internet is very popular in Australia. *Indeed* (or *In fact*), Australia has the highest proportion of Internet users per head of population of any country in the world.

Find three places in the text where you could use "In fact" or "Indeed".

#### Task 6 Paragraphs

The structure of the text is now well marked by connectives so that the reader can clearly identify the main thesis, supporting arguments and conclusions.

You can also use paragraphs to mark the structure of the text so that it is even more clear and easy to read.

## Analyzing Argument

Aristotle hoped that mankind would embrace the logic of the syllogism and the enthymeme for making arguments. While he recognized the need for, and importance of, emotional appeals, he claimed that the affairs of mankind should be handled through logic. You will recognize the syllogism as the old "fluffy is a mammal" argument. It goes like this:

All cats are mammals.  
Fluffy is a cat.  
Therefore, fluffy is a mammal.

The enthymeme is the rhetorical syllogism, in which part of the logical sequence is left unstated. For example:

Some politicians are corrupt.  
Therefore, Senator Jones could be corrupt.

Edward P. J. Corbett described the difference between syllogism and enthymeme this way: "[T]he syllogism leads to a necessary conclusion from universally true premises but the enthymeme leads to a tentative conclusion from probable premises. In dealing contingent human affairs, we cannot always discover or confirm what truth is."

The problem with Aristotle's logic (concerning his desire for logic) is that argument by the syllogism is often deadly dull. Humans are passionate creatures whose hearts and minds are moved with appeals to emotion (pathos), character (ethos), as well as logic (logos). The rhetorician must decide the proper balance of these appeals in the presentation of any argument.

## Forms of Argument

1. **Induction:** Argument by induction builds from evidence and observation to a final conclusion. Most people recognize induction as the basis for scientific method. Simple induction moves from "reasons" and examples to conclusion and does not require scientific observation or eyewitness reports.
2. **Deduction:** Argument by deduction builds from accepted truths to specific conclusions. The syllogism and enthymeme are examples of deductive arguments. We may also structure deductive arguments based on cultural or social truths leading to specific conclusions.
3. **Narrative:** Stories and anecdotes should not be considered innocent moments of entertainment in political communication. Narrative argues partly by denying its ability to persuade. Remember the powerful use Ronald Reagan made of anecdotes. He perfected the form for the modern presidency, and every president since has followed his lead.

## Aristotle's Artistic Proofs

How do arguments persuade? Aristotle said that rhetorics persuade by effective use of "proofs" or "appeals." He divided proofs into two classes: 1) the inartistic proofs that one simply uses for inductive arguments (e.g. statistics), and 2) the artistic proofs that one must create.

**Logos:** appeals to reason

Such an appeal attempts to persuade by means of an argument “suitable to the case in question,” according to Aristotle. Appeals to logos most often use the syllogism and enthymeme. You may recognize the syllogism as the formal method of deductive reasoning (see above). The enthymeme is a truncated syllogism, also referred to as the rhetorical syllogism, in which one or more minor premises are left unstated. You may recognize the enthymeme as assertions followed by reasons. We rarely find syllogisms in their pure form in civic discourse. Instead, we find statements and reasons that are incomplete and are therefore enthymemes. For example: “We do not have enough money to pay for improvements to our railroads. And without improvements, this transportation system will falter and thus hinder our economy. Therefore, we should raise taxes to pay for better railroads.”

**Pathos:** appeals to the emotions of the audience

Such an appeal attempts to persuade by stirring the emotions of the audience and attempts to create any number of emotions, including: fear, sadness, contentment, joy, pride. Pathos does not concern the veracity of the argument, only its appeal.

For example: Bob Dole wants to hurt the elderly by cutting Medicare.

**Ethos:** appeals exerted by the character of the writer/speaker

Such an appeal attempts to persuade by calling attention to the writer’s/speaker’s character. It says in effect: “I’m a great guy so you should believe what I’m telling you.” Ethos does not concern the veracity of the argument, only its appeal.

For example:

I am a husband, a father, and a taxpayer. I’ve served faithfully for 20 years on the school board. I deserve your vote for city council.