



ARGUMENT: CONVINCING OTHERS



What is Argument?

- A paper, grounded on logical, structured evidence, that attempts to convince the reader to accept an opinion, take some action, or do both. Argument is also a process during which you explore an issue fully, considering different perspectives, assumptions, reasons, and evidence to reach your own informed position.
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You Cannot Argue:

- Questions of personal preference or taste
 - Ex: red is prettier than blue. Rock music is better than country. McDonald's hamburgers taste better than Wendy's.
 - Questions of simple fact
 - Ex: Eisenhower was first elected president in 1952. Pluto is no longer recognized as a planet.
- *We turn to argument when there is room for disagreement.*

When You Write an Argument

- You do NOT start from scratch. You join a conversation where ideas and evidence have already been exchanged.
- You need to be thoughtful and informed
- Know that the most successful arguments rest on a firm foundation of solid, logical support.

The Rational Appeal

- **Rational**=relating to, based on, or agreeable to reason.
- Reasons are the key points or general ideas you'll use to defend your conclusions.
- Your reasons **MUST** be substantiated by evidence.
- Evidence falls into several categories: established truths, opinions of authorities, primary source information, statistical findings and personal experience. The strongest arguments usually combine several kinds of evidence.

Established Truths

- These are the facts that no one can seriously dispute. Established truths aren't arguable themselves but do provide strong backup for argumentative propositions
- Ex: The First Amendment to the US Constitution prohibits Congress from abridging freedom of the press.
- Ex: The layer of ozone in the Earth's upper atmosphere protects us from the sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation.

Opinions of Authorities

- An authority is a *recognized expert* in some field.
- Authoritative opinions are the ONLY kind of opinion to use in your paper.
- You still have to cite the source you got the expert opinion from.
 - Ex: Nancy Connor, the head of pediatric behavioral psychology at Johns Hopkins, affirms that “children under the age(s) of puberty do not have the neural capacity to tolerate even a glass of alcohol” (Connor, 82).
- Beware of biased opinions. The PETA expert who claims that all animal-based testing is cruel and pointless may not be very believable to many.
- The audience must accept the authority as authoritative. Although advertisers successfully present sports stars as authorities on deodorant and credit cards, most people would not accept their views on the safety of nuclear energy.



Primary Source Information

- These are documents or other materials produced by individuals directly involved with the issue.
 - Ex: To take a position on the violence mentioned in some gangster rap, you would want to analyze the actual lyrics in a number of songs.
 - Ex: To make a claim about the press coverage of 9/11, you would want to read the newspaper and magazine accounts of correspondents who were on the scene.
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Statistical Findings

- Statistics consist of data showing how much, how many, or how often.
- Make sure they come from a reliable source.
- Make sure they are from the correct timeframe.
 - Ex: If you're discussing the increase of alcoholism from the '50s to the '60s, you shouldn't look at present day alcoholism numbers.
 - Ex: If you're claiming that the country has a 50% divorce rate, the statistics you're using had better be as recent as possible.



Personal Experience

- Often the experiences and observations of others, gathered from books, magazines, or interviews, can support your position.
- Personal experience reinforces but does NOT replace other kinds of evidence. Unless it has other support, readers may reject it as atypical or trivial.

Evaluation of Evidence

- That a piece of information is in some way connected to your topic does not make it good evidence or qualify it for inclusion in your paper.
 - Ask yourself:
 1. How credible are the sources of the information? How reliable is the evidence?
 2. How much confirming evidence is there?
 3. How much contradictory evidence is there?
 4. How well established is the evidence?
 5. How well does the evidence actually support the claim?
 6. What does the evidence actually allow you to conclude?



The Emotional Appeal

- Although effective argument relies mainly on reason, an emotional appeal can lend powerful reinforcement.
 - Make sure the facts warrant an emotion.
 - Identify the stories, scenes, or events of the topic that arouse the strongest emotional response within you. Write the section so that it builds to the kind of emotional conclusion that will help your argument.
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The Emotional Appeal 2



“But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free; one hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination; one hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity; one hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land.”



The Ethical Appeal

- = the image that the writer projects
- Write with a genuine concern for your topic, a commitment to the truth, and a sincere respect for others.
- Avoid bitter or snide comments, judgment, and anything else that could reveal a bias.



Fallacies

- Fallacies are lapses in logic that reflect on your ability to think clearly, and therefore they weaken your argument.
 - Correct any you find in your own arguments, and call attention to those used by the opposition.
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Hasty Generalization

- Results when someone bases a conclusion on too little evidence.
- Ex: Someone meets a Collin College student at a party and that student acts like a jerk. The person now tells everyone he doesn't like Collin students because they're jerks.



Non Sequitur

- Draws unwarranted conclusions from seemingly ample evidence.
- Ex: Logan falls asleep in class every morning. He must be quite the partier.



Card Stacking

- The writer presents only part of the available evidence on a topic, deliberately omitting essential information that would alter the picture considerably.
- Ex: College students have a very easy life; they attend classes for only 12-16 hours a week.

Either/Or Fallacy

- Asserts that only two choices exist when, in fact, several options are possible.
- Ex: Either drive the speed limit or you will get a ticket.
- Not all either/or statements are fallacies.
- Ex: Either turn a copy of your paper to me AND one to turnitin.com or you will fail the paper.

Begging the Question

- Asserting the truth of some unproven statement.
- Ex: “Vitamin A is harmful to your health, and all bottles should carry a warning label. If enough of us write the FDA, we can get the labeling we need.”
 - How do we know vitamin A harms users? No evidence is offered.

Circular Argument

- Supports a position merely by restating it. Offers repetition instead of evidence
- Ex: Pauline is a good manager because she runs the company effectively.
- Ex: Tracey is a stage actress because she's been in lots of plays.

Arguing off the Point

- The writer sidetracks an issue by introducing irrelevant information.
- Ex: Designer clothes are often more well-made than those found in the average clothing store. But that doesn't make those clothes worth thousands of dollars. The fashion industry has been price-gouging for years and will not stop until people stop paying those awful prices.

The Argument ad Hominem

- Ad Hominem = “to the man”
- This type of argument attacks an individual rather than an individual’s opinions or qualifications.
- Ex: Janie doesn’t deserve a promotion. She’s horrible to her boyfriend and she never spends enough time with her dog.

Appeal to the Crowd

- Arouses an emotional response by playing on the irrational fears and prejudices of the audience.
- Ex: These deadbeats are ruining our country with their entitled attitudes and their communistic whining.
- (author is writing about proponents of welfare)

Guilt by Association

- Points out some similarity or connection between one person or group and another. It tags the first with the sins, real or imagined, of the second.
- Ex: Jared was childhood friends with James, who went on to become one of America's most notorious serial killers. Can we really trust Jared around our children?

Post Hoc, ergo Propter Hoc

- “after this, therefore because of this” refers to the fallacy of assuming that because one event follows another, the first caused the second.
- Ex: My husband cheated on me because it rained on our wedding day.



Ethical Issues

- Have I carefully considered the issue I'm arguing and the stance I'm taking?
 - Am I fair to the other positions on the issue?
 - Are my reasons and evidence legitimate?
 - Do I use fallacies or other types of faulty thinking to manipulate the reader unfairly?
 - What consequences could follow if readers adopt my position?
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Before you start writing:

- Focus your question
 - Explore your topic
 - Figure out what the purpose of your argument is
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Introduction

Arouses the reader's interest and presents the proposition—a special thesis statement that names the issue and indicates which position the writer will take.

- Declares something is fact
 - Ex: Carron College does not provide adequate recreational facilities for its students.
- Supports Policy
 - Ex: Our company's policy of randomly testing employees for drug use has proved effective and should be continued.
- Calls for action
 - Ex: Because the present building is overcrowded and unsafe, the people of Midville should vote funds for a new junior high school.
- Asserts Value
 - Ex: The new Ford Fire-Eater is superior to the Honda Harmony in performance and economy.

Body

- Provide your evidence arranged in whatever order you think is best
- Refute: Point out weaknesses and errors in the opposing position
 - Point out any evidence that undermines that position
 - Identify faulty assumptions and indicate how they are faulty: they don't lead to the implied conclusion, they lack the effectiveness of an alternative, or they are false or unsupported
 - Identify problems in the logic of the argument
 - Do NOT adopt a gloating or sarcastic tone
 - Don't resort to straw man tactics
- Don't be afraid to concede secondary or insignificant points to the opposition.

Refutation Example

“Christianity, according to research published by Andrew L. Whitehead of Baylor University, is also strongly linked to the belief that sexual minorities choose their alternative lifestyle (63). If it is true that homosexuals have a defining moment in their lives when they make a choice to be attracted to the same sex, it would only make sense that heterosexuals experience the same exact moment, choosing to be heterosexual. Yet, finding a heterosexual who admits to experiencing such a defining moment proves quite difficult. Should a heterosexual acknowledge this rubicon, he or she would also be admitting to having enough knowledge about, or experience in, the homosexual option to choose which sexual orientation he or she finds more appealing. In other words, if everyone is potentially straight, then everyone is potentially gay, as well.”



Conclusion

- Conclude in a manner that will sway the reader to your side.
 - Restate your position
 - Summarize your main points
 - Predict the consequences if your position does or does not prevail
 - Make an appeal for support or action



Assignment

- Do the Exercise that begins on page 273
 - You will complete all 11 examples
 - You will turn this in for a grade, so please write neatly.