

Writing and Study Skills Services – Laurier Brantford
Constructing an Argument – As Outlined in the Brief Penguin Handbook

An argument is needed throughout your paper to convince readers that the claim you are making in your thesis statement is valid. In your written argument, you should outline and explain the evidence and reasoning that supports your thesis, but also be sure to acknowledge opposing viewpoints.

The Warm Up

- Make sure you understand the assignment requirements
- Know what issue you are responding to
- Consider your audience and prepare to write with appropriate formality

Where Are You Going?

There are two types of arguments (Faigley, Graves and Graves 111-13):

- **Position Argument** – Make a claim about a controversial issue
 - Define the issue and take a clear position
 - Make a convincing argument
 - Acknowledge opposing views
- **Proposal Argument** – Proposing a course of action
 - Define the problem and propose a solution
 - Explain why the solution will work and is feasible

Do Not Enter Zones

Topics that are not easily argued

- **Statements of fact** – Facts can be challenged on the basis of what they are founded on, but to argue a fact head-on is generally unsuccessful. For example, it is hard to argue that Sarah is 5’2” unless you are disputing the techniques used to measure her.
- **Personal taste** – If you dislike asparagus, no argument is going to convince you otherwise.
- **Claims of belief** – Of course individuals still discuss topics of belief and faith. Yet if a claim is accepted “as a matter of faith or religious belief, that claim is true for that person and cannot be refuted” (Faigley, Graves and Graves 113).

Gathering Support

- Think about your argument from different angles and try to challenge what you are claiming by asking yourself *why? how? so what? etc.*

Know Your Route

When coming up with good reasoning for your argument, there is a series of questions that can help to support your claim as outlined in *The Brief Penguin Handbook* (116-18):

- **Can you argue by definition?**
 - Do you think that your topic could be thought of in a different way?
 - E.g. While many people think that chocolate is an unhealthy junk food, it offers many health benefits and is better thought of as wise dietary decision.

- **Can you argue from value?**
 - When providing examples about your subject matter, can they be discussed in terms of good, better, best (or bad, worse, worst)?
 - E.g. There are many pastries available to choose from, but none has the light flakiness, airy sweetness, and nuanced flavour of the Passion Flakie.

- **Can you compare or contrast?**
 - Does your topic share similarities or differences with other events or situations?
 - E.g. Despite the perceived similarities in chocolate content between Mississippi Mud ice cream and Maui Brownie Madness ice cream, the extra macadamia nuts within the Maui create a distinct and entirely separate flavour palate.

- **Can you argue from consequence?**
 - Although many people assume that an event resulted from a specific cause, could an alternative event have lead to the outcome?
 - E.g. Sharon’s friends believed that Sharon ate an entire box of chocolates because of a PMS craving. However, Sharon was, at that time, also trying to put on weight to move up a weight category for her upcoming wrestling tournament.

- **Can you counter objections to your position?**
 - Are you able to anticipate opposing arguments and use your responses to support your own claim?
 - E.g. Some experts recommend that parents completely forbid their children from eating any sort of “junk food” for fear of the development of poor eating habits. In fact, as many esteemed paediatricians have noted, by exposing children to a variety of foods with proper guidance, parents can encourage their children to learn how to make smart dietary choices.

You Are Ready, So Get Set, And Go!

But Remember:

- Be sure you are clearly addressing the question.
- Be specific about your viewpoint on the issue.
- Demonstrate critical thinking in your analysis of the issue.
- Show your reasoning so that readers can follow your train of thought:
E.g. “Proofread your paper.” versus “Proofread your paper because then you will be able to correct the mistakes you made while writing your essay.”

Work Cited:

Faigley, Lester, Roger Graves and Heather Graves. *The Brief Penguin Handbook*. Canadian ed. Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2008. 111-119. Print.