

How to Construct an Argument

Planning an Argument

1. The issue

- What is the issue you are responding to in your paper?
- An issue can be defined as a specific problem attracting debate.
- Here is a student example stated as a central research question:
 - "As the Canadian Government approaches a balanced budget, should taxes be cut?"

2. The academic context

- What is the context of the issue?
- How have others perceived the issue?

3. Your thesis

- How do you perceive the issue/problem?
- What specific viewpoint do you have on the issue?
- Does your claim/viewpoint clearly address the issue involved?

4. Your support/subject matter

- How are you going to support your viewpoint?
- What does your viewpoint obligate you to discuss?
- What do you need to learn more about?
- How do you plan to get this information?
- Can you prove your viewpoint?

5. The audience context

- Who is going to read your paper?
- What is your relationship with the audience?

6. Your organizational plan

- How will you construct order and logic in the text?
- How will you communicate your viewpoint to your audience?
- Which organizational plan is most likely to persuade the audience to accept your viewpoint? What will you do to make sure the audience can follow the construction of the text?
- What should you talk about first?
- Where might that lead?
- What might you end with?

7. Your voice

- How do you want to be perceived by the audience?

Analyzing Your Argument

The Case

The model below can help you formulate the case for your argument. Use it as a form to fill out.

Your claim needs to be warranted. You should think about what warrants your claim and what exceptions there could be to this claim.

Your Claim:

The qualifier:

The exceptions:

Reason 1 for claim:

- What makes this relevant?
- What evidence supports this reason?

Reason 2 for claim:

- What makes this relevant?
- What evidence supports this reason?

Reason 3 for claim:

- What makes this relevant?
- What evidence supports this reason?

The Refutation

Anticipate what people might say to refute your claim and rebut their arguments.

Objection 1:

- Rebuttal:

Objection 2:

- Rebuttal:

Objection 3:

- Rebuttal:

Remember that each argument is different. Some arguments may be based on just one reason, while others will be based on several related reasons.

Adapted from: Crusius Timothy W. and Carolyn E. Channel. *The Aims of Argument: A Brief Rhetoric*. Toronto: Mayfield Publishing , 1995.

Testing Your Argument

1. Is the claim a specific viewpoint stated in one sentence?

- Have signal words been used (when appropriate) to identify the claim?
 - should, must, have to, etc.
- Is the claim qualified to make it more defensible?
 - on the whole, typically, usually, most of the time
- Are exceptions stated openly?

2. Is/are the assumption(s) made explicit?

- Will the readers agree with the assumption(s)?
- Has the writer argued for the assumption to make the argument more persuasive?

3. Identify and evaluate the reasons that support the thesis.

- *Are the reasons relevant to the thesis?*

4. Accumulate and evaluate the evidence used to support the reasons.

- Is the evidence:
 - sufficient
 - representative
 - relevant
 - accurate
 - testable

5. Are key terms defined?

6. Are opposing views considered?

7. Has the reaction of the readers been anticipated?

- Is the material arranged according to a persuasive strategy?

8. Does the writer come across as credible?

- Are there any logical fallacies?
- Does the writer rely on logical or emotional argument?

Organizing the Research Paper

1. Introduction

The introduction will set up a relevant context for the position that is being argued in the paper.

- First you will state the central issue. Then you briefly establish the academic context for it by explaining how others have perceived it and by identifying what they agree on.
- Now you show where you stand on the issue. Identify a problem that has gone unnoticed, requires further thought, or shows your disagreement with the research of others you have mentioned. This problem becomes the main focus of your paper. At this point, make it clear what the scope of your investigation is and, when necessary, define key terms.
- Finally you articulate your argument or thesis in one sentence. If your paper is long, give an overview of how it is organized at the very end of the introduction.

2. Background

The background section will give a review of the literature relevant to the topic and describe the research of others that influenced the present work. Sometimes this section is combined with a lengthy introduction. If this is the case, state your thesis at the end of this section, but make sure you have anticipated it at various points along the way so the reader knows which direction your paper is taking.

3. Body

The body of the paper will consist of reasoned analysis and evidence that support your thesis.

4. Opposing Views

This section acknowledges opposing points of view and their differences from the writer's point of view. This section need not be positioned at the end.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion sums up the key points of the argument and makes a final statement about the thesis/claim.

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