

9 The Basic Argument Essay

In our first essay, we will learn how to write a straightforward basic argumentative essay.

Sometimes called by other names including: the persuasive essay, the analytical essay, and the research paper the basic argument essay sounds daunting, right? Actually, no, it shouldn't considering you probably use this skill every day. When was the last time somebody changed your mind about something? When did you last change someone's mind? Were you ever convinced to buy an item you had no intention of buying? If so, somebody used some persuasive skills on you! They had the winning argument.

Arguments can be serious and not so serious. Take into account how often a person argues in any given day; be it on what to eat, where to go, what time the kids want to go to bed, buy or rent a home, or whether or not to choose one medical treatment over another, arguments play a big role in our lives.

Why argue?

- People argue to clarify thinking and learn new information about a topic.
- Make judgments or solve problems. Arguing helps to facilitate decision making.
- Defend or explain beliefs or actions.
- Have fun! The clash of ideas can be intellectually stimulating.
- Establishes credibility. If you have a winning argument it means you are treating your audience with respect while informing them in a logical and concise manner.

The point of this essay is for the writer to make an argument, pick a side, and defend it using solid evidence, concessions and counterarguments. By including concessions or counterarguments you are demonstrating to the reader that the opposing view is valid but weaker than yours.

This is the basic essay type for all composition classes. Much of what we have covered in this textbook has been focused on this basic argumentative essay. Just as a review:

Basic Components of an Argument

An argument is **claim** about a topic. It is supported by using evidence and reasons. Claims are statements about what is true or good or about what should be done or believed. Claims have the potential of being arguable. "Students are better prepared and educated in private schools than in public schools" is a claim, while "I didn't like that movie" is not one. No one can quarrel with me about whether or not I liked the film, but anyone can argue about the benefits of private versus public schools. While "I thought the movie was cool" is not an arguable statement "that movie was an actor's best" does present possibilities for argumentation. People can disagree and offer reasons why an acting job was the actor's best based on what they consider to be an outstanding performance.

Reasons (or “because statements”) are statements that support a given claim, making that claim more than just an assertion. Reasons are statements in an argument that pass two tests.

First, reasons are answers to the hypothetical challenge: “Why do you say that?” or “How are you going to get me to believe that?” If a claim about private school education is challenged, for instance, a reasonable response might be: “The number of students in each classroom is smaller so students receive more individual attention.”

While not etched in stone, often reasons can be linked to claims by simply using the word “because.”

The Basic Argument Essay Checklist

To effectively write a basic argument essay:

1. Select a topic of interest to you but stay clear of “obvious” arguments. *The topic must be debatable;*
2. Take a position/side on that issue;
3. Defend your position with logical arguments (logos);
4. Address the opposing side’s views and refute those with logic and reason;
5. Demonstrate an awareness of your target audience and appropriately use appeals for that audience to persuade them of your position.
6. Never use “I.” You are making an argument, not writing an opinion.
7. Use a convincing tone. Nobody wants to read a shrill, over-the-top screed or rant.
8. Use research to get up to speed on your topic to help make logical arguments.

Deductive versus Inductive Arguments

A **deductive** argument is when the claim or situation is supported by the conclusion. It is bona fide and provides a guarantee of truth. If the conclusion is true the argument must be sound.

Ex. The sky was blue and the sun was shining in Hawaii so I won’t bring my umbrella and I am not carrying an umbrella is a deductive argument.

An **inductive** argument depends on observations and evidence to reach a probable conclusion. It is unlikely it is false.

Ex. The sky was blue with scattered clouds and the sun was shining in Hawaii. I will bring my umbrella in case it rains; even though it may not rain is an inductive argument.

The main differences are deductive arguments are those which are considered to truthful and *guaranteed* as such as opposed to *probably* being the truth. That said, the inductive

argument is worthy because it is structured logically even though there is no guarantee of total accuracy.

Concessions and Counterarguments

According to Merriam-Webster, **concessions** are “the act or an instance of conceding (as by granting something as a right, accepting something as true, or acknowledging defeat).” A concession is also “the admitting of a point claimed in argument.” A **counterargument** is an objection to an argument by using an alternative position (or alternative argument) to refute the claim.

A vital part of building your credibility (ethos) happens when you acknowledge and address other viewpoints other than yours. While you might be tempted to ignore them, don't run from them, run *towards* them. By making concessions you recognize the logic or strength of the opposing view. They become a valuable element of your paper when you shed light on the reasons why they are deficient, flawed or weak. Always present your arguments concisely and clearly.

By refuting an argument you are making the case as to why you think they are incorrect or weaker. Identify the writer's use of pathos, ethos and logos to help you formulate your counterarguments or concessions. Deficiencies to look for include:

- Is the reasoning flawed?
- Is the evidence faulty, outdated, lacking, incomplete or untrustworthy?
- Are the arguments questionable?
- Compare and contrast. First compare by looking at the similarities, then contrast to see the differences.

How to Analyze an Argument

- Determine whether it is a claim of fact, value or policy. Refer to Chapter 5 Rhetorical Analysis if you need a refresher.
- Access the reasons, the “because,” that support your claim. Are they relevant, recent, reliable, or accurate? Refer to Chapter X Prove for a refresher on sourcing if necessary.
- Ask questions. *Is that true?*
- Notice assumptions because assumptions are not necessary always accurate.
- Notice insights. *Wow, I did not know that.*
- Notice overgeneralizations and sweeping broad statements. *Really? Prove it.* These can be easily identified when you see key words like: always, all, everybody, anything, no one, nothing, and everything.
- Pinpoint and address concessions. *Are there any other legitimate arguments?*
- Pinpoint and address any counterarguments. *Are there any arguments that could contradict or challenge your position?*

Tips: The Do's and Don'ts When Presenting Other Arguments

- First present your claims and evidence to lay down the groundwork so you can then respond to the other arguments.
- Identifying the argument(s) by objectively summarizing them in a paragraph.
- Be fair.
- Point out the strengths and weaknesses.
- Don't cherry pick information, exaggerate or make up examples because not only are you being dishonest and look foolish, you will have critically wounded your credibility (ethos). Sound arguments are sound arguments.
- Don't use logical fallacies. The red herrings that distract the reader and do not belong in honest arguments. (Chapter 2).
- Think again and review. Did you miss anything after learning something new?

A Basic Argument Essay Assignment

This paper should be at least three pages (750 words) in length. This essay goes beyond summarizing and analyzing. This time you will make your own argument. To successfully complete this assignment, you will:

1. Select a topic of interest to you. *The topic must be debatable.* Feel free to choose a topic that you dealt with in Essay 1 and/or Essay 2;
2. Take a position/side on that issue;
3. Defend your position with logical arguments;
4. Address the opposing side's views and refute those with logic and reason;
5. Demonstrate an awareness of your target audience and appropriately use appeals for that audience to persuade them of your position.

Basic Organizational Pattern: There are multiple ways to organize argumentative position essays, but most follow a basic pattern like the **sample** outline below:

1. Introduction: Setting up some context for the issue is a great way to open a position paper, as it allows you to show the issue is current. End this introduction paragraph with your **thesis statement** (note "Thesis and paragraph development" in this unit's reading).
2. Reason 1: Set up the first reason for the position in a **topic sentence**. Develop a paragraph on that one claim, using supporting evidence to develop that point.
3. Reason 2: See #2
4. Reason 3: See #3
5. Refutation of the Opposition's claims: This may take a couple of paragraphs. This section of the paper requires you directly address the main claims made by the opposition and refute those, showing why those are not strong or valid claims.
6. Conclusion: Think about how you can lead the reader back out of the paper.

Revising/Editing: Your final essay should be well polished and easy to read, make a strong argument, and contain no grammar, usage, punctuation, or other mechanical errors.

GUN CONTROL SAMPLE ESSAY

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February 30, 2015

Unnecessary

The Sandy Hook shooting and the Aurora, CO shooting are two of the most recent attacks which caused severe loss of life. In both cases, the shooters opted to use semi-automatic rifles. The shootings brought with them a resurgence of debates about gun control. The argument used by a majority of opponents of gun control is that doing so restricts their personal liberties; they use their guns for protection, hunting, or target practice. However, weapons like automatic or semi-automatic rifles are largely ineffective at all of these. Such rifles should be restricted because they serve no important purpose, they do more harm than good, and doing so could assist in deterring more severe shootings.

In a poll organized by Gallup, 60 percent of gun owners in 2013 reported that they owned guns for protection, and 36 percent owned guns for hunting purposes. The next highest reason for gun ownership was for recreational use, at 13 percent (“Guns”). By a healthy majority, gun owners use their guns for protection and hunting far more than they do for recreation. Automatic and semi-automatic rifles are useless for these. They are far too bulky and can jam easily, making them much less effective than a pistol, a bolt-action rifle, or even a shotgun for protection; additionally, they are highly inaccurate, making them pale in comparison to bolt-action rifles and shotguns for hunting purposes (Irving). In reality, the only understandable use for automatic and semi-automatic rifles is for

recreation, things like target practice. They are not practical weapons—they're simply fun to play with.

Many will argue what constitutes an “assault weapon” and what doesn't, but the Federal Assault Weapons Ban enacted in 1993 did have a significant effect on homicide rates. Within the ten years it was active, firearm homicide rates dropped consistently, ending at 6,000 less in 2004 than in 1994. This period was also the biggest drop in overall homicide rates within the past fifty years (Roman), so it's not far-fetched to draw correlations between these sorts of weapons and homicide rates overall.

The ownership of such weapons has an unexpected effect on the government, as well. The FBI is constantly trying to prevent homegrown terrorist attacks before they happen. With so many people owning guns that the government considers “assault weapons,” it makes it more difficult for them to distinguish who is good and who is not. An author of the Harvard Political Review theorizes, “Instead of worrying about the intent of certain assault rifle owners, agencies could go after all assault weapons, period” (Matthews).

Handguns kill far more people each year than semi-automatic or automatic weapons do. In fact, most weapons are used far more than these, even hammers and clubs (Hawkins). Assault rifles are not necessarily the devil incarnate. They are, however, closely associated with mass shootings. From 1982 to 2012, over half of all mass shooters used some form of weaponry that would be considered assault weapons, such as high-capacity magazines, either semi-automatic or automatic rifles, or a combination thereof (Follman). These are weapons used and associated with war, and mass shooters use them to instill that fear in their victims. By restricting access, those same shooters will not be able to do as much damage as they have done up to now.

Keeping these weapons out of the public's hands will not prevent mass shootings. Those with intent to harm others will find ways. However, by restricting use, it means that the police and government will know for a fact that anyone with such weapons has one goal in mind: to harm others.

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