# 4    The Basics of Argumentation, Part I: The Gazebo

We're going to look at making an argument in two different ways over the next two chapters. In this chapter, we will look at how an argument is organized (thesis, topic sentences, evidence, etc.). In the next chapter, we will look at what we call the "rhetorical tools" we use to make an argument.

Remember back in chapter 2, when Bill and John were arguing about the quality of the movie, *The Planet of the Blob People*? In that example, we took a simple conversation between two people and almost effortlessly turned it into two separate outlines, one for Bill and one for John.

This was relatively easy, because when we make a point with somebody (or as we have called it, an "argument"), we always follow a pattern. Here it is again:

1.    Make an argument
2.    Defend that argument

This is beautifully simple. Now we're going to make it just a little tiny bit more complicated. Don't panic, because it's going to make sense to you. In fact, this new, updated model of the argument fits better with the outlines we created for Bill and John in chapter 2.

Essentially all we're doing is getting more specific with our second piece here (Defend the argument). So in our new organization, we have three pieces, as follow:

1.    The core argument
2.    The "because" statements (also called "reasons" or "supporting points")
3.    The evidence

In our example of *The Planet of the Blob People* above, we can break Bill's argument down as follows:

1.    The core argument: "The new movie, *The Planet of the Blob People*, was awful."
2.    The "because" statements: "because the special effects were horrible, the acting stunk, and the movie had a horrible ending."
3.    The evidence: examples of bad special effects, bad acting and the horrible ending.

See how this actually fits our outline better:

Bill's essay:

     I. Introduction
        a.    Thesis: The new movie, Planet of the Blob People, was awful.

II.     The special effects were horrible
    a.     (examples from the movie demonstration horrible special effects)

III.     The acting stunk.
    a.     (examples from the movie demonstrating the bad acting)

IV.     The move had a horrible ending
    a.     (an explanation of what made the ending horrible)

V.     Conclusion
    a.     Thesis restatement: Clearly, this was a terrible movie.

We always have to have these three pieces in our argument. A perfect example of this can be found in any political campaign.

Think for a minute about the **core argument** of *ALL* political campaigns. Can you guess what it is? Think for a minute. It's incredibly simply and takes only three words. (This game is called, "Guess what the teacher's thinking," and it's my favorite game to play with students.)

Figured it out yet?

All political campaigns have the same core argument:

VOTE FOR ME

Right? When everything else is stripped away, that's the core argument all politicians make when they are running for office, isn't it?

Now, think about the first question that comes to mind once you hear that core argument: VOTE FOR ME.

Can you guess what it is?

I'm sure you've guessed it, but here it is: WHY?

Almost any time someone makes an argument, we ask that question. Consider these:

- Handguns should be outlawed.
  o WHY?
- Gay marriage should be legalized.
  o WHY?
- Xbox is better than PlayStation.
  o WHY?
- People should eat more organic food.
  o WHY?
- My grandfather was the greatest influence on my life.

       o   WHY?

       o

You can see from this last example that even with an argument that isn't controversial ("My grandfather was the greatest influence on my life"), people still ask the same question. And that question must be answered.

So going back to VOTE FOR ME, when people ask, "WHY?" the politician must answer that question.

Because of how this works, I call these **because statements**.

(In more traditional terminology, these are often called **topic sentences**, or **reasons**.)

Here is how they work:

Why?
Because!

Why should I vote for you?
Because…

The politician must answer:

*Because I am honest, brave, and have the necessary experience.*

Remember Bill and John? Look above at Bill's outline, and you can see how the "because statements" fit in with his core argument, can't you?

Bill's Core argument: The new movie, *The Planet of the Blob People*, was awful.
Listener: WHY?

Bill's because statements:

    Because the special effects were horrible.
    Because the acting stunk.
    Because the move had a horrible ending.

And you have already seen how these "because statements" fit into the outline, right? They form the main sections of the outline (II, III, IV).

These "because statements" provide support for the core argument. That is why they are often called, **supporting points** in college writing classes. But in reality they are simply answering the question "WHY?" in response to the core argument.

And again, there is nothing insanely difficult about this. This is simply the way we make arguments all the time. Now we're just formalizing the process in a college essay.

But we're not quite through.  Once we have provided our core argument:

The new movie, *The Planet of the Blob People*, was awful.

And we've answered the natural question, "WHY?"
Because the special effects were horrible.
Because the acting stunk.
Because the movie had a horrible ending.

We can't simply assume that our listener will say, "Okay.  Fair enough."

Remember this: THE READER WILL NOT TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT, especially if he or she disagrees with us.

That being the case, now have to PROVE IT.

In other words, now we have to provide EVIDENCE that backs up our "because statements."  For example, if I said the movie horrible special effects, I have to give some examples of those lousy special effects.

- What make them lousy?
- When the blob queen was dangling off the side of the building, could you see the wires attached to her waist?
- Did the CGI creatures mouths not match the sound they made?
- Did the blob people home world look like it was colored in by preschoolers?
- What *exactly* make the special effects horrible?

*Provide examples.*
*Be specific.*

The same is true for all the "because statements" included in the argument.  If you remember way back to Bill's outline, you will see that for each because statement / supporting point, Bill must include EVIDENCE to support it, in the form of examples or explanation.  Here is Bill's outline again:

I.    Introduction
      a.  Thesis: The new movie, Planet of the Blob People, was awful.

II.   The special effects were horrible
      a.  (**examples** from the movie demonstration horrible special effects)

III.  The acting stunk.
      a.  (**examples** from the movie demonstrating the bad acting)

IV.   The move had a horrible ending

       a.  (an **explanation** of what made the ending horrible)

  V.    Conclusion
       a.  Thesis restatement: Clearly, this was a terrible movie.

The same is true of our politician. Remember the pieces:

VOTE FOR ME

WHY?

*Because I am honest, brave, and have the necessary experience.*

If I'm on the fence with my vote, I'm not just going to take this person's word that he or she is honest, brave, and has the necessary experience, right? (Remember, this is a politician we're talking about here. NEVER trust a politician.)

So I will say…

**PROVE IT.**

Now the candidate must provide examples of his or her honesty, bravery, and experience.

And here's an important point for the candidate, for Bill in his evaluation of *The Planet of the Blob People*, and for YOU, the college composition student:

*If any of this breaks down, so does the entire argument.*

For example, if Bill says the movie was bad because the acting was lousy, but he can't provide any evidence of bad acting, his "because statement" falls apart, and because his "because statement" is supporting his core argument, that core argument also falls apart.

If the politician claims that you should vote for him or her because he or she has the necessary experience, but cannot provide any evidence of experience that would qualify him or her for the office in question, the "because statement" falls apart, and since the "because statement" supports the core argument, that core argument also falls apart.

If YOU as a college writing student claim that guns should be outlawed because it will lower the crime rate, but you can't find any evidence of a place where guns were outlawed and then the crime rate declined, your "because statement" falls apart, and since the "because statement" supports your core argument, that core argument also falls apart.

See how that works? All of these pieces tie together:

1   Core argument
2   Because statements

3   Evidence

Think of the core argument as the roof of a gazebo.  It sits at the top (in the introduction) of our essay and covers everything—remember, the thesis **makes our argument**.  It is the core of the essay and covers everything else you say.  Everything else in the essay **defends that argument**.  That core argument is presented in our **thesis**.

The thesis/core argument is supported by pillars (the "because statements" or "supporting points"). These pillars support the thesis and answer the question WHY our argument is valid.

Finally, our pillars / "because statements" are supported by our evidence.  Our evidence becomes the foundation of our gazebo.

***If a core argument is supported by solid because statements, and those statements are in turn supported by strong evidence, you have a solid argument.***

BECAUSE STATEMENTS

THESIS / CORE
ARGUMENT

EVIDENCE