

CRITICAL WRITING AND ARGUMENTS

What is an academic argument?

It is a series of connected statements, which lead the reader from your thesis statement to your conclusion.

How do you develop an argument?

First you need a thesis statement, i.e. a statement of the position you will argue for throughout your essay (See Writing a Thesis Statement Survival Guide).

Once you have determined your position, continue researching and critically reading the academic literature for relevant information to substantiate your position.

Reading critically involves some or all of the following:

- Comparing and contrasting research on your topic.
- Noting why the same or different conclusions were reached by different authors.
- Discussing different ways the same methodology has been used.
- Commenting on the strength of the evidence presented in each text.
- Forming an opinion on why theoretical perspectives used by different authors have resulted in different conclusions.
- Commenting on authors' biases.
- Being aware of your own biases.

TIP

Use One Search to find scholarly sources. Look at the date (try to find recent work) and publisher (with high ranking). For journals, check it is peer-reviewed.

How do you structure your argument?

After creating your main arguments, you need to decide the order you want to present them in. Plan the most effective way to present your ideas as they will not all be as strong or as effective as each other.

It is best to **begin and end with your strongest points**, then disperse the weaker arguments throughout. However, you could also structure your argument **thematically** or **chronologically**, depending on your essay topic.

How do you convince your reader?

You will be most convincing if you:

- develop one main point in each paragraph,
- elaborate each point using referenced definitions, explanations, examples and/or evidence from the research literature, and
- introduce and then evaluate or comment on your referenced material by explaining how it adds to your argument.

Linking arguments:

Each paragraph should flow from one to the next. Use keywords in the first sentence to identify the central argument of that paragraph. Finish your paragraph by reinforcing your point, linking it to your thesis statement and using keywords that link to the next paragraph.

TIP

Think of your essay like a debate and dot point both sides of an argument. This will help generate ideas for your argument and the counter argument.

What is your 'critical voice'?

When you comment on the quotes and paraphrases used in your essay, you are demonstrating your 'critical voice'. It should be analytical and draw out ideas that contribute to your argument.

TIP

Avoid relying too heavily on quotes and the voices of others, as this does not show your understanding or depth of analysis. Check that each paragraph has your critical voice.

Why do you need counter arguments?

In an argumentative essay, it is important to acknowledge that there are positions counter to the one(s) you are arguing for. Ignoring these can weaken your own argument. However, if you present a counter position, you will need to discount or refute it, that is, argue against it. Doing this will show your reader that you have considered other options but decided your position is much stronger.

TIP

Do not spend too many words on your counter argument. Your main focus should be on arguing for your position.

Essay Writing Checklist:

- Does your introduction have a welcoming sentence?
- Does your introduction give some background and identify a problem or issue worth discussing?
- Does your introduction have a clear thesis statement?
- Does your introduction outline what is to come in your essay?
- Is there a clear significance to backup your topic?
- Does your introduction have a concluding sentence to link to your next paragraph?

- Have you given sufficient definitions and background on your topic?
- Have you used your critical voice throughout?
- Does each paragraph have a new point/argument.
- Does each paragraph link to your thesis statement?
- Have you included counter arguments?
- Have you refuted the counter arguments?
- Does each paragraph flow between each other?
- Have you used linking words and linking sentences?
- Have you checked your paragraph lengths?

- Have you avoided new ideas in your conclusion?
- Has your conclusion summarised all key points?
- Has your conclusion restated your thesis statement?
- Have you made any recommendations or referred to the impact of the topic?

- Have you answered the essay question?
- Have you proofread your work?
- Have you followed the submission guidelines?
- Have you re-read the rubrics?
- Have you built a strong argument throughout ?
- Have you maintained an academic tone of voice?
- Have you proof read for repetitive wording?
- Have you checked your format?
- Are all numbers under 10 written as words?
- Have any lengthy phrases been written in full the first time with the abbreviation in brackets?
- Any sentences that are too long?

This is only a guide. Add to it as is relevant to your discipline.

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