



What is an Argumentative Essay?

The function of an argumentative essay is to show that your assertion (opinion, theory, hypothesis) about some phenomenon or phenomena is correct or more truthful than others'. The art of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire. Many people might think that if you simply have an opinion, you can argue it successfully, and these folks are always surprised when others don't agree with them because their logic seems so correct. **Argumentative writing is the act of forming reasons, making inductions, drawing conclusions, and applying them to the case in discussion; the operation of inferring propositions, not known or admitted as true, from facts or principles known, admitted, or proved to be true.** It clearly explains the process of your reasoning from the known or assumed to the unknown. Without doing this you do not have an argument, you have only an assertion, an essay that is just **your unsubstantiated opinion**.

Notice that you do not have to completely prove your point; you only have to convince reasonable readers that your argument or position has merit; i.e., that it is somehow more accurate and complete than competing arguments.

Argumentative essays are often organized in the following manner:

1. They begin with a statement of your assertion, its timeliness, significance, and relevance in relation to some phenomenon.
2. They review critically the literature about that phenomenon.
3. They illustrate how your assertion is "better" (simpler or more explanatory) than others, including improved (i.e., more reliable or valid) methods that you used to accumulate the data (case) to be explained.
4. The argumentative essay is a genre of writing that requires the student to investigate a topic; collect, generate, and evaluate evidence; and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner.

Please Note: Some confusion may occur between the argumentative essay and the expository essay. These two genres are similar, but the argumentative essay differs from the expository essay in the amount of pre-writing (invention) and research involved. The argumentative essay is commonly assigned as a capstone or final project in first year writing or advanced composition courses and involves lengthy, detailed research. Expository essays involve less research and are shorter in length. Expository essays are often used for in-class writing exercises or tests.

Argumentative essay assignments generally call for extensive research of literature or previously published material. Argumentative assignments may also require empirical research where the student collects data through interviews, surveys, observations, or experiments. Detailed research allows the student to learn about the

topic and to understand different points of view regarding the topic so that she/he may choose a position and support it with the evidence collected during research. Regardless of the amount or type of research involved, argumentative essays must establish a clear thesis and follow sound reasoning.

The structure of the argumentative essay is held together by the following:

- **A clear, concise, and defined thesis statement that occurs in the first paragraph of the essay.**

In the first paragraph of an argument essay, students should set the context by reviewing the topic in a general way. Next the author should explain why the topic is important or why readers should care about the issue. Lastly, students should present the thesis statement. It is essential that this thesis statement be appropriately narrowed to follow the guidelines set forth in the assignment. If the student does not master this portion of the essay, it will be quite difficult to compose an effective or persuasive essay.

- **Clear and logical transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion.**

Transitions are the mortar that holds the foundation of the essay together. Without logical progression of thought, the reader is unable to follow the essay's argument, and the structure will collapse. Transitions should wrap up the idea from the previous section and introduce the idea that is to follow in the next section.

- **Body paragraphs that include evidential support.**

Each paragraph should be limited to the discussion of one general idea. This will allow for clarity and direction throughout the essay. In addition, such conciseness creates an ease of readability for one's audience. It is important to note that each paragraph in the body of the essay must have some logical connection to the thesis statement in the opening paragraph. Some paragraphs will directly support the thesis statement with evidence collected during research. It is also important to explain how and why the evidence supports the thesis (warrant).

However, argumentative essays should also consider and explain differing points of view regarding the topic. Depending on the length of the assignment, students should dedicate one or two paragraphs of an argumentative essay to discussing conflicting opinions on the topic. Rather than explaining how these differing opinions are wrong outright, students should note how opinions that do not align with their thesis might not be well informed or how they might be out of date.

- **Evidential support (whether factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal).**

The argumentative essay requires well-researched, accurate, detailed, and current information to support the thesis statement and consider other points of view. Some factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal evidence should support the thesis. However, students must consider multiple points of view when collecting evidence. As noted in the paragraph above, a successful and well-rounded argumentative essay will also discuss opinions not aligning with the thesis. It is unethical to exclude evidence that may not support the thesis. It is not the student's job to point out how other positions are wrong outright, but rather to explain how other positions may not be well informed or up to date on the topic.

A Complete Argument

The argumentative essay must be complete, and logically so, leaving no doubt as to its intent or argument.

The Five-Paragraph Essay

A common method for writing an argumentative essay is the five-paragraph approach. This is, however, by no means the only formula for writing such essays. If it sounds straightforward, that is because it is; in fact, the method consists of (a) an introductory paragraph (b) three evidentiary body paragraphs that may include discussion of opposing views and (c) a conclusion.

Longer Argumentative Essays

Complex issues and detailed research call for complex and detailed essays. Argumentative essays discussing a number of research sources or empirical research will most certainly be longer than five paragraphs. Authors may have to discuss the context surrounding the topic, sources of information and their credibility, as well as a number of different opinions on the issue before concluding the essay. Many of these factors will be determined by the assignment.

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Select one (1) of the topics below to write an Argumentative Essay. Find four (4) current sources to support your argument/ incorporate into your essay:

- a. Only Black Lives Matter.
- b. African American Studies should be taught in all schools.
- c. There is no longer a need for HBCUs.
- d. Should persons who entered the country illegally be forced to leave? What about their children who were born here?
- e. (1) The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is irrelevant?
- f. Black History Month isn't needed because Black history is American history.
- g. Black culture is a lifestyle.
- h. The United States is a racist country.
- i. Police brutality is a part of systemic racism in the United States.
- j. Black Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?
- k. Black self-hate is the cause of Black on Black crime.
- l. Hip-Hop Music Projects Negative Stereotypes of Black Culture and Black People.
- m. Black women are the most oppressed group in the United States.
- n. Africa is the Origin of Everyone and Everything.

- o. Black people were “much better” educationally, socially, and economically during legal segregation.
- p. Black students attending Predominately White Institutions (PWI) should be required to attend a Historically Black Colleges or University (HBCU) for one year.
- q. The Institution of Slavery is still having devastating effects in/on Black people lives.
- r. “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.”
- **Marcus Garvey**
- s. When you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions.”
- **Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson**
- t. “Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
- **James Baldwin**
- u. “Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.”
- **Malcolm X**
- v. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”
- **Martin Luther King, Jr.**
- w. “The color of the skin is in no ways connected with strength of the mind or intellectual powers.”
- **Benjamin Banneker**
- x. “There should be a national holiday honoring Malcolm X.”

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