

## **The Argumentative (Persuasive) Essay**

### **What is an Argumentative (Persuasive) Essay?**

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.

Argumentative essay assignments generally call for extensive research and/or intensive interpretation 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 s/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.

### **What is the structure of an Argumentative (Persuasive) Essay?**

**The structure of the argumentative (persuasive) 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.

### ***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.

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 conclusion that does not simply restate the thesis, but readdresses it in light of the evidence provided.***

It is at this point of the essay that students may begin to struggle.

This is the portion of the essay that will leave the most immediate impression on the mind of the reader. Therefore, it must be effective and logical.

Do not introduce any new information into the conclusion; rather, synthesize the information presented in the body of the essay.

Restate why the topic is important, review the main points, and review your thesis. You may also want to include a short discussion of more research that should be completed in light of your work, or describe how the narrowed topic could apply to the "bigger picture."

### ***How can I determine my Complete Argument?***

Perhaps it is helpful to think of an essay in terms of a conversation or debate with a classmate. If I were to discuss the cause of World War II and its current effect on those who lived through the tumultuous time, there would be a beginning, middle, and end to the conversation. In fact, if I were to end the argument in the middle of my second point, questions would arise concerning the current effects on those who lived through the conflict. Therefore, the argumentative essay must be complete, and logically so, leaving no doubt as to its intent or argument.

## **What are the components of an Argumentative (Persuasive) Essay?**

**The basic components of an argumentative (persuasive) essay is 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

- 1) an introductory paragraph
- 2) three evidentiary body paragraphs that may include discussion of opposing views and
- 3) a conclusion.

## **How do I Write an Argumentative (Persuasive) Essay?**

**Here are the steps as to how to write an argumentative (persuasive) essay:**

### ***Planning Stage***

For an argument essay to be effective, it must contain certain elements. For this reason, you must take a few minutes to plan before you jump into writing an argument essay.

### ***Find a Good Topic (if your professor has not provided options)***

To find good topic for an argument essay you should consider several issues that will have two conflicting points of view or very different conclusions. As you look over a list of topics you should find one that really sparks your interest.

While a strong interest in a topic is important, it's not enough. You next have to consider what position you can back up with reasoning. It's one thing to have a strong belief, but when shaping an argument you'll have to explain why your belief is reasonable and logical.

As you explore the topics, make a mental list of points you could use as evidence for or against an issue.

### ***Consider Both Sides of Your Topic and Take a Position***

Once you have selected a topic you feel strongly about, you should make a list of points for both sides of the argument and pick a side. One of your first objectives in your essay will be to present both sides of your issue with an assessment of each. Of course, you will conclude that one side (your side) is the best conclusion.

In the planning stage you will need to consider strong arguments for the "other" side. Then you'll shoot them down!

## **Gather Evidence**

When we think of arguments we might picture two red-faced people speaking quite loudly and making dramatic gestures. But that's because face-to-face arguments often become emotional. In fact, the act of arguing involves providing proof to support your claim, with or without emotions.

In an argument essay you will have to provide evidence without providing too much drama. You'll explore two sides of a topic (briefly) and provide proof as to why one side or position is the best one.

## **Writing Stage**

Once you've given yourself a solid foundation to work with, you can begin to craft your essay. An argument essay should contain three parts: the **introduction**, the **body**, and the **conclusion**. The length of these parts (number of paragraphs) will vary, depending on the length of your essay assignment.

### **1. Introduce your topic and assert your side**

As in any essay, the first paragraph of your argument essay should contain a brief explanation of your topic, some background information, and a thesis statement. In this case, your thesis will be a statement of your position on a particular controversial topic.

Example introductory paragraph with thesis statement:

Since the turn of the new century, a theory has emerged concerning the end of the world, or at least the end of life as we know it. This new theory centers around the year 2012, a date that many claim has mysterious origins in ancient manuscripts from many different cultures. The most noted characteristic of this date is that it appears to mark the end of the Mayan calendar. But there is no evidence to suggest that the Maya saw any great relevance to this date. In fact, none of the claims surrounding a 2012 doomsday event hold up to scientific inquiry. *The year 2012 will pass without a major, life-altering catastrophe.*

### **2. Present both sides of the controversy**

The body of your essay will contain the meat of your argument. You should go into more detail about the two sides of your controversy and state the strongest points of the counter-side of your issue.

After describing the "other" side, you will present your own viewpoint and then provide evidence to show why your position is the correct one.

Select your strongest evidence and present your points one by one. Use a mix of evidence types, from statistics, to other studies and anecdotal stories. This part of your paper could be any length, from two paragraphs to two hundred pages.

Re-state your position as the most sensible one in your summary paragraphs.

### **Tips for Your Essay:**

- Avoid emotional language
- Know the difference between a logical conclusion and an emotional point of view
- Don't make up evidence
- Cite your sources
- Make an outline
- Be prepared to defend your side by knowing the strongest arguments for the other side. You might be challenged by the teacher or by another student.