

Prewriting

Understand the assignment

In your essay, you will defend an opinion about an academic topic.

Research

Remember that after you do enough preliminary research to brainstorm and choose your focus, you should do more detailed research about your topic so that you can make your outline.

When you research for an argumentative essay, look for the opinions of the supporters, but also look for the opinions of the opponents. A strong argument often acknowledges the opposite point of view.

Brainstorm

You can use a mind map, a free write, general internet search, or a discussion group if you are having a difficult time thinking of things to write about.

Example topics could include the following:

- Should the government be able to legislate the end of labor strikes?
- Should nurses be allowed to work longer than eight-hour shifts?
- Should teachers' salaries be based on student performance?
- Should certain animals be protected?
- Are alternatives to a college education worth it?
- Choose a topic that you have a strong interest in. Do you have a debatable opinion about that topic?

Brainstorming Guiding Questions

As you brainstorm your argument, you may want to consider the following questions:

1. Claim: What do I think?
2. Reason: Why do I think it?
3. Evidence: How do I know?
4. Counterclaim: What is the other side?
5. Rebuttal: [What is] my response to the other side?

(Sedita, 2017, para. 7)

Note: Switching Topics

While it is okay to choose a personally difficult or sensitive topic to write your essay on if given the choice of choosing your own topic, you may find it more difficult as you continue researching, writing, and revising. It is okay in those situations to talk with your teacher and switch your essay topic to a different one. If you feel comfortable writing about the topic, feel free to continue to do so, but if dealing with that topic becomes too much, it is okay to change topics.

Choose Your Focus

Make sure the topic isn't too broad to cover in your essay. If you choose to make a broad argument, you will need *a lot* of evidence to support the broad claim you made. Furthermore, when you have a broad topic, there are many possible counterclaims that your opponent could make to show why your argument is not good. Therefore, it is easier to defend arguments with a more narrow focus and to do so with the time and word count restraints of a school assignment.

Find Your Focus

You can use these questions to find the focus of your essay:

- What opinion do you have about the topic in the prompt?
- What reasons do you have for believing that opinion?
- Of those reasons which are the **strongest** contributing arguments that would lead others to agree with your opinion?
- What counterarguments might your opponent have to your opinion?
- Of those counterarguments which is the **strongest** in leading people to disbelieve your opinion?
- What could you say to **specifically** address that/those counterargument(s)?

As you determine your focus, also determine which of the effective rhetoric appeals would best help you support the narrowed topic you choose. Would ethos, pathos, or logos best convince your reader that your opinion is right? You can use one, two, or all three appeals if you think it will help your argument. For more information on effective rhetoric see the [Structure of an Argument](#) section or [Purdue OWL's resources](#) on this topic.

Outline

Also, begin an outline for your essay. As you research your topic, start organizing your findings. Some people begin an outline by listing topics and quotes. Others write topic sentences and supporting sentences. An argumentative essay follows typical essay organization, but you may find the body paragraphs don't always follow the regular 5-paragraph essay rules. You may need to plan for more or fewer body paragraphs depending on the support you need for your argument.

Exercise 7.10: Make an Outline

Make an outline for the example essay "[Biofuels: Renewable resource friendly to the environment](#)" at the start of this unit.

Exercise 7.11: Build an Outline

Make an outline for an essay with the following prompt.

Prompt: What is one way your school should improve? Support your answer with reasons and details.

Your outline could include any of the following parts in the order that you think would be most effective for convincing people of your argument.

- Thesis Statement
- Topic Sentence(s)
- Supporting Detail(s)
- Restated Thesis Statement
- Counterclaim(s)
- Rebuttal(s)
- Call to Action/Conclusion etc.

Introduction

Your introduction should start by describing any background that will be important for the reader to know.

Here are some questions that can help you think about the background information that the reader needs to be able to understand the problem:

- Who typically supports my opinion? What reasons do they have?
- Who typically opposes my opinion? What reasons do they have?

At the end of your introduction paragraph, you should give your thesis. The thesis should clearly state the opinion that you will defend in your essay. This is your "**overarching argument**" (University of Galway, 2022, para. 3) .

Example

Thesis Statement: Everyone should begin taking small steps today to begin reducing the negative effects of air pollution on our environment, our health, and the global climate.

The overarching argument here is that "Everyone should begin taking small steps today to begin reducing the negative effects of air pollution." This is the writer's main opinion that the whole essay is going to try and prove.

Review the characteristics of an effective thesis as needed. For an argumentative essay, it is especially important that you don't simply state a fact; your thesis should be an opinion that someone else could argue against.

Effective Thesis Statement Review

An effective thesis statement...

- addresses the **prompt** if there is one* (i.e., answers the question. Includes an arguable opinion.)
- is usually at the **end** of the 1st paragraph.
- controls the content of **all** of the body paragraphs.
- is a **complete** sentence.
- does **not announce** the topic (e.g., "I'm going to talk about why pandas should be protected.").
- should **not** simply be a **fact** (e.g., "There are many animals on the endangered species list.").
- should **not** be **too general** (e.g., "Preservation is good.").
- should **not** be **too specific** (e.g., "Animals with limited populations whose habitats are threatened by primarily human actions such as pandas, polar bears, and elephants should be protected at the local, national, and international level in order to preserve these species so that future generations of people will be able to live in a world full of biodiversity.")
- may **state** or **imply** main points (e.g., "Certain animals should be protected by multiple levels of government and organizations." vs. "Certain animals, namely endangered animals, should be protected by local, national, and international governments and organizations. ")

Exercise 7.12: Practice Thesis Statements

Read the titles of argumentative essays below. Consider the topic of the essay, and then write an effective thesis sentence for each one. Remember to argue for one side of these debatable topics.

1. America's Giant Trucks: A Safety or a Danger?

2. Why Everyone Should Go Hiking

3. Flowers or Books: Should Students Foot the Bill for College Landscaping?

Exercise 7.13: Revise thesis statements

Revise the thesis statements to be more effective for an argumentative essay.

1. Legalizing marijuana can affect all of the population.
2. The primary argument in favor of banning animal testing is not a good argument.
3. Animal testing is not necessary.
4. Globalization has promoted free commerce and low prices for many products around the world in our actual society.
5. Some farmers grow flowers as a commercial crop.
6. It is thought that eating vegetables will help children to grow up healthy and strong which would lead to a stronger more populous workforce which would benefit a country's economy and well-being as a whole.
7. Due to these various reasons. Schools should provide secure parking for electric scooters.

Body

Your body paragraphs should give reasons that support your thesis. The topic sentences of your supporting paragraphs will need to include "contributing arguments" (University of Galway, 2022, para. 3). There are like mini claims or arguments that when proven by the evidence in the paragraph will help your overarching argument from the thesis statement.

If you prove the contributing argument true in its body paragraph, it will help convince your reader that the overarching argument is true. Prove the little arguments true in the body paragraph, to show how your big argument from your thesis statement is true.

Example

Overarching Argument:

Everyone should begin taking small steps today to begin reducing the negative effects of air pollution.

Contributing Argument:

First of all, if people made small daily changes such as turning down the thermostat or carpooling, the effect of air pollution on the environment would be lessened.

Your body paragraphs will need to support your side of the argument and acknowledge your opponent's side of the argument. This can be done in its own paragraph(s) or worked into the supporting paragraphs. A counterargument is usually followed by evidence for the counterargument and then a rebuttal with evidence for the rebuttal. When writing the counterargument, make sure you keep a respectful tone in your writing.

Example Opposition Paragraph:

1. Counterargument	Some people say that regulations on guns are unwise because....
2. Evidence	The evidence they offer in opposition to these regulations includes....
3. Rebuttal	However, ...
4. Evidence	There is evidence to support this such as...

Whether you do this in a single paragraph right before your conclusion, split it into two paragraphs before the conclusion, or use these as supporting details within your regular body paragraphs, it is important to give evidence and present the information fairly. You want your counterclaim to be strong so your rebuttal can stand out and give really good support to your main claim. If you give a good rebuttal to a strong and fairly presented counterclaim, your argument will be even more convincing to the reader.

Exercise 7.14: Matching

Match the rebuttals to the counterclaims. Write the letter of the rebuttal on the line next to the counterclaim it addresses.

1. ___ Governments have a vested interest in ensuring the economy of a nation flows smoothly.
 2. ___ However, students are individuals who are responsible for their own actions and their own resulting test scores.
 3. ___ Some may argue that governments should support and protect laborers as the laborers are citizens and the companies are not.
 4. ___ There is an argument to be made that because students may have a variety of challenges such as learning disabilities, test anxiety, or impacts of socioeconomic status that the teachers can control, that teachers should not be paid based on their students' test performances.
- A. Teachers became teachers knowing that their students would have various challenges and are trained to account for those challenges in their teaching.
- B. While students do in the end make their own decisions, teachers as role models and guides in their students' lives influence students' actions and thus students' test performance.
- C. However, while ensuring the economy in general prospers, the government is hurting the individual laboring citizens who may lose benefits their strike would otherwise have been able to bring about.
- D. That being said, companies provide livelihoods for many citizens and services for many others, so in the end, average citizens are still benefited when the government intercedes in labor strikes.

Exercise 7.15: Fill in the Blank

Read the basic outlines for the arguments below. Write the missing claim (C), counterclaim (CC), and/or rebuttal (R) to complete the argument. Write your answer as a complete sentence.

1. **C:** Hot chocolate should be provided for all students during the winter months.

CC:

R: While that is true, hot chocolate is fairly inexpensive when the flavoring is bought in bulk and the school already has water from the water fountains.

2. **C:** Classes should be held outside at least once a week in the summer.

CC: Although there are some benefits from studying outdoors, the summer weather where the school is located is hot and dry, so outdoor classes could damage students' health.

R:

3. **C:** Valentine's candy traditions should be discontinued as they commercialize what would otherwise be a meaningful holiday about genuine love and affection.

CC:

R:

Exercise 7.16: Complete the Outline

Complete the outline for an argumentative essay below that answers the following prompt.

Prompt: Should college freshmen be required to take a home economics class?

TH: First-year college students should be required to take a home economics class in order to learn how to cook, maintain a home, and manage a budget at what is for many the start of independent adult living.

TS: Because many college students are living away from parents and other caregivers for the first time, learning how to cook basic, nutritious food would be beneficial for their health.

TS: Furthermore, students can learn the basics of home maintenance such as how to clean and do easy repairs to care for themselves in their new homes.

TS: Third, freshmen can establish good financial habits at the start of college by learning to budget.

CC:

R:

RTH: Therefore, college first years should be required to take a home economics class with instruction on some things required to live independently as an adult.

TH = thesis statement, TS = topic sentence, CC: counter claim, R = rebuttal, RTH = restated thesis statement

Conclusion

The conclusion paragraph of an argumentative essay should "draw a conclusion" based on the information provided in earlier paragraphs. **Draw a conclusion** means "to decide that a particular fact or principle is true according to the information you have been given" (Pearson, 2022, para. 1). What you say in your conclusion paragraph should be based on the claims, reasoning, evidence, counterclaim(s), and rebuttal(s) that you made earlier in the essay. You should draw a conclusion for the restated thesis statement, but you may also use this in other sentences of the conclusion paragraph depending on how you develop the paragraph.

Logical Conclusions Examples:

- We would have better-educated people and thus, a better economy.
- In conclusion, with these things, we can have a better experience studying abroad, learn better, and can be better helped in achieving our goals.

Your conclusion paragraph should start by restating your thesis. If your essay is well written, the restated thesis should be a logically drawn conclusion based on the information that comes before it. After your restated thesis, you should discuss your topic more generally and apply your opinion to the general context you established in your introduction. You can end with a closing statement that is a suggestion, prediction, or opinion. The ending sentence could also be a logical conclusion. For argumentative essays, you might also try using a **call to action**, asking your readers to join you in your cause.

Call to Action Examples:

- Let us be more careful about what people are going through. Let us not build walls around ourselves. Let us make this place the place it should be, a place where everyone can feel loved and accepted.
- If a person wants to understand a little bit more of Rio Grande do Sul's culture, she or he should try "churrasco".
- It should be treated as a serious crime.
- Therefore, homeschooling is an attractive alternative to traditional schools and something that parents should seriously consider before deciding to enroll their kids in local classrooms.

While planning your conclusion paragraph, consider the information you plan to give to support your argument. What logical conclusion(s) can you draw from that information?

Exercise 7.17: Drawing Conclusions

There has been a murder. Dun Dun Dun! Use the clues below to draw a logical conclusion about who the culprit is. Write your conclusion as a concise sentence on the line. Can you solve the mystery?

The crime: On Wednesday, February 15th, a Ms. Millie of Ms. Millie's Marvoulus Muffins on Main Street in downtown May Spring, Maine was found murdered in her shop. The dearly departed is remembered by dozens of doting citizens for her devilishly delightful dark chocolate muffins. Police are presently pursuing the guilty party.

The suspects:

- Mr. Mula, a fabulous millionaire, and patron of the arts who always had his assistant pick up Crazy Choco Muffins from Ms. Millie's bakery on Tuesdays.
- Mr. Jack Colby, Mr. Mula's assistant, and Ms. Millie's secret admirer.
- Ms. Sherry Clemintine, Ms. Millie's baking assistant and Clark's ex-girlfriend
- Mr. Clark Custard, a frequent customer and a worker at the rival bakery, Muffin Madness which is also on Main Street.
- Ms. Hazel Hatch, a local painter recently denied a commission by Mr. Mula
- Mr. Benedict Kale, owner of Muffin Madness and long-time childhood friend and rival of Ms. Millie.

The clues:

- Ms. Millie was found surrounded by scattered chocolate truffles.
- The coroner determined that the cause of death was poison.
- The day before the crime was discovered Ms. Millie told her sister she was closing the shop early to go on a date. Her sister does not know with whom.
- The shop security cameras show Ms. Millie working busily until 5:45, 15 minutes before the regular closing time, before the recording suddenly stopped
- Mr. Kale has a chocolate allergy and only makes healthy veggie-based muffins
- A love letter addressed to Ms. Millie was found on the premises, but it was unsigned. There was a smudge of chocolate on the letter, but no fingerprints.
- Ms. Clemintine was out of town at the time of the murder.
- Clark Custard was seen waiting outside the bakery with flowers the day of the murder.
- Ms. Hatch is known to be jealous and good friends with Ms. Clementine.
- Mr. Kale saw Mr. Colby with a box of chocolates on Main Street on the day of the murder.
- Mr. Mula was having dinner with Ms. Hatch on Center Street at 5:30 pm on February 14th. They saw a sad Mr. Custard checking his phone frequently at the same restaurant.

Your conclusion:

Exercise 7.18: Practice Restated Thesis Statements

Read the thesis statements from the argumentative introduction paragraphs below. Then, paraphrase to write a matching restated thesis statement you could use in a conclusion paragraph.

1. Schools should provide students with all the books they will use during the semester of classes.

2. Social media use should be restricted during classes because it affects our concentration.

3. With that in mind, parents must understand that they are responsible to teach their children good principles, values, customs, and so forth.

Exercise 7.19: Evaluate an outline

Read the outline for an essay about art paint. Evaluate it. What would make the outline more effective? Work to revise the outline.

- TH: Acrylic paints are widely used in art.
 - TS: Acrylic paints are considered non-toxic, but can still have some negative effects on the human body.
 - TS: The some pigments are not good such as "Acrylic paints are water-based but still could contain some toxic ingredients such as cobalt, manganese, cadmium, chromium, and lead. These ingredients can cause some side effects when precautions are not followed." (Artincontext, 2022, para. 1)
 - TS: The polymer emulsion part of acrylic paints affecting skin.
 - TS: Acrylic paint is bad for the environment because it uses synthetic resin which is mostly manufactured from plastic, a petroleum-based product.
 - TS: Furthermore, the processes of making the resin for acrylic paint can cause water pollution.
 - TS: Lastly, the irresponsible disposal of acrylic paints by artists can also cause water pollution.
- RTH: Although acrylic paints are relatively safe and usable by the public, people should be careful using them or find alternative mediums for their art.

Sources: Artincontext. (2022, July 29). *Is acrylic paint toxic? - A guide on the key acrylic paint ingredients*. artincontext.org. Retrieved December 8, 2022, from <https://artincontext.org/is-acrylic-paint-toxic/>

Exercise 7.20: Complete the Outline

Complete the outline below by filling in the 8 blanks. You may need to write phrases or sentences to show your ideas. You may also need to fill in the missing cohesive devices to show the relationship between the ideas.

- TH: In-person gaming is a better hobby than video gaming because it develops more social skills and is more affordable.
 - TS: **1)** _____
 - CC: Some may say that social skills can **2)** _____ be developed while playing multiplayer video games.
 - R: **3)** _____
 - TS: **4)** _____ The equipment needed for tabletop games or card games is also generally cheaper than video game equipment which makes it more affordable and accessible to more players.
 - CC: **5)** _____ local libraries often have computers community members can log into and computer and video games available for checkout, **6)** _____ this hobby can be accessed by many people for free.
 - R: **7)** _____
- RTH: **8)** _____

* TH= thesis statement, TS= topic sentence, CC= counter argument, R= rebuttal, RTH= restated thesis statement

Exercise 7.21: Make an Outline

Make an outline for an argumentative essay that answers the following prompt.

Prompt: Your school miraculously gets a grant to provide free ice cream to students, but they can only provide one flavor. What flavor of ice cream should the school provide and why?

References:

Purdue OWL. (2022). *Using rhetorical strategies for persuasion*. Rhetorical Strategies - Purdue OWL® - Purdue University. Retrieved December 11, 2022, from https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/establishing_arguments/rhetorical_strategies.html

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University of Galway. (2022). *Evaluating arguments and evidence*. Evaluating arguments and evidence - University of Galway. Retrieved December 11, 2022, from <https://www.universityofgalway.ie/academic-skills/criticalthinking/evaluatingargumentsandevidecnce/>



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