

Structure of an Argument

An **argument** is an opinion that is supported with evidence on a debatable topic. That means someone else might have a different opinion than you. The goal of argumentative writing or speaking is to convince that other person, called an opponent, that your opinion is right. This will require providing evidence for your side of the argument and showing why your opponent's side of the argument is wrong or at least not as good as your side. To do this you will need to effectively communicate why your opinion is great and theirs is not.

When you make an argument, you can make one of three basic kinds of argument. You can defend an opinion, challenge an opinion, or qualify an opinion (Gaughen, n.d.).

Example

Prompt: Do agree or disagree with the following statement. School should start an hour later.

The response could be a defense, challenge, or qualification.

- **Defense:** School should start an hour later because students will be more awake during classes.
- **Challenge:** School should start at the regular time because starting school early in the morning allows students to work or study in the afternoon.
- **Qualification:** School should start at the regular morning time for young children and adults, but due to adolescent sleeping patterns, the start time should be delayed for high schools.

Parts of an Argument

Whichever argument you choose to make, you will need to use reasons and evidence as well as acknowledge the opposition with a counterclaim which you will address with a rebuttal to bring readers to agree with your position. There are some specific parts of an argument that you should know and be able to purposefully use.

Term	Definition
claim	"to state that something is true, even though it has not been proved"
reason	"a cause or explanation for something that has happened..."*
evidence	"the facts, signs or objects that make you believe something is true"
counterclaim	"a claim made in reply to another claim and different from it"
rebuttal	"the act of saying or proving that a statement or criticism is false"

*Why you think your opinion

Claim

A **claim** is an argument that you are trying to prove. Most importantly a claim is an argument, not an assertion. An **assertion** is an opinion without any evidence or proof ("Arguments, non-arguments and evidence", n.d.). For example, if a writer says "Students should walk more to reduce stress." that is their opinion and just an assertion. Why should the reader believe it? There is no evidence.

Your claim should be an argument. An **argument** is an opinion supported with evidence or proof. You will probably state your claim in your thesis statement and topic sentences, but for them to be real arguments, not just assertions, you will need to back them up with proof in the supporting sentences.

Reason

Reasons are the thoughts behind why you believe something. For example, you could explain the claim "Students should walk more to reduce stress" by giving the reason "Walking can cause chemical changes in the brain which reduce stress." This is more specific than the claim and provides the start of supporting detail. These may be your own ideas or they may be paraphrased ideas from your research.

Evidence

Evidence is the proof behind your claim. It may also give objective backing to your own ideas or the paraphrased research ideas found in the reason. Evidence are often facts, statistics, statements from experts, definitions, examples, etc.

For example, "Research has shown that walking promotes the release of brain chemicals called endorphins that stimulate relaxation and improve our mood. Walking does not have to be done at a fast pace to have stress-relieving benefits. Even a stroll at a comfortable pace promotes relaxation, studies indicate." (Crawford, 2011, para. 4) is information that could be quoted or paraphrased as evidence.

It is important to find and use evidence that is honest and trustworthy. Evaluate the sources of your evidence to decide if it is trustworthy enough to use.

Counterclaim

The counterclaim is your opponent's claim that goes against your own claim. The argument is like a sword fight. The opponent is countering your attack with an attack of their own. The counterclaim will show what the other side of the debate thinks. This can be done in its own body paragraph, an opposition paragraph (Kevin deLamplante, 2009), or as part of one of the regular supporting body paragraphs.

For example, "Walking might reduce stress chemically, but many people do not live in peaceful areas for walking so it might actually increase stress for those people." this would be a counterargument to the claim "Walking reduces stress." The counterclaim can be the exact opposite "Walking *does not* reduce stress." or just a sort of opposite "Walking is sometimes good, but [insert any problem with walking here]"

Rebuttal

The rebuttal follows the counterclaim. The rebuttal shows why the counterclaim is actually not that good of an opinion. For example, "Although some areas are not peaceful to walk in, people can either travel to areas that are peaceful or they can use a treadmill. While not everyone may be able to enjoy the benefits of walking due to their location, the stress-reducing benefits of walking still exist. Students just need to find a place to walk to access them."

Essay Structure

You may notice that the vocabulary for structuring an argument is different than the words usually used for structuring an essay. You will use the regular parts of an essay like thesis statements, topic sentences, and so on to express your ideas about your claim and reasons and evidence etc. The parts of an essay are the tools you will use to show your argument to the reader.

There is not one set way to write an argumentative essay. You can use the parts of an essay and specific types of sentences to show your argument in your own way. You will probably still have an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. You will probably still use thesis statements, topic sentences, supporting sentences, concluding sentences, restated thesis statements, etc. However, you choose how to arrange those to show your argument in a way that the reader will understand the best.

Examples of Argumentative Essay Organization

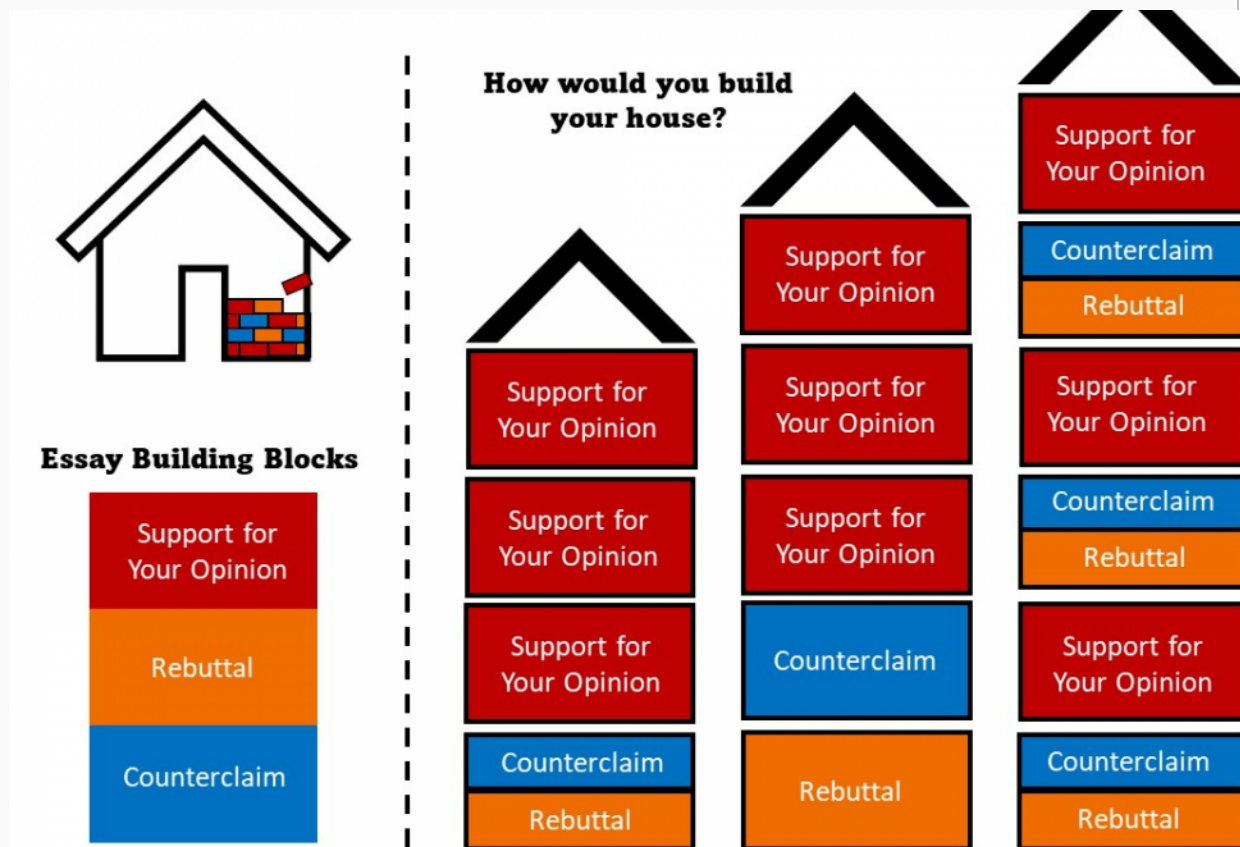


Image: Barraza 2022 (made using PowerPoint and PowerPoint Icons)

These are just a few ways you could arrange the building blocks of an argument into a complete essay. You may find that the parts you need to best defend your idea are different or would be more effectively arranged in a different order. That is okay. This ability to move things around and make your own decisions about the structure of the essay is part of what makes writing a creative process. Your argumentative essay structure will use the building blocks of an argument in a way that may be unique to you and your personal writing style.

Exercise 7.4: 10-Minute Paragraph Outline 1

Set a timer for 10 minutes. Write an outline for an argumentative paragraph using the template below.

Prompt: Now that the internet, and through it information, is so prevalent, should local brick-and-mortar library buildings be closed to focus on online libraries instead?

- Claim: _____
- Reason: _____
- Evidence: _____
- Counterclaim: _____
- Rebuttal: _____
- Restatement of the Claim: _____

Exercise 7.5: 10-Minute Paragraph Outline 2

Set a timer for 10 minutes. Write an outline for an argumentative paragraph using the template below.

Prompt: Should there be a limit to how geographically large a town can grow? (I.e. Should there be a boundary line drawn around cities to mark the area of land they can use?)

- Claim: _____
- Reason: _____
- Evidence: _____
- Counterclaim: _____
- Rebuttal: _____
- Restatement of the Claim: _____

Effective Rhetoric

One last thing to consider when creating your argument is what type of appeal you will use to convince your reader your opinion is correct. You will need to use affective rhetoric to convince the reader.

Rhetoric is "the art of speaking or writing effectively" using principles of composition made by ancient critics to communicate and persuade (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Rhetoric was created by the ancient Greeks to effectively communicate and persuade (Sloane and Perelman, 2022). Aristotle, a famous Greek philosopher, divided rhetorical appeals into what we now call ethos, pathos, and logos (Sloane and Perelman, 2022).

Ethos is the appeal to authority. This is where you use experts or show yourself to be an expert in order to get the reader to trust you and believe your opinion. An example would be a commercial for basketball shoes that features a celebrity basketball player saying how great the shoes are.

Pathos is the appeal to emotion. This is where you use the emotions of the reader, specifically their emotional response to what you write, to convince them that your argument is right. An example would be telling a sad story about dogs in animal shelters to convince people not to give dogs as surprise presents.

Logos is the appeal to logic. This is where you use logical reasoning and evidence to show readers why they should believe your argument. This is one of the most common appeals you will use in academic writing. An example of logos is explaining that everyone should drive more carefully in winter weather because accidents increase by X% with snow on the roads.

As you make your argument to your reader, you can use these appeals to convince them. You can use one, two, or all of the appeals in the defense of your opinion.

Exercise 7.6: Identify the Appeal

Identify which appeal is being used in each sentence. Write **E** for ethos, **P** for pathos, and **L** for logos. If more than one appeal is being used, you can write more than one letter.

1. ____ If education in Mexico improves, there could be more hope for future generations.
2. ____ "More wild bees were seen on the pollen rows than on the sterile rows. When all sterile varieties were compared, only 1 (SW517) had fewer bee visits" (Parker, 1981, p.65).
3. ____ According to the National Park Service run by the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Great American Outdoors Act will increase recreational opportunities and address infrastructure and modernization issues for National Parks and federal lands (2021).
4. ____ From that study, they found that bachelor's degree holders earned 64% more than high school diploma holders in one year, and they are expected to earn 1 million dollars more during their lifetime than a high school diploma holder (Emerson, 2022).
5. ____ It will open your mind to be willing to contribute to your environment and try to be a blessing to the community in which you live.
6. ____ For example, a person who lives in a different country from their family maybe feels alone because she does not know many people in that new place, but because of technology, she can decrease her loneliness by calling her family and sharing about how she is and listening to them about their day.

Exercise 7.7: Argumentative Paragraph Time Writing 1

Practice making short-form arguments by writing a paragraph with all the parts of an argument. Answer the prompt below. Your paragraph should include a 1) claim, 2) reason, 3) evidence, 4) counterclaim, 5) rebuttal, and 6) restatement of claim.

Prompt: Should hack video accounts be held liable for any damage or injury caused by a person following the video's instructions?

Exercise 7.8: Argumentative Paragraph Timed Writing 2

Practice making short-form arguments by writing a paragraph with all the parts of an argument. Answer the prompt below. Your paragraph should include a 1) claim, 2) reason, 3) evidence, 4) counterclaim, 5) rebuttal, and 6) restatement of claim.

Prompt: Should urban towns and cities allow residents to keep livestock on their property or not?

Exercise 7.9: Partner Argument

Find a classmate to be your opponent for this exercise. Each of you take one side of the argument about the prompt: one person is for, and one person is against. Complete Parts A, B, and C below.

Prompt: In democratic countries, should all eligible citizens should be required to vote?

Part A:

Write the start of an argumentative paragraph on a piece of paper. Include your claim and at least one reason and piece of evidence. You may include more reasons and evidence if you have time.

Part B:

Swap papers with your opponent. Read their claim, reasoning, and evidence. Then continue the paragraph by writing a counterclaim and evidence for the counterclaim.

Part C:

Swap papers with your opponent. You should now have your original paper back. Read the paragraph and write a rebuttal with evidence to respond to their counterclaim. Finish the paragraph with a concluding sentence that restates your original claim.

*Optional: Read your completed paragraphs to each other. Compare the strength of your arguments.

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