

AN ALLY CENTER WRITING GUIDE

ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY GUIDE



INTRO

Writing an argumentative essay is both challenging and deeply valuable. Use this writing guide to plot out your writing journey to success. Remember, articulating a clear argument is not only needed to complete a class, it is a necessary life skill.

THINK

Whether it is an introductory English course or a graduate level class, many courses require the ability to write an argumentative paper. The types of argumentative papers may vary, but there are some important questions to ask before beginning to write any of these types of papers. Answering the following questions can be constructive for the process:

- 1. Does my paper require MLA, APA, or SBL formatting?*
- 2. What is the prompt asking of me?*
- 3. What is my topic?*
- 4. How many sources are required?*
- 5. What kind of sources do I need?*
- 6. Am I allowed to write in first or second-person? Or, does the paper require strict adherence to third-person writing?*

If you do not know the answer to any of these questions, make sure to ask your professor. If the answers cannot be found in the information already given, then it does not hurt to ask. It will be far better to start off well than to write a draft and gut it for simple misunderstandings.

OUTLINE & RESEARCH

There are three basic categories for understanding the research of the argumentative essay.

- 1. Begin the research broadly. Do not get stuck in the weeds quite yet, but attempt to find general sources that give an overview of the topic and possible arguments. The library even manages databases which possess these kinds of sources. See a library technician for help to find general sources about the topic.*
- 2. After beginning broadly, you may begin to get more specific. For example, in the previous stage, you may have done broad research for police violence. However, this is far too broad. So, while you researched police violence, you noticed that some people argue for mandatory body cameras on police to reduce violence. Now, in the second stage of specific research, you can identify and read information and arguments which are for and against the idea of mandatory body cameras.*

3. *While doing the specific research, you may begin to hone in on a specific thesis. The process may work as defining a topic, assertion, then argument. For example, while doing broad research, you found that mandatory body cameras on police may be a good route to take. Now that you have a topic, you determine your assertion. You might simply say, "Mandatory body cameras (topic) are unhelpful (assertion). . ." This previous sentence is an assertion because you are asserting or saying something about the topic. Lastly, you must determine your reasons. Why are mandatory body cameras unhelpful? Putting the reasons in a thesis statement may look like, "Mandatory body cameras (topic) are unhelpful (assertion) because x, y, and z (arguments)." The more you move from step one, the more specific your research gets. And the more specific your research gets, the more specific your thesis should become.*

If you find yourself struggling with these steps, do not hesitate to schedule with the Ally Center. An Ally Center mentor would love to meet with you and discuss the interpretation of research as well as formulating your research into an argument.

Now that you have determined a thesis statement, you can begin to construct an outline for your rough draft. Sometimes, a professor may expect a certain outline which would be given on paper. However, if no such specifications are given, then you may begin four steps for the outlining process.

- A. *First, block up the main arguments. Generally, to prove the thesis, there will be three main arguments. Start simply by numbering these three points on paper.*
- B. *Second, determine proofs for arguments. In order for the arguments of your thesis to work, they will have to contain proofs that prove them to be true. For instance, the first point of the thesis may be, "Climate change is real because of worldwide temperature changes. . ." If it is true that the world wide temperature has been changing, then it would be a good argument that climate change is real. So, how do you prove that the world temperature has been changing? This is where the proofs come in. You must show the reader that there have been overall changes in temperature around the world. You may use statistics, scholarly sources, experiences, historical facts, or some other authority. For instance, you could show statistics from the seven main continents which show an overall increase in temperature. That would prove that the worldwide temperature is changing, thereby proving that climate change is real. So, ask yourself the question, how or with what can I prove my argument?*
- C. *Third, create topic sentences to relate back to the thesis and forward to the argument. Sometimes, it may be helpful to write the topic sentences ahead of time. By doing so, all you have left to do is fill out the argument with your proofs. A topic sentence for your point will restate the thesis in order to keep the paper on focus, while also looking forward to the following point. An easy way to do this would be to literally restate the thesis but only with the one point in focus.*
- D. *Fourth, create sections for rebuttals. Usually, in an argumentative essay, the writer must deal with at least two opposing viewpoints to the arguments at hand. So, determine what those opposing responses would be. After determining which responses to tackle, think about the best place to put them. Maybe it would be best for each rebuttal to be put against a certain point. Or, it could be just as well to save the rebuttals for the end. Wherever you might put them, begin with a solid transitional phrase such as, "Those who oppose [insert here] often say. . ." A phrase like this alerts your reader that an opposing viewpoint is being introduced. After explaining the opposing argument, provide a critique of it in the following paragraph. You could introduce it like, "However, those who argue as such are often mistaken in two ways. . ." Then, you could list those out, or whatever response your topic sentence points toward.*

THINK

At this point, writing should become a little bit easier. If you have created a thesis, outline and topic sentences with proofs, all that is left is to fill in the space. If possible, try to write consistently without stopping while following your outline. You can leave the editing for later; just focus on creating a rough draft.

EDIT & REVISE

It is always preferable to accomplish the editing process with someone else. An extra set of eyes can spot strengths or issues that you may not have seen before. The Writing Center is a great place to start this process! At any stage, mentors at the Writing Center are more than happy to be an extra set of eyes to help you succeed in writing.

Finally, while reading the draft on your own, it can be helpful to ask the following questions:

1. Did I stick to my thesis throughout the paper?
2. Do my topic sentences look back to the thesis and forward to the argument?
3. Are my sources cited correctly?
4. Are there any grammatical errors?
5. (And possibly most important) What did I learn from this paper?