

HANDOUT OF WRITING FOR S.6 STUDENTS

THE ARGUMENTATIVE COMPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

After narration and description, we have seen how expository writing aims primarily at explaining and analysing. Another type of development is one that consists in convincing and persuading. This is the argumentative composition.

An argument ensues when two parties disagree about something. One party gives an opinion and offers reasons in support of it, and the other party gives a different opinion and offers reasons in support of his/her stand. However, people can disagree about many things that cannot be argued effectively, such as a preference (*a flavour of ice cream*), a faith (*a religious belief*), or a fact (*who won the Soccer World Cup in 2022*).

The kind of argument that can be argued logically is the one based on an opinion that can be supported by evidence such as facts. For example, when a nuclear explosion takes place somewhere, a debate ensues concerning the whole issue of nuclear energy. Those in favour of continuing the construction of nuclear power plants argue against those who want to ban further construction of plants. Both proponents and opponents give their reasons.

An argumentative essay is one that attempts to change the reader's mind, to convince the reader to agree with the point of view of the writer. Therefore, the argumentative essay attempts to be highly persuasive and logical.

Avoid confusing between a thesis with a strong central idea and an argumentative statement. While the former is a fact, the latter is a course of action often expressed with the modal '*should*'.

Exercise: Are these statements argumentative?

- 1- The flood of Boumerdes was one of the most devastating in history.
- 2- Prospective parents should be required to get licences in order to have children.
- 3- The building codes in Algeria are inadequate.
- 4- Most of the Algerians I met are hospitable.
- 5- There are complex reasons for the failure of the police to respond quickly to alarms.

Refutation

When you write an argumentative essay, you must be intensely aware of the audience--the reader. Remember that the purpose of an argumentative composition is to convince the reader that your position is the best. To begin with, assume that the reader disagrees with you. Next, remember that although the reader disagrees with you, that does not mean he or she is any less intelligent than you. Therefore, avoid attacking the reader with such statements as "*anyone who believes we should ban nuclear plants must be ignorant, or out of touch with reality*". Indeed, address your reader writing objectively, logically, and respectfully.

The most important thing to consider about the members of the audience is why they hold their opinion. What reasons do they think they might use to support their opinion? Trying to identify and understand your opponent's point of view is important. If you do not understand your opponent's reasons and you just argue your own reasons, you are not likely to convince the reader at all.

Argumentation

How can you convince someone who disagrees with you? First, you need to understand what points need to be argued; that is, you must be sure that you understand the 'heart' of the issue. If you know your stand on the issue and you know what points you have to prove, then, you are well on your way toward constructing a logical argument.

All formal arguments are based on logic. There are two kinds of formal logical reasoning: *inductive* and *deductive*. **Induction** refers to the process of examining particular details and arriving at a conclusion based on that evidence. Let's say that you are an investigative reporter for a newspaper. You have been asked to look into the causes of a famous hotel fire. After some research, you learned that the fire was due to a faulty electrical wiring and you found out that Sonelgaz Company has installed the wiring. After further research, you found out that 60% of the buildings that were wired by Sonelgaz Company caught fire within two years, and 85% of those fires were due to faulty electrical wiring. From this, you reasonably conclude: "*Buildings wired by Sonelgaz Company are likely to have faulty wiring*".

Deduction, on the other hand, refers to the process of arriving at a conclusion about a particular case based on a generalisation. In other words, in deduction you begin with a generalisation and apply it to a specific case. Concerning the Sonelgaz Company, you would begin with the conclusion mentioned above, and end with "*The International Hotel probably had faulty wiring*".

When you plan an argumentative composition, it is often a good idea to begin the argument at a point where you and your opponent both agree.

Planning the Argumentative Composition

When you plan an argumentative essay, be aware that the essay should contain the following characteristics:

- 1- *The argumentative composition should introduce and explain the issue or case.* The reader needs to understand the issue being argued. It is often necessary to define any ambiguous term. To avoid any misunderstanding with the reader, quite often you will need to define the key words in a second introduction.
- 2- *The composition should offer reasons and support for those reasons.* In other words, the essay should prove its point.
- 3- *The essay should refute opposing arguments.* You must prove your own case, and you should also prove that the opponent is wrong. Refute means to prove wrong by arguments.

Organising the Argumentative Composition

The basic workable approach commonly used is the following:

1. *Introduction:* Sometimes writers break down the introduction into two paragraphs: the first one introducing the thesis and the second one explaining additional information or giving background information necessary for the argument.
2. *Reasons:* It is a good idea to devote one paragraph for each reason. Two or three reasons are typical.
3. *Refutation:* Depending on how many points the writer wishes to address, the refutation can take from one to two paragraphs. It is possible for the refutation to come before the reasons.
4. *Conclusion.*

Some Argumentative Topics to Discuss

1. One of the good reasons the use of pesticides in farming should be severely restricted and controlled is that pesticides kill 'good' and 'bad' insects indiscriminately. You may think the more dead insects the better, but some insects are beneficial to farmers.
2. Excluding a student is the perfect type out of pure evil against which all teachers should fight.
3. Students should have a say in the hiring and firing of teachers.

STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY (Purdue Website)

What is an argumentative 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 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, he will meet difficulties to compose an effective or persuasive essay.

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

Transitions are the cement 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.

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 absolutely wrong, 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 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.

A 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.

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.

ANALYSIS OF A MODEL ESSAY

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| <p>Title: An original title – not just stating the topic</p> <p>Intro: Describes situation: defines the issue and basic terms that the essay will discuss</p> <p>Thesis Statement</p> <p>Follows pattern: (Noun) should (action)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">"Fixing" What Is not Broken</p> <p>Every pet owner knows that there are enormous responsibilities that go along with having a cat or dog. You must feed and exercise your pet, to keep it physically healthy. There is another responsibility that not all pet owners think about, however: spaying or neutering or “fixing.” What does “fixing” your pet mean? Simply put, it means taking your pet to the vet for a quick, cheap surgery that will prevent your pet from ever becoming a mother or father. I believe that all pet owners should be required to have their pets fixed.</p> |
| <p>Argument 1: Why is my claim (the one I make in the Thesis Statement) a good one? What reasons can I give to support my idea? Here I explain that (1) overpopulation of animals is a real problem, and (2) why it is a problem (from several different points of view). I have so many details to talk about; just one argument takes a long paragraph. The paragraph ends with a strong claim.</p> | <p>Everybody loves a pretty new puppy or kitten. But those cute babies soon get bigger, and right now, there simply are not enough homes for them all. Some unwanted animals go to shelters, or “dog pounds.” These shelters are like prisons for animals, but with one important difference: many of the prisoners will never get out. Shelters have limited funds and limited space, and they cannot keep all the animals they collect. If a cat or dog is not adopted within a certain time period, that animal is killed. On the other hand, not all unwanted animals go to a shelter. What happens to a homeless animal left out on the street? They are not wild animals. They cannot find fresh water or hunt their own food (especially in a city). They cannot understand traffic laws, so they often get struck by cars. They are susceptible to common illnesses. They may attack other animals or people. In either case, the life of most unwanted animals is not long, but it is full of misery and pain, and it is also a life that is dangerous to pets (or people) whom they meet. By not “fixing” your own animal, you will almost certainly be adding to this problem.</p> |
| <p>Argument 2: A totally different reason for my thesis statement. Here, I talk about health, from three different points of view. The paragraph ends again with a strong claim.</p> | <p>Another thing to consider is the health of your pet itself. Animals, especially pets who eat processed foods just like we do, are prone to the same illnesses as we are, like heart disease and cancer. An animal who has been spayed or neutered is at less risk from certain kinds of cancer. Furthermore, animals who are not fixed can sometimes go crazy trying to find mates. They can injure themselves trying to escape from their homes, or they may fight with other animals when they have escaped. Of course, while running free, they are in danger from cars. And finally, for females who become mothers, we must remember that giving birth is not a safe process. For the ordinary pet owner, all these reasons should be strong enough to convince them to “fix” their dear pet.</p> |
| <p>Counterargument/Rebuttal 1: I give a direct quote of what my imaginary “enemy” might say. 2 ideas are combined here. This one is related to one of my</p> | <p>Of course, some people will not agree with me. “I don’t want to give my animal an unnecessary surgery,” they will say. “Surgery is risky, too, and it’s certainly expensive.” That idea shows ignorance. Spaying or neutering should be done as soon as you get your pet - when he or she is young and healthy - and it is almost 100% safe. Your animal is in much more danger if not fixed, for the urge to run away from home will put your pet in extremely dangerous situations.</p> |

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| <p>arguments. I start my rebuttal immediately with a strong criticism I give a definition for the acronym S.P.C.A</p> | <p>And almost all cities have a fund to help pay for the surgery. Just ask at your vet or the local S.P.C.A. (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). The cost can be as low as \$10.</p> |
| <p>Counterargument/Rebuttal 2 One idea, explained in a few different ways. This idea is completely unrelated to any of my arguments. Both ways of writing a counterargument (related to argument or unrelated) are OK it's your choice.</p> | <p>Others might feel that this surgery will change their pet's personality. They might think that a "fixed" dog might not be a good watchdog, for example. Or they may simply say "I like my pet the way he/she is." This shows a basic misunderstanding of what the effects of spaying or neutering are. Your pet's personality, like a human's personality, is his or her own, and it will not change after "fixing". However, it is true that some behaviour will change. Your pet will not want to "mark" with urine as much, for example, and females will not "go into heat" and tear up the house every few months. Your watchdog will still be a good watchdog, but probably will not want to fight with other dogs as much. This simple surgery solves many behaviour problems that can make an otherwise loveable pet into a monster. The best solution is simply to get your pet "fixed" as soon as you get it home, as young as possible. That way, fewer bad habits will form.</p> |
| <p>Conclusion: Comes back to the arguments; restates (does not repeat) the thesis statement.</p> | <p>No matter how you look at it, there is really no valid reason not to spay or neuter your pet. Whether you consider the potential suffering of unborn animals, the health and comfort of your own pet, or your own convenience as a pet owner, you must agree that the facts all show that spaying or neutering is the way to go. It is not only the convenient choice, but also the morally right choice, and one that all pet owners should make.</p> |

Analyze the following essay in terms of refutation and argumentation, and locate the important parts in each of its paragraphs.

Prohibition and Drugs

“The reign of tears is over. The slums will soon be only a memory. We will turn our prisons into factories and our jails into storehouses and corncribs. Men will walk upright now, women will smile, and the children will laugh. Hell will be forever for rent.”

This is how Billy Sunday, the noted evangelist and leading crusader against Demon Rum, greeted the onset of prohibition in early 1920. We know how tragically his hopes were doomed. New prisons and jails had to be built to house the criminals spawned by converting the drinking of spirits into a crime against the state. Prohibition undermined respect of the law, corrupted the minions of the law, created a decadent moral climate – but did not stop the consumption of alcohol.

Despite this tragic lesson, we seem bent on repeating the same mistake in the handling of drugs.

On ethical grounds, do we have the right to use the machinery of government to prevent an individual from becoming an alcoholic or a drug addict? For children, almost everyone would answer at least a qualified yes. But for responsible adults, I would answer no. Reason with the potential addict, yes. Tell him the consequences, yes. Pray for him and with him, yes. But I believe that we have no right to use force, directly or indirectly, to prevent a fellow man from committing suicide, let alone from drinking alcohol or taking drugs.

I readily grant that the ethical issue is difficult and that men of good will may well disagree. Fortunately, we need not resolve the ethical issue to agree on policy. Prohibition is an attempted cure that makes matters worse for both the addict and the rest of us. Hence, even if you regard present policy towards drugs as ethically justified, considerations of expediency make that policy most unwise.

Consider first the addict. Legalising drugs might increase the number of addicts, but it is not clear that it would. Forbidden fruit is attractive, particularly to the young. More important, many drug addicts are deliberately made by pushers, who give likely prospects their first few doses free. It pays the pusher to do so because, once hooked, the addict is a captive customer. If drugs were legally available, any possible profit from such inhumane activity would disappear, since the addict could buy from the cheapest source.

Whatever happens to the number of addicts, the individual would clearly be far better off if drugs were legal. Today, drugs are both incredibly expensive and highly uncertain in quality. Addicts are driven to associate with criminals to get the drugs, become criminals themselves to finance the habit, and risk constant danger of death and disease.

Consider next the rest of us. Here the situation is crystal-clear. The harm to us from the addiction of others arises almost wholly from the fact that drugs are illegal. A recent committee of the American Bar Association estimated that addicts commit one-third to one-half of all street crimes in U.S. Legalise drugs, and street crimes will drop automatically.

Moreover, addicts and pushers are not the only ones corrupted. Immense sums are at stake. It is inevitable that some relatively low-paid police and other government officials – and some high-paid ones as well-- will succumb to the temptation to pick up easy money.

In drugs, as in other areas, persuasion and examples are likely to be far more effective than the use of force to shape others in our image.

Some Essay Writing Topics

- In education, life experience is much better than school.
- Is the daily homework assigned by teachers really necessary?
- There is nothing that young people can teach older people.
- Many people claim that human values have changed during the pandemic. Argue!
- Do art and culture play an important role in your life?
- Is co-education more advantageous than single-sex education?