

## ARGUMENTS

Argumentative writing is essentially an intellectual exercise, which allows for the comparison of other people's opinions/hypotheses, and their proof. We use this process to compare our own opinions/hypotheses with the opinions/hypotheses of others in order to make decisions; and, most importantly: To learn.

### ARGUMENTS STEM FROM OPPOSITION

Arguments are born from binaries. Yes, binaries.

Binaries are natural oppositions that exist in the universe.

Example:

0 and 1

Cold and Hot

Something and Nothing

Light and Dark

With respect to argumentative binaries, we recognize that there are always two opposing viewpoints on a controversial topic (perhaps even more, depending on the topic).

People can be:

For or Against

Pro or Anti

Guilty or Innocent

And, even much more simply, a person can claim that

They Believe Something or They Do Not Believe Something (as in the existence of Aliens, or even a God)

Or, they can simply say "Yes" to an idea, or they can say "No" to an idea (as in the belief of whether caffeine is healthy).

They can be in "agreement" with something, or they can "disagree" (as in whether a "rhythm method" is a reliable and/or acceptable method of birth control).

Applied to a controversial topic, one can say:

Cloning Pets is a good thing (a pro-stance).

-Or-

Cloning Pets is a bad thing (an anti-stance).

Applied to a philosophical topic, one can say:

I believe in God.

-Or-

I do not believe in God.

### CHOOSING THE BEST TOPIC

Both "good" and "bad" topics exist with respect to argumentative writing.

Good topics are “good,” because they are binaries. They allow two parties to argue (that is, to have a dialogue about the topic). Bad topics are “bad,” because they do not allow for argument.

Example: (Poor Argumentative Topic)

Child Abuse... This topic is definitely not a “good” topic. Why? There is no binary opposition.

Everyone is generally against child abuse. Moral and ethical norms (or normal behavior) tells us that such behavior is wrong. Therefore, this topic is not viable (not really subject to debate).

So, what’s a good argument topic?

Good argument topics exist in binary opposition. Good argument topics allow for discussion and evaluation of proof from both sides.

Example: (Good Argumentative Topic)

The United States should have a public healthcare system.

-Or-

The United States should not have a public healthcare system.

Example: (Good Argumentative Topic)

Automatic rifles should be available for purchase in the U.S.

-Or-

Automatic rifles should not be available for purchase in the U.S.

Because both topics have opposition for both sides of these topics, these topics become viable argumentative topics.

CLAIM

We tend to call a well-developed and well-informed opinion (on an argumentative issue) a CLAIM (some people refer to a claim as an assertion, hypothesis, or a claim – this depends on your instructor).

Put simply:

Your OPINION = Your CLAIM

Usually, in an academic argument, you begin with a CLAIM.

This claim is made to attempt to change the minds of those who believe the other side of the argumentative binary.

In most early college courses, you will find instructors asking you to make judgments on the value of something or to ask you to suggest your personal opinion. In making a CLAIM, you pick a side to the argumentative binary. Then, you defend it. You draw on

proof for your argument from a variety of sources and attempt to persuade the reader that your position is the best.

## SUPPORT

In order for a reader/audience to decide on which claim/position is the best, the argument must have SUPPORT. In college courses, SUPPORT is also called “proof” or sometimes “evidence.”

SUPPORT refers to any type of material (physical or textual) that can be found and brought to help to persuade an audience that your CLAIM is correct and acceptable.

As you will learn, SUPPORT exists in different forms.

Typically, support for a claim exists as:

- +Indisputable Physical Facts
- +Indisputable Physical Evidence
- +Data from Scientific Instrumentation (e.g., DNA tests, carbon-dating, etc.)
- +Statistics
- +even, Witness Testimony (although your witness must be an expert on the topic or in fact a witness to something).

Example: (The Public Healthcare Argument)

### PRO

Fact: Most U.S. Citizens do not have health insurance.

Fact: Health insurance is expensive and unaffordable.

Statistic: One out of every two individuals is not covered by medical insurance.

Witness Testimony: Dr. Johnson, a prominent doctor, explains that most people refuse medical treatment because of the costs.

### ANTI

Fact: Public healthcare would involve heavy taxation.

Logical Reasoning: Who would pay for healthcare for the poor?

Fact: Public healthcare would create longer waiting times for medical/surgical procedures.

Fact: Rich individuals would still want a private option.

Example: (Automatic Rifles)

### PRO

Fact: While unspecified, the Second-Amendment of the Constitution of the United States guarantees the right to own guns.

Logical Reasoning: Automatic rifles may be necessary for personal protection of individuals (and their families) in the case of revolt, government breakdown, or civil war.

### ANTI

Expert Testimony: Automatic rifles are not practical for home defense. The rounds or bullets of most automatic rifle go through walls of most structures and may hurt other individuals in the home.

Fact: Automatic rifles have been banned in the United States for years.

Logical Reasoning: If a person were able to use an automatic rifle during a mass shooting, the casualties would be much more numerous than if a semi-automatic rifle were used.

## THE REALITY OF ARGUMENTS

Fallaciously, many people claim that people win arguments or arguments can be "won." However, not all arguments can be "won." For an argument to be "won" outright, a fact is changed or something is changed to reflect the reasoning is acceptable by the masses.

Since some people are unwilling to accept the personal opinions of other people, persuasion through argument may not be possible. In either case, the best a person can hope for with an argument is to either create a new fact or to attempt to change a person's mind about a topic.

Example:

In a court of law, an attorney may create enough doubt about the theses of another lawyer to create "reasonable doubt" about whether or not a person has committed a crime.

Example:

In the case of science, many scientists can agree to a hypothesis and proclaim it to be an accepted theory based on their reasoning; however, because they are in-agreement does not make the accepted theory factual or even definitive. For example, there are no definitive conclusions about the creation of the universe nor the death of the dinosaurs. Some items remain mysteries, although oftentimes a convincing enough claim and support can persuade people to make a judgment.

## ARRANGEMENT

Components of your argument should never be placed arbitrarily (that is, without reason).

Even the early Greeks and Romans had a set arrangement or organization for their speeches and legal process:

Exordium (or Introduction)

+catch the reader's attention

Narration (or the Description of the Situation)

+presents the facts

Division

+discusses the points to be contested

Proof

- +Provides support for the argument
- Refutation (or Rebuttal)
- +refutes the opponent's arguments
- Peroration (or Conclusion)
- +summarizes the argument and stirs the audience

We borrow from this model.

You should be strategic in placing the components of your argument (that is, taking advantage of your arrangement in order to help your work to be logical and easy to understand).

Typically, an argument works like this:

1. Open with an introductory section which explains the issue. For example, start with a story or some other persuasive technique in order to “get the reader’s attention.”
2. Provide a claim or a hypothesis either in the introduction or shortly thereafter.
3. Start providing support to the claim. Here is where you want to bring in the facts, data, and even expert opinion. If such things are not available, you may also use other forms of support (such as logic). Most often, having a few substantial facts to support the claims works well enough.
4. Consider adding a rebuttal or a refutation (either implies the writing of a statement convincing the audience that the opposing argument or opposing points are wrong), although rebuttals/refutation are not necessary and may, in fact, lead the audience to doubt or question your claim/support. One colleague suggested, “Out of sight, out of mind” when discussing rebuttals/refutations.
5. Conclude your argument by reviewing your points of support and advocating or recommending a course of action. As the classical model suggests: Stir the audience one last time and leave them pondering the topic.

Although the above arrangement provides a very conventional method of argumentation, the sky is definitely the limit to what is possible. Some arguments may begin with rebuttals and refutations and then review support for the author’s claim. Others may start with the claim. Then again, some arguments end with the claim. Some arguments only imply a claim.

Note: Typically, your instructor/professor will want to be able to identify your claim.