

## INTERMEDIATE ARGUMENTATION

### WHAT ARE ARGUMENTS?

The term, argument, has different meanings:

1. a quarrel between individuals.
2. a logic-based framework where premises lead to a conclusion (e.g.,  $A+B=C$ .  $C-B=A$ . Therefore,  $C-A=B$ ).
3. a series of facts intended to support a point of view (i.e., an opinion) for the purpose of persuasion.

Academic Argumentative writing is essentially sandwiched between definitions two & three.

Academic argumentation is 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.

Examples:

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.

## REBUTTALS AND REFUTATIONS

Both ideas are synonymous with the idea of presenting a counter argument. The purpose of the counterargument is to recognize the opposing viewpoint or the counterclaim and look for weakness in its support.

Weakness can be obvious, while others are not. Typically, one can find fallacies in the argument and point them out to the audience. Other things, asking hard questions may be the answer. The point of an honest/ethical counterargument is to look for error. The alternative (the unethical thing to do) is to ridicule the author, their support, and/or their witnesses.

Example:

We need to have a public healthcare option for everyone in the United States.

Rebuttal/Refutation:

How will we pay for this option? Raising taxes and even taking reallocating money from things like national defense are unacceptable, as the poor cannot afford more taxation, and many things in our current government like national defense are important. Now, this rebuttal/refutation is an oversimplification, but hopefully you understand the idea.

#### HOW TO WRITE AN ARGUMENT?

Begin with a discussion of the situation. (background)

Present an opinion. (claim)

Support your claim with facts, evidence, and data. (support)

Explain how your facts, evidence, and data support the claim. (warrant)

Recognize and counter any facts/claims contrary to your argument. (counterargument)

Make recommendations to implement your claim. (call to action)

#### SAMPLE ARGUMENT 1

Example:

Homelessness is a significant problem in the United States both morally and financially. Many temporarily unemployed families and individuals do not have the money to rent/lease or buy housing.

Tiny home communities may likely solve the homelessness issue.

Tiny homes are inexpensive shelters which provide short-term and long-term solutions for homeless people. Several cities have created tiny home communities for homeless families and individuals, and the results have been positive and financially feasible. Tiny homes cost a fraction of monthly housing costs provided currently.

Tiny homes can reduce the homelessness problem. This reduction has been proven by examples. The costs are significantly lower than housing credits or temporary housing.

Many people suggest we should simply give “monthly vouchers” to homeless people to help them afford housing. However, giving money to homeless people will not provide them with housing. Yet, providing housing in lieu of cash may solve the problem.

Therefore, we should create a community of tiny houses for our homeless, which provides a more permanent solution to the problem while reducing overall costs to taxpayers.

#### SAMPLE ARGUMENT 2

Example:

The cost of prescription drugs keeps increasing. Regular citizens are unable to afford their medications with such cost increases. Despite this situation, almost every major drug company posted record profits last year.

To counter rising drug costs, the government should likely implicit cost regulation policies on prescription drugs.

The citizens of several European countries, as well as several countries in South America, pay much less for prescription drugs since their governments set limits and negotiate with the drug companies to lower prices. Furthermore, these governments subsidize their drug companies with tax breaks and financial incentives to cut costs (for operation and research costs).

If the United States follows the example set by other countries to set cost limits and negotiating prices/supply, then drug companies would most likely lower costs on prescription drugs. However, if left unchecked and unregulated, prices will surely continue to rise.

Therefore, we need to create government policies to regulate drug costs and find ways to remunerate drug companies for reduced prices. Write your representatives, and ask for their participation in solving this issue.

#### HOW TO START: BACKGROUNDS

Always begin your argument with an in-depth explanation of the problem or the current situation. Oftentimes, starting with the history of a situation and informing the reader about its origins can be helpful. If not, start directly by addressing the current state of affairs. Use context questions to situate the issue with the reader. Ask:

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

How?

To What Degree?

Explain the affected populations or individuals. Explain the situation to the shareholders or interested parties.

#### HOW TO END: CALLS TO ACTION

Calls to action take many different forms; however, their purpose is the same: asking the reader to act on the claim of the argument. These actions may take the form of recommendations (sometime tangible to do, an action to do, etc.). Or, these actions may be more intellectual (such as discussions).

#### CLAIMS

To create an argument, you must have a claim (sometimes called a Thesis or Thesis Statement). The claim is the beginning point of an argument. To create a claim, you must have chosen a side in the argumentative binary.

When constructing a claim, there are three things to remember:

- 1) A claim clearly states your position/your opinion in the argument (claims are not facts).
- 2) A claim is a declarative sentence.
- 3) A claim should be qualified (that is, a claim must have qualification).

#### USE YOUR OPINION

Typically, a claim is an opinion, an assertion, or a hypothesis, not a fact. For example, you can make a sort of declaration:

"Eating fiber is good for you" (An opinion which offers an evaluation...)

However, you cannot say:

"Eating fiber reduces instances of colon cancer." (This would be a fact)

Changing the subject, you could say

"Blu-ray discs should replace DVDs."

However, you should not say:

"Blu-ray discs offer five times the storage capacity of traditional DVDs." (This would be a fact).

#### WRITE A DECLARATIVE SENTENCE

A declarative sentence is a sentence which makes statements. Declarative sentences do not ask questions, do not make commands, and do not make exclamations.

#### USE QUALIFICATION

One thing that helps many authors to have valid and significant claims is qualification. When you qualify your statement, you help to make the statement truer (recognizing that arguments have definite limitations).

Think of qualification in this way: Oftentimes, a claim can be too strong (leaving us open to attack from the opposing side). If we soften the claim, then we make the claim truer and more valid. Additionally, a claim may not consider a possibility which has not presented itself yet (an alternative not yet known to the problem or an explanation not yet available). In order to write in a way which considers all the options, then we must qualify our claims.

Consider the "Fiber" example again:

"Eating fiber is good for you."

With qualification, you would probably say:

"Eating fiber may be good for you."

-OR-

"In most cases, eating fiber is good for you."

One thing which has plagued scientists, mathematicians, rhetoricians, and philosophers for generations is the question of "universal statements." Universal statements are statements about things in the universe which seem to apply to ALL circumstances, conditions, or situations.

So, you could write:

"Blu-ray discs should replace DVDs."

However, if you wrote:

In most cases, Blu-ray discs should replace DVDs.

You would have written the statement with a larger sense of truth and validity, and you would left open the possibility that DVDs might (in some way) be better than Blu-ray discs. Consider if some technologies still rely on using DVDs and are incompatible with



Blu-ray discs. Keeping this question in mind, we qualify the claim by adding the phrase “In most cases....” Then, the statement would be more acceptable.

Other qualifiers are: Oftentimes, most likely, in most cases, some, often, regularly, more than likely, etc.

## COUNTERARGUMENTS

Counterarguments recognize any circumstances/conditions which might affect/hinder your thesis and/or your support.

Counterarguments serve many purposes:

- 1) To show an understanding of the opposing argument
- 2) To recognize and show understanding of potential problems with your argument.
- 3) To play the “Devil’s Advocate” (that is, to take the opposing position for the sake of understanding any potential circumstances/conditions which might arise as a result of or as a cause of your thesis).

In this sense, counterarguments are simply components of arguments which recognize the opposing viewpoint (its thesis and its argument), and attempt to refute, deny, or debunk it.

Counterarguments contain four components:

- 1) The Counterclaim
- 2) The Counterpoints
- 3) The Analysis
- 4) The Rebuttal

These components equate to main four steps, which must be accomplished to have a valid and well-constructed counterargument:

- 1) The opposing viewpoint is recognized (counterclaim).
- 2) Points of support from the opposing argument are discussed (counterpoints).
- 3) A weakness or limitation is recognized, if any exists (analysis).
- 4) Then, action is taken to restore credibility in your claim/argument (rebuttal).

## COUNTERCLAIM

The counterclaim is simply the claim of the opposing viewpoint or the opposing argument.

Note: The opposing viewpoint is always presented fairly and honestly (so that you do not expose ill-will towards your opponent (or opponents) in the eyes of the audience/reader).

## COUNTERPOINTS

Counterpoints are points of support for the counterclaim. Essentially, you will discuss the opposing argument. Usually, you will recognize the most substantial evidence of the opposing argument (one or more points from the opposing argument).

## ANALYSIS

In conducting an analysis of the counterclaim and its counterpoints, you should ask yourself if any of these circumstances/conditions apply:

- 1) Is the support weak? In other words, do they have enough proof? Is the proof substantial? Are there any limitations of their support (e.g. time, technology, expertise)? (Example: Sometimes, arguments are supported by bad information - including old information, badly-researched information, etc. Recognizing that an argument has bad information can be helpful. You should simply point out that something is not sufficient or unacceptable since the support is limited, not conclusive, or even not substantial due to its research).
- 2) Is the logic faulty? In other words, is one of the common fallacies present? (There are many different types of fallacies which could have been used by the opposing viewpoint to construct their argument; likewise, the information presented could be flawed since there is little connection between the thesis and the support).
- 3) Are there ulterior motives for the argument which are not discussed (presenting these motives may help against showing their argument as unethical or not very moral)? Would a favorable outcome for the opposing viewpoint lead to something other than the desired outcome?
- 4) Does the opposing viewpoint move contrary to commonly held beliefs or assumptions? Groups are generally conservative and superstitious. If something about the opposing viewpoint disrupts the commonly held belief systems or superstitions, the argument is likely to be viewed unfavorably.
- 5) Is this an emotional issue rather than a logical one? If the logic is sound and valid, then you might employ some emotional support to strengthen your own argument. Use an image presenting the outcomes of favoring the opposing viewpoint -> Point to long-term effects/outcomes, problems in implementation, etc. Any certain or foreseeable effects may be enough to create doubt in the argument.
- 6) Are there other problems/concerns/opportunities which do not appear here...?

## REBUTTAL

After you have recognized and analyzed the counterclaim and the counterpoint, you may use a rebuttal to point out problems with the counterclaim or its argument.

Rebuttals may focus on the counterclaim itself (rather than the entire opposing argument), particular points of its support/argument, or they may simply focus the argument as a whole.

Once you have identified any problems/hazards represented by the opposition, you should attempt to move forward with them.

You may decide to:

- +Point to fallacies
- +Point to problems in their natural support (their evidence)
- +Point to problems with their artificial support (their rhetorical appeals)
- +Point to how artificial support is wrongly used or exploited for the ends of the counterclaim
- +Offer your own questions to unseat the counterclaim, the counterpoints, or the writer/speaker/composer (sometimes called, "cross examination").
- +Offer your own critical interpretation of the counterclaim and/or its support
- +Point to errors, incongruities, or biases.
- +Etc.

Again, you can point to problems in the opposing viewpoint directly; however, if no problem can be identified and the argument is fairly sound/valid, then you should attempt to use your own artificial support to strengthen your own claim while moving away from the opposition.

Example:

1: All Christians, Jews, and Muslims should be vegetarians.

2: Why?

1: It says in the Old Testament: Thou Shall Not Kill. And, it does not specify what is not to be killed. Therefore, I think this applies to animals as well, so Christians, Jews, and Muslims should not kill and consume meat.

2: [Rebuttal] I understand that you believe this interpretation is correct; however, there are well-documented accounts of early Christians/Jews offering animal sacrifices and eating meat. Additionally, while Mosaic Laws suggest not killing, we accept that this text (because of its context) refers to crimes between human beings, since there is plenty of mention of meat consumption and sacrifice in the Old Testament. And, again, most of the "commandments" are expressly between humans and other humans, and humans and their conception of God.

Notice the use of logos after the opposition's support.

### CIRCULAR ARGUMENTATION

Many "closed-minded people" practice an interesting maneuver to move away from the opposition and return to their thesis by practicing something called "Circular Argumentation."

Circular Argumentation involves the circumventing (or moving around) factual or valid evidence/appeal by directly returning to the thesis and the recapitulation of support.

Example:

1. All drugs should be legalized.
2. No, drugs should be illegal.
  1. The legalization of drugs would reduce the number of people in prison.
  2. Yes, but it would increase the number of people in rehabilitation and addiction programs.
    1. Drugs, especially prescription drugs, are good. Many people do not develop an addiction to prescription drugs.
    2. Not true. Many prescription drugs are more commonly abused, since they represent the bulk of drugs available to the general public.
      1. Well, regardless of this fact, drugs should be legalized, since legalization would reduce the number of people in our prisons.

Notice the recapitulation of the thesis statement and some evidence.

Circular Argumentation is somewhat unethical and fallacious in academic writing, since it does not allow for a synthesis and understanding of both argumentative positions. In a sense, this practice rejects the argument of another completely. So, we consider it unwise as a practice in academic writing.