Constructing an Argument

We are all expected on occasion to explain our ideas. When we engage in such an explanation, we call upon evidence to convince our listener or reader that our ideas are true and correct and, therefore, worthy of attention. Sometimes we are expected to present and defend our ideas in writing. For example, in your academic career and in the workplace you will be called upon to analyze situations and texts and to argue for or against certain ideas or opinions. From small businesses to large corporations, employees who can articulate their views logically have an advantage in being considered for advancement. As a student, a citizen, a parent, an employee, or a consumer, you will have many opportunities to express your ideas. Being familiar with argumentative skills will improve your chances of being convincing and persuasive. But, more importantly, you will be able to use these same skills in distinguishing between truth and falsehood in the world around you. Being familiar with the tools of argument, you will be able to determine the correctness of claims made by political figures, employers, salespeople, advertisers, and friends. You can then not only determine the validity of others' arguments, but also formulate your own strategy of reasoned argument to counter the beliefs with which you disagree.

The word *argument* itself usually suggests a negative activity. We think of an argument as a synonym for a quarrel or disagreement: we argue with parents, spouses, and friends. This use of the term, however, differs from its original and still primary meaning, which is associated with reason and objectivity. An *argument* is defined as the process of demonstrating, through reason, the likelihood or necessity of a given proposition. The purpose of an argument is to persuade. It is the process of influencing others, through reasoning, to respond as we wish them to respond. If everyone always agreed on everything, there would be no need for argument. But we know that disagreements do exist at all levels of life. The fact that some of our disagreements are ancient ones suggests the difficulty people have in reaching agreement. For example, consider the controversial topics of abortion, censorship, and capital punishment. These controversies will never approach resolution until the truth is discovered and there is agreement as to that truth. Yet truth can never be discovered until there is a free and open encounter between opposing views. This very encounter is at the heart of argumentative discourse; therefore, disagreements must be addressed reasonably, objectively, and thoroughly if we are ever to attain the truth. Once we have demonstrated the truth of an argument, however, we must then persuade others of the correctness of that truth. This attempt at persuasion is a complicated undertaking. To gain our reader's assent to our proposition, we must organize our supporting evidence in a format that will present our ideas most effectively. Thus, since rhetoric is the art of using language persuasively, we employ rhetoric every time we try to convince others of the truth of our convictions.

Strategy

To construct a persuasive argument, you must first determine what your purpose is. Do you intend to persuade by offering a defense or an attack? Since you will be expected to argue your views in an attempt to persuade your reader to see the issues as you do, and, possibly, to act upon the views

or recommendations you have prescribed, you must understand and be able to use effectively the rhetorical elements involved in writing persuasive arguments. In addition, you will be expected to identify your specific audience for your essay. The audience determines the approach you take to your argument. Next, with your purpose and audience in mind, you must take a stand on your topic, state a claim that reflects that stand, and finally provide evidence to support that claim.

Audience

You must first have a clear understanding of your audience. Your audience will shape a great deal of what you say and how you say it and will guide you in determining your particular approach to your topic. First, your language must be appropriate for your readers. It would be unwise to address a group of middle-school readers with complex language and reasoning, just as it would be imprudent to address a group of experts on your topic in a manner that assumes no knowledge on their part. You must always be both clear and respectful of your audience. In addition, knowing your audience allows you to make certain assumptions in order to select the appropriate and most convincing points to be discussed. It also gives you the ability to anticipate what objections to your ideas your audience will have. Generally, you should assume that your audience is intelligent, informed about your topic, and not only opposes your position but resists it. By anticipating your audience's opposition, your stand on a given topic will be stronger and more convincing.

While argument begins in conflict, it should, ideally, end in resolution. However, since your topic is controversial, both sides believe they are right, and your opponent will probably have at least one sound argument on his side. Yet even if your reader remains unconvinced that you are right and he is wrong, you can present such a clear and coherent argument that he must admit, at least, the credibility of your position.

Definition of Terms

Many arguments fail because the writer does not define the terms on which his essay is based. Therefore, make certain you clearly define the terms you discuss. State, for example, what you mean by "affirmative action," "sexual harassment," "censorship," "pornography," "aesthetic value," or "redeeming quality." You must define any term your audience, for one reason or another, might misunderstand. Consult a dictionary or construct your own definition based on your understanding of the term and on the manner in which you discuss the term in your argument.

THE APPEAL TO REASON

The rational appeal is one of three methods of persuasion identified by Aristotle and since discussed, expanded, and analyzed by philosophers, rhetoricians, and scientists. The rational appeal is used to convince an audience that the writer's claims are true. To construct an argument using the rational appeal, the writer will employ either *induction* or *deduction,* both forms of logic.

Terms

In order to employ the rational appeal effectively, the writer must first understand some basic concepts and terms:

Logic. Logic is a method of distinguishing between correct and incorrect reasoning. Since reasoning is represented in arguments, logic is a method for evaluating arguments.

Argument. An argument is an organized discussion of an idea or an issue. It can proceed from a premise or several premises to a conclusion, or it can start with a claim and then give evidence to support that claim. An argument is meant to persuade its readers or listeners that the belief or position held by the arguer is true and valid.

Claim. A claim is a statement that affirms or denies the truth of something. It can be as concrete and as easily verified as the statement *Houston is the largest city in Texas,* or as abstract and difficult to prove as the statement *The soul is immortal*. Claims are like thesis statements of essays.

Truth. While *Truth* is hard to define, the following will provide a working definition: Truth is the state of affairs in which a claim corresponds to reality or expresses a tautology (truth by definition). Correspondence with reality can only be determined empirically, that is through observation and experience. For example, the statement that the sun is approximately 93,000,000 miles from earth can be verified by experiment. Truth by definition is a matter of how speakers of a language have agreed (often implicitly) upon meanings of words. For example, the statement that bachelors are unmarried men is true because "unmarried men" and "bachelors" mean the same thing in English.

Arguments are composed of two types of claims:

Premises. A premise is a claim stated by the arguer as evidence for the belief that he or she is trying to prove. Either the premise will be readily accepted by the audience as being true, or it will be necessary to devise further arguments to show that the premises of the main argument are true. (This usually involves the minor premises.)

Conclusion. The conclusion is the claim expressing the belief that the arguer is trying to persuade the hearer or reader to accept. In a sound argument the conclusion follows logically from the premises.

A sound or cogent argument not only provides evidence that its claims are **true,** it also makes sure that its conclusions are **validly** drawn from its premises.

Validity. The process by which arguments are determined to be correct. An argument is valid if its conclusion is properly drawn from its premises, that is, if the rules of logic have been followed in proceeding from premise to conclusion.

Deductive Reasoning

Deduction. Deduction is a strict form of argument aiming for the strongest possible connection between premises and conclusion. The writer using deductive reasoning aims to set forth evidence so that if the premises are true, the conclusion necessarily follows as true. Alternatively, the writer tries to make it impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. For example, if

A > B
C > A
C = B

The above example is a *syllogism,* which is a form of deductive argument. There are several types of syllogisms, but the one most commonly known and used is the categorical syllogism.

Categorical Syllogism. The categorical syllogism is composed of two premises and a conclusion, as in the following example:

Parts

Major Premise	All men are mortal.
Minor Premise	Socrates is a man.
Conclusion	Socrates is mortal.

Terms

Major term The predicate of the conclusion (mortal)
Minor term The subject of the conclusion (Socrates)
Middle term The term common to both premises but not included in the conclusion (man/men)

Enthymemes. An enthymeme is a syllogism with one of its premises omitted (usually the major premise). In order to test the validity of the syllogistic argument, we must supply the omitted premise.

Example 1. He couldn't have stolen that money; he is a church deacon.
Suppressed Premise: Church deacons do not steal.

Example 2. They must be rich because they spend every summer in Europe.
Suppressed Premise: People who spend their summers in Europe are rich.

Example 3. You can't deny a criminal his natural rights; after all, he is a human being.
Suppressed Premise: Humans cannot be denied their natural rights.

A danger in using an enthymeme is that your readers may not recognize it as an enthymeme and, therefore, fail to realize the full import of your argument. The advantage, however, is that if the enthymeme is recognized it creates greater reader involvement in the argument and the essay as a whole.

While your thesis can be a statement that contains the whole syllogism, it can be shortened to include only an enthymeme. If you choose to use the enthymeme as your thesis, as in the examples above, you must still discuss the omitted premise in the body of the essay. Sometimes you may not want to use the syllogism or enthymeme as your thesis. Even though you employ deductive argument and it is based on a syllogism, you may have a thesis statement independent of the syllogism. For example, suppose that your discussion is organized around a syllogism that shows the validity of an argument indicating the benefits of America's space program. Your reason for using the syllogism is to suggest that Congress should increase NASA's long term appropriations. Your purpose, therefore, is to advocate more money for the program while the syllogism itself argues, deductively, that the United States benefits from such a program. Your thesis statement might look something like the following: "Because the United States benefits from the space program, Congress should increase NASA's appropriations."

A good deductive argument is a **sound argument,** that is one whose premises are all true and whose form is valid. The reader must be satisfied with both before he can give assent to the conclusion. The fact that an argument is valid does not make it automatically acceptable because the premises may be false. For example:

Major Premise	All college students must take American history.
Minor Premise	You are a college student.
Conclusion	You must take American history.

This argument/syllogism is valid in the sense that if the premises are true, the conclusion necessarily follows; remember that validity is about the connection between the premises and the conclusion. The problem here, however, is that the major premise is untrue. (American history is only a Texas state requirement for a college degree.) This argument, then, would be classified as valid but not true.

When you are evaluating a deductive argument, ask yourself two questions:

1. Is it valid? Is the connection between the premises and the conclusion logical?
2. Are the premises true?

If your answer to both questions is "yes," the argument is **sound.** If your answer to either question is "no," you have a basis for rejecting the argument. The fact that the argument is unsound, however, does not mean that the conclusion is false; it simply means that the logic of this particular attempt to prove the conclusion has failed.

Inductive Reasoning

Induction is a less strict form of argument than deduction. The writer of an inductive essay aims to set forth evidence so that if the premises are true, the conclusion **probably** follows as true. Yet it is possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. Induction is often used in science, history, and everyday life when one cannot obtain enough evidence to make the conclusion absolutely certain. An inductive argument is **strong** when the writer has succeeded in arranging the premises so that, if they are true, the conclusion follows. Here are some examples of strong inductive arguments listed by type:

1. Generalization.

Mockingbird #1 was observed to eat worms.

Mockingbird #2 was observed to eat worms.

Mockingbird #99 was observed to eat worms.

Conclusion: All mockingbirds eat worms.

2. Prediction.

In the past, an increase in stock prices has been followed shortly by a decrease in bond prices. Stock prices increased last week.

Conclusion: Bond prices will decrease this week.

3. Analogy.

The car I am now driving weighs 3500 pounds, has a fuel-injected V-8, has wind resistance coefficient of .29, and gets 30 mpg on the highway. The car I am about to buy has the same characteristics.

Conclusion: The car I am about to buy will get 30 mpg on the highway.

4. Causal Inference.

The old bridge that was here yesterday is not here today. It was inspected last month and was found to be dangerously weak. We have had torrential rains for the past week, and the creek has risen up to a level above the roadway on the bridge.

Conclusion: The old bridge was probably swept away by the floodwaters in the creek.

In addition, a **cogent** inductive argument is one that is strong and whose premises are all true. When you are evaluating an inductive argument, ask yourself two questions:

1. Is it strong? Is the connection between the premises and the conclusion logical?
2. Are the premises true?

If your answer to both questions is "yes," the argument is **cogent.** If the answer to either question is "no," you have a basis for rejecting the argument. Once again, finding that an argument is not cogent does not mean that the conclusion is false; it merely means that this particular attempt to prove the conclusion has failed.

Evidence

The most difficult task for the writer using inductive reasoning is to know whether he or she has sufficient evidence from which to draw a conclusion. All the writer can do is establish as high a degree of probability as possible. Once the writer is certain that the evidence provided for the inductive argument is sufficient, random (there are a variety of examples), accurate, and relevant, the writer must make what is known as the **"inductive leap,"** a conclusion he or she reaches based on the evidence discussed. Unless the evidence meets these criteria, the argument will not be convincing, and the writer will appear to have made a hasty generalization.

If in developing evidence for an inductive argument you discover an **exception** to your proposition, **you should include it, too, in your discussion.** A couple of reasons suggest this course of action. First, the inclusion of the single exception (negative evidence) can work to your advantage psychologically and ethically since, by including the exception with your evidence, you suggest to your reader that you are trustworthy in reporting such potentially damaging evidence. Second, you can take the opportunity to mitigate the force of the exception.

Kinds of Evidence

Facts. According to the National Academy of Sciences, a fact is "an observation that has been repeatedly confirmed and for all practical purposes is accepted as 'true.'" However, what constitutes a "fact" may be open to discussion. Be sure to distinguish between **fact, opinion, and judgment.** An opinion is an unsupported statement of belief, while a judgment is a conclusion that sums up a large number of previous observations.

Examples. Examples are used to support generalizations. They give specific instances to illustrate the material from which inductive generalizations are derived. Examples should be **relevant** and **appropriate;** that is, they should directly bear on the issue being discussed, and they should be suitable and fitting, not extreme or unusual.

Authorities. Authorities are experts in various fields. Their work or statements are used as evidence to support claims. An authority may be an expert by virtue of his knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education.

Statistics. Numerical data in the form of tables, graphs, or charts are used to support claims. Since contradictory conclusions can be drawn from the same data, especial care must be taken in evaluating statistics. Good statistical data are usually presented visually (as a chart or table) as well as numerically; they should also be accompanied by an analysis, and the sources of the data should be clearly stated.

Public Records. Information drawn from public records, such as the Bureau of the Census, state agencies, or historical archives is frequently used as evidence.

Interviews. Personal interviews with people with experience can also be used as evidence, either as examples or as expert testimony.

Personal Experience. If one has relevant personal experience, it can also be used as evidence as example or testimony.

Sources

Since a crucial element of persuasive argumentation is the evidence you use to support your assertions, you must pay particular attention to the sources of that evidence. Sources include reports in the media, statistics, testimonials, research, and authority. More weight is generally attributed to primary sources than to secondary sources. **Primary sources** include such things as original documents and eyewitness accounts. **Secondary sources** are those materials that are based on primary sources. For example, in a political science class you might be asked to write a paper on the freedom of religion in this country. One of your primary sources might be the Constitution itself; your secondary sources might include analyses and interpretations of what the Constitution means by historians, scholars, and legal experts.

Secondary sources should be assessed in relation to whatever primary evidence is accessible. You will find that among secondary sources there is usually disagreement, which makes your task of **evaluating** them more difficult. Sources should be **reliable, current, appropriate, unbiased, and authoritative.** For example, check the date of the published source, see if there is any material on the author (Is she a university professor? Has he published other articles on this topic?), and find out who published the material (Is it a university press, a political organization, a state government?). The more secondary sources you are able to accumulate, the better your chances are at arriving at some general assumptions regarding the validity of the sources you actually use.

Informal Fallacies

A fallacy is a particular kind of defect in an argument caused by unsound or incomplete reasoning. It weakens an argument and makes it vulnerable to attack. However, sometimes writers consciously use such unsound reasoning to bolster their own side of an argument or to deflect criticism away from a weak argument. There are two kinds of fallacies: Formal fallacies result from not following the rules of formal logic, such as not distributing the middle term in a categorical syllogism. Informal fallacies result from the ambiguity inherent in language, such as when a word is used in two different senses in the same argument, called equivocation. Of the two, the informal fallacies are more regularly employed in every day argument. After all, normal arguments between people are conducted through language, not mathematical symbols. Therefore, not only should you be familiar with informal fallacies so you can avoid them in your own argumentative essays, you *should* also be able to identify your opponent's defective arguments, allowing you to refute his claims more easily. The following list includes some of the most common informal fallacies:

Hasty Generalization. An argument that draws a conclusion based on insufficient or inappropriate samplings: "My Oldsmobile is a real lemon; therefore, General Motors manufactures inferior automobiles." "Students at Hudson University are rude. Last night the guys in the room next to mine played their stereo at full blast until two in the morning, and as I was on my way to class this morning a bicyclist almost ran me down."

Begging the Question. An argument based on an assumption that has not been proven: "The immoral experimentation on animals for research must be abolished" ; "My narrow-minded English instructor seems to have forgotten how difficult it is to be a student."

Circular Reasoning. An argument that goes in a circle, where one proves the premise by the conclusion and the conclusion by the premise: "The governor would never lie to the public because he is an honest man." "Drugs are harmful because they injure the body." "I believe in God because I believe in the truth of the Bible; I believe in the truth of the Bible because it is the inspired word of God."

Either/or Reasoning. An argument, also called a **false dilemma,** that suggests that only two alternatives exist when more than two actually exist. Valid inferences can be drawn only from alternatives that are exhaustive: "Either he voted Republican or he did not vote Republican" is quite different from "Either he voted Republican or he voted Democratic." People have a tendency to turn difficult issues into simple ones with two sides—black/white, right/ wrong, good/bad. "If you quit college, you will never succeed in anything you do." "We can recognize that athletes who participate in major sports must be given special consideration at Hudson University, or we can let the university sink into athletic oblivion."

Faulty Analogy. An argument based on a comparison of two things that share few or no common and relevant features. An analogy should be carefully examined to be sure that the things being compared are alike in ways essential to the conclusion being drawn. The fact that they are alike in some ways is not enough. "Since he was a good governor, I'm sure he will make a good President." "Bill, you are a superb computer technician. You seem to have a natural talent for analyzing system problems and remedying them. Surely, then, you should be able to analyze the problems in the rough drafts of your papers and turn them into polished essays."

Argumentum ad Hominem. The Latin phrase means **argument against the man** and names the fallacy of attacking the person rather than his argument. Such an attack may be legitimate when someone presents no argument but his own unsupported testimony. For example, the procedure is frequently used in courts to impeach witnesses who are testifying as experts. If it can be shown that they are not experts or that their testimony cannot be relied on, their trustworthiness as witnesses is seriously challenged. However, if someone presents evidence to support a claim, simply attacking his character is illegitimate. "Mr. Grumpky shouldn't be allowed to serve on the school board; he is a non -Christian." "Of course Senator Sparky voted for the big bailout of Global Mortgage; I hear he's received lots of money from their political action committee."

Argumentum ad Populum. This "appeal to the people" is used particularly by politicians and advertisers. This fallacy ignores the issue at hand to appeal to the in-group loyalties and fears of the audience. Appeals to prejudice and self-interest are also part of this appeal. For example, one might argue that people should be against any form of government regulation of business since America was founded on the principle of freedom from oppression.

Appeal to Ignorance. This argument implies that since no one has proved a particular claim, it must be false; or, since no one has disproved a claim, it must be true. This fallacy usually involves a matter that is either incapable of being proved or has not yet been proved. For example, a frequently heard retort in an argument, say, about the existence of telepathy, is: "Well, you can't prove that it doesn't exist!" This is not a clinching argument, for our ignorance about how to disprove a proposition does not establish its truth or falsehood. Keep in mind that the burden of proof rests with the person making a claim.

Tokenism. This fallacy occurs when one makes only a token gesture (does very little of what is required), but then shouts or brags about it as loudly as one can. For example, a company might point to a highly placed executive who is female to show how well they treat and promote women when, in fact, she is the only woman in an executive position in the whole company.

The Straw Man Fallacy. This fallacy occurs when a person misinterprets or distorts an opponent's position to make it easier to attack, or when he attacks weaker opponents while ignoring stronger ones. For example, when opponents of gun control characterize those who are for some limitations on the ownership and use of weapons as radicals who would do away with hunting and Americans' constitutional right to bear arms, they are attacking a straw man.

Bandwagon Fallacy. An argument that claims that something cannot be true (or false) because a majority of people support (or oppose) it. Based on popular opinion, the argument appeals to prejudice and ignores the facts. For example, "It is obvious that any caring parent would not want his / her child attending school where a classmate has HIV."

Slippery Slope. An argument based on an unlikely chain reaction. It consists in objecting to a particular action on the grounds that once an action is taken it will lead inevitably to a similar but less desirable action which, in turn, will lead to an even less desirable action and so on. For example, "If we legalize marijuana, the United States will become a nation of addicts and criminals." "If we allow physician-assisted suicide, it will eventually lead to the wholesale killing of the very ill or permanently disabled."

Selective Sampling. Proof offered that contains part of, but not the whole truth. Since not all the facts are stated, the claim can be true and false (misleading?) at the same time (half-truths). For example, "Three out of five dentists surveyed preferred Brand X toothpaste."

Unreliable Testimony. An argument based on an untrustworthy, biased, or unqualified authority. Fame or celebrity does not qualify one as authoritative or expert. For example, "Several of my well-educated neighbors support the termination of our school's head coach."

False Cause. An argument that confuses a causal relationship. For example, one might mistake a contributory cause for a sufficient one, or assume that because one event occurred before a second event, the first caused the second (an example of the **post hoc, ergo propter hoc** fallacy, a Latin phrase meaning *after this; therefore because of this***.**) "Since the city council outlawed firearms, the crime rate has risen." "Research shows that successful people have large vocabularies; therefore, one way to become successful is to develop a large vocabulary."

ORGANIZATION

In his *Rhetoric,* Aristotle discusses the five parts of the deliberative discourse (a discussion of what we should or should not do to bring about some future goal), only two of which, *invention* and *disposition,* are relevant to the organization of the written essay.

Invention

Invention is the process or method writers use to discover arguments. Aristotle divided the process into two parts, finding arguments and devising arguments from scratch.

Non-Artistic Proofs. What Aristotle called non-artistic proofs are arguments that have already been formulated by others. We call this process research. Properly conducted research will lead to an abundance of information on, and authoritative discussion of, the topic you are writing about.

Artistic Proofs. Artistic proofs are arguments you develop on your own; that is, they are arguments you devise through your own ability, your own art, without reference to outside sources. They include the Logical Appeal, The Emotional Appeal, and The Ethical Appeal. See **Chapter Three** for a complete discussion of the latter two.

Topics. Topics are proofs grouped under common headings. Under **common topics** Aristotle discusses such topics as definition, comparison-contrast, causal analysis, and the proper use of testimony or authority. See **Chapter Four,** and **Chapters Six through Eleven** for detailed discussions of these methods of exposition. Under **special topics** for a deliberative discourse, Aristotle points out that an argument can attempt to persuade the reader that a particular solution to a problem is a Common Good, that it is moral, just, or right. If a writer can do that, readers will more easily offer their assent. In making this kind of an appeal, a writer may refer to our religious beliefs (adultery may be condemned because it is forbidden in the Bible), to our sense of fair play (we may be told that eliminating the capital gains tax will unfairly benefit the very rich who already pay few taxes), to our belief in law (we may be told that we should not smoke marijuana because it is illegal), to our sense of loyalty to an ideal (it may be argued that political action committees should be severely curtailed because they are inherently undemocratic), or to our empathy for fellow humans (all people deserve to have food and shelter).

The power of this appeal comes from its assumption of moral authority. If a writer's audience is composed of strong believers in some holy text, for instance the Bible or the Koran, the writer can use scripture as a source of authority. However, someone who does not accept the moral force of a holy text will hardly be convinced by references to it. The same is true of other groups. Some of the most intractable of contemporary conflicts derive from the fact that different groups have different moral bases for their beliefs. Again, to echo Aristotle, in making this kind of plea, writers appeal to what their audience considers to be good or right over and above what they consider useful or in their own interest. For example, Jane Goodall, in "Some Thoughts on the Exploitation of Non-Human Animals," makes an essentially ethical appeal when she states that "all except the most primitive of non-human animals experience pain, and [. . .] 'higher' animals have emotions similar to the human emotions that we label pleasure or sadness, fear or despair." She implies that, since animals have feelings just as we do, it is no more right for us to subject them to suffering than it would be for us to subject other humans to suffering. Rhetorically, she asks: "How can we, the citizens of civilized, western countries, tolerate laboratories which—from the point of view of animal inmates—are not unlike concentration camps?" Her point is that no matter what benefits we receive, it is simply wrong to experiment on animals.

Finally, one can attempt to persuade readers that a particular solution to a problem will benefit them in some way. Not only will quitting smoking promote one's health, for example, since health is a Common Good, it will also save one money.

Disposition

Disposition is the way one disposes, or organizes, one's argument. According to Aristotle, there are six parts, or sections, to an argument:

Introduction. In your introduction you need to supply an attention-getting opener to your topic and then a statement of your claim (the stand you intend to take).

Narration. The narration is a discussion of the background of the issue under consideration. Readers, for example, may not know that there is a problem to be solved. The amount of background material you provide depends upon the knowledge of your audience and the complexity of the issue you are dealing with.

Division. In the division you list the arguments you will advance in support of your proposition/claim.

Confirmation. The confirmation is the longest and most important part of your argument. Here

you give the evidence to support your proposition/claim arranged in the order you have listed in the division.

Refutation. The refutation is a discussion and rebuttal of your opponents' counter arguments. See below.

Conclusion. In your conclusion make a strong appeal for acceptance of your argument.

Refutation

In a face-to-face argument, we have the advantage of responding directly to an opponent. In writing, however, we lack this advantage. Therefore, we must depend on refutation when we argue our ideas in writing. In your **refutation** section, you anticipate your opponent's arguments and prove they are, to some degree, wrong, invalid, or fallacious. Methods of refutation include pointing out an opponent's faulty premise, an error in deductive logic, a deficient definition, a logical fallacy, any inappropriate or inaccurate evidence, insufficient evidence, or a questionable authority, to name a few. For the most part, refutation involves undermining an opponent's argument. You might deny that he has proved his claim. You might refute the truth of his premises or object to the inferences drawn from the premises. You might say, "I admit the truth of your conclusion, but I challenge its appropriateness in this particular instance because [. . .] ." Let good judgment and common sense rule. Consider your audience and their emotional biases, the occasion, the subject, and your own personality to help you determine the best course of action regarding refutation.

Some instructors prefer that you refute the opposition before beginning your confirmation. There is reasonable cause for such placement, especially if your opponents' views are shared strongly by your audience. However, if your opponent's arguments are weak, you can afford to delay refutation until the end of your own argument, using your discussion to build a case against your opponent's views. If your audience is hostile to your views, it might work to your advantage, psychologically, to delay your refutation until the end of your argument, to keep the direct attack of your opposition out of sight as long as possible. You need not remind your audience at the outset of your opposition, thus closing their ears to the remainder of what you have to say. By placing the refutation at the end, you may dispose your audience momentarily to hear what you have to say without compounding their hostility. Finally, you can also incorporate refutation wherever it is needed in each paragraph, rather than placing it in a separate section.

Outline for an Essay Based on Deductive Argument

I. Introduction
   A. Lead-in to your topic
      l. Startling statistic and/or
      2. Interesting example
   B. Statement of the conclusion of your syllogism; the proposition or claim you are going to defend

II. Narration
   A. Background information to clarify your topic and illustrate the problem for which you are proposing a solution. You might need to include here definitions of terms relevant to your argument.
   B. Statement of the major premise and the minor premise that lead to your conclusion. (*Note: One option to this method is to combine paragraphs I and II into a single paragraph. Consult with your instructor.*)

III. Statement of major premise as topic sentence

A. Evidence #1 supporting the truth of your major premise.
   Examples
   Statistics
   Authority
B. Evidence #2 supporting the truth of your major premise
   Examples
   Statistics
   Authority

IV. Statement of minor premise as topic sentence
A. Evidence #1 supporting the truth of your minor premise
   Examples
   Statistics
   Authority
B. Evidence #2 supporting the truth of your minor premise
   Examples
   Statistics
   Authority

V. Restatement of conclusion of syllogism as topic sentence
A. Evidence #1 supporting the benefits to your audience of accepting your conclusion.
B. Evidence #2 supporting the benefits of your audience of accepting your conclusion.

VI. Refutation (optional—see discussion of refutation above)
A. Statement of counter argument (alternative conclusion) #1
   Evidence #1 to refute or mitigate the force of A
   Evidence #2 to refute or mitigate the force of A
B. Statement of counter argument (alternative conclusion) #2
   Evidence #1 to refute or mitigate the force of B
   Evidence #2 to refute or mitigate the force of B

VII. Conclusion A strong appeal for acceptance of your conclusion and/or a call to action.

While this format is the standard method of organizing a deductive essay, it offers options to the student in the construction of the introductory paragraph (you may wish to combine paragraphs I and II in the above outline), and you may prefer to insert your refutation into each of the body paragraphs rather than have a separate section for refutation at the end of the essay. Consult your instructor for guidelines and preferences.

Outline for an Essay Based on Inductive Argument

I. Introduction
A. Lead-in to your topic
   Startling statistic and/or
   Interesting example
B. Statement of the generalization you have reached through your research; the proposition or claim you are going to defend in your argument.

II. Narration
A. Statement of background information to clarify your topic and to illustrate the problem you are dealing with. You might need to include here definitions of terms relevant to your argument.
B. Statement listing in one sentence at least three major pieces of evidence (x, y, and z) that support your generalization or claim.

III. First major piece of supporting evidence as topic sentence.
  A. Subtopic #1 supporting X
    1. Examples 2 Statistics
    3. Authority
  B. Subtopic #2 supporting X
    Examples
    Statistics
    Authority
IV. Second major piece of supporting evidence as topic sentence.
  A. Subtopic #1 supporting Y
    Examples
    Statistics
    Authority
  B. Subtopic #2 supporting Y
    Examples
    Statistics
    Authority
V. Third major piece of supporting evidence as topic sentence.
  A. Subtopic #1 supporting Z
    Examples
    Statistics
    Authority
  B. Subtopic #2 supporting Z
    Examples
    Statistics
    Authority
VI. Refutation (optional —see discussion of refutation above)
  A. Statement of counter argument (alternative conclusion) #1
    Evidence #1 to refute or mitigate the force of A
    Evidence #2 to refute or mitigate the force of A
  B. Statement of counter argument (alternative conclusion) #2
    Evidence #1 to refute or mitigate the force of B
    Evidence #2 to refute or mitigate the force of B
VII. Conclusion A strong appeal for acceptance of your generalization and/or a call to action.

While this format is the standard method of organizing an inductive essay, it offers options to the student in the construction of the introductory paragraph (you may wish to combine paragraphs I and II in the above outline), and you may prefer to insert your refutation into each of the body paragraphs rather than have a separate section for refutation at the end of the essay. Consult your instructor for guidelines and preferences.

CHECKLIST FOR ARGUMENT ESSAY

1. Have you identified your audience and adopted the appropriate voice for your audience?
2. Are your premises true? Will your implied premises be clear to your reader?
3. Did you check your premises and reasoning to make sure your argument is sound, true, and valid?
4. Did you make certain that your enthymeme's missing portion does not alter the argument?

5. Is your argument free of logical fallacies?
6. Is your representation of the facts for your argument honest and accurate?
7. Does your proposition or thesis statement say what you want it to say, and does it clearly indicate your purpose?
8. Is your argument supported with adequate and convincing examples?
9. Have you indicated your order or pattern of development, either by listing reasons (inductive) or premises (deductive)?
10. Have you accounted for the arguments of the opposition and refuted them— early in the essay, throughout your discussion, or before your conclusion?
11. Are your transitions clear and logical?
12. Does your conclusion make a significant contribution to your audience's understanding of your purpose?
13. Did you edit your paper carefully, checking for major grammatical and spelling errors?