

Argumentation

**What is it and
what are its parts?**





Argumentation: What is it?

- **It is a reasoned, logical way of asserting the soundness of a position, belief, or conclusion.**
- **It takes a stand—supported by evidence—and urges people to share the writer’s perspective and insights.**



Argumentation: Purposes

- 1. To convince other people to accept—or at least accept the validity of—your position**
- 2. To defend your position, even if others cannot be convinced to agree**
- 3. To question or refute a position you believe to be misguided, untrue, or dangerous without necessarily offering an alternative**



Purposes Continued

To achieve these purposes, argumentation has a formal structure which evolves according to a writer's interpretation and presentation of evidence.



Elements of an argumentative essay

- 1. Evidence**
- 2. Appeals**
- 3. Nods to and refutation of the opposition**
- 4. A clear sense of purpose**
- 5. A clear thesis or claim**
- 6. A clear sense of audience**

Evidence is evaluated in terms of four criteria:

- 1. Relevance: evidence should support the essay's thesis or claim and be pertinent to the argument being made.**
 - Example: in an essay supporting mandatory HIV testing for all health care workers, one writer made the point that the spread of AIDS is at epidemic proportions. To illustrate the point the point, the writer provided a discussion of the bubonic plague in 14th century Europe. Why might that be a problem?**

Evidence and the Four Criteria Continued

2. **Representative or Typicality:** evidence should represent the full range of opinions about the subject and not just one side or the other. You want a balanced and convincing discussion. In addition, the examples and expert opinions you include should be typical rather than aberrant
 - If you argued against the use of animals in medical experimentation, you would not use just the information provided by animal rights activists. Why?

Evidence and the Four Criteria Continued

- 3. Sufficient: there should be enough evidence to support the claim(s). The amount of evidence required depends upon the length of your paper, your audience, and the nature of your thesis.**
 - Why would an author arguing for the validity of alien abduction stories require more evidence than one arguing against their validity?**

Evidence and the Four Criteria Continued

- 4. Accuracy: Data shouldn't be used unless it is accurate and up-to-date, and it can't be persuasive unless the audience believes in the writer's credibility. Faith in the accuracy of a writer's data is one function of ethos.**

Evidence: Different Kinds

- **Factual (Chester A. Arthur was the 21st president):** The most commonly used type of evidence; may be drawn from your own experience but primarily drawn from research and reading. Facts are more convincing when supplemented by opinions, or interpretations of facts.

Evidence: Different Kinds

- Authoritative (expert testimony): Not all opinions are equal. The opinions of experts are more convincing than those of individuals with no specialized knowledge. In the end, what is important is not just the quality of evidence but also the credibility of the person offering it.

Evidence: Different Kinds

- **Personal/anecdotal (calling upon your first-hand experience),**
“Volunteering at the battered women’s shelter, I was constantly reminded of the emotional and psychological devastation wrought by spousal abuse on the most innocent of victims: the children. In this time of slash-and-burn budget cuts, we must protect the social programs that protect our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. ”

Evidence: Different Kinds

- Statistical (graphs, surveys)

“A 2001 survey by Nielsen Media Research found that 71 percent of the top 10 programs in 60 countries were locally produced in 2001, representing a steady increase over previous years. American movies on television still drew big ratings, grabbing 9 percent of the top 10 slots, but American dramatic or comedic series typically rated much lower than local shows.”

Work Cited

Kapner, Suzanne. “U. S. TV Shows Losing Potency Around the World.” NY Times on the Web 2 Jan. 2003. 2 Jan. 2003 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/02/business/businessspecial/02TUBE.html>.

Evidence: Different Kinds

- Logical Appeals (using inductive or deductive reasoning, or Toulmin logic)
 - All books from the RU bookstore are used.
 - These books are from RU bookstore.
 - Therefore, these books are used.
- Emotional Appeals (appealing to readers' feelings)
- Social/Ethical Appeals (appealing to readers' sense of right and wrong)

2.0 The Three Levels of Appeal

1. Logical: an appeal to the reader's mind and sense of reason. This is the most heavily used appeal in argumentative essays. We want our readers to trust our opinions because they trust not only our evidence but our interpretations of it.

More on the Three Levels of Appeal

- 2. Emotional: an appeal to the reader's emotions. Use this type of appeal most sparingly and be especially careful to avoid using an unfair appeal. When writers employ inappropriate emotional appeals—to prejudice or fear for example—to influence readers, they destroy their own credibility and authority.**
- 3. Social/Ethical: an appeal to the reader's sense of right and wrong. We want our readers to view us as good, trustworthy people; therefore it is important that we establish a shared sense of ethics and we establish our credibility.**



Beware the Inappropriate Appeal

Again, of the three, the emotional appeal is the most dangerous and should be used the most sparingly. Why? Because writers with little concrete support for their claims often resort to manipulating readers with fear tactics or to exploiting readers' insecurities. Skeptical readers—your college-level audience—will always be alert to such manipulation. An inappropriate appeal always renders your argument ineffective because it makes readers question your credibility and your ethics.



Appeals continued

Though argumentation emphasizes logical appeal and rational reasoning, that does not mean that it cannot involve the other levels of appeal.

3.0 Nods to the opposition

- **A rhetorical strategy whereby a writer acknowledges the points of view of those that do not agree with him or her in order to refute (disprove) that position.**



4.0 Sense of Purpose

- **This boils down to two all important questions:**
 1. **What do you want to accomplish in your essay? Do you want to correct a misconception or straighten a record? Do you want to prove or disprove a particular point of view?**
 2. **What do you want readers to do when they've finished reading your piece?**

5.0 Strong claim

- **Argumentative writing takes a stand; it requires that the writer stick his/her neck out and make a claim. This claim comes in the essay as a strong thesis**

6.0 Clear Sense of Audience

In argumentative writing, it is best to assume that you are writing for an educated, skeptically neutral audience. They may not be hostile to your claim(s), but they need to be convinced.

6.0 Clear Sense of Audience

Effective argumentation depends upon having a clear sense of audience. Who a writer is attempting to convince controls the types of evidence selected and the form of argument.



6.0 Clear Sense of Audience

You must accommodate the views of your audience even if you are arguing with those views. Nobody wants to be lectured to or to be told that he or she is a bad person for having certain views, beliefs.



Other Things to Consider: Fallacies

**Statements that may sound reasonable or true but are deceptive and dishonest.
The most common are**

Fallacies: Examples Continued

- **Begging the question: assumes in the premise what the arguer should be trying to prove. This tactic asks readers to agree that certain points are self-evident when they are not. Ex.: “The unfair and shortsighted legislation that limits free-trade is clearly a threat to the American economy”**

More on Fallacies

- **False analogy: Asks readers to assume two things are comparable when they, in fact, are not.**
 - **Ex: The overcrowded conditions in some parts of our city have forced people together like rats in a cage. Like rats, they will eventually turn on one another, fighting and killing until a balance is restored.**

No evidence is offered that people behave like rats under these or any other conditions.

More Fallacies

- **Personal Attack:** Tries to divert attention from the facts of an argument by attacking the motives or character of the person making the argument.
 - **Ex.** The public should not take seriously Dr. Mason's plan for upgrading county health services. He is a recovering alcoholic and his second wife just left him.

Fallacies Cont.

- **Hasty or Sweeping Generalization: when a conclusion is based on too little evidence.**
 - Our daughter Maggy really benefited from nursery school; every child should go.
- **Either/Or Fallacy: Assumes only two alternatives exist though there may be others**
 - We must choose between life or death, between intervention and genocide. There can be no neutral position.

Still More

- **Red Herring: When the focus of an argument is changed to divert the audience from the actual issue**
 - **Ex.** The mayor has proposed building a new baseball-only sports stadium. How can he even consider allocating millions to this irresponsible scheme when so many professional baseball players have drug problems?
- **Appeal to Doubtful Authority: Citing people who may have name recognition but no authority on an issue.**
 - **Ex.** According to the late Joey Ramone, interest rates will remain low during the next fiscal year.

Fallacies: Examples Continued

- **Misleading statistics: a misrepresentation or distortion of statistics.**
 - **Ex. Women will never be competent firefighters; after all, 50% of the women in the city's training program failed the exam.**
 - **The writer has neglected to mention that there were only two women in the program. Because this stats is not based on a large enough sample, it is unreliable**



Fallacies: Examples Continued

- **Post hoc reasoning**
- **Non sequitur**

Fallacies: Examples Continued

- See Michael Fumento's Article for an example of an argumentative essay directed at debunking bad science, http://www.fumento.com/outlook_sci.html

Consider: Documentation

- **All points in your paper must be supported and all of your evidence must be documented. If you don't document your sources your readers are likely to dismiss your evidence as inaccurate, unreliable, or false. Documentation gives readers the ability to judge the sources you cite and to consult them if they wish. When you document your sources you are telling readers that you are honest and have nothing to hide.**
- **You don't have to document every idea in your paper. Common knowledge can be presented without documentation. The trick is figuring out what is common knowledge.**