

Writing an argument essay

Many essays that you have to write, whether during your school or college course or in an examination, will require you to present a reasoned argument on a particular issue. This will often be based on your research into the

topic, but some questions may ask you to give your opinion. In both cases your argument must be clearly organized and supported with information, evidence and reasons. The language tends to be formal and impersonal.

Paragraph 1—Introduction

- ¹ Introduces the topic.
- ² States the focus of the essay.

Paragraph 2—Introduces the argument

The first point (manned missions are not cost effective) with a quote from an expert to give authority.

- ¹ This is a useful way to introduce a quotation.

Paragraph 3—Development

Reasons and data are given to support the writer's point of view.

Paragraph 4—Development

Introduces the second point (unmanned projects are more scientifically productive).

Paragraph 5—Counterargument

- ¹ Presents the argument: *Some may argue* suggests that the writer will go on to argue against this position.
- ² Refutes it. *However* introduces the argument against ¹.

Paragraph 6—Conclusion

Summarizes the writer's points and states his/her conclusion on the title.

- ¹ *Thus* introduces the conclusion.
- ² *I would argue that* clearly shows the writer's position.

Linking words and phrases guide the reader through the argument and show the writer's opinion.

Adverbs can be used to show your opinion.

These phrases make the argument less personal and more objective.

Experts are quoted to support the argument.

'Manned space missions should now be replaced with unmanned missions.' Discuss.

It is clear that the study of space and the planets is by nature expensive. Scientists and politicians must constantly attempt to balance costs with potential research benefits. ¹ A major question **to be considered** is whether the benefits of manned space flight are worth the costs. ²

For Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg the answer is clear. As he noted in 2007¹ in a lecture at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore. 'Human beings don't serve any useful function in space. They radiate heat, they're very expensive to keep alive, and unlike robotic missions, they have a natural desire to come back, so that anything involving human beings is enormously expensive.'

Unmanned missions are much less expensive than manned, having no requirement for airtight compartments, food or life support systems. They are also lighter and therefore require less fuel and launch equipment. According to NASA, the 1992 manned Space Shuttle Endeavor cost \$1.7 billion to build and requires approximately \$450 million for each launch. In contrast, the entire unmanned Voyager mission from 1972 until 1989, when it observed Neptune, cost only \$865 million.

In addition to their relative cost effectiveness, unmanned projects generally yield a much greater volume of data. While manned flights have yet to extend beyond the orbit of Earth's moon, unmanned missions have explored almost our entire solar system, and have recently observed an Earth-like planet in a nearby solar system. Manned missions would neither be able to travel so far, be away so long, nor collect so much data while at the same time guaranteeing the astronauts' safe return.

Some may argue that only manned space flight possesses the ability to inspire and engage the general population, providing much-needed momentum for continued governmental funding and educational interest in mathematics and the sciences. ¹ However, media coverage of recent projects such as the Mars Rover, the Titan moon lander, and the Hubble telescope's photographs of extrasolar planets demonstrates that unmanned missions clearly have the ability to attract and hold public interest. ²

Thus, ¹ taking into account the lower cost, the greater quantity of data and widespread popular support, I would argue that ² for now, at least, unmanned space missions undoubtedly yield the most value in terms of public spending.

Preparing to write

- Brainstorm your ideas on the question, read and research the topic (unless in an examination). Which do you think are the strongest arguments? Decide what your viewpoint will be.
- Select 2 or 3 strong ideas on each side, with supporting examples, ideas or evidence. For some questions you can use evidence from your personal experience.
- Decide how to organize your essay to persuade readers of your case.
- Note down some useful vocabulary on the topic.

Structure 1 (used in the model essay)

Introduction
Arguments **for** your case + supporting evidence, examples or reasons
Arguments **against** + evidence
Evaluation of arguments
Summary and conclusion
It is possible to reverse arguments for and against.

Structure 2

Introduction
Argument 1: + supporting evidence, examples or reasons
Counterargument
Argument 2: + supporting evidence, examples or reasons
Counterargument (and so on)
Evaluation of arguments
Summary and conclusion

Tips

- Look carefully at the **title or question** and make sure you really answer it.
- Use **general statements** to convey the main ideas, and then provide **evidence, examples, details and reasons** to support these statements.
- Use **paragraph divisions and connecting words and phrases** to make the structure of your essay clear to your readers.
- For **language** to help you structure your argument, look at the notes at 'addition', 'first'.

Showing your position

When you write an argument essay, you can show what your opinion is on the issue or question without using personal phrases such as *I think*...

or *In my opinion*,.... You can do this by choosing words carefully as you write. Some examples are given below. Look out for more in your reading.

Language bank

Adjectives

important, major, serious, significant
e.g. *An important point to consider is...*; *This was a highly significant discovery.*

Patterns with It + adjective

clear, likely, possible, surprising, evident
e.g. *It is clear that the study of space is expensive.*
important, difficult, necessary, possible, interesting
e.g. *It is important to consider the practical effects of these measures.*

Adverbs and phrases

clearly, indeed, in fact, of course
generally, usually, mainly, widely
perhaps, probably, certainly, possibly
rarely, sometimes, often
e.g. *Clearly, this is a serious issue that deserves further study.*
This book is generally held to be her greatest novel.

Verbs

These help show how certain you are about a point or an argument.
Modal verbs: can, could; may, might; will, would (*the first of each pair is most certain*)
Compare: *I argue that...* (very certain). / *I would argue that...* (not so certain)
It + verb: It appears that, It seems that...
It + passive verb: It can be seen that...; It should/must be noted/emphasized that...
Showing verbs: show, indicate, demonstrate, suggest, imply (*These have a non-human subject*)
Arguing verbs: argue, suggest, consider, conclude (*These can have a human subject e.g. I*)

Linking words and phrases

Firstly (= *I have several points to make*)
Furthermore...; In addition,... Moreover,...
(= *I have another important point*)
However,... (*to introduce a counterargument*)
Thus,... Therefore,... (*to introduce a conclusion*)