

## Lesson 1. Building your argument

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## Table of contents

**What is an argument?**

**Outlining your argument using a list**

**Activity: Headings in a journal article**

A closer look

**Building your argument using connecting and transition words**

**Activity: Turning your main and subpoints into sentences**

**Activity: Using connecting and transition words to link sentences**

**Building your argument by linking paragraphs**

**Further reading**

# What is an argument?

Learning how to build your argument using a logical and clear flow is a very important skill that we can use when writing many types of documents, for example, papers, reports, research briefs, policy briefs, lay summaries and features. For this reason, it's important that we practice how to build an argument.

To make the best of this lesson, it's important that you know **what you want to write about**, as the activities in this lesson are built around crafting your argument.

If you are working on a paper, we recommend using the **Introduction** or **Background** section for the exercises in this lesson, though you are free to apply the learning to any sections of your paper.

Don't worry if you don't have a paper to work on, as you can adapt the instructions and activities in this lesson to craft an argument for any type of document that you are currently working on, for example a research brief, technical report, blog or feature.

## Definition of argument

The [Oxford English Dictionary](#) defines the word **argument** as **'A reason or set of reasons given in support of an idea, action or theory.'**

## How can I outline my argument?

Before you begin writing anything that contains an argument, it's important that you have mapped out or outlined the argument that you want to present.

Many journal guidelines offer you a standard structure to follow that can help you outline your argument. Journal guidelines usually include variations of introduction/literature review/background, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion/summary. Guidelines can either specify headings to signpost the reader or be a free-flowing essay format.

Each journal has its own guidelines, so make sure you read the guidelines carefully (see the fourth lesson in this module for more about reading journal guidelines) and read articles in your chosen journal too, so you understand how authors have used any suggested structure.

Often, however, journal guidelines don't tell you **how** to build your argument. So, before you begin to write the sections of your paper, you need to know what your argument is and understand how to build a coherent argument.

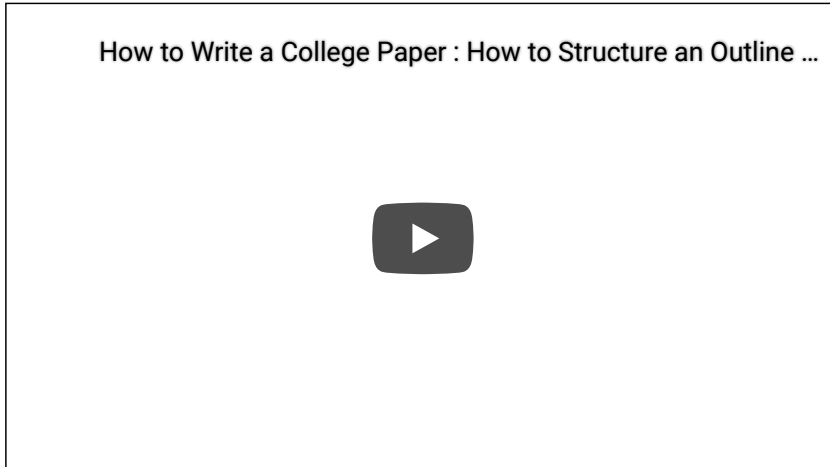
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## Outlining your argument using a list

You can use several tools to help you map out or outline your argument, for example, mind maps, freewriting, brainstorming, or using lists.

Take a look at this information by [Georgia Tech Library](#), that shows a simple way to outline your paper using a bullet list, along with this video explaining what a bullet list would look like in Word:



Activity

If you haven't done so yet, outline your argument using a similar bullet list method. Include all the points under headings such as Introduction, Methodology, Conclusion if you find that helpful.

The outline that you have just completed should contain **all the reasons that support your argument** and **all the main and supporting or subpoints that you want to include in your paper**.



Have you included every point that will support your argument? Are your points organised into a 'set of reasons'? If you need to, take some more time to outline all your main and subpoints before you move on to the next page.

When you outlined your argument, you will have listed all your main points and subpoints. Take another look at your list – have you naturally grouped your ideas together under each main point? If not, do that now quickly before moving on to the next exercise.

Those main points can serve as headings for your **working draft**, for example, '*The challenges of ecotourism in X coastal village*', '*The benefits of ecotourism in X coastal village*', etc.

## Activity: Headings in a journal article



### Activity

Take a look at all the **headings** used in this journal article titled "*Sub-Saharan Africa's Engagement with Emerging Partners: Opportunities and Challenges*" (Elmorsy, Samah SA. *Bandung 3.1* (2016): 1-22).

1. Background
2. Theoretical issues – international cooperation theory
  - a. The role of trade
  - b. The role of foreign direct investment
  - c. The role of development assistance
3. Africa-South cooperation – background
  - a. China-Africa partnership
  - b. India-Africa partnership
  - c. Brazil-Africa partnership
4. Methods
  - a. Estimation determinates of Sub-Saharan Africa's trade intensity with China
    - i. Overview of the gravity model methodology
    - ii. Source of data
  - b. Model results and discussion
5. Reorientation on Sub-Saharan African countries toward new markets
  - a. Trade
    - i. Sectoral composition of the reorientation
    - ii. Exports
    - iii. Imports
  - b. Foreign Direct Investment
  - c. Development assistance
  - d. Economic impact of Sub-Saharan Africa's engagement with new partners
6. Opportunities and challenges
  - a. Opportunities
  - b. Challenges
  - c. Policy implications
    - i. Recommendations for African countries
    - ii. Recommendations for developing country partners
    - iii. Recommendations for developed country partners
    - iv. Recommendations for regional and multilateral institutions
7. Conclusion

What do you notice about the headings used in this journal article? What do you like about the way this article is structured? Is it clear and logical?

Reveal

## A closer look



### Activity

Now let's take a closer look at **point 3c in the list on the previous page: the section on Brazil–Africa partnerships**. This section has 2 paragraphs, replicated below. **Working backwards from the published paragraph below, list all the main and subpoints that you can see in these paragraphs.**

**Top tip:** Reading backwards (i.e. the last sentence first) is a self-editing technique that often helps us spot obvious errors or leaps in logic. Used in this exercise, it might help the main points leap out. Give it a try!

*Brazil has bilateral cooperation arrangements with individual countries in the region for which there is no formal bilateral dialogue platform, and has provided support to them through projects in areas such as health, infrastructure and agriculture. Brazil is also key driver of interregional cooperation partnerships between South America and Africa. Furthermore, it is active promoters of cooperation among developing countries in multilateral negotiations and reform of the international financial architecture.*

*Brazil has a unique partnership arrangement with India and South Africa that has attracted international attention. The IBSA partnership is a trilateral alliance between Brazil, India and South Africa aimed at boosting their bargaining power and clout on global issues and strengthening economic and political ties amongst the three countries. Since its inception in 2003, it has become a powerful force in setting the agenda and pace of multilateral negotiations. It also plays an important role in ensuring that the concerns and interests of developing countries are taken into account in global responses to the financial crisis and the reform of the international financial architecture (UNCTAD 2010:16–20).*

When you read the section on Brazil–Africa partnerships, is it obvious what the main points are? We identified 7 main points with 2 subpoints, did you identify similar points?

Reveal



Can you see how the subpoints work together to build up an argument?

**Top tip: Expand each of your main and subpoints into full sentences to create paragraphs.** In the previous examples, you can see how main and subpoints are used to identify and organise ideas. In your outline, you will have listed several subpoints under your main points. **You should aim to expand each subpoint into at least one sentence.** Subpoints may be substantial enough to form single paragraphs in their own right, or they may be sufficient as single sentences.

## Building your argument using connecting and transition words

Before we begin building your argument fully, it's worth spending some time understanding how you can use words that help you connect or transition from one part of your argument to another. This will help make your writing smoother and your argument more coherent.

### Connecting words

Connecting words are useful when you want to join information together **in one sentence**. Examples of connecting words include:

Connecting words		
for example	yet	also
whereas	when	or
because	and	such as
although	but	if

### Transition words

Transition words have 2 useful functions. They help you to:

1. signal to the reader that you are moving from one piece of information to another; and
2. join ideas together from one sentence to the next, and from one paragraph to the next

Examples of transition words include:

Transition words	
in addition	firstly, secondly, etc
furthermore	consequently
however	therefore
in contrast	by comparison
in summary	indeed



### Activity

Now take a look at the paragraph below from the paper "*Integrating Institutional and Behavioural Measures of Bribery*" (Rose, Richard, and Caryn Peiffer. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 22.3 (2016). We have identified 12 connecting and transition words included in the paragraph below. Click on all the connecting/transition words that you see. When you click on any of these words, it will get highlighted.

*Both behavioural and ethical norms have significant influences on bribery, but in opposite directions. If individuals perceive public officials as very corrupt, they are significantly more likely to pay a bribe than if they think there is no corruption, thus confirming hypothesis 4a. However, perceptions are usually not based on firsthand experience but drawn from media accounts of grand bribes. Moreover, most people who use a service without paying a bribe see public services as to some extent tainted with corruption. In other words, perceiving services as corrupt is not sufficient to result in people paying a bribe. This is likely to be an endogenous relationship; people who have paid bribes in the past are intuitively more likely to perceive the government as marred with corruption. People who endorse the ethical norm that bribery ought to be reported are significantly less likely to pay a bribe, as predicted in hypothesis 4b. However, the impact of these countervailing influences is not equal. Whereas those who see officials as very corrupt are 20 % more likely to pay a bribe, those who think an incident of bribery should be reported are only 6 percentage points less likely to do so (Table 2).*

Did you spot 12 words/phrases in all? Click the reveal button below to check your answer.

Reveal



## Activity: Turning your main and subpoints into sentences



### Activity

Now look at the outline you made for your paper earlier in this unit. Using your outline, take one of your main points (this could be from your Introduction or Discussion section) and start fleshing out its subpoints into full sentences.

## Activity: Using connecting and transition words to link sentences



### Activity

Now use connecting and transition words to link the sentences together.

**Does using connecting words help clarify your argument? Do they link together to form one paragraph?**

Don't worry if any one point needs a paragraph in its own right, just continue with the exercise until you are happy with what you have fleshed out.

Now let's look closer at how you can use sentences between paragraphs to help your argument flow.

## Building your argument by linking paragraphs

Writing each point as a sentence isn't enough to create a coherent argument: you will need to structure your sentences into paragraphs. [The University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) describes paragraphs as 'units of thought' that come together to form 'one coherent idea'.

Writing paragraphs isn't easy. Poorly constructed paragraphs can leave the reader confused or bored, but well-constructed paragraphs will help your argument flow.

The sentences you have written for your introduction/discussion section are first drafts of paragraphs. These paragraphs now need to link together to create a coherent argument.

The first sentence of a paragraph is sometimes called the '**topic sentence**'. The last sentence of a paragraph is sometimes called the '**wrap up sentence**'.

The **first and last sentences of a paragraph** help link the different points of your argument together, which ultimately help create a logical flow in your journal article. For example:

<b>Paragraph 1 - First sentence:</b>	<i>'The college decided to implement a writing course aimed at undergraduate students...'</i>  This paragraph then details the main and sub-points that support the argument for implementing the course.
<b>Paragraph 1 - Last sentence:</b>	<i>'Implementing the course was therefore seen as a good investment for the college and students.'</i>
<b>Paragraph 2 - First sentence:</b> (follows on from the last sentence in paragraph 1 by using the word 'implementing')	<i>'As a result of implementing this course, students reported...'</i>  This paragraph then details the main and sub-points on the impact of implementing this course.
<b>Paragraph 2 - Last sentence:</b>	<i>'The impact of the course has therefore been...'</i>



### Activity

The below extract is from this article: Rassi, Christian, et al. 'Have you heard of schistosomiasis? Knowledge, attitudes and practices in Nampula Province, Mozambique.' *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases* 10.3 (2016): e0004504.

Click the sentences that link the paragraphs to reveal why they work and why they are important. If you click on an appropriate linking sentence, it will get highlighted and an explanation will appear in the box on the right. At any point you can click the reset button below to start over.

Reset

Over 90% of all people who require PCT for schistosomiasis live in sub-Saharan Africa [5]. Mozambique is one of the worst affected countries, with an estimated 19 million of a total population of 23 million people requiring PCT for schistosomiasis in 2010 [6]. It is thought that 47% of school-age children in Mozambique are infected with the disease [7]. As one of the signatories of the London Declaration on NTDs, the Republic of Mozambique has committed to implementing a multi-sectoral plan to control and eliminate NTDs, targeting lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis and trachoma in endemic areas [8].

Individual and community perceptions, experiences and understanding of schistosomiasis are likely to have a significant effect on prevention and control efforts. A range of social and political factors such as not understanding the rationale of MDA, fear of side effects and lack of trust in drug distributors may influence individuals' and communities' willingness to participate in campaigns [9–11]. Community perceptions of the diseases will also influence how widely protective behaviours are adopted among populations living in endemic areas. For this reason, prevention and control interventions need to invest in social mobilisation and community participation [12–15], taking into account knowledge gaps, misconceptions and barriers to adoption of recommended behaviours. It is therefore important to gain a better understanding of knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) with regard to schistosomiasis at the community level.

Malaria Consortium, in partnership with the Republic of Mozambique's Ministério de Saúde (Ministry of Health) and the Direção Provincial de Saúde (Provincial Health Authority) in Nampula province, is conducting operational research to assess the effectiveness of the community dialogues approach to improve schistosomiasis prevention and control at community level. [the article goes on to describe the approach]



### Activity

Using the outline you have developed, write 3 paragraphs of your introduction/discussion section, using linking sentences at the top and bottom of each paragraph where possible. You can revisit the sentences that you wrote in the previous activity and rewrite these into more structured paragraphs if you like.

## Further reading

The [Academic Phrasebank](#) also has useful phrases that you can adapt to show you are moving from one part of your argument to another. If you want some more tips about structuring a journal article, read [Ten simple rules for structuring papers](#) (*PLOS Computational Biology*). This is a very good article: well written, clear and concise.