

Writing (Part 2) – Argument

To write a composition on an argument, you should include an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion.

- I. **Introductory Paragraph:** You state the author's conclusion, refer to the assumptions based on which the conclusion is made, and contend that the assumptions are questionable.
- II. **Body Paragraphs:** In each body paragraph you prove the invalidity of the assumptions of the argument.
- III. **Concluding Paragraph:** You should reiterate your position in the introductory paragraph; that is, you ought to repeat the author's conclusion, state that it is invalid because it rests on some unsubstantiated assumptions, and observe that the conclusion cannot be accepted unless the validity of the assumptions is demonstrated.

Important NOTE: The assumptions included in the arguments most often suffer from the following common flaws:

1. Overlooking the role of intervening variables
2. Immutability of things over time
3. Weak analogy
4. Confusion of correlation with cause-effect
5. Overgeneralization of the feature of a small sample to a larger group

EXAMPLE:

Read the following argument sample question:

Seven years ago, homeowners in nearby Brookville community adopted a set of restrictions on how the community's yards should be landscaped and what colors the exteriors of homes should be painted. Since then, average property values have tripled in Brookville. In order to raise property values in Deerhaven Acres, we should adopt our own set of restrictions on landscaping and housepainting.

Let's first briefly analyze the argument and then read a sample essay on it.

CONSLUSION: Restrictions similar to those applied in Brookville community should adopted for property values to increase in Deerhaven Acres.

Assumption 1: the restrictions were implemented (Answer: There is no evidence that such restrictions were actually applied)

Assumption 2: Increase in property values was due to such restrictions (Answer: Maybe some other variables such as the balance of supply and demand was changed due to immigration or due to an increase in demand.)

Assumption 3: People in Deerhaven Acres care as much about the exterior appearance of homes as those in Brookville community. (Answer: Maybe it is not true. Or even it is not impossible to imagine that such people hate the imposed exterior appearance for homes and care more about other things such as interior design, quality of building materials, resistance against natural disasters, etc.)

Now read a sample essay on the same argument

In this letter, a committee of Deerhaven Acres homeowners recommends that in order to enhance Deerhaven property values homeowners should follow certain restrictions concerning their homes' exterior appearance. To support this recommendation the committee points out that in the seven years since Brookville adopted similar restrictions property values there have risen. This argument rests on a series of unsubstantiated assumptions, and is therefore unpersuasive as it stands.

A threshold assumption upon which the recommendation relies is that Brookville homeowners implemented Brookville's restrictions in the first place. The letter fails to substantiate this crucial assumption. If these restrictions were not implemented, then any change in Brookville's property values cannot be attributed to them. Accordingly, the committee cannot draw any firm conclusion about what effect similar restrictions would have on Deerhaven property values.

Even assuming that Brookville homeowners implemented these restrictions, the committee relies on the additional assumption that this course of action was responsible for the increase in Brookville property values. However, it is entirely possible that one or more other factors were instead responsible for the increase, especially since a considerable period of time has passed since Brookville adopted its restrictions. Property values are a function of supply and demand. Perhaps the demand for housing in the area has increased due to an influx of major employers. Or, perhaps the supply of housing has decreased. Either scenario would provide an alternative explanation for the increase in property values.

Even assuming that Brookville's rising property values are attributable to the implementation of these restrictions, the committee fails to consider possible differences between Brookville and Deerhaven that might help to bring about a different result for Deerhaven. For instance, potential Deerhaven homebuyers might be less interested in a home's exterior appearance than Brookville homebuyers. For that matter, perhaps Deerhaven homebuyers would find consistent exterior appearance a distasteful feature-in which case adopting these restrictions might actually tend to decrease Deerhaven property values. Without accounting for these and other possible dissimilarities, the committee cannot assume that what resulted in rising property values in Brookville would bring about the same result in Deerhaven.

In conclusion, to persuade me that Deerhaven should adopt the proposed restrictions the committee must supply clear evidence that the implementation of Brookville's restrictions, and not some other factor, was responsible for the rise in Brookville's property values. The committee must also provide evidence that other factors affecting home prices in the two areas are otherwise essentially the same.

Pattern to follow:

The writer of the argument concludes/recommends that **SUCH A THING SHOULD BE DONE**; however, this conclusion/ recommendation cannot be accepted as it is in that it rests on a number of premises all of which can be challenged in one way or another.

The first problem with the argument is that the writer assumes that X has happened because of Y. However, there is no evidence to prove that X actually happened because of Y. For example, maybe X happened because ----- . Or maybe X happened because ----- .

Another problem with the argument is that the writer assumes that City A is identical to City B in all respects. However, there is no evidence to definitely prove that this is the case. Maybe the people in City A ----- but the people in City B ----- . Or maybe City A is geographically different from City B and because of this difference ----- .

A third problem with the argument is that the writer assumes that things remain the same over the years. However, in most cases this is not true. Maybe ten years ago ----- but now ----- .

In the final analysis, the writer's conclusion/recommendation cannot be taken to be correct because ,as it was shown in the body paragraphs above, it depends on a number of assumptions each of which is questionable. The conclusion/recommendation can only be accepted if the weaknesses already referred to are all removed.

HOMework

Write a response to the following argument.

The following appeared in a memo from the chairperson of the school board in the town of Saluda.

"For the past five years, Mr. Charles Schade has been the music director at Steel City High School, and during that time the school band from Steel City High has won three regional band competitions. In addition, the quality of the music rehearsal facilities and musical instruments at Steel City High has improved markedly over the past five years. Because of such successes at Steel City High, the Saluda school board should hire Mr. Schade to plan and direct the general music education programs for the entire Saluda school system."