

# Argument

## What this handout is about...

This handout will define what an argument is and why you need one in most of your academic essays.

## Arguments are everywhere...

You may be surprised to hear that the word "argument" does not have to be written anywhere in your assignment for it to be an important part of your task. In fact, making an argument--expressing a point of view on a subject and supporting it with evidence--is often the aim of academic writing. Your instructors may assume that you know this fact, and therefore they may not explain its importance to you in class. Nevertheless, if your writing assignment asks you to respond to reading and discussion in class, your instructor likely expects you to produce an argument in your paper.

Most material you learn in college is or has been debated by someone, somewhere, at some time. Even when the material you read or hear is presented as simple "information" or "fact," it may actually be one person's interpretation of a set of information or facts. In your writing, instructors may call on you to question that interpretation and either defend it, refute it, or offer some new view of your own. In writing assignments, you will almost always need to do more than just present information that you have gathered or regurgitate information that was discussed in class. You will need to select a point of view and provide evidence (in other words, use "argument") to shape the material and offer your interpretation of the material.

If you think that "fact," not argument, rules intelligent thinking, consider these examples. At one point, the "great minds" of Western Europe firmly believed the Earth was flat. They had discussions about how obviously true this "fact" was. You are able to disagree now because people who saw that argument as faulty set out to make a better argument and proved it. Differences of opinion are how human knowledge develops, and scholars like your instructors spend their lives engaged in debate over what may be counted as "true," "real," or "right" in their fields. In their courses, they want you to engage in similar kinds of critical thinking and debate in your writing.

Argumentation is not just what your instructors do. We all use argumentation on a daily basis, and you probably already have some skill at crafting an argument. The more you improve your skills in this area, the better you will be at thinking critically, reasoning, making choices, and weighing evidence.

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## Making a Claim