

# Political Sociology (Tutorials)

## Writing Argumentative Essays

Clemens Jarnach - clemens.jarnach@gtc.ox.ac.uk  
Academic Year 2024/25 – Hilary

## 1 Tips on Writing Essays

### 1.1 General Preparation

#### 1.1.1 Read the resources listed on the Reading List

- This cannot be stressed enough. The reading list has been carefully constructed, listing the most relevant books and papers to provide you with the necessary materials and tools for your essays and exams.
- As the term progresses, don't forget about earlier materials. Use any relevant content from prior weeks to strengthen your essay.

#### 1.1.2 Understand the essay question

- Take your time to thoroughly read and comprehend the question. Understanding what is required is the most critical step in essay writing.
- Formulate a short, one-sentence summary of what you want to say and claim. This is your thesis.

### 1.2 Structuring Your Essay

#### 1.2.1 Develop an argument

- Ensure your essay has a clear argument or overarching point. An argument is more than an opinion; it requires thorough analysis and evidence to support your claims.

#### 1.2.2 Follow a standard structure

- **Introduction:**
  - Briefly describe the debate.
  - Define any key terms, if necessary.
  - State your position and thesis.
  - Provide a concise roadmap of how you will argue your case.
- **Main Body:**
  - Discuss each point outlined in the introduction.
  - Clearly connect each paragraph back to your argument and the essay question.
  - Sources have to be cited. Back up your claims with examples, logic, literature, research, or data.
- **Conclusion:**
  - Summarise the key arguments made in your essay.
  - Where appropriate, highlight any limitations or gaps in the literature.

### 1.3 Critical Analysis

#### 1.3.1 Be critical, but within reason

- Identify problems or limitations in theories and articles where appropriate.
- Avoid overdoing criticism; a few flaws do not necessarily invalidate a paper or field.
- When criticising, explain why and suggest alternative approaches to address issues.

### 1.3.2 Avoid plagiarism

- Familiarise yourself with the university's practical guide on plagiarism.
- The Department takes plagiarism seriously. Suspected cases are referred to the Proctors, who can impose penalties, including expulsion from the university.

## 2 Keys to a Good Argumentative Essay

### 2.1 Key Components of an Argumentative Essay

- Explain the question.
- Make a definite claim or proposal.
- Develop your arguments.
- Consider objections and alternatives.

## 3 Common Issues and Fallacies

### 3.1 Logical Fallacies

- Drawing conclusions from too little evidence.
- Overlooking alternative evidence.
- Answering the wrong question.
- **Over-reliance on anecdotal evidence:** Using personal stories or isolated examples as definitive proof.
- **Circular reasoning:** Supporting a claim with reasoning that simply restates the claim in different terms.
- **Equivocation:** Using ambiguous language to mislead or misrepresent the truth.
- **Straw man argument:** Misrepresenting an opponent's argument to make it easier to attack.
- **Appeal to authority:** Overvaluing the opinion of an authority figure without critically assessing their claims.
- **False equivalence:** Drawing comparisons between two things that are not actually comparable.
- **Ad hominem:** Attacking the person rather than their argument.
- **Ad ignorantiam:** Arguing a claim is true because it hasn't been proven false.
- **Ad populum:** Appealing to the emotions of the crowd.
- **Composition:** Assuming a whole must share the properties of its parts.
- **Non sequitur:** Drawing a conclusion that does not logically follow from the evidence.
- **Overgeneralizing:** Generalising from too few examples or an unrepresentative sample.
- **False dilemma:** Reducing options to two opposing choices, often unfairly.
- **Post hoc, ergo propter hoc:** Assuming causation based on mere succession in time.
- **Red herring:** Diverting attention from the main subject by introducing an irrelevant issue.
- **Suppressed evidence:** Presenting only supporting evidence while ignoring contradictory parts.

## Bibliography

- Becker, H. S. (S. (2020). Writing for social scientists how to start and finish your thesis, book, or article. In *Writing for social scientists how to start and finish your thesis, book, or article* (Third edition.). The University of Chicago Press.
- Billig, M. (2013). Learn to write badly : How to succeed in the social sciences. In *Learn to write badly : How to succeed in the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press.
- Weston, A. (1992). A rulebook for arguments. In *A rulebook for arguments* (2nd ed). Hackett.