

Understanding and Analysing Arguments

COM 101, Session 9

An academic argument is...

✓ Taking a debatable position
presenting evidence and using sound logic to convince the
audience/reader to accept (or at least consider) your position.

An Argument will typically include three essential elements:

1. Claims
2. Evidence
3. Warrants

Claims:

In argumentative writing the writer presents a claim to the audience.

Claim: a proposition that conveys the writer's interpretations or beliefs about something.

Claims are not facts but rather conclusions drawn from facts.

Please remember:

The truth or validity of a claim can be argued by others and there is always an opposing point of view.

Claims:

Make sure that when you are developing a claim (for whatever type of assignment), that the following conditions are met:

1. The claim actually conveys your interpretation and is not a statement of fact.
2. The claim(s) can be supported by specific evidence.

Claim Statements:

A claim statement is typically just your position on the issue posed.

Evidence and Warrants:

Evidence: support, data, or facts that are indisputable because they are grounded in solid, academic, reliable research.

Evidence is used to support the claim.

Warrant: logical connection/bridge between a claim and the supporting evidence.

Sometimes the relationship between the claim and the evidence will be obvious and the writer won't need to expound on the relationship between the two.

Sometimes you will need to show the reader the connection.

The Three Appeals of Argument

Ethos, Pathos, & Logos

Logical Fallacies

- What is a logical fallacy?

A mistake in reasoning that seriously affects the ability to argue effectively.

- Why are they used?

The writer is unsure if the argument is sound.

When used deliberately, logical fallacies are used simply to win an argument and obscure the truth.

Bias

- A place where the writer demonstrates their outlooks & prejudices—typically these are presented as facts, not opinions
- A bias argument lacks outside, credible research to support the writer's argument
- You need to avoid arguments with an extreme and obvious bias

Circular Reasoning – restating argument with no proof.

Example:

Harry Potter is a popular movie because it makes a lot of money.

It makes so much money because people liked the movie.

People like the movie because it is popular.

Hasty Generalization

Definition: writers draw conclusions about an issue too quickly without considering the complete issue

Example: Some professional baseball players use performance enhancing drugs therefore all professional baseball players are drug addicts.

Either-or Arguments

Definition: reduce complex issue to black and white choices;
this creates a problem that doesn't really exist;
this argument ignores choices & options to solving the issue

Example: Either we change the legal driving age to 18 or teenagers won't be able to drive at all.

Slippery Slope – A-Z

Definition: an argument that suggests one step will inevitably lead to more, eventually negative steps; this argument implies that that the descent is inevitable & unalterable; speculative argument

Example: If elementary school children are forced to wear a school uniform then eventually middle schools and high schools will also require uniforms, and if they go to uniforms then public universities and colleges will also have to require uniforms.

Bandwagon Appeals

Definition: attempt to persuade people to do something or believe in something simply because everyone else is doing it or believes in it

Example: Everyone is writing on global warming these days, so you should too.

Ad-Hominem – attacking character of a person rather than his/her arguments.

Definition: arguments limit themselves not to the issues but to the opposition itself

The Principles of Argumentation

Argumentation can be applied to virtually all assignments involving critical reasoning no matter the subject or discipline.

The argumentative essay shares many characteristics with the expository essay.

The argument also consists of an introduction, body and conclusion.

It also is built around a major premise (in this instance, called the Proposition rather than the Thesis Statement).

Additionally, there is a definite pattern of organization used in developing the argument.

So, what is an "Argument?"

"a reasoned attempt to convince the audience to accept a particular point of view about a debatable topic."

The key concept here is "to convince the audience/readers," that is, you must make them believe your position, accept your logic and evidence.

Not only do you want them to accept the evidence, but you want that audience to accept "a particular point of view" -- that point of view, or perspective, is yours.

It is your position, your proposition.

Finally, there must be "a debatable topic" present for a true argument to develop.

Again, the key principle here is that the topic must be one which has at least two sides --

Pro (those in favor of the proposition under discussion) and

Con (those who are against the Proposition as stated).

The Proposition

Now that we understand what the term argument refers to, we move to the fact that every argument must have a Proposition --

this is the major premise of the argument

What you want to keep in mind, irrespective of the position you might be advancing, is to formulate a clearly stated proposition.

There must be no ambiguity about your proposition.

You also want to indicate within that proposition how you intend to support or develop it.

And finally, you want to do so within one complete sentence that carries a subject and a verb.

Evidence in Argumentation

To support your proposition, one must present evidence.

There are two (2) types of evidence used in argumentation : fact(s) and opinion(s).

Facts consist of items that can be verified or proven. There are at least four (4) categories of facts:

- 1 By Scientific Measurement
- 2 By the Way Nature Works
- 3 By Observation
- 4 By Statistic

The second type of evidence that can be utilized in an argument is opinion.

In this instance, we are not talking about your personal opinion

The opinion(s) cited must be credible.

It is in presenting your evidence that you are, in fact, developing the Body of your argument.

That evidence, be it fact or opinion, must be present in each of the three planks you put forth to develop and support your proposition.

Let's revise

Key Concepts

- 1 Proposition
- 2 Fact(s)
- 3 Opinion
- 4 Fallacy
- 5 Argument
- 6 Rationality
- 7 Social Convention(s)
- 8 Premise
- 9 Breadth
- 10 Credible