

The Language of Argumentation

This matrix illustrates the words and phrases commonly seen in argumentative writing that help writers to *establish, forward and conclude* their argument.

At the start of the argumentative text, there are **words and phrases used to establish a position** aka proposition or thesis. The **body of the text displays a range of words that forward a line of reasoning, demonstrate a balanced view point, express evaluation of sources and highlight the author's views**. The **tail end of the text has words and phrases that show conclusions** being drawn and which may also set the scene for the next stage of an argument's offensive.¹

In ES2660, "Communicating in the Information Age", we have taught explicit terms for deconstructing arguments, e.g. assumptions, counter arguments and refutation – these words are found in the glossary. Those are the words that you would use to deconstruct someone else's argument. **This matrix is for the words and phrases that you would use to help construct your own arguments.**

Authors who produce strong, persuasive, clear arguments and ethical arguments use words to signal their intentions and to demonstrate their ethics.

Conversely, authors who produce weak, less persuasive and less clear arguments may omit such signal words. Authors of strong and persuasive arguments with less clear ethics may use some of these words, but intersperse them with some of the fallacies or emotive words such as weasel words or fallacious reasoning.

Please turn over for the matrix of argumentative language.

¹ An argument may be part of a series of on-going developments in a field of study. In this instance, the conclusion section of the text, e.g. a scientific paper, may set the scene for further experiments to prove a hypothesis, or if a report then recommendations for follow up. Whilst many argumentative texts are complete in themselves, some may be part of evolutionary development of knowledge. The word "offensive" is here used to mean "strategy" as in a military campaign.

Argumentative Language Matrix

These are the three main stages of constructing an argument.

Establishing a proposition	<p>Sentences explaining the background and the context. <i>E.g. The background of this issue is.....</i> Explicit sentence on your own position. <i>E.g. "my stance on XXXX is"</i></p>
Forwarding a line of reasoning	<p>The use of discourse markers is very important to write cogently and cohesively. Here are some language cues that may be used. Please also refer to the helpful links given below to helpful online links.</p> <p>Language cues to reinforce ideas: <i>E.g. Further support for xxxx can be found in ...</i> <i>E.g. The evidence supports the view that....</i></p> <p>Language cues to contrast or introduce counter arguments: <i>E.g. However, (contrasting idea...)</i> <i>E.g. On the contrary....</i></p> <p>Language cues to show concession but also to refute counter arguments : <i>E.g. Although (Name of author) has a point aboutNevertheless, his/she does not account for (whatever omission there is), thus....(your refutation here to strengthen your position).</i></p>
Concluding an argument	<p>Before the traditional "<i>in conclusion blah, blah , blah...</i>" you might have mini-summations at the end of body paragraphs showing how that paragraph has advanced your argument. <i>E.g. "...Thus what the three studies on XXX show in common areThis seems to indicate quite strongly that(mini conclusion for how the contents of that paragraph lead to the final conclusion).</i> <i>E.g. "...The economics of free downloading do not help less well known artists, so not paying for downloading their work is unethical."</i></p> <p>Traditional conclusion in the last paragraph: <i>E.g. "In conclusion, I have demonstrated in this essay that there are arguments to support the view that all stealing including that of digital downloads is wrong."</i></p> <p>Definitive last word by author on the argument: <i>E.g. "Although moral positions on positions can be easily influenced by practical circumstances such as how easy it is to pay, research suggests that there is an ethical sense that stealing is always wrong".</i></p> <p><i>Note: These examples on the language of conclusions come from Cottrell, (2011), Think Critically, p199 and 200). Palgrave-Macmillan: London.</i></p>

Here are how these words and phrases may **also** be used to demonstrate your critical thinking dispositions.

Critical Thinking Disposition Language Matrix

Being open-minded and well informed	<p><i>As (Surname of author being quoted and Year of Publication) says... (written argument)</i></p> <p><i>As (Name of person or author being quoted) says in (very brief description of source)</i></p> <p><i>It would be interesting to see if X has a different view to mine</i></p>
Being systematic in arriving at or deducing beliefs, showing a line of reasoning	<p>Use of enumerators; <i>firstly, secondly, thirdly</i></p> <p><i>This is evidenced by...</i></p> <p><i>This suggests...</i></p> <p><i>Thus/therefore/hence</i></p> <p><i>If X exists, then Y will follow... Without X, then Y is</i></p>
Showing carefulness in evaluating information as being credible, e.g. in reporting empirical evidence of your own, illustrating the differences between your view and those of other authors whom you are quoting to distinguish your agreement from your disagreement with them	<p>Showing carefulness in evaluating sources</p> <p><i>E.g. The study on X showsthis seems to replicate the data found by the research work of Y...</i></p> <p><i>The news report comes from a senior official at the official at the ministry, so we may infer that it is at least the government's stance on the matter.</i></p> <p>Distinguishing your use of source material</p> <p><i>E.g. As Lim (2013) has shown X is...</i></p> <p>Showing your own voice/view</p> <p><i>E.g. My own stance is...</i></p> <p><i>E.g. One still has reservations about...</i></p> <p><i>E.g. Looking at the work of X and also of Y, if one might synthesis these two sources.....</i></p> <p>Showing disagreement – <i>However, one has concerns about (Surname of author being quoted and Year of Publication) when he/she states (paraphrase of their point), (written argument). I disagree with (Name of other speaker or author)'s point aboutbut I concede his/her point about</i></p>
Asking appropriate questions, drawing warranted conclusions	<p>Asking questions</p> <p><i>E.g. If X is the case, then we must ask the question if a deduction can be made and that is.....</i></p> <p><i>E.g. Thus far the data seems to indicate a causal link between X and Y. Further research on Z may be needed to establish a definitive link.</i></p> <p>Drawing warranted conclusions</p> <p><i>E.g. Looking at the primary data, we may infer from item X, that there is a pattern of behaviour in the research subjects when.....conditions are met.</i></p>
Being able to develop and defend your position, or being able to express counterargument and refutation	<p>Showing concession to the opposing viewpoint and refuting it:</p> <p><i>E.g. Although (Name of author) has a point aboutNevertheless, his/she does not account for (whatever omission there is), thus....(your refutation here to strengthen your position).</i></p>

NB – There is some overlap between the two matrices, nothing to worry about. These are just two angles for looking at the aspect of language in arguments.

In constructing arguments, you need to first get your content in hand, second, you need to organise the flow of ideas, and thirdly, you need to use the sort of language cues that signal your intentions. Lastly, you need to make sure that your use of words is as ethical as possible, so for instance you do not get someone to believe something because you have only given the good points and have glossed over the negative points, e.g. persuading someone to have Botox. Nor do you use words or appeals that focussed on the emotions at the expense of facts.

Words and Phrases to Avoid

Double speak	E.g. Studies have found... Many experts believe...
Weasel words	Collateral damage
Emotionally laden words, subjective/ "emo"	E.g. ' miserable, despair-filled conditions in the orphanage'
Straw men	Some people say Imagine poor Aunty Lau, living from hand to mouth... Did you know that ex-British soldier David Thompson died of starvation because his unemployment benefits were stopped just because he missed two appointments with the job centre?
Words showing bias, stereotypes and over generalisations	Singaporeans are "kia su", they are afraid to lose out.
Overuse of discourse markers in speech	"He was rapping away like Eminem. And I'm – like – wow!"