

## WRITING ARGUMENTATION PAPERS

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In a paper with an argumentation focus, the objective is to convince the reader of the writer's position on a debatable topic.

### Elements of an Argumentative Essay

In order to write an effective argumentative essay, writers must show that they understand the issues involved with the topic. They need to communicate their understanding of both sides of the topic, not just the point of view they agree with. This is done by including some of the key arguments for the opposing viewpoint.

### Arguments for your Viewpoint

In order to convince your readers of your viewpoint, you need to carefully construct your arguments. Your arguments need to do the following:

- **make sense**—The arguments need to be logical. They need to be appropriate for your opinion on the topic.
  - Example: If your opinion is that cohabitation before marriage is beneficial, you would want to use arguments that directly relate to the positive aspects of living together. In this example, you would not want to use an argument that claims that cohabitation results in more divorces. That would obviously not support your opinion that cohabitation is a good thing.
- **contain convincing evidence**—The support for your arguments needs to be based on evidence, not opinions. The following types of evidence may be used. They are listed in terms of strength from strongest to weakest.
  - **Paraphrase from a source**
  - **Quote from a source**
  - **Personal example**
- **relate to your readers**—Your arguments need to be convincing to your readers. If your audience is your classmates in your own country, in other words, people your own age who are from your same culture, your arguments or supporting details would be different than if your audience is a group of adults who come from different cultures.
- **be thoughtfully ordered**—The arguments need to be organized in such a way that you maximize their impact. This means that you need to think about how best to build your arguments.

- **Weakest to Strongest**—Many writers want to start with their weakest arguments and end with their strongest arguments. This technique allows them to leave their readers with their strongest arguments fresh in the readers’ minds. This may help to convince the readers of the writer’s opinion.
- **Strongest to Weakest**—Some writers start with their strongest arguments. They may want to get their readers on their side as soon as possible. The idea is that if the reader begins to believe the writer’s arguments from the beginning, the weaker arguments might be viewed more positively. In other words, if the reader does not agree with the writer’s opinions and the writer begins with the weaker arguments, the reader may dismiss the weaker arguments and not be persuaded until reading the strongest argument.

**Arguments against your viewpoint—“Counterarguments”:**

The arguments against your viewpoint are called counterarguments or opposing arguments. You need to give a fair representation of the other side’s views, but you do not want your readers to be convinced by these counterarguments.

**Problematization:** In order to make it clear that the counterarguments are not your arguments, you need to problematize them. In other words, you should use special language to introduce them so that the reader knows whose arguments they are.

Examples:

- It {may | might | could } be {argued/claimed/contended/said} that ...
- It has been {argued/said} that ...
- Some people might {argue/believe/maintain/claim/contend} that ...

**Development:** Try to limit the number of counterarguments you discuss to 2-3. You may need to explain each idea briefly, but you do not want to spend too much time supporting the opposing views. Some teachers want students to choose the strongest counterargument and develop only that one point. Your teacher should let you know how much development of the counterarguments he/she wants.

**Acknowledgement/Concession:** After the counterargument, there is sometimes some statement(s) in which you acknowledge that these points have some merit. Be careful not to give too much weight to these opposing views since the objective is to show that you have looked at both sides and believe your argument is correct and the counterarguments are not.

Examples:

- These arguments seem to make sense....
- These arguments have some validity, ...

**Transition:** After discussing the counterarguments, you need to signal to your reader that you are transitioning from the opposing views to your own views.

Examples:

- **However,** ...
- ... **but** on further reflection, ...
- ... **yet** they do not ...
- **Actually,** ... or ... **actually** ...
- ... **really** ...

**Refutation:** Your task as a writer is to refute the counterargument(s) you introduce. In other words, you need to show how their claims are not as strong as your arguments.

- In a “Point-by-Point” essay, each counterargument is refuted separately. In fact, the writer’s own arguments serve as the refutation in each body paragraph.
- In “Me First” and “You First” essays, there may be a short or more detailed refutation in the same paragraph as the counterarguments. This refutation is separate from your own arguments, which are expounded upon in the rest of the body of the essay.
  - If you are focusing on only one counterargument, your refutation should address the problems with that point specifically. The details of your refutation should cause readers to doubt the truth of the other side’s claim.
  - However, if you list several counterarguments, your refutation will focus more on general problems with the other side’s points. Examples of general problems with counterarguments could be: they are based on faulty data, they over-generalize, they are biased, etc.