

Crafting the “Argument”

One of the most common types of essays students write is the “critical analysis” essay. These essays rely on the writer’s argument to guide the reader toward a final conclusion.

Authors like Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz, & Walters in their book *Everything’s an Argument* suggest that everything in life is subject to interpretation and debate. Translating their ideas about debate to our own writing helps us see the function of well-formed arguments that support our ideas throughout the essay.

To enhance our essay writing skills, let’s untangle some of the ways we can form a solid argument to convince the readers that our topic is important to discuss.

First, how do we find an argument if we don't have one to begin with?

When forming an argument, we have 2 key components:

Heart

- "Arguments from the heart appeal to readers' emotions and feelings." When brainstorming ideas for an argument that aligns with your ideas, try opting for an emotional angle.
- What effect do you want your paper to have on the reader? Do you want to prompt anger? sympathy? envy? love? These emotions might be a good starting point for creating an argument. Ask yourself, how should my reader feel after reading my paper? Considering emotional appeals is a good place to start thinking about arguments.

Values

- "As you consider making an argument, you should ask yourself who you want to persuade and what values your readers likely hold."
- You should understand the values of your audience before creating an argument. What does my audience care about? How might I appeal to the audience? Will I subvert the audience's expectations? What are other people in the community saying about a topic? All of these questions might guide you toward a position.



Facts and Reason

- "To find potential logical arguments, nothing beats a good brainstorming session. Just list every argument, however implausible, that might support your case: jot down, too, any types of evidence that would really help your case if you could find them."
- Exploring and researching what others are saying about your subject is a good place to start forming your argument. What are the facts? What questions do you still have after researching? What are some of the logical problems within a subject? Like Lunsford et al. say, brainstorm some ideas about evidence you would like to find about the subject and search for answers through research.

Now that you have some prompts to begin an argument, how do we convince our reader?

When forming an argument, we have 2 key components:

Making a Claim

- "Think of claims as vortices of energy in an argument-- little dust devils stirring up trouble."
- A claim or claims (yes, your essay can have more than one claim) should be a "take" on any given topic. For example, I can make a claim that this section of the handout is helpful for making a claim and that the handout, in general, is helpful for new writers learning how to form an argument. Each of my claims may be true, but now I need to shape an argument that proves my claim.

Shaping the Argument

- "Aristotle carved the structure of argument to its bare bones when he observed that it had only two parts," statement and proof.
 - This is to say: make sure each claim you make throughout the essay is backed by sufficient evidence that the claim is true. If your claim is untrue according the evidence, you might question the validity of the evidence (If the evidence you're citing wrong, why is it wrong?). If the claims you're making are true according to the evidence, cite specific facts from the source that prove your argument.



Now some final tips:

- Collect good, reputable sources (ones that come from .edu, .gov, academic journals, books, or peer-reviewed articles) that back up/defeat your claims.
- Write with authority. The reader needs to know that you believe your own claims. Avoid words like "may," "might," "maybe," "probably," etc. that may you sound unsure.
- Study rhetorical appeals like Logos, Pathos, and Ethos to give body to your argument.