

HOW TO BUILD AN ACADEMIC ARGUMENT

What is an Argument?

An argument involves **establishing a claim and proving it with logical reasoning, examples and research**. Your ability to provide an argument will set your work apart from that of students who treat assignments as merely an accumulation of facts/details.

The Importance of an Argument

The word "argument" may not appear in your assignment, but it is often **key to writing essays and giving presentations**. **The aim of academic work is to express a point of view on a subject and support it with evidence**. Most material learned in college has been debated before i.e. the argument exists in the class module and further research, although it may not be obvious at first - they might be presented as facts.

TOP TIP

Facts can be

- ✓ Open to interpretation.
- X Don't equal arguments.

Your Role & the Academic Argument

Differences of opinions can generate debate which furthers our knowledge. **This can centre on what is "true", "real" or "right"**. Your classes encourage you to **engage in critical thinking**. Your assignments will require you to **examine interpretations; – defending them, refuting them, or providing your own view**. You almost always need to do more than summarise information or regurgitate what you have learned in class.

How to Create an Academic Argument

- **Organisation is an essential** part of building your argument.
- Creating a **clear outline for your audience, you will guide them through your argument and reasoning process.** It is often helpful to complete an outline of your assignment before attempting to construct an argument.
- This **layout will help clarify your thinking and writing process** to ensure that your audience will be able to clearly follow your argument.
- Make sure that you offer a **clear explanation for each argued point.**
- This will demonstrate your credibility, making your argument stronger because it is understandable.

The Introduction & Thesis Statement

TOP TIP

The thesis statement is the MOST IMPORTANT sentence in your assignment. It will guide your argument and inform your audience what your argument is about. It should answer the question: "What am I trying to prove?". It should have a direct link to the assignment brief or the question asked.

The thesis statement is a claim that **you will need to prove throughout the rest of your argument. Keep your argument/ thesis statement on a sticky note with you** and you can always refer back to it. It will guide your assignment, which will detail the reasoning and evidence that have led you to believe that your thesis is correct. **Remember you have to convince your reader!**

Body Paragraphs & Your Argument

TOP TIP

Your body paragraphs can: critique the material, apply it to something else and explain it in a different way

Your body paragraphs will **build upon the claim(s) you made in your introduction**. Each paragraph should focus on one point that supports your argument. **Use a topic sentence for each paragraph that illustrates the main idea** of that paragraph so that it will be clear and easy to follow. You should **prove** that you understand the material. **Demonstrate your ability to apply the material in ways that go beyond what you have read or heard.**

TOP TIP

Avoid the common pitfall of summarising information and creating “information dumps”. The application of the information to your argument is essential.

Remember, your instructors probably already know the subject matter, and you should avoid providing them with material that is not related to your point.

How to Develop your Argument

As you edit your argument, remember that **you should never stop having a point – keep your argument on track!** Remember that **the strength of your evidence can make or break your argument** so use it carefully. Ensure that **your argument consists of more than just summarised information or regurgitated facts**. You need to develop your interpretation of the material and provide evidence for your position!

TOP TIP

Structure and evidence are vital to develop your argument and remember to convince your reader. You cannot convince a confused person, so keep things tidy and ordered:

- Clear
- Specific
- Concise

Useful links

- UGC ICOSA Project, 'Using Academic Style and Tone in Writing', Available at: <http://elss.elc.cityu.edu.hk/ELSS/Resource/Academic%20Style%20and%20Tone%20ICOSA%20Version/>
- University of North Carolina Writing Centre, 'Argument', Available at: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/argument/>
- University of North Carolina Writing Centre, 'Thesis Statements', Available at: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/thesis-statements/>
- University of Sussex, 'Developing an argument', Available at: www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub/?id=357
- University of Maryland University College, 'Writing Arguments', Available at: <https://coursedev.umuc.edu/WRTG999A/chapter8/ch8-08.html>

Other Relevant Online PDFs

- How to Write an Essay
- Paragraph Structure
- Critical Reading
- Critical Thinking
- Evidence & Incorporating Research
- Counter Arguments