

PREVIEW



Comprehensive Argumentative Writing Guide

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Empowering[®]
Writers

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An author writes an argument essay to demonstrate the writer's position, belief, or conclusion in a reasoned, logical way. Argument writing is organized much like expository/informative writing. An argument essay is characterized by:

- An *introduction* that clearly states the claim (or thesis) based on the author's point of view relative to the issue being raised.
- At least several paragraphs, each presenting a *main reason* as well as supporting *evidence*.
- A *conclusion* paragraph that restates the claim or thesis.

Here is a graphic organizer that will help you to craft an argument piece:

THE ARGUMENT PILLAR

INTRODUCTION Lead/Claim Statement		
Main Reason #1 _____		
Evidence	Evidence	
Evidence	Evidence	
Main Reason #2 _____		
Evidence	Evidence	
Evidence	Evidence	
Main Reason #3 _____		
Evidence	Evidence	
Evidence	Evidence	
CONCLUSION		

As the author of an argument essay, your goal is to influence or affect a reader's point of view, to bring about some action, to appeal to the reader to accept your explanation, evaluation, or conclusion relative to a concept, issue, or problem. The purpose and goal is to motivate the reader to acknowledge that your argument is valid and deserves consideration.

In order to accomplish this you must always be aware of the opposing view. While making each argument, you must be careful not to suggest that an alternate point of view or opinion is foolish, unreasonable, or wrong. (How would you feel if, during a discussion, someone told you your idea was just plain silly? Would you be likely to continue to listen?)

Instead, as the author, you must acknowledge opposing ideas or opinions and then thoroughly explain the logic of your own point of view. A successful writer of argument presents his/her arguments/reasons in a reasonable, logical, nonjudgmental way. In order to be convincing, you must anticipate, address, and refute each opposing argument, much the way a lawyer builds a case. As an effective argument writer you must enable the reader to clearly see and understand your point of view. Your point of view or claim should be based on strong reasons and solid information in order to be convincing. You must give your reader the opportunity to stand in your shoes and to see the situation through your eyes.

SO, STRONG ARGUMENT WRITERS WILL:

- Present and explain their claim clearly through a strong organizational plan.
- Acknowledge alternate points of view.
- Demonstrate what the reader has to gain by thinking as they do.
- Show what the reader has to lose by supporting the opposing view.
- Use vivid, specific language, and powerful evidence.
- Elaborate with quotes, statistics, and anecdotes.

Lesson Plan

Effective and Ineffective Argument

Objective: Students compare argument essays to develop an awareness of what makes for an effective argument.

Procedure:

- 1.) Reproduce and distribute p. 42, Effective and Ineffective Argument, Keep the Beaches Private and pp. 47-48, Laurel Heights Beach – Public or Private? and the question sheets that follow each essay.
- 2.) Read and discuss the introductory p. 42, Effective and Ineffective Argument.
- 3.) Explain that they will use these ideas to compare two argument essays on the same topic. One is more effective than the other. The questions that follow each essay will help them to point out the effective and ineffective elements in each piece.
- 4.) As you project each piece, walk the students through your analysis. Discuss each question with the class, and annotate each piece as the question page suggests.

Student Reference Sheet

Name _____

Effective and Ineffective Argument

It is always difficult to encourage someone else to see things from your point of view, but that is the challenge of argument writing. As a writer of an argument essay, your goal is to support your point of view with evidence so that it is considered valid – even by those who might disagree.

You do that by:

1) **Presenting a number of clear, compelling facts that support your claim.**

Example: If you state a claim that the local power plant poses an environmental hazard, you might present some statistics that project an increase in pollution. You can also support your claim with anecdotal evidence drawn from personal experience.

2.) **Acknowledging your reader's sense of fairness, responsibility, caring and intelligence.**

Be sensitive when addressing the shortcomings of the opposing point-of-view.

3.) **Anticipating the arguments of those supporting the opposite view and address them with viable, fact-based alternatives.**

Read the following argument essays on p. 43 and pp. 47-48. Compare these essays and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Be sure to look for:

- 1.) Clear facts
- 2.) Acknowledgement of the reader's sense of fairness, responsibility and caring
- 3.) Respectful recognition of the opposing point of view with suggested alternatives

The questions following each piece will help you analyze the effectiveness of the writing.

Keep the Beaches Private

1.) It costs a lot to live in Laurel Heights. That is why it is smart not to let just anybody from anywhere come use our beaches. Our beaches should be private for people who live here.

2.) Our beaches are nice here. There is smooth, clean, soft sand and clean salt water. There is a place for a picnic or to take a suntan. There is a good snack stand that makes a lot of money and this is good for the town. The beach gets crowded and this is not a good thing. The sailing club meets there and some people play volleyball. The people in Laurel Heights love their beaches. These are only some of the reasons why they should be private.

3.) Because the beaches are so nice, people in Laurel Heights pay a lot of taxes. This is to keep the beaches nice. So, why should other people just come in and use them and make them crowded? Let them pay their own taxes for their own beaches. It would be better to lower the taxes in Laurel Heights, because how can people pay all these taxes? This is the second reason that people should keep our beaches private.

4.) If other people get to come to our beach, then we should get to have reserved beach parking for people who live in Laurel Heights. Nothing is worse than having an out-of-town car park in your lot. We should have the town bus go to the beach so you don't need a car. Plenty of people from inland want to come to Laurel Heights Beach because it is so beautiful, but they should just forget it. If you want to come here, why not move here?

5.) So, that is why our beaches must be just ours to use. Because they're so nice, because of taxes, and because of parking. So, if you live out of town and want to come to Laurel Heights Beach, forget it.

Name _____

Keep the Beaches Private

Number each paragraph of the piece titled: Keep the Beaches Private. Then answer the following questions:

- 1.) Read the second sentence in the piece titled Keep the Beaches Private. (*That is why it is smart not to let just anybody from anywhere use our beaches.*) If the reader disagrees, and currently believes that the beaches should not be private, how will he/she feel about that statement? _____

Do you think that the reader who believes that beaches should be open to everyone will read on past sentence 2 with an open mind? Why or why not?

- 2.) Does the writer state a claim in the introduction? If so, what? _____

- 3.) Read the main reason sentence in paragraph 2 (Our beaches are nice here.) Is that a convincing statement? Why or why not? _____

After reading all of paragraph 2, can you identify any evidence the author provided to support the main reason sentence? _____

- 4.) Look at paragraph 2 for sentence variety. Underline the sentences that begin with *There is*, *The*, or *These*. What does that tell you about word choice and sentence variety? _____

Lesson Plan

Pro or Con? What's Your Claim?

Objective: Students will recognize that in argument writing the author raises an issue. The author also recognizes and acknowledges both points of view – pro and con.

Procedure:

- 1.) Reproduce and distribute pp. 59-60. Project these pages.
- 2.) Begin by reading through p. 59 which outlines the issue: Whether to restore or tear down the run-down Victorian buildings in Eastville. Point out that the issue as well as each author's position and main arguments are listed. (A summary or basic plan for each author's piece.)
- 3.) Read Tom Green's letter on pp. 60-61 and discuss the analysis questions with the class. On another day, follow the same procedure for Jessica Ramirez's letter - pp. 67-68. Project each piece to keep the class focused and to annotate the letters as suggested in the corresponding questions.
- 4.) After the class has read and analyzed both letters, discuss the Think About It section on p. 73. They can begin to determine what they found most effective, and to decide if anything the author said compels the reader to consider another point of view.

Important Vocabulary:

- **Issue:** a matter of importance to be examined.
- **Point of View:** a specific opinion or perspective on an issue.
- **Claim:** an attitude, opinion, or particular stand on an issue.
- **Pro:** a position in support of or in favor of (for) a particular issue (opposite of con).
- **Con:** a position against or opposing a particular issue.

Name _____

Pro or Con? What's Your Claim?

The town of Eastville is considering tearing down three old Victorian buildings in the center of town. These buildings once housed stores, but they have not been well maintained, and will require at least a million dollars to restore them properly. The question is, should the town finance the restoration of these buildings or tear them down to make room for a park? Read the following Letters to the Editor arguing whether or not the buildings should be destroyed.

The first author claims that the buildings should be restored.

- Reasons they should be restored:
 - 1.) They have historic value and add charm and style to the town.
 - 2.) Restoring these buildings would promote downtown business.
 - 3.) A park in place of these buildings would do little to preserve the environment.

The second author claims that they should be torn down in favor of a park.

- Reasons to tear them down for a park:
 - 1.) Restoration would be costly and dangerous.
 - 2.) There are many traffic concerns.
 - 3.) A park would provide quality family time.

A number of questions follow each letter. Answering these questions will help you to analyze the writing.

Tom Green's Letter to the Editor

To the Editor, *introduction*

1.) *issue* Concerned citizens are all talking about the possible demolition of the stores on Elm Street in the center of town. These old historic buildings were once beautiful for sure, and it is a shame that they have not been maintained. The question is, should the town invest a million dollars to restore these buildings, or should the buildings be torn down to make way for some open space—a park for the residents to enjoy? Once we've examined all the facts, *claim* it becomes clear that we really must preserve these nostalgic and graceful landmarks.

2.) Eastville is known both for its quaint and charming houses and shops and for the beautiful countryside surrounding them. In fact, this is what draws people to Eastville and why many of them have become life-long residents. While the three Victorian storefronts in question have peeling paint, loose shutters and rickety stairs, to many this is not considered an eyesore. *charm* In fact, many residents of Eastville believe this vintage look adds to the old-fashioned charm of downtown. Bulldozing these buildings to the ground would leave a gaping hole that will surely be filled with stores and franchises *logical reasoning, specific examples* that belong to national chains. The unique town center of Eastville would be immediately transformed to Anytown, USA. As a lifelong resident of Eastville who hopes to grow old here, I believe that the promise of a park is insufficient compensation for the loss of the local architectural style and historic color that defines our town.

3.) *supporting small downtown businesses* It is obvious that the people in Eastville are concerned about the economy and committed to supporting the small businesses in town. *acknowledging alternate view* This support is crucial if we are to keep our downtown area vital and busy. I can understand that some citizens are concerned about the costs of the restoration. However, it will not only provide

retail space for local businesses, but will also bring much-needed tax dollars to the town. The streets will bustle with stylish restaurants, perhaps a trendy boutique or even a cozy coffee shop to stop in while running errands in town. The other advantage of restoration is that it would eliminate our dependence on the mall. I speak for myself and many of my neighbors when I say we are tired of having to travel to the Westville Mall every time we want to eat out or shop for a gift. Clearly, the cost of transforming these glorious old buildings would be balanced by the restoration's boost to our local economy.

4.) Opponents of restoration think that we need to preserve and promote open spaces such as town lands and forests and it is hard to disagree. After all, the environment is critically important to all of us. But, is a park in the center of downtown, where a diversity of wildlife couldn't possible thrive, really an environmental plus? A more suitable place for a park would be in the beautiful woods and wetlands that surround Eastville. A more ecologically responsible plan might be to have our zoning board restrict new construction in undeveloped areas where animals, plants and birds make their homes. A wildlife refuge with nature trails, a picnic area and nature center would offer more environmental and recreational benefits than a small park squeezed between the downtown retail area.

5.) We must think not only about the history of Eastville, but also about its future. By supporting the restoration of the ornate Victorian storefronts on Elm Street, we can preserve our town's history while bolstering our economy and protecting our environment. Without a doubt, the people of Eastville will be proud that they preserved these historic buildings for many generations to come.

Sincerely,

Tom Green

Name _____

Analyze Tom Green's Letter to the Editor

- 1.) Number each paragraph.
- 2.) Draw a circle around the introduction paragraph and a box around the conclusion paragraph.
- 3.) Reread the introduction. Underline the issue in RED and the claim in BLUE.
- 4.) Underline each main reason sentence. In the margin beside each paragraph, write a word or two that summarizes the main reason the author is trying to make. Circle evidence provided to support that reason.
- 5.) Point out the evidence provided to support the main reason in paragraphs 2, 3, and 4.
- 6.) Circle each definitive word or phrase. (of course, certainly, etc.)
- 7.) Read the following detail: *The creation of a number of small, tasteful restaurants or shops would also boost the economy by attracting out-of-town visitors.*

In which paragraph would this belong? _____

- 8.) Read the following detail: *According to the Eastville Historical Society, these buildings represent the best of Victorian architecture of a century ago.* In which paragraph would this belong? _____
- 9.) Read the following detail: *Has anyone considered the fact that an in-town park, with children playing near the main road could be dangerous?* In which paragraph would this belong? _____

Name _____

- 10.) Go back to paragraph 2. Underline the phrase that acknowledges the point of view that the buildings are a mess. How does the author address this issue? (In other words, how does the author respond with a “yes, but...”?) _____

- 11.) Reread paragraph 3. Underline the phrase that acknowledges that restoration will be expensive. Explain the “yes, but...” _____

- 12.) Reread paragraph 4. How does the author refute the idea that a park will help preserve the environment? What is the author’s alternative idea?

- 13.) Reread the conclusion paragraph, (paragraph 5). How does the author restate the claim? _____

- 14.) Before the author finished the final draft of this letter, he’d included the following sentence in the conclusion paragraph: So now, don’t you agree that tearing down these buildings would be a really stupid thing to do? Why do you suppose the author eliminated this sentence from the final draft? _____

Specific, Distinctive Main Reasons

Objective: Students begin to see the value and power of choosing main reasons that are specific and distinct from one another.

Procedure:

- 1.) Read through and familiarize yourself with the material on pp. 106 and 107:
Generating Specific, Distinct Reasons and Specific Distinctive Main Reasons.
- 2.) Reproduce and distribute pp. 106 and 107. Read through and discuss with the class.
- 3.) Ask if the students can pick out some of the overly general, almost meaningless words in the first set of main reason sentences about the ferret. (*nice, fun, great*)
- 4.) See if the students can pick out the more specific, distinct key words in the second example. (*inexpensive, entertaining, easy care*)
- 5.) Move on to p. 107. Have a student or students read each sample paragraph aloud. Ask them to underline all of the overly general adjectives in the first paragraph. (*great, terrific*) Then, ask them to underline each *specific* example in the second paragraph.
- 6.) Explain that in order to successfully generate a number of specific, distinct reasons, it is critical to carefully examine the pros and cons that surround the issue in question. Exploring the many aspects of an issue is the way in which an author both chooses a position, and generates distinct reasons that support that position.

Name _____

Generating Specific, Distinct Supporting Reasons

In order to build a powerful, effective argument piece, the author needs to begin with a number of specific, distinct arguments or reasons for their claim. Building these specific, distinct reasons begins by a thorough examination of the entire range of pros and cons centering around the issue. The list of pros and cons will not only allow the author to choose a claim, but will illustrate the opposing views that will need to be addressed.

The use of overly general adjectives weakens any argument. It is never enough to simply state that the reader should do something, or change his/her mind about something because your position is right, good, fun, nice, or cool. These general adjectives are not distinct from one another and weaken the piece.

Here is an example of an overly general, weak collection of reasons:

Issue: Should you buy a pet ferret?

Claim: Yes, you should buy a pet ferret.

Reason #1: Ferrets are nice animals.

Reason #2: Ferrets are a lot of fun.

Reason #3: Ferrets are great to have around.

These kinds of overly general reasons will hamper the author's ability to develop and support these arguments with relevant elaborative detail. In other words, the reasons are vague and similar. Where, for example, would the following supporting detail belong? Would it successfully support reason 1, 2, or 3?

Owners can enjoy carrying their ferrets comfortably in a large pocket.

In reality, this detail could belong in any of these reasons. The reasons are so vague that just about any detail could be placed anywhere in the piece. The result is a piece of writing that is not at all logical, is repetitious and wishy-washy at best.

Instead, the author needs to brainstorm all of the PROs and CONs relating to owning a ferret. The three or four strongest, most distinct PRO ideas will become the main reasons. The CONs will provide the author with the alternate points of view that will need addressing. This would be a stronger pre-writing plan:

Issue: Should you buy a pet ferret?

Claim: Yes, you should buy a pet ferret.

Reason #1: Ferrets are inexpensive to buy at your local pet store.

Reason #2: Ferrets are lively, entertaining pets.

Reason #3: Ferrets are easy to care for.

Name _____

Specific, Distinctive Main Reasons

In order to change someone's point of view or to state your claim logically, it is important to present a number of **specific, distinct**, reasons. Look at the paragraphs below taken from two different essays. Both authors are trying to provide a reasoned, logical argument to change the reader's thinking about purchasing tickets to a fund raising concert. Which do you think is more effective?

- 1.) *This concert will really be great. I know that everyone will enjoy it. The music will be terrific and will appeal to just about everybody. You won't regret paying the price of a ticket, that's for sure. Who regrets spending money on all kinds of great music? Nobody.*
- 2.) *This concert will include everything from rock to jazz, folk to classical music. The variety of styles will make this an appealing evening for just about any music lover - there will be something for everyone. For those people who are not into jazz, there will be folk and classical music to enjoy. Where else, for this reasonable ticket price, can you be treated to such a varied program? This is a terrific opportunity to gain an appreciation for musical styles beyond what you normally listen to.*

Clearly, the second paragraph is stronger than the first. Why? Because the main reason in paragraph 2 is specific and distinct. The author shows specifically how a variety of musical styles is a plus. The author of paragraph 1 does not present a specific, distinct reason. Instead, she uses generalities such as great and terrific. Paragraph 2 also contains a higher level of specific supporting details. Generating effective detail is easier when the main reason is specific, clear, and distinctive. The question is, how does an author choose a number of specific, distinct reasons?

Lesson Plan

Pro/Con - Know Both Sides of the Issue

Objective: Students will examine a number of issues and identify opposing points of view.

Procedure:

- 1.) Discuss the concept of “point of view” as two sides of an issue. Write the following on the board:

Should soda be available in the school cafeteria?

Also list the following: Students, Parents, Soda Company Executives

- 2.) Discuss how each group might feel about this issue and the reasons why. Ask students, “If you were writing an essay to reveal your point of view on selling soda in the cafeteria, why would it be important to consider the opinions and beliefs reflected in both sides? Anticipate and address resistance and build a convincing argument.”
- 3.) Photocopy and distribute p. 148 to the class.
- 4.) Read the introduction together on the top of this page and introduce the concept of “PRO” and “CON.”
- 5.) Based on the PROs and CONs listed on p. 148, ask students to take a stand on this issue. Poll the class and have students discuss how they arrived at their particular position.
- 6.) On another day, reproduce p. 149, Should Dogs Be Allowed on Public Beaches? As a class, discuss and list three pro arguments and three con arguments. Be sure to caution them about overly general statements such as:

“Dogs are fun on the beach.” or “Having dogs on the beach is bad.”
- 7.) Use pp. 150-156 in similar fashion. These can be done in a whole class format, or in smaller collaborative groups. Of course, they can also be completed independently and discussed.

Name _____

Pro/Con - Know Both Sides of the Issue!

In order to successfully get the reader to acknowledge that your claim is relevant and to accept that your point of view is worth considering, it is critical to understand both sides of the issue. Why would someone hold the opposite point of view? What are the advantages of the opposing view? What does a person have to gain or lose by embracing the opposing view? These are all questions that need to be acknowledged and addressed in order to be successful in writing argument.

Look at the following question. Before writing an argument piece, the author has brainstormed three positive and three negative aspects of this issue:

The Issue: **Should soda be available in the school cafeteria?**

PRO

- 1.) Students should be able to make their own choices about what to eat and drink.
- 2.) Since students have to pay for a beverage, they should be able to get what they want.
- 3.) The large soda companies offer cash bonuses to schools for every can of soda sold.

CON

- 1.) Schools have a responsibility to provide healthy choices.
- 2.) Parents usually provide money for lunch, and therefore should be assured that their money is well spent on healthy beverages.
- 3.) Soda companies stand to make huge profits while compromising good nutrition in our schools.

Detail Generating Questions

Objective: Students review the Detail Generating Questions and analyze how the answers to those questions provide powerful elaboration and convincing detail in argument writing.

Procedure:

- 1.) Reproduce and distribute p. 195, Detail Generating Questions. Project as you explain that these are the questions authors ask in order to elaborate their arguments. Read each one through, focusing especially on the examples.
- 2.) If time permits, you can move on to p. 196, How Do the Detail Generating Questions Improve Paragraphs? This can be done on another day if you choose.
- 3.) On p. 196, How Do the Detail Generating Questions Improve Paragraphs?, you might want to project and mark each of the examples of the detail generating questions/answers highlighted in the “Think About It” section.
- 4.) Following classroom discussion, students can complete the analysis on pp. 198-200. Find the Elaboration – 1, 2, and 3 in small groups, independently or as homework. Students will need a variety of colored markers or pencils for the color coding activity. Also, point out the importance of identifying the issue as well as the author’s claim. (What does the author want the reader to consider?)
- 5.) Rather than simply collecting their responses to pp. 198-200, look them over and project them for discussion. It is particularly important for students to explain their analysis. Often writing or talking about their thinking helps clarify it for them.

Name _____

Build Your Evidence

Detail-Generating Questions

What does that “look” like? Show, Don’t Tell!

Instead of TELLING: These buildings should be demolished.

SHOW the audience what you mean:

*These **run-down, dilapidated** buildings should be demolished.*

Why is that important to your argument?

Ex. What does your audience have to gain by agreeing?

***Public safety** is important to everybody and the demolition of these crumbling buildings will certainly make our town a safer place.*

Ex. What does the audience have to lose by disagreeing?

*Those **concerned with town finances** should realize how the proposal to renovate these crumbling buildings will **completely break the town budget** and **might even force us to raise taxes**.*

Can you give a specific example?

Ex. Other towns have wasted a lot of money trying to restore old buildings.

*Instead, use a SPECIFIC example: **Just ask the people of neighboring Montgomery. After budgeting \$500,000 for restorations on their town center, they wound up spending over 1.5 million.***

Did you acknowledge the opposing view and follow it with a “yes, but...”?

*Ex. **Of course it is admirable to want to preserve historical architecture,** but these buildings are too far gone for preservation or restoration.*

Did you support your claim with first hand evidence?

(Remember, first hand evidence is information you gathered yourself.)

*Ex. **I polled my 7th grade classmates and found that 38 out of 40 agreed that the buildings should be demolished.***

What facts, statistics and expert opinions can I bring to my argument?

(Remember, this is called second-hand evidence, evidence that comes from research.)

*Ex. **Even John Powers, head of our town board, says, “If we were going to restore those buildings it would have made sense to do so years ago. The cost today will be prohibitive.”***

Name _____

How do the Detail Generating Questions Improve Paragraphs?

Read and compare the following two paragraphs. The first simply states the author's claim and some related facts. The author of the second paragraph has used the detail generating questions to provide evidence for the same claim.

- 1.) The school should provide every student with a laptop computer. It isn't fair that only students who can buy their own laptop can have one. Taking notes is easier on a laptop. You can spell check and use the encyclopedia without leaving your seat. And, every student needs to be computer literate, and this is impossible unless you can practice every day. Having these skills can get you a better job.
- 2.) From facilitating quick communication through e-mail to making last minute travel arrangements, we depend on our computers in a multitude of different ways. It is unrealistic to believe that any one of us will be able to compete in the job market unless we are computer literate. As the daughter of a single mother, I can't afford my own laptop computer and the only time I get to practice my computer skills is at the local library, which closes early in the evenings. This makes it very hard for me to use the computer for my school assignments. That is why it's so important for schools to provide their students with lightweight, laptop computers that have word processing and research capabilities. Students could easily carry their computers from class to class so that the advantages of technology (spell check, thesaurus, encyclopedia, dictionary, and even a calculator) are available to all. If schools provided laptop computers, every graduate, regardless of their own ability to afford this privilege, would have sufficient computer skills to offer prospective employers and increase their chance at getting hired. It is true that laptop computers would be a significant expense to the school, but it is a critically important investment in the future of students that will reflect well on our whole community for many years to come. Further, large corporations like GE and Coca Cola might be willing to lend financial support to get laptops into schools with diverse student populations such as ours. In fact, our principal, Dr. Maryanne Brown says she's already "seeking funding not only from corporations but from several grant programs that specialize in bringing cutting-edge technology into public schools." Providing laptop computers to all students is an important way to help everybody achieve to the best of their ability in the classroom. Not only are laptops an invaluable aid to learning today, but they are essential in the workplace of tomorrow.