

Writing Tip Sheet: Argument Structure – An Overview

The following provides an overview of an argumentative essay. For more information, please also read tip sheets *Introductions & Conclusions*, *Writing a Comparison Essay*, & *Structuring an Essay*.

Main Sections of an Essay

I) Introduction

Please remember that an introduction can be more than one paragraph, but in general, length should be proportional to overall length of paper (i.e. shorter paper = shorter intro).

Introduce the reader to the topic you are going to argue. Provide enough background so that the reader has a clear context, then introduce your argument and state your **claim/thesis**.

Often, your thesis will be the last sentence of your introduction. (For more info, see tip sheets on “Thesis” and “Introductions & Conclusions.”)

II) Body

This is the part of your paper where you **prove** the claim you make in your thesis. You do this by supplying:

Supporting arguments: reasons that support your side of the argument.

Or by anticipating what your opposition might say and deflecting these arguments before they even formulate them. Also known as:

Counter/opposing arguments: reasons that support the opposing side of the argument. Once you introduce the opposing viewpoint, make sure you *refute* it (i.e. prove it wrong), otherwise the reader will be unsure what side you are arguing.

You must support your reasoning by providing **evidence** to prove your point. Evidence can come in any number of forms. Some of the most common are:

- Anecdotes
- Case studies
- Data and Facts
- Statistics
- Quotes from authority/expert testimony
- Examples
- Personal experience

Always provide concrete, real evidence to support your points whenever possible. Real examples are almost always better than hypothetical ones.

Also provide *sufficient* evidence.

Keep in mind that if you take evidence from an outside source, you must paraphrase or quote it correctly. You also must be sure to include a *citation*, crediting the original source. If you fail to do these things, you run the risk of *plagiarizing* (trying to pass someone else’s work off as your own). For more information see the handouts “Paraphrasing,” “Quoting,” “Citation,” and “Electronic Citation.”

One final note – evidence should always be accompanied by critical analysis or commentary. Don’t just drop in a quote and move on. Be sure to explain to the reader the significance of the idea expressed in the quote. Make sure the reader understands why this concept is important. You may feel it is self-evident (after all, you see it), but this is not always the case. Most readers won’t have your knowledge; they will need some extra help understanding a point. So be reader-friendly—make connections whenever you can.

III) Conclusion

Like an introduction, a conclusion can be more than one paragraph. And also like the intro, its length should be proportional to the length of the overall paper.

The conclusion should wrap the paper up. In it you should restate your thesis in some way to remind the reader of your main point. However, you then should **not** simply restate everything you have said in the paper. Then it sounds like you have run out of things to say. Try to do more. (For strategies, see “Introductions & Conclusions” tip sheet.)

Putting it all back together. An argument essay often looks like this:

Introduction (background information and thesis)
Body
 Supporting/Counter Argument #1
 Evidence (Quote, statistic, fact, anecdote)
 Supporting/Counter Argument #2
 Evidence (Quote, statistic, fact, anecdote)
 Supporting/Counter Argument #3
 Evidence (Quote, statistic, fact, anecdote)
Conclusion

Please keep in mind that the exact number of supporting/counter arguments you use is up to you (and may be dependent upon the length of your paper). However, it is often advisable to have at least three to make it look as if you have given careful thought to the topic. It is also generally a good idea to say more about less (i.e. deeply analyze 2 or 3 points, rather than barely mention 6 or 8).

Again, for more information about this topic, see the tips sheets: *Introductions and Conclusions*, *Comparison, Structuring a Paper*, and *Paper Structures*.