

Understanding Argument: An Overview

Name: _____

| Element | Question to Ask | Traits of Effective Argument | Example | Language |
|--|---|--|---------|---|
| <p>1. Make a claim. (Your proposition, or assertion, the central point you will argue. The “main claim” for a paper is also known as the “thesis.”)</p> | <p>What do you claim?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • X is true • X is important • X should be done • X is of a certain quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not obvious • defensible • debatable • not a fact/opinion • significant • avoids either/or | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • qualifiers: <i>many, often, almost, tends to, might</i> • verbs: <i>suggests, implies, supports, contends, demonstrates</i> |
| <p>2. State your reasons. (Sentence or two that explain why readers should accept your claim.)</p> | <p>What reasons support that claim?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • logical • persuasive • relevant • substantial • appealing | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think X because... • X suggests Y since... • Because X leads to Y, Z must happen. • A leads to B because C... |
| <p>3. Provide evidence to support your claim. (Consists of facts, figures, or statistics used to prove the claim. Should be something that can be seen, touched, heard, felt; a <i>fact</i>.)</p> | <p>What evidence supports those reasons?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid logical fallacies. • Valid evidence is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • authoritative • relevant • specific • effective • current • compelling | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • based on... • According to A, B stems from... • Studies consistently show that A leads to B... • X found that Y caused Z when A happened. • A concluded B based on C. • X demonstrated that Y... |
| <p>4. Acknowledge and respond to opposing perspectives. (A good claim challenges previously held beliefs. You must recognize the other points of view and then explain how your claim disproves or improves upon the other claims.)</p> | <p>Do you acknowledge this alternative/complication/objection—and how do you respond?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use concessive language to acknowledge and respond. • Cite specific important alternatives or objections, and then address them head on with reliable evidence to support your claim. | | <p>Use subordinating conjunctions (<i>although, as if, because, unless, while, etc.</i>) to signal concession, e.g., While X consistently shows Y, not everyone agrees with the results or the method by which these results are obtained.</p> |
| <p>5. Ethos (Invisible sixth element of any argument; relates to image of the author reflected in the claim and supporting details.)</p> | <p>What is the author’s or speaker’s ethos? How do we know we can believe what he or she says?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be thorough. • Establish and maintain credibility throughout. • Focus on quality of the argument’s construction. • Consider integrity of sources. | | <p>What the writer/speaker does not want to do is use—or at least overuse—the pronoun <i>I</i>, as if to imply “If I say or think it, it must be true.”</p> |