

How to Write an Argument

What is Academic Argumentation?

During your career as an undergraduate student, you will be asked to write many kinds of assignments that require argumentation (literary analysis, literature review, critical analysis, report, etc.). At its core, to write an argument means to enter a conversation with others' views and add your perspective with the intent of persuading readers.

Structure of an Argument

Academic argumentation follows a basic pattern:

1. Begin with what others say about a topic
2. Add your perspective to the topic
3. Anticipate objections to your perspective
4. Offer a rebuttal to the objections
5. Say why your argument matters

Step One: Begin with what others say

Begin your argument by introducing what others have said about your topic. Imagine you are guiding your reader into a pre-existing conversation so that they can understand the context of your argument.

- "Leading scholars, X and Y, have introduced the idea that _____"
- "Popular opinion states that _____"
- "Traditionally, researchers have approached (the topic) in the following way _____"

Step Two: Add your perspective

Then, add your perspective to the conversation. You can situate your argument in one of three ways:

Disagree, but give a reason why

- "I disagree with X that _____ because _____"
- "X is misguided in their approach to (the topic) because _____"

Agree, but add something new to the conversation

- "X's approach to (the topic) is useful because _____"
- "I agree that _____ because _____"

Agree and disagree at the same time

- "Although I agree that _____, I cannot accept X's overall assessment of the _____"
- "Though this assumption is probably wrong that _____, X is still correct that _____"

Step Three: Anticipate objections

Once you have established your perspective on the topic, you can build credibility for your argument by addressing possible objections.

- "While my argument is compelling, some may argue that _____"
- "Some researchers may question my premise that _____"

Writing Services

Step Four: Offer a rebuttal

Even though it builds credibility to address objections to your argument, don't let the "naysayer" have the last word! Respond to the objections to further support the viability of your point.

- "Though objectors may be right that _____, they overlook the fact that _____"
- "While it is understandable that _____, it does not necessarily follow that _____"

Step Five: Say why it matters

Finally, you can conclude your argument by helping the reader see the significance of your perspective. Perhaps your argument solves a pre-existing problem, meets a need, resolves a conflict, or more.

- "Ultimately, what is at stake here is _____"
- "These findings help to _____"

Learn more about argumentation

They Say/I Say with Readings. 3rd Ed. Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein, and Russel Durst.