

Tidewater Community
College
Phone: 757-822-7170
Fax: 757-427-0327
<http://www.tcc.edu/writing>
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Writing Center

Argumentation or Persuasion Guidelines

Note: Always check with your teacher to make sure you understand the specific requirements of any assignment. This handout contains general guidelines for writing argumentative or persuasive essays.

An argumentative essay requires careful planning and revision. Writers must take a stand on an issue for which there is opposition and must present the opposing viewpoint fairly. The major strength of a formal argument lies in the selection and presentation of logical evidence to support a controversial position. In addition, a tone of moderation reinforces the credibility of the writer and the writer's position.

Introduction

1. Write an opening (motivator) to attract the attention and interest of readers. Make readers feel that the topic is important and establish clearly the context for the issue.
2. Include, if appropriate, a paragraph or more to define unfamiliar terms, to give background, to state the case under question, to summarize the opposition viewpoint, and/or to indicate weaknesses in the opposition viewpoint. Remember, however, that your presentation of the opposition view should be brief-after all, you want to be fair but not to give equal time.
3. In a clear thesis statement at the end of the paragraph, present the subject and the precise viewpoint you intend to argue.
4. Indicate a plan of development for the essay (essay map).

Body

1. Provide enough reasons or points to fully support your thesis. Although the numbers of points varies with the topic, you should try to develop more than two in order to be convincing.
2. Be sure to illustrate each point fully with reasons, specific examples, names, numbers, facts cases, and (when appropriate) expert testimony.
3. Unless another system of documentation or a research paper has been assigned, give full credit in parentheses for all information taken from outside sources, both quotations, and paraphrases. From the text *A Writer's Reference*, 4th edition, by Diana Hacker:

Example for in-text documentation: In his article "California and the West," reporter T. Christian Miller asserts that from 1990 to 1997, California spent roughly \$26 million on conservation lands "to provide habitat for exactly 2.6 mountain lions (A3).

Or: According to T. Christian Miller, “Mountain lions, also called pumas or cougars, range vast territories in search of food, sometimes as large as 100 square miles” (“Cougars” 1).

4. Make sure that each central paragraph has a clear topic sentence that provides a transition from the previous paragraph, identifies the topic and purpose of the new paragraph, and contains a reminder of the opinion expressed in your thesis statement. This reminder reinforces your position and thereby strengthens your argument.
5. You may wish to use your points to refute specific aspects of the opposition view. This method works well when you are able to respond to several specific reasons presented by opponents.

Conclusion

1. If appropriate, concede points about which the opposition is correct.
2. If you have not already done so, summarize the opposition viewpoint in order to reinforce the strength of your viewpoint—and show clearly the connection.
3. Summarize your own major points.
4. Draw any appropriate conclusions.
5. Make any appropriate recommendations
6. Reinforce your original thesis statement by repeating the ideas (but not the exact wording).
7. Provide an interesting closing—a striking statement or a dramatic example or a reference back to your opening— and include an appeal for support for the view expressed in your thesis.

Editing and Proofreading

1. Evaluate and revise your first draft for clear expression, adequate support, logical thought, logical organization, unity, and coherence. Do not be too concerned about grammar, punctuation, and spelling until you have fully developed your ideas.
2. Proofread your revision for mechanical and grammatical accuracy. Be especially attentive to sentence structure elements such as completeness, proper connections, logical coordination and subordination, and parallel structures.
3. Prepare a final paper in an appropriate format, and then proofread the finished paper carefully, making minor corrections neatly with ink (white-out fluid helps you make neat corrections). If you find many errors, rewrite, or retype the page.

Format

1. Unless a title page is assigned, type your name, the course, the assignment, and the due date in the upper left corner of the first page.
2. Provide a title that clearly reveals the content and focus of your essay. Center your title on the top rule of the notebook paper, 1 inch from the top on typed work. Use correct capitalization for your title; do not underline it or place it in quotation marks.
3. Use one side of standard 8 ½-by-11 paper, using blue or black ink if handwriting, black ribbon if typing. Computer printing should be letter quality or near-letter quality. Double-space all typed work.
4. Leave margins of 1 inch on all sides (on notebook paper, use the margin guides provided).
5. In the upper right hand corner of every page except the first, write the page number. Staple the pages in the order. Do not use a folder or binder unless your teacher has requested one.

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Student Model

English 111

Argumentation Essay

Source unknown

Keep Basic Studies

A college degree is no longer the meal ticket it once was, which is probably one reason that so much criticism is being directed at higher education in America. Colleges and universities across the nation are evaluating their programs with the stated intent of making higher education more practical and more relevant. From the point of view of many students, the least relevant and least useful component of their college education is the segment of courses variously labeled as core courses, basic studies, or general education. This set of courses typically includes composition, humanities, history, and social and physical sciences. In most American colleges and universities, students complete courses in all these subjects, usually during the first two years of college, before officially selecting a major. Many students feel that these first two years could be better spent taking courses in their majors. However, this segment of courses from various areas of learning is valuable and should therefore be kept in the college and university curriculum.

Opponents of basic education argue that these courses repeat high school courses. Valid college-level basic studies courses, however, explore subjects in greater depth and on a more mature intellectual level than their high school counterparts. For example, college history professors, usually less restricted by outside pressure than high school teachers, may present a more accurate view of such topics as America's treatment of Indians or the role of blacks in American history. In addition, most teachers and textbooks scarcely keep up with the new scientific discoveries and the rapidly changing social, economic, and political scene, so these courses at the college level are not mere repetition of high school material. In fact, college basic studies courses often give students an up-to-date version of material studied in high school.

In addition, these core courses are valuable even when they do repeat high school material. All but the college students who were fortunate enough to attend exceptional high schools can benefit from review. The fact that students have been previously exposed to material does not mean that they have learned the information or concepts. Falling Scholastic Aptitude Test scores in English and math seem to bear this out. Furthermore, most colleges and universities provide testing procedures by which those students with exceptional aptitude or superior high school preparation may be exempted from subjects they

have already mastered. Most of today's entering college students, however, can benefit from basic studies. Virtually every college freshman has had some form of high school English, for example, but some have never written an essay. Even students who have written essays may not have had the benefit of careful marking and extensive feedback by their overworked high school English teachers. Considering the wide range of motivation and abilities and the overload of students and extracurricular duties which high school teachers have to contend with, teachers of other subjects also may be unable to give students sufficient time and attention. Therefore, college basic studies courses are needed to compensate for inadequacies in high school education.

Another reason for including basic studies in the college curriculum is the helpful period of time for adjustment. Most college freshman are just out of high school and living away from home for the first time. Taking courses to which they have had some prior exposure eases the shock of transition from high school to college and provides time to adapt both socially and academically. Furthermore, many students come to college because of parental pressure or because they have been told that they need a college degree in order to survive in a competitive world. Many of these students have only the dimmest notion of what they want to major in. A sampling of various courses can help them locate their interests and aptitude. Students returning to school after several years also find reassurance in the familiarity of general education courses, and many returning students welcome the opportunity to brush up on fundamentals.

Yet another justification for basic studies courses is that they broaden a person's education. Many people value things according to their usefulness in a material sense. Nothing is more frustrating to an English teacher than the student who complains, "I'm going to be a computer programmer. What good will literature ever be to me?" Science teachers probably experience the same frustration when a humanities student questions the need to study physical science. This all-too-common attitude is based on the assumption that the only function of higher education is to teach a marketable skill. The great nineteenth century educator John Henry Newman wrote in his book *The Idea of a University* that "cultivation of mind is surely worth seeking for its own...; there is a knowledge which is desirable, though nothing come of it, as being of itself a treasure, and a sufficient remuneration of years of labor." Newman meant that learning is worthwhile in itself; whether you can buy a hamburger with it or not. General education courses support this commendable philosophy.

Admittedly, the subjects being taught in basic studies courses in colleges and universities probably should be taught in high school. But it is futile to discuss what should be done in American high schools as long as teachers are burdened by so many nonteaching duties and by an overload of students of widely divergent ability and motivation. It is unlikely that these problems in public education will be remedied in the near future. In the meantime, basic studies courses might be accelerated so that students could complete them during the first year of college, and students could be given a wider choice of basic studies courses. However, this important component of higher education should not be eliminated at the present time. In fact, general education courses are the heart of life-long learning.