

HOW TO WRITE ARGUMENTS

What is an 'argument'?

Sometimes the word is used to describe a fight or quarrel.

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In this lesson though, we'll be using the word in its other sense – the way it is often used in school.

This is 'argument' used in the sense of 'proof' or 'logic'. It's what we call trying to **persuade** other people of something.

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Are we worried about the environment?

Of course we're worried. More people should **care** about our environment.

But how to get others to think the same way? What we need is an 'argument'!

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An argument can appear in several forms, but if they are trying to **persuade people**, they are doing the same job.

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What is an argument?

What you want people to do is called a '**contention**'.

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It's important that the contention is quite clear. There is no value in something vague like

POLLUTION IS NOT NICE

or a personal comment like

I DON'T LIKE POLLUTION

or something weak like

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH POLLUTION, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT

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The contention should state some sort of **general principle – the sort that everyone might agree with.**

And the contention is usually a 'call to action' - that is a statement that **tells people what they should do about the problem.**

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You need **reasons** for people to believe what you are arguing.

Your **contention** is like a big building. Without proper support, the building - the argument - will fall down.

If you can provide clear supports, things are much better.

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In an argument, the 'supports' are the **reasons** – or **proof** - for your contention. *Here are examples.*

WE SHOULD ALL PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT

Habitat destruction kills wildlife

Pollution endangers human health

Rubbish wastes precious resources

Green house gases contribute to climate change

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These supporting reasons, or proofs, are what 'hold up' your contention.

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Each reason, or proof, needs to be supported itself.

What helps you build the supports?

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You need **evidence** - real **facts and figures** that prove your reasons!

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The evidence must be serious. It should come from **reliable** sources - such as

Government or university studies

or

The opinions of qualified experts

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Evidence is **not**

What your friends say!

What your parents say!

What weird websites say!

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So there you have the basic ingredients of an argument:

CONTENTION

REASONS

EVIDENCE

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(1) **LANGUAGE**

Because argument is about persuading people, writers often use words in a special way. This is usually called '**persuasive language**'. It includes tricks such as these:

- 'Do all the fish in the sea, and all the wild animals left, have to die before we notice something is wrong?'
- 'The sea is sick. The air is sick. People are sick - because we don't care.'
- 'The atmosphere is like the Earth's lungs. And now those lungs are full of smoke and chemical poison. The Earth is slowly dying.'
- 'Our freeways are **choked** with the **poisonous fumes** of cars. Our

waterways are *sludgy drains, dying* of the *foul* things industry *spews* into them...!.

Language like this can be used to add flavour to your argument. It is **not** a replacement for sound reasons and proper evidence!

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Finally, there is the matter of structure.

(2) **STRUCTURE**

If you are writing a letter or an essay, it is usual to follow this pattern:

- PARAGRAPH 1 ... **Introduction** - introduce the topic, give an example, and state your **contention**
- PARAGRAPH 2 ... **Reason 1** - with back up evidence ... give examples
- PARAGRAPH 3 ... **Reason 2** - with back up evidence ... give examples
- PARAGRAPH 4 ... **Reason 3** - with back up evidence ... give examples
- PARAGRAPH 5 ... **Rebuttal** - why the opposite side (in the argument) are wrong
- PARAGRAPH 6 ... **Conclusion** - restate your contention and sum up with a memorable quote or figure

This structure is the classic argument one. Each paragraph should be about one reason (or proof). You must introduce and conclude your argument.

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So let's sum up.

An argument is

A CONTENTION

SUPPORTING REASONS

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

All of this needs to be set out in a systematic way - with paragraphs.

And happy arguing!!