



Writing an Argumentative or Position Paper



What is an Argumentative or Position Paper? In this type of assignment, you take a stand on a particular topic that is debatable. You present a clear and strong statement usually at the start of your paper that asserts your position on the topic. (See the Writing Center's handout on thesis statements for more help with this stage!). You then provide strong, logical evidence that supports the validity of your argument throughout your paper.

Consider your Audience! Who is the intended audience of your paper? It may be your professor, classmates, or some other person or group out in the world that you want to convince. Knowing your audience is essential to making a strong argument! Ask yourself the following:

- **What does your audience value and believe?** Keep these things in mind when writing the paper! Your argument is going to be more convincing if you show that you have taken the situation of your audience into account.
- **What side of the argument do they favor?** Are you trying to convince someone who probably already agrees with you, or is the reader someone you need to convince to think otherwise?
- **How will their interests be affected by the issue?** In other words, why should your audience care about this issue? This question can also be broader—why should *anyone* care about this issue?
- **What kind of evidence will be most effective with them?** Because you are writing a college-level paper, the type of evidence you want to use should be based on reputable research and sound logic. (see below)

What type of evidence do I use to support my argument? The evidence can be in many forms, but make sure it is reputable and clearly connects to the point you are trying to make.

- Statistics— always investigate how this data was achieved. This could influence the credibility of the information.
- Factual data—this data should be widely agreed on by most people, or supported by other reliable information.
- Reputable opinions and claims—make sure the individuals have the credentials to be making these claims and are respected in their fields.
- Relevant Personal Testimony—the testimony might be from individuals directly involved in the issue you are investigating. They may be able to provide first-hand experience that will help validate your argument.



How do I set up my paper? There is no one “right” way to set up your paper. Depending on the type of assignment, the discipline, the professor, or even the topic, the organization of your paper may vary from the outline presented below.

Sample Outline

- I. **Introduction**
 - A. Introduce the general issue
 - B. Background information about the issue
 - C. Gradually lead up to your Thesis Statement
- II. **Background Information / Counterargument**
 - A. Explain the context of the issue
 - What's the history of the issue?
 - What makes the issue so important?
 - B. Counterargument
 - Research that supports it
 - C. Reiterate your point-of-view to refute Counterargument
- III. **Point 1**
 - A. Topic Sentence
 - B. Research, Examples, and Discussion
 - C. Explain how the point relates to your Thesis
- IV. **Point 2**
 - A. Topic Sentence
 - B. Research, Examples, and Discussion
 - C. Explain how the point relates to your Thesis
- V. **Point 3**
 - A. Topic Sentence
 - B. Research, Examples, and Discussion
 - C. Explain how the point relates to your Thesis
- VI. **Point 4**
 - A. Topic Sentence
 - B. Research, Examples, and Discussion
 - C. Explain how the point relates to your Thesis
- VII. **ETC....**
- VIII. **Conclusion**
 - A. Revisit / summarize your thesis (don't simply restate it).
 - B. Ask yourself the "so what" question. Why does what you wrote about matter to your audience, to society, etc.?



Points to remember:

1. **You may need more than one paragraph for each point you make.** Do not fall victim to the "5 paragraph essay" format you may have learned in high school. When you feel that you are introducing a new facet of the point you are making, start a new paragraph.
2. **Transition smoothly from one point to the next.** Do this by previewing the following paragraph at the end of the current one you are writing, OR by referring back to the previous paragraph at the beginning of the current paragraph. Think about what connects the two points. Why are you placing them in the order that you are? (For more help with *Transitions*, see our handout on this topic, or visit the Writing Center.)

The following resource was consulted in the design of this handout: "Cybrary: Writing a Position Paper." Aspen University Writing Center. 1998. <<http://www.aspen.edu/cybrary/positionpaper.htm>>.

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