Argumentative Essays: Writing Your Own

Inquire: It’s Time to Begin!

Overview
You’re now ready to write your own argumentative essay! Make sure, as with all essays, that you walk through the entire essay writing process from brainstorming to editing. Each step is vital in ensuring that you finish the process with a product you are proud of! You’ll begin by brainstorming before moving on to outlining and drafting your essay. Finally, you should engage in the revision and editing process, so you have a completely polished final essay.

Big Question: How can I use the writing process to complete my argumentative essay?

Watch: The Argumentative Writing Process
Sometimes, trying to start an essay can feel like you’re stuck on a freeway with a dead battery while everyone else zooms past you. How can you get started? Why is everyone else moving so quickly? Why is no one slowing down to help? However, getting started can be simplified if you have the right tools and the right help to get a quick jump start. Starting your writing process with brainstorming can offer you the same kind of help in getting started on your essay.

There is no one strategy that works for brainstorming an argumentative essay, but it can be helpful to think about your paper as you make your way through your day. You spend more of your day than you might realize forming arguments, such as processes that should change or ideas you don’t understand or wish people would adopt. You might also think about solutions to little and big problems you encounter throughout your day. All of these are claims you could make in an argumentative essay. Simply keeping your eyes and your mind open for paper topics can help you tremendously.

After you’ve brainstormed, you will draft your claim and then your thesis. The kind of claim and argument you want to make will affect the kind of outline you write for your essay. Will it be a Rogerian structure or a Toulmin structure? Once you’ve decided this, you are ready to begin outlining your paper. In this stage, it’s important to remember that your paper will need to show that you understand and can respond to your reader’s concerns or counterarguments. After outlining, you can begin drafting your essay! In the drafting process, it’s important to be thoughtful of your audience’s concerns and feelings.

After you have a draft, all you need to do is revise and edit. Then you are ready to submit your argumentative essay! Are you ready to begin writing?
Read: Beginning Your Argumentative Essay

Overview
So, now you're ready to begin your argumentative essay, but where do you start? With an argumentative essay, you'll want to make sure that you thoughtfully go through the entire writing process, from brainstorming to revision and editing. By taking your time with this process, you will ensure that you have a polished final product to share and submit.

Choosing Your Topic
If your teacher has given you a topic, you are ahead of the game, but if not, you'll need to find some inspiration. You can look for it in many places:

- Think about something you're passionate about. It can be a future career field, parenting, a hobby, a sport, etc. Anything you care about is a goldmine for paper topics.
- Think about problems you wish could be solved. Whether you're thinking about something you're passionate about or something else, consider problems — big or small — that deserve the world's attention. These can also be great paper topics.
- Consider the course theme. Does the class have any overarching theme? Social justice? Historical movements? Advertising? If it does, you could consider that theme and whether there are any issues within aspects of the theme.
- Flip through class readings. Review some of the assigned readings from the course. Did anything stand out as interesting to you? Did you disagree with anything?

The above bullet points are simply a few options that can get you thinking. Really, inspiration is all around you, as long as you are looking for it. Try to keep a list of all the issues you hear about during the day, or the problems you see that need to be solved. Such issues would make excellent paper topics.

Writing Your Thesis
Once you have a topic, develop a claim that you will spend your essay making an argument for. At its most basic level, your thesis statement in an argumentative essay should state your claim. A good thesis, however, should also preview some part of your essay's structure or sub points.

A claim, for example, might be something like this: "Universities should stop over-specializing their students."

To revise this into a solid thesis, however, you will want to add additional information about your claim and preview your organization: "In order to provide their graduates with more job opportunities, universities should stop over-specializing their students by providing them with a well-rounded liberal arts education."

You can use a well-developed thesis to help guide the organization of your essay.

Organizing Your Essay
Once you have a thesis and you're ready to begin your essay, you'll need to decide whether you're writing a Rogerian argument or a Toulmin argument, as it will dictate the kind of organizational structure you
need. Rogerian arguments are more focused on your readers and ensuring that you have considered their position fully and fairly. Toulmin arguments, instead, focus primarily on examining all the underlying assumptions in your claim and backing. Take a minute to decide which method of argumentation will be most effective for you, and then begin outlining your essay using that method's argument structure.

Rogerian arguments all follow the same general structure:
1. Introduction: Describe the issue at hand. Be sure to illustrate your understanding and appreciation of all valid alternative positions.
2. Opposition's Position: Take the time to outline the ways in which the opposition's positions are valid and worthwhile.
3. Your Position: State your own position on the issue. Take the same care to explain why your position is valid as you did in the above section.
4. Benefits to Opposition: Conclude your essay by discussing the ways in which the opposition would benefit by adopting your position. Why should they take on your position?

Here is a quick look at the basic structure of a Toulmin argument:
1. Your Claim: Describe what you want to prove.
2. Conditions: Express the limits you impose on your claim.
3. Reasons/Evidence: Provide support for your claim.
4. Warrants: Address underlying assumptions that support your claim.
5. Backing: Provide evidence that supports your warrant(s).

Once you've chosen the type of argument that makes the most sense for your essay, you should begin outlining your content, including examples that support your overall claim.

Reflect Poll: Essay Structure

Which aspect of the Rogerian structure do you think would be most difficult?
- Outlining the opposition's position
- Discussing benefits to the opposition

Expand: Revising Your Argumentative Essay

Overview

Now that you have a draft of your essay, you’re almost done! Taking the time to go through the revision and editing process before turning in your paper can vastly improve your essay.

Revising Your Essay

Once you’ve written your essay, it’s time to engage in revision. As you read back through your essay, you’ll need to give special thought to the ways in which you are appealing to your audience. Remember the audience for whom you are writing the essay. Which of your claims might they take issue with? How can you make sure that you are not alienating them or pushing them away with any of your claims? If you are using a Rogerian model of argument, this step is especially important.

Now, read carefully back through your paper as a member of your target audience, as if you’re reading it for the first time. Does your argument make sense to a reader examining it for the first time? Is there anything that will require additional explanation?
Keep in mind the level of knowledge and understanding your audience has. Is the topic completely new to them? If so, make sure to explain important terminology and key concepts. If, however, your audience generally has expertise in the subject, don’t waste time by explaining things they already know.

Finally, as you reread your essay, be sure that you’re considering what kind of ethos you are projecting to your readers. Do you come across as knowledgeable? Do you come across as trustworthy? Do you support all of your claims with reasonable and reliable evidence? Is your language professional and courteous?

Revision is also the time for you to review your essay’s structure. Did you choose a method of organization that makes sense for your claim? Does everything flow logically together? If not, consider revising your essay to another method of organization or incorporating more transitions in your writing.

Editing Your Essay

Take the time now to read carefully back through your revised essay for any proofreading or editing errors. Use methods like reading aloud or reading sentences backward to catch mistakes you might otherwise miss. You should also consider handing your essay over to a friend at this point in time, as a fresh pair of eyes can catch things you might miss after looking at your own paper for too long.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

A guide for revising an argumentative essay with a peer

- Link to resource: http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson-docs/Peer-Editing_Argumentative_Essay.pdf

A guide for brainstorming an essay

- Link to resource: https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/brainstorming/

A blog entry about how to succeed in argumentative writing

- Link to resource: https://blog.udemy.com/persuasive-essays/

Lesson Glossary

None

Check Your Knowledge

1. A claim and a thesis are the same thing.
   a. True
   b. False
2. You should conclude the writing process by editing.
   a. True
   b. False
3. Toulmin arguments have different organizational structures than Rogerian arguments.
   a. True
b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

Lesson Content:
Authored and curated by Cady Jackson MA, MSE for The TEL Library. CC BY NC SA 4.0