

Argument Essay

An argument essay explores a controversial issue, one where various opinions may differ. In addition to describing the issue, you must try to get the reader to accept your point of view. You can do this by offering logical proof in a reasonable way. A good argument offers facts, examples, details, or statistics. These should either be well-known, or come from an authority on the topic. In some cases, you might support your argument with interviews. An argument involves critical thinking. Avoid fallacies and propaganda. Critical thinkers are well-informed about both sides of an issue. They can understand weaknesses in their own and their opponents' arguments and can also recognize points of compromise.

Organization

1. Illustrate the issue using an anecdote, explanation, etc.; briefly explain both sides of the argument; include a thesis statement showing your position.
2. Develop the argument by discussing and using verifiable evidence (use several paragraphs here).
3. Mention and refute counter arguments to the points you have discussed. CLEAR TRANSITIONS ARE VERY IMPORTANT HERE.
4. Reexamine your position and reevaluate its correctness. End with a warning, prediction, or value judgment.

Note: It could be more useful to put the refutation before the paragraphs where you express your own point-of-view. Another organizational pattern in the body of the essay would be to use your own arguments to refute each of the opponents' arguments (point-counter-point).

Making a good argument

When writing an argument paper, some types of argument are more appropriate than others. For example, an argument needs to be free of bias, vagueness, and over-reliance on personal beliefs. In order to make your argument appealing and credible, use the following methods:

1. Opinions of experts: using the words of well-known experts to support your views
2. Supported generalization: using facts, figures, and case studies to support a general statement.
3. Personal experience: relate the argument to your own experience or the experiences of people that you know.
4. Solid research and documentation from a variety of sources (different periodicals, interviews, etc.)
5. Careful refutation of the opponents' arguments, showing a balanced and fair consideration, not bias.

Examples of poor arguments:

1. Generalization: stating that “everyone” thinks a certain way, or that “people” do things a certain way, e.g. “All Americans watch too much T.V.” Be more specific!
2. Stereotype: for example, “All Americans are loud and rude”; “(certain nationalities) are lazy.”
3. Threat: warning your audience of drastic consequences, e.g. “We will all be dead in 50 years if we don’t take care of the ozone problem now.”
4. Distortion: twisting arguments of your opponents in order to make your own argument stronger, e.g. “Pro-Choice supporters are really pro-death because they believe in abortion.”
5. Slander: trying to persuade through emotional or false statement rather than reason, e.g. “High school teachers get paid too much money and they don’t deserve it because they are so lazy.”
6. Religious belief: using your religious convictions as proof. Not everyone will have the same beliefs as you do, and you need to convince a wider audience.
7. Poor reasoning: drawing conclusions that are not necessarily true or may be based on incomplete evidence, e.g. “After interviewing two Americans who were opposed to capital punishment, I can see most Americans are opposed to capital punishment.”

Note:

Emotions tend to distort arguments and make your position unattractive to the reader. Good arguments should be based upon facts, not feelings. Try to avoid topics that you have very strong feelings about. Your feelings may show you to be too biased. Instead, choose a topic that you can study dispassionately. Then you should be able to analyze all sides of the controversy reasonably

Refuting opposing arguments

In an essay where you give the opponents' arguments after you make your own arguments, you should give one or two of the opponents' strongest points. Usually, these points will focus on different aspects of the issue than the ones you have already given. When you refute the opponents' arguments, you don't have to prove that they are wrong. You can suggest that the arguments that they are focusing on are not as important as the arguments that you have raised, or you can allow some concessions and suggest some compromises that would still allow your case to be the stronger of the two.

The following is a sample outline of the pros and cons in an argument:

Topic: "Eating and drinking should be allowed in the class."

Pros (Arguments):

1. Some students don't have time to eat outside of class;
2. It allows for a more relaxed atmosphere, which helps students to learn;
3. It's a matter of individual freedom: allow eating and drinking as long as it doesn't interfere with the class.

Cons (Counterarguments):

1. It can be messy; students in a following class may sit on some Coke that has been spilled on a seat, and the janitors complain about having to clean up too many spills.

Refutation: The janitors are paid to clean the classrooms; Messy students can be fined, or they can be told to clean up their own messes; most students are not messy.

2. It can be noisy: for example, someone eating potato chips; the smell of food can also be distracting to other students.

Refutation: Most foods do not have strong smells; noisy eaters can be asked to stop, just like noisy talkers.

You will notice that the arguments *pro* focus on different aspects of the issue than the arguments *con*. The arguments *pro* need to be developed with strong, authoritative evidence and examples; you may make some concessions when you refute the arguments *con*, but don't make these arguments seem more attractive than your own.

Argument vocabulary

People:

proponents	opponents
supporters	detractors
defenders	
advocates	critics
pro-	anti-

Verbs:

believe	theorize	acknowledge	recognize
contend	fear	concede	realize
argue	estimate	admit	counter
claim	project	grant	disprove
assert	accept	rebut	advocate
refute	favor (be in favor of)		

Nouns:

belief
contention
claim
argument
conclusion
assertion

Adjectives:

inaccurate
incomplete
(in)valid
illogical
unproved

Transitions:

however
on the contrary
(meaning: that isn't true)
conversely
on the other hand
despite this (fact)
in spite of (this)
although
while
actually
furthermore
in addition
nevertheless
therefore
thus

Transition Sentences to Introduce Counter-Arguments

"On the other hand, not everyone agrees."
"Despite this evidence, some do not agree."
"My opponents would disagree with me."
"Some people may claim that my solution will not work."
"Some groups might criticize this solution."
"In spite of this situation, some insist that no solution is needed."
"Supporters of ___ might oppose my idea."

Controversial issues to write about

Choose your topic very carefully. If you can find a subject that is interesting for you, you will enjoy writing your essay more and probably do a better job. Make sure that your topic isn't too broad. Your arguments should be comprehensive. Choosing a manageable topic will make it possible to stay within the three to five page range while still effectively presenting all the arguments necessary to persuade the reader. Your instructor may also require you to write about a certain topic or give you a choice of topics.

You could also argue a social or political situation in your country if you are able to obtain the necessary factual information. Some topics in the news include the following:

farming animals for their fur	Internet censorship	genetic engineering
food labels	legalized gambling	term limits for politicians
jail reform	cell phones/driving	trade policies
giving money to panhandlers	English Only laws	legalized prostitution
home schooling	tax reform	mandatory retirement
birth control policies	recycling	protection of old growth forests
the Internet in education	school budgets	curfews for teenagers
Facebook	bilingual education	raising the minimum wage
protecting the salmon	landmines	U.N. sanctions and embargoes
price of college textbooks	politicians' sex lives	U.S. immigration policy
manned mission to Mars	medical marijuana	raising the driving age
spanking children	distance learning	drilling for oil in the Arctic

Other topics:

Having a baby after the traditional childbearing years
Returning to one's native country to find a marriage partner
Requiring foreign language proficiency for high school graduation in Oregon
Having women serve in combat in the military
Providing nursing home care for an elderly relative
Requiring welfare recipients to work while receiving benefits
Placing prisons in population centers
Allowing sex offenders to return to their communities without warning neighbors
Providing educational and medical services to illegal immigrants
Teaching pre-school children two languages
Requiring engaged couples to have counseling before marriage
Reducing the future number of legal immigrants permitted to enter the U.S
Using animals in laboratory experiments
Rating video games more strictly
Using photo radar at traffic lights

Of course, it is always a wise choice to pick an issue with which you have had some experience, such as education, parenting, neighborhood issues, or a controversial topic from your own country. Otherwise, you may have to do some time-consuming research to familiarize yourself with the topic.

In addition, it is always important to **narrow your topic**. After choosing an issue, try to confine your opinions about it to a particular place, time, or country. Make sure that this is clear in your thesis statement.

Some advice:

The following topics have been written about so much that all of the arguments on both sides are already familiar to most readers. Please choose a topic that is not related to these subjects:

abortion	capital punishment/ the death penalty
euthanasia/ assisted suicide	working mothers
smoking	alcohol/ drinking and driving
gun control	sex and violence on TV
human cloning	gay marriage

Sample student thesis statements:

The following are examples of thesis statements from student essays:

It should be legal for married couples in Japan to have different surnames.

The practice of bride price among the Kikuyu is often punitive and prices should be lowered to a token amount.

Adoptees should have the right to know the identities of their birth parents when they become teenagers.

The U.S. Embassy in Vietnam should re-issue F1 visas for students more easily.

Burundi's Tutsi-dominated army should integrate members of the majority Hutu into its ranks.

Because college textbooks have become so expensive, we need to regulate publishers' practices.

Marijuana should be legally marketed as a source of fuel and fiber.

There should be stricter controls over liposuction.

Google should resist the Government's subpoena to submit user records in the name of the Child Online Protection Act.

Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan should cease his visits to Yasukuni Shrine in honor of war veterans.

Montessori schools are an excellent choice for parents seeking an alternative kind of education for their children.

The United States should drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Miyagi Prefecture should continue with its system of single-sex high schools.

The government of Thailand needs to crack down on the use of amphetamines in night clubs.

English immersion, rather than bilingual education, should be the program of choice for ESL students in public elementary schools.

The United States government should require labeling of all foods derived from GMOs (genetically modified organisms).

Cat owners should have their pets neutered to prevent unwanted problems.

Argument Essay: Example #1

(see also the example at the end of the *Handbook*)

Save the Planet

As if it were not confusing enough for us to read the nutrition labels at the grocery stores, we have to think what the best answer is to the most popular question at the cashier “Paper or plastic?” when we try to do our best for the planet. For the last few years, the global climate has been changing drastically, and it seems like our everyday lifestyle and needs are a big contribution to the devastating effects on our planet. Among so many other factors, the so common paper and plastic grocery bags we use also have a big impact on the environment and the statistics on which one is better can be quite confusing. I have been just as confused as most people probably are about “Paper vs. plastic;” in fact, even before reading some of the statistics, I was inclined to use paper most of the time, but now I know that by choosing paper bags at the grocery store from the first use, to the reuse and the recycle, we can take a better approach to having a cleaner planet.

Many statistics show that plastic bags are by far less expensive to make than paper bags being made from petroleum. This is the reason why, “In 1980, many supermarkets switched from using paper bags to plastic since the plastic (polyethylene) bags are less expensive” (Brower & Leon); in addition, plastic bags are weightless and have smaller volume so less fuel is needed to ship them around.

People may say that grocery paper bags cost more than plastic bags when making new ones, but they have a higher rate of recycling and the cost of making a new paper bag from a recycled one brings paper bags to a lower use of energy; in short, the recycling rate of paper bags brings the cost down. Another advantage is that “paper bags are made from renewable material – wood” (Milstein). Also petroleum, which is used to make plastic bags, is a nonrenewable resource, and it is not cheap anymore; it is also another question how long the resources of oil are going to last. In addition, as the owner of Far West Fibers mentions, because of plastic bags mixed with other recycling materials, sorting crews have to spend thirty percent of their time cleaning the sorting machines from the tangled plastic bags that are in people’s recycling bins (Milstein). For many people it is much harder to recycle plastic bags since there are very few places that take them back.

Some times plastic bags are more convenient because it seems that the handles are stronger than paper bags; also, they protect your merchandise and don’t break in the rain, and if the eggs break you have less chance of getting your car dirty if the bag was tied well. On the other hand, if we use paper bags at the grocery store we need much fewer than plastic bags because you can fit about four times more into a paper bag than a plastic bag. Besides the rate of reusing paper bags is high since many stores reimburse customers if they bring their own bags. Another way we can reuse paper bags at home is to store things in them. They look nice, last forever on the storage shelves, and hold a lot more than plastic bags.

When it comes to air and water pollution, we may think we have got a winner by choosing plastic bags because many statistics show that less water and less air is

polluted in the process of making plastic bags. However, it is impossible not to notice plastic bags flying in the air even under the smallest wind causing other types of pollution. It is not only unaesthetic to see trees decorated with the flying bags, but it is dangerous for the animals and birds that get caught inside the bags (Haberman). If paper bags are not recycled and they go with the regular garbage, it is not as bad as throwing away plastic bags because paper is biodegradable and it decomposes faster than plastic, which is a plus for the environment knowing how many years it takes for plastic to decompose.

While paper bags have higher recycle rate, it is less likely we will see them flying in the air or strangling small animals. That makes paper bags less of a hazard to wildlife and helps to keep the environment cleaner; this is a big factor why countries like South Africa and Taiwan banned the use of plastic bags and also San Francisco adopted the same measure (McKinley).

Despite the fact, that paper bags and plastic bags have pros and cons, we have to make the best decision on using, reusing, and recycling to improve the climate on our planet because both use natural resources and are big contributors to pollution (“Paper Bags Are Better Than Plastic, Right?”). We have to use, reuse and recycle our resources carefully and perhaps next time when we go to the grocery we can bring along some paper bags from home and then we know for sure that’s a plus for the environment.

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Argument Essay: Example #2

(see also the example at the end of the *Handbook*)

Keep Your Hands to Yourself!

I didn't know an "International Spank Out Day", which is on April 30th, has existed since 1998 until I recently found it on the Internet. This day was designated because its supporters hope that it will raise awareness about the dangers of corporal punishment such as spanking. Unfortunately, I also found a piece of news which reported that a spanked woman compared her punishment to rape. In *Spanking Harms Children, Especially Girls*, Melinda Rice described the experience of a female student in a Florida high school, was paddled by a male administrator. She was being made to bend over his desk and stretch out her legs while she was wearing a mini skirt. At this time, another male administrator was attracted by this scene. The first male administrator struck her hard three times. The woman never told this to anybody until she wrote the letter. In the woman's words, it was the closest thing to a rape as she could imagine. I am wondering whether it would have evolved into rape if there had been nobody around him. Nowadays, there are still some people who contend that spanking children is a good way to teach them. However, spanking is harmful for children's health, hearts and minds.

Children will behave well if parents have more patience. I had an experience when I went to a library one day in China. I was attracted by some noise, and then I turned my head and saw a young mother was arguing with her little daughter. It seemed that the mother wanted to finish her book before she left, but the little girl refused to read her books. The young mother became weary, and said loudly, "Just go to read the books you like. I have already told you that we will not leave until I finish the book." However, the little girl shook her head. At this time, her mother slapped her daughter's face sharply, and then everyone in library was shocked. With little girl's crying, her mother felt guilty and said, "Go read your books, okay?" The little girl still stood there. The young mother was embarrassed and asked her daughter that if she wanted to sit next to her and waited until she finished the book. The girl nodded her head. In this case, the little girl just wanted to stay with her mother. People sometimes think that children are being unreasonable and hard to communicate with if they are insubordinate. In fact, children are innocent and naïve and if parents have more patience, it is not hard to communicate with their children.

Spanking children is not a good long-term way to teach them. Actually, "Spanking a child will stop the child from misbehaving for the moment, but studies have shown that the child's compliance will only last for a short time; corporal punishment actually increases the child's non-compliant behavior in the future" ("*Child corporal punishment: spanking*"). Children just have to face what their parents do, but deep inside they believe that they are innocent, and it was not their fault. Punishment might even make children hate their parents. For instance, one of my cousins ShanXin, who is in China, is outgoing but audacious and hard to control. Moreover, she always got "Fs" in her classes. As a result of that, scolding and spanking became a normal part of ShanXin and her mother's daily lives. I still remember that once I asked ShanXin if she understood why her mother spanked and scolded her. She

answered that secretly she didn't agree with her mother's words and didn't think she had done something wrong. Spanking her made her behave worse because she wanted to get revenge on her mother. She pretended to behave well in front of her mother, and she said sorry immediately if she found her mother was trying to slap her. However, when she was behind her mother's back, she was naughty again. She told me that she didn't like her mother anymore. Through her words, I felt that she thought she was being smart by behaving worse behind her mother's back in order to pay back her mom. However, she didn't think she was wrong. This case shows that it is not necessary to spank a child.

However, the opponents contend that corporal punishment is a normal disciplinary way to raise children. They consider that spanking and yelling at children to discipline them and teach them what is good and what is bad, is for their own good. My grandmother, JieQing Huang, whom I interviewed on May 31, 2007, said, "Spanking was not bad for me, and I am so good right now. I claim that children would not behave well if parents do not spank them. Once children feel painful after being spanked, they notice that they did something wrong. Then they will remember and be afraid to do it again." My dad was raised by my grandmother. She spanked my dad when he was naughty and refused to study. In her opinion, punishment is necessary for parents to raise their children. Furthermore, the excessive dotting on children without punishment could lead to destroy the youths' lives. She believes that children should be praised when their behavior is well; they should be punished when they behave badly. Today she usually praises me and gives a small present if I behave well. She asserted that although more and more abandonment of corporal punishment are permitted today, she believes that punishment is a helpful way to bring up children. However, she doesn't know that spanking my dad left him was a bad experience which made him introverted and not easy to get along with now.

In conclusion, different people use different methods to raise their children. However, I prefer raising children without corporal punishment. Because raising children without spanking would make children healthy, parents should teach their children without violence. In order to love children and make them happy, parents should have more patience for them and care about their thoughts more.

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