

(BASIC-LEVEL) ARGUMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The process of arguing (in college) is more or less a comparison of opinions and support, and an evaluation of one another's persuasion. We use this process to compare our beliefs with the beliefs of others in order to make decisions and to learn.

ARGUMENTS HAVE OPPOSITION

When we create an argument, we must recognize that there are always two opposing viewpoints (perhaps even more, depending on the topic). However, most of us accept that arguments are "two-sided."

We recognize opposing viewpoints on topics:

For & Against

Pro & Anti

I Believe & I Do Not Believe

Yes & No

Guilt & Innocent

CLAIMS

In a collegiate environment, we tend to call a well-developed and well-informed opinion (on an argumentative issue) a CLAIM (some people refer to a claim as an assertion, hypothesis, or a thesis statement – this depends on your instructor).

Put simply:

Your Informed Opinion = the CLAIM

Usually, in an academic argument, you begin with a CLAIM such as this:

Genetically modified foods (or GMOs) should not be sold in the United States.

This claim is made to attempt to change the minds of those who believe the COUNTERCLAIM:

Genetically modified foods should be sold in the United States.

When given your claim, the audience usually evaluates the support (or proof) of both sides and renders a choice (or verdict) between the two. Usually, the claim is the foundation for the entire argument.

SUPPORT

In order for a reader/audience to make a determination on whether which claim is the best, the argument must have SUPPORT. Now, SUPPORT is basically what it sounds like: proof. If you make a statement, then you better have some proof, although academics tend to call it SUPPORT.

SUPPORT is any type of evidence (textual, material, or physical) types of proof that can be found and brought to help to persuade an audience that your CLAIM is correct and acceptable.

THE REALITY OF "WINNING ARGUMENTS"

Fallaciously, many people claim that people win arguments or arguments can be "won." However, not all arguments can be "won."

Likewise, most arguments are not necessarily about winning or losing. Most arguments are about choices (e.g., good choices, moral choices, logical choices, choosing employees, deciding which technique to use, etc.).

Let's put these ideas into perspective (covering a bit of terminology):

An *academic argument* is an intellectual argument (something ancient Greeks referred to as dialectic -- a space of thinking where two arguments meet or where two claims converge... a type of informed conversation).

EX: In most cases, the death penalty is an unethical way to deal with violent criminals (counterclaim would be: In most cases, the death penalty is an ethical way to deal with violent criminals).

Arguments of Personal Preference are not intellectual arguments, although they may contain preferences (overtly personal opinions) and support (or proof).

EX: It is your turn to take out the trash tonight.

EX: He should date me.

EX: I do not like X person...

Note: Some readers/audiences ignore proof/support in favor of the communal thinking or popular beliefs. Know your reader/audience and their assumptions/beliefs/norms, before you make a claim. Otherwise, you will have no audience for your argument.

CREATING A CLAIM

In most early college courses, you will find instructors asking you to make judgments on the value of something or to ask you to suggest your personal opinion. For example:

How do you feel about guns, particularly, gun control?

In such an argument there are two sides (again, a binary):

A. Those who want the guns legal and readily available to regular citizens...

-AND-

B. Those who want guns to be illegal and unavailable to regular citizens...

In making a CLAIM, you pick a side to the argument. Then, you defend it. You draw on support for your argument from a variety of sources and attempt to persuade the reader that your position is the best.

Your claims could be either:

A. Guns should continue to be available to regular citizens

--or--

B. Guns should be unavailable to regular citizens.

SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

Returning to the "Gun" argument:

SUPPORT for the PRO-GUN position might include a listing of advantages of owning a gun. The author might provide some in-depth discussion of the historical value of owning a gun. The author might use statistics about violent crimes and spaces in which guns offer personal protection. The author might include quotations from PRO-Gun experts and commentators.

SUPPORT for the ANTI-GUN position might include a listing of disadvantages of having guns in public. The author might dispute the need for owning guns in modern times. The author might use statistics showing the amount of violent crimes committed with guns. The author might include quotations from ANTI-Gun experts and commentators.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF (BASIC-LEVEL) ARGUMENTS

Components of your argument *should never* be placed arbitrarily (that is, without reason).

You should be strategic in placing the components of your argument (that is, taking advantage of your arrangement in order to help your work to be logical and easy to understand).

In the Classical Greek/Roman traditions, writers often used a 5 stage method to construct arguments; this model is still used today in science, industry, law, and even in college debate.

The parts included:

1. An Introduction
2. A Statement of Fact
3. A Confirmation
4. A Refutation
5. A Conclusion

For writers, this model has evolved into what we know as The "Five-Section" form, which contains 5 sections:

1. The Introduction (an opening designed to grab the reader's attention) with a CLAIM.
2. A Supporting Idea
3. Another Supporting Idea
4. And, another Supporting Idea (later, you will learn that this section is replaced by a counterargument).
5. Finally, the Conclusion

Note that you can add more points of support or ideas, and you can even make them longer and more detailed.

(BASIC-LEVEL) ARGUMENT ARRANGEMENT

EX:

Introduction (Introduces the topic and your claim)

Vegetarianism is one of the most substantial ways to promote health. Vegetarians do not consume meat; however, they may consume some animal products. Vegetarians do not rely on eating animals, making the lifestyle/diet very economical and very diverse. Generally, vegetarians have reduced instances of heart disease, cancer, and other ailments. *Most everyone should consider becoming a vegetarian* for these reasons.

Supporting Idea #1 (Develops an important thought or idea supporting your claim in this paragraph)

Vegetarians do not consume meat. Vegetarians consume mostly fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, cheese, and other dairy. Vegetarians may choose this diet in respect of animals or simply for health reasons alone; regardless of their reasons, vegetarians tend to find many combinations which make eating a delightful experience. In many supermarkets, Meat substitutions are available (many substitutes are made from grains and beans).

Supporting Idea #2 (Develops an important thought or idea supporting your claim in this paragraph)

The vegetarian lifestyle is very economical. The cost of a pound of meat (and side dishes) compared to the cost of a vegetable, beans, and rice for a single meal is considerably less. Of course, vegetarians like to mix things up (keeping things diverse in the kitchen), so they try different recipes with different ingredients (after all, beans and rice are not for everyone). But, the average grocery cost (after a few weeks of acclimation) is significantly lower.

Supporting Idea #3 (Develops an important thought or idea supporting your claim in this paragraph)

On average, vegetarians suffer from few diseases of the heart, liver, and other organs. They often maintain much healthier weights, and they often live longer on average than meat eaters. In addition, vegetarians suffer from fewer cancers and other ailments. In all, vegetarians are generally healthier than people who eat meat.

Conclusion (Recapitulate your claim, and leave the reader pondering the topic)

Most everyone should consider become a vegetarian. Consider becoming a vegetarian for a week, and see how the process goes. See how you feel. Try some simple dishes with beans, cheese, and rice. Then, incorporate some more elaborate recipes (e.g., eggplant pasta, macaroni and cheese with asparagus, etc.). Consider some meat substitutes as well. Try some non-meat chicken nuggets, and consider the taste (in most cases, the taste is almost the same).