

(INTERMEDIATE-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.

BINARY OPPOSITION

Arguments begin when an author considers the binaries involved within the topic matter. What is a binary? Well, the universe is full of binaries (that is, things which have opposites).

Some basic binaries:

0 & 1

Good & Evil

Male & Female

Animal & Plant

Life & Death

Light & Darkness

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

In doing so, we recognize that there is always a CLAIM to your argument which takes one side of the debate or argument. Your CLAIM is usually your point/viewpoint.

In doing so, we recognize that there is always a CLAIM and a COUNTERCLAIM. Your CLAIM is usually your point/viewpoint, while the COUNTERCLAIM is the opposing point/viewpoint.

CLAIMS

In a collegiate environment, we tend to call a well-developed opinion a CLAIM (or, some people refer to a claim as an assertion or a thesis statement).

To simplify:

CLAIM = Your Opinion

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

I am very convinced that A is more appropriate for our needs.

Whereas the COUNTERCLAIM may be:

I am very convinced that B is a more suitable option.

The purpose of the argument at this point is to determine which of the two options is better. The audience usually evaluates the proof/support of both sides and renders a choice (or verdict) between the two.

SUPPORT

In order for a reader/audience to make a determination, 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...

Some readers/audiences ignore proof/support in favor of the communal thinking or popular beliefs.

EX:

With enough proof/support, you could make the claim that all drugs (including illicit drugs) in the United States should be legally available and regulated by the government. You could state that taxing the sales of such drugs would be profitable and would allow more funds for education, states, and reduce the general population's tax liability (that is, how much tax you pay every year). Also, you could mention that a large majority of the

"abusers" of drugs would simply have had their problems anyway. However, few will subscribe to your claim or even validate your support mainly because of beliefs or cultural norms/assumptions, which can oftentimes be more powerful than a logical argument. If a person knows a loved one who died of a drug overdose, then he/she will hardly listen to your argument. If a person who is religious and refrains from using drugs thinks that drugs are bad, then that person will inevitably be against drugs.

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:

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 CHALLENGE OF COUNTERARGUMENTS

Regardless of the position in either paper, both authors must identify and discuss the COUNTERCLAIM (or opposing viewpoint) within their paper. If you do not recognize the COUNTERCLAIM (or opposing viewpoint) at all, then you are a fool (plain and simple), since a fool, by definition, is a person lacking the understanding of something.

Moreover, to properly argue for a point, you must understand the opposing viewpoint and everything about it.

If a person believes in something or supports something (like a bill/new law) without understanding the problems and consequences, then the person is an idiot.

You must understand the other side of something you argue about... However, the author does not have to yield to the opposing position. The author can include a COUNTERARGUMENT in their basic argument. COUNTERARGUMENTS are sections found towards the end of an argument where the author concedes on some of the problems with his/her argument.

For example, a PRO-GUN counterargument may recognize that many violent crimes happen as a result of the availability of guns. However, the author can also recapitulate (or summary and reinforce) how guns do not kill people -> People kill people (thus removing the logical connection between the availability of guns and the motive for violent crime with guns).

Likewise, an ANTI-GUN counterargument can concede that guns are in-fact needed for national defense. Therefore, in a counterargument, the author can advocate special parameters or conditions for the ownership of guns should be considered (e.g. perhaps only individuals in law enforcement and individuals who have served in the military can own guns).

Since support varies and winning is not a realistic goal for argumentation in the realm of the academy, the primary goal should then be to construct convincing arguments which help people to become unseated from such strong convictions; this philosophy is readily apparent in the judicial system of the United States, where "reasonable doubt" is the "tipping point" for the verdict of guilty or innocent. Suffice it to say, if both attorneys have good cases with good evidence then persuasion is everything....

THE ARRANGEMENT OF (INTERMEDIATE-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 (explanation of the context/case)
2. A Statement of Fact (or Facts)
3. A Confirmation (confirming the fact)
4. A Refutation (refuting the counterargument)
5. A Conclusion (recapitulation of the material)

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. Another Supporting Idea or the Counter Argument (where you recognize the COUNTERARGUMENT and discuss it)
5. Finally, the Conclusion

Make a note to yourself that many students use this form as a starting point for writing longer argument papers. Others use the form as a way of organizing their thoughts logically and sequentially.

When considering it as a starting point, note that you can add more points of support or ideas, and you can even make them longer and more detailed.

In some cases, before even writing the draft, you might even try creating a *Zero Draft*, which is a very, very rough draft of your paper with many holes (or missing content to be placed into the paper later). This practice is good only if you decide on supporting points first.

(INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL) ARGUMENT ARRANGEMENT

EX:

Introduction (Introduces the topic and your claim)

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to rock climb? Rock climbing is one of the most exciting ways to spend your spare time. The sport of rock climbing is fun and interesting. Many people find enjoyment in rock climbing, while getting plenty of exercise. Additionally, while sometimes dangerous, rock climbing is a very safe and accessible sport for people of all ages.

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

First of all, rock climbing is really fun, yet many people ask, "Why climb rocks?" Well, when we are children, we tend to climb everything. Yet, climbing is for everyone. Seriously, there is a strong sense of achievement when you get to the summit (or top) of something. And, everyone loves the feeling of accomplishment.

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

One of the most fundamental reasons for rock climbing is exercise. You will never get a better workout for your upper body, arms, and hands. Your arm strength alone will increase substantially over night. In addition, your stamina and endurance will dramatically increase with rock climbing. The sport is considered one of the most aerobic exercises available.

Counterargument (Attempts to focus on the opposing viewpoint, and attempt to disprove it, discredit it, or debunk it, if possible. Otherwise, again, develop an important thought or idea supporting your claim in this paragraph)

Some people claim that rock climbing is extremely dangerous. This can be true sometimes; however, everything has a sense of danger to it. Moreover, all sports can be dangerous. For example, if you play golf you are likely to be hit with the ball or the club of another player from time to time. And, let's not forget about lightning. Rock climbing is only dangerous if you fall. However, climbing safely, with an expert, can ensure you never fall.

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

Consider trying the sport of rock climbing. You might try climbing by visiting a local rock climbing gym. The experience will be enjoyable and rock climbing gyms are very safe. You can meet many interesting people as well. In addition, you will get plenty of exercise. So, give it a try. Go for it!