

Argumentative Essays: Getting Started

According to The Holt Handbook (HH), an **argumentative essay** takes a position on an issue using logic and evidence to convince readers.

Choosing a Debatable Topic

Since an argumentative essay is an attempt to change the way people think, it should focus on a debatable topic—one over which reasonable people disagree. Factual statements that reasonable people do *not* disagree over are not suitable for argument.

Example:

Fact: First-year students are not required to purchase a meal plan from the university.

Debatable topic: First-year students *should* be required to purchase a meal plan from the university.

Developing an Argumentative Thesis

Argumentative Thesis:

After choosing a topic, you will need to state your opinion in an argumentative thesis that takes a strong stand about your topic. This thesis will act as the foundation for the rest of your argument.

Antithesis:

An antithesis is a statement that takes an arguable position opposite of your original thesis. Formulating an antithesis is the best way to make sure that your thesis does take a stand. If you can create an antithesis, your thesis statement takes a stand, if not, then your statement needs further revision in order to be argumentative.

Example:

Thesis Statement: Term limits would improve government by bringing people with fresh ideas into office every few years.

Antithesis: Term limits would harm government because elected officials would always be inexperienced.

Defining Terms

Be careful to use precise terms in your thesis statement. Try to avoid vague or judgmental words such as *wrong*, *right*, *good*, *bad*, and *immoral*.

Example:

Vague: Censorship of the Internet would be wrong.

Clear: Censorship of the Internet would unfairly limit free speech.

Elements of an Argumentative Essay

- Introduction
- Background
- Thesis statement
- Arguments in Support of Your Thesis
- Refutation of Opposing Arguments
- Conclusion

Checklist: Argumentative Essays

- √ Is your topic debatable?
- √ Does your essay develop argumentative thesis?
- √ Have you adequately defined terms used for your argument?
- √ Have you taken into consideration the values, beliefs, opinions of your audience?
- √ Have you refuted opposing arguments?
- √ Have you supported your claims with evidence?
- √ Have you established credibility?
- √ Have you documented all information that was not your own?
- √ Have you been fair?
- √ Have you constructed logical arguments?
- √ Have you avoided logical fallacies?
- √ Have you provided your readers with adequate background information?
- √ Have you presented your points in a clear and concise manner and organized them understandably?
- √ Have you written an interesting introduction and a strong conclusion to your paper?

*All information on this handout came from 6th ed. *The Holt Handbook* and/or the 4th ed. *Brief Handbook*. For more information, please see the 4th ed. *Brief Holt Handbook* chapter 5, pages 91 to 96.