

# 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.