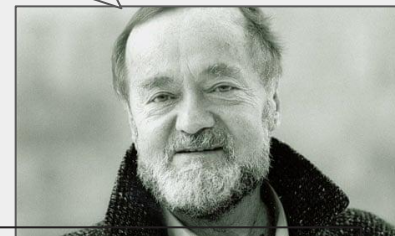


Activities to Improve the Structural Quality of Arguments in Essay Writing

A three-tiered approach

1 First, specific activities, techniques, and tips are presented that help students understand the elements and structure of an argument and different types of claims.

“Argument is at the heart of critical thinking and academic discourse” (Hillocks, 2010)



Parts of an Argument

1) The Claim

Identifying Qualifiers (words like *some, most, many, in general, usually* - little words whose value to an argument is immeasurable)

-*Many sports are fun to watch live.* (qualified claim)

-*Sports are fun to watch live.* (unqualified claim)

Identifying Exceptions (specifically excluding certain cases or situations to restrict a claim)

-*Sports are fun to watch live.* (claim with no exception)

-*With the exception of cricket, sports are fun to watch live.* (claim with exception)

2) The Reasons and Warrants (assumptions)

Determining the Relevance of the Reasons - are the reasons relevant to the claim they mean to support.

Determining the Effectiveness of the Reasons - a reason is effective, if it invokes a *value* we can agree with.

3) The Evidence

Determining the Sufficiency of Evidence

Determining the Credibility of Evidence

Determining the Accuracy of Evidence

4) Anticipated Objections and Rebuttal

Supporting Your Ideas

Illegal organ trades go unchallenged because the demand for human organs has grown much faster than the supply of organs. For instance, while kidney donation increased by only 33%, the number of patients on waiting lists for a kidney grew by 236% in the US between 1990 and 2003 (Scheper).

Is more evidence needed here?

Yes

No

Prenatal testing has been widely endorsed all over the world before genetic engineering appeared. It tests many items, for instance, if the fetus is alive or not, its posture, and so on. The health of the baby is a big issue for parents as for the baby.

What are three ways to improve these sentences?

The second reason why genetic human enhancement should be banned is that the effect lasts longer than a single life. Genetic modification is not a simple isolated matter for people to decide. Mitani, the professor of Saitama Medical University, points out that edited genes continue to be inherited to one's offspring and can have an influence on them.

Where is the bridge sentence? What is its function?

Sex selection should be permitted because it can prevent gender specific diseases from passing on to one's baby. Some diseases would pass on to the baby from his or her grandparents even though the parents do not appear to have the disease. The Human Fertilization and Embryology Act 1990, Schedule 2 12a(c), allows embryonic sex selection to take place only if they have a "particular risk that any resulting child will have or develop (i) a gender-related serious physical or mental disability, (ii) a gender-related serious illness, or (iii) any other gender-related serious medical condition"(Wilkinson 29).

Do you think this is a well-supported idea? Why or why not?

Activity: Cut all of these pieces up and give each group a set of cards to students arrange in a similar order

Claim	Debatable statement that forms the main point of an argument. (Sometimes called a thesis statement.)	Mr. Jones is an incredibly lazy anthropology teacher.	What do you think?
Reasons	Arguments that help support the main claim. (These allow you to break a broad claim into smaller, more precise sections.)	Mr. Jones tends to give us old, outdated material and sometimes it is not connected to the topic.	Why do you think so?
Evidence	Personal experience, outside authorities, facts, and statistics that support subclaims. (Stands by itself: the evidence is not debatable, though its interpretation may be.)	His last lecture had data from the 1990s. Also, during two tests, I had to show him as many as eight questions that covered material he had never assigned. Both times, he told the class to skip those questions.	How do you know you're right?
Acknowledgement and Response	Admission of possible counterarguments, reassertion of your argument.	Half the class named him as their favorite teacher. The same half of the class slept through class every day.	What reason or evidence does not support this claim? Why is this reason or evidence weak or wrong?
Warrants	Assumptions that underlie your argument. (Usually left unstated, if you can assume your reader shares them.)	Teachers ought to be engaged, attentive, and hardworking. Teachers should only test students on material covered in class.	What are you assuming?

CLAIMS OF FACT, VALUE & POLICY

Claim of Fact

Is/Is not

Proposes whether something is or is not, true or false. Frequently verifiable, and often takes a more objective approach. Draws on logical inferences.

Obesity causes health problems.

Can you think of another example?

Claim of Value

Good/Bad

Takes a more evaluative position. Judges whether something is good/bad, right/wrong, just/unjust, ethical/unethical, etc. We judge the worth of something.

It is immoral to commit suicide.

Can you think of another example?

Claim of Policy

Should/should not

Advocates a specific course of action. Claims will include empowered agencies (any group that has power to make policy), and needs to include the words "should/should not".

The university should provide more parking spaces.

Can you think of another example?

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2

Second, lessons and materials are exhibited that help learners analyze the relevance and effectiveness of reasons and examine the sufficiency and credibility of evidence. Some of these materials include making distinctions between qualifiers and exceptions and anticipating objections and rebuttals.

Hedging Language

When you read academic texts, you see that writers use sentences to state uncertainties for some possible reasons:

- it allows for argument from the reader,
- the information is accurate but may not be acceptable to all,
- to be confidently uncertain.

Sentences that use "hedging" language, give hypotheses, theories, and "educated guesses." To indicate uncertainty, writers use language that hedges, or reduces the commitment to, the truth of the statement, not because it is untrue but because there is no guarantee that a statement is absolutely true all around the world, all the time or believed by every single person. Therefore, authors provide "wiggle" room so that a statement can be argued (unless it is a fact, e.g. The sun rises in the east).

Type of hedging	Examples
Verbs for observation, opinion, or belief	seem, tend, look like, appear to be, think, believe, indicate, suggest, assume
Modal verbs	may, might, could, should, would
Adverbs of frequency	often, usually, sometimes, hardly ever, almost always, almost never
Adverbs showing possibility	possibly, probably, perhaps, potentially
Adjectives showing possibility	probable, possible, likely, unlikely
Nouns showing possibility	possibility, assumption, probability
Quantifiers	most, many, several, almost all, almost none, the majority of, the minority of, few, some



Practicing Hedging

Circle the hedging statements in the sentences below

- Students who took these classes were more likely to do better at the university.
- Scientific studies suggest that climate change could have very serious consequences for the earth.
- The news report indicates that green tea can potentially prevent cancer.
- Most people in the United States are in favor of democracy.
- Many people do not enjoy exercise, but it is perhaps the best thing you can do for your health.

Breaking Down the Argument

By breaking down the claim, reasons (premises), and assumptions BEFORE writing a paragraph, the author can see the parts needed to develop the argument. Remember to look at the evidence from reliable sources first, and then work backwards. If one determines the reasons without looking at the evidence first then the writer is likely to search for evidence that only confirms their initial beliefs.

Example 1:

Claim: Mental health issues among high school students have not been addressed (because school counselors are not properly trained).

Reason: There is a lack of training/qualifications among counselors.

Reason: Students' mental health can be addressed through counseling.

Assumption: School counselors need training/qualifications to be effective.

Evidence?

Counter-arguments?

Example 2:

Claim: The United States should ban all automatic and semi-automatic guns (to reduce gun violence)

Reason: Most gun violence is caused by people using automatic guns and semi-automatic guns as opposed to other kinds of firearms.

Reason: A ban would restrict the number of automatic and semi-automatic guns from those committing the violence

Assumption: The availability of automatic and semi-automatic guns make it easier for someone to commit violence.

Evidence?

Counter-arguments?

Sample Paragraph Utilizing the Argument Structure

Second, the death penalty should be banned ^{reason 1} since it cannot be administered fairly ^{reason 1 supporting the claim}. When it is used often, it is almost certain that a few innocent people will be executed ^{reason 2 supporting reason 1 and claim}. According to Williams, The United States has executed at least 23 people during the last 100 years who were later found to have been innocent (37) ^{evidence supporting reason 2}. Since 1972, 102 people who were sentenced to die were later released when new evidence showed that they were innocent (Williams 40) ^{evidence supporting reason 2}. Moreover, race seems to be a factor in determining who will receive the death penalty. African-Americans are often sentenced to die while whites who committed similar crimes are given life in prison (Williams 52) ^{evidence supporting reason 1}. While it is unfortunate that some innocent people die, no system is perfect. The death penalty serves a more important purpose of protecting people from murderers who are likely to kill again ^{acknowledge/counter}. However, there are better alternatives to protect the public from murderers such as hiring more police officers or using more surveillance to monitor criminal behavior ^{response to acknowledge/counter}. A fairer system of punishment for terrible crimes should be implemented to preserve the personal liberties of both the innocent and guilty ^{bring/acknowledge sentence supporting claim}.

3

Lastly, the presentation provides lessons that encourage students to apply rubrics to evaluate the structural quality of their arguments. Other assessment measures that specifically address the quality of argumentation in essay writing and ideas for diagnosing a student's command of argument construction are also available.

Argument Rubric - adapt to use when analyzing the arguments presented in writing

Focus and Organization	Evidence and Elaboration	Conventions
<p>4 The introduction engages the reader and establishes a claim in a compelling way.</p> <p>The argument includes valid reasons and evidence that address and support the claim while clearly acknowledging counterclaims.</p> <p>The ideas progress logically, and transitions make connectors among ideas clear.</p> <p>The conclusion offers fresh insight into the claim.</p>	<p>The sources of evidence are comprehensive and specific and contain relevant information.</p> <p>The tone of the argument is always formal and objective.</p> <p>The vocabulary is always appropriate for the audience and purpose.</p>	<p>The argument intentionally uses standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.</p>
<p>3 The introduction engages the reader and establishes the claim.</p> <p>The argument includes reasons and evidence that address and support my claim while acknowledging counterclaims.</p> <p>The ideas progress logically, and some transitions are used to help make connectors among ideas clear.</p> <p>The conclusion restates the claim and important information.</p>	<p>The sources of evidence contain relevant information.</p> <p>The tone of the argument is mostly formal and objective.</p> <p>The vocabulary is generally appropriate for the audience and purpose.</p>	<p>The argument demonstrates general accuracy in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.</p>
<p>2 The introduction establishes a claim.</p> <p>The argument includes some reasons and evidence that address and support the claim while briefly acknowledging counterclaims.</p> <p>The ideas progress somewhat logically. A few sentence transitions are used that connect readers to the argument.</p> <p>The conclusion offers some insight into the claim and restates information.</p>	<p>The sources of evidence contain some relevant information.</p> <p>The tone of the argument is occasionally formal and objective.</p> <p>The vocabulary is somewhat appropriate for the audience and purpose.</p>	<p>The argument demonstrates some accuracy in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.</p>
<p>1 The introduction does not clearly state the claim.</p> <p>The argument does not include reasons or evidence for the claim. No counterclaims are acknowledged.</p> <p>The ideas do not progress logically. Transitions are not included to connect ideas.</p>	<p>Reliable and relevant evidence is not included.</p> <p>The vocabulary used is limited or ineffective.</p> <p>The tone of the argument is not objective or formal.</p>	<p>The argument contains mistakes in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.</p>

