



The Catholic University of America
Writing Center Handout

Argumentative Writing Basics

Like a lawyer's court case, arguing involves much more than simply stating a point of view. When you write an essay in which you assert your opinion, you are required to supply reasons and evidence that support your position. It is also important to anticipate the oppositions to your thesis and answer those objections.

Asserting a Thesis

The thesis, necessary for any argument, states the point of view the writer wants readers to consider. The thesis statement must be clear, straightforward, and it must announce the main point of the essay.

Examples of thesis statements regarding cloning research:

1. The government should enact laws to regulate cloning research.
2. Cloning research should not be restricted by governmental laws.

Examples of thesis statements regarding animal testing:

1. Animal testing is necessary to develop medicines and scientific knowledge.
2. Animal testing is unethical and should be outlawed.

Arguable Assertions

Not all assertions create a springboard for reasoned arguments. For example, a statement of fact cannot be an arguable thesis statement because facts are easily proven true or false.

- Dr. Smith is a professor in the Mathematics department at CUA.

This statement can be verified by checking the CUA teaching roster of the Mathematics department. There is no reason to create a detailed argument for such a statement.

Like facts, declarations of personal feelings are not arguable assertions. While facts are unarguable because they can easily be proven true or false, feelings are unarguable because they differ according to each person.

- Running is my favorite way to exercise.

You cannot offer a structured argument to support this statement; you can only explain why running is the type of exercise you enjoy most. You could, however, present an argument for this thesis statement: "Running is the only form of exercise that benefits the mind, body, and soul."

Giving Reasons and Support

In order for your argument to succeed, you must not only give reasons but also provide support. To argue that running benefits the mind, body, and soul because it makes you feel good would not be a convincing argument. If, however, you include examples, statistics, authorities, anecdotes, and textual evidence, then your argument would be more persuasive.

Examples

Examples are an effective way to show that your reasons should be taken seriously. Effective examples are representative, familiar and not extreme, and numerous enough to be convincing yet selective enough not to overwhelm readers.

Statistics

In many economic, educational, social, and political issues, statistics prove to be an effective tool. Ensure that the statistics you select are current, relevant or appropriate for your argument, and accurate. Make sure to choose reliable sources, such as published journals and professional periodicals, rather than unaffiliated Web sites or tabloids.

Authorities

To support an argument, you may cite experts on the subject who agree with your point of view. Quoting, paraphrasing, or even just referring to a respected authority can add to a writer's credibility. These "authorities" must be trustworthy and reputable. If you are making an argument for the best method of swinging a golf club, it would be wise to quote a professional golfer rather than your neighbor who goes golfing as a hobby.

Anecdotes

Anecdotes are brief stories about events or experiences, recounted in an interesting way. In order to provide convincing support, anecdotes must be relevant to the argument, well told, and true to life. A slightly embellished, humorous story about your dog is not going to strengthen your argument against animal testing. To be relevant, an anecdote must serve as more than entertainment; it must provide a necessary contribution to your argument.

Textual Evidence

Textual evidence is of great importance for most college courses. If you are asked to compare two poems for literature class, evaluate Plato's arguments for philosophy class, or study primary sources for history class, you are often expected to quote, paraphrase, or summarize passages in order to strengthen your argument. Carefully select these bits of textual evidence to be relevant to your argument's thesis and reasons.

For further information, please use the following link via Purdue OWL:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/establishing_arguments/index.html