

How to Approach an Argumentative Essay

People have opinions on lots of different topics, and argumentative essays allow writers to argue why one position/opinion is right or why the position/opinion is better than others. These are sometimes called *persuasive* essays as the writer aims to demonstrate to the reader that their opinion is correct. Creating a strong argumentative essay can be challenging, so we will break down this common type of essay here.

Choosing a Topic

Most students are given a topic when writing an argumentative essay and can choose which side to argue (Example: Do cats or dogs make better pets?). Meanwhile, there are times when you may be asked to choose a topic relevant to the content that you're learning in class. For instance, if an instructor states the argumentative essay should be about school, the writer may argue why year-round school is best, why all students should be required to take a gym class, or why schools should provide lunch to all students. These are all arguments where there is a clear and obvious "other side" that could also be argued.

**** One of the most common pitfalls for argumentative essays is that students fail to present an argument that is debatable.** When choosing a topic, students should think about the following question: what exactly are you trying to persuade someone to do or think by reading your paper?

Breaking It into Parts

Argumentative essays usually follow the same general outline which is shown below:

- Introduction
- Body Paragraph 1: This should share the first reason for your argument.
- Body Paragraph 2: This should share the second reason for your argument.
- Body Paragraph 3: This should share the third reason for your argument.
- Counterargument: This should share why some people have another opinion on this topic and why they don't agree with your argument.
- Conclusion

5 Steps for Writing an Argumentative Essay

1. Select a **topic** that people have differing opinions on. Then, do some quick **pre-writing** in which you note the various reasons that people have different opinions on your topic. Decide which side of the topic you will argue in your essay and conduct **research**.
2. Develop a **thesis statement** that shares your argument and the reasons you will use to support it. The thesis statement should be precise and provocative. Consider one of the following sentence stems when initially crafting your thesis, and remember the wording of your thesis can always be enhanced more later:
 - a. Despite _____, everyone should _____ because of AA, BB, and CC.
 - b. _____ should happen because of AA, BB, and CC, but others believe _____.

Strong Thesis Statements	Weak Thesis Statements*
Despite not having long summer vacations, schools should use year-round schedules because of benefits such as improved student learning, reduced expenses, and increased community involvement.	Overall, technology is good, but some technology can also be bad.
Despite peer pressure, parents should not give middle school students phones because they cause distractions in school, increase the chances of bullying, and reduce the amount of sleep students get at night.	Getting an education can lead to greater success in one's career.
Yearly gym classes should be required for students because they improve health, advance social skills, and reduce stress, but others believe they are not worthwhile in today's society.	Gym classes provide benefits to students even though some students do not enjoy it.
	Gym classes provide benefits to students such as improved health, advanced social skills, and reduced stress.

*Notice that these thesis statements are missing a debatable argument, and they are too generic.

3. Make an **outline** of your paper. You know the main points for each paragraph from your thesis statement. Write each main point on your sheet of paper. Then, you can create a list of examples and evidence you will use to support each one.
4. Begin drafting the **body** of your essay. When doing this, it is helpful to start each paragraph with a topic sentence that shares what the paragraph will be about. Then, you can support your reason using research, statistics, examples, and studies. Remember, you should have 3 paragraphs supporting your argument and 1 paragraph showing an opposing viewpoint.

Example Topic Sentence: First, gym classes are crucial because they improve the physical health of students.

5. Write the **introduction** and **conclusion**. For the introduction, start with an interesting hook such as a fact or brief anecdote. Then, share some background information on your topic. The introduction will end with the thesis statement that you created earlier in step two. For the conclusion, you'll start by rephrasing your thesis statement, then summarize the main points, and explain why the topic matters—in other words, what should someone do with the knowledge they've gained from your paper?