

Writing an Argumentative Essay

The argumentative essay, although bearing many similarities to the persuasive (argument) essay, has several very distinct differences.

The objective of a persuasive essay is to “win” the reader over to your side of an argument, while the primary objective of an argumentative essay is just to show that you have a valid argument, allowing the reader either to adopt your position or to “agree to disagree”.

Another difference between the two types of essay is that in the persuasive essay, although you acknowledge the opposing view, only one side of the issue is debated. An important part of the argumentative essay is to use evidence both to substantiate one’s own position and to refute the opposing argument.

The final difference between the argumentative essay and the argument (persuasive) essay is the organization of the composition. The persuasive essay follows the basic essay format as displayed in the example.

The argumentative essay may be formatted in several ways:

Basic Essay Format
I. Introduction
II. Body
A. First point and supporting info
B. Second point and supporting info
C. Third point and supporting info
III. Conclusion

Example 1: Claim/Counter Claim	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Introduce the topic and state or explain the question. State both the claim (your position) and the counter claim (the opposing position). ☑ Start building a strong case by refuting or disproving the opposing position. ☑ Use one paragraph to state each counter point, following your statement with related evidence that refutes the point. ☑ Present your case in the second section of the body. ☑ Use one paragraph to state each of your points, following your statement with the evidence that proves or supports your point. ☑ The conclusion of this format is a restatement of your claim and a summary of the information that supports it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Introduction (Claim and counter claim statement) II. Body Part I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. First counter point and refuting information B. Second counter point and refuting information C. Third counter point and refuting information III Body Part II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. First point and supporting information B. Second point and supporting information C. Third point and supporting information IV Conclusion – Restatement of claim and summary of the main ideas

Example 2: The Cluster Format

- ❑ Introduce the topic and state or explain the question.
- ❑ Start the first section of the body with your statement of claim or position.
- ❑ In this format, you begin by stating and supporting your points. Use one paragraph to state each of your points, following your statement with the evidence that proves or supports your point.
- ❑ Follow each point with an opposing view related to that point and evidence that supports the objection. Use one paragraph for each counter point and its evidence.
- ❑ After you have finished presenting all points, counter points and evidence, start the second section of the body with your rebuttals to each of the counter points.
- ❑ Back your rebuttals with evidence and logic that shows why the objections are invalid. If the opposing view is valid, acknowledge it as so but use your evidence to show that it's somehow unattractive and that your position is the more desirable of the two.
- ❑ Use one paragraph to rebut each counter claim.
- ❑ The conclusion of this format is a restatement of your claim, a summary of supporting information and an assessment of rebuttals.

- I. Introduction (Claim and counter claim statement)
- II. Body Part I – Presenting the Case
 - A. Statement of the claim
 - B. First point and supporting information
 - C. First point opposition and refuting evidence
 - D. Second point and supporting information
 - E. Second point opposition and refuting evidence
 - F. Third point and supporting information
 - G. Third point opposition and refuting evidence
- III. Body Part II– Author's rebuttal
 - A. First point rebuttal
 - B. Second point rebuttal
 - C. Third point rebuttal

IV Conclusion

Example 3: The Alternating Format

- ❑ Introduce the topic and state or explain the question.
- ❑ Start the body with your statement of claim or position.
- ❑ In this format, you begin by stating and supporting your points. Use one paragraph to state each of your points, following your statement with the evidence that proves or supports your point.
- ❑ Follow each point with an opposing view related to that point and evidence that supports the objection. Use one paragraph for each counter point and its evidence.
- ❑ Follow each objection with your rebuttal. Use one paragraph to rebut each counter claim.
- ❑ The conclusion of this format is a restatement of your claim, a summary of supporting information and an assessment of rebuttals.

- I. Introduction (Claim and counter claim statement)
- II. Body
 - A. Statement of the claim
 - B. First point and supporting information
 - C. First point opposition and refuting evidence
 - D. First rebuttal and supporting information
 - E. Second point and supporting information
 - F. Second point opposition and refuting evidence
 - G. Second rebuttal and supporting information

III Conclusion

Writing the Argumentative Essay

Now that you know how to format an argumentative essay, it's time to begin writing.

Again, as in the persuasive essay, state your thesis objectively. Don't use first person. Instead of saying, "I don't think global warming is worth worrying about", you might say, "A two degree rise in temperature over the last hundred years makes global warming a trivial problem."

Now that you have 'put the gloves on' be prepared to back up your thesis with facts. Use statistics, expert quotations, and other evidence in support of your thesis and in rebuttal of counter claims. In addition, all counter claims should be backed with solid evidence as well.

As you research your material, anticipate objections and be prepared to make concessions. This will help you to research and write your thesis as if you were debating a real person instead of a piece of paper!

Perhaps the biggest mistake people make in writing an argumentative essay is to substitute their opinions for facts. Remember that each claim you make must be supported by solid evidence if your argument is to hold up to counter claims and objections.

Although in an argumentative essay you don't have to win the reader over to your side, your objective at the least should be to persuade them to "agree to disagree" with your position and accept it as another point of view that merits further thought and discussion.