



How to Structure an Argument in Your Essay

Lesson Transcript

When you write a persuasive essay, it's important to think about how you'll construct your argument, from how you'll arrange your major points to how and where you'll refute opposing views. This video covers some of the basics for structuring an argument.

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Have you noticed that in action movies, the hero usually seems to have an endless supply of weapons and ammunition, and he always makes just the right moves? And even though there might be a lot of bad guys, they can never get in a good shot? The hero is always armed with just what he needs, while the other guy is sloppy, can never hit his target, and never mounts a real defense.

Don't be that other guy. Think of the arguments that you construct in your persuasive essays as battles that you must come prepared for with plenty of evidence for your claims as well as defenses to potential challenges to your positions.

Provide Sufficient Evidence

In persuasive essays, it isn't enough to have smart, compelling arguments in favor of your position, though you do want those. You also need evidence to support your arguments, and that evidence should come in the form of specific facts and examples.

If you're writing a term paper for school, you may conduct research to find the facts and examples you need. If you're writing a persuasive essay as part of a timed essay exam, you'll be provided with information that you can use as evidence, or you'll be asked to draw on your own experiences as evidence for your arguments.

For example, if you're writing a persuasive essay in which you argue that your school should offer a free tutoring service staffed by student volunteers, you'll need to provide evidence to support your thesis, or main argument.

You'll need to come up with a few major points in support of your thesis that can serve as topic sentences in the body paragraphs of your essay. You might identify two major argumentative points that you want to make in your paper: *Students are often able to relate to and understand their*

peers' explanations of academic concepts and The student tutors themselves benefit from increased understanding by explaining concepts to other students.

Consider what evidence you might offer for the first major point. You might offer some researched statistics regarding the benefits of learning from a peer in a one-on-one setting. You might offer a brief story from your own experience relating how you were tutored by a friend in high school and how you were able to understand the concepts in a new and better way.

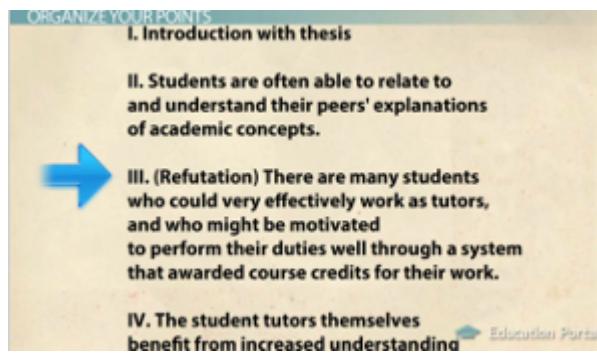
The key is that you can't simply make an assertion that something is true. You wouldn't simply state that students understand their peers' explanations and offer that as support for your thesis without providing evidence to back up your claim. Always imagine that your reader is skeptical. You'll need to fully prove your point with evidence in order to receive a good score on your essay.

Refute Opposing Views

In addition to offering evidence to support your own position, you'll need to anticipate and refute potential opposing views. To **refute** an idea is to prove that idea false. Why is it important to refute opposing views in your essays? You might have enough strong points in the case you're already building without discussing what skeptical readers who oppose your arguments might say.

But if you don't address potential opposing views, you've left your argument open to very easy criticism without defending your ideas. So you'll need to conduct research - or, if you're working on a timed essay exam, do some brainstorming - to come up with what the opposing side's strongest arguments would be.

For our example essay about student tutoring, an opposing view might be that the school should offer a tutoring center staffed by professional tutors and teachers rather than students, so that the people who come to the center seeking help can be assured that they'll be receiving reliable and accurate information.



Outline your major points and how you will address opposing views in the essay.

You might refute this point by countering that the school does not have the funds to hire professional tutors and that your school is home to more than enough students who could very effectively work as tutors and who might be motivated to perform their duties well through a system that awards course credits for their work.

Organize Your Points

So we know that you'll need to identify major argumentative points in support of your thesis, that you'll need to present evidence in support of those points, and that you'll need to refute opposing ideas. Naturally, you'll need to figure out where to put all of that stuff.

As is the case with any paper, it's very useful to sketch out an outline of the major points that you'll make so that you can more effectively structure your paper. Doing this will help you determine the best ways to arrange your points with respect to the opposing views that you'll raise and refute.

Consider what your strongest points are. Do your strengths lie in the major argumentative points that you sketched out in support of your thesis? Is your most effective point one that comes from refuting an opposing view? It's up to you to decide whether to open the body of your essay with what you deem to be your strongest point or to close with your strongest point. Each strategy can be effective in its own way.

Similarly, you might group all of your points that you make refuting opposing views together at the start of the body of your paper or at the end of the body. Or you might decide to structure the paragraphs in your argument so that you address opposing views when they naturally arise.

For example, after you devote a paragraph to your major argumentative point that *Students are often able to relate to and understand their peers' explanations of academic concepts*, you might devote a paragraph to refuting the opposing view that professional tutors would be preferable by underscoring the availability of qualified and effective student tutors. Remember that you'll need to provide evidence in support of your point, perhaps in the form of details about other schools that have student-staffed tutoring services that have proven successful.

Lesson Summary

In a persuasive essay, it's crucial to offer specific details and examples in support of the major points that you argue. In addition to structuring your body paragraphs around your major argument points, you'll also need to anticipate and refute potential opposing views so as not to leave yourself vulnerable to obvious criticisms of your points. You'll be more convincing if you shore up any potential weaknesses in your argument.

As you structure your paragraphs, think about whether you want to begin or end your argument on the strongest note, as well as where your refutations of opposing views might arise naturally in the course of your argument.

Learning Outcomes

After you have viewed the lesson, you should have learned to:

- Recognize the importance of structure in your essay
- Identify the components that make a strong argument

- Organize your argument in an essay