

Argumentative Essay Writing


In an **argumentative essay**, your job is make the reader agree with your opinion about a controversial topic. You have to **(1)** state your opinion, **(2)** give reasons to support your opinion, and **(3)** argue against the opposite opinion. Overall, you must **convince** the audience that your side of the argument is correct. To convince the audience, your essay must be balanced—it must include your viewpoint and the opposing viewpoint, or **counterargument**.

Even though you are arguing only one side of an issue, you must think about what the other side would say about your opinion. After you give the counterargument, you must **refute** it by showing that it is wrong. If your essay is balanced, a reader is more likely to agree with you.



ORGANIZATION

The most common type of argumentative essay has six paragraphs. Like all essays, it begins with an introduction and ends with a conclusion. In between are the body paragraphs where you must do three things: support your opinion, present the opposing point of view, and tell why that viewpoint is wrong.

INTRODUCTION	Paragraph 1	Hook Connecting/Background Information Main idea Statement/Thesis Statement
BODY	Paragraph 2	Support 1 (first reason) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation, detail, example • Explanation, detail, example
	Paragraph 3	Support 2 (second reason) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation, detail, example • Explanation, detail, example
	Paragraph 4	Support 3 (third reason) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation, detail, example • Explanation, detail, example
	Paragraph 5	Opposite Side <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counterargument 1 • Refutation (ATTACK) • Counterargument 2 • Refutation (ATTACK) 
CONCLUSION	Paragraph 6	Repeat your thesis statement in different words Suggestion/Opinion/Prediction for the future

Studying an Argumentative Essay

The following essay argues for the use of school uniforms. Discuss the Preview Questions with the class. Then read the example essay and answer the questions that follow.

Preview Questions

1. Did you wear a uniform when you went to school?
2. Some people believe that children are too materialistic these days. For example, they may be too interested in wearing expensive brand name clothes. What is your opinion?

The School Uniform Question

1 Individualism is a **fundamental** part of society in many countries. Most people believe in the right to express their own opinion without fear of punishment. This value, however, is coming under fire in an unlikely place—the **public school** classroom. The issue is school uniforms. Should public school students be allowed to make individual decisions about clothing, or should all students be required to wear a uniform? School uniforms are the better choice for three reasons.

2 First, wearing school uniforms would help make students' lives simpler. They would no longer have to decide what to wear every morning, sometimes trying on outfit after outfit in an effort to choose. Uniforms would not only save time but also would eliminate the stress often associated with this chore.

3 Second, school uniforms influence students to act responsibly in groups and as individuals. Uniforms give students the message that school is a special place for learning. In addition, uniforms create a feeling of unity among students. For example, when students do something as a group, such as attend meetings in the auditorium or eat lunch in the cafeteria, the fact that they all wear the same uniform gives them a sense of community. Even more important, statistics show the positive effects that school uniforms have on violence and **truancy**. According to a recent survey in a large school district in Florida, incidents of school violence dropped by 50 percent, attendance and test scores improved, and student suspensions declined approximately 30 percent after school uniforms were introduced.

4 Finally, school uniforms would help make all the students feel equal. Students' standards of living differ greatly from family to family, and some people are **well-off** while others are not. People sometimes forget that school is a place to get an education, not to promote a "fashion show." **Implementing** mandatory school uniforms would make all the students look the same regardless of their financial status. School uniforms would promote pride and help to raise the self-esteem of students who cannot afford to wear expensive clothing.

5 Opponents of mandatory uniforms say that students who wear school uniforms cannot express their individuality. This point has some merit on the surface. However, as stated previously, school is a place to learn, not to **flaunt** wealth and fashion. Society must decide if individual expression through clothing is more valuable than improved educational performance. It is important to remember that school uniforms would be worn only during school hours. Students can express their individuality in the way that they dress outside of the classroom.

6 In conclusion, there are many well-documented benefits of implementing mandatory school uniforms for students. Studies show that students learn better and act more responsibly when they wear uniforms. Public schools should require uniforms in order to benefit both the students and society as a whole.

a fundamental:
essential, basic

a public school: a school run by the state government and paid for by taxes

truancy: absence without permission

well-off: wealthy

to implement: to put into effect

to flaunt: to show off, display

Post-Reading

1. The topic of this essay is school uniforms. What is the hook in the first paragraph?

2. What is the thesis statement?

3. Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 each give a reason for requiring school uniforms. These reasons can be found in the topic sentence of each paragraph. What are the reasons?

Paragraph 2: _____

Paragraph 3: _____

Paragraph 4: _____

4. In Paragraph 4, what supporting information does the writer give to show that uniforms make students equal?

5. Which paragraph presents a counterargument—an argument that is contrary to, or the opposite of, the writer’s opinion? _____ What is the counterargument?

6. The writer gives a refutation of the counterargument by showing that it is invalid. What is the writer’s refutation?

7. Write the sentence from the concluding paragraph that restates the thesis.

8. Reread the concluding paragraph. What is the writer’s opinion about this issue?

TOPICS FOR ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

What is a great topic for an argumentative essay? Obviously, it should be an issue that you feel strongly about, know something about, and would like to share your opinion about. What is your opinion, why do you feel this way? Can you think of some reasons why people might disagree with you?

When you choose a topic, consider these two questions:

- **Does the topic have two sides?**
- **How much do you know about the topic?**

Look at the list of argumentative topics below. What is your opinion about each topic? Are there two sides of each topic?

Topics for Argument	
Banning cigarettes	Banning violent video games
Requiring school uniforms	Using animals for medical research
Mandating military service	Requiring a test for people who want children
Lowering the drinking age to 18	Banning cell phones in schools
Getting rid of zoos	Requiring a year of study abroad

ACTIVITY Identifying Topics for Argumentative Essays

Read these eight topics. Put a check mark (✓) next to the ones that could be good topics for argument essays.

- _____ 1. The first time I flew in a plane.
- _____ 2. University education should be free.
- _____ 3. How and why birds fly south for the winter.
- _____ 4. High school teachers need a higher salary.
- _____ 5. Steps needed to get a driver's license.
- _____ 6. Legalizing gay marriage.
- _____ 7. Increasing tax on imported food.
- _____ 8. How to become a karate master.

Can you think of three additional topics that would be excellent for an argumentative essay?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

TOPICS FOR ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

After you choose a topic, think about what you know about it. What do you know about your side of the argument and what do you know about the opposite side of the argument? A good way to organize your ideas is to use a **Pro & Con T-chart**. [Pro = in favor of thesis statement, Con = against thesis statement]

If you cannot think of several ideas for one or both sides, you should do more research about that topic or choose a different topic.

Here is a Pro & Con T-Chart for an essay about cell-phones being allowed in classrooms.

Thesis statement: Cell phones should not be allowed in university classrooms.

PRO	CON
1. Cell phones distract students from learning if they send messages or play games in class.	1. Cell phones can easily be turned off and kept out of sight.
2. Cell phones might ring in class and disturb the teacher.	2. University students are not children and cellphones are important in an emergency.
3. Students could use cell phones to cheat on tests.	3. Cell phones can be useful tools for education such as being used as a dictionary or to make memos.

ACTIVITY Brainstorming Supporting Ideas

Read the thesis statements and complete the Pro & Con T-charts. Write three ideas to support each statement. Then write three ideas against each statement. Finally, choose an original topic and write a thesis statement of your own. Then fill in the pros and cons for your new topic.

1. *Thesis statement:* Adults should be required to pass a test before they can become parents.

PRO	CON
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

2. *Thesis statement:* The drinking age in Japan should be lowered to 18 years old.

PRO	CON
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

3. *ORIGINAL Thesis statement:* _____

PRO	CON
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Original Student Writing: Argument Essay

Brainstorming will help you get started with your argumentative essay. In this section, you will choose a topic for your essay, write your thesis statement, think about several supporting ideas for your opinion, and think about the counterargument.

ACTIVITY Planning your Essay

Follow the steps below to develop ideas for an argument essay.

1. First, choose any other topic and thesis statement that you want to write about. Remember that the topic must have more than one point of view to qualify as an argument.

Essay topic: _____

Thesis statement: _____

2. Now brainstorm ideas about your topic. Fill out the Pro & Con T-Chart with as many ideas as you can.

PRO	CON
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

3. Look at your Pro & Con T-chart again. Choose three reasons from your PRO list that support your thesis most effectively and **circle** them. You now know what your major supporting information will be.
4. Now give attention to opposing points of view. In the box below, choose two counterarguments from your CON list and write a refutation for each.

Counterargument (from CON list)	Refutation (ATTACK - Why is it wrong?)
1.	
2.	

Try to complete the following outline before you begin writing your essay. You may use more support sentences if you need. And try to use complete sentences when it is possible.

1. Introduction (**Paragraph 1**)

A. Hook: _____

B. Connecting Information: _____

C. Thesis Statement: _____

2. Body

A. First Reason (**Paragraph 2**) topic sentence: _____

Support

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. Second Reason (**Paragraph 3**) topic sentence: _____

Support

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

C. Third Reason (**Paragraph 4**) topic sentence: _____

Support

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

D. Counterargument (**Paragraph 5**)

1. Counterargument #1: _____

Refutation (attack): _____

2. Counterargument #2: _____

Refutation (attack): _____

3. Conclusion (**Paragraph 6**)

A. Restated Thesis: _____

B. Opinion/Suggestion/Prediction: _____
