



Academic Writing Guide: How to Write an Argumentative Paper

Argumentative Paper: What it is

An argumentative paper is a reasoned defense of a thesis. You must take a position and provide reasons for the validity of your position. This may include evidence from research.

Argumentative Paper: What it is NOT

An argumentative essay is **NOT** a report of facts, what various scholars have said about a particular topic, or a presentation of the latest findings of experiments. It is also **NOT** a presentation of your personal feelings or opinions.

The Six Steps to Writing a Successful Argumentative Paper:

1. **Break it down:** Determine what the assignment is asking you to do.
2. **Research your topic:** Look for reliable sources to use in your paper.
3. **Take a position and write a thesis statement:** Decide what you will be arguing for/against.
4. **Organize your thoughts into an outline:** Group similar ideas together and keep track of your sources.
5. **Begin writing:** Get your thoughts down on paper.
6. **Proofread your essay:** Review your draft for grammar, spelling, and citation mistakes before submitting it.

Step 1: Break it Down

- Read the assignment instructions carefully.
- Separate the different assignment requirements.
- Write down the questions from the instructions, leaving space in between each for you to add your own notes.
- Ask your instructor for clarification if anything is unclear before starting the next step.

Step 2: Research your Topic

- Make sure you fully understand the research requirements for your assignment. Not all argumentative papers involve research.
 - If you need to do research, make sure that you use reliable academic sources. Wikipedia, for example, is neither a reliable nor an academic source.
 - Sometimes, only peer-reviewed research is allowed. Read the assignment carefully.
- Make sure you understand the ideas, concepts, arguments, and claims that each source is presenting. If you don't, it may not be the most suitable for your paper.
- The librarians at Alexander College can help you search for sources that you can reference in your paper.

Step 3: Take a Position/Write a Thesis Statement

- Before you start writing, you should be able to state in one or two sentences exactly what you want to argue in your essay.
 - If you aren't clear about your position, your audience won't be convinced.
 - For **some** assignments, it is okay to state your position using personal language (e.g., "I argue that..."). However, **most** assignments require the use of objective third-person language. If you aren't sure which to use, ask your instructor.
- A thesis statement should be:
 - **Focused:** It should tell the reader exactly what you are setting out to prove.
 - **Limited in scope:** It should be specific enough to be explained within a single paper.
 - **Arguable:** Readers should be able to disagree with you.
 - **Supportable:** There should be evidence to support your claims.
- Technically, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The important thing is that you can give reasons and support for your argument.
- Remember that if your ideas change, you can revise your thesis later.

Step 4: Organize your Ideas and Research into an Outline

- Don't skip the outlining step!
 - Essay outlines help you organize your ideas into a logical sequence and keep similar ideas together.
 - Group related points into sections. Each major point will become a paragraph for your essay supported by evidence and subpoints.

- Remember to add your sources into your outline while you write. This helps you avoid plagiarism.
 - Make note of points that will need more evidence and research.

Sample Essay Outline

Section 1: Introduction

- *Background information:* Cellphones are banned in Ontario; B.C. tried to ban them but failed (Benchetrit). Some B.C. schools have their own bans (Shen). Cite issues in academics, behavior, and mental health and have seen improvement (Shen).
- *Thesis:* To protect students and promote learning, cellphones must be banned from classrooms in B.C.

Give background information to help readers understand your topic

Use headings to organize your ideas

Your thesis should be the end of your introduction

Section 2: Impacts on Learning

- Distracting ex. notifications, texting, social media
 - U.S. study, 72% teachers agree it's a huge issue (Hatfield)
 - Having a phone on students' desks alone has been found to impact their studies (Rowan qtd. in Katzel)
- Can use to cheat: easy to hide phone and look up answers during quizzes
- Access to misinformation
- Acknowledge counterargument: Some advantages ex. looking up definitions, using as a calculator (**Note to self:** find source for more details)
 - But there are more serious problems than there are benefits, like damage to mental health

Group evidence and subpoints together

Make a note of places where you need to find more information

Section 3: Personal Impacts

- Classrooms should be a supportive space to promote students' learning and wellbeing
- Direct impacts: cyberbullying (Abramson)
- Indirect impacts: damage of social media to self-image and self-esteem (Criddle; Wair)
- Breaks in use help lessen damaging cellphone and social media addictions (Katzenstein)

Section 4: Additional Counterarguments and Rebuttals

- Difficult to implement a ban (Benchetrit)
 - Has been done successfully (Katzel; Shen)
- If laptops are allowed, these problems are not solved
 - Phones are easier to hide than laptops, can be an extra layer of distraction

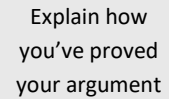
Remember to cite while you write!

- Notifications, social media, and texting are more prevalent on cellphones (**Note to self:** find source)

Section 5: Conclusion

- *Restate thesis:* To foster a safe and supportive learning environment, B.C. needs to follow Ontario's example and ban cellphones from classrooms.
- Reiterate benefits and importance of ban but recognize difficulties

Explain how you've proved your argument



Step 5: Write Your Essay

You have an outline of your essay and a thesis statement. Your next task is to convince your readers that your thesis is valid by presenting evidence and explaining what it means and why it matters.

- Look at your outline. Your thoughts should be organized into **sections**, not paragraphs.
 - Each section, aside from your introduction and conclusion, will likely become more than one paragraph.
- Each paragraph should group together similar ideas to prove one main point that supports your thesis. Start each paragraph with a topic sentence that states your point. Then, prove your point with evidence and analysis.
 - When you begin to discuss a new idea, move on to a new paragraph.
 - Remember to “cite as you write” and keep track of your sources.
 - Your evidence should **support** your analysis. It is not sufficient to only have a list of evidence, as it does not demonstrate how it relates to your thesis statement.
- When you are finished writing, make sure that your topic sentences and conclusion all support your thesis.
 - If they don't, go back and revise your thesis, conclusion, and points.

Step 6: Proofread Your Essay

- Carefully proofread your essay multiple times. Check for grammar, flow, proper citations, etc.
 - Run a grammar check (MS Word) or proofreader (Mac Pages). While they don't catch every issue, they are helpful. **Avoid** AI tools like Grammarly which rewrite your work for you; they count as plagiarism.

Common Mistakes to Avoid in Argumentative Papers

Mistake 1 – Not Enough Support

Don't overestimate the strength of your position. You must convince readers.

- Assume the person reading your essay disagrees with you and is asking "Why should I accept that?" Explain to them with evidence to support your stance.

Mistake 2: Fence Sitting

Do not present many different positions and say you don't know which you agree with.

- While it is good to acknowledge counterarguments, you are expected to make a clear argument in favour of one position.

Mistake 3: Accusations of Falsehood

You cannot say a counterargument is false just because you disagree with it.

- You need to prove to readers why it is false. Your argument should be based on logic and facts, not opinions.

Mistake 4: Everything but the Kitchen Sink

The "everything-but-the-kitchen-sink" approach is when you include every point you can to support your argument.

- This can make it hard to keep track of your ideas.
- Including weak points gives the impression you are unable to tell what makes a strong argument.

It is better to cover less points in depth rather than more points very briefly.

Mistake 5: Circular Reasoning

Circular reasoning involves saying something is true because of its premises.

Example

Drugs are illegal because they are against the law.

In other words: Why are drugs illegal? Because they're against the law. Why are they against the law? Because they're illegal. Being illegal and being against the law mean the same thing, so this does not make sense as a definition.

Example

Drugs are illegal because they are harmful.

This claim is much better because it has a specific argument that it will address.

Mistake 6: Arguing by Citation

Inexperienced writers often rely too heavily on quotations and paraphrases. They argue by citation, allowing their sources to speak for them.

- Remember that your sources are there to support your points and provide evidence, not to make points for you. You must explain **why** and **how** this evidence supports your stance.
- Keep quotations and paraphrases to a minimum. Focus on explaining your ideas.

For additional help, please make an appointment with a WLC Academic Writing Specialist at:



<https://alexander.mywconline.com/>