

DATT ENGL 101

Beginning Rules of Argument Essays

Definition of an Argument: An Argument takes a stand and presents evidence that helps to convince people to accept the writer's position.

Example of a statement that can be argued: It is going to be a very cold winter.

Example of a statement that can't be argued: The sky is blue.

The difference between the two statements is more than whether it's a fact or not. Facts are just very well proven, timelessly re-enforced statements. The sky is blue has been proven and re-proven plenty of times. There is more to it. An argument has to be about something that matters. The color of the sky isn't really all that important. The weather this winter is important because we should make plans for bad weather and prepare. Here is another example.

-Should torture be banned in all situations?

-Should torture be used to elicit information that could prevent and imminent attack?

-What actually constitutes torture? For example, is sleep deprivation torture? What about a slap to the face? Loud music? A cold cell? Is more intense interrogation-such as water-boading-torture?

-Who should have the legal right to approve interrogation techniques?

You do the exact same thing in your argumentative essays.

1. You make a claim (your thesis statement).
2. You give facts, statistics, and other pieces of evidence to support your claim.
3. You try and convince the reader that you are right by being persuasive.

You try to persuade your reader by using three different appeals. You can appeal to the reader using Logic (Logos), by using Emotion (Pathos) and by using Authority (Ethos). Each one is different and effective in different ways.

-You should do your homework because I'm your mother and you love me (Emotional Appeal)

-You should do your homework because I'm your Professor and you need to respect my judgment when it comes to your education (Authoritative Appeal)

-You should do your homework because your grade depends on it and because you paid for this class. Failing a class you paid for because you're lazy is pretty stupid. (Logical Appeal)

When you write an essay, you should think of the essay as a construction. You are building your essay, one step at a time.

- Thesis statement (Claim)
- Evidence
- Rebuttal
- Conclusion.

This looks simple, but there are many different ways to build an argument, just as there are many different ways to build a building. And, just like many buildings, if you don't construct your argument correctly, your argument will completely fall apart and fail.

Here are a few questions that many people have when trying to understand arguments.

What is rhetoric? Rhetoric is the art of persuasive speaking and writing. It is when you use words, phrases, and language designed to be persuasive. When someone says that he or she is using Rhetoric, it means that he or she is trying to be persuasive. Get use to that word.

How do I judge what a successful argument essay is?

Typically there are two types of Arguments: Traditional (You're right and I'm wrong) and Consensual (Let's try and solve this problem together). We'll be tackling the traditional argument first, because it is the one you're most familiar with.

Arguments argue about issues. First, what is an issue?

An issue is a problem that is difficult to solve. Late for class once? That's a problem. Late for class all the time? It is an issue. Broke this week? That's a problem. Broke all the time? That is an issue. Typically, issues cause your life or the life of others to be more difficult than it should be. That is why issues need to be addressed. Usually, however, different people see different ways to solve an issue, and that is why arguments occur.

Under what Conditions does Argument work best?

1. An Issue (A problem that is difficult to address.)
2. An Arguer (That's you.)
3. An Audience (That's the person reading your essay.)
4. Common Ground (The idea that the two sides might work together).

5. A forum (A way to make your argument public, for people to see and read)
6. Audience outcomes (A result. What's the point of persuading if there isn't an option or a chance for your audience to be persuaded?)

For example, when the President gives a speech using those steps:

1. The issue is the future of America.
2. The arguer is President Obama.
3. The audience is the United States people.
4. Common Ground is that we all love this country and we all want to succeed.
5. The forum is a speech to the joint session of congress and the internet and print, television, tons of ways to get this argument across.
6. Is there a chance for an outcome? Yes, but it is hard to know what that outcome will be, especially this soon after the speech.

What conditions do Arguments fail?

1. No disagreement or reason to argue.
2. Risky (too big) or trivial (too small) issue.
3. Hard to find common ground. The arguer and the audience have nothing, or little, in common. A house wife from Hollywood talking about how she needs a cheaper way to do her hair to a group of Haiti earthquake victims.
4. Negative outcomes. A negative outcome is when the audience refuses to work together or the arguer can't persuade strongly enough, resulting in a stand still.

What is an Current Issues and Enduring Issues. How can you tell the difference?

Enduring issues are issues that have been around for generations and are extremely difficult to resolve. These enduring issues generate current issues. Here's an example.

Current Issues: Should everyone pay taxes? In what proportion to their income? Should free trade be limited? How much business profit can be sacrificed to keep the environment clean and safe? Should scholarships and fellowships be taxed? How can we reduce our dependence on foreign oil? How should we finance health care? Is the national debt too high, and if so, what should be done about it?

The Enduring issue behind the Current issue: From what sources should a government obtain money, and how should it spend it?

Wrapping it up.

The key point of all this is that, in order to argue, you need an issue. You have to argue about something you care about. If you don't care about the issue you're writing about, you will not write a very good argument. How do you pick an issue? You think about it. What do you care about? What bothers you? What do you think would make this world a better place? Thinking about an issue and deciding what is important to you is the first step to writing a good argument essay.