

Guide to Writing an Argumentative Essay

There are a variety of reasons to write an argumentative essay. This style of essay can be used to argue a position on a topic, explain a particular side of an argument, or advocate a new initiative. This handout is intended to offer guidance on how to organize an argumentative paper and where to place elements such as the thesis statement and the counterargument. In all cases, students should always follow the guidelines provided by the instructor.

An argumentative essay includes at least six paragraphs that each cover a sub-topic. An explanation of the paragraphs that need to be included, followed by a graphic feature to assist in understanding the organization, is included below.

Step 1: Introduction

The introduction sets the stage for the rest of the essay. This is the first paragraph of the essay and should provide a basic introduction to the topic with essential background information. The introduction should include enough information so that the reader can have a basic understanding of the topic and arguments being discussed. Next, the writer should explain the different viewpoints on the topic. The introduction should conclude with the thesis statement, which states the position being argued and provides reasons to support the argument. In an argumentative essay, the thesis statement is commonly placed either at the end of the introductory paragraph or at the end of the paragraph containing the counterargument.

Step 2: Counterargument

Within this paragraph, the writer should explain opposing viewpoints and alternate proposals. This is the only paragraph where these topics should be discussed because the rest of the paper should be devoted to supporting the writer's viewpoint. Remember to be fair and present all evidence of each viewpoint in a non-biased way. It is also important to acknowledge all aspects of the opposing viewpoint before refuting it. Providing support and fairly refuting the opposing viewpoint increases the writer's credibility with the reader. The placement of this paragraph can vary, so always check the instructor's guidelines.

Step 3: Support/Evidence

This paragraph is the appropriate place to present the evidence to support the argument stated in the thesis. A good argument uses a combination of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* to support its main points.

- Logos: uses logic to appeal to the audience's sense of reason
- Ethos: uses expert or authoritative evidence to build audience trust
- Pathos: uses emotion to make the audience feel something about the argument

The support for the argument can be in the form of statistical evidence (*logos*), scholarly or expert opinion (*ethos*), or anecdotal evidence (*pathos*), which presents a story that ties into the topic. This paragraph should not feel threatening or aggressive to the reader. Simply present the position and allow the supporting evidence to convince the reader. Without backing the stated position with a credible authority, there is no strength to the argument.

Step 4: Support/Evidence

This paragraph will follow similar steps to those mentioned in the previous paragraph; however, it will include a new argument or piece of documentation. While the same point is still argued, this paragraph should present an alternate perspective as to why the writer's position should be considered. This paragraph should include additional evidence that will persuade the reader of the advantages of the advocated position. *Logos*, *ethos*, or *pathos* can again be used to support the argument.

Step 5: Support/Evidence

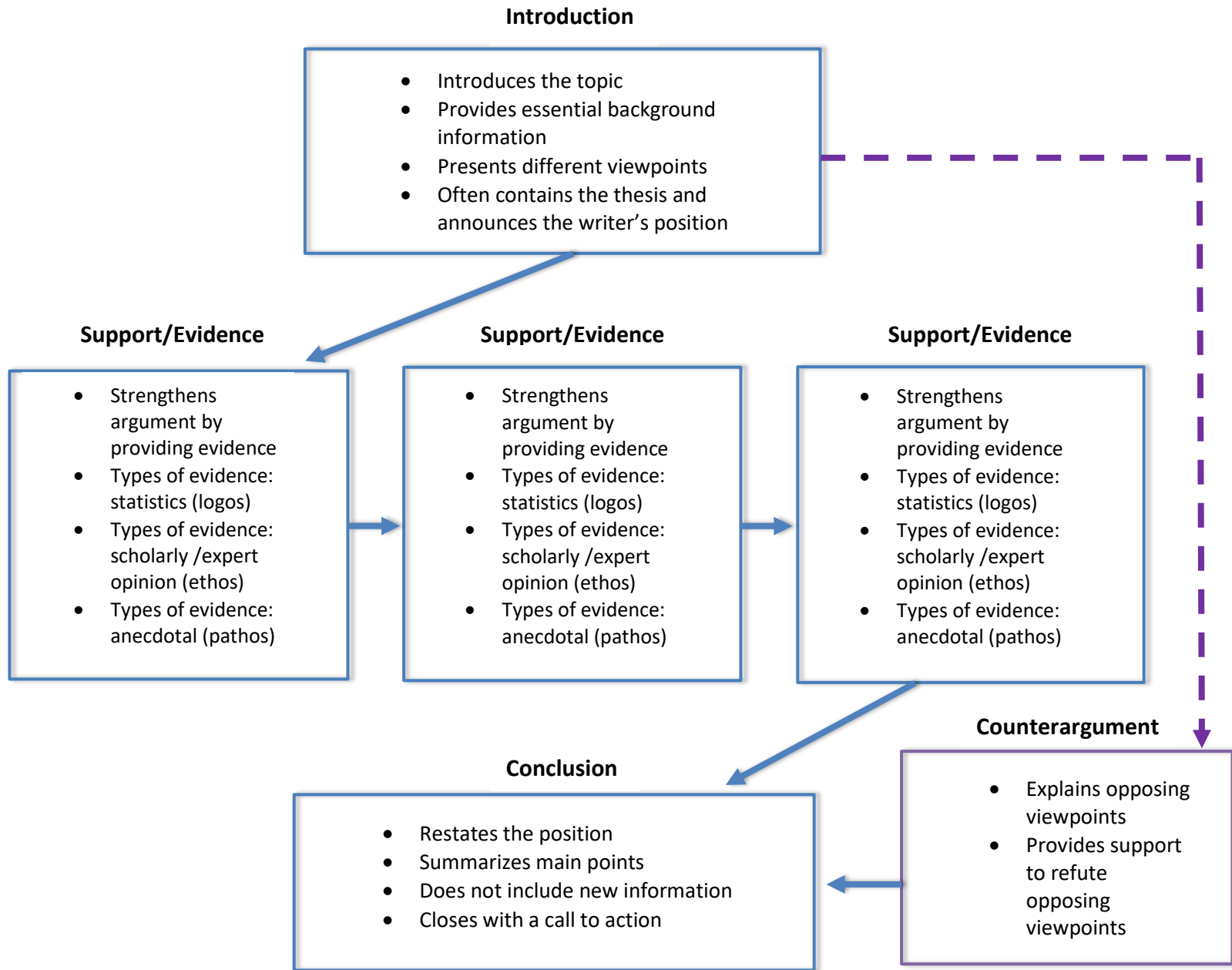
This paragraph should include a third reason to support the writer's argument. A good argumentative essay includes multiple opportunities to persuade the reader of the writer's position. Credible, authoritative evidence should again be used to advocate the argument.

Step 6: Conclusion

This paragraph provides a summary of the essay. It reiterates the points being argued and solidifies the stance taken. It is important not to include any new information within this paragraph; instead, the writer should briefly revisit the main points. An effective conclusion ends on a strong note with a call to action. The final sentence should be the "big finish" that leaves the reader with a significant lasting impression.

A graphic organizer and a fillable template are provided on the next two pages to help students visualize the argumentative essay organization.

Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer



Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer

