

## Writing an Argumentative Essay

To some extent all of the writing that you do presents some type of argument. However, thesis-driven essays, which the majority of college essays are, have very specific guidelines for presenting arguments. All of the writing that we will be doing for the rest of the semester will be thesis-driven and will involve the presentation of some type of argument.

The goal of any argument, argumentative essay, or thesis-driven essay is to convince the reader that you are correct. This requires a strong initial claim supported by well-reasoned evidence that is hard to argue against.

*\*\*Additional resources in online text*

Adapted from *What Is Writing?: An Introduction to Writing as an Act and Medium of Communication* (2015).



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## Logical Argumentation

When writing an Argumentative Essay, you want to be sure that you are using sound logic to make your points. It often helps to think of your essay argument as a conversation with another person. For example:

*Writer: “The United States needs to implement stricter gun control laws.”*

*Responder: “I disagree. The gun control laws in the US are fine.”*

*Writer: “No, the US needs to implement stricter gun control laws because people die from gun violence in the US at an unusually high rate, other similarly developed countries have much stricter laws (and fewer deaths), and there is no need for citizens to have access to assault weapons.”*

*Responder: “I am still not so sure. The second amendment says...”*

*Writer: “Let me explain each reason. First, the number of people in the US that die as a result of gun violence each year...”*

This dialogue helps do three things:

- (1) determine if you have an arguable thesis (as opposed to a statement of fact);  
. the first thing the writer says is the argument of the essay
- (2) decide on main points that will support the argument (and convince the responder);  
. the second thing the writer says contains the main points of the essay
- (3) raises possible objections or holes in the argument (that can weaken the essay).  
. the second thing the responder says is a common objection and can help develop stronger points in opposition (or can help with a counter argument)

Obviously, this is a simplified form of the argument, but it is a good tool to get started.



## Errors in Logic

There are three common errors often made when constructing arguments. Avoiding them will result in a much stronger argument.

### Error #1: Generalization

A generalization is when you take something that applies to one person or thing and globalize it by saying it applies to all people or things similar to that one person or thing.

*Example:* All women want to be mothers.

*Issue:* We know that not all women want to be mothers. There is plenty of research and anecdotal evidence to prove this. Some women, or possibly many women, want to be mothers, but that is not the same thing as saying that it is something all women want.

*Solution:* Be specific and stick to claims that can be checked and backed up by sources.

### Error #2: Appeals to Emotion

An appeal to emotion usually occurs when there is not enough evidence to back up what you think is correct, so instead you just use that reasoning that it “feels” a particular way (wrong, immoral, right, etc.)

*Example:* People shouldn’t cheat on their partners because it is wrong.

*Issue:* What does wrong mean here? According to who is it wrong? What may be wrong to one person may be completely acceptable to another. There are many studies that show how cheating hurts relationships and the people in them, which can be used to prove the point not that cheating is just wrong, but that it is wrong because it is harmful.

*Solution:* Figure out the underlying cause of this emotion. Just because it is emotion doesn’t mean it is incorrect, it just means that you need to find a different way to justify the claim. Find sources that prove your point without relying on emotion.

### Error #3: Correlation vs. Causation

Errors in cause and effect usually appear when two things happen at the same time, but one is not causing the other. It is easy to assume that one is causing the other, but many times that is not the case.

*Example:* You will get sick if you go outside in cold weather with wet hair.

*Issue:* The only way to catch a cold is by being exposed to the germs that cause it. Having wet hair does not make you more likely to come into contact with those germs. However, more people do catch colds in the winter, so whether or not you go out with wet hair, you are more likely to catch a cold in the winter. One does not cause the other, but more people get colds in the winter, and more people go out in cold weather with wet hair in the winter (because that is when it's cold out!). These two things *correlate*.

*Solution:* Be sure to check if things are actually causing one another, or if they are just happening together (correlating).



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