

How to Write an Argumentative Essay

An argumentative essay uses reasoning and evidence—not emotion—to take a definitive stand on a controversial or debatable issue. The essay explores two sides of a topic and proves why one side or position is the best.

The First Steps

Choose a specific issue to discuss. Some debatable issues cover a wide range of topics.

For example, “legalizing drugs” is too broad a subject because topics within that issue include legalizing marijuana, the effectiveness of the FDA, or whether a painkiller made in Europe should be allowed into the US. Any of these could be the sole focus of an argumentative paper.

Develop a working thesis. State your position on the issue and summarize your argument’s main reasons in one sentence. Your body paragraphs should explain your reasons fully.

Body Paragraphs

Option #1: Present both sides of the issue, then state your opinion and explain why you chose that side.

- One half to two-thirds of your paper explains the issue, shows the two opposing sides, and gives an assessment of each.
- Next, when you state your position, readers might be more inclined to agree with you.
- Last, explain your reasons for choosing that side without repeating ideas from previous paragraphs.

Option #2: State your opinion at the beginning. List and explain the reasons for your choice.

Acknowledge the other side’s arguments; then, disprove/refute those arguments.

- Select the strongest evidence and present your points—usually one point per body paragraph.
- Next, explain one or two of the opposing side’s points to show how readers might object to your argument. Then, show how these arguments are not reasonable, not logical, or not effective. Be sure to reassert your own viewpoint and why it is the best choice.

Final Steps: Revise and Edit

- Pretend that your readers are a skeptical panel or jurors. You can best convince them of your arguments by avoiding emotional or aggressive language and by using a mix of evidence types—facts, statistics, examples, expert opinions, or even personal experience.
- In your conclusion, emphasize why your topic is important, summarize your arguments, and re-state your position as the most sensible choice. Do not include new evidence or arguments.
- Use transition signals, e.g. to begin with, secondly, however, thus, hence, furthermore, moreover, what is more, to conclude, all in all, all things considered etc.

A DETAILED STUDY – Essay

Essay: Marriage is a tradition that is unnecessary in modern society.

- 1 Read the sample answer below and decide whether the writer is:
 - a suggesting that marriage is unnecessary
 - b suggesting that marriage is still a good idea
 - c providing a balanced argument for and against marriage.

Over the last few decades there has been a considerable change in many people's attitudes towards the institution of marriage. It used to be the case that people had to get married in order to live together and raise a family but now more and more people are choosing to remain as 'partners'. The question is whether or not marriage still has a role to play in society today.

Central to this issue is the idea that marriage is an expression of commitment. Advocates of marriage believe that a wedding ceremony symbolizes the couple's serious intention to remain together no matter what difficulties they may face. However, the high rate of divorce does not support this theory. It could be argued that 'unmarried partners' also frequently break up, but this does nothing to support the theory that marriage is better.

There is also the subject of children to consider. There was a time when the children of unmarried parents were stigmatized but now a family is judged more on how they interact with one another; in other words, whether the parents spend enough time with their children and encourage them to think positively about themselves. The point is that a good home environment can be created by both married and unmarried parents, and it is their love and guidance that counts.

To conclude, for those people who are not religious, there seems to be no genuinely good reason to undergo a formal ceremony. Couples should be able to devote themselves to one another without the aid of a ring or formal document.

TIPS

- 1 Start your essay with some background information on the topic.
- 2 Rephrase the statement/essay title rather than just repeating it.
- 3 Separate your main points into different paragraphs (eg para 2 = the subject of commitment, para 3 = the subject of children).
- 4 Do not just write one or two sentences for each main point. Try to extend your ideas.
- 5 Make your final opinion clear without repeating the information from the paragraphs above.

2 Range

Which underlined form in the first paragraph shows:

- a a past situation/state that is no longer true.
- b a trend that started recently and will probably continue into future.
- c a situation/state that started in the past and is still true.

3 Which phrase or word in bold:

- a means 'the most important thing about this subject'.
- b could be rephrased as 'some people might say'.
- c is used to show the writer's final opinion or decision.
- d is used to introduce a new point.
- e is followed by an explanation or rephrasing of what the previous sentence means.
- f means 'it was true in the past'.
- g is a synonym for 'supporters'.
- h could be rephrased as 'we need to ask if'.
- i is used to summarize one particular argument or the information in a particular paragraph.