

Argument Essay

In an argument essay, just like in an oral argument, you must win the person over to your way of thinking. The difference between an oral argument and a written argument is that you must appeal to the other person's reason by being logical and by providing evidence.

First, assume that the reader does not agree with you. If the reader did agree, then you would not have to write an argument. When arguing your point, remember not to insult the reader in any way because he or she may have different opinion than yours. Insulting your reader with a statement such as "People who believe that handguns should not be banned are all killers," will weaken your argument. Always be respectful and logical.

Just arguing your own reasons is not sufficient to convince the reader. In order to really convince the reader you must understand your opponents' position and the reasons they would give to support their opinion. It is therefore essential to know both sides of the argument in order to be convincing.

Using Specific Evidence

Nothing will support your opinion better than pertinent facts and statistics. To find the evidence, go to the library where you will find facts, numbers, and data. These will give a definite view to your opinion that cannot be contested.

- Look at the following examples of strong and weak support.

Lack of support: Many American workers suffer from repetitive injuries annually.

Good support: According to a 1992 OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) report, more than five million workers suffer from repetitive injuries annually.

Lack of support: Children spend more hours watching television than any other activity except sleeping.

Good support: According to A.C. Nielsen, in the average household, television-watching among children ages 2 to 12 occupies more of their time than any activity except sleeping—including hours spent attending school. Studies show the average child in that age bracket watched twenty-eight hours of television a week.

Use authority to support your argument.

The authority you use must be recognized, reliable, and expert. In the above example, the authority for the injuries was OSHA, and the authority for television was A.C. Nielsen, a famous rating company. When using an authority, you should identify it by name, and enclose the exact words of the authority in quotation marks.

Exercise 2

Which of these sentences do not have a reliable authority?

1. Research indicates that most Americans spend their leisure time at home watching television, listening to music, and talking on the phone.
2. According to the United Media Enterprises Report on Leisure in America, eight out of ten of the most popular leisure activities were home-based, including watching television, reading the newspaper, listening to music, and talking on the phone.

3. Americans spend almost as much time listening to the radio as they do watching television according to a report.
4. Americans spend almost as much time listening to the radio as they do watching television, according to the Radio Advertiser's Bureau figures for 1985.

Organizing Your Argument

The Introduction

Introduce the topic by giving background information. It is important that the reader understand the issue to be argued. Define any terms that are unclear. If you were going to argue against virtual reality, you would first have to define virtual reality very clearly before taking your stand.

The Thesis Statement in an argument essay is different from those in other types of essays. In the argument essay thesis, you have to be persuasive and take a stand or choose a side on an issue.

Body Paragraphs

The body paragraphs give reasons for your opinion and support them with evidence or facts. Each body paragraph relates back to a point of the argument stated in your thesis. The body paragraphs should be ordered so that the strongest reason is the last.

Counterargument and Refutation

A characteristic of the argument essay is that you must recognize the opposing view and prove it wrong, or refute it. This means that you start with one of your opponent's viewpoints and prove that it is wrong by your superior reasons. Generally, the refutation occurs in the last body paragraph.

Read the following argument about spending on the space program, and then read the sample refutation.

Argument

It's about time our government stopped wasteful spending on trips to outer space and started concentrating on our needs here on earth. While billions of dollars are being spent launching telescopes that don't work, space probes that don't reach their destinations, and manned flights that circle around the planet a few times, millions of people are dying from illness and starvation, are hopeless refugees living under horrible conditions in camps, or are innocent victims of ethnic slaughter and civil war. We need to spend money on education and medical research, on rebuilding and replenishing, and on finding a lasting solution to peace here on planet Earth.

Refutation

While it is true that the space program is costly, it is well worth the money spent. Yes, we have important needs here on Earth, but the space program also contributes to those needs. Satellites allow ships and planes to travel safely. Communication satellites bring information, and therefore education, to the farthest reaches of the planet. It's true

that the Hubble telescope didn't perform up to design, but it has nevertheless provided scientists with invaluable information about our stars and planets. One space probe didn't reach its destination but others are on their way, performing gallantly as messengers from space. Furthermore, important medical and scientific experiments are performed on board manned flights. Finally, we cannot deny the human need for exploration that will one day see us populating Mars and other planets, and allow us to see life, and the need for peace, in a new perspective.

Exercise 3

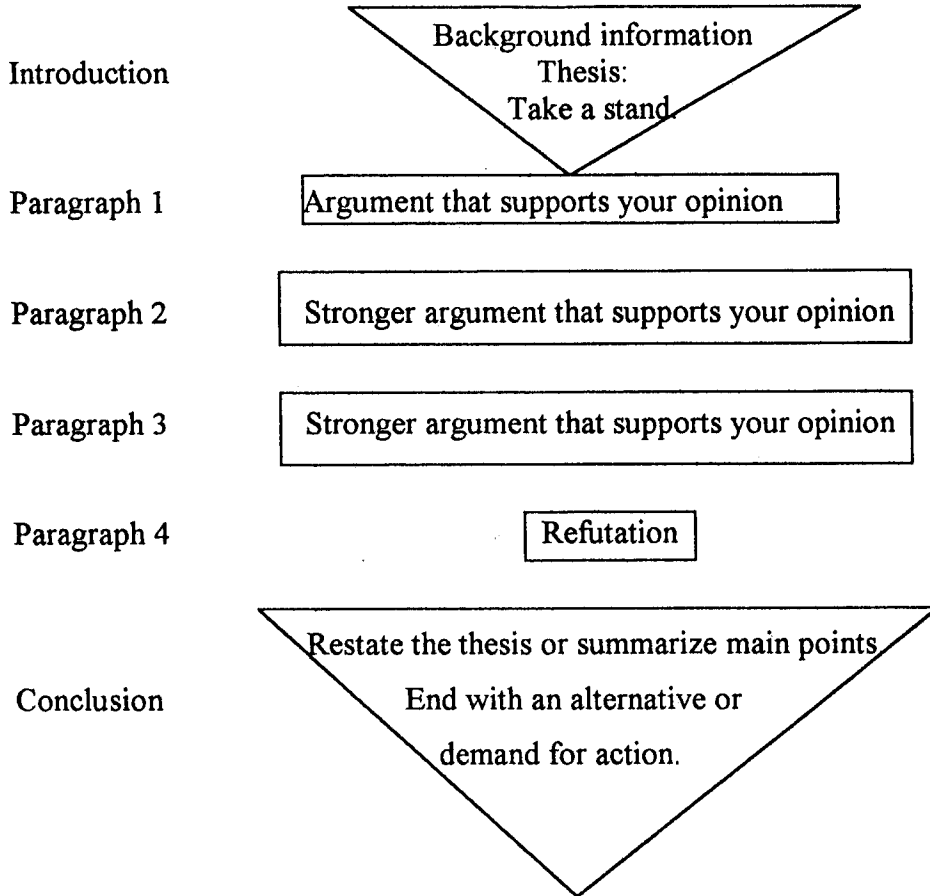
Read the following argument about the place of computers in education. Then write your own refutation.

It's time for computers to take over the classroom and introduce a new age in education. The classroom, the instructor, and the current formal system of education should be eliminated because computers have the ability to provide tailored, individual instruction. With computerized education, children could all learn at their own pace. Advancement to high school and college could be based solely on the achievement of certain levels of knowledge and skills based on competency tests, administered by computers of course. Smart ten-year-olds could work on advanced degrees while their less-gifted peers learn at their own pace. Multimedia programs would make learning fun and concepts easier to understand. No more lectures or overcrowded classrooms. The computer is the school of the future.

The Conclusion

Summarize the main point of your argument or restate the thesis. End your conclusion with a stronger statement such as a demand for action or an alternative solution.

The following is a brief outline for an argument essay:



Logic in writing is very important. People often say things they don't intend. The following are lines taken from actual letters received by the Welfare Department.

I am forwarding my marriage certificate and six children.

I am writing the Department to say my baby was born 2 years old.

Mrs. Jones has not had any clothes for a year and is visited regularly by the clergy.

I am glad to report that my husband who is missing is dead.

This is my eighth child. What are you going to do about it?

Please find out for certain if my husband is dead. The man I am living with now can't eat or do anything until he knows.

I am very much annoyed that you have branded my son illiterate. This is a dirty lie as I was married a week before he was born.

In answer to your letter, I have given birth to a 10 pound boy. I hope this is satisfactory.

My husband had his project cut off two weeks ago and I haven't had any relief since.

You have changed my little boy to a girl. Will it make any difference?

In accordance with your instructions, I have given birth to twins in the enclosed envelope.

I can't get sick pay. I have six children. Can you tell me why?

I am forwarding my marriage certificate and my three children, one of which is a mistake which you can see.

I want money as quick as I can get it. I have been in bed with the doctor for two weeks and he doesn't do me any good. If things don't improve, I will have to send for another doctor.

FORMAT: WORKS CITED

Here is a graphic representation of the MLA style specifications for your bibliography—entitled “Works Cited” in your research paper.

Consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Gibaldi and Achtert) for more specific details.

Like EVERYTHING in your essay, your bibliography should be typed in upper and lower case (NOT ALL CAPS) and DOUBLE SPACED. Everything: the words “Works Cited” and all entries.

The words “Works Cited” should appear on the first page of your bibliography, centered 1 inch from the top of the page. On all other bibliography pages, begin typing entries here.

Use the same HEADER that appears on all of the other pages of your essay, numbering continuously.

DO NOT SKIP LINES after “Works Cited” or between entries.

EVERYTHING except “Works Cited” should be ALIGNED FLUSH LEFT, ragged right.

Within each entry, EVERY LINE EXCEPT THE FIRST should be INDENTED 5 SPACES.

An article

A recording

Multiple entries by one author

A book

A reference book

An original Web site

A Web reprint of an article (features original print data)

Use 1-INCH MARGINS around all 4 sides of your text—top, bottom, and sides. (Place the header in the upper right corner 1/2 inch from the top of the page.)

ANATOMY OF A WORKS CITED ENTRY

The author’s name, last name first. Alphabetize entries according to the first author’s last name. In citing a work by two or more authors, list them in the order printed in the source, listing all authors after the first in normal name order—that is, first name first.

The title of the book in which the article was printed—underlined. Treat the titles of periodical publications in the same fashion.

The city of publication. Give only the first if more than one are listed in the source.

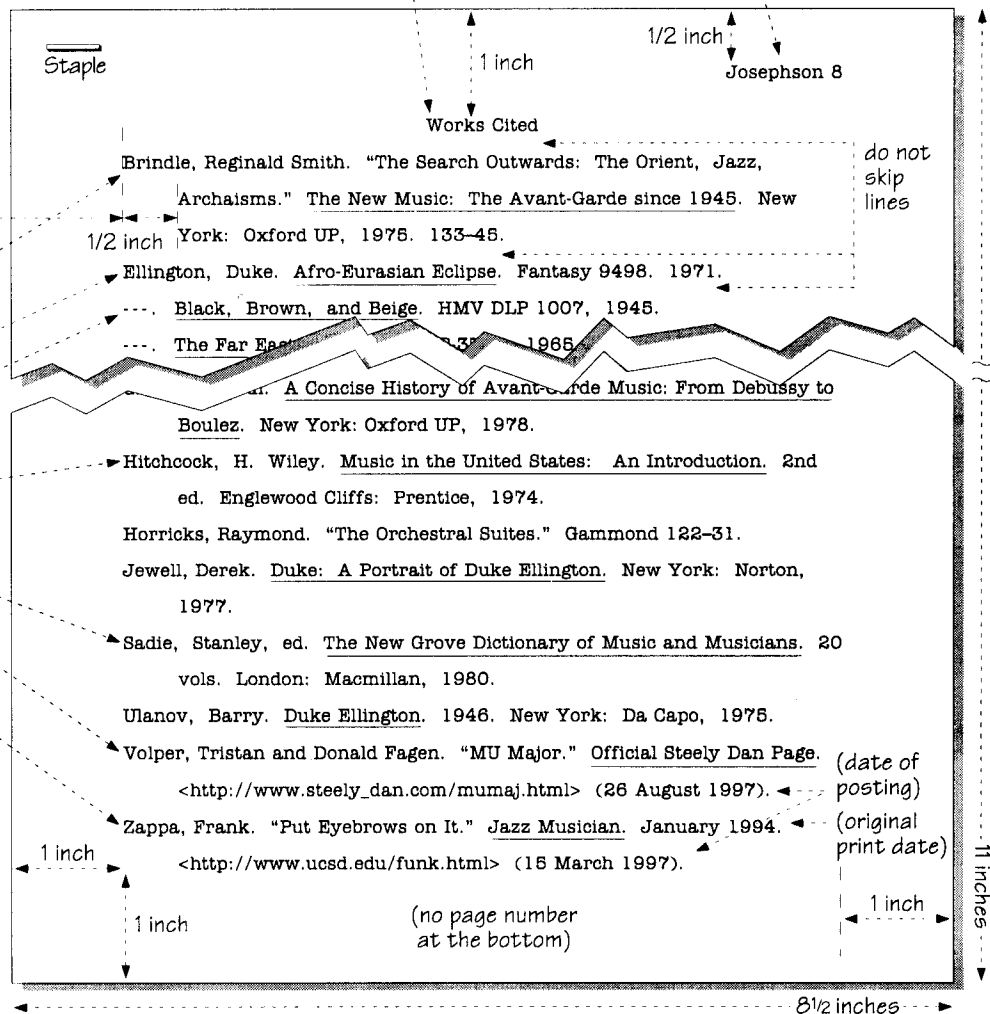
The publisher.

The year of publication—list month, quarter, etc. for periodicals.

The title of the article or book chapter—in quotation marks.

Page numbers (inclusive) of the article. This does not refer to the pages you use, but to the entire article.

★ how to cite a type of source not shown here, consult the MLA handbook or <<http://webster.commnet.edu/mla.htm>>



Introduction to Research Techniques and Documentation

A research paper:

- ✓ Presents the results of your investigations on a selected topic.
- ✓ It is a creation that is uniquely yours because it has your own thoughts based on facts and ideas that you have gathered from a variety of sources.
- ✓ The information you gathered from outside sources is documented in appropriate MLA format.

Documentation of Sources

You must tell the reader the sources (books, article, and so on) of borrowed material in your paper. Whether you quote directly or summarize ideas in your own words, you must acknowledge your sources.

1. Citation at the End of a Paper

- ✓ Your paper should end with a list of "Works Cited" which includes all the sources actually used in the paper.
- ✓ The list is organized alphabetically according to the authors' last names. (If no author is given, the entry is alphabetized by title.) Entries are not numbered.
- ✓ Entries are double-spaced, with no extra space between entries.
- ✓ After the first line of each entry, there is a half-inch indentation for each additional line in the entry.

2. Model Entries for a List of "Works Cited"

Model entries of "Works Cited" are given below. Use these as a guide when you prepare your own list.

Book by one Author

Nuland, Sherwin B. *How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter*.
New York: Vintage, 1995.

Note that the author's name is reversed.

In addition, when citing any book, always provide the full title, which you should copy from the inside title page. Including any subtitle by placing a colon after the main title and then copying the subtitle, word for word.

Two or More Entries by the Same Author

---. *The Mysteries Within: A Surgeon Reflects on Medical Myths*. New
York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

If you cite two or more entries by the same author (in example above, a second book by Sherwin B. Nuland is cited), do not repeat the author's name. Instead, begin with a line made up of three hyphens followed by a period. Then give the remaining information as usual. Arrange the works by the same author alphabetically by title. The words *A*, *An*, and *The* are ignored in alphabetizing by title.

Book by Two or More Authors

Baxandall, Rosalyn, and Elizabeth Ewen. Picture Window: How the Suburbs Happened. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

For a book with two or three authors, give all the authors' names but reverse only the first name. For a book with more than three authors, cite only the first authors' names, followed by a comma and the phrase *et al.*

Magazine Article

Chin, Paula. "You Were a Good Man, Charlie Brown." People 28 Feb. 2000: 52-59.

Write the date of the issue as follows: days, month (abbreviated in most cases to three or four letters), and year, followed by a colon. The final number or numbers refer to the pages of the issue on which the article appears.

Newspaper Article

Zoroya, Gregg "A Hunger for Heroes." USA Today 28 Feb. 2000: D1-2.

The final letter and number refer to pages 1 and 2 of section D.

If the article is not printed on consecutive pages, simply list the first page, followed by a plus sign "+" (in that case, the above example would read "D1+"). In addition, when citing newspaper titles, omit the introductory *The* (for example, *Boston Globe*, not *The Boston Globe*).

Editorial

"Drugs and Preschoolers." Editorial. Philadelphia Inquirer 28 Feb. 2000: A10.

List an editorial as you would any signed or unsigned article, but indicate the nature of the piece by adding *Editorial* or *Letter* after the article's title.

Selection in an Edited Collection

Feist, Raymond E. "The Wood Boy" Legends: Short Novels by the Masters of Modern Fantasy. Ed. Robert Silverberg. New York: Tor Books, 1998. 176-211.

Revised or Later Edition

Davis, Mark H. Social Psychology. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000.

Note: The abbreviation Rev. ed., 2nd ed., 3rd ed., and so on. Are placed right after the title.

Chapter or Section in a Book by One Author

Secunda, Victoria. "A New Sense of Family." Losing Your Parents, Finding Yourself: The Defining Turning Point of Adult Life. New York: Hyperion, 2000. 242-59.

Pamphlet

Hear and Stroke Facts. New York: American Heart Association, 2000.

Television Program

"Not As Private As You Think." 60 Minutes. Narr. Lesley Stahl. Prod. Rome Hartman. CBS. 13 Aug. 2000.

Film

Music of the Heart. Dir. Wes Craven. Miramax, 1999.

Sound Recording

Chapman, Tracy. "Speak the Word." Telling Stories. Elektra Entertainment, 2000.

Videocassette

"To the Moon." Nova. Narr. Liv Schrieber. Videocassette. PBS Video, 1999.

Personal Interview

Anderson, Robert B. Personal interview. 17 Sept. 2000.

Online Source in a Reference Database

"Heredity." Britannica Online. Sept. 1999. Encyclopedia Britannica. 2 Mar. 2000 <<http://www.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/4/0,5716,120934,00.html#Article>>.

The first date refers to the online publication date; the second refers to the exact day when the student researcher accessed the information and should not be followed by a period.

Online Article

Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Will Women Still Need Men?" Time Online 21 Feb. 2000. 15 Apr. 2000 <http://www.time.com/time/reports/v21/live/men_mag.html>

ACTIVITY

On a separate sheet of paper, modify the information in each of the following references into the correct form for a list of "Works Cited." Use the appropriate model above as a guide.

1. An article by Alex Yannis titled "In New League, Women Get Payoff and Payday" on page D5 of the April 13, 2001 issue of the *New York Times*.
2. An article by Nancy Franklin titled "Nonsense and Sensibility: on pages 96-97 of the March 6, 2000 issue of the *New Yorker*.
3. A book by Ellen N. Junn and Chris Boyatzis titles *Child Growth and Development* and published in a seventh edition by McGraw-Hill in New York in 2000.
4. A book by Francis McInerney and Sean White called *Futurewealth: Investing in the Second Great Wave of Technology* and published in New York by St. Martin's in 2000.
5. An article by Melinda Liu and Leila Abboud titled "Generation Superpower" dated April 11, 2001 and found on April 12, 2001 at <http://www.msnbc.com/news/557986.asp> in the online version of *Newsweek*.