

Introduction to the Argumentative Essay

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Some Basics

What does the argumentative essay require?

1. Understand the position of the prompt
2. Take a stand: argue, qualify, or disagree
3. Clearly and logically support your claim

Agree, Disagree, Qualify?

- **Agree** – do I think about this subject in the same way as the writer?
- **Disagree** – do I think the writer is totally wrong?
- **Qualify** – do I think some of what is said is correct some incorrect?

Syllogism

- Deduction uses the syllogism
- Syllogism is the format of a formal argument
- Major premise: All A are C.
 - All lions are cats.
- Minor premise: B is A.
 - Leonard is a lion.
- Conclusion: Therefore, B is C.
 - Leonard is a cat.

Logical Fallacies

1. Non sequitur argument
2. Begging the question
3. Circular reasoning
4. Straw-man argument
5. Ad hominem argument
6. Hasty generalization
7. Overgeneralization
8. Post hoc argument
9. Either/or argument

Non sequitur argument

- Latin for “does not follow”
- Argument with a conclusion that does not follow from the premise.
- Ex: Diane graduated from Vassar. She’ll make a great lawyer.

Begging the question

- A mistake the writer assumes in his or her premise/thesis of something that really remains to be proved.
- Ex: Taking geometry is a waste of time. High school students should not be required to take this course.

Form of Begging the Question

- The premises include the claim that the conclusion is true or (directly or indirectly) assume that the conclusion is true.
- Premises in which the truth of the conclusion is claimed or the truth of the conclusion is assumed (either directly or indirectly)
- Claim C (the conclusion) is true. This sort of "reasoning" is fallacious because simply assuming that the conclusion is true (directly or indirectly) in the premises does not constitute evidence for that conclusion.

Form of Begging the Question

- Obviously, simply assuming a claim is true does not serve as evidence for that claim.
- This is especially clear in particularly blatant cases: "X is true. The evidence for this claim is that X is true."
- Some cases of question begging are fairly blatant, while others can be extremely subtle.

Examples of Begging the Q

- Bill: "God must exist."
Jill: "How do you know."
Bill: "Because the Bible says so."
Jill: "Why should I believe the Bible?"
Bill: "Because the Bible was written by God."
- "If such actions were not illegal, then they would not be prohibited by the law."
- "The belief in God is universal. After all, everyone believes in God."

Circular reasoning

- Restates the premise rather than giving a reason for holding that premise.
- Ex: I like to eat out because I enjoy different foods and restaurants.

Straw-man argument

- Often used by politicians
- Writer attributes false or exaggerated characteristics or behaviors to the opponent and attacks him on those falsehoods or exaggerations.
- Ex: You say you support allowing people under 18 to drive alone. I'll never be able to understand why weak-willed drivers like you are willing to risk your life and the lives of all other drivers with these crazy teenagers on the road.

Ad hominem argument

- “argue against the man”
- Attacks the person rather than dealing with the issue.
- Ex: We all know Sam has several speeding tickets on his record. How can we trust him to vote for us on the issue of a trade agreement with Europe?

Hasty generalization

- Draws conclusion about an entire group based on evidence too scant or insufficient.
- Ex: The veterinarian discovered a viral infection in five beagles. All beagles must be infected with it.

Overgeneralization

- Stereotyping
- All, never, always, every
- Use these words instead: some, seem, often, perhaps, frequently, etc.
- Ex. All members of group A are not to be trusted.

Post hoc argument

- This fallacy cites an unrelated event that occurred earlier as the cause of a current situation
- Ex: I saw a black cat run across the street in front of my car 5 minutes before I was hit by a foul ball at the park. Therefore, the black cat is the cause of my bruised arm.

Post Hoc

- Also Known as: Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc, False Cause, Questionable Cause, Confusing Coincidental Relationships With Causes
- Fallacy with the following form
- A occurs before B. Therefore A is the cause of B.

- Derives its name from the Latin phrase "Post hoc, ergo propter hoc."
- Traditionally interpreted as "After this, therefore because of this."
- Fallacy is committed when it is concluded that one event causes another simply because the proposed cause occurred before the proposed effect.
- More formally, the fallacy involves concluding that A causes or caused B because A occurs before B and there is not sufficient evidence to actually warrant such a claim.

Post Hoc Examples

- Many superstitions are probably based on Post Hoc reasoning.
- For example, suppose a person buys a good luck charm, does well on his exam, and then concludes that the good luck charm caused him to do well. This person would have fallen victim to the Post Hoc fallacy.

- Typically committed because people are simply not careful enough when they reason.
- Leaping to a causal conclusion is always easier and faster than actually investigating the phenomenon. However, such leaps tend to land far from the truth of the matter.
- Because Post Hoc fallacies are committed by drawing an unjustified causal conclusion, the key to avoiding them is careful investigation.

Examples

- I had been doing pretty poorly this season. Then my girlfriend gave me this neon laces for my spikes and I won my next three races. Those laces must be good luck...if I keep on wearing them I can't help but win!
- Bill purchases a new PowerMac and it works fine for months. He then buys and installs a new piece of software. The next time he starts up his Mac, it freezes. Bill concludes that the software must be the cause of the freeze.
- Joan is scratched by a cat while visiting her friend. Two days later she comes down with a fever. Joan concludes that the cat's scratch must be the cause of her illness.
- The Republicans pass a new tax reform law that benefits wealthy Americans. Shortly thereafter the economy takes a nose dive. The Democrats claim that the the tax reform caused the economic woes and they push to get rid of it.

Either/or argument

- The writer asserts that there are only 2 possibilities, when in reality, there are more.
- Ex: Tomorrow is April 15; therefore, I must mail in my tax return, or I will be arrested.

Red Herring

- Also Known as: Smoke Screen, Wild Goose Chase. An irrelevant topic is presented in order to divert attention from the original issue.
- The basic idea is to "win" an argument by leading attention away from the argument and to another topic.

Form of Red Herring

- Topic A is under discussion.
- Topic B is introduced under the guise of being relevant to topic A (when topic B is actually not relevant to topic A)
- Topic A is abandoned.
- This sort of "reasoning" is fallacious because merely changing the topic of discussion hardly counts as an argument against a claim.

Examples of Red Herring

- "We admit that this measure is popular. But we also urge you to note that there are so many bond issues on this ballot that the whole thing is getting ridiculous."
- "Argument" for a tax cut: "You know, I've begun to think that there is some merit in the Republican's tax cut plan. I suggest that you come up with something like it, because if we Democrats are going to survive as a party, we have got to show that we are as tough-minded as the Republicans, since that is what the public wants."
- "Argument" for making grad school requirements stricter: "I think there is great merit in making the requirements stricter for the graduate students. I recommend that you support it, too. After all, we are in a budget crisis and we do not want our salaries affected."

Slippery Slope

- Also Known as: The Camel's Nose.
- A person asserts that some event must inevitably follow from another without any argument for the inevitability of the event in question.
- There are a series of steps or gradations between one event and the one in question and no reason is given as to why the intervening steps or gradations will simply be bypassed.

Form of Slippery Slope

- Event X has occurred (or will or might occur).
- Therefore event Y will inevitably happen
- This sort of "reasoning" is fallacious because there is no reason to believe that one event must inevitably follow from another without an argument for such a claim.
- This is especially clear in cases in which there is a significant number of steps or gradations between one event and another.

Examples of Slippery Slope

- "We have to stop the tuition increase! The next thing you know, they'll be charging \$40,000 a semester!"
- "The US shouldn't get involved militarily in other countries. Once the government sends in a few troops, it will then send in thousands to die."
- "You can never give anyone a break. If you do, they'll walk all over you."
- "We've got to stop them from banning pornography. Once they start banning one form of literature, they will never stop. Next thing you know, they will be burning all the books!"

Sample Prompt

- Dissect and highlight the essential elements of the prompt
- Time yourself
- Compare your markings to mine

Sample Argumentative Essay

In his famous "Vast Wasteland" address to the National Association of Broadcasters in May of 1961, Newton Minow, the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, spoke about the power of television to influence the taste, knowledge, and opinions of its viewers around the world. Carefully read the following, paying close attention to how timely it is today, especially in light of the worldwide Internet.

Sample Argumentative Essay

Minow ended his speech warning that “The power of these instantaneous sight and sound is without precedent in mankind’s history. This is an awesome power. It has limitless capabilities for good – and for evil. And it carries with the awesome responsibilities – responsibilities which you and [the government] cannot escape...”

Using your own knowledge and your own experiences or reading, write a carefully constructed essay which defends, challenges, or qualifies Minow’s ideas.

Timing & Planning

- Find a way to think through the issue in your position
- Kinds of the support/evidence
 - Facts/statistics
 - Details
 - Quotations
 - Dialogue
 - Definitions
 - Examples
 - Anecdotes
 - Contrast and comparison
 - Cause and effect
 - Appeal to authority
- Choose strategies that you are comfortable with

Timing & Planning

- 1-3 min. reading and dissecting the prompt
- 3 min. deciding on a position
- 10 – 12 min. planning the support of your position
- 20 min. writing the essay
- 3 min. proofreading

Introductory Paragraph

- Create a KO
- Refer specifically to the prompt
- Clearly state your position on the issue

Body Paragraph

- Write a brief outline
- Brainstorm a list of ideas that
- Carefully consider your choices
- Be sure to address the opposition
- Ideas about organization or approach can sometimes be found in the excerpt
- Use Minow’s own three-part warning to the NAB
- Brainstorm for ideas that could be linked to each category

Brainstorming

Good	Evil	Responsibility
education	Promote hate	laws
Warning of dangers	Distort reality	ensorship
Recognition of heroes	Help terrorists	First amendment
Involvement in mankind’s achievements	Invasion of privacy	Financial gain
Instant communication with family and friends	Threats to national security	Personal checks and balances
Medical care	Create mass hysteria	Parental control
entertainment	Exploit children	copyrights
	Conspiracy	
	Fraud	

Conclusion

- **Allow for final remarks but make it meaningful**