

WHAT IS AN ARGUMENT?

Argument	This is an essay that argues a point. You are taking a position that you are required to defend your with persuasive evidence.
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You will need **sufficient evidence** to support your assertions. You will need to make a point worth arguing; a point that elicits a “**so what?**” from your reader **will not** generate a strong essay.

The “So What?” Test

- Why is it important? What will readers learn from it? How will it illuminate a text or help us to answer a problem?
- The “**so what?**” question can help you to distinguish a summary of observations from a real argument.
- When you notice something interesting in a text, you are on your way to asking a question, and that question can lead you towards formulating an argument.

Good Questions for a Good Argument

- In your readings, you might notice something surprising, disturbing, or interesting, and you should formulate a question to help you understand why.
- Your questions may come from a dissatisfying interpretation offered in secondary sources. Maybe you would like to offer another interpretation. Your interpretation then becomes your argument.
- Class discussions that go unresolved can also lead to questions. Maybe you think that after so much discussion, additional interpretations can be made. Those interpretations become your argument.

Four Basic Elements of an Argument:

A claim	The position that you put forth.
Evidence	The details that support your claim.
Definition of terms	So that you and your reader share an understanding of the terms that you use in presenting your claim and your evidence.
Consideration of counter-arguments	To show your reader why these are weak and your claim is strong.

How to Consider Opposing Arguments:

1. What are the most important opposing arguments?
What concessions can I make and still support my argument?
2. What evidence do I have to support my own argument?
How does that evidence compare with that used by my opposition?
3. What are possible misunderstandings of my own argument?

Strong Argument Checklist

1. Write a one sentence summary of the main point of each paragraph.

- Do the points follow logically? Yes No
- Would adding one or two points strengthen your argument? Yes No
- Should your paragraphs be re-ordered? Yes No
- Do you digress (move away from your subject)? Yes No

2. Look at your use of evidence.

- Is the quotation integrated into the context of your own essay? Yes No
- Is the quotation understandable within the text of your essay? Yes No
- Do you substitute your own explanations with quotations? **Do not.** Yes No
- Are your quotations used as evidence for your assertions? Yes No

3. Look at your introduction and conclusion.

- Does your introduction and conclusion help the reader understand the significance of your argument? Yes No
- Do you answer the “so what” question? Yes No