



Argumentative Essays: Getting Started

An argumentative essay takes a position on an issue using logic and evidence to convince readers.

Choosing a Debatable Topic and Creating an Argumentative Thesis

Since an argumentative essay is an attempt to change the way people think, it should focus on a debatable topic—one over which reasonable people disagree. Factual statements that reasonable people do not disagree over would not be suitable for a paper that needs to focus on an argument.

Example:

Topic: Requiring Meal Plans on Campus

Debatable Thesis: First-year students should be required to purchase a meal plan from the university.

Defining Terms

Be careful to use precise terms in your thesis statement. Try to avoid vague or judgmental words such as wrong, right, good, and bad.

Example:

Vague: Censorship of the Internet would be wrong.

Clear: Censorship of the Internet would unfairly limit free speech.

Elements of an Argumentative Essay

- Introduction
- Background
- Thesis statement
- Arguments in Support of Your Thesis
- Counterargument/Refutation (Check Assignment Guidelines If Required)
- Conclusion

*All information on this handout came from 6th ed. The Holt Handbook and/or the 4th ed. Brief Handbook. For more information, please see the 4th ed. Brief Holt Handbook chapter 5, pages 91 to 96. Please also see our handouts, “Writing an Argument” and “Creating an Outline for a Classic Argument” on our website.