

## English in Use

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## Argumentative Essay Structure

**S**TUDENTS often laugh when they are told to PEE all over their work. Understandable, but the importance of providing Point, Evidence and Elaboration in each paragraph of an argumentative essay (sometimes also called 'persuasive' or 'analytical') cannot be overstated.

As a basic rule of thumb, there is a 'big' structure to teach: an argumentative essay must have an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion. The 'small' structure is the PEE content of the body paragraphs themselves. These paragraphs are the meat of the essay and make the overall argument through a series of smaller points and logical conclusions, supported by evidence and elaboration. Due to the difficulty of mastering this style of writing and understanding the true rationale behind it, the argumentative

essay is something which many struggle with, not just in their high school years, but through university and beyond.

**The thesis**

WHAT students should be asking first and foremost is: what is the overriding thesis and can I show that it is worth making? The thesis should be stated in the introduction and not left to the conclusion. After all, why should the reader believe your argument if it only becomes apparent to them by the time they reach the end? The introduction is a vital tool for both the author and the reader. For the author, it helps focus the attention and provides the direction for the rest of the essay. For the reader, it sets the tone and introduces them to the overall idea being presented. Apart from a clear and concise thesis, there are other tick-boxes which students should consider when writing their introductions:

- 1) providing context helps orientate the reader;
- 2) outlining the scope of the essay can make writing more manageable, especially when presented with a broad or open-ended title;
- 3) defining key terms is essential for questions which present complex concepts or contain ambiguous vocabulary.

Furthermore, outlining assumptions that are being made, the methodology which is being employed, and key pieces of literature or existing theories that are being supported/negated transform a good essay into an exceptional one.

**Evidence**

A GOOD argument stands on the evidence that supports it. When writing an argumentative essay, it is essential that students include specific examples from history, literature, current events or personal anecdotes. However, personal anecdotes should be used as a last resort because the information is largely

subjective, and there is no written record that could otherwise support such a claim. A good argumentative essay will address the prompt or debate through a variety of sources to demonstrate that the student has considered the argument from multiple perspectives.

**Style**

OFTEN when writing an argumentative essay, students find difficulty transitioning from one topic to another or expressing their argument in a clear, concise matter. Transitions help the student to organise their essay and cement the evidence supporting their argument together. Transitional techniques range from the incorporation of repetition or patterns to the use of key words or phrases.

Repeating key words that identify the central topics will organise the essay so that the reader can readily digest the information. The repetition pulls the reader from one sentence or paragraph to the next naturally. However, the use of repetition should be used sparingly. The student can connect the ideas simply through words that convey time or sequence: before, during, after, eventually, next, etc. Students can also use logical words such as since, therefore, as a result, consequently, and inevitably.

Another useful transition would be to highlight the similarities or differences between topics by incorporating such phrases as likewise, equally, and similarly or otherwise, although, nevertheless, and in contrast, respectively. Lastly, students signal emphasis or explanation with such phrases as in other words, indeed, and in fact.

**Conclusion**

LASTLY, students must include a conclusion at the end of their argumentative essays. The conclusion should both readdress the points of the argument and clarify the writer's position on the argument.