

Organizing Your Argument

How can I effectively present my argument?

Use an organizational structure that arranges the argument in a way that will make sense to the reader. The Toulmin Method of logic is a common and easy to use formula for organizing an argument.

The basic format for the Toulmin Method is as follows:

Claim: The overall thesis the writer will argue for.

Data: Evidence gathered to support the claim. **(We call the "data" a concrete detail or "CD".)**

Warrant (also referred to as a bridge): Explanation of why or how the data supports the claim; the underlying assumption that connects your data to your claim. **(We call the "warrant" commentary or analysis.)**

Backing (also referred to as the foundation): Additional logic or reasoning that may be necessary to support the warrant (CM).

Counterclaim: A claim that negates or disagrees with the thesis/claim.

Rebuttal: Evidence that negates or disagrees with the counterclaim.

Including a well thought out warrant or bridge is essential to writing a good argumentative essay or paper. If you present data to your audience without explaining how it supports your thesis they may not make a connection between the two or they may draw different conclusions.

Don't avoid the opposing side of an argument. Instead, ***include the opposing side as a counterclaim***. Find out what the other side is saying and respond to it within your own argument. This is important so that the audience is not swayed by weak, but unrefuted arguments. Including counterclaims allows you to find common ground with more of your readers. It also makes you look more ***credible*** because you appear to be knowledgeable about the entirety of the debate rather than just being biased or unformed. You may want to include several counterclaims to show that you have thoroughly researched the topic.

Example:

Claim: Hybrid cars are an effective strategy to fight pollution.

Data 1: Driving a private car is a typical citizen's most air polluting activity.

Warrant 1: Because cars are the largest source of private, as opposed to industry produced, air pollution switching to hybrid cars should have an impact on fighting pollution.

Data 2: Each vehicle produced is going to stay on the road for roughly 12 to 15 years.

Warrant 2: Cars generally have a long lifespan, meaning that a decision to switch to a hybrid car will make a long-term impact on pollution levels.

Data 3: Hybrid cars combine a gasoline engine with a battery-powered electric motor.

Warrant 3: This combination of technologies means that less pollution is produced. According to ineedtoknow.org "the hybrid engine of the Prius, made by Toyota, produces 90 percent fewer harmful emissions than a comparable gasoline engine."

Counterclaim: Instead of focusing on cars, which still encourages a culture of driving even if it cuts down on pollution, the nation should focus on building and encouraging use of mass transit systems.

Rebuttal: While mass transit is an environmentally sound idea that should be encouraged, it is not feasible in many rural and suburban areas, or for people who must commute to work; thus hybrid cars are a better solution for much of the nation's population.

Persuasive Essay Skeleton

The following outline is designed to help you build a skeleton for the persuasive essay. As with all essays, you will need an intro and a concluding paragraph. This essay will be in MLA format. You will correctly document and cite all of your sources. You will include signal phrases for each fact (CD) and you will include parenthetical documentation. You will also have a Works Cited page. Times New Roman font size 12 is the standard and required font.

An introductory paragraph will include the thesis statement, which will be the last sentence in your intro paragraph. Be sure to identify your topic and your point of view on the topic in this paragraph. You must take a stand and you must clearly identify your stand on the issue. You can not "flip-flop" on the issue. Be firm throughout the essay. Do NOT use first-person pronouns in your body paragraphs.

Thesis Statement (Prepare the audience for both sides of the argument). This is the last sentence in the intro paragraph: _____

BODY PARAGRAPH #1

Body Paragraph TS (*The other side*): _____

Counterclaim/Acknowledgment #1 of Opposition's POV: _____

Counterclaim/Acknowledgment #2 of Opposition's POV: _____

Concession/Commentary

BODY PARAGRAPH #2

Body Paragraph 2 TS (*Your Side*): _____

Refute/ Explanation #1 of your POV: _____

Refute/ Explanation #2 of your POV:

Assertion - This is your side only. Be authoritative. Based on your commentary, what should the listener to believe?

You will have additional paragraphs. The **first body** paragraph is the *only place you have to acknowledge and discuss the opposing side*. Remember that you want to make your side look the stronger, so think of strong, relevant examples (CDs) and detailed commentary to back up your viewpoint. If you want to prove your point, you can create three body paragraphs.

Would you like more information about organizing your arguments? Check out *The Owl at Purdue*.
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/03/>