

WRITER'S TOOLBOX FOR BUILDING ARGUMENTS

The questions and checklists provided here are intended to help you as you are reading arguments in preparation for writing your own and as you are writing and revising your arguments. Many of these sets of questions also appear within the Chapter links. We have included these lists and questions separately here to highlight their importance and to make them readily available to you. You may want to use these reading, thinking, and writing strategies throughout the course with each of your argument essays.

Reading Strategy: Analyzing Sources of Disagreement

The following questions will help you examine the sources of disagreement in any two articles on an issue.

1. In your own words, summarize the core of each writer's argument.
2. What is the key issue for each writer?
3. Where do the writers disagree over interpretations of facts?
4. Where do the writers disagree over values, assumptions, or analogies?
5. What questions would you like to ask each writer? Where do you see gaps, fuzziness or confusion in the argument?
6. What further information would you like to have about the issue?

Reading Strategy: Determining the Core of an Argument

Use the following questions as guides for determining the core of arguments that you read.

1. What issue question lies behind the claim this argument is making?
2. What makes this a genuine argument?
3. What would the core of the argument look like stated as a claim with reasons in because clauses?
4. Does the argument have a self-announcing or unfolding structure and how do you know?

Writing Strategy: Exploring Ideas and Mapping Out an Argument

Use the following exploration tasks to help you generate a full set of ideas for each rough draft of your papers for the course. These are the tasks in “Set 2: Exploration and Rehearsal” listed in Chapter 3.

Task 1: What issue do you plan to address?

[Try wording the issue as a one-sentence question.]

Task 2: What is your tentative answer to the question?

[Write out this answer and put a box around it. This answer is your beginning thesis statement or claim. You might write out a few other answers, directed at a neutral audience.]

Task 3: Why is this a controversial issue? Is there insufficient evidence to resolve the issue? Is the evidence ambiguous or contradictory? Are definitions in dispute? Do the parties disagree about basic values, assumptions, or beliefs?

Task 4: What personal interest do you have in this issue? What are the consequences for you if your argument succeeds or doesn't succeed? How does the issue affect you? Why do you care about it?

[Determining why you care about it may help you get your audience to care about it.]

Task 5: Who is the audience that you need to persuade? If your argument calls for an action, who has the power to act on your claim? Can you address these persons of power directly? Or do you need to sway others (such as voters) to exert pressure on persons in power? With regard to your issue, what are the values and beliefs of the audience you are trying to sway?

Task 6: What obstacles or constraints in the social or physical environment prevent your audience from acting on your claim or accepting your beliefs? What are some ways these obstacles can be overcome? If these obstacles cannot be overcome, should you change your claim?

Task 7: What is your plan for the main body of your paper?

[In this task, you will use freewriting or idea mapping to think up the main reasons and evidence you could use to sway your intended audience. Brainstorm everything that comes to mind that might help you support your case. Because this section will eventually provide the bulk of your argument, proceed rapidly without worrying whether your argument makes sense. Just get ideas on paper. As you generate reasons and evidence, you are likely to discover gaps in your knowledge. Where could your argument be bolstered by additional data such as statistics, examples, and expert testimony? Where and how will you do the research to fill the gaps?]

Task 8: Now reread what you wrote for Tasks 5 and 6, in which you examined your audience's

perspective. Role-playing that audience, imagine all the counterarguments people might make. Where does your claim threaten them or oppose their values? What obstacles or constraints in their environment are individuals likely to point to? (“I’d love to act on your claim but we just don’t have the money” or “If we grant your request, it will set a bad precedent.”) Brainstorm all the objections your audience might raise to your argument.

Task 9: How can you respond to those objections? Take them one by one and brainstorm possible responses?

Task 10: Finally, explore again why this issue is important. What are its broader implications and consequences? What other issues does it relate to? [Thinking of possible answers to these questions may prove useful when you write your introduction or conclusion.]

Writing Strategy: Analyzing Your Audience

Use the following questions to explore what you know about your intended audience for your argument.

1. Who is your audience?
2. How much does your audience know or care about your issue?
3. What is your audience's current attitude toward your issue?
4. What will be your audience's likely objections to your argument?
5. What values, beliefs, or assumptions about the world do you and your audience share?
6. What argumentative strategies are you considering to reach this audience?

Writing Strategy: Choosing and Refining Your Strategies to Accommodate Your Audience

The following questions can help you refine your sense of audience and zero in on the most effective ways to handle your audience's resistance.

1. Is your intended audience supportive, neutral, or hostile toward your claim?
2. Are you addressing one audience or multiple audiences? Should you consider limiting the purpose of your argument to focus on one audience?
3. What overall strategies are you planning to use to reach your audience: one-sided or multi-sided argument? classical argument, argument with a delayed-thesis, or Rogerian argument?
4. What would be a fair summary of opposing views on your issue?
5. Which opposing views will you refute? Which points will you concede? If you have to concede points, how will you shift the argument back to your values?
6. Which rebuttal strategies (denying the validity of data, citing counterexamples, casting doubt on evidence, and questioning testimonies, quotations or interpretations of statistical data) will you use?
7. Would humor enliven your argument and soften up your audience?

Writing Strategy: Using Evidence Effectively in Arguments

Use the following questions to think critically about your use of evidence and to help you as you draft and revise your arguments.

1. What kinds of evidence (personal experience narratives or data, examples, details, or numerical data) are you using to develop your claim?
2. If you are using evidence from personal experience, how will you give authority, weight, and validity to this personal evidence?
3. If you are using numerical data, how will you make it clear, comprehensible, and meaningful? (For instance, in a speech arguing for more public support of the arts, Barbra Streisand asserts that the amount of money the government gives to the National Endowment for the Arts and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is equal to what the government spends for one F-22 fighter jet, and the government buys hundreds of those. This comparison drives home the point that the arts are undervalued and unsupported.)
4. Consider your audience, occasion, and purpose for this argument. Does your evidence fit this rhetorical context?
5. What is rhetorically effective or ineffective about your use of evidence?

Writing Strategy: Strengthening Your Appeals to Ethos and Pathos

Use the following questions to help you focus on your appeals to ethos and pathos as you draft and revise your arguments.

1. What image do you want to project of yourself in this argument? What is your investment in the issue?
2. How do you convey that you are knowledgeable about the issue?
3. Where do you acknowledge alternative views? Are your summaries and recognition of these views fair?
4. Which of the strategies for engaging the audience's emotions and imagination are you using: concrete language, specific examples, narratives, and connotative and metaphoric language?
5. How are your appeals to ethos and pathos tailored to your audience?

Writing Strategy: Using Claim-Type Strategy to Develop a Proposal Argument

Use the following exercise to help you generate support for your proposal argument by exploring claims of category, cause, and resemblance.

1. Argument from category: This proposal should (should not) be enacted because the proposed action is _____.

[Fill the blank with a noun, adjective, or phrase that appeals in some way to your audience's values. Your purpose is to show that your proposed action fits into a category or fulfills a principle that your audience adheres to.]

2. Argument from consequence: This proposal should (should not) be enacted because this proposed action will lead to the following good (or bad) consequences:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

(List as many good or bad consequences as you can think of.)

3. Argument from resemblance: This proposal should (should not) be enacted because the proposed action is like (similar to)

[Fill the blank with an analogy or precedent that will have a favorable (or unfavorable) impact on your audience. Your purpose is to transfer your audience's favorable (or unfavorable) attitude to the precedent or analogy back to your proposed action.]

Writing Strategy: Using the “Stock Issues” Strategy to Develop a Proposal Argument

Use the following questions to help you generate ideas for your proposal argument.

1. Stock issue 1: Is there really a problem here that needs to be solved?
2. Stock issue 2: Will the proposed solution really solve this problem?
3. Stock issue 3: Can the problem be solved more simply without disturbing the status quo?
4. Stock issue 4: Is the proposed solution really practical? Does it stand a chance of actually being enacted?
5. Stock issue 5: What will be the unforeseen positive and negative consequences of the proposal?