

Making an Academic Argument

Effective argument will be well-grounded, persuasive, and significant. Effective argument requires us not just to participate in an academic conversation but also contribute something of value to the discussion.

Questions to Consider

1. What are you claiming?
2. What reasons do you have for believing that claim?
3. What evidence do you base these reasons on?
4. What warrants make your reasons relevant to your claim?
5. What would you say to someone who said, “But what about...?”

What qualities should a main claim have?

1. Contestable
2. Reasonable
3. Specific
4. Significant
5. Interpretive

What are the different kinds of reasoning?

1. Inductive: from the specific to the general
2. Deductive: from the general to the specific
3. Abductive: problem driven reasoning beginning with and then testing a hypothesis

What counts as evidence?

1. Evidence is either extrinsic (data, facts, testimony, authority) or intrinsic (invented).
2. Strong evidence is sufficient, precise, accurate, representative, and authoritative.

What are warrants?

Warrants connect your reasons to your claims, by relating the evidence for each reason to the claim it supports. They generally fall into one of two categories:

1. A system of commonly held beliefs, based on empirical evidence (Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.)
2. Authority (When X says Y, Y must be so.)

But what would you say to someone who said, “But what about...?”

To acknowledge and respond to questions and opposition to your argument, consider using phrases such as “to be sure,” “admittedly,” and “some have claimed,” etc., followed with “although,” “but,” “however,” “on the other hand,” etc.

What are other considerations for evaluating an argument?

1. Definition
2. Qualifiers
3. Common Ground
4. Acknowledgement of sources

How important is definition of terms in constructing an effective argument?

Definition of terms is crucial. Identify and then precisely define your key terms. Stipulate definitions that will, in turn, support your claim.

What is the value of qualifiers?

Qualifying an argument allows room for reflection and interpretation and is crucial to creating a strong ethos.

Categories of qualification:

1. Quantity: many, most, some
2. Frequency: often, usually, frequently
3. Probability: probably, unlikely
4. Proof: suggests, indicates, points to

How can you establish common ground?

Provide background information and then lead your reader to the problem or issue you will consider.

How do I acknowledge sources?

Quotations, paraphrases, or summaries: If you use the author's exact words, enclose them in quotation marks or indent passages of more than four lines. In literary studies, first quote a few words of the work you're analyzing and then comment on them.

In other disciplines, quote only when the original words are especially memorable. In most cases, use your own words to paraphrase or summarize the idea you want to discuss, emphasizing the points relevant to your argument. Be sure to name sources even when you are not using the exact original words.

Additional Information

Argument Essay:

<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/documents/argument.pdf>

Developing a Central Claim:

http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/documents/developing_claim.pdf