

Arguments in Writing

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the requirements and conventions of argumentative writing, and how to approach this type of writing. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Overview of Argumentative Writing](#)
2. [Modes of Argument](#)
3. [Rhetorical Appeals](#)

1. Overview of Argumentative Writing

The primary form of academic writing is driven by **argument**, or a clear position on a debatable question that is supported with evidence and reasoning. In an academic context, an argument doesn't refer to fighting, which sometimes comes to mind when the word is mentioned.

When discussing writing, it's instead useful to think of an argument as a conversation between thoughtful people who, although they have different views, want to answer the same questions.

The components of successful academic arguments include:

- A clear, focused thesis on a debatable question
- Support consisting of reasoning, credible research, and evidence
- A discussion of counterarguments
- Use of rhetorical appeals

Being able to identify the components of an argument is not only a useful skill, but it is also necessary for anyone who wants to master written communication. Readers who understand what an argument is (including its structure, components, and assumptions), and what particular arguments are trying to convince them to accept, derive the most benefit from what they read.

By identifying the components of an argument, you can analyze its effectiveness. Instead of just being convinced or unconvinced (perhaps without understanding why), you'll be able to evaluate arguments critically. You won't be misled by elegant phrasing or false logic.



Argument

In academic writing, a clear position on a debatable question that is supported with evidence and reasoning.

2. Modes of Argument

Although argumentative essays sometimes incorporate other modes of writing (e.g., the persuasive or informative modes), all essays that present an argument are considered argumentative.

The persuasive mode is similar to the argumentative: Both of these writing modes seek to influence readers to accept an assertion or take a particular action. The persuasive mode, however, emphasizes pathos (appeals to readers' emotions) more than ethos (appeals to readers' sense of right and wrong) or logos (appeals to logic and reasoning).

Writing in the informative mode does not argue a specific point, but instead provides information about a subject. This sometimes involves analysis and interpretation, however, which require a form of argumentation. Since the purpose of informative writing is to inform—not to convince or persuade—this mode is a different kind of writing with different requirements.

The following paragraph is an excerpt from an essay. As you read it, look for elements of argumentative, persuasive, and informative writing.

Part of the reason why Hawaii seems like such a paradise is that it's not home to many of nature's less pleasant organisms: no nettles or poison ivy, few thorny plants or poisonous plants, no snakes or apex predators. Until humans arrived, Hawaii was a paradise for many organisms. But now that rats, cats, sheep, pigs, and invasive vines, trees, and grasses have been introduced, the ecosystem that had been at stasis for so long is slowly and steadily becoming more like that of the continental United States (Harjo, 2005). Even as government officials inspect ship and air cargo for green tree snakes, fire ants, tree frogs, and the multitude of other species that haven't yet established a foothold in the islands; even as ranchers and hunters coordinate to keep wild pigs and sheep populations under control; even as university researchers and park rangers tag and protect endangered birds and turtles, they know it's a battle they can't win.

Multiple modes of writing are used in this excerpt. The writer attempts to inform the reader about the subject, but he also takes—and supports—a position. In addition, the persuasive mode is evident at the end of the excerpt, when the writer makes an emotional appeal that expresses his sadness at how human actions have irrevocably changed Hawaii, rather than making a reason-based argument about the ecosystem.



BIG IDEA

The lines between the different modes of writing can be crossed. In fact, those lines are blurred to some extent in most essays. Therefore, most argumentative writing incorporates some elements of the

3. Rhetorical Appeals

Rhetorical appeals are strategies used in writing that are designed to persuade or convince the reader. There are three types of rhetorical appeals, which you will learn more about in the next lesson.

For now, here is a brief description of each:

- Pathos is used to convince readers by evoking their sympathy or compassion for the claims that are made. Pathos can be used unethically, especially when it is not balanced by evidence and reason.
- Ethos bases appeals on credibility. Although the term used to refer only to the credibility or character of the writer (or speaker), modern ethos-based arguments are likely to rely on the credibility and trustworthiness of the information sources used in an essay.
- Logos bases appeals on logic and reasoning. Logos-based arguments use facts and evidence to support logical claims. This form of appeal is the primary focus of many argumentative essays.

Note that most instances of argumentative writing use all three forms of appeal in one way or another.



TERM TO KNOW

Rhetorical Appeal

A strategy used in writing that is designed to persuade or convince the reader.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you received an **overview of argumentative writing**. Argumentative writing takes a clear position on a debatable question and backs up claims with evidence and reasoning. You then learned that there are different **modes of argument**. This means that argumentative writing often incorporates elements from the persuasive and informative modes of writing. Argumentative writing also requires the use of **rhetorical appeals**, which are strategies that you can use to try and convince your readers of your position.

Best of luck in your learning!

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TERMS TO KNOW

Argument

In academic writing, a clear position on a debatable question that is supported with evidence and reasoning.

Rhetorical Appeal

A strategy used in writing that is designed to persuade or convince the reader.