Classical Argument Model

by Sophia Tutorial

WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial examines one of the many models of argumentation, the classical model. It presents the basic elements of argumentation in the classical style, and indicates when this model may be the best choice for a writer who is contemplating the format of an essay. It also includes an evaluation of an example of the classical argument model.

This tutorial investigates the classical argument model in four parts:

1. Models of Argumentation
2. Classical Argumentation
3. Using the Classical Model
4. Classical Argument Model: Example

1. Models of Argumentation

There are several different models for constructing arguments that are recognized in the field of composition. This tutorial focuses on one of them: the classical model.

HINT

There is no such thing as the "right" or "best" model of argumentation. Some models simply work better in certain situations than others, and some writers prefer some models to others for personal reasons. New writers should consider the qualities and priorities of particular models within the context of their writing needs.

The point of learning models of argumentation is to give beginning writers options to consider during the stages of the writing process, including brainstorming, pre-writing and outlining, and during the drafting and revision processes. Writers who are familiar with multiple argumentation models can select the one they believe is best-suited to construct an argument on a specific subject and purpose.

2. Classical Argumentation

The **classical model of argumentation** is one of the oldest systems of argumentation. It is primarily designed

to persuade readers to take an action, or to share a writer's perspective.

The classical argument model was designed by the ancient Greek rhetorician and philosopher, Aristotle.

The classical model was created when arguments were made in speeches. It emphasizes the use of the three rhetorical appeals that are known by their Greek names:

- Logos: appeals to logic or reasoning.
- Ethos: appeals to credibility.
- Pathos: appeals to emotion.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Classical Model of Argumentation
A methodology for structuring arguments designed by Aristotle to persuade an audience to take an action or share a writer's perspective.

An argument built on the classical model consists of five components:

1. **Introduction.** The introduction must be engaging and interesting.
2. **Background.** This is the necessary background information regarding the thesis.
3. **Claims.** These are arguments asserted with force and clarity. This section comprises most of the essay.
4. **Counterarguments.** These address and refute opposing or alternative viewpoints, whether they exist, or are viewed by the writer as having the potential to exist.
5. **Conclusion.** This final component must conclude the argument in a way that is satisfying, and that clearly identifies what is at stake in the broader context. Traditionally, the conclusion addressed a call to action to the audience, though this is no longer a requirement of the classical model.

3. Using the Classical Model

There are many reasons why modern writers choose the classical model to structure their work. One of the main reasons is that the classical model is familiar to those who learned (and used) it as students. The classical model is also a good choice for timed writing (e.g., as when answering essay questions on tests) because of its simplicity and compatibility with the five-paragraph essay model.

Writers often choose the classical model when their primary goal is persuasion, and because counterarguments can be effectively addressed using this model.

⚑ **HINT**

One reason *not* to choose the classical model is its simple structure. Although it confers advantages in some situations, writers who want to thoroughly develop a complex or detailed argument may be limited by this model. However, the classical model remains a good form of argumentation to understand and apply, when approriate.

4. Classical Argument Model: Example

Following is an outline of an essay that was constructed according to the classical model.

Topic: College and national service

Working thesis: We should expand opportunities for national service that lead to funds for college tuition and related expenses.

Introduction: A college graduate is likely to earn $570,000 more, over the course of his or her lifetime, than those without a college degree. A college degree is a requirement for most good-paying jobs. However, the cost of college has skyrocketed: this expense, combined with class and cultural differences, has made a college education unattainable for many. Military service is a way to pre-earn college funds, but many do not have the temperament or desire for it. Therefore, we must provide opportunities for national service in addition to those provided by the armed forces that lead to funds for college education.

Background:
a. Institution of the "GI Bill" and its goals

b. National service models in other nations

c. Rising costs of college and ballooning debt

d. Growing problem of student debt among students who do not earn a degree (i.e., who do not finish college). This situation is more devastating than not attending college at all.

Claims:
a. Various national service opportunities must be available (military and non-military), and prospective students between the ages of 18-21 should be encouraged to embrace them. These opportunities should provide 2-4 years of college funding upon completion of service.

b. National service opportunities will improve college access for working class people, and lower the college debt burden for middle class people.

c. National service will directly benefit the country and also increase the sense of civic duty and social commitment in participants.

d. National service opportunities will increase employability by providing "real world" experience, and time to mature, before enrollment.

Counterarguments:
a. Such a program would be too expensive — Costs would be defrayed by higher government income from increased tax revenue and greater spending by employed citizens.

b. The real answer is to make college free — This is unlikely, due to political realities. However, a national service model might entice both liberals and conservatives.

c. The real answer is to let the market decide: let people sink or swim on their own merits — It is widely acknowledged that the U.S. is not a true meritocracy because of social inequality. National service that leads to college education would help those who are smart and driven to succeed.

Conclusion: An expanded national service model that pays participants in funds for college would benefit the country, and could be a model that other nations adopt. Everyone should consider the merits of this proposal and think of ways to implement it on a national level.

Begin by evaluating the topic: college and national service. The working thesis states that opportunities for national service that lead to funds for college education should be expanded. The draft outline has been divided into sections according to the classical model, beginning with an introduction that focuses on capturing readers' interest as well as introducing the subject.

According to the model, the next section (i.e., background) must provide all of the information that the audience will need to understand the argument. The essay will outline the institution of the "GI Bill" and its goals, then refer to national service models in other nations, the rising cost of college and growing student debt. Next, it will address the problem of students who go into debt but do not finish college: It will assert that this situation is more devastating than not attending college at all.

The background is followed by a section on claims. In it, the writer will argue about the national service opportunities that should be available to potential students, both military and non-military, including a claim that people between the ages of 18 and 21 should be encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities. The writer plans to argue that national service will increase college access for working class people and lower the college debt burden of many middle class people. The outline also posits that national service will benefit the country, not only in terms of what the service produces, but also in an increased sense of civic duty and social commitment among participants. Finally, the writer will argue that national service opportunities will improve employability by providing real-world experience and time to mature prior to enrolling in college.

The next section in the model is for counterarguments. The sample outline considers several counterarguments, including the assertion that a program like this would be too expensive. The outline's response to this argument is that costs will be offset by increased government income from greater tax revenue and more spending by employed citizens. The next counter argument addressed in the outline is that the "real" answer is to make college free. The essay will refute this by indicating that this is unlikely to happen due to political realities, but a national service model might gain the support of liberals *and* conservatives. The final counter argument included in the outline states that the best solution is to let the market decide: to let people sink or swim on their own merits. To refute this counterargument, the essay will argue that the U.S. is not a true meritocracy due to social inequality. National service that leads to college education will help those who are smart and driven to succeed.

The last section specified by the model is the conclusion. In this example, the conclusion will state that an expanded national service model that provides funds for college would benefit the country, and could serve as a model for other nations. Like many classically-modeled arguments, it ends with a call to action: everyone should consider the merits of this proposal and think about ways to implement it on a national level.

SUMMARY

This tutorial examined one of the models of argumentation, the classical model, which is designed for persuading an audience to take an action, or to share a writer's perspective. It described the components of the model, and when (or where) it can be most useful. The outline of a sample argument structured according to this model was evaluated.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

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A methodology for structuring arguments, designed by Aristotle, and primarily designed to persuade the audience to take an action or to share the author's perspective.