

# Writing an Effective Argumentative Research Essay

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the steps that writers must take to compose a strong argumentative research paper. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Brainstorming and Prewriting](#)
2. [Conducting Research](#)
3. [Using Opinions](#)
4. [Drafting and Incorporating Research](#)
5. [Avoiding Plagiarism](#)
6. [Revising, Editing, and Proofreading](#)

## 1. Brainstorming and Prewriting

Writing is a recursive process. Writers must often refer to the steps of the writing process throughout a writing project:

- Brainstorming and prewriting
- Research and drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Proofreading

Brainstorming and prewriting, the first step in the process, is the time when writers think about their topics and the purpose of their essays, identify a working thesis, and determine the research they must do.

Topics are often assigned to student writers. When working with an assigned topic, students should remember that a topic or focus is not the same as a thesis. Writers should choose topics and theses that are debatable, and that include at least two perspectives.

Once you have determined your topic and thesis, you can start to determine the structure of your essay by creating an outline. Your detailed outline should include notes on what support you plan to use for each component of the essay, so that you can use the outline as a reminder and guide during the drafting process.

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## 2. Conducting Research

Writers of argumentative research papers must allow extra time to research their primary subjects before beginning the process. They must take good research notes on source content and bibliographic data.

As you learned previously, all of this information can be organized in an annotated bibliography, which is a document that includes bibliographic data on each source the writer plans to use, and brief notes on sources and their possible use in the essay.

When researching, you also need to evaluate the credibility of each source while looking for quotations and other information (i.e., points of agreement and disagreement, and nuanced differences between the arguments).

The detailed outline should incorporate some of this information so that, during the drafting process, the writer can refer to it and the annotated bibliography to determine which source she originally planned to use where, and for what purpose.

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## 3. Using Opinions

Opinions can help a writer demonstrate her engagement with and passion for a subject. Most thesis statements begin with an opinion about a subject that has been developed and supported by research. It's also common for writers of argumentative research essays to cite and use the opinions of other writers—as support (through agreement) or to distinguish others' ideas from their own.

Because of the complicated nature of argumentation, it is important for writers to make it clear when they are expressing an opinion rather than a fact.

### IN CONTEXT

If, for instance, you were writing an argumentative essay about adoption, you might state the following opinion:

*It's important to protect children who are put up for adoption, but when couples, individuals, and deserving children wait years for the bureaucratic wheels to turn and bring them together, something must be changed.*

Then, if you added a fact to support your argument, you would need to make it clear that that's what

you were doing, as shown below:

*Though most adoptions in the U.S. take less than three months to finalize, exceptions abound, including 10% that take a whopping two years, or more (Adoptive Families, 2014).*

As a result of the objective tone and the parenthetical reference at the end of this last sentence, the reader would understand that you were presenting this as a fact rather than your opinion.

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## 4. Drafting and Incorporating Research

Although it can be difficult to do so, it's important to incorporate research artfully during the drafting process. When used well, research helps you to make your argument. Writers must thus avoid overusing quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. Excessive use of the words and ideas of others can overwhelm your own words, ideas, and points.

Here are several techniques that can enable you to use citations without losing your voice or perspective:

- Select the most important parts of a source to quote and use summaries and paraphrases to synthesize and explain ideas, arguments, evidence, and points.
- Use signal phrases and transitional phrases to situate quotes in your essay, and to surround them with your own words and points.
- Introduce and follow up quotations with your own words, making sure that you've explained how and why the quotation relates to your argument.
- Whenever possible, avoid using block quotations; use summaries or paraphrases instead.

Because of the need to effectively (and artfully) incorporate research, drafting an argumentative research essay usually takes longer than drafting other types of academic essays. Writers often find that their opinions on the subject, and even on the thesis, change during the writing of an initial draft, which sometimes prolongs the process. However, changing opinions on a subject is an indicator of critical thinking, which is always a good thing (even if it is sometimes inconvenient).

Outlines for argumentative research papers are useful guides that can help writers to avoid writer's block, but all writers must remember that an outline is a guide, not a contract. It should be revised as needed to make the best possible argument. Trust the writing process and remember that you'll have time to revise and edit more than one draft.

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## 5. Avoiding Plagiarism

Recall that plagiarism is the presentation of the words or ideas of another as your own. In an academic context, this is cheating: It is unethical—and possibly illegal—in all contexts. To avoid plagiarism, writers of argumentative research papers must carefully note and reference the sources they use.

There are two kinds of plagiarism:

- Intentional plagiarism, in which a writer deliberately steals another writer's work
- Unintentional plagiarism, in which a writer fails to cite a source or attribute an idea, thus unintentionally presenting it as her own

Although people sometimes distinguish between the two kinds of plagiarism in composition, it doesn't matter whether the act was intentional or unintentional from the plagiarized author's perspective.

In addition, there isn't much difference between the two for writers who plagiarize, as the penalties are often the same. Each form of plagiarism is a failure to live up to the responsibility of all writers to treat their sources ethically and accurately.



BIG IDEA

Taking detailed research notes—and being a careful, thoughtful researcher—is key to avoiding unintentional plagiarism.

## 6. Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

When working on an argumentative research paper, writers should allow themselves extra time to revise and edit their drafts, and to proofread the final version before submitting it (to a professor, or for publication).

Revision may require significant changes to the argument, support, or ideas in a draft. It's important to make sure that you've used sources accurately and ethically, explained the value or relevance of their support for the argument, and fully developed your ideas and points.

When editing, you should make necessary changes in word choice and correct redundancies and awkward or repetitive sentences.

When proofreading, correct mechanical and grammatical errors, and anything that does not align with the assignment's prompts, requirements, and formatting guidelines.



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how the steps in the writing process can be applied specifically to the development of an argumentative research essay. First, you will engage in **brainstorming and prewriting**, during which you will determine your topic and thesis, as well as create an outline for your essay. Next, you will begin **conducting research** to back up your argument. Remember that in this type of essay, you will be **using opinions** as well as facts to support those opinions.

**Drafting** the essay will involve **incorporating your research**, so you should be sure to cite all of your sources appropriately in order to **avoid plagiarism**. Finally, you will **revise, edit, and proofread** your essay to ensure that the finished product is polished and ready for your readers.

Best of luck in your learning!

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