

Writing an effective argumentative research paper

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WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial discusses what writers must do to write an effective argumentative research paper. It explores the steps involved in this process, from brainstorming and prewriting to research and taking opinions into account. It covers drafting the essay and incorporating research while avoiding plagiarism, as well as revising, editing, and proofreading.

This tutorial examines how to write an effective argumentative research paper in seven parts:

1. Brainstorming and Prewriting
2. Research
3. Opinions
4. Drafting
5. Incorporating Research
6. Plagiarism
7. 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
- Prewriting
- Thesis generation
- Research
- Drafting
- Revision
- Editing
- Proofreading

Brainstorming, 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.

One thing to consider when beginning to outline an argumentative essay is the type or model of argumentation you'll use. Selection of the classical, Rogerian, or Toulmin models will influence the form and impact of the argument. The classical model is best-suited for arguments intended to persuade. The Rogerian is best for arguments that are meant to seek or build common ground between opposing sides. The Toulmin is useful in almost any context, but is best-suited for complicated topics, and for building arguments based on reasoning. You can merge the components of these models to suit your needs and stylistic preferences.

➞ **EXAMPLE** You can use a classical or Rogerian structure for your essay, while using the Toulmin model to make each of your points.

No matter how you structure your essay, create a detailed outline that fits the model (or mix of models) that you have chosen. 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.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you are using the Toulmin model, your outline should include claims, grounds, warrants, backing, qualifiers, and rebuttals.

2. 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. All of this information should 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, evaluate the credibility of each source while looking for quotes 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 he or she originally planned to use where, and for what purpose.

3. Opinions

Opinions can help a writer demonstrate his or 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.

If, for example, you were writing an argumentative essay about adoption, you might state an opinion like this.

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.

Next, 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 in the example 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 tone and the lack of keywords like "needs" and "obviously," the reader shouldn't need the parenthetical reference at the end of this last sentence to understand that you are presenting this as a fact rather than your opinion.

4. Drafting

Because of the need to effectively (and artfully) incorporate research, drafting an argumentative research essay usually takes longer than drafting other types of academic essay. 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. However, all writers must remember that an outline is a plan, not a contract, and that the outline 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.

5. Incorporating Research

Although it can be difficult to do so, it's important to incorporate research artfully. When used well, research helps you to make your argument. Writers must 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 quotes with your own words, making sure that you've explained how and why the quotation relates to your argument.

- Whenever possible, avoid using block quotes; use summaries or paraphrases instead.

6. Plagiarism

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 his or her own



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

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: 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.

7. 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 (its prompts, requirements and assumptions) and the formatting style you are using.



SUMMARY

This tutorial examined the factors involved in writing an effective argumentative research paper. The following steps were reviewed:

- Brainstorming and prewriting
- Researching

- Incorporating different opinions into one argument
- The drafting process
- Incorporating research into drafts
- Avoiding plagiarism
- Revising, editing, and proofreading.

With an understanding of these steps and how they work together, you can write an effective argumentative research paper.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall