

The Argument Essay

40 minutes

What does the argumentative essay require of me?

You'll need to do three things:

- understand the nature of the position taken in the prompt
- take a specific stand—agree, disagree, or qualify—with the assertion in the prompt
- clearly and logically support your claim

How do I decipher the prompt?

Carefully read and deconstruct the prompt. You will have to read the prompt more than once. Your success depends upon your clear understanding of what is expected of you. To do this, highlight the essential elements of the prompt that tell you what your essay needs to accomplish. In addition, you need to be able to paraphrase and summarize the writer's assertion so that you are able to decide if you will agree, disagree, or qualify the writer's position.

How do I respond to the excerpt or statement?

Choose the question that best represents your thinking:

- Do I think about this subject in the same way as the writer/speaker? If so, you will **agree** with, support, or defend the writer's assertion.
- Do I think the writer/speaker is totally wrong? If so, you will **disagree** with, dispute, challenge, or refute the writer's assertion.
- Do I think that some of what is said is correct and some is incorrect? If so, you will **qualify** the writer's assertion. "Qualify" means that you will modify, limit, or restrict your agreement or disagreement by presenting exceptions. You might *limit* your agreement by supporting some of the writer's ideas but asserting some opposing ideas as well. Or, you might limit your disagreement by refuting some of the writer's ideas but supporting some aspects of the writer's position.

How do I know which position to take?

Think quickly. Use the key words, phrases, and ideas from the prompt to develop a graphic organizer such as a list, a chart, or an outline that will help you decide on your position and will also dictate the structure for your essay. Then, brainstorm ideas in categories as dictated by the prompt. Brainstorm for and against the claim. If possible, you should refute the claim made by the author of the passage. If done well, essays that refute the author's claim will be the most interesting. If you lack strong evidence in either direction, you will have to qualify the author's claim. Whatever your choice, make your position perfectly clear in your introduction. You will not be penalized for taking an unpopular, unexpected, irreverent, or bizarre position on an issue. As long as you address the prompt and support your position appropriately, there is no danger in taking a different approach. Your essay is graded for process and mastery and manipulation of language, not for how close you come to the viewpoint of your reader. The most important things are that you have clearly decided how you feel about the issue and that you have the examples to back up your claim. Keep in mind that no one really knows or cares what you *really* think about an issue. This is not a testimonial. Take the stand that's easiest for you to defend at that particular moment based on the ideas that come to you.

How do I support my position?

You'll support your position with evidence from reading, literature, history, personal experiences, observations, your study, etc. The strength of your supports should lead you to your position (agree, disagree, or qualify). Here's a list of some types of support and evidence that you might use to bolster your argument:

- facts
- statistics
- details
- quotations
- dialogue
- needed definitions
- recognition of the opposition
- examples
- anecdotes
- contrast and comparison
- cause and effect
- appeal to authority

What should my opening include?

Make certain that your introductory paragraph

- refers specifically to the prompt
- cites the speaker and occasion
- states the writer's position on the given issue
- clearly states your position on the given issue (agree, disagree, qualify)

What should the body of the essay include?

The key ideas and categories indicated in the prompt will dictate the topics of your body paragraphs and, consequently, the structure of your essay. So, choose the best ideas from the lists that you brainstormed and categorized based on the key ideas from the prompt. Then, expand and elaborate on these points in order to support your position.

How do I conclude my essay?

Focus on your body paragraphs, not on a conclusion. You do not need to summarize your major points, restate your thesis, or repeat the prompt. If you feel that you must have a concluding statement or remark, you should do so. But, make certain that the final remark is of interest, shows insight, and is appropriate to your purpose. Use the last sentence or two of your last body paragraph to deliver this concluding comment.

What are some things I need to keep in mind as I write?

- In your essay, you should address the opposition in order to put your argument in context and show how and why you are "entering the conversation" on the topic.
- In this essay, you will use the first person ("I") and you will write in present tense.
- The readers are open to a wide range of approaches. Your tone can be informal and personal, formal and objective, or even humorous and irreverent. Just be sure that your choice is appropriate for your purpose.
- You should utilize effective language in your argument. Remember all of the rhetorical and literary devices that you are discussing in your analysis essays? Well, you need to use these now in your own writing so that you present yourself as a mature writer.

How do I pace myself?

1-3 minutes	Read and decipher the prompt
3 minutes	Decide on a position (agree, disagree, qualify)
10-12 minutes	Plan the support of your position
20 minutes	Write the essay based on your preparation
3 minutes	Proofread
40 minutes	Total time on essay