



STUDY GUIDE

WRITING AN ARGUMENT

HOW TO DEVELOP AN ARGUMENT

Everyone knows what an argument is, but when you are at university writing essays and giving presentations, the word 'argument' has a particular meaning and you are being asked to do something quite specific. It is worth taking the time to develop the skills of presenting an argument, as it is something you will use throughout your degree. This guide takes you through a four-step process to presenting an argument in the way your lecturers will expect.

AN ARGUMENT - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

An argument aims to persuade people to accept your conclusion, because you have given them convincing reasons to agree with you, whether they are reading what you have written or listening to you speak.

You want to aim for these three **p's**:

- **Put forward** the reasons for your argument, backed up with examples and evidence.
- **Provide reasons** for your audience to reject the views of people who take a different view to yours.
- **Persuade** your audience to accept your conclusion.

What makes a well-presented argument

When you present an argument, you are taking your audience on a journey. Your readers and listeners will be looking out for:

- **A clear structure.**
- **A fact-based rebuttal of the arguments of other people, showing why their arguments are wrong, and yours are right.**
- **Reasons for agreeing with your conclusion, based on examples and evidence.**

ACTIVITY 1: HOW TO RECOGNISE A GOOD ARGUMENT

Start by making some notes about what you think the key components of a good argument are.

Then, polish your skills at presenting an argument by analysing and evaluating arguments presented by other people. Understanding what persuades you to agree with someone else's argument is a great way to get better at presenting your own arguments. Here is a simple way to do it:

- Visit the letters page of a national newspaper. [The Guardian](#) and [The Times](#) are both good sources of letters from readers.
- Read a number of letters and select examples which present an argument.
- Starting at the end of the letter, identify the components that make up the argument.
- Ask yourself whether or not the writer has persuaded you of their argument, and why.

Now that you have worked on some letters, go back to the notes you wrote for exercise 1. Do you agree with your original view about what an argument is. Is there anything you think you should change now that you have developed your understanding. If so, why.

For additional help
contact the **HE Study
Support team** on **01803
540780** or email
hestudy@southdevon.ac.uk

GETTING STARTED

Brainstorm ideas. Make notes on your tablet or phone or write them in a notebook. Using your notes organise your ideas.

Throw out some ideas. Get rid of the weaker ideas and the ones that are too vague as they will not keep your audience interested.

Put the remaining ideas in order. Put the remaining ideas in order so that you have a structure for your argument. Not forgetting to include any counter arguments. You can change the order if you want to once you start writing your essay or presentation.

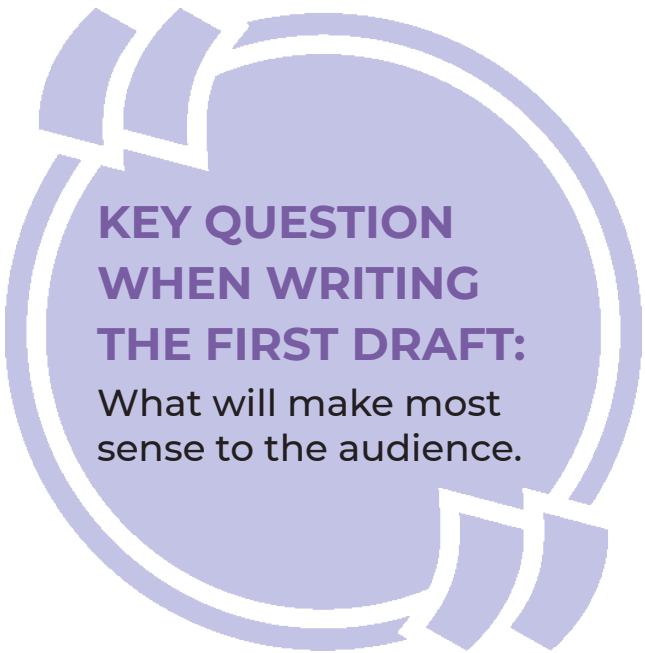


WHEN YOU ARE BRAINSTORMING:

Choose your strongest ideas and get rid of the weakest ideas.

WRITING YOUR FIRST DRAFT

Get your thoughts down on screen or paper, thinking about the journey you want to take your audience on. Do not worry too much at this stage about creating a polished draft. You can spend time later checking the spelling, grammar and punctuation.



KEY QUESTION WHEN WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT:

What will make most sense to the audience.

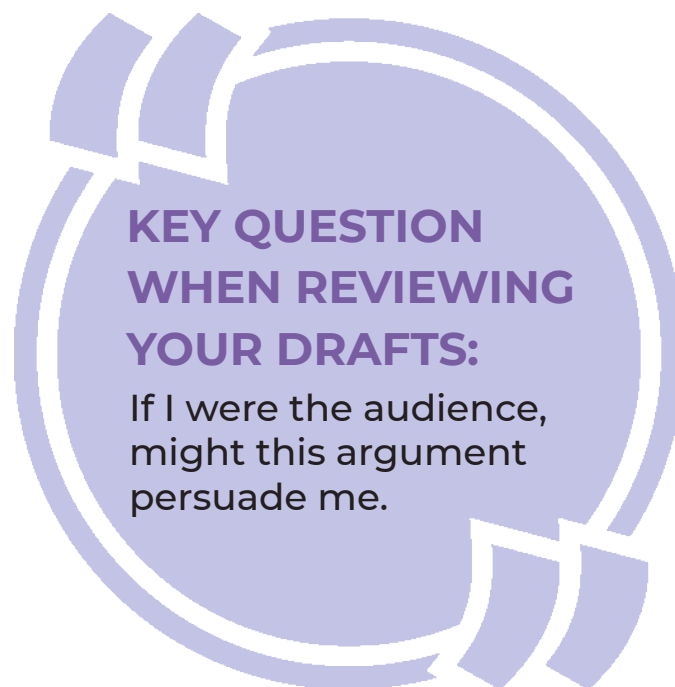
USEFUL WORDS TO HELP YOU STRUCTURE YOUR ARGUMENT

- **Because, as, since, the reason for this is, the first reason is** – use to introduce reasons.
- **Many people believe, some may argue, although, it is often claimed that** – use to introduce counter arguments.
- **However** – use as a transition between a counter argument and the main argument.
- **Therefore, so, so it follows that, hence, we can see that** – use to draw attention to and highlight conclusions.

REVIEWING YOUR DRAFTS

Look critically at the argument you have presented. One way to do this is by checking that you have:

- Provided a clear route through my argument.
- Corrected or cut out any obvious weakness in my argument.
- Given examples and evidence to support the reasons I give for my argument.
- Chosen examples that directly support the reasons I have given.
- Given enough evidence to support my argument and that it is credible evidence.
- Acknowledged counter arguments and countered them strongly.
- Made sure that the reasons I have given for my argument support my conclusion.



Recommended resources

Greetham, B. (2009) *How to Write Your Undergraduate Dissertation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zinsser, W. (2006) *On Writing Well*. 30th Anniversary Edition. New York: Harper Perennial.

PRODUCING THE FINAL DRAFT

Now you have the key points of your argument in place, you can turn your attention to working on the final draft. Here are some of the things you can do to help you keep your audience with you, from the opening sentence right through to the concluding words.

Use clear and concise language. Check the spelling and meaning of any words you are uncertain about in a dictionary. A thesaurus will give you alternative ways of expressing words and phrases you need to use frequently to present your argument.

KEY QUESTION WHEN PRODUCING THE FINAL DRAFT:

Check that everything you have written work together to keep your audience involved, e.g. evidence, examples, counter arguments, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation.

Start a new paragraph for each new idea. This will help people navigate your argument and absorb it bit by bit. You do not want people to be overwhelmed by too many ideas squeezed into a single paragraph.

Check spelling, grammar and punctuation. If they are sloppy and inaccurate, some members of your audience will be distracted and will lose track of your argument.

Resources to help you

[Oxford Dictionaries](#) and [Cambridge Dictionaries](#) both offer a free online combined dictionary and thesaurus.



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