

ARGUMENT: How to identify its quality

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Objective:

- Understanding the goal of academic writing
- Understanding the nature of argumentation
- Identifying the criteria of good argument in academic writing
- Explaining the way to defend claims in argumentative essay
- Analyzing comprehensively the writing based on the elements of good argumentative essay

Part 1. The Goal of Academic Writing

In academic writing, learners need to set the goal as it becomes the starting point of their success in their study. Academic writing is basically meant to demonstrate an objective approach and explore the subject matter thoroughly, resulting in a careful analysis. Therefore, it is important to be critical when accomplishing academic writing .

Based on Gillett et al. (2009), the following are the criteria of being critical:

- showing an understanding and knowledge of theory
- demonstrating an awareness of what has been written or said about the subject
- taking into consideration different points of view
- using reason to make a judgement
- not accepting ideas until they have been examined closely (and then maybe rejecting them)
- coming to your own conclusions
- using your own voice.

You might think this looks like a tall order, but hopefully there is nothing in the list that you would disagree with. The same approach is used in reading an academic text, where you need to:

- identify the line of reasoning or argument
- look for hidden assumptions
- decide if the evidence used to support the argument is good enough.

Task 1

Find an argumentative essay which you think fulfill the criteria of a good one.

Identify whether the author of the argumentative essay you chose has applied the principle of being critical

I find that the author has applied 'being critical' because:

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Part 2. Argumentative Writing

Writing an argumentative essay should begin with an understanding on what argument is. Read the following part from Kirsznner and Mandell (2009).

When most people hear the word *argument*, they think of the heated exchanges on television interview programs. These discussions, however, are more like shouting matches than arguments. True **argument** involves taking a well-thought-out position on a **debatable topic**—a topic about which reasonable people may disagree (for example, “Should intelligent design be taught in high school classrooms?” or “Should teenagers who commit felonies be tried as adults?”).

In an **argument paragraph**, your purpose is to persuade readers that your position has merit. You attempt to convince people of the strength of your ideas not by shouting but by presenting **evidence**—facts and examples. In the process, you address opposing ideas, and if they are strong, you acknowledge their strengths. If your evidence is solid and your logic is sound, you will present a convincing argument.

Task 2

Read carefully the argumentative essay you used in Task 1.

Answer the following:

A. Is the topic in the essay debatable? Why?

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B. Does the author present evidence? Are there facts?

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C. Does the author also use examples? What are they?

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D. Is there any expert opinion? Do you think that it is convincing?

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Part 3. Elements of Argument

Arguments should at least cover the following elements:

- ⦿ ISSUE - problem or controversy about which people disagree
- ⦿ CLAIM - the position on the issue
- ⦿ SUPPORT - reasons and evidence that the claim is reasonable and should be accepted
- ⦿ WARRANT- relation between claim and support
- ⦿ REFUTATION - opposing viewpoints

Task 3. You have practised on identifying issue, claim, support and warrant in the previous tasks. Now, can you recognize the opposing view points in the essay you used in your analysis?

A. What are they?

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B. How does the author present his/her refutation? Identify the use of transition

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Part 4. Types of Claim

There are three types of claim discussed below.

Type of Claim 1: **CLAIM OF FACT** - statement that can be proven or verified by observation or research. It asserts that a condition has existed, exists or will exist. The support consists of factual information that can be verified. Make sure the support can refute your opponent's claim

Examples:

- ⦿ "Air travel is more dangerous today than it was five years ago."
- ⦿ "Within ten years, destruction of rain forests will cause hundreds of plant and animal species to become extinct."

DEFENDING CLAIMS OF FACT

1. Is the claim clearly stated?
2. Does the author define terms that may be controversial or ambiguous so that readers would understand exactly what he meant?
3. Does the evidence –facts and opinions, or interpretation of the facts- fulfill the appropriate criteria of the data (i.e. sufficient, accurate, recent, typical, reliable authorities)?
4. Does the author make clear when conclusions about the data are inferences or interpretations, not facts?
5. Has the author arranged the evidence in order to emphasize what is most important?

Type of Claim 2: **CLAIM OF VALUE** - states that one thing or idea is better or more desirable than another.

- ⦿ Book example: Thomas Paine said, "Liberty is more precious than life."
- ⦿ *"Requiring community service in high school will produce more community-aware graduates."*

This type makes judgments about good vs. bad, right vs. wrong, just vs. unjust, moral vs. immoral. It applies to people, behavior, events, ideas, and policies. It also works best when your audience has the same values as you

4 Types of Claims of Value:

- ⦿ Artistic: beautiful or ugly, good or bad taste
- ⦿ Moral: right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust basis for laws
- ⦿ Political: important within the governmental structure. Disagreements between countries are because of different political values
- ⦿ Pragmatic: practical or impractical. Time efficiency, cost efficiency, practicality

DEFENDING CLAIMS OF VALUE

1. Does the author try to make clear that the values or principles s/he is defending should have priority on any scale of values?

2. Has the author suggested that adherence to the values will bring about good results in some specific situation or bad results if respect for the values is ignored?
3. Does the author use examples and illustrations to clarify meanings and make distinctions?
4. Does the author use testimony to prove that knowledgeable or highly regarded people share his values?

Type of Claim 3: **CLAIM OF POLICY** - suggests what should or ought to be done to solve a problem. It advocates adoption of policies or courses of action as solution

- ☉ *“To reduce school violence, more gun and metal detectors should be installed in public schools.”*

It is often found in persuasive speeches. Mostly accompanied by the other two claims because claims of policy requires support and reasoning. It uses appeal rationally or morally.

DEFENDING CLAIMS OF POLICY

1. Does the author make his proposal clear?
2. Does s/he establish that there is a need for a change and there are understandable reasons why this is so?
3. Has the author considered the opposing argument?
4. Does the essay prove that his proposal is an answer to the opposing arguments and that there are distinct benefits for the readers in adopting his proposal?
5. Has the author supported his proposal with solid data and not neglecting the moral considerations and the common-sense reasons?

OVERLAP CLAIMS

Types of claims rely on each other for support

- ☉ Claim of fact: “Safety has declined in the past five years as shown by an increase in near accidents, non-fatal accidents, and deteriorating equipment.”

- ⊙ Claim of value: “Safety is important to all of us, and the government has an obligation to guarantee travelers’ safety.”
- ⊙ Claim of policy: “Stricter controls on airlines are needed to increase safety.”

Task 4. Read critically the essay you analyze. Identify its type of claim. Analyze further the way the author defend his/her claim

Type of claim:

Claim of fact

1. Is the claim clearly stated?

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2. Does the author define terms that may be controversial or ambiguous so that readers would understand exactly what he meant?

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3. Does the evidence –facts and opinions, or interpretation of the facts- fulfill the appropriate criteria of the data (i.e. sufficient, accurate, recent, typical, reliable authorities)?

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4. Does the author make clear when conclusions about the data are inferences or interpretations, not facts?

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5. Has the author arranged the evidence in order to emphasize what is most important?
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Claim of value

1. Does the author try to make clear that the values or principles s/he is defending should have priority on any scale of values?
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2. Has the author suggested that adherence to the values will bring about good results in some specific situation or bad results if respect for the values is ignored?

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3. Does the author use examples and illustrations to clarify meanings and make distinctions?

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4. Does the author use testimony to prove that knowledgeable or highly regarded people share his values?

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Claim of policy

1. Does the author make his proposal clear?

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2. Does s/he establish that there is a need for a change and there are understandable reasons why this is so?

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3. Has the author considered the opposing argument?

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4. Does the essay prove that his proposal is an answer to the opposing arguments and that there are distinct benefits for the readers in adopting his proposal?

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5. Has the author supported his proposal with solid data and not neglecting the moral considerations and the common-sense reasons?

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