**Argumentation: Standard Format**

Compiled by the UWF Writing Lab

There is no clear distinction between exposition and argument. The first explains, defines and interprets; so does the second. What difference there is lies in the fact that exposition usually tries only to make something clear to the reader, whereas argument attempts not only to do that but also to convince, persuade, and even entice the reader. The end of argumentation is wholly practical; the reasoner wishes to persuade someone to act upon his suggestions or, at least, to accept his views.

Like exposition, argument rarely appears in pure form. Except when you debate in a literary society or intercollegiate society, most of your arguing is highly informal. In typical informal argument, much use is made of the other three forms of discourse.

But whether formally or informally, you will argue much, both in college and later. Your mind is constantly being pulled about by propagandists; at home, at church, in the classroom, on the athletic field, over the radio, in newspapers and books and television programs, speakers and writers are trying to get your attention so that they can convince you of the wisdom of their position. Every day you are called upon to accept, reject, or debate some point of view. All education, in fact, has been defined as learning what to believe and what not to believe. We shall never learn what is proper to believe and do unless we learn to think straight, to distinguish good argument from bad. We learn to study and to analyze evidence, to distinguish between that which bears on the subject and that which does not. We strive to avoid thinking in a haphazard fashion and to keep prejudice and emotional bias from taking the place of sound reason. Acquiring honest habits of thought is the major problem of argument as well as being a lifetime pursuit.

There are four major steps in formal argument, each of which deserves attention: establishing the proposition to be debated, analyzing the proposition, formulating the argument, and preparing the brief.

**Establishing the Thesis**

The thesis should be a clear, definite, and exact statement of what is to be discussed. It should be stated in specific, affirmative terms and should be narrowed sufficiently to permit a definite point of contact.

**Analyzing the Thesis**

Hardly less important than establishing the thesis is analyzing it. There is little point in arguing until you understand the precise meaning of what you are discussing. You must analyze the thesis for its intention and meaning. Who has not engaged in a heated debate, only to discover at long last that he and his opponent were really in agreement all along? Careful definition of terms will bring out clearly the basis of disagreement and will remove the danger of not meeting on a common ground with your opponent.

In other words, you must indicate definitely the meanings and the limits of the position you intend to defend or attack. This analysis may combine definition of terms with a statement of the history of the question, where applicable, and the gathering of supporting material which will be logical evidence.

**Planning the Development**

After you have analyzed the proposition to determine the points to be raised, you need to arrange these points and their supporting proof to your own advantage. Fundamentally, this formulation of proof depends upon reasoning. Evidence alone will not convince; it must be arranged in a definite order so that it will make the best possible appeal to your readers. You will have to consider carefully the usual orders in exposition; which is best suited to the argument? Shall you make your point or points at the beginning and then elaborate on them? Or shall you obtain suspense by withholding conclusions and by gradual disclosure convince the skeptical of the truth of your reasoning? If you choose the former, you are proceeding deductively; if the latter, inductively. Or shall you use comparison and contrast, strengthening your argument and weakening your opponent’s at the same time? Ultimately, of course, the choice of order will depend upon purpose: as it relates to your argument, and which takes your audience into account.

**Writing the Paper**

Argument is almost wholly a matter of recognizing and revealing logical relationships between ideas. Any device that will clarify and emphasize these relationships is important because argument is prone to "jump the track" and take up unrelated issues. In argument, as in other forms of discourse, an outline is usually arranged under headings of introduction, argument, and conclusion. But the purpose of the brief is always the same: to present a close line of argument in a clearly revealed series of related ideas.

**The Structure of an Argument**

In its simplest form an argument consists of two statements, one of which is a conclusion from the other:

Mary's temperature is 104 degrees. She ought to go to the hospital.

The second statement is a conclusion from the first. The first statement, the premise, is what tends to make us believe the second. The two statements taken together constitute an argument. A person who accepts the argument believes that anyone with a temperature of l04 degrees needs medical attention. Thus, the premise is the reason for accepting the conclusion.

The difference between statements that are related as premise and conclusion (arguments) and those that are not is illustrated below. Each of these pairs of statements consists of a premise and an italicized conclusion.

These men and women are doing the same job. They should get the same pay.

Professor Jones is a tough grader. A check of his grades shows that less than 5% of his students got A's.

Unless you arrive on campus before eight o'clock, it is impossible to find a parking space. Something ought to be done about the campus parking situation.

In these pairs, there is no such premise-conclusion relationship, for it is not logically possible to conclude one statement from the other. These statements are not arguments.

These men and women are doing the same job. Some of them are married.

Professor Jones is a tough grader. He received his doctorate from the University of Minnesota.

This morning, I had to park half a mile from campus. Students cannot afford to park in a metered area.

The first group of arguments is not necessarily convincing. Some readers might want additional premises before accepting the conclusion. But whether convincing or not, these paired statements are related as those in the second group are not. We can make that relationship more obvious by inserting "because" before the premise or "therefore" before the conclusion. But no statement in the second group can be inferred as a conclusion from the statement paired with it. Certainly, we cannot conclude that Professor Jones is a tough grader because he received his doctorate from the University of Minnesota.

So far, we have been considering arguments of the simplest structure: a single premise and a single conclusion. Many arguments are more complex--for example:

Final examinations should be abolished because (1) they are detrimental to student health, (2) they place undue emphasis on memorizing facts, (3) they encourage last-minute cramming instead of daily preparation, and (4) they penalize the nervous student.

Or a conclusion from one or more premises may become a premise for another conclusion, as one unit of argument is built on another.