

ASSIGNMENTS & ESSAYS



What is an argumentative essay?

An argumentative essay is a piece of academic writing that requires students to investigate a chosen topic, gather and evaluate evidence, and most importantly establish a position (form an opinion) about the topic. This must all be formulated in a concise, well-structured manner in order to persuade the reader.

It is important to note that you will probably be expected to create an argument in almost all academic writing regardless of whether your brief asks for an argumentative essay or not. Most academic texts that we read are arguing a point. If we can find and understand the writer's argument it helps us think about and understand the issue without emotional bias, analyse conflicting claims, and make judgments about the writer's claim and the nature of evidence provided.

We make arguments all the time in everyday life. Think back to when you were younger and you wanted to see a movie with your friends. Your argument (claim), to your parents, was that you should be allowed to go. You then gave reasons why this was true (evidence) such as, you had done all your homework, you had been working hard and needed a break or all the other parents were allowing their kids to go.

We have been preparing for these essays our entire lives.

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING



What makes a good academic essay?

A good essay does not only rely on a good topic but rather an interesting approach to the topic. Once you have an approach and you have narrowed the topic down decide what your point of view on the topic is. Your point of view is vital in creating a good argument. What evidence can you find to back up your point of view? In some instances this evidence can be drawn from personal experiences. But we often need credible sources to validate our point of view. We still have a lot to learn and are by no means experts on any given subject yet. It takes years of experience to become an expert. Experts and credible sources give authority to our point of view, forcing readers to take our opinions more seriously.

How to start

- If it is not already given to you, find and formulate a problem you want to investigate (this is your topic or research question).
- Create a list of ideas that support your point of view (idea).
- Now pick the best ones.
- Put them in a logical order that will help persuade the reader. E.g. weakest to strongest ideas. These ideas will create separate paragraphs. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph where you tell the reader what the main idea/theme of the paragraph is.
- Now think of any argument that could oppose your main ideas.
- RESEARCH! Find relevant evidence to support your point of view (your idea). Keep reading.

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Now put it into paragraphs

(See *Effective Paragraphs* pg 38)

- 1) Put forward a well-considered point of view.
- 2) Now provide support for this view (evidence to back-up your view). This must be referenced.
- 3) You could also provide some contrasting views. This will show you have done research and are aware of the counter arguments. This must also be referenced.
- 4) Explain, carefully, why your view is more fitting/reasonable.

Be logical! Remember that all your paragraphs are arguing one point. Make sure you link them to this point. The most important part of writing an essay is to show your understanding of the topic. This should include all areas and contrasting views. How can you make the reader believe in what you are saying if you don't completely understand the topic? **RESEARCH!**

Things to avoid

Don't assume anything. Everything must be proven or backed up with evidence.

This section is adapted from:

write a more effective argument (online). 2013. Available: <http://www.englishbiz.co.uk/mainguides/argue.htm> (Accessed 28 November 2013).

Argument (online).2013. Available: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/rgument/> (Accessed 28 November 2013).

Beckman, L. Dube, C. Underhill, J. 2011. Academic Literacy. Cape Town: Juta and Company LTD (pages 40-43).

Think of introductions as taxi conductors.

They try really hard to get you on their taxi and will tell you where the taxi is going so you can decide if you want to go on the ride. The reader needs to know what's going to be discussed and how the essay is structured to decide if it's relevant to them and if they want to continue reading. A good introduction is short and direct but still draws the reader in. A bad introduction loses the reader before they even start. Before you start ask yourself: What type of person are you writing for (your audience) and what is the purpose of the writing?

An introduction should get the reader's attention, explain why you are writing this essay/report/etc. and provide the direction that your topic has explored.

INTRODUCTIONS



INTRODUCTIONS

What to include in your introduction:

Start off generally about your topic and then narrow it down. (Be careful not to be too broad)

- 1) Grab the reader's attention. You can do this by using:
An interesting example
An inviting quote
Referring to a current event
A rhetorical question
Narrative ("imagine you were...") or
A statement
- 2) Provide some background on the topic: This helps the reader understand the context of your writing.
- 3) If necessary, define the key terms in your writing (quote a dictionary).
- 4) Why are you writing this (essay/report/etc.)? What is the purpose: are you arguing, comparing or discussing a point? What is the topic you are arguing, comparing or discussing?
- 5) State how your information will be organised. What are the subtopics (paragraphs) you will focus on? This is where you tell the reader how your topic will be explored.

This section is partially adapted from:

Writing a Research Paper (online). 2012. Available: <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/PlanResearchPaper.html#intro>

(Accessed 14 October 2013).

Topic Sentence and Thesis Statement : The keystones of Organized Writing (online). 2013. Available: <http://www.rrcc.edu/writing/topic-thesis.html> (Accessed 14 October 2013).

What is paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is an accurate, simple restatement of a section of text. This means that you change what you have read into entirely new/your own words without changing the meaning of what you have read. It does NOT have to be SHORTER than the section of text you are paraphrasing. It must however ALWAYS be referenced, as it is still someone else's ideas.

When do we use paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is used in almost all academic writing. It is used to provide evidence, from a credible source, for our point of view. We do this by paraphrasing or quoting these sources.

When do you paraphrase and not quote?

- The ideas in the text are more important than the way the author has written it.
- The piece of text is hard to understand because of the language used.
- A quotation is too long or could be simpler.
- A paraphrase might integrate into your writing better than a quote.
- When you want to make sure you understand the concepts you are reading.

PARAPHRASING



How to Paraphrase?

- 1) Read/ skim the whole text. (If you don't know what the entire text is about it will be hard to understand the section you need to paraphrase).
- 2) Now read and reread the section you are about to paraphrase. (Make sure you understand what the author is trying to say. What is the main idea?).
- 3) Place the text aside so you can't see it.
- 4) Write down everything you can remember from what you have read in YOUR OWN WORDS.
- 5) Go back and look at the text. Compare what you have written with the original passage. Make sure you haven't left out any important ideas.
- 6) Now check that you have not used the same wording as the author (use a thesaurus if you need to).

PARAPHRASING

PARAPHRASING

- 7) If your paraphrase is still too similar, rearrange your sentences, combine ideas (the sentences structure must be different to that of the authors).
- 8) You cannot:
 - Just rearrange words.
 - Keep the same word order and just change the words using a thesaurus.
 - Keep the same sentence structure.
 - Use a direct quote (this defeats the purpose).
- 9) Now this paraphrase needs to be referenced. Use your referencing guide.
- 10) You are not finished yet. Try to incorporate your paraphrase into your essay. Refer to *Effective Paragraphs* (pg 38) to do this successfully.

This section is partially adapted from:

Beckman, L. Dube, C. Underhill, J. 2012. *Academic Literacy*. Cape Town: Juta and Co Ltd.
Paraphrase and Summary(online)2013. Available: <http://writing.ku.edu/paraphrase-and-summary> (Accessed 21 November 2013) (pages 55-56).
Paraphrasing (online) 2011. Available: <http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/2005/types-communication/academic-writing/paraphrasing/> (Accessed 21 November 2013).

What is a quote?

A quote is a section of text that has been copied word for word and placed between open and closed quotation marks (“ ”). It is always referenced.

When do we use a quote?

Quoting, like paraphrasing, is used in almost all academic writing. It is used to provide evidence, from a credible figure/piece of writing, for our point of view. We do this by paraphrasing or quoting these sources.

When do you quote and not paraphrase?

The only time one uses a quote and not a paraphrase is when the section of writing expresses an idea so well you can't say it better or simpler through paraphrasing.

It is vital to reference a quote correctly, to ensure you do not plagiarize. This will also allow the reader to differentiate between your voice and the author you are quoting. **Quotation marks are not enough.** There are three different ways one can reference and incorporate a quote into a paragraph.

QUOTING



QUOTING

Referencing a Quote

1. *You can add the in-text reference at the end of the quote.*

Impressionists recorded ephemerality in “the changing conditions of light and atmosphere as well as their individual sensations before nature” (Hurrell 2001: 8-9).

2. *You can incorporate the in-text reference into the sentence*

According to Hurrell (2001: 8-9) Impressionists recorded ephemerality in “the changing conditions of light and atmosphere as well as their individual sensations before nature”.

3. *You can incorporate the in-text reference into the sentence by sandwiching the quote between the in-text reference.*

According to Hurrell Impressionists recorded ephemerality in “the changing conditions of light and atmosphere as well as their individual sensations before nature” (2001: 8-9).

Lead in words

We use 'lead in' words to incorporate a quote into a paragraph as well as to incorporate the reference or paraphrase fluidly into our writing. I used the phrase "according to" in the above example but there are a number of different words and phrases one can use. It is a good idea to use as many different lead in words as possible throughout your assignment. It is however important that you use the most appropriate word. Please note that they all have different meanings, some show where the writer is very sure (e.g. states) and some show where a writer is tentative (e.g. suggests, feels) in their opinion. Below is a list of a few alternate words one could use for "According to" or "says"

According to	Demands	Remarks
Says	Argues	Believes
States	Suggested	Feels
Explains	Claims	Illustrates

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph consists of a number of related sentences that deal with a single topic.

A paragraph should: have one main idea, be logical and develop the idea (have evidence to support the idea)

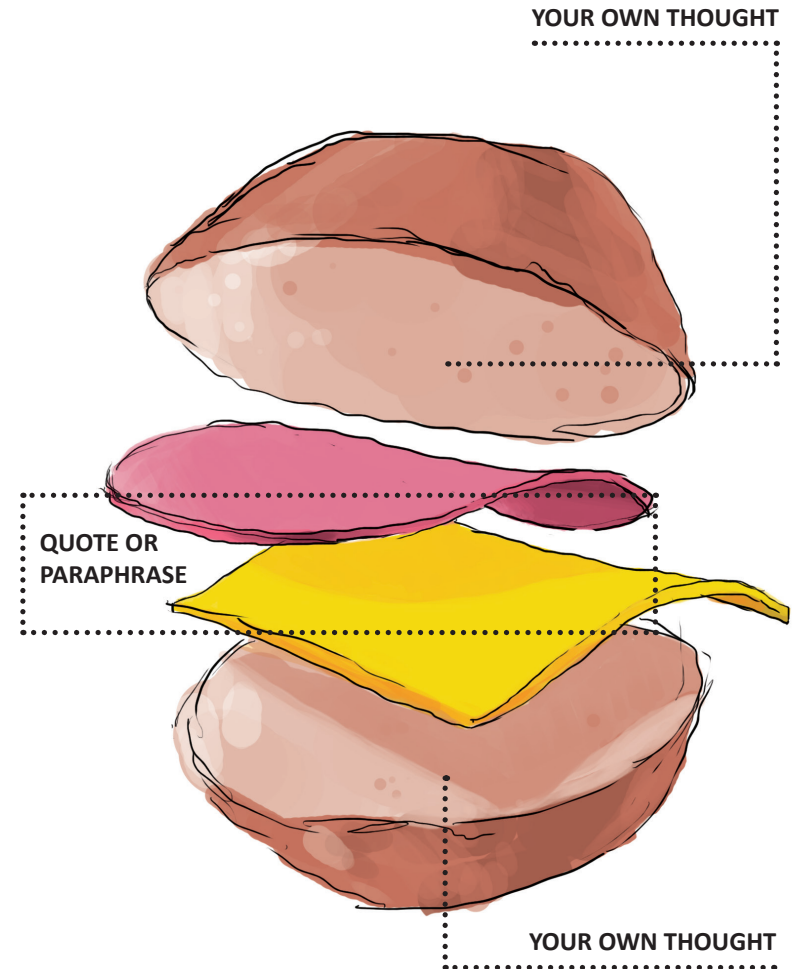
How to structure a paragraph

Don't start or end a paragraph with a quotation or paraphrased idea. ***Sandwich that idea between your own thoughts.***

EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS



THE QUOTATION SANDWICH (GWINYA)



Pie paragraphs

An easy way to sandwich a quote is by using the PIE method to integrate quotes.

- Point: Introduce the point you are making in this paragraph (often referred to as the “topic sentence”)
- **Illustration: Use a quotation or paraphrased idea (or other example or evidence) to illustrate and support the Point – here you are providing examples that give your Point credibility. You’re showing that your Point has merit.**
- Explanation: this is where you explain how your *Illustration* supports your *Point*. Also show the reader how this links back to your argument.

Example: Point: Tone is the gradient between light and dark. **Illustration:** “**The way light falls on objects and surfaces informs us of their shape and form**”(Lower 1997: 4). **Explanation:** Thus the greater the tonal value, the more three-dimensional your artwork will appear.

This section is partially adapted from:

PIE: How to Construct an Effective Paragraph (online). 2012. Available: [facweb.northseattle.edu/jclapp/ONLINE English 102/PIE Paragraph Form.htm](http://facweb.northseattle.edu/jclapp/ONLINE%20English%20102/PIE%20Paragraph%20Form.htm).
<http://www.iordache.biz/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/sandwich3.jpg> (Accessed 20 November 2012).

References

- Hurrell, K. 2001. *Essential Impressionists*. Bath: Parragon. (pages 8-9).
- Lower, P. 1997. *The Essential Guide to Art and Design*. London: Hodder and Stroughton.
- Huffington, A. 1988. *Picasso: creator and destroyer*. London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd.

EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

**POINT
ILLUSTRATION
EXPLANATION**

Now you try

According to Huffington (1988:9)“Surprise was the key characteristic of Picasso’s art”.

Conclusions are the final paragraph of your assignment. A conclusion is often seen as one of the hardest things to write. You have spent an entire essay constructing your argument and now you need to bring all the points together. See it as your final opportunity to persuade the reader that your argument is the better argument. You will find that the conclusion is closely linked to the introduction.

What to Include in your Conclusion

- You start off by confirming the text is coming to the end by using statements or devices such as: “In conclusion” or “Therefore”.
- Remind the reader what the essay was about (Your research question).
- Summarise the essay’s main points (these should be the main ideas in each paragraph).
- Give your final words. This can be something for the reader to think about or a call for an additional investigation on the topic.

Things to avoid

- Do not introduce any new ideas in your conclusion (that’s what the body of your essay is for).
- Avoid using new terms/words that would require definition.
- Don’t go off topic. The aim is to restate what you have already said, to drive home the point.
- Avoid long conclusions. Keep it short and to the point.

This section is partially adapted from:

Beekman, L. Dube, C. Underhill, J. 2011. Academic Literacy. Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd (page 85).

CONCLUSIONS



ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

Have I understood and answered the brief correctly?

Is my name, student number, date, subject and lecturer on the cover page or top of my first page?

Do I have a research question/main idea that the assignment explores throughout?

Do I have an introduction, body and conclusion?

Do I have a topic sentence/ one main idea per paragraph?

Have I used the PIE paragraph format for each paragraph in the body?

Does each main idea have paraphrased or quoted evidence to back it up?

Is the evidence I am using the most appropriate to back up my point?

Is the evidence quoted or paraphrased correctly?

Does each quote or paraphrase have an in-text reference?

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Is the divide between my thought/ opinion and the research I have used clear to the reader?
- Do I have one thought per sentence?
- Are my sentences as short and clear as they could be?
- There are no new ideas in my conclusion.
- Do I have a clear argument throughout my assignment?
- Do I have a reference list on a new page?
- Are all my references correct, according to the DUT?
- Harvard Referencing Guide?
- Have I written more than one draft of this assignment?
- Have I used the Writing Centre?