

Argument

What You Will Learn

- ▶ To take a position on a topic
- ▶ To craft a good working thesis or take-home idea
- ▶ To build an argumentative position in four main ways—deductive, inductive, Toulmin, and Rogerian approaches
- ▶ To arrange an argument effectively
- ▶ To develop material that supports your thesis

What a confusing word *argument* is! Consider how the word is used in these two situations:

- Between classes in the hallway of your school, you can hear loud, angry shouting and the slamming of locker doors. You look in the direction of the noise and your friend tells you, “Oh, that’s just Warren and Charlotte. They’re having an argument.”
- When you get to your Advanced Placement English Language and Composition course, you hear that students are expected to learn how to “create and sustain arguments based on readings, research, and/or personal experience.”

Can these two examples possibly be referring to the same concept? In the first instance, argument stops communication. As stated in the second, argument is a *kind* of communication that’s ongoing, sustained.

There are lots of the first kind of arguments that fascinate the general public—the magazines beside the grocery checkout are full of stories about Celebrity X arguing with Celebrity Y—but we’re going to concentrate on the second kind in this chapter. (In fact, as you’ll discover perhaps, knowing how

to accomplish the second kind of argument can sometimes prevent the first from occurring.) As with *analysis*, the etymology, the origin, of *argument* suggests a path for our discussion. **Argument** comes from the Latin *argumentum*, meaning “evidence, ground, support, proof.” By the time English came to use the term in the fourteenth century, it meant “statements and reasoning in support of a proposition.” In academic settings, that meaning hasn’t changed over the past seven centuries. That’s what the second example above calls for. When you engage in an argument in school—when you produce an argumentative essay or, less formally, just argue a position—you focus on a specific, clear idea that you want your readers to consider carefully and finally adhere to: stick to, like a Band-Aid sticks to your skin. And you convince your readers to adhere to your central idea by offering details, explanations, and reasons, all arranged in an effective order and all well developed, that support your central idea.

Taking a Position

The most important step in engaging in academic argumentation and writing an argumentative essay is to construct your **position**, the central point you want to propose and develop—what we call the take-home idea in Chapter 4. You may not be completely certain about this main idea when you start working on an argumentative assignment—main ideas usually get developed while you’re in the midst of considering them—but you should have a clear position formulated by the time you’re producing the final draft to turn in.

How do you develop a main, take-home idea? Suppose you are constructing an argument in response to the following assignment, which actually appeared on the 2008 Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Examination:

For years corporations have sponsored high school sports. Their ads are found on the outfield fence at baseball parks or on the walls of the gymnasium, the football stadium, or even the locker room. Corporate logos are even found on players’ uniforms. But some schools have moved beyond corporate sponsorship of sports to allowing “corporate partners” to place their names and ads on all kinds of school facilities—libraries, music rooms, cafeterias. Some schools accept money to require students to watch Channel One, a news program that includes advertising. And schools often negotiate exclusive contracts with soft drink or clothing companies.

Some people argue that corporate partnerships are a necessity for cash-strapped schools. Others argue that schools should provide an environment free from ads and corporate influence. Using appropriate evidence, write an essay in which you evaluate the pros and cons of corporate sponsorship for schools and indicate why you find one position more persuasive than the other.