

## Choosing a Topic

- Choose a topic you care about. You can most effectively defend a position with which you are emotionally and intellectually engaged. If it is too personal, emotion inhibits effectiveness.
- Choose something you are well-informed about (or be willing to conduct the necessary research).
- Your topic must be specific enough to be covered thoroughly within the length restraints of the assignment. You may need to choose one aspect of an issue if it is too broad.
- Recognize that you must be open-minded about your topic. Are you willing to change your thesis if you find that it is weak and unsubstantiated?
- Try to choose a topic you can approach with some degree of objectivity. Remember, you must be willing to consider both sides of an issue: understanding the opposing viewpoint will strengthen your argument.
- In choosing a topic, keep your **purpose** in mind:
  - ⇒ What do you want to accomplish?
  - ⇒ How do you want your audience to respond?
  - ⇒ Is your purpose too idealistic?
- Remember to analyze your **audience**:
  - ⇒ What beliefs or opinions are your readers likely to hold?
  - ⇒ Will their response to your position likely be neutral, favorable, or hostile?
  - ⇒ Will you be able to defend your position convincingly and logically to your particular audience?
  - ⇒ If you choose a controversial topic, you should assume that the opposition will be well-informed and looking for weaknesses in your argument.

## Taking a Stand: Formulating Your Thesis

The thesis for an argumentation paper is a clear statement of the position you wish to defend (or of the position you wish to refute). You will have to support each tenet of your thesis persuasively and logically, using specific evidence.

Once you have chosen a topic and stated your thesis, examine it to make sure it is *debatable*.

- ⇒ Do not make your thesis a statement of fact or one that is self-evident (one that most people agree on automatically). For example, it would be pointless to argue that racism is an evil that should not be tolerated in a democratic society. A more viable thesis might argue that a certain government policy is racist, and therefore should not be tolerated.
- ⇒ Test your thesis to see if it is *debatable* by trying to formulate an **antithesis**, a statement that supports the opposite position. For example:

**Thesis:**

Because minorities have suffered outright discrimination in past educational systems, university admission policies should still employ affirmative action quotas.

**Antithesis:**

Even though minorities have suffered outright discrimination in past educational systems, university admission policies should no longer employ affirmative action quotas.