



Writing an Argumentation Paper

What is Argumentation?

- Argumentation is a well-organized, reasoned method by which one declares his or her position, belief, or conclusion to be logically sound.
- Argumentation involves taking a stand on an issue and giving evidence to support that point of view.

Some Purposes of Argumentation:

- The primary purpose of argumentation is *not* to persuade an audience in order to move them to action; rather, its purpose is to demonstrate effectively the validity (or invalidity) of an idea.
- Another purpose is to defend your position as feasible, regardless of whether you can convince others to agree.
- You may aim an argumentative paper to question or refute a position you disagree with, without necessarily offering an alternative.

Points to Remember:

- A good argumentation paper appeals primarily to **reason**, employing a logical chain of rationale to lead the reader to a particular conclusion.
- An argumentation paper must provide evidence to support its claims.
- Strong argumentation papers also refute opposing arguments.
- Sometimes an appeal to emotions or ethics may be appropriate, but these should only *reinforce the logic* of an argument, not take the place of it.

The Two Main Forms of Argumentation

There are two primary types of argumentation used to move from evidence to a conclusion.

1. DEDUCTIVE REASONING

Deductive reasoning proceeds from a general principle or assumption to a specific conclusion.

- This kind of reasoning uses a **syllogism** as its basic form:

Major premise: General statement or assumption

Minor premise: A related, but more specific statement.

Conclusion: Must be drawn from the two premises.

- For example:

Major premise: *Racism should not be tolerated.*

Minor premise: *The current admission policy at Jones University is racist.*

Conclusion: *Therefore, the policy should not be tolerated.*

- If you can grant each of the premises, you must also grant the conclusion. If either of the premises is false, the conclusion will also be false, **even if the reasoning is sound**. In the following example, the reasoning is logical, but the conclusion is false because the major premise is false:

Major premise: All cats are white.

Minor premise: My pet, Queenie, is a cat.

Conclusion: Therefore, Queenie is white.

- If you can convince your audience to accept your major and minor premises, and if your conclusion follows from them, the force of logic should bring the audience to accept your conclusion. **Therefore**, try to select premises that are self-evident or that can be well-supported (otherwise, use *inductive* reasoning).

2. **INDUCTIVE REASONING**

Inductive reasoning proceeds from individual, specific observations to a more general conclusion. This kind of reasoning uses no strict form.

- All relevant evidence must be stated, and the conclusion drawn should fit the evidence better than any other conclusion.
- First, decide on a question to be answered.
- Gather all evidence relevant to the question and to finding the answer.
- Move from evidence to a conclusion by making an inference that takes the evidence into account.
- The more information you gather, the smaller the gap between your evidence and your conclusion.
- Conclusions are only highly probable, not certain. To avoid reaching an ungrounded or false conclusion, try to consider possible conclusions before making inferences (hypothesize).

An example of inductive reasoning:

- **Question:** Who stole the cash from my bedroom dresser drawer?
- **Evidence:**
 1. The money was there before I left for work but not when I came home.
 2. There was no sign of forced entry into the house.
 3. My brother, John, was home for lunch (he left the milk out on the counter) but he was gone when I arrived home in the evening.
 4. No one else is home during the day.
 5. John complained to Mom that he wanted his allowance early, but she refused to give it to him.
 6. John brought home new tennis shoes tonight.
- **Conclusion:** My brother stole the money from my drawer and used it to buy new shoes.