

Lecture on Academic Arguments (Academic Discourse or Academic Argument)

- Documented research and evidence
- For professional, academic, or school audience familiar with material
- Makes clear and compelling point in formal, objective and often technical style
- Follows conventions of format, usage, and punctuation
- Documented using professional citation style
 - Draws materials from reports
 - Some aimed at specialists
 - Some complex reports become sources for more broader audiences

Developing an Academic Argument

- Choose a topic you want to explore in depth
- Get to know the conversation surrounding your topic
- Assess what you know and what you need to know
- Come up with a claim about your topic
- Consider your rhetorical stance and purpose
 - You may take the stance of a reporter: you review what has been said about the topic, analyze and evaluate contributions to the conversation surrounding it, synthesize the most important strands of that conversation, draw conclusions based on them

- You may see yourself primarily as a critic: you intend to point out the problems and mistakes associated with some view of your topic
- You may prefer the role of an advocate: you present research that strongly supports a particular view on your topic
- Think about your audience(s)
 - Summarize its main points
 - Analyze how those points are pertinent
 - Evaluate the quality of the supporting evidence
 - Synthesize the results of your analysis and evaluation
 - Summarize what you think about the article
- Concentrate on material you are gathering
 - Summarize its main points
 - Analyze how those points are pertinent
 - Evaluate the quality of the supporting evidence
 - Synthesize the results of your analysis and evaluation
 - Summarize what you think about the article
- Take special care with documentation
- Think about organization
 - Does the article open with an abstract, summarizing its content?
 - Is there a formal introduction to the subject or a clear statement of a thesis or hypothesis

- Does the article begin with a “review of literature,” summarizing recent research on its topic?
- Does the piece describe its methods of research?
- How does the article report its results and findings?
- Does the article use charts and graphs to report data?
- Does the piece use headings and subheadings?
- How does the work summarize its findings or make recommendations?
- Does the essay offer a list of works cited or references?
- Consider style and tone
 - It strives for clarity and directness, though it may tolerate jargon
 - It favors denotative rather than connotative language
 - It is usually impersonal, avoiding “I” and using the third person
 - In some fields, it may use the passive voice routinely
 - It uses technical language, symbols, and abbreviations for efficiency
 - It avoids colloquialism, slang, and even contractions

- Consider design and visuals
- Reflect on your draft and get responses
- Edit and proofread your text

Finding Evidence

The most persuasive evidence should match the time and place in which you make your argument—in other words—your rhetorical situations.

- What kinds of data are preferred as evidence? How are such data gathered and presented?
- How are definitions, causal analyses, evaluations, analogies, and examples used as evidence?
- How does the field use firsthand and secondhand sources as evidence? What kinds of data are favored?
- How are statistics or other numerical information used and presented as evidence? Are tables, charts, or graphs commonly used?
- How much weight do they carry?
- What or who counts as an authority in this field?
- How are the credentials of authorities established?
- What weight do writers in the field give to precedence—that is, to examples of similar actions or decisions made in the past?
- Is personal experience allowed as evidence? When?
- How are quotations used as part of evidence?

- How are images used as part of evidence, and how closely are they related to the verbal parts of the argument being presented?

Use data and evidence from research sources

- Explore library resources: printed works and databases: Galileo, JSTOR, etc. (Library Resource Lecture upcoming)
- Explore online resources
- Collect data on your own
 - Perform experiments
 - Make observations
 - Make sure that the observation relates directly to your claim
 - Brainstorm about what you're looking for, but don't be rigidly bound to your expectations
 - Develop an appropriate system for collecting data. Consider using a split notebook or page: on one side record the minute details of your observations; on the other, record your thoughts or impressions.
 - Be aware that the way you record data will affect the outcome, if only in respect to what you decide to include in your observational notes and what you leave out.
 - Record the precise date, time and place of the observation(s)
 - Conduct interviews

- Determine the exact purpose of the interview, and be sure it's directly related to your claim
- Set up the interview will in advance. Specify how long it will take, and if you wish to record the session, ask permission to do so.
- Prepare a written list of both factual and open-ended questions. Leave plenty of space for notes after each question. Don't feel you have to cover all questions.
- Record the subject's full name and title, as well as the date, time, and place of the interview.
- Be sure to thank those people whom you interview, wither in person or with a follow-up letter or email message.
- Use questionnaires to conduct surveys
 - Write out your purpose in conducting the survey, ad make sure that its results will be directly related to your purpose.
 - Brainstorm potential questions to include in the survey, and ask how each relates to your purpose and claim.
 - Figure out how many people you want to contact, what the demographics of your sample should be, and how you plan to reach these people.

- Draft questions that are as free of bias as possible, making sure that each calls for a short, specific answer.
 - Think about possible ways that respondents could misunderstand you or your questions, and revise with these points in mind.
 - Test the questions on several people, and revise those questions that are ambiguous, hard to answer, or too time-consuming to answer.
 - If your questionnaire is to be sent by mail or email or posted on the Web, draft a cover letter explaining your purpose and giving a clear deadline. For mail, provide an addressed, stamped return envelope.
 - On the final draft of the questionnaire, leave plenty of space for answers.
 - Proofread the final draft carefully. Typos will make a bad impression on those whose help you're seeking.
 - After you've done your tabulations, set out your findings in clear and easily readable form, using a chart or spreadsheet if possible.
- Draw upon personal experience

Evaluating Sources

- Assessing Print Sources
 - Relevance

- Credentials of the author
- Stance of the author
- Credentials of the publisher or sponsor
- Stance of the publisher or sponsor
- Currency
- Accuracy
- Level of specialization
- Audience
- Length
- Availability
- Omissions
- Assessing Electronic Sources
 - Who has posted the document or message or created the site/medium (individual, group, company, government?)
 - What can you determine about the credibility of the author or sponsor (can info be verified, how accurate and complete?)
 - Who can be held accountable for the information in the document or site?
 - How current is the document or site.
 - What perspectives are represented (is it at all balanced?)
- Assessing Field Research
 - Have you rechecked all data and all conclusions to make sure they're accurate and warranted?

- Have you identified the exact time, place, and participants in all your field research?
- Have you made clear what part you played in the research and how, if at all, our role could have influenced the results or findings?
- If your research involved other people, have you gotten their permission to use their words or other materials in your argument? Have you asked whether you can use their names or whether the names should be kept confidential?