ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

Goals of Argumentation

- To present a viewpoint to the reader
- To explain, clarify, and illustrate that viewpoint
- To persuade the reader that the viewpoint is valid
    1. To move the reader to action
    2. To convince the reader that the opinion is correct

Evidence

- Opinion is almost worthless alone. Anyone can have an opinion; simply expressing an opinion won't persuade or convince, especially in academic writing.
- Your reader may think that a mere statement of opinion is a sign of laziness, ignorance, or inability to adequately support your statements.
- Opinions, then, must be supported by facts, examples, statistics, personal experience, or authoritative sources.
- The amount of evidence necessary depends on audience -- will the audience be people who already agree with you or people who might not agree with your position? When in doubt, pretend the reader will be a grump who NEVER agrees with anything. Provide enough proof to force the grump to admit that your opinion has merit.

Counterarguments

- Intelligent readers will know that there is an opinion other than yours. If you, as the writer, do not show an awareness of the counterarguments, readers might think either you have not explored the subject thoroughly or that you are presenting one-sided propaganda, afraid to admit the counterarguments. So YOU must look at the other side too. Present the counterarguments and then refute them, either by disproving them or by conceding their truth but showing that they are not as strong or valid as your arguments. You can do so by: correcting your opponent's facts, denying the relevance of contrary proof, or denying that what your opponent presents as proof, though relevant, is sufficient.

Alternative Structures for Argumentative Essays

Option One: Weakest to Strongest Argument Followed by Counterargument

Introduction (thesis)
Weakest argument that supports your opinion
Stronger argument that supports your opinion
Strongest argument that supports your opinion
Counterarguments and refutation
Conclusion

Option Two: Counterargument Followed by Arguments

Introduction (thesis)
Counterarguments and refutation
Arguments that support your opinion, arranged from
least important to most important point or vice versa
Conclusion

Option Three: Multiple Counterarguments Followed by Argument

Introduction (thesis)
Counterargument 1 and argument to refute it
Counterargument 2 and argument to refute it
Counterargument 3 and argument to refute it
Strongest argument that supports your opinion
Conclusion

From Joy M. Reid (1982). *The Process of Composition*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc. pp. 99-102.