

9. ARGUMENT

Any point that can be reasonably debated is *argumentative*; however, as a mode, *argument* also means that writers follow a specific method to support the argumentative position which typically involves combating the position of those who disagree with that position. The combat is not actual fighting, simply arguing against opposing viewpoints. The term *argument* in a rhetorical sense does not denote anger or hostility. An academic argument should be carried out in a calm and rational manner. The purpose of argumentative writing is to convince readers to accept as valid the position of the writer. Because academics speak so often about argumentative writing, it may sometimes be confused with the *Argument mode*. Usually, this does not cause any problems, because they are so closely related; in fact, one of the two common methods, the *Toulmin Method*, is probably the way most students envision argumentative writing as a whole. However, as a student learning the modes it is important to recognize distinctions. (Mostly for the reason that if one is asked to write an *argument*, it is important to know what approach to take.) If a thesis statement takes a position, this is *argumentative*; when a systematic approach is used to support the argument, this is the Argument rhetorical mode.

There are two strategies most commonly used in the mode: *Toulmin Argument* and *Rogierian Argument*. A Toulmin Argument uses claims, grounds, and warrants to support a position, while a Rogierian Argument uses common ground to show that other positions are weaker when compared to the writer's position or that compromise is necessary. Both writing argumentatively and writing in argument mode require writers to take a position on a topic, use evidence to support that position, and present the information in a way that convinces readers to accept or seriously consider the writer's position; however, use of the mode requires that this be done in a specific way. It is easiest to see the difference in a non-academic situation; for example, a letter of recommendation for a job is typically argumentative—it asserts that the candidate being recommended is appropriate for the position—but it is *not* in the Argument mode—it does not make claims like *If Joe Smith applies for this job, you should know that he is frequently late to class and arrives without his textbook, while Suzanne Doe has never once arrived late or unprepared*. Granted, this seems more antagonistic than the peaceful combat one sees in an academic argument, but that is why the mode would not be used in such a situation.

Effective arguments require the use of other modes. Most papers assigned in college courses—not just English—require skillful argumentation; not all of these will require the Argument mode. On the other hand, using the Argument mode results in an argumentative essay regardless of whether the mode is required. Although there is plenty of additional information about arguments available in *The Little Seagull Handbook* and elsewhere, these visual representations may help one remember, recognize, and be able to use them:

Toulmin

Claim	the argumentative position (i.e. thesis statement; topic sentences)	
Ground	the reason for making the claim and the evidence to support the claim (i.e. why should the reader care and why should the reader believe the claim)	
Warrant	how the ground is connected to the claim (i.e. explaining how the evidence supports the thesis and topic sentences)	

The pattern in a Toulmin Argument works when thinking about the structure of an entire essay (introduction/thesis, body paragraphs, conclusion) and when thinking about the structure of body paragraphs (topic sentence, examples and support, explain how these support the thesis). Most academic writing can fit into this model no matter which discipline one is studying. Take, for example, a history essay or an economics essay. History essays do not just present factual information such as dates and events; they employ arguments to persuade readers to accept the *interpretation* of those dates and events offered by the writer. Economics and other disciplines that employ large amounts of data do not do so in purely expository terms. These papers use the data as evidence to support arguments about what the data means. Try writing points for a Toulmin Argument in the chart above or in one of these that follow in order to test this out.

Toulmin Argument as an Essay Structure

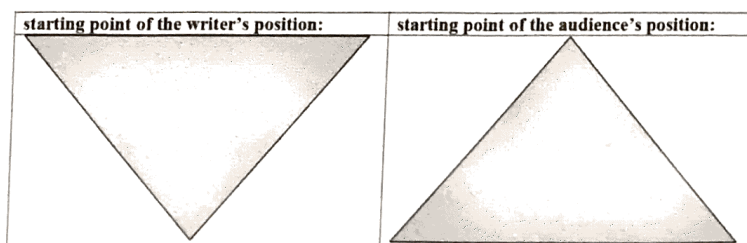
Claim	Thesis Statement (the argument)	
Ground	Body Paragraphs (the evidence)	1. 2. 3.
Warrant	Conclusion (how the evidence supports the argument)	

Toulmin Argument as a Body Paragraph Model

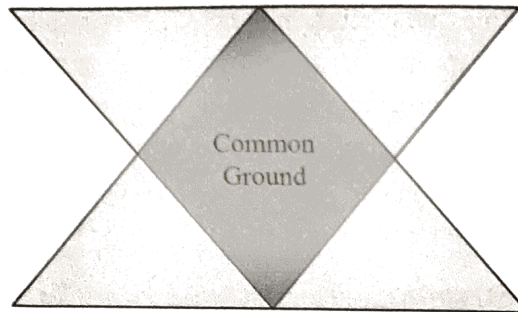
Claim	Topic Sentence (a claim that supports the thesis of the essay)	
Ground	Examples (the concrete evidence that illustrates the topic sentence claim)	
Warrant	Analysis/Explanation (showing how the evidence supports the topic claim and thesis claim)	

Rogerian

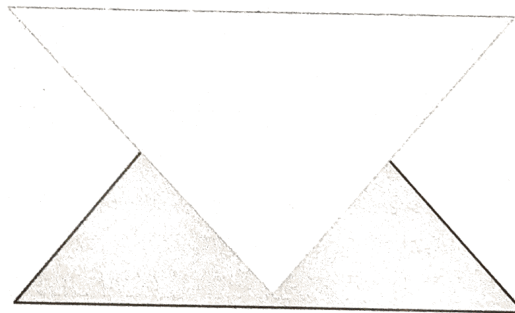
Although Rogerian Argument is used when a writer expects to have combative readers (i.e. it is expected that most readers will strongly disagree), it is also referred to as the *Common Ground Argument*. Writers engage with positions that differ from their own in order to strengthen their own position, but they attempt to do so by making readers see where their beliefs and interests coincide. It is designed to keep readers from rejecting an argument before being convinced.



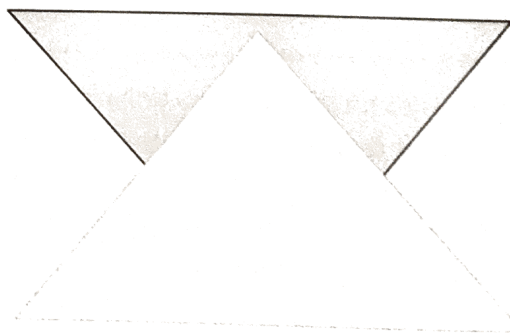
A Rogerian Argument begins by discussing the darker shaded area below, where the writer's position and the reader's position can find common ground:



Next, a Rogerian Argument covers the rest of the area involved in the audience's position sympathetically (i.e. it does not judge or portray that position as weak or wrong), in order to show understanding of where opposing viewpoints are coming from, see the shaded areas below:



Finally, the writer thoroughly presents the writer's own position and supporting evidence, as in the shaded areas below. Because writers have already sympathetically covered opposing viewpoints, they already have established the appearance of being rational and fair before supporting their own position:



A Rogerian Argument concludes by re-emphasizing the writer's position while suggesting a compromise or a synthesis of opposing viewpoints.

A General Argument Strategy

Introduce the issue and state the thesis position: _____

Pro-claim 1 and supporting evidence (usually establishes merit of the thesis): _____

Pro-claim 2 and supporting evidence: _____

Opposition (explains and refutes the main/strongest claims against the thesis): _____

Pro-claim 3 and supporting evidence (usually the clincher; best evidence to support the thesis): _____

Conclusion: _____
