

How to Write an Argumentative Essay in PHIL 100 – Appreciation of Philosophy

Picking your topic:

The topic of an argumentative essay should be one in which there are at least two conflicting viewpoints or different conclusions. The topic should have evidence both for and against your conclusion. These types of topics make for the most interesting argumentative papers and provide you with enough material to construct a strong argument. Remember, in an argumentative essay you must provide reasoning and evidence that supports your conclusion and attempts to answer possible objections that could be raised by someone who disagrees with you.

Structure of the Essay:

Like the essay comparing and contrasting relevant similarities and differences, your argumentative essay will need a structure. In both essays you must have a thesis statement, an introduction, and a conclusion at the end. Where the argumentative essay differs is how you write the body of your paper. In an argumentative essay you should offer at least two points of reasoning or evidence that will support your conclusion. These points should be crafted in a way that will convince the reader to accept your position. Your argument should not make an appeal to emotional language or an emotional argument. When we typically think of arguments we think of two people screaming at one another while turning red in the face. This is because emotions slip into face-to-face arguments. In academia, emotional appeals are not acceptable. You must rely on confirmed evidence (cite your sources) and logical reasoning. Crafting your argument in a logical manner in which your premises lead the reader to accept your conclusion is the most effective way to construct your paper.

Points of Opposition:

You should always include an argument from the opposing point of view in your essay. When you do this, make sure you are able to offer the reader a strong counter-argument against the opposition. This serves two purposes: First, it shows the reader that you have considered the issue from both sides and that you are strongly convinced that your conclusion is the correct one. Secondly, it offers the reader a chance to see what the other side has to say and gives you an opportunity to show why the opposition's reasoning is faulty. To accomplish this goal effectively one must clearly understand the opposition's argument, be able to re-state that argument in a logical and effective manner, and provide a strong counter-argument that is backed up with reasoning and evidence. This also prepares you for responding to questions about your thesis that a reader might have. If you can anticipate these questions and answer them in your paper, then your argument will be much stronger.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of an argumentative paper is an effective place to remind your reader what your argument is and why it is the most sensible conclusion to the topic. Since you have just been discussing the opposition, here is your opportunity to recall the strongest points of your argument and further convince the reader of your position. This is not simply restating your argument, but it should present your conclusion in light of the evidence you have provided.

Tips and Things to Keep in Mind While Writing:

1. Have a clear and concise thesis in your introductory paragraph.
2. Make clear and logical transitions between paragraphs (make sure the information you are including in the paper is relevant to the topic and your argument).
3. Your body paragraphs should include evidential support for your conclusion (this may be fact or a logical reasoned argument).
4. Your conclusion should not merely restate your thesis, but should re-address it in light of the evidence you have provided throughout the essay.
5. Do not rely on emotional arguments or emotional language. Stick to facts and reasoning to convince your reader.
6. Always explain your points of support clearly. Do not assume the reader understands the topic or has read the same material that you have (this is often NOT the case). The reader should get all of the information they need to understand your argument from your paper without having to search through outside sources.
7. Keep your content relevant to the thesis and your argument. Fluff does not help your argument, but makes it look weak.

The Five Paragraph Method of Argumentative Essays:

The five paragraph method is just an easy way to remember to include all of the key points of an argumentative essay. This can be expanded to include more than just five paragraphs, but it can serve as a simple guideline and reminder of the important features of the essay that should be included. The five paragraphs are:

- I. The Introduction and Thesis
- II. The First Point of Support
- III. The Second Point of Support
- IV. The Opposition's Argument and Your Response
- V. The Conclusion

Notice how this outline captures all of the key features of the argumentative essay. This is by no means the only way to write an argumentative essay, but it is an effective way to do so if you are unfamiliar with this form of writing. Keep in mind that some arguments will require more than two points in support of your thesis. Some arguments are more complex and require two or three paragraphs to explain just one point of support. Also, not all argumentative essays require a point of opposition. Perhaps you are just arguing for a case that does not have such strong opposition, or you are merely defending someone's thesis that does not have clear opposition. In these cases you can feel free to add more points of support for your thesis in place of points of opposition.

More Writing Tips

Determining a Thesis Statement

As stated in the Essay Requirements, the essay requires a thesis statement. This is a central part of setting up your essay as the content of your thesis statement ought to determine the way the rest of the essay goes. Your thesis statement should be a position that is defensible, such that you can provide evidence/reasons to support it, and it will be limited by the type of essay that the assignment is asking for. For instance, when asked to compare and contrast two positions a

thesis statement should reflect the aim of the assignment by being about how the two positions relate to one another. The thesis statement should not be that one's theory succeeds and the other does not. Rather, it should be about the differences and similarities that can be found between the content of the two positions. This could be accomplished by taking the position that they are more similar than different or vice versa, which focuses explicitly on a conclusion drawn from comparing and contrasting the two positions.

Setting up the Introduction

Another important part of setting up the essay is the introduction paragraph. The introduction not only is the place where the reader will find your thesis statement, but it also ought to provide a picture of what the essay is going to do. Now there are multiple ways to accomplish this task, but here is a rough template of one way to do this.

- i) Begin with a brief statement about the subject. For instance if you're doing an essay on comparing and contrasting Thales and Anaximander, a brief statement or two about these two philosophers would be sufficient. **(Make sure to avoid using "over the top" statements that attempt to grab the reader's attention but are strictly speaking false. For instance, the statement "since the beginning of time, man has ____" is false. Stick to the facts.)**

Example: Early Greek philosophers were primarily concerned with answering the question of where everything comes from. This concern can be seen in the two earliest Greek Philosophers, Thales and Anaximander, who have been regarded as the first two individuals in Western Philosophy to offer a philosophical approach to this question.

- ii) A statement about what you'll be doing in the essay (i.e. comparing and contrasting different characteristics of their work).

Example: In this essay, I will be comparing and contrasting the two philosophical approaches of Thales and Anaximander in their attempt to explain what the source of all things is.

- iii) List the points and the order that the essay will be addressing them in.

Example: First, I will explain some of the important specific similarities that these two Greek philosophers share. This will consist in ____, ____, etc. (whatever the similarities you are going to talk about are). **These similarities should be substantial and very specific. They should not be merely that both were Greek dudes from way back when.** Then, I will explain some of the important differences between the two. This will consist in ____, etc. (whatever the difference you talk about happens to be). **Again, these differences should be substantial and specific.** Lastly, I conclude that ____ (either that they are more different than similar in a certain relevant respect, or vice versa, which ever your thesis statement claims).

The rest of the essay should follow the format that you say the essay will have in (iii). For instance if this was the way I ended my introductory paragraph, the next thing that I should address would be the similarities between the two, and then their differences. Lastly, I would then offer a conclusion paragraph which briefly recapped the main points of the essay and how they support my conclusion.

A Further Important Consideration

It's important to notice that if one merely lists out the similarities and differences between the two, one has not explicitly shown that the two are more similar than different or vice versa. One has merely listed reasons and evidence for the reader to put together the pieces on their own. In order to actually support this thesis, one needs to explicitly state how such similarities and differences support the claim that they are more different than similar or vice versa. One way of working this in with the above format is to frame the transitions from one section to the next in a way that explicitly brings the content of the essay back to the thesis.

For instance, when beginning your section on the differences you could use a transition such as the following, if your thesis is that they are more different than similar.

Example: As we can see, some may think that Thales and Anaximander are quite similar due to the similarities listed above. However, we can see that these two philosophers are actually far more different than they are similar by considering some of the important differences between them.

However, one must also make sure that discussion of these important differences that follows makes explicit that these differences, such as appealing to the differences being greater in number or more fundamental to their position than the similarities.