Developing Strong Arguments

Although argument is considered one of the more sophisticated, advanced types of writing, every paper is in some way an argument paper. Every paper resembles argument because it must **convince the reader that the writer’s ideas are valid.** Being logically persuasive is the key idea behind the argument paper.

**Example:** If you are arguing that the death penalty should be used, you should develop at least three ideas that support that position. You could argue 1) that the severity of the crime determines the severity of the punishment, 2) that using the death penalty more frequently may deter crime, 3) that the death penalty provides some sense of justice for the victim’s family and friends, and 4) that capital punishment is less expensive for taxpayers than life imprisonment.

**Strategies to consider**

1. Introduce your argument at the point where there is the greatest difference of opinion. Focus on this and avoid getting sidetracked by side issues. Let the reader know what is at stake. Engage with what matters most to the reader. *What specifically is the controversy you are writing about?*

2. Begin your argument with an assumption that you have evidence for or can defend. This assumption should be acceptable to your audience – a fact, value, or truth that they hold in common with you. *What do you assume to be true about the issue?*

3. Draw your evidence from multiple sources. Don’t rely on just one book, one article, one case, etc. *Do you have enough evidence?*

4. Anticipate the opposition. Remember that you are trying to persuade others to see the validity of your point of view. Ignoring the clear objections that those opposed to your point of view could raise weakens your paper. *What part of your argument is most open to challenge by those who disagree with you?*

5. At times, supplement your reasoning with emotional appeal. Although, you should use this strategy sparingly. It can be very effective. *Is there an aspect of the issue you can use to hook your reader’s emotions?*

A successful argument paper is most often based on a topic about which you feel strongly or want to know more about. Discuss with your instructor and look in the newspaper or on the Web for topics most appropriate for you and your interests.