

## **Argumentation: Section I. Thesis Development**

An argument is thesis-driven. Its effectiveness depends, first of all, upon an effective, clearly stated thesis, also called a claim. Often students begin argument essays with statements that are not actually theses, even though the authors may intend them as thesis statements. You can test for a workable thesis by examining your statement for the following characteristics: (1) Is the statement debatable? In other words, could a reasonable person disagree with your statement and make an opposing argument? (2) Is the statement an assertion of fact (a new, or controversial point about the essential nature of something), value, cause, or policy? (3) Is the statement limited or focused sufficiently for a manageable approach and length? (4) Does the statement submit to a logical, organized presentation of evidence. All elements on this list are necessary for an adequate thesis or argumentative claim.

In view of this definition of a workable thesis examine the following statements and decide if they are debatable; offer assertions of fact, value, cause, or policy; show appropriate focus; and can be supported by evidence. For each of the items below, check the boxes that are accurate for the thesis statement example.

**1. My essay will discuss the role of student athletes and their need for respect.**

- Can be debated
- Claims fact, value, cause, or policy
- Has focus
- Can be supported by evidence

**2. Technology and automation contribute to the climbing unemployment rate.**

- Can be debated
- Claims fact, value, cause, or policy
- Has focus
- Can be supported by evidence

**3. Plants produce oxygen that the world needs to sustain life.**

- Can be debated
- Claims fact, value, cause, or policy
- Has focus
- Can be supported by evidence

**4. Cable television will become more popular than free-to-air television within five years.**

- Can be debated
- Claims fact, value, cause, or policy
- Has focus
- Can be supported by evidence

**5. Abortion law is very important to women.**

- Can be debated
- Claims fact, value, cause, or policy
- Has focus
- Can be supported by evidence

**6. The European-style, single payer health insurance should be instituted in the U. S.**

- Can be debated
- Claims fact, value, cause, or policy
- Has focus
- Can be supported by evidence

## Argument: Section II. Organizing Argument (Subclaims, Warrants, Evidence)

Every argumentative claim must be supported by reasons, or, in this outline, subclaims. Each **subclaim** shows a different dimension or phase of the argument. A key feature of your organization is to be able to breakdown your claim into subclaims, reasons, phases of argument. The outlines below break down such claims on two sides of a debatable topic:

**Claim:** Women should be barred from joining military combat units.

**Subclaim1:** Women for the most part don't have the strength or endurance for combat roles.

**Subclaim2:** Serving in combat isn't necessary for women's career advancement in the military.

**Subclaim3:** Women in close-knit combat units would hurt unit morale by introducing sexual jealousies.

**Subclaim 4:** Pregnancy or the need to care for infants and small children would make women less

reliable to a unit.

**Claim:** Women should be allowed to join combat units in the military.

**Subclaim 1:** Millions of women are stronger and more physically fit than most men; women selected for combat duty would have the strength and endurance to do the job.

**Subclaim 2:** The image of women as combat soldiers would help society overcome harmful gender stereotyping.

**Subclaim 3:** Serving in combat units would open up many more opportunities for women's career advancement in the military.

**Subclaim 4:** The justice of equal rights for women demands that women be allowed to serve in combat units.<sup>1</sup>

Stephen Toulmin, a philosopher, has provided scholars with a system for analyzing arguments. One particular feature of this system is useful for checking your logic and support. Often, when you disagree with an argument, you do so because of some assumption that the author makes—and that you don't agree with. Such an assumption that connects the Claim with the subclaim, reason, or evidence may be invisible to the writer because it is a value the writer holds. Therefore, as you review and revise your own argument, you should check for your own assumptions, called **warrants** in the Toulmin system. Here is an example of a warrant:

**Claim:** Women should be allowed to join combat units.

**Stated Reason or Subclaim:** The image of women in combat would help eliminate gender stereotypes.

**Warrant:** Gender stereotypes are harmful and should be eliminated.

**Claim:** Cocaine and heroin should be legalized.

**Stated Reason or Subclaim:** Legalization would eliminate the market in illegal drugs.

**Warrant:** An action that eliminates the illegal marketing in drugs is good.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Ramage, John D., John C. Bean, and June Johnson, *Writing Arguments*, Brief Edition (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2001, 93-94).

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Ramage, 94-95

Finding your own warrants, and those in the arguments others make, assist you in finding grounds for rebuttal. The invisible assumption may be the weakest link in any argument. As for the grounds, data, or evidence with which you further support an argument, you should let those elements meet the following conditions:

Evidence must be typical, **representative**, not exceptional.

Evidence must furnish clear support for the claim or subclaim; it must be **relevant**.

Evidence in your essay must be **sufficient** to substantiate your claim. You need enough evidence.

Supporting evidence must be highly **specific**; it must use names, numbers, specific sources, particular events.

Evidence must be **reliable**; that quality indicates that the data are accurate, clearly cited, from good authority.

### **Argument: Section III. Analyzing Argument: Logos, Pathos, Ethos**

One way to analyze any argument is to break it down into three critical elements: *Logos*, or the argument's appeals to logic, the focus of the two other sections of this presentation; *Pathos*, or appeals to the emotions; and *Ethos*, appeals to credibility.

You have probably heard heated arguments, with emotions raging and logic lacking. Such an argument is hardly the goal for academic arguments; however, every argument has an emotional dimension and every writer needs to develop credibility with her intended audience. Therefore, even college writing, in which logos predominates, must pay attention to the emotional features or outcomes in the argument and must work hard for the kind of balanced presentation that inspires the trust of your audience. Academic writing strives for good logic—a focused claim with clear subclaims. It also must acknowledge the moral or political ramifications of an issue, acknowledge the dimensions of the argument that make people react passionately. Finally, the credibility of the college writer is essential; the writer must demonstrate good research, a legitimate use of valuable sources, and a competent understanding of both sides. Such features inspire the reader's trust.

Examine the letter to the editor below and analyze for the claim and subclaims (thesis and organization) or LOGOS; the appeals to emotions of a targeted audience or PATHOS, and the developed believability or ETHOS of the writer:

**"The Rules Apply to Students, Too" - by Rachel Grimes, *AJC*, June 1, 1997**

My students were chatting about Sea World as they did math, arguing over whether the "real" Shamu was living or dead. Then the door opened, and fury came in. A student from another class burst in and attacked one of my students, with whom she had a conflict. In the briefest of moments, she was on him, screaming obscenities while pummeling his head.

An administrator and I were able to free him and then continued trying to restrain the girl. We almost had her under control when she burst free and, while lying on the floor, delivered several swift kicks to my abdomen. My eleventh rib is fractured, my rotator cuff is injured, and a nerve in my arm is pinched.

After half a dozen x-rays, visits with four doctors, two trips to the pharmacy and the first of many sleepless nights, I was ready to read the paper. I was relatively certain that my injuries would be big news—because for the past year, local teachers involved in physical incidents have been. Four local teachers who used "inappropriate force" have been reprimanded, and each time, the *Statesboro Herald* ran a lengthy story, usually with student and parent opinions.

Every teacher should learn self-control and appropriate discipline. Our students should be protected. This was proclaimed boldly in our paper. It was news, and I thought I was too.

The student's "simple battery" arrest, for which I had to pay a \$10 filing fee, was reported in the newspaper's police blotter. It was one sentence. It did not say whom she had

battered or even mention that this took place at a school. The same day I was hurt, an employee was assaulted at another school. This, too, was in the blotter. Buried.

It seems that the public, informed recently when a teacher at another school slapped a student's cheek, didn't need to know that a student broke my rib or that a school official was also accosted that day. To parade the sins of educators on the front page, then to ignore the even more blatant failings of students, is to perpetuate a double standard: A standard that says that the students can do anything they want to teachers and not be held accountable, but teachers must be prepared to account for even the most innocuous actions. A standard that protects the families of students from social embarrassment while teachers are pilloried with the world as witness. A standard that says children's actions aren't news but adults' actions are.

I think it is increasingly critical that adult actions by children receive the same attention as acts of adults themselves. It is unfair to hold teachers up to a mirror that reflects—even magnifies—flaws, while students are allowed to engage in all sorts of behavior without even looking at themselves. If students are to become responsible for their actions both in the classroom and in society, they must know that what is done in the light will not be draped in darkness. For the media to protect students' misdeeds while punishing teachers is wrong. It's that simple.

The 17-year-old student's assault on me May 22 should be news. She deliberately injured me in front of my class. She deserves accountability in the public eye and all the embarrassment that can be heaped upon her hot head.

And my community deserves to know what is happening in its schools, including the reality that, sometimes, teachers get hurt too.

**LOGOS:** Describe the Claim and Subclaims:

**PATHOS:** Describe the types of emotional appeals the author employs.

**ETHOS:** What is your view of the author's credibility? How did she earn that reaction?