

English 122: Composition II

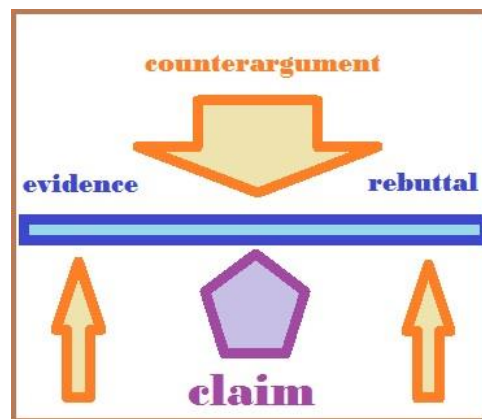
An Introduction to Argument

Argument and Rhetoric

An argument can take many forms. An academic argument, at its root, a method for communicating a singular position with evidence, logic, and persuasion. There are essential elements to all valid arguments, though they may take different forms.

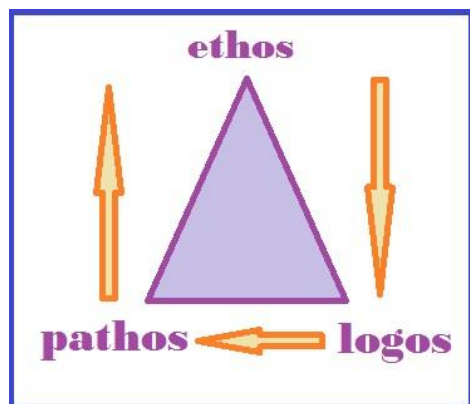
1. Claim
2. Evidence
3. Counterargument
4. Rebuttal

A successful argument depends upon the delicate balance between these elements. Imagine a teeter-totter at the playground. The claim is the basis of the argument, much like the base of the teeter-totter. A big opposing viewpoint, called the counterargument, is constantly pushing down on one side or the other. Balance can only be achieved by providing enough evidence to support the claim along with rebuttal of the counterargument. Essentially, an argument depends on research (evidence) and finding flaws in opposing viewpoints (rebuttal). Each claim made in an argument needs this support to be valid.



Any time you begin to write, you must analyze the rhetorical situation. This means identifying the best way to appeal to your audience, and there are three possible appeals: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. These three items form a triangle that will frame your project. Let's take each item and apply it to an argument.

First, we will consider the writer. It seems obvious that you are the writer. However, who are you? Are you a student at a university or are you something else? When writing academic papers, try to set your other interests and behaviors aside and write as a scholar. This will make you a credible writer. Aristotle referred to the credibility of a speaker or writer as **ethos**. Ethos is very important when presenting an argument. To persuade readers to agree with you, writing must be clearly credible (and ethical--considering was it good for everyone).



Next, let's think about the audience. For most papers, the audience will be Ashford University. How can you appeal to this audience? University students, faculty, and staff are educated, detail-oriented, smart, and play a big role in your success at school. You must find a way to reach this audience and impress them with your ability to use shared values and culture to persuade the reader.

Aristotle used the term **pathos** to describe the humanistic appeal to emotion and values of your audience. But appealing to emotions often involves logical fallacies, so be mindful not to rely on those to make your argument.

A research-based paper will rely heavily upon **logos**, Aristotle's term for an appeal to reason and logic. An argument will also require attention to reason and logic to be credible. A simple formula for logos in an argument is *claim + evidence = credible argument*. Other factors, such as counterarguments and rebuttals, can also play a role in this equation. All factors should be analyzed in a logical manner to add credibility to an academic argument.

Two common types of argument are Classic and Rogerian. How do the four elements of an argument fit into these two styles? How do the three points of the rhetorical triangle fit into each style?

Classic and Rogerian Arguments

Classic (Aristotelian) Argument

Classic or *traditional argument* is rooted in Greek philosophy and rhetoric. Aristotle believed that every valid argument contained a syllogism. At its roots, a syllogism is nothing more than a statement with evidence to support it. The key to understanding how a syllogism works is the ability to evaluate or generate proper evidence. In the classical form, this evidence should work to convince an audience of the author's contentions in a fashion that not only supports their argument's major claim, but rebuts all alternative arguments in a way that is both logical and decorous. Remember, it is crucial to win your audience over with logic and credibility, but one can only accomplish that feat by courting the audience with rhetoric: "The art of using language so as to persuade or influence others; the body of rules to be observed by a speaker or writer in order that he may express himself with eloquence" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1910). The structure below is a basic outline of how a classic argument is constructed. The sections do not represent paragraphs; they represent distinct segments of an argumentative essay and, with the exception of the introduction and thesis statement, the body of an essay can be situated in any fashion that is most effective at convincing a given audience.

Section One: Introduction and Thesis—Your introduction should describe the rhetorical situation and give a clear forecast of the material you will cover in your essay. Your thesis statement should make a clear, limited, descriptive assertion and explain why your stance matters. Example: Failure to pass the recent gun law is a bad move for public safety because inexperienced, mentally ill, and unethical people will continue to have access to firearms.

Section Two: Present the position that you most agree with. Then, give ample evidence to support why you hold this view. (Do not use first-person. Use third-person narrative).

Section Three: Present the position that you most disagree with. Then, validate the perspective with a circumstance or situation in which that viewpoint could or might be correct.

Section Four: While remaining non-offensive in language and style, provide a rebuttal of the opposition's stance by pointing out its fallacies or lack of logos and ethos.

Section Five: Conclusion—Provide a sound but brief explanation of your argument and further direction for your reader.

Consensual (Rogerian) Argument

The *consensual* or *Rogerian method* is based on the notion that many contentious issues, subjects, problems, etc. can be solved by identifying the “common ground” of all parties involved and working together toward a common goal. Common ground is the shared values, concerns, and constraints of each party. There are no clear winners or losers in this type of argument style. The key is that both (or various) parties profit in some defined fashion while making concessions or changes that benefit the traditionally labeled opposition. The structure below is a basic outline of how a consensual (common ground) argument is constructed. The sections do not represent paragraphs; they represent distinct segments of an argumentative essay and, with the exception of the introduction and thesis statement, the body of an essay can be situated in any fashion that is most effective at convincing a given audience.

Section One: Introduction and Thesis—Your introduction should describe the rhetorical situation and give the audience a clear forecast of the material you will cover in your essay. Your thesis statement should make a clear, limited, descriptive assertion and explain why your stance matters. However, you need to remember to argue for a solution that is acceptable to both perspectives. Your thesis should clearly state a type of compromise. You should then be able to expand on that compromise in Section Three. Example: Though video games often have positive educational value, children should not be allowed to play video games until they are 13 years old.

Section Two: Present the perspective that you disagree with the most. Make sure you do so with fair language, and fully develop the perspective from the constraints in which the stance might be most valid—i.e. no one is wrong all the time. In what circumstance might this perspective be the most correct to select?

Section Three: Present the most valid perspective using logic, credibility, and ample evidence. Your research should guide you in the creation of this section.

Section Four: Create common ground/ a Rogerian solution. This section should convince your audience that the opposing perspective will benefit from your stance. The key here is not to point out why the opposing perspective is faulty, but to explain why your perspective serves the greater good or is more logical in the given constraints and how it benefits the opposing perspective.

Conclusion: Provide a wrap up and continuation of your Rogerian solution. It should also include direction for your audience (i.e., no subject can be completely solved). Therefore, you should work toward plausible solutions rather than absolute remedies.