

The Argument Paper

Eastwood Christian School

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Overview

Purpose: To provide a document that lays out the components of an argument paper in a consistent, step-by-step format. This document is designed to explain the incremental steps for writing an argument paper so that students and parents alike can access this information at their convenience. The information applies to all upper school grades and reflects the kind of papers that students will be required to write in college. This document supplements and supports the specific guidelines provided by teachers with each assignment. The argument paper is the fundamental writing skill we teach at Eastwood; however, there are ample opportunities to develop other writing skills such as creative writing, poetic expression and autobiography. This document focuses only on the skills required for argument papers.

Technique: Writing an argument paper is an incremental process, meaning each step builds on the one before it. Prewriting produces a thesis statement; the thesis statement determines the

outline; the outline is expressed in the introductory paragraph; the introductory paragraph guides the body; the body yields the conclusion. Careful attention to each stage makes subsequent stages easier and clearer.

The Prewriting Stage (a.k.a. brainstorming)

Purpose:

- To collect ideas and determine interests
- To test knowledge (what do I already know?)
- To observe and question text
- To organize ideas
- To identify or discover a thesis or chain of thought for a topic
- To begin the process of collecting support for various ideas

Technique:

I. Record your thoughts on the topic regardless of how simple or complex. Write down everything you can think of about this topic (memory dump). Collect ideas. Do free association.

A. Ask questions.

1. What are your favorite scenes, lines, characters (why?)
2. Did you notice any recurring images, symbols, colors, words, weather, animals?
3. Do you like/agree with aspects of the topic? Did anything inspire you? Repel you? Amuse or intrigue you?
4. Where have you seen these ideas: literature, popular culture, current news/history, your own life ?

B. Go look for some outside ideas.

1. What ideas do other people think are important to consider?
2. Do any of them look like your ideas? How so?

II. Organize your ideas

- A. How do these ideas relate to:
 1. The topic?
 2. Each other?
- B. Can these ideas be grouped according to the five key elements for analyzing literature (setting, characters, plot, conflict, theme)?
- C. What big ideas emerge from these thoughts?
 1. Develop an appropriate system for structuring thoughts: list (numbers/bullet points), word web, Venn diagram,
 2. String them together with arrows, colors, numbers, letters, etc.

The Thesis Statement **(a.k.a. the claim, premise, argument, main point)**

I. Purpose: To condense the premise of your paper into one arguable claim that summarizes the point you will be making and supporting throughout the paper. The thesis statement should be

- a single sentence.
- an arguable idea and not an indisputable fact.
- an adequate expression of your topic.
- the main idea which unites every other point in the paper.

II. Technique: This idea should naturally flow from the pre-writing stage.

- A. After pre-writing, ask how the main ideas can be used to support an argument.
- B. After pre-writing, ask if the main ideas answer a specific question.
- C. That argument/ answer will be your thesis.

III. Examples:

1. Don Richardson wrote *Peace Child* to reveal the redemptive analogies that existed in the Sawi culture and to propose this type of evangelization as a God-given method for effectively explaining the gospel to cultures that have never heard.
2. In *Bruchko* Bruce Olson demonstrates the power of God to transform the lives of a primitive South American tribe despite the jealous opposition of existing mission agencies, the destructive elements of the jungle habitat, and the violent hostilities of Columbian colonists and oil companies.
3. In Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* Phileas Fogg embarks on a global odyssey of adventure for the purpose of winning a 20,000 pound wager and discovers that while reason may win the bet, the true prize is to love and be loved in return.
4. The whole of *Gulliver's Travels*, though it is timeless in its vision of the unchanging condition of man, is at the same time contemporary, presenting humanity in the particular situation of Jonathan Swift's scientific, system-making, Deistic, and rationalistic age.*
5. By comparing and contrasting the roles of female mortals and female gods in *The Iliad*, one can develop an idea of what Homer considered the proper place for women during a time of war.*
6. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the color green symbolizes and reinforces the concept of the value of life.*

*Not original. Based on prompts found at paperstarter.com.

The Outline

(a.k.a. the road map/ GPS, the skeleton)

I. Purpose:

- A. To organize the paper
- B. To provide direction for the paper
- C. To create a visual structure or the pegs upon which to hang ideas

II. Technique

A. Introduction:

- 1. State thesis
- 2. Organize the ideas of your pre-writing into a list of your main supporting points

B. Body: Break out main supporting points and provide support for each.

C. Conclusion:

- 1. Restate thesis
- 2. Emphasize how your main points logically led to it.

III. Example

The Title of Your Paper

I. State your thesis statement in a complete sentence since this is the sole purpose for writing this paper.

- A. State your first piece of supporting evidence in a complete sentence.
- B. State your second piece of supporting evidence in a complete sentence
- C. State your third piece of supporting evidence in a complete sentence.

II. Write a complete sentence about your first piece of supporting evidence (IA).

- A. Breakdown of the points in this paragraph in a complete sentence

1. Further breakdown if possible (quotes, secondary sources, etc.)
2. Further breakdown if possible

B. Breakdown of the points in this paragraph in a complete sentence

III. Write a complete sentence about your second piece of supporting evidence (IB)

A. Breakdown of the points in this paragraph in a complete sentence

B. Breakdown of the points in this paragraph in a complete sentence

IV. Write a complete sentence about your third piece of supporting evidence (IC)

A. Breakdown of the points in this paragraph in a complete sentence

B. Breakdown of the points in this paragraph in a complete sentence

V. Restate your thesis in a complete but slightly re-worded sentence. Include any pertinent observations.

Notes:

- All writing projects are to be properly formatted in the **MLA style**.
- Use **traditional formatting** for a formal outline. (Roman numerals, capital letters, numbers, lowercase letters, etc.)
- Grammar–punctuation, spelling, end marks–always counts.
- Never have a I without a II or an A without a B.
- Keep the grammar patterns similar within levels. In other words all Roman numerals should be the same kind of sentence or phrase or clause. All A's, B's, C's should be similar, etc.
- **Complete sentences** for main headings (I, II, III . . .) and subheadings (A, B, C . . .). Beyond that, you may use similar phrases and clauses **but no one-word subpoints**.
- Do not use the words Introduction or Conclusion or Thesis Statement. Give the main thought(s) contained in those paragraphs.

The Introductory Paragraph (a.k.a. a mini version of the paper)

I. **Purpose:** to provide in one paragraph the scope (topic/destination) and sequence (order/map) of the paper; to introduce the premise and main points covered in the paper

II. Technique

A. Working from your outline, state your thesis and main points in a succinct, concise paragraph.

B. The introductory paragraph must cover certain required elements.

1. Adequate background information (author title, any contextual information pertaining to your thesis)
2. Thesis statement
3. Each of your main points
4. Concluding or transitional sentence

The Body of the Paper (a.k.a. the guts, the goods, the fruit of your laborious research)

I. **Purpose:** To provide primary (from the text) and secondary (from other texts) support for your thesis.

II. Technique

A. Working from your outline, develop each of your main points in sequential sections until each point has been thoroughly articulated.

1. Develop your supporting points, i.e., points II, III, IV from your outline.
2. Provide quotes from the book that support that point.
3. Provide quotes or references from reputable outside sources.

B. Each supporting point should be no less than one paragraph but may expand to more depending on the depth of the assignment.

1. 1 well-developed paragraph should suffice for a 2-3 page paper.
2. 2-4 paragraphs per point for a 4-6 page paper.
3. 5 pages per point for a 15 page paper.

The Conclusion **(a.k.a. what you want to be sure they caught)**

I. Purpose:

- A. To restate the thesis of the paper
- B. To show how the main points support the thesis
- C. To show how the main points relate to each other

II. Technique

- A. Revisit your introduction.
- B. Think of a different way to express your claims.
- C. Remind your reader with confidence that your arguable claim is well-founded and supported.
- D. Helpful reminders
 1. No new information
 2. Be concise
 3. No personal reflection or recommendations

Proofreading Guidelines

(a.k.a. important considerations and reminders; stuff we don't won't u 2 4 get)

- Use proper grammar.
- Properly format papers according to the MLA handbook.
- Limit the use of abbreviations.
- Take advantage of spell check and grammar check.
- Employ action verbs.
- Vary sentence structure and vocabulary.
- Strive for clarity.
- Avoid contractions.
- Avoid 1st or 2nd person.
- Avoid slang, clichés, text-talk.
- Do not use too many superlatives and universals.
- Do not employ a casual or conversational tone.

Links to Internet Resources (a.k.a. we aren't alone)

For more information:

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/thesis-statements/>
<http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/collegewriting/index.htm>
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/677/01/>