Guide to Writing the Argument Essay

EN 102 Module 3

How to write an Argument Essay:

* Do research
* Develop an argument
* Write a thesis statement
* Create an outline
* Develop body paragraphs
* Consider the organization
* Write and submit draft
* Proofread, edit, and complete the peer review
* Revise
* Submit revision

You’ve already completed most, if not all, of the research for your Argument Essay. You have also developed an argument that stems from your research question, and you should have a working thesis statement.

Now, you’ll need to put these pieces together to create an outline for your Argument Essay.

First, let’s look at **Thesis Statement Reminders**.

Your thesis statement is:

* The most fundamental part of your essay – all of your main points should come back to your thesis statement
* One to two sentence statement that presents the main idea and makes an assertion on your issue
* Explains your perspective and alludes to the major points of your essay
* Answer to your research question

Your thesis statement is NOT:

* An announcement: “I will be writing about standardized testing.”
* A topic: “Standardized testing is an issue that deals with college admission.”

Your thesis should be the ARGUMENT of your paper. Make it very clear so that your reader knows what you plan on arguing throughout the essay. Traditionally, your thesis statement comes at the end of your introduction paragraph.

Example thesis statement:

Standardized testing should not be used as a tool for college admission because it negatively impacts applicants and is a poor indicator of collegiate success.

Here, you can see that my example thesis statement outlines my argument while also giving some insight to the reasons behind my argument. You can also check the Google Slides for more examples of thesis statements.

**Create an Outline**

Check Blackboard for the instructions for your Outline Assignment. On your outline, you should include:

* At least 250-500 words
* Thesis statement
* Some method of organization (bullet points, traditional outline, etc.)
* Reasons and points that support your thesis
* Research that you plan to use as support for your claims from at least 4-6 sources
* Works Cited page in MLA format (don’t forget you probably already have the citations from your Annotated Bibliography)

Below is my example of an outline. The more detailed your outline is, the more feedback I’ll be able to provide you when I leave comments. Do not include the highlighted notes on your own outline; these are just for your benefit here.

Standardized Testing Outline Example

1. Introduction
   1. Discuss college admission process in general with a particular focus on how standardized testing is used.
   2. The pandemic has changed this practice anyway, and many institutions aren’t requiring SAT or ACT scores at all.
   3. Thesis statement: Standardized testing should not be used as a tool for college admission because it negatively impacts applicants and is a poor indicator of collegiate success.
2. Standardized testing negatively impacts applicants. [REASON]
   1. Requirements for standardized testing unfairly target lower income students.
      1. Carnevale’s article examines the elimination of standardized tests and the benefits that would come with this action, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. However, this article also claims that eliminating standardized testing won’t be the only necessary step to creating more equitable admissions processes (Carnevale’s). [RESEARCH TO SUPPORT CLAIM]
3. Standardized testing is a poor indicator of collegiate success. [REASON]
   1. Standardized test scores do not necessarily mean that students will be successful in college courses.
      1. According to one article, “Research has shown over time that standardized test scores are most strongly correlated to socioeconomic factors and are not predictive of college success” (Strauss). [RESEARCH TO SUPPORT CLAIM]
   2. Test scores represent just one moment in a student’s life, unlike GPA and other factors.
4. Test preparation has become an unfair industry that some students are able to take advantage of while others cannot. [REASON]
   1. Costs of test preparation; it is unattainable for some students because of money and time. Other students from wealthy backgrounds have more time to pay and prepare for tests as opposed to students who need the time to work, like untraditional or lower income students.
      1. In her article, Abigail Hess writes that rich students tend to perform better on the SAT because of costs, academic support, extra time and more. [RESEARCH TO SUPPORT CLAIM]
5. Despite the issues and unfairness caused by standardized testing to applicants, some research reinforces the idea that standardized testing should be used as an indicator for college admission. [ACKNOWLEDGES THE COUNTERARGUMENT]
   1. Some research suggests that standardized testing is an essential part of admission for college and higher education institutions.
      1. Pietrafetta writes, “These tests offer important reference points against GPAs that vary from school to school, provide ambitious standards against which to measure, drive skills-based instruction and motivate students to learn.” [RESEARCH TO SUPPORT CLAIM]
   2. Ultimately, standardized testing should not be used as an indicator for college admissions because students are more than just test scores and should be considered for it.
6. Conclusion
   1. Restate thesis
   2. Discuss why we should get rid of standardized testing for college admissions; it isn’t fair and doesn’t indicate that students will succeed in college.
   3. What could be used instead of standardized testing? Potentially propose a solution.

Works Cited

Carnevale, Anthony P. “Much Work to Be Done.” *Inside HigherEd,* 3 August 2020, www.insidehighered.com/admissions/views/2020/08/03/dropping-standardized-tests-only-one-part-equalizing-college-admissions.

Hess, Abigail. “Rich students get better SAT scores—here’s why.” *CNBC*, 3 Oct. 2019, www.cnbc.com/2019/10/03/rich-students-get-better-sat-scores-heres-why.html.

Pietrafetta, Matthew. “Standardized Tests Can Promote Rigor.” *Inside HigherEd,* 24 August 2020, www.insidehighered.com/admissions/views/2020/08/24/defense-standardized-tests-opinion.

Strauss, Valerie. “Colleges should rethink using standardized test scores for admissions, major counselors’ group says.” *The Washington Post,* 19 August 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/08/19/colleges-should-rethink-using-standardized-test-scores-admissions-major-counselors-group-says/.

**Develop Body Paragraphs**

After you’ve created and submitted your outline, you can begin writing your paper. Start wherever you feel comfortable.

When you are developing the body paragraphs for your Argument Essay, you should focus on developing your argument and supporting your claims. You need to use your research to back up your claims.

Organize your body paragraphs based on reasons and claims that you are making to support your argument. Don’t organize it around your research; instead, your research will be used to support your claims.

Remember, your body paragraphs should include:

* Topic sentences that make a claim/reason to support your argument
* Quotes, paraphrasing, or summary from your research to support your argument WITH in-text citations
* Your own commentary to explain your reasoning

Below is an example of a body paragraph I could write from my outline:

Standardized testing negatively impacts some applicants that send applications to higher learning institutions. [TOPIC SENTENCE WITH CLAIM] Many different types of students apply to colleges and universities across the United States, and it is no secret that the college admission process can be inherently difficult for some students, particularly because of standardized testing. The standardized tests that are required for college entry present difficulties to lower income students because they do not have the same opportunities as other students. Paying for expensive tests required for college admissions can be a major financial hardship for some students and their families. Also, lower income students often do not have the same time and opportunities to prepare for these standardized tests because they might be required to help their own families. [REAONS THAT SUPPORT CLAIM] Because of this, some research calls for standardized testing to be eliminated. Carnevale’s article examines the elimination of standardized tests and the benefits that would come with this action, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. However, this article also claims that eliminating standardized testing won’t be the only necessary step to creating more equitable admissions processes (Carnevale’s). [RESEARCH TO SUPPORT CLAIM: notice that this is paraphrasing!] While eliminating standardized testing might not completely create an equal admissions process, standardized testing requirements unfairly affect lower income students and their applications. [COMMENTARY: this should situate/explain your research in your argument]

Here is another example of a body paragraph that acknowledges the counterargument:

Despite the issues and unfairness caused by standardized testing to applicants, some research reinforces the idea that standardized testing should be used as an indicator for college admission. [TOPIC SENTENCE THAT STATES CLAIM] It is often considered an essential part of admission for college and higher education institutions because it allows applicants to be compared to one another in a quantitative manner that is easily gathered. [REASONS TO SUPPORT COUNTERARGUMENT] In one article, Pietrafetta writes, “These tests offer important reference points against GPAs that vary from school to school, provide ambitious standards against which to measure, drive skills-based instruction and motivate students to learn.” [RESEARCH TO SUPPORT CLAIM: notice that this is a direct quote!] Pietrafetta’s argument claims that standardized testing essentially motivates students and encourages ambition, but it also causes a lot of hardship and difficulties on the students that are required to take these tests. [REBUTTAL OF THE COUNTERARGUMENT] Standardized testing might make college admission decisions easier for admission committees, but it is not productive for the students that are required to take these tests. Ultimately, standardized testing should not be used as an indicator for college admissions because students are more than just test scores and should be considered for it. [COMMENTARY TO SUPPORT REBUTTAL]

**Organizing** your Argument Essay

There are a few different ways that you could potentially organize your Argument Essay. Here are two example organization techniques that you might use:

Strategy 1:

* Introduce the topic and provide necessary background
* State the thesis
* Give the first reason with supporting evidence
* Give the second reason with supporting evidence
* Give the third reason with supporting evidence (and so on)
* Acknowledge and/or refute opposing arguments
* End with a call to action, a restatement of your thesis, or consider the implications of your argument (ex. Why does this matter? Who cares?)

As you can see, in Strategy 1, you would group all of your reasons together and explore those first before engaging with any counterarguments.

Strategy 2:

* Introduce the topic and provide necessary background
* State the thesis
* Give the first reason with supporting evidence
* Acknowledge and/or refute opposing arguments
* Give the second reason with supporting evidence
* Acknowledge and/or refute opposing arguments (and so on)
* End with a call to action, a restatement of your thesis, or consider the implications of your argument (ex. Why does this matter? Who cares?)

In Strategy 2, you would present a reason and then immediately engage with the counterargument for that reason and then continue in this pattern throughout your essay.

It doesn’t matter which strategy you choose for your essay, but make sure that it best fits your topic and that you stay consistent throughout your paper. You can also refer to Norton Chapter 38 if you need more help or information about organization.

**Write** the rest of your paper!

**General Reminders:**

* Your Argument Essay is about an argument! You should be arguing throughout the entire essay.
* Avoid language like “I think” and “I believe.” You don’t need to situate your argument in first person pronouns; just argue it!
* Use research to support your claims in your body paragraphs. Be sure to correctly cite any material that you use from other sources.
* Reread your assignment sheet on Blackboard as you are writing.
* Don’t forget to include your Dear Reader letter or your Works Cited page.

**MLA Format Resources:**

Remember that you need to include in-text citations for the research that you use throughout your paper. You also need to include the Works Cited page that is correctly formatted.

Here are some resources to help you with MLA:

* [Purdue OWL MLA](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html)
* [MLA Style YouTube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSekgYAdQcU)
* Norton Chapter 54 MLA Style, link in Blackboard

**Examples and Other Resources:**

You have materials on Blackboard that you can also reference as you write your Argument Essay if you need more help.

* Norton Chapters in textbook
* Analog example Argument Essays
* Google Slides for Module 3
* Shared Google Document with notes from class

Email me if you have any questions or need any help!

\*Argument Essay Draft Submission DUE MONDAY 3/29 by 11:59 PM\*