



## Constructing an argument

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### Other related Study Hub guides in the critical thinking series include:

- Evaluating a source
- A guide to critical reading
- Themed notes method
- Showing analysis and evaluation in your writing
- Constructing an argument
- A guide to developing an argument map
- A guide to synthesis
- A guide to critical writing

### Introduction

Being able to present an argument is an important part of critical writing and thinking. This is one of the four main types of writing that are commonly used in Higher Education. The other three being descriptive writing, evaluative writing and reflective writing. Using argument in your writing will help you understand the relationships between statements and evidence, query the evidence and any claims being made. Once you have interpreted the evidence you need to present your own argument and point of view; this is commonly called academic voice. (Find out more about this in the guide to synthesis). Presenting reasons for and against involves the skills of analysis and evaluation (Wason and Southall, 2016).

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### What is an argument?

According to the Oxford Learners' Dictionary of Academic English (2014), an argument is a logical and reasoned way of demonstrating whether or not a view is valid. You use arguments to encourage people to see things from your point of view, believe it is true and to change their attitude towards something (Wason and Southall, 2016 p. 20).

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## What is an argument in academic writing?

Arguments are made up of claims based on factual evidence. They take opposing views into consideration, make counter-claims and refute or qualify points. An argument convinces the audience through its merits, and the strength of the support used to back up claims (Wason and Southall, 2016).

An academic argument entails being able to:

- Present a case for or against something
- OR**
- Present a point a view/ perspective/opinion based on a coherent set of reasons and facts
- OR**
- A course of reasoning which attempts to demonstrate a 'truth' or a 'falsehood'

### Example

Imagine you were presented with an assignment title that makes the statement:

“Attending study skills workshops increases Higher Education students’ assessment grades.” Critically discuss this statement.

What this question requires is for you to demonstrate that it is true or not. How would you do this? The following are steps you might take:

Step	Associated academic skills
1) Having done your research you will have some idea whether this statement is true, is partly true or not true at all	Researching information and planning how to answer the question
2) You will then need to present this view i.e. it is true, partly true or not at all true	Clear, accurate use of English including grammar, punctuation and spelling

3) You will need to write this as a set of statements or reasons which follow logically as a conclusion from the others	Analysis and Evaluation
4) You will need to provide evidence and examples to support your view/argument	Selecting and using the literature (from your academic discipline)
5) You will need to show where the evidence has come from and that it is reliable (i.e. not a personal opinion but based on theories/ concepts/models/research studies etc.).	Citation of sources
6) You do this by citing your sources i.e. referencing in the text of the assignment with a separate list of the full references at the end of the assignment.	Referencing/avoiding plagiarism
7) You should also show that you considered other views/positions that do not agree with the argument you are presenting	Analysis and evaluation
8) Finally, you should show that the argument you present is the most convincing.	Evaluation, coming to a conclusion based on the evidence

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## Argumentation

Wason and Southall (2016, p.21) provide a helpful overview of 'argumentation language' and how to develop argumentation skills:

**What is the language of argumentation?** (Find out more about this in the guide 'Developing an argument map')

- Your own point of view about a topic is a **claim**
- An opposing point of view based on sound argument is a **counterclaim**
- To prove an argument is wrong is to **refute**.
- A **hypothesis** tends to be used when you are starting to develop an argument. You have limited evidence at this point and need to find more to back up your point and turn it into a claim.
- A response to a counterclaim is a **rebuttal**. This involves rejecting/refuting the points made in the counterclaim due to lack of validity, persuasion or importance and demonstrating that your claim is stronger.
- The evidence or facts used to back up your claim is called **support**.
- If you partly agree with your claim and partly with a counterclaim, then you **qualify** your view

### **Developing the skills of argument construction**

Use a series of guiding questions when thinking and reviewing your lecture material. Think of your own example to illustrate this concept. Provide support for this using any relevant theories or models.

- a) What would happen if.....
- b) What are the implications of...?
- c) What is the counterargument for this point...?
- d) Have you any evidence which can rebut this point....
- e) How does this tie in from what you have learned before?
- f) What is this similar to.....?
- g) Are there any competing theories...?



### Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as online study guides and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit: [lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub](http://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub)

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### Reference

Oxford Learners Dictionary of Academic English (2014), Oxford: Oxford University Press

Wason, H. and Southall, J. (2016) 'The Argument' *Critical thinking skills toolkit student guide* p.20 -21 [unpublished] Available from Kingston University