

Writing an argumentative essay

Overview

The purpose of an argumentative essay is to present an argument or point of view and give examples or reasons to support it. The topic to be discussed will often be something controversial and the essay should argue strongly for or against the topic. An essay should be written in a formal or neutral register and should be well organised, with an introduction that explains clearly the approach to be taken, a main section (using clearly connected paragraphs) and a conclusion that is a considered final judgement of the issues discussed, not merely a repetition of points made. It should include language appropriate for expressing opinions, agreeing or disagreeing, and vocabulary that is topic specific. Points made should be supported by clear evidence and example.

Tips for writing an argumentative essay

Language

- think about the audience that the essay is for
- write in a neutral or formal register
- clearly present opinions related to the topic
- include a range of grammatical structures and related vocabulary
- use cohesive devices to link ideas and paragraphs

Organisation

An argumentative essay should be well organised, with an introduction, main section and a conclusion. It should include well-developed ideas and opinions.

You should use linking words/phrases (e.g. furthermore, however, in conclusion, etc.) to link ideas in sentences and paragraphs.

- Introduction – briefly outline the argument that the essay will employ by providing a thesis statement. Engage the reader to make them interested in the topic, for example, ask a rhetorical question.
- Use only one main concept in each paragraph as you build your argument.
- Make sure that the argument in each paragraph relates logically to the thesis statement and is supported by examples.
- Include one or two paragraphs showing that you are taking into account opposing views on the subject.
- Conclusion – this should briefly summarise your argument and show how you have come to your opinion on the subject based on the evidence. Try to end the essay with a thought-provoking comment.

Example of an argumentative essay

	Comments
<p><i>Education is the key to cutting crime – do you agree?</i></p> <p><i>In the media, there is constant talk of crimes being committed – knife attacks among the young, robberies, violence, rapes and murders. It sometimes seems as if society is breaking down and that there is no way to stop the decline. Successive governments have tried to meet the challenge of cutting crime but with little success and now it appears that prisons are full to bursting. What can be done?</i></p> <p><i>Crime is undoubtedly associated with poverty and deprivation but also with lack of education. This is not the type of education that results in GCSEs at school, but education in a much broader sense. It involves discussion of what it means to be a good citizen, taking an active and engaged part in society and living by its laws. Education starts in the home, so parents need to be educated in the art of parenting which involves so much more than just feeding and changing a baby. From the earliest days, parents should speak and read to children, instilling in them a sense of love and community. Then, in school, children should be able to explore what it means to be a member of society, living a productive life and making a contribution.</i></p> <p><i>However, if these pieces are missing from a person's life, then things can quickly go awry. Laws become irrelevant and apply only to other people who are too stupid to realise that they are there to be broken. It is vital that there are programmes in place to get criminals back on track in their lives with a sense of purpose and a feeling of control over their destinies. A total reset may be necessary. This may be in the prison system where rehabilitation through education is a vital way of ensuring that criminals do not reoffend. Often this might mean relearning how to live in society.</i></p> <p><i>Of course, some will say that people are born into crime and that they are bound to become offenders. There is evidence to suggest that a young person brought up in a family where crime provides</i></p>	<p>The candidate gives some background to the topic in the first paragraph and uses a rhetorical question to engage the reader.</p> <p>The opening paragraph discusses different types of education and the effect on people from birth onwards.</p> <p>The candidate gives examples of what education means for them – not just academic success but learning to live in society.</p> <p>The candidate uses some extended sentences and attempts more complex structures. There is a description of the viewpoint of a criminal to bring this section alive.</p> <p>The candidate presents an opposing view to show briefly another viewpoint but then attempts to refute it.</p>

Comments

the means of survival may grow up with the same attitude. But there is equally evidence to suggest that this kind of background need not necessarily influence a person's life and there are many examples of young people making a great success of their lives including sportsmen and women and entrepreneurs. This is often the result of great role models outside the home, like teachers and coaches.

Crime is a sad fact of life and there will always be people who take the wrong path. Education, in all its forms, has a key role to play in ensuring that young people stay away from trouble and in allowing a second chance to those who may be serial offenders. More carrots than sticks might be the best way to improve the situation.

The candidate provides a clear conclusion which sums up the opinions provided and ends with a strong statement to trigger a reaction in the reader.