

Argument

Constructing a Persuasive Essay

There are several strategic **appeals** that can be used in persuasive writing. Logical appeals are the backbone of any strong argument. Credible arguments consist of claims which are supported by evidence and logical explanation. The major claim of an argumentative essay is the **thesis statement**. All other claims in the essay should relate to and elaborate upon the thesis statement.

Claim: a statement of position or opinion about a certain subject. Claims must be supported with evidence.

- Ex. The parking fee at UCF is an unfair burden on students.

Evidence:

Evidence is information which supports a claim and makes it valid. There are four general kinds of evidence:

- Facts
- Statistics
- Expert Authority
- Personal Experience

Facts are agreed-upon and accepted truths that most readers are unlikely to dispute. This makes them a strong form of evidence. For example...

- The sky is blue.
- All people are human beings.
- Smoking damages your health.

However, facts can be used incorrectly or incompletely, or be taken out of context, thus giving a false impression. Also, personal opinions are not facts (they are claims). For example...

- The sky is blue. (At night?)
- Hitler was a famous man, loved by many people.
- It's a fact that Americans are rude and loud.

Statistics are a comparison of amounts and numbers. They help support claims because they are often logical and factual.

- Seventy percent of Americans like to eat pizza.
- The unemployment rate in Orlando is less than 2%.
- Steve averages two goals per game.

Statistics, however, must be used in context, come from a reliable source, and represent an accurate depiction of reality. They can be misleading if used improperly.

- Nine out of ten people surveyed prefer Mexican food to Italian food. (What kind of people? Where? In what situation?)
- Bob spent one-third of his life doing nothing. (Sleeping?)
- Fifty percent of Anna's students failed the test. All of John's students passed. (How many students does each teacher have? What are their academic skills and levels? What's on the test?)

- Alabama is the 50th poorest state in America. (This says that Alabama is 50th on the list of poor states...which would make it the richest state.)

Expert Authority is support from known or accepted experts in a particular area. Expert authorities help show that a claim is logical and accepted by those who are educated and considered knowledgeable in that area.

- Harvard-based medical researcher Dr. Howard Smith notes that taking a multi-vitamin every day can be beneficial to your health.
- Alice Jones, a veterinarian, says that cats make better pets than ferrets because "they are cleaner and less destructive."

But like other forms of evidence, expert authority can be misused and misrepresented.

- My little brother, who just turned seven, says that the federal income tax laws need to be changed. (Probably not an expert...)
- I talked to two people in Georgia, and they agreed that Atlanta is a better city than San Francisco. (Biased sources?)
- Dr. Smith recommends Nutri-Quik vitamins for good health. (Doctor of what?)
- Movie critic Ron Lewis writes that Titanic is "tremendous" and "definitely worth seeing." (Actual quotation from Lewis: "Titanic is a terrible film. It is a tremendous waste of time, but it is definitely worth seeing if you want to understand the qualities of a very bad movie." In this case, the quotation is taken out of context.)

Personal Experience shows the writer's own experience with the topic. This can be a powerful way to support a claim, especially when used in combination with other types of evidence, and show how an issue relates to real people.

- Having lived in Poland for two years, I can verify that Polish cuisine is both varied and flavorful.
- For many years, I was abused by my husband, and the police and justice system did not put him in jail. We need tougher laws against domestic abusers.
- Handgun laws should be more stringent. I know the dangers of unsecured guns from personal experience—my sister was hurt when she found my parents' gun and accidentally shot herself.

For personal experience to be valid support, however, it must be relevant, present credible knowledge, show a common or general situation, and be related to the claim, unlike these examples...

- I've never met a Russian, but my experience from watching films is that they are usually drunk and violent.
- My experience in visiting Italy for a day showed me that they need a different form of government.
- Dogs are dangerous and vicious animals. Once, I tried to take a bone away from a dog, and it bit me.