

We Like Having Our Own Way: Learning How to Argue So We Get It!

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Welcome to the world of collegiate composition, where most of your writing projects will be of an argumentative nature. Learning how to write persuasively is one of the most important skills that you'll be expected (and not just by your English 112 instructor, either!) to master during your stay here at BGSU. There is more to the art of written argument than just stating a claim; check out the list below for some guidelines to aid you along the way!

1. First, the obvious: make sure the topic you've chosen is indeed arguable. Be sure to select a subject that has another 'side' to it, meaning that there is someone in your reading audience who could legitimately disagree with what you're arguing.
2. When stating your thesis, do it in an argumentative, aggressive way; use forceful language. For example, instead of stating, "Perhaps the government needs to censor the internet more," which is wishy-washy and non-specific, state, "Because of the controversial content found on many web sites, the government must quickly find a way to control childrens' access to sites designed for more mature audiences."
3. Make sure the points you plan to use to back up your thesis are reasonable and legitimate; if they're not, you quickly lose credibility with your readers.
4. Be sure to support every claim you make regarding your argument; claims left open-ended and unsupported will appear illegitimate. You want to show your readers that you've thoroughly done your research!
5. Don't make 'sweeping generalizations' about your readers (this is usually done involuntarily); avoid using words and phrases such as *all*, *everyone* knows that, *people* are foolish to think that, *no one* actually believes, etc. On the surface, such generalizations appear to strengthen arguments; what they really do, though, is intimidate and alienate readers who would've otherwise been your allies. Instead, settle for words and phrases that don't encompass the whole population: *many*, *a few*, *several*, *some people* may believe, etc.
6. Consider the 'other side(s)' of your argument. Integrate counter-arguments (the opposing points of view) into your essay to show that you're respectful and aware of differing opinions. Be sure to use counter-arguments to strengthen your own argument, though: "Ms. Brown's article makes an excellent and legitimate point about freedom of

speech and how it applies to the internet; however, I feel she failed to consider..." If you leave counter-arguments unrefuted, you're freeing your audience to side with the opposing point of view!

7. Above all, be tactful. Maintain a reasonable tone (audience awareness) throughout your essay; your goal is not to offend anyone (including those who oppose your point of view), and you don't want to make any generalizations or propose any stereotypes that could hinder your credibility. The more tactful and reader-friendly your tone is, the more likely you will be to succeed with argumentative essays!