

Arguing with Sources

“Learning how to write persuasively is one of the most important skills that you’ll master during your time at BGSU.”

- ✓ **Prioritize:** make sure the topic you’ve chosen is actually arguable. Don’t argue that you “think” or “feel” a certain way about a topic. Argue that some aspect of that topic is or isn’t functioning - that some part of it needs to be changed, fixed, revised, etc.

-In other words, select a topic that has another “side” to it, a side that someone in your reading audience could legitimately disagree with.

- ✓ When stating your thesis, do it in a specific, argumentative, and aggressive way. Use forceful language.

Try stating: *“Because of the controversial content found on many web sites, the government must quickly find a way to control children’s access to sites designed for more mature audiences.”*

- ✓ Make sure all your points are reasonable and legitimate; if they’re not, you’ll quickly lose credibility with your readers because it will be clear you haven’t thought the issue through.

- ✓ **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.

- ✓ **Don’t make “sweeping generalizations”** about your readers. Most issues aren’t black or white, to avoid this pitfall consider revising such phrases as:

- *everyone knows that, no one believes that, always, never, everybody, nobody, all, none, etc.*

While such generalizations *appear* to strengthen arguments, they may alienate readers who may have been your allies. Try using phrases that don’t encompass the whole population:

- *many, a few, several, some people may feel, too many people believe, etc.*

- ✓ Integrate counterarguments (the opposing points of view) and use them to your advantage. Counterarguments show that you’re respectful and aware of differing opinions, and can actually serve to strengthen your own argument. For instance:

- *“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...”*

* But remember,
if you leave counterarguments un-refuted, you’re freeing
your audience to side with the opposing point of view!