

Writing an argumentative essay (a guideline)

Sociology, Human Rights



Writing An Argumentative Essay (A Guideline) An argument is basically a claim (presented as a conclusion to premises) which is supported by supporting statements (premises). An argument is used to convince the reader that a particular claim is true, or at least, likely to be true.

Alternatively, an argument can also be used to cast doubt on a claim or to convince the reader that a claim is not true, or likely to be false. The purpose for putting forth an argument (in written or verbal form) is to try to convince the readers to accept / believe a claim (or conclusion) that is put forth.

Example of an argument: " Marrying at an early age is not advisable because young couples are not emotionally equipped to cope with the pressures of married life as well as financial constraints. " The conclusion (the claim) = " Marrying at an early age is not advisable..... ". The premise = "..... young couples are not emotionally equipped to cope with the pressures of married life as well as financial constraints. " (Note: if more than one premise = premises). Premise indicator = "... because ...". A good argument should have premises that are acceptable or likely to be true. In addition, a good argument should be backed up with examples or even better, evidence which is relevant to the claim (or conclusion) and provide sufficient grounds for accepting the claim (or conclusion). This is best carried out by referring to reliable sources of information which are then cited (the citation / reference part). Now that you have understood what an argument is, let us look at how to write an argumentative essay. An argumentative essay is a written form of an argument which has a typical organizational pattern consisting of an introduction which contains a thesis statement (the claim that is made in that essay - or simply thought of as the " main" or central argument), a few

paragraphs of supporting arguments which argue for the validity of the claim made, at least a paragraph of counter arguments with the appropriate refutation and a concluding paragraph which often summarizes the arguments in support of the claim. In a nutshell, the goal of an argumentative essay is to convince the reader that the claim that is made is true based the list of supporting arguments and the evidence (or examples) that have been provided in support of the claim. Remember that the aim in writing an argumentative essay is not merely to convey information but to take sides in the argument presented and to try to win over the readers into accepting a claim. Therefore, it is important to make sure the supporting arguments put forth are relevant and valid. An argumentative essay with a clear, concise statement of the claim (termed a thesis statement) of the chosen topic provides the direction of the essay because it presents the central argument on an issue. As in any issue, when claims pertaining to the issue are made, there are sides in which one could agree or disagree with. Thus, a thesis statement must be framed in a way which is open for debate or discussion and presents a good issue to be argued (for or against). In that sense, a thesis statement that is made based on a known fact or an already widely accepted claim would NOT be appropriate. E. g. " Dinosaurs existed millions of years ago. " Or " Smoking is bad for health and leads to illnesses such cancer and emphysema. " A good, effective thesis statement in an argumentative essay should at least meet these 3 criteria: (1) It is a claim that can be supported by evidence (or example). (2) It is a condensed outline of the essay: it is the central focus in which the rest of the essay is based on. (3) It is specific; this means that it should be a topic that is narrowed down.

E. g. "Gambling should be prohibited" (Statement is too broad & vague) should be rewritten as "Legalized gambling in casinos and public places should be prohibited in this country" (Statement is more specific & clear). Three examples of thesis statements are shown below (alternative versions are provided in brackets): Students should be allowed to bring phones to school. – (Students should not be allowed to bring phones to school). The widespread use of technology in the classroom enhances students' motivation to learn and encourages learning. – (The widespread use of technology in the classroom distracts students and impedes learning). Censorship is an effective way to protect teenagers from immoral influences such as pornography and violence. – (Censorship is an ineffective way to protect teenagers from immoral influence such as pornography and violence). Follow any of these possible organization patterns (or outline of ideas) for your argumentative essay: Example 1: Written in 6 paragraphs (P1) Introduction & Thesis statement (P2) Supporting argument 1 (P3) Supporting argument 2 (P4) Supporting argument 3 (P5) Supporting argument 4 (P6) Conclusion Example 2: Written in 6 paragraphs (P1) Introduction & Thesis statement (P2) Supporting argument 1 (P3) Supporting argument 2 (P4) Counter argument & refutation 1 (P5) Counter argument & refutation 2 (P6) Conclusion Example 3: Written in 6 paragraphs (P1) Introduction & Thesis statement (P2) Supporting argument 1 (P3) Supporting argument 2 (P4) Supporting argument 3 (P5) Counter argument & refutation (P6) Conclusion Example 4: Written in 6 paragraphs (P1) Introduction & Thesis statement (P2) Counter argument & refutation 1 (P3) Counter argument & refutation 2 (P4) Counter argument & refutation 3 (P5) Counter

argument & refutation 4 (P6) Conclusion Description of the main sections in the organization pattern for your argumentative essay: Introduction: This is where you tell the reader what your argumentative essay is all about, i. e. the topic that you have chosen. Keep this part short but yet interesting enough to catch your reader's attention. A creatively written introduction is a good strategy to tell your readers from the very beginning that the essay is special. Key terms should be defined in this section of the essay especially if these terms are somewhat technical (or scientific, medical, etc) terms which are not readily familiar to most people. Thesis statement: This is where you tell the reader the claim that you are making in your argumentative essay. In making a claim, you are taking sides in an argument on a particular issue. Make sure your claim is specific yet clear enough to let the reader know what it is that you are arguing for or against. Precision and clarity are therefore important in this section of your essay. The thesis statement is usually mentioned towards the end of the introduction section. Definition: Thesis statement — (noun); a short statement, usually one sentence which summarizes the main point / claim of an argumentative essay (or research paper, etc) and is developed in the essay by means of examples and evidence. Supporting argument (s): This is where you have a main point which you will need to argue and more importantly, support with at least one supporting evidence (more than one if possible). It is important to provide the source of your evidence for the reader's reference. To do so, give a proper (APA format) citation of the source of your evidence. If you truly can't find (or think of) good and reliable evidence (after much effort, of course) to back your point or claim, precise examples should be provided, though these

pale in comparison with properly cited evidence in terms of its strength of persuasion and impact to the readers. Counter argument (s) & refutation (s): This is where you present an opposing argument (to your claim) and refute (or rebut) that argument to lend support to your claim instead. A proper rebuttal of a counter argument makes a good argument for your stand. Bear in mind that this is much easier said than done in practice. Definition: Counter argument — (noun); an argument opposed to (or simply which is against) your argument and it expresses the argument which is in disagreement with your argument. Refutation — (noun); part of an argument in which a speaker / writer counters opposing points of view. Conclusion: This is where you end (conclude) your essay, by briefly highlighting your previous supporting arguments (though not always necessary) or restating your previous arguments, summarising these arguments allow (justifiably) for the final chance for you to drive home the point in your argumentative essay. An example (follows the organization pattern of example 3 above) of a short argumentative essay (Note: In this example given, the thesis statement is highlighted in yellow): Abortion: when killing fetuses for the sake of choice is simply unacceptable! (P1) Abortion is defined as a procedure to terminate a pregnancy closely followed by the death of the embryo or fetus before it is viable (Merriam-Webster, 2012). Many women around the world regardless of their race, religion and socioeconomic background, have gone for abortions. Worldwide, it is estimated that approximately 42 million women have abortions every year (World Health Organization, 2007). There are many reasons why a pregnant woman would opt to abort her fetus, such as, the fear of having or raising a child at a young immature age, an unwanted

pregnancy as a result of being raped or having unprotected sex with a boyfriend, not having enough money to raise a baby due to financial constraints (financial instability), not willing to be a single mom and other reasons (Lowen, 2012). Whatever the reasons may be, women should not abort their pregnancy due to human values, religious values, and values of conscience. (P2) The first reason why women should not have an abortion is related to basic human values. Women need to think about their unborn babies who are not responsible for this situation. These unborn babies should have the right to live and grow into adulthood (Schwartz, 1990). It is not wrong to say that abortion is murder, and it is the murder of an unborn baby. The embryo is in fact a person from the moment of conception (Fasouliotus & Schenker, 2000). This is supported by scientists who say that the first moment of human life is when a sperm cell unites with an ovum or egg cell (Shettles, 1986). We have human values, and among the most important human values is the universal human value that we do not knowingly take the life of an innocent human being. Furthermore, Foster (1985) wrote that killing a human being who is still inside his or her mother is not really different from killing a human being who has already been born. The unborn baby is an innocent human being who doesn't know how or why he or she is conceived in the first place. Hence, it is not necessary to take another person's life; it is against norm and is just contrary to all human values. (P3) The second reason why it is unacceptable for women to have an abortion has to do with religious values. In almost all religions, women are not permitted to have an abortion as all human beings including that of an unborn fetus, have a sacred right to live to their full potential. If women choose to carry

out an abortion, they would have committed a grievous sin and in the eyes of their religions, and they will be punished (Veazey & Signer, 2011). In some religions, Roman Catholicism, for example, a woman cannot take communion after having an abortion, and before taking communion again, she must do many things as a form of penitence. Abortion is also forbidden in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and other faiths in the world in which the unborn child's life is considered sacred. In fact, Buddhism, Sikhism and Catholicism teach that life begins at fertilization (Education for Choice, 2011). Similarly, people with secular values can still agree that all forms of human life, be it a full grown human being or a developing fetus, are capable of pain and as such, must be treated with respect. Hence, having an abortion of a developing fetus strips that sacred right from a developing human being. Evidently in whatever religion or the beliefs of the secular section of society, abortion is definitely considered a wrongful act or a sin. The penalty for such heinous and unethical act would be punishment in this lifetime by either treated as an outcast or be disfellowshipped from the religious reason or suffer from the punishment in the afterlife from the higher being. For these compelling reasons, it is clearly not acceptable for women to have an abortion. (P4)

Finally, the third and most important reason why women should not abort their pregnancy is related to their conscience. A person's conscience acts like a moral compass which helps one to the course of action in dealing with moral dilemma. When a woman has an abortion, she will always think about the baby she might have had. She will always believe about the future that could have been her baby's which she has destroyed. Because she has had the abortion, she will never have a peaceful life, and her conscience will

constantly taunt her of the immoral deed she had done. The burden of guilt will bear upon her if she is unable to forget what she had done. If a woman who has had an abortion can't forget about what she had done to her unborn child, these thoughts and feelings of guilt will always be with her, and the results can be calamitous. Unfortunately for some women, they could never come to terms with their decision to have an abortion and as a result, may suffer from mental health problems (Coleman, 2011, Doughty, 2011) which in some extreme cases could lead to them taking their own lives. This problem of guilt and remorse by the mother who has aborted a baby is a justifiable reason to agree that it is unacceptable for a woman to have an abortion. (P5) It is often asserted by people who think that it is acceptable for women to have an abortion and that it is a woman's right to decide if she should have an abortion. This argument stems from the belief that everyone has a right to choose and that it would be unfair or unlawful to restrict a woman's choice to terminate her pregnancy. After all, it is argued that since the body which supports the pregnancy belongs to the woman, no one but herself is qualified to decide the right course of action that is to be taken in this matter. Hence, it is asserted that it is acceptable for women to have an abortion as it constitutes a basic human rights issue. Nonetheless, this argument is seriously flawed and contradictory. This is because in doing so, the arguer ignores the rights of the unborn baby, whose right to live must be taken into consideration as well, if the right to choose to have an abortion is readily granted to the mother. According to McGraw (2010), if the human rights issue is to be universally applicable, the fundamental right-to-life should be first acknowledged as its importance outweighs other forms of

human rights. In fact, McCall, Shireman and Valderrama (2010) mentioned that the right to life is a prerequisite for all other rights. Hence, we cannot in all fairness, override the rights of the unborn baby to live in favour of the rights of the mother to decide that her unborn baby is best terminated for whatever reasons. Evidently in such instances, it is unacceptable for women to have abortions. (P6) As mentioned earlier in this argumentative essay, there are many reasons why women decide to have an abortion.

Nonetheless, to avoid being caught in such a difficult situation, the truth is that women need to think about the consequences that can occur before having sexual relations and in the case of rape, women must still consider the life of the innocent unborn baby who certainly does not deserve to die. The effects of an abortion can be very sad for everyone involved, for the woman who has the abortion, the unborn baby whose life will be forfeited and for the woman's family who will no doubt be indirectly drawn into the issue. There are in fact, viable and better alternative solutions to abortions and these can and should be explored before abortion is even to be considered as an option. As argued in the essay, there are strong reasons for women not to have abortions and these include basic human values such as the sanctity of a human life, religious and secular values which prohibits the very act of aborting and last but not least, the conscience of the mother who must bear the unimaginable burden and guilt of killing her unborn child. Such reasons are compelling enough for anyone to question the legitimacy of abortion. In conclusion, it is unacceptable for women to have an abortion for whatever reasons. List of References (Note: References in the essay are highlighted in grey colour) Coleman, P. K. (2011). Abortion and mental

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