

Argumentative Writing

An argumentative writing takes the act of persuasion further by not only attempting to convince the reader of the importance of an assertion, but by providing reasons why the particular assertion is better than others. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle discussed the features of persuasive writing, as well as language and style. Before drafting an argumentative writing, first complete a detailed outline, following the traditional organization as seen in the outline format, below.

See the handouts in your Grammar and Composition packet on Argumentative Writing, page 24, the Sample Persuasive Outline, page 25, and the Transitions, page 16 for more information. Also consider the thesis statement: see the examples, below, and the notes on page 22, Types of Thesis Statements.

In Classical Argumentation, the first step is Invention, the process of coming up with good ideas. Aristotle subdivided the art of inventing arguments into ethos, pathos & logos. Good persuasive writing includes some of each of these elements. **Ethos is the establishment of good character.** **Pathos emotion is the appeal to emotion.** **Logos is the use of reason, establishing an argument.**

The Other Side:

The Refutation states the other side.

Your opinion on this question will be more strongly and persuasively stated if you also understand and express the other side. Consider the following excerpt from a recognized text on academic writing, *They Say, I Say*: “. . .the underlying structure of effective academic writing - and of responsible public discourse- resides not just in stating our own ideas, but in listening closely to others around us, summarizing their views in a way that they will recognize, and responding with our own ideas in kind. Broadly speaking, academic writing is argumentative writing, and we believe that to argue well you need to do more than assert your own ideas. You need to enter a conversation, using what others say (or might say) as a launching pad or sounding board for your own ideas” (3). As a writer, you need to do more than just logically state your views. You need to also enter into the conversation with the other point of view, expressing the “they say” side of the story.

For example, notice the following “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr., consisting almost entirely of his response to clergymen who disagreed with his civil rights actions. The letter is written as a structure of summary and response; King first summarizes and then responds to their criticisms. Here is a typical passage:

“You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations” (5).

King uses quotes from his critics to provide the background for what he has to say. Over and over he uses the opposition as a basis to prove his points, in “they say, but I say” manner. Rather than “playing it safe” and “sticking to his points,” he doesn’t mind provoking controversy, challenging accepted ways of thinking, and expressing lively ideas.

Templates, or patterns of response, may help you lay out ideas. Furthermore, argumentative writing may also be essentially agreement, rather than disagreement.

- “She argues _____, and I agree that _____.
- “Her argument that _____ is supported by _____.

Notice the following templates:

- In recent discussions of _____, a controversial issue has been whether _____. On the one hand, some argue that _____. From this perspective, _____. On the other hand, however, others argue that _____. In the words of one of this view’s main proponents, “_____.” According to this view, _____. In sum, then, the issue is whether _____ or _____.
- My own view is that _____. Though I concede that _____, I still maintain that _____. For example, _____. Although some might object that _____, I reply that _____. The issue is important because _____.

By entering into a **conversation** about the topic at hand, we recognize that **there is not one or two possible points of view, but in fact many possible attitudes**. You as a writer become a critical, intellectual thinker who participates in debates and conversations about ideas in a active way.

Consider the quote below by the philosopher Kenneth Burke, in which he likens the world of intellectual exchange to a never-ending conversation at a party:

You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you. . . . The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Forms.

An argumentative writing may not fit neatly into a five paragraph essay. That is fine. You may have five, six, seven, or even more paragraphs. Follow the outline. **Try the templates**, changing them to fit your needs. Use **transitions** (see list in Grammar & Composition packet) for variety. Provide plenty of examples.

Sample Thesis Statements, Persuasive Essay: Indian Education

- Complex or compound-complex sentences
- Arguable points that present a discussion

Even though it is true that Native Americans must receive good educations to be successful in today's world, they **still** need to integrate their traditions into their school curriculum, **since** they are more successful as students when given opportunities to study their culture.

Even though it is true that Native Americans must receive good educations following state standards to be successful in today's world, they **still** need some amount of control over their school curriculum, **since** experience has shown that when they study their cultural traditions, they can be more successful.

Native Americans should study **not just** a regular, full curriculum in school including state standards, **but also** have the opportunity to include traditional ways such as their own languages, culture, and stories, **since** they are more successful when they do integrate their traditional knowledge.

While Native Americans need to have a well-rounded curriculum to attain success in today's world, their curriculum **also** needs to include study of their unique traditions, **since** this study helps them relate to their culture and instills pride in their people.

Sample Argumentative Outline for Persuasive Essay: Indian Education

Template language is highlighted in red; transitions are important.

I. Introduction

A. Lead

1. On the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, students at the Wyoming Indian Middle School learn Arapaho, archery, storytelling, singing, dancing, and drumming. They also receive an education which allows them to go on to college, which has a quality demonstrated by rising test scores. One teacher at the school says the motto now is "Save the Indian, Save the Child" (Long 38).
2. In the 1890s, Captain Richard Pratt helped round up Indians on reservations in South Dakota to take to boarding schools such as Carlisle. The policy he and others advocated, which would wipe out the traditions of the natives and have them be assimilated in society, was known as "Kill the Indian, and Save the Man" ("Capt. Richard H. Pratt on the Education of Native Americans").

B. Statement of the Case

1. From the time of colonization and the treaty period, Indian tribes have been treated as less important than the dominant culture.
2. The boarding school era of the late 1800 and early 1900s was a time when traditional tribal education was denied to Indians. Today, through laws such as Montana's Indian Education for All, reservation schools are supported in learning about their traditions, while they also learn the same information any other student learns.

C. Proposition Statement – **Even though it is true** that Native Americans must receive good educations following state standards to be successful in today's world, they **still** need some amount of control over their school curriculum, **since** experience has shown that when they study their cultural traditions, they can be more successful.

II. Refutation

A. **Although some people may say that** Indians will not need to know languages such as Arapaho or traditions such as oral storytelling, the inclusion of such study helps students connect school to home.

B. **The reality is** at schools such as Chief Dull Knife Community College, located on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Lame Deer, Montana, when history is taught using books such as Cheyenne Autumn, a novel about the tribe's return to Montana after exile in Oklahoma, students relate to the subject far better.

C. **Some people may believe that** Native Americans waste their time when they integrate study of traditional games and skills such as tee-pee raising

D. **However, the fact of the matter is** over half the graduates of Chief Dull Knife Community College go on to four year institutions.

E. **While some people may argue that** the government creates standards and a curriculum which provide all the information students need to be successful

F. . . . **actually, it has been proven that** when students live below the poverty line, experience high alcohol abuse, drug addiction, and racial taunts as part of their everyday lives, they connect better to a curriculum that includes elements of their culture.

III. Confirmation, one example

A. **It is certainly true that** Indians have an uphill battle to survive.

B. As Sherman Alexie says in his short story "Indian Education," ". . . when we look in the mirror, see the history of our tribe in our eyes, taste failure in the tap water, and shake with old tears, we understand completely" (Alexie 178).

C. **Since** Indians have been denied an identity in the past, derided for claiming their traditions were important, and have participated in a cycle of poverty and neglect, encouraging them to celebrate their culture while they learn seems a hopeful step for their development.

IV. Confirmation, second example

A. **Furthermore, it is clear that** efforts have been made for years to encourage Indians to determine their own course of education.

B. For example, as part of the “Three –Legged Stool” for Indian Education, under President Nixon in 1970, the “tribal governments ‘should’ view the education of their tribal members as a fundamental goal of tribal self-determination. . . (Juneau 39).

C. In the 1970s and on, the data showed that “Indian-controlled schools increased enrollment” (Juneau 39).

V. Confirmation, third example

A. **Undoubtedly, it is important** that Indians receive an education to suit them for any occupation, on or off the reservation.

B. Ensuring a quality education was the goal of opening public schools on the reservations in the early 1900s.

C. **While** the public schools offered some information on the local Indian culture, history, and traditions, they did not encourage tribal government officials to participate in their decision-making process.

D. **Nevertheless**, the Indian community became more involved in the public schools, and today many Indians serve in official capacities such as teachers or administrators, while integration of local culture is becoming common.

VI. Digression

A. **A close examination of the situation at Wyoming Indian Middle School on the Wind River Reservation reveals that** the traditional problems of alcoholism, unemployment, and drug abuse affect the community.

B. **Yet** offering the native language, Arapaho, and cultural studies along with a regular curriculum seems to be paying off.

C. The dropout rate, in 2005 the highest in the country, is on the decline.

VII. Conclusion

A. **A careful consideration of this problem will conclude that** when Indians are empowered to include study of their own history, traditions, and culture within their education, they have greater pride in their learning.

B. Examples such as that of the tribal college in Lama Deer, Montana, and the middle school on the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming, show that inclusion of native traditions in education can have a positive effect on the students’ achievement.

C. If native peoples continue to initiate study of their own history and culture within their local educational settings, more and more of them will be successful and help their peoples to live better lives.

Works Cited

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