

## Term Paper Basics; Making Arguments and Using Sources

John McMahon, Writing Fellow 2014-2015, Political Science, Hunter College

### The Basic Elements of an Academic Essay

#### Before You Write

- Re-read the assignment/directions. Take special notice of any bolded, underlined, or italicized direction
- Read the criteria on which you'll be graded, if provided
- Think about and write several possible thesis statements. Think about how you would support each one.
  - Consider visually mapping possible responses
- Freewrite; make an outline

#### An Effective Introduction

An introduction needs a clear thesis statement, but what else?

- What is the purpose of an introduction?
- Introduce your topic; create interest; identify your main argument; preview your essay (roadmap)
- Thesis statements are active statements that establish a clear, yet arguable, position that can be supported by developing related sub-arguments; good thesis statements are...
  - **Unified:** have a singular purpose, and if there are multiple points they are connected to an overall idea
    - Not unified: Detective stories are not a high form of literature, but people have always been fascinated by them, and many fine writers have experimented with them.
    - Unified: Detective stories prove popular with readers because of the emotional responses they generate as well as the vivid imagery of the text, which work together to establish a relationship between the writer and the text.
  - **Specific:** directly responds to prompt/problem, making a particular argument
    - Not specific: James Joyce's *Ulysses* is very interesting.
    - Specific: James Joyce's *Ulysses* helped create a new way for writers to deal with the unconscious by utilizing the findings of Freudian psychology and introducing the techniques of literary stream-of-consciousness.
  - **Arguable:** someone could argue against your thesis statement; it is not a self-evident statement
    - Not arguable: This essay explores the politics of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.
    - Arguable: This essay contends that political arguments about class and morality in early 19<sup>th</sup> century England are the primary influence in Austen's characterization of Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*.

#### Main Paragraphs

Your paragraphs should support the main argument (thesis) of your paper.

- Development and details in each paragraph should support your thesis
- **At the end of each paragraph, re-read it and ask yourself, 'Does this connect to and develop my argument?'**

Each paragraph will have *its own main idea* that must be supported

- There should be a topic sentence early in the paragraph that works as a mini-thesis statement for that paragraph
- The argument of each paragraph should support your thesis (develop one aspect of argument, respond to counterarguments, introduce supporting evidence, etc.)

Some 'moves' you might make within a paragraph

- Develop and connect different sub-points of your main argument/thesis
- Provide supporting details for paragraph's main ideas
- Synthesize sources with your own argument and perspective
- Put sources in conversation with one another through your argumentation
- Respond to potential counterarguments

**CONNECT YOUR PARAGRAPHS!: Transition sentences**

## Conclusion

This is the last chance to make an impression on your reader. Try to accomplish three objectives: 1) restate the main argument of the essay; 2) briefly summarize the main subpoints of your arguments, in relation to your thesis; 3) leave reader with interesting sense of your argument in response to the problem/puzzle of the paper

- Especially in a longer term paper, point to further directions for research; for example “While this paper has argued \_\_\_\_\_, demonstrating \_\_\_\_\_, further research could evaluate this argument in response to contexts/locations/etc. X and Y and Z”, or “The argument of this paper has implications for A and B and C...”

## **Revising Your Paper**

- *suggested*: do this on a paper copy, not on the computer
- Re-read the assignment! Did you: follow the specific directions?; meet logistical/formatting requirements?
- Start your revision from the conclusion: you often have a better idea of your argument at the end of a paper than at the beginning
  - Revise thesis, introduction, organization, sub-arguments, etc. from this perspective
- How would you write a critique of your paper? Revise based on this

## **Editing**

- read for mechanics – grammar, syntax, etc.
- reading paper aloud to yourself or friend, colleague, classmate, etc. will catch most errors

## **Using Transitions to Connect Sentences, Ideas, and Arguments**

*Adapted from Graff and Birkenstein 2014, 109-10*

<i>Addition</i>	<i>Elaboration</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Comparison</i>
Besides Furthermore In addition Indeed Moreover	By extension In other words That is Actually	After all Consider For instance For example Specifically	Along the same lines In the same way Likewise Similarly
<i>Cause and Effect</i>	<i>Contrast</i>	<i>Concession</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>
Accordingly As a result Consequently Hence Thus Therefore So	Although But By contrast Conversely Despite Even though However In contrast Nevertheless Nonetheless On the other hand Whereas	Admittedly Although Granted To be sure Of course	As a result Consequently Hence In short In sum Therefore Thus In conclusion

## Your Argument(s): Joining Academic Conversations

Questions to ask yourself about the conversation you are joining and arguments you are making

- What is the *empirical and/or interpretative puzzle/problem* you intend to address?
- What *makes* the problem you are working on a *problem*?
- What are the *stakes* in addressing your problem? Why is it significant?

### Making arguments

- Remember: arguments are *arguable*!
  - Counterarguments and counterexamples
  - *Some* basic structures of academic argument (Bean 2011, 32)
    - Many scholars have argued A, but I am going to argue B
    - Scholars have frequently asked questions A, B, and C about case/issue X. However, they have not adequately asked or investigated question D. I pose, explore, and seek to answer question D.
    - Scholars are confident in their understandings of A and B. However, because they have failed to analyze X and Y, A and/or B is not comprehensively evaluated.
  - *Some* important argumentative moves and examples (Graff and Birkenstein 2014)
    - They say / I say
      - In discussions of X, one controversial issue has been \_\_\_\_\_. While scholars have proposed \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, this paper instead argues \_\_\_\_\_
    - Respond to another scholar's/position's/theory's view
      - Accept and extend it
      - Disagree and reject it
      - Complicate it
    - Planting a naysayer / Responding to counterarguments
      - Some might object that \_\_\_\_\_. Although I concede \_\_\_\_\_, I argue that \_\_\_\_\_
    - So what?
      - This argument has significant implications for broader question of \_\_\_\_\_, namely \_\_\_\_\_.
  - *SOME* ways of evaluating and arguing about your sources (Graff and Birkenstein 2014, 60-64)
    - Missing factor: A overlooks \_\_\_\_\_
    - Unexamined assumptions: A relies on the question assumption \_\_\_\_\_, however \_\_\_\_\_
    - More current events and research: As recent research X has shown, A's argument \_\_\_\_\_ is insufficient for explaining \_\_\_\_\_
    - Contradiction: A's argument contradicts itself: one the one hand, \_\_\_\_; on the other, \_\_\_\_
    - Confirmation: More recent research confirms A's contention that \_\_\_\_\_
    - Extrapolation: A's argument \_\_\_\_\_ is helpful because it illuminates problem \_\_\_\_\_
    - Mixed evaluation: A's argument is correct on \_\_\_\_\_, however it fails in the area of \_\_\_\_\_
    - Combine arguments: A provides ample evidence that \_\_\_\_\_, however B's argument \_\_\_\_\_
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## Using sources (when you're making your own argument...)

### What roles do sources play?

- Background information on case, context, etc.
- Evidence and exhibits of your argument
- Method and/or Theory
- Scholarly work to be in conversation with
- Material to question, interrogate
- Counter-arguments to engage in your own writing

### Possible functions of assembling a conversation of academic sources

- Establish a controversy
- Establish a consensus that you develop or apply elsewhere, that you dissent from
- Establish a gap in knowledge

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## Using Active Verbs in Your Writing and Argumentation

For making a claim:	For expressing agreement:	For questioning/disagreeing:	For marking recommendations:
argue assert believe claim emphasize insist observe report suggest	acknowledge admire agree corroborate endorse reaffirm support verify	complicate contradict disavow question refute repudiate	advocate demand encourage implore recommend urge

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Portions of this handout adapted from:

Anderson, Steph M. 2012. "Elements of Successful Argumentation and the Drafting Process," Hunter WAC Program.

Bean, John C. 2011. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. 2014. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company

Zitani, Ellen. n.d. "Mechanics of a Paper" Hunter WAC Program