

This reference packet belongs to Miss Hastings and Mrs. Nickle. It does NOT leave the auditorium.

# Elements of an Argument

Strong arguments have the following elements:

- Claim
- Reasons
- Evidence
- Sources
- Opposing Viewpoint
- Counterargument
- Rebuttal

A claim is the writer's position on the argument.

Reasons explain *why* the claim is correct or why the author takes a certain viewpoint.

Evidence is the facts that back up the reasons.

Sources tell where information, or evidence, comes from.

## How Do I Evaluate an Argument?

### Notes on Relevance, Sufficiency, Reliability and Credibility

Important questions to ask when evaluating an argument:

- Is the evidence relevant?
- Is the evidence sufficient?
- Are the sources reliable?
- Is the author credible?

### Relevance

Evidence is relevant when it:

- Clearly relates to the reason(s).
- "Proves" the reasons through the use of facts, statistics, and examples.

Example

- Claim: Teachers should get paid more.
  - Reason: Teachers often grade assignments and plan lessons after school hours.
    - Relevant Evidence: GR teachers spend an average of 12 hours a week working from home.
    - Irrelevant Evidence: Miss Hastings, Mrs. Hudak, and Mrs. Nickle would spend their extra money on matching designer purses and diamond earrings.

Why is the first piece of evidence relevant and the second irrelevant?

---

---

---

---

### Sufficiency

Reasons are sufficient when:

- There are enough to support the claim.

Evidence is sufficient when:

- There are enough relevant pieces to support the reason(s).
  - If the evidence is not relevant it will not be sufficient.

### Relevance and Sufficiency work together!

If the evidence isn't relevant it cannot be sufficient.

Relevant evidence may still be insufficient if there isn't enough to convince your reader.

Read the first example.

- How many pieces of evidence are present? Five
- How many pieces of evidence are relevant? Zero
- Is there enough relevant evidence to be sufficient? No

Read the second example.

- How many pieces of evidence are present? Three
- How many pieces of evidence are relevant? Three
- Is there enough relevant evidence to be sufficient? Yes

### Reliability and Credibility

- Sources can be reliable if they are trustworthy.
- Author's credibility refers to how much the author knows about the topic through personal experience, education, or research.

Brainstorm:

- Websites with .gov in the URL
- Websites with .edu in the URL
- Websites with .org in the URL
- Can it be verified (proven to be true)?
- Who wrote the article?
- Are they writing for a publication? Is it a major one?
- When was it written? Are there new facts that the article is missing?
- Are there misspelled words?
- Is the grammar correct?
- Does the author cite his/her sources?

This is what a writer's explanation of an argument looks like.

The author's argument is effective because he clearly supports the claim that polar bears need to be saved. The author gives two reasons. The reasons are polar bears need to be saved because global warming is affecting their habitat and because they are at risk of extinction. Loss of habitat and risk of extinction both support the need to save the polar bears.

The author backs up the reasons with relevant evidence. For example, he included the fact that the bears' hunting ground will be nearly gone by 2100. This supports the reason that global warming is affecting their habitat. Another piece of evidence is that polar bear populations could drop by 30% over the next 30 years. Thus supports the reason that polar bears could become endangered. Altogether, the author includes five pieces of relevant evidence, which is sufficient.

The author documents the evidence by including three sources; The Plank Institute for Meteorology, the National Resource Defense Council, and the World Conservation Union. The sources sound like trustworthy organizations and are most likely reliable. Unfortunately, there is no background information provided about the author. This hurts his credibility because the reader does not know the author's level of education or personal experiences.

DO NOT MAKE THIS MISTAKE. You could say this about ANY effective argument.

The argument is effective because the reasons support the claim. The evidence is relevant because it clearly supports the reasons. The author also proves his reasons by providing statistics and examples. The evidence is sufficient because there are multiple examples and it is relevant. The sources are reliable because they are real places that are trustworthy. Finally the author is credible because he has a good claim, reasons, evidence and sources.

Polar bears, one of Earth's most beautiful species, have evolved to survive the planet's harshest environment—the Arctic Circle. Yet these furry white giants could become extinct soon—and humanity is the culprit.

Most scientists believe that greenhouse gases, especially the carbon dioxide released by cars and factories, cause global warming by trapping solar heat in the atmosphere. The Planck Institute for Meteorology in Hamburg, Germany, for example, predicts that average global temperatures could rise as much as 4.1 degrees Celsius by 2100, melting sea-ice and raising worldwide sea levels by as much as a foot.

That's bad news for polar bears. During the warm months in the Arctic, the bears hunt for seals over hundreds of miles of sea-ice, building up their body fat for their long winter hibernation. But in the last thirty years, a million square miles of that sea-ice has melted. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, an advocacy group, if global warming continues at its current rate, the bears' hunting grounds will be nearly gone by the year 2100. Without their habitat, polar bears will die.

Everyone loves polar bears; it's hard to imagine the planet without them. It's imperative we change our wasteful ways if we want our children to live in a world with polar bears.

In 2005, experts at the World Conservation Union urged the WCU to classify the polar bear as "vulnerable," meaning at "high risk of extinction in the wild." Global warming, the scientists said, could cause polar bear populations to fall over the next 35 years by more than 30 percent. The facts are in. Now it's time to act to save the polar bear.

The opposing viewpoint is the "other side" of the argument; it is the opposition's claim.

The counterargument is the other side's entire argument. Counterarguments may have reasons, evidence, and sources as well.

The counterargument is not intended to provide an equal look at both sides of the position. Rather, the counterargument provides the writer an opportunity present a rebuttal.

The rebuttal is when the author explains the flaws in the opposing viewpoint.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Pd \_\_\_\_\_

## How Do I Evaluate a Counterargument and Rebuttal?

Important questions to ask when evaluating a counterargument:

- Does the counterargument address the claim?
- Does the counterargument present facts?
- Is the counterargument presented without bias?

\*\* An author who is for or against a topic has bias. The author's bias is the side of an issue that he or she favors. Bias is revealed through the use of words with positive or negative connotations, or feelings.

Important questions to ask when evaluating a rebuttal:

- Does the rebuttal address the counterargument?
- Does the rebuttal prove the counterargument wrong?



## The Benefits of Homework

Students should have homework in all subjects on a daily basis. Insert the following elements of an argument here: reasons, evidence, and sources.

Those opposed to nightly homework believe that most children do not have time to complete daunting homework for an overwhelming five subjects every night. In a recent study, 65% of students are involved in essential afterschool clubs and sports. In addition, 40% of students have the more important job of helping their families by watching younger siblings and preparing dinner. However, students have extra time at the end of classes, as well as enrichments and study halls, which provide plenty of time for homework. In addition, many clubs and sports work in time for homework completion. Therefore, students have time to complete nightly homework for each of their academic classes.

### Evaluating a Counterargument and Rebuttal

- ✓ Does the counterargument address the claim?
- ✓ Does the counterargument present facts?
- ✓ Is the counterargument presented without bias?
- ✓ Does the rebuttal address the counterargument?
- ✓ Does the rebuttal prove the counterargument wrong?

### Sample Written Evaluation

Overall, the counterargument is effective. It addresses the claim that students should complete homework daily in all subjects by arguing that students do not have time to complete that much homework that often. Another component to the counterargument that makes it effective is that it presents facts. For example, the counterargument provides percentages of students involved in extracurricular activities or those with considerable responsibilities at home. Although the counterargument is clearly biased against homework, calling homework "daunting" and "overwhelming", extracurricular activities "essential", and responsibilities at home "more important", this bias does not influence the reader too greatly as facts are provided to balance the reader's impression.

The rebuttal is a bit less effective than the counterargument. The rebuttal addresses the counterargument that students do not have time to complete homework by arguing that students have time to complete homework during the school day and during their extracurricular activities. This rebuttal also proves the counterargument wrong, but only to an extent. Since the rebuttal does not offer any facts (or evidence), it is less effective than the counterargument.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Bias and Loaded Language

An author who is for or against a particular person, group, topic, or issue is said to have a bias. The author's bias is the side of an issue that he or she favors.

The way authors reveal their bias is through loaded language that is constant and consistent throughout the entire text.

Loaded language consists of words with strong positive or negative connotations, intended to influence a reader's or listener's attitude.

Connotations are the ideas and feelings associated with a word, as opposed to its dictionary definition. Connotations are positive, negative, or neutral; however, in persuasion, authors tend to use words with positive or negative connotations.

*The author or writer can also be an organization, particularly in persuasive writing.*