

## Argument & Evidence

*Appealing with evidence, reason & explanation*

### Argument as appeal

Many people mistakenly think of arguments as confrontations ending in disagreement. In fact, a good argument is quite the opposite—a carefully thought-out, audience-sensitive *appeal* to accept a fact, value or course of action. And that appeal is based on sound reasons, solid evidence and clear explanations. The goal is not to defeat an opponent, but rather to convince that opponent of the merits of a position so that one's opponent comes to share the same position as his/her own. Far from severing relationships, a good argument is designed to establish relationships by focusing both sides on the facts...and letting the truth win out for the benefit of both sides.

Thus, a good argument requires a thorough SMART analysis. The goal is determine what facts, evidence, reasons and explanations will move your audience in its situation. It's simply not possible to figure out how to convince your audience to change positions, if you don't take the time and effort to study closely the audience and its situation. Only then is it possible to determine a realistic response from that audience.

### Argument basics

In an effort to get your audience to accept a key detail (general claim) presently in dispute (or simply not accepted), you use supporting claims facts (evidence) the audience already accepts, and show how together they make your general claim believable. Your explanations show how those facts connect and support the general claim. Once the audience accepts the general claim as fact, you can use it to motivate the audience to act as you want it to.

Think in terms of firmly establishing as fact, each important point you want your audience to accept. List and explain several supporting claims with evidence that proves each is true or probable. If your audience finds each supporting claim believable, it will usually be ready to accept your starting general claim as reliable.

#### Basic Pattern

1. Start by establishing your credibility and that of your sources—*what makes you believable*
2. Refute opposing position(s) fairly and factually but briefly—*just enough to let your audience know you are familiar with other positions, but not so much that attention is diverted from your position.*
3. State the general claim (point to be proved) clearly, precisely & concisely
4. Provide a series of claims (each supported with evidence & explanation) that support your general claim—*no one claim prove the point by itself, but together they make a strong case.*
5. Reaffirm general claim precisely & concisely once each claim has been presented clearly.

### SMART expanded—*more at stake, thus much tougher analysis*

- ▶ **Situation:** why argument necessary; urgency...
- ▶ **Message:** details/evidence/explanations/reasons that will be convincing to audience...
- ▶ **Audience:** relationship (voluntary or captive/dependent); familiarity with subject; disposition toward general claim;
- ▶ **Response:** degree of change required...reasonableness of request; one step or multiple steps...
- ▶ **Tool(s):** what is best for the audience, situation & content; sequence for multiple steps...

### Argument Types

*Factual arguments – 4 types – establish degree of certainty*

1. Common knowledge—so widely accepted, no challenge (e.g. *men cannot bear children*)
2. Personally experienced—events, observations, conditions
3. Reported by others—primary & secondary sources
4. Generalizations—assertions accepted as true for a large number of subjects over a long period of time; generally pulled together from a combination of 1-3 (e.g. *hockey is Canada's national sport*)

## Examples

- ▶ Notebook computers are roughly twice as expensive as desktop computers of the same capabilities
- ▶ Toronto is the business hub of Canada

### **Causal arguments** – *establish relationship between cause and effect*

Causal arguments demonstrate/prove the link between cause & effect. They demonstrate that one thing causes another, either to explain what happened, or predict what will happen. Causal arguments must meet two tests:

1. The cause & effect must occur together—*A rash appears every time you eat oranges, and never appears when you do not eat oranges*
2. The cause & effect must vary together—*One slice of orange results in a small rash; eating several oranges results in a huge rash*

### **Analogous arguments** – *establish essential similarities between apparently unlike things*

Similarity must be true in all relevant and important respects—those aspects relevant to the point being proved (e.g. John got an A- on his assignment; mine is virtually identical, yet you gave me a B)

### **Evaluative arguments** – *value judgment(s)*

Appeal based on underlying values or beliefs—carefully explained and applied to particular case(s) (e.g. The negative campaigning by all parties in the last federal election was wrong)

### **Recommending arguments** – *judgment about present / concerned with future*

Two basic approaches:

1. Focus on present conditions in order to prove that change is necessary without getting into precisely what must be done (e.g. *Education must be more practical if it is to adequately prepare one for employment*)
2. Focus on the future with a plan for change, demonstrating that it is realistic/feasible and effective (e.g. *A new emphasis on employability skills will much better equip students for the workplace.*)
3. Focus equally on present and future to prove both the seriousness of the current problems and the predictable effects of the proposed change.

## **General Comments**

The reasons and evidence you provide must stand up to independent scrutiny, and be acceptable to your audience—*hence the importance of thoroughly analyzing your audience and context before settling on your purpose and the message detail*. How do you determine whether to develop an argument of fact, value or policy? *SMART!*

Most arguments fail because they simply state the fact/value/action by itself and fail to back up those claims with

- factual evidence that is convincing to the target audience (different audiences are moved by different facts)
- adequate explanations and examples that help the audience understand the importance of the claim(s) and show how they relate to and solve the problem facing the audience
- solid citation — correct footnoting & documentation that directs the reader to reliable sources

Successful arguments come down to thorough communication-problem analysis (*SMART*) leading to convincing claims, explanations, proofs, etc. that show you fully understand and know how to fix the problem it is facing.