

## 08 Assignment 04: The Argument Essay

### Overview

Argumentative writing is perhaps one of the most common forms of writing; often we argue every day, sometimes without even knowing it. We write to ask for things, to convince people to do or believe things, to make social or political points, or even to make academic statements. Even advertisements, which all of us see every day, are really just short and often very clever argumentative pieces of writing— designed to convince us to buy their product.

This assignment will be focused on enabling you to craft a well-organized argument that a.) appeals to its audience's values and concerns, b.) uses appropriate documented evidence, including that from a secondary source, and c.) makes effective use of rhetorical techniques.

### Assignment Requirements

The Argument essay must conform to the following **formatting** requirements:

- Must be in MLA Manuscript Format
  - Have 1 inch top, bottom, right and left margins;
  - Times New Roman 12 font;
  - Running header with last name and page number;
  - MLA compliant title block on first page;
  - All content double spaced.
  - Must have a minimum of 2-3 properly-formatted MLA in-text citations; these citations must refer to quotations, included in the paper, taken from a primary or secondary source.
  - Must have a properly-formatted MLA Works Cited page that contains a correct entry for each primary or secondary sources in use in the paper.

The Argument essay must conform to the following **content and mechanics** requirements:

- Must be at least 1,250 words long;
- Must contain an easily identifiable and sufficiently detailed **thesis statement** outlining a claim and warrants for that claim;
- Must have **body paragraphs**, with strong and **clear topic sentences**, that support and develop each of the warrants in the thesis statement;
- Must have a **clear and developed sense of the intended audience** of the piece;
- Must provide **sufficient evidence** in the form of contextualized quotations (2-3), examples from the primary or secondary texts, and explanations thereof;
- Must contain **at least two (2) properly-formatted MLA-in-text citations** of primary or secondary materials;

- Must have a **properly formatted MLA Works Cited page** containing correct citations for all primary and secondary materials used in the essay;
- Must have **an introduction and conclusion** that establishes exigence—a sense of urgency and importance—for the subject;
- Must contain none of the following major mechanical errors:
  - Run-on sentences
  - Fragments
  - Tense shifts
  - Possession errors
  - Capitalization errors
  - Subject-verb agreement errors
- Must conform to Standard English Grammar requirements for proofreading, usage, and spelling.

## Assignment Prompts and Variations: The Encomium

An *encomium* essay is a piece of writing in praise of something. Encomia are extremely common forms of writing, even though you may not have heard the term before. Encomia of many kinds—and of many things—appear in many venues and forms. When someone writes an article praising the performance of a sports team in their last game, he is writing an encomium; when a pundit writes in support of a politician or a policy, he is writing an encomium; when one delivers a moving eulogy at a funeral, she is giving an encomium of the deceased. You may have even written an encomium yourself—if you have ever written an application essay or cover letter for a job outlining your qualifications, you have written an encomium.

Your essay will seek to persuade an audience that your subject is worthy of their respect and admiration. To do this, you will need to illustrate a connection between your audience's concerns and values and your subject. Your essay should not simply list your subject's good qualities or admirable traits, but rather make concrete assertions about why *this particular audience* should see those traits as important or relevant to their values or concerns.

What, then, makes something “praiseworthy”? If you are writing about a person, you might consider the unique or meritorious things that he or she has done, or perhaps how he or she overcame adversity, or how the subject displayed a particular trait or quality in a commendable way—like showing extreme courage, determination, dedication, independence, ingenuity, or selflessness. If you are writing about an event, object (like a piece of technology), or text, you might discuss the positive outcomes stemming from this event, or the positive effects the object or text has had in society.

There are three variations of the encomium in English 101—your teacher will assign the variation that the class will complete.

### **Argument Option 1: Encomium of an Action or Event**

In this option, you will select an action or event from recent history—i.e., within your lifetime—and convince your selected audience that this was important or praiseworthy. Your argument should focus on the importance of the action or event itself *to your audience*, and not primarily on the people who did it.

You may choose local events—like something a local citizen or public servant did (a particular city resident, the mayor, a government official, a police officer, a teacher, or firefighter, or even a Coppin student)—or more national events or actions, like a specific accomplishment of a sports star or team, a major scientific discovery or medical breakthrough, or even the passage of a particular piece of legislation. Remember: your task here is not to simply tell the story of the action or event, but to convince your audience that it was an event relevant to their lives and values.

You may consider the following as you generate ideas for this essay:

- Was the action or event inspired by some noble goal? Did the actors undertake the action with a praiseworthy end in mind? What was it?
- Were there particular challenges or obstacles that the actors overcame to accomplish the action or hold the event?
- Was the event or action the first of its kind? A unique, groundbreaking, or game-changing occurrence? What made it so? Does it show in itself praiseworthy values, like compassion, courage, creativity, audacity, or determination?
- Did the action or event bring about positive things? Did it lead to beneficial consequences, or lay the groundwork for other noteworthy or praiseworthy accomplishments?

As this essay requires an MLA-formatted in-text citation of a source, you will be required to find an acceptable source (book, journal article, or other periodical) using the University's research tools (<http://www.researchport.umd.edu>) or use a specific source that your instructor provides for you.

Your essay must be guided by a strong thesis statement, supported by well-developed body paragraphs that have clear topic sentences, and make use of appropriate evidence. The essay must also have a clear sense of its audience and purpose, and a strong introduction and conclusion.

### **Argument Option 2 Prompt: Encomium of an Object or Invention**

In this option, you will select an object or invention that was created in recent history (i.e., the last 40 years or so), and convince your selected audience that it is important and praiseworthy.

You should pick an object or invention with which you are somewhat familiar—a piece of technology or object that your audience may use all the time, a thing that is important in your audience’s life, or even a piece of software that serves some form of crucial function for your audience.

Remember: your task is not to simply tell the story (narrative) of the object or invention, but rather to argue to your audience for its importance using details and evidence.

You may consider the following as you generate ideas for this essay:

- Was the object’s invention or creation inspired by some noble goal? Did the actors undertake the action with a praiseworthy end in mind? What was it?
- Were there particular challenges or obstacles that the actors overcame in the object’s creation? Were there obstacles to their success, like a pre-existing competitor or a specific technical, economic, or political problem?
- Was the object or invention the first of its kind? A unique, groundbreaking, or game-changing device? What made it so? Does it show in itself praiseworthy values, like compassion, courage, creativity, audacity, or determination?
- Did the object’s invention bring about positive things? Did its creation lead to good consequences, or lay the groundwork for other noteworthy or praiseworthy accomplishments?

As this essay requires an MLA-formatted in-text citation of a source, you will be required to find an acceptable source (book, journal article, or other periodical) using the University’s research tools (<http://www.researchport.umd.edu>) or use a specific source that your instructor provides for you.

Your essay must be guided by a strong thesis statement, supported by well-developed body paragraphs that have clear topic sentences, and make use of appropriate evidence. The essay must also have a clear sense of its audience and purpose, and a strong introduction and conclusion.

### **Argument Option 3: Encomium of a Film or Book**

In this option, you will select a film or a book and convince your selected audience that it is important, praiseworthy, and relevant to their lives. In convincing your audience of your text’s praiseworthiness, you can comment on the its subject matter, the lessons that it teaches its reader or viewer, praiseworthy elements in its creation, or something else valuable in the text that your audience would find important and relevant to their lives. You should write about a book or movie with which you are very familiar—this could be a novel that you’ve read many times, or a film that you’ve viewed on multiple occasions. As you will need to refer specifically to the text of the book or specific dialogue in the movie for evidence of the book or film’s praiseworthiness, you should pick a book or film of which you have an accessible copy.

Remember: your task is not to simply tell the story (narrative) of the movie or book, but *to argue* to your audience for its importance using details and evidence. This evidence will come in the form of plot events, dialogue or speeches, characters and their character traits, themes, and other elements of the text.

You may consider the following as you generate ideas for this essay:

- Does the film or book say something important about your audience's values or life situation?
- Does it offer lessons or themes that your audience will find valuable or important to their lives? Do the characters, for example, face similar problems to those your audience faces?
- Was its creation inspired by some noble goal? Did the creators undertake the action with a praiseworthy end in mind? What was it? For example, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe was written specifically to arouse anti-slavery sentiment; *Food, Inc.* was made as an exposé of the power of agricultural corporations in America.
- Were there particular challenges or obstacles that the author or produce overcame to create the work? Were there significant obstacles to its success?
- Was the book or film the first of its kind? A unique, groundbreaking, or game-changing text? What made it so? Does it show in itself praiseworthy values, like compassion, courage, creativity, audacity, or determination?
- Did the book or film accomplish something positive? Did the text's publication or release lead to beneficial consequences, or lay the groundwork for other noteworthy or praiseworthy accomplishments?

As this essay requires an MLA-formatted in-text citation of a source, you will be required to find an acceptable source (book, journal article, or other periodical) using the University's research tools (<http://www.researchport.umd.edu>) or use a specific source that your instructor provides for you. Quoting and citing from the text itself *does* count toward this requirement, as long as it is done properly.

Your essay must be guided by a strong thesis statement, supported by well-developed body paragraphs that have clear topic sentences and make use of appropriate evidence. The essay must also have a clear sense of its audience and purpose, and a strong introduction and conclusion.

### **Invention and Generating Ideas**

The first task you must consider in building your argument is your *audience*. To whom should this writing be directed? Who are they? What do they care about? What are their values? What problems do they confront in their lives? If you write to Coppin students, for example, consider what defines this group. How old are CSU students, in general? What do they value? Once you have defined both your audience and their primary values and problems, you can move on to how your subject is relevant to or addresses those values and problems. Chapter 07 of this text,

Rhetorical Skills, will be particularly helpful in understanding this element of your writing task: this chapter covers how to assess an audience and craft an argument that speaks to its values.

Once you have defined your audience and its values, you can use any of the generating ideas techniques (Chapter 05.1) in this text to discover specific things about your subject that relate to your audience.

### **Organizing Your Essay**

More than any other form of writing, argumentation depends on organization for effectiveness. If an argument is disorganized, the audience will fail to grasp the logic of the piece and the writing will be unsuccessful—the audience will be unconvinced. Your essay *must* have an introduction that lays out background and establishes the *exigence* (or importance) of the subject. That introduction must also contain a clear and coherent thesis statement (Chapter 05.3.1) that makes a strong and direct claim about your subject, along with providing warrants (reasons) for that claim. Subsequent paragraphs—several body paragraphs—*must address, develop, and expand the claim made in your thesis statement*. The essay should also conclude with a paragraph that reminds the audience of the importance of the subject in their lives. See Chapter 05.2, Organizing a Writing Plan, for some specific organizational schemes appropriate for the argument essay.