

University of Houston Clear Lake

WRITING CENTER

Planning an Argumentative Essay

Start by brainstorming your topic

Brainstorm potential ideas for your essay topic. When you decide on a topic for your essay, write it out as a sentence. For example: *“I am interested in achievement testing for K-5th grade.”*

Identify a problem

After deciding on your topic, consider potential issues surrounding it. For example: *“The benefit of testing is debated heavily; some teachers believe it’s a good idea while others do not.”*

Create your research question

After identifying a problem within your topic, turn it into a research question. For example: *“What are some of the problems and/or benefits of testing?”*

Focus your research question to fit your scope

Sometimes the assignment will limit how much space you have to explore your topic, so it’s important to limit the scope of your research. Be specific! For example: Instead of *“I will look into testing done on 4th graders,”* revise your question to be *“What are some of the problems caused by testing 4th graders, and do these overshadow the benefits?”*

Compose secondary questions

Break down your research topic into smaller secondary questions. This will help you when it comes time to find resources for your paper. For example:

- What tests are given to 4th graders?

- Who supports these tests? Who is against them?
- What are the main arguments from both sides?
- What are the pass/fail rates?
- Does data support that these tests are reliable?

The topics suggested by these secondary questions will likely help you form the body paragraphs of your paper. The research about them will help you answer your research question.

Define your audience

Determine who the audience of your essay is. For example: “I want to address the CCISD school board” or “I want to address the parents of fourth-graders who will be testing next year.” Knowing your audience will help you decide how to structure your argument and the tone you use when writing your paper. You should know what you want your audience to think, feel, and understand about your topic after reading your essay.

Identify the opposition

Summarize the arguments made by both sides of the issue you chose for your topic. It may help to do this by creating a chart or a graph and separating the statements into two groups. Brainstorm how you will counter arguments made by those who disagree with your stance.

Answer your main question by creating your thesis

The answer to your main question found throughout your research will likely become the thesis statement for your final draft.