

Planning an Argumentative Essay

Start with your topic

Write a sentence that summarizes the specific topic you are interested in. For example: *“I want to investigate achievement testing in K-5th grade.”*

Identify the problem

Specify a problem within your topic. For example: *“The value of testing is hotly debated. Some educators believe it’s a good idea while others do not.”*

Compose a research question

Turn the problem into a research question. For example: *“What are some of the problems and/or benefits caused by testing?”*

Focus your main question to fit your scope

The length of your assignment will limit your discussion, so you need to find an appropriate scope. For example: *“I will look into testing done on fourth graders in Houston.”* Then revise your question to reflect this focus: *“What are some of the problems caused by testing fourth graders in Houston and do these problems overshadow the benefits?”*

Compose secondary questions

Break down your research question into a list of secondary questions that will help you research your main question. For example...

- ✓ What tests are given to fourth graders in Houston?
- ✓ Who supports these tests? Who does not?
- ✓ What are the main arguments given on both sides?
- ✓ How are the tests developed?
- ✓ Do the data show them to be reliable?
- ✓ How do the tests compare with other national tests?
- ✓ What are the pass/fail rates?

The topics suggested by these questions will form the sections of your paper. The answers will help you answer your main question.

Answer your main question to form your thesis

The answer to your main question will probably become the thesis statement in your final draft of the paper.

Define your audience

Decide on an audience for your essay. 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.”* Your choice of audience will affect the way you structure your argument and the tone you adopt. You should also decide what you want your audience to think, feel, and/or know about your topic after reading your essay.

Identify the opposition

While planning your essay, before you attempt a rough draft, try to summarize the points those on both sides of the issue would make, perhaps with a chart or table. Brainstorm how you will counter arguments made by those who disagree with you. (A chart or table will help you to decide which experts to quote or summarize and why and how you will use them.)