



Writing Center
Academic Affairs

Strengthening Your Argument

Identify your Thesis

What is the claim or thesis of your paper? Can you identify a sentence or set of sentences that articulates that thesis within your paper? If you cannot identify a specific central claim for the paper, you will need to do so. The lack of a clear thesis can make your entire discussion unfocused and difficult for your audience to understand. You can try summarizing each paragraph in your essay and then putting those summaries in an outline form. This may help you to clarify your major claim by identifying which parts of your argument need additional information.

Characterize your audience

What does your audience think, feel, and know about the topic?

- Has your audience already chosen sides on the topic?
- What emotional response (if any) will your audience have to your argument?
- What is your audience's level of expertise about the topic?

What do you and your audience have in common?

- Do you share common values with your audience?
- Do you share similar experiences?
- Do you use similar terminology when talking about your topic?

Will you have multiple audiences to consider?

- Will your audience have varying levels of understanding about your topic?
- Will your audience have different areas of concern? How will you respond to them?

By characterizing your audience, you will be able to identify different parts of your paper that you may need to strengthen. For example, if your audience is entirely new to your topic and you use lots of slang or jargon you may need to consider communicating those ideas in a simpler way. Additionally, if your audience has different areas of concern how will you convince them your solution is the most correct?

Analyze how you characterize yourself in the essay

What type of character have you created?

- Are you an expert or a novice?
- Are you humble, respectful, or arrogant?
- Are you an intellectual or just "plain folk"?

- Do you use authorities to support your claims?
- Do you try to draw an emotional response from your audience?

It's important to understand how your audience views you, the author, as well. If your audience would describe themselves as "plain folk" they may be biased against hearing an intellectual explain to them why their issues aren't as big as they think. If this is the case, make sure you connect with your audience in your introduction and convince them you have their best interests in mind. If you characterize yourself as an expert on your topic but aren't able to support your arguments with details and facts your audience may not believe anything you say. By understanding how your audience views you as the author you will be able to determine which tone fits best for your essay.

Decide how to develop common ground with your audience

What is your tone of voice?

- Do you vary your language to match the expertise levels of audience members?
- Are you formal or informal?
- Do you use jargon or figures of speech your audience resonates with?
- Are you respectful of the audience's attitudes and/or feelings about the topic?

Which of your audience's characteristics/attitudes can you draw on to develop common ground? By understanding fully who your audience is you will be able to meet them halfway on the topic.

Consider the opposition

Put yourself in the shoes of someone who disagrees with your claim. What objections, questions, or arguments would they have after reading your argument? Write as many as you can think of.

Afterward, brainstorm how you can address these objections. Will you need to do additional research? How will addressing the opposition change the way you develop and defend your claim? It's important to address the opposition in order to make them feel like you have considered their point of view and also to prove to them why your solution or stance is the better choice.