

## Chapter 15: The Argument Essay



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### Why Write an Argument Essay?

When you hear the word “argument,” what do you think of? Maybe you think of a shouting match or a fist fight? Well, when instructors use the word “argument,” they’re typically thinking about something else. What they’re actually referring to is a position supported by the analysis that preceded its conception, not necessarily defending against antagonism.

More to the point, they’re talking about defending a certain point of view through writing or speech. Usually called a “claim” or a “thesis,” this point of view is concerned with an issue that doesn’t have a clear right or wrong answer (e.g., four and two make six). Also, this argument should not only be concerned with personal opinion (e.g., I really like carrots). Instead, an argument might tackle issues like abortion, capital punishment, stem cell research, or gun control. However, what distinguishes an argument from a descriptive essay or “report” is that **the argument must take a stance**; if you’re merely summarizing “both sides” of an issue or pointing out the “pros and cons,” you’re not really writing an argument. For example, “Stricter gun control laws will likely result in a decrease in gun-related violence” is an argument. Note that people can and will disagree with this argument, which is precisely why so many instructors find this type of assignment so useful—it makes you think.

Academic arguments usually “articulate an opinion.” This opinion is always carefully **defended with good reasoning and supported by plenty of research**. Research? Yes, research. Indeed, part of learning to write effective arguments is finding reliable sources (or other documents) that lend credibility to your position. It’s not enough to say “capital punishment is wrong because that’s the way I feel.”

Most of the papers students write in college are arguments. This should not be surprising. We are surrounded by them. Every time we watch television, surf the Internet or read a magazine, we are bombarded with ads. Ads are persuasive arguments trying to get consumers to buy or do something.

Here is an ad that uses an interesting twist to make its argument:



Kleenex Tissue Ad 1990- “Teach Them Not To Share”

- Irony is “the use of words to convey one meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning” (“Irony”).
- What is ironic about this ad?
- What is the main argument of the Kleenex ad?

## Elements of Argument

When writing or analyzing arguments, we begin by examining how the argument appeals to the reader. There are three types of appeals utilized in arguments: logos or logical, pathos or emotional, and ethos or ethical appeals.

### Aristotle’s Triangle: Three Types of Appeals

**Logos or the logical appeal** relies upon well-developed, well-organized and well-reasoned arguments supported by evidence from reliable, authoritative sources. When writing argumentative

essays and papers, we rely heavily upon the logical appeal to make our case. The evidence utilized in the logical appeal is usually research-based evidence: statistics, clinical studies, any empirical evidence collected carefully and methodically. This is also why arguments are written in third person. We let the evidence drive our arguments, so readers do not think our work is based upon our biased viewpoint.

**Pathos or emotional appeal** recognizes that humans are emotional beings. The key to using the emotional appeal successfully in papers is to provide an opportunity for an emotional response and not to try and orchestrate an emotional response. An example of the wrong use of an emotional appeal are infomercials for organizations like the ASPCA or UNICEF. While there is no doubt their work and message is important, they try to manipulate the audience with the use of emotional music, and manipulative photographs with an emotional narrative running beneath the music and images. While this may be okay for non-profit organizations, it does not work in college papers. Do not try to manipulate your audience this way. Also, do not try to use emotionally charged language. Stay in third person and avoid sounding biased, accusatory or self-righteous. As a writer, the people you are trying to persuade are the people who either disagree with you or are not sure. By sounding accusatory or self-righteous, you will put the opposition on the defensive, and you have already lost your argument.

The proper use of emotions is through narrative case studies. Case studies provide the opportunity to appeal to readers' emotions. The key is not to tell the readers what to feel or to try and manipulate the readers to feel a specific emotion. Instead, writers tell the story and allow the readers to decide how they want to respond. Readers can become emotionally involved with the topic or not. It is up to them. This works well for social issues like hunger and homelessness, bullying, child abuse, or illegal immigration. The blending of specific case studies with empirical evidence creates a deeply meaningful approach to argument. If you are talking about homeless children in America, by providing the statistics on the large number of children affected by this issue along with stories of the struggles of specific children, this drives the point home. We have a name and face to go with those numbers making the argument very human.

**Ethos or the ethical appeal** relates to the writer's persona being projected through the work. By using an unbiased tone and unbiased language, we project an image of trustworthiness and credibility. That is also why we use credible sources. We, as writers of college papers, do not have any credibility yet with our audience. By using authoritative, reliable sources, we borrow their credibility to help persuade readers to adopt our point of view. We are effectively saying, it is not just me that thinks this way. Here is a testimonial from Dr. So and So and his research that supports it. The research, surveys or clinical studies provides the evidence that supports the argument.

- **Looking back at the Kleenex ad, what types of appeals did the ad use?**

Beyond the use of these appeals, there are some other elements to consider when analyzing or writing arguments: **audience, purpose, a well-defined issue, compelling evidence, refutation, and persona.**

## Audience

What audience does the writer have in mind? Who is the target audience the writer is trying to persuade? As a writer, your audience is the first consideration. This determines the language you will use, the sources you will cite, and the approach you will take. For example, if I were writing an anti-abortion paper, I would address a panel of scientists much differently than a church congregation. Some of my sources would change, and my language use would probably change. For scientists, I

would sound more clinical. For the church congregation, I would sound more emotional. My evidence would change, too. For scientists, I would use clinical evidence. For a church congregation, I would use sacred text. What if my target audience were children instead of adults? Once again, some of my sources would change and my approach would be different.

## Purpose/Thesis

Why are you writing it? What are you trying to prove? The purpose is the thesis statement. As a writer, you need to know why you are writing the paper. It cannot be just to fulfill a requirement. It is imperative that your position is clear. What exactly are you arguing? It should be very apparent which side you are on and why.

Provide the reasoning behind your position. Remember, do not state it overtly like this: **The purpose of this essay is to prove** that potential dog owners must research breeds in order to choose dogs that best suit their lifestyles and opt to spay or neuter them if the overcrowded dog population is ever going to be solved.

This is considered weak. That said, you do have a good thesis statement if you drop the initial part: **Potential dog owners must research breeds in order to choose dogs that best suit their lifestyles and then spay or neuter them if the overcrowded dog population is ever going to be solved.**

Here is an example from a student paper: **Although the American flag is worthy of great esteem, the government cannot take away the right to desecrate the flag without taking away all that it stands for—freedom.**

Using language strengthens your argument. The following examples from the Community College Consortium’s *Rhetoric and Composition* textbook help further illustrate this point:

You should avoid using “I” and “My” (subjective) statements in your argument. You should only use “I” or “My” if you are an expert in your field (on a given topic). Instead choose more objective language to get your point across. Consider the following:

I believe that the United States Government is failing to meet the needs of today’s average college student through the under-funding of need-based grants, increasingly restrictive financial aid eligibility requirements, and a lack of flexible student loan options.

“Great,” your reader thinks, “Everyone’s entitled to their opinion.”

Now let’s look at this sentence again, but without the “I” at the beginning. Does the same sentence become a strong statement of fact without your “I” tacked to the front?:

The United States Government is failing to meet the needs of today’s average college student through the underfunding of need-based grants, increasingly restrictive financial aid eligibility requirements, and a lack of flexible student loan options.

“Wow,” your reader thinks, “that really sounds like a problem.”

A small change like the removal of “I” and “my” can make all the difference in how a reader perceives your argument— as such, it’s always good to proof read your rough draft and look for places where you could use objective rather than subjective language.

## The Fallacies of Argument

Okay; your paper is filled with quality research. You’re feeling good about your paper. But when you get the paper back your instructor has left a comment like, “This is an argument fallacy.” So now you’re left wondering what is “false” about the argument; what is this “argument fallacy”?

Argumentative fallacies are sometimes called “logical fallacies.” Usually these fallacies are created when the reasoning behind the argument lacks validity. A lack of validity weakens your argument, and then leads to a failure to provide a sufficient claim. This is a common error in argumentative papers.

These fallacies can be caused by your negligence or lack of rigor and attention while making a certain argument. In other words, a very general argument, not followed through rigorously, can end up in an “argumentative fallacy.” So, never generalize; don’t just say and leave—pursue your point to its logical termination.

The following section from LEO: Literacy Education Online explains some of the fallacies that can easily occur in your writing.



When you attempt to employ logic to support claims in your papers, your reasoning is sometimes weakened because you are presenting fallacious arguments. It is important for you to be able to identify and eliminate fallacies in your writing. This section will explain and give examples of typical fallacies as divided into five major categories:

- feelings
- distraction from the argument
- misinformation
- generalization
- irrelevant connections

The argumentation methods comprising these five categories can be used as rhetorical devices, but they must not be confused with logical thinking. Tutors can help their students to make such a distinction.

### FEELINGS

Quite often, writers appeal to their audiences’ feelings to attract attention to and elicit agreement with their ideas. Although this can be effective, manipulating audience feelings is not employing logic, and it does not make a writer’s argument stronger. Logical thinking never involves feelings.

**Appeal to Force:** The writer threatens the audience, explicitly or implicitly, with negative consequences if the claim is not believed.

*If you do not believe in God, you will go to hell.*

**Appeal to Pity:** The writer begs for the approval of the claim; the audience may agree because they feel sorry for the arguer.

*I cannot get a job because the public education system failed me; I have to steal to survive. It is society’s fault, not mine.*

**Appeal to Gallery:** The writer uses emotive language that will produce a desired effect on a group or “gallery” of readers. By appealing to the fears or interests of the audience, the writer hopes to gain approval.

*Same-sex marriage must be prohibited, or the family structure as we know it will collapse.*

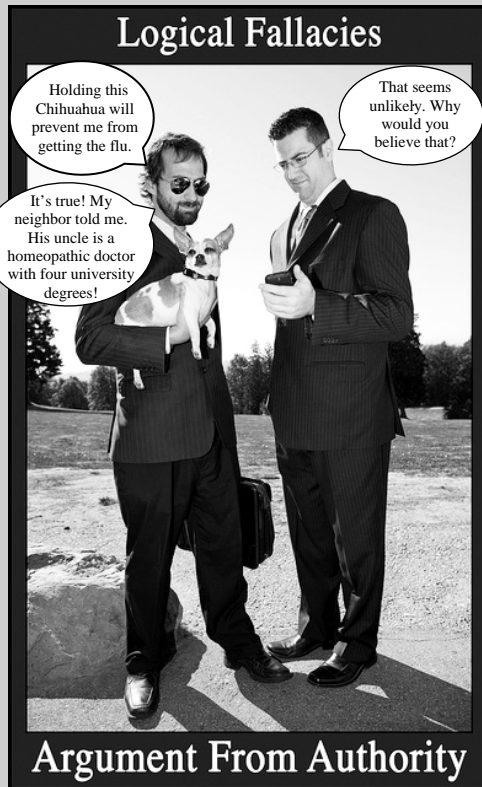


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**Appeal to Authority:** The writer cites authorities to show the validity of the claim, but the authority is not an expert in the field, the authority’s view is taken out of context, or other experts of that field disagree with the authority quoted.

*I think that businesses should not have to limit the amount of pollutants they release into the atmosphere because Rush Limbaugh says that there is no real evidence for industrial pollutants causing the Greenhouse Effect.*

**Old is Better:** The writer relies on traditional wisdom to support the argument. This is a logical pitfall because the argument does not consider that new ideas could apply.

*People have believed that fish is “brain food” for decades, so I don’t believe the FDA when they claim that eating fish does not enhance the intellect.*

**New is Better:** The writer claims that a new discovery has better effects or is more applicable to a given situation simply because it is new. However, being newer does not make an idea more correct.

*Word processed papers are clearer and more error-free than typed papers because they make use of new technology.*

### DISTRACTION FROM THE ARGUMENT

This type of fallacy often happens when writers do not have strong support for their claims. Distraction is also used if the opposition's view is strong and logical; then, writers have a tendency to attack the context instead of the argument.

**Attacking the Speaker:** The writer reduces the credibility of the opposition by attacking them personally for who they are and not for what they say. The validity of logical reasoning does not depend on the morality of the speaker.

*Oprah Winfrey’s diet advice is useless; she has had problems with maintaining her weight for most of her life, bouncing back and forth between being overweight and slender.*



**Irrelevant Material:** The writer introduces irrelevant material to distract the audience from the subject at hand. Then, s/he draws conclusions based on the unrelated material presented.

*Education is important for the future of the American people and our country. So, you should choose to study at St. Cloud State University.*

**Shifted Burden of Proof:** The writer challenges those with an opposing view to defend their arguments; this puts the writer in a position in which s/he can deny the opposition's assertions.

*The author writes that animals shouldn't be killed because they can feel pain, but he doesn't prove that they can. For his argument to persuade me, he has to give me positive empirical evidence of animals' ability to feel pain.*

**Straw Man:** The writer does not attack the argument that the opposition sets forth. The arguer may attack one of the opposition's points as if it were the whole argument, distort what the opposition is attempting to express, or exaggerate the opposition's argument to the point of satirizing it.

*Al Gore's support of the discussion of sexual orientation issues on Ellen is dangerous: he advocates the exposure of children to sexually explicit materials, which is wrong.*

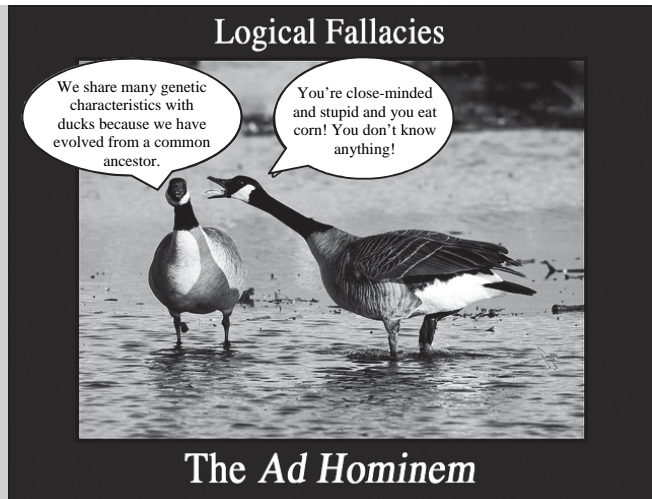


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## MISINFORMATION

Sometimes, writers present questionable or ambiguous reasons to sustain their arguments. A logical demonstration of a belief, however, must be conclusive and convincing to be effective; any doubtful premises leads the audience to believe that the conclusion is weak.

**From Ignorance:** The writer's argument is simply that the point has not been proven otherwise. The fact that the counterclaim has not been proven does not make a claim correct.

*I believe in God because no one can prove that a god doesn't exist.*

**False Cause:** The writer points out as the cause of an event something that is not the actual cause, or the writer has insufficient evidence for making a causal link. If the identified cause is not the real cause, nothing assures that the point of discussion is true.

*Bush was "determined to knock down Saddam Hussein" because of his "nuclear bomb potential."*

Note: Hussein did not have any nuclear weapons.

**Questionable Premises:** The writer's reasons for holding a belief are not as obvious to the audience as they are to the writer, and the writer does not back up the claim with enough support. This fallacy also occurs when the writer introduces an unsupported value judgment.

*All judges are fair-minded individuals; therefore, Judge Ito is fair in his decisions.*

**Ambiguity of Terms/Equivocation:** The writer uses two different senses of the same word in an argument, and this ambiguity allows a mistaken conclusion to be drawn by the writer.

*It is immoral to kill an innocent human being. Fetuses are innocent human beings.  
Therefore, it is immoral to kill fetuses.*

Note: In the first sentence, the writer uses “human being” in the sense of a morally considerable being. In the second, the writer could be using the term “human being” to make the less controversial claim that a fetus is a genetically human creature.

**Simplifying:** When restating the oppositions view, the writer mistakenly ignores information which is relevant to the conclusion reached by the opposition.

*Freud argued that women have penis envy because they want to be men.*

**Presuppositions:** The writer presupposes some information that supports his/her claim; the writer does not confirm the assumed material.

*All students who study on this campus want more computers available for their use,  
so computer fees should be raised 50% to cover the costs of the expansion.*

**Hiding Information/Half Truth:** The writer, consciously or unconsciously, establishes conclusions without stating all of the facts relevant to the situation.

*The Geo Metro is a superior car because it averages 43 miles per gallon.*

Note: The writer neglects to mention that this figure was derived in tests where the car was driven with 30 mile per hour tailwinds.

## GENERALIZATION

Some writers stereotype and generalize their ideas to make a powerful statement. To construct effective logical arguments, writers must avoid generalizations; once an exception to a generalization is found, the argument that the generalization supports is discredited.

**Popularity:** The writer bases the argument on the belief that if an idea is held by a large group of people, it is true.

*Millions of people are Marxists, so Marxist economic and political theories are correct.*

**Exception:** The writer applies a general rule to a case where the rule is inapplicable.

*A year is 365 days long, so I celebrate my birthday every 365 days.*

**Particular Experiences:** The writer makes a rule out of particular experiences to support the claim. As soon as an exception to the derived rule is found, the rule fails to support the argument.

*All Greek food causes illness; when I traveled through Greece, I got food poisoning.*

**Property in the Whole:** The writer makes a claim based on the belief that a whole always possesses the characteristics of its parts, which is often untrue. Although this belief is sometimes acceptable, it is not universally applicable, so the appropriateness of using this idea must be determined on a case by case basis.

*Since many of the students at St. Cloud State University get A's, St. Cloud State must be a top-rated school.*



**Property in the Parts:** Often, a writer who makes the above fallacy will also commit this one. The writer erroneously assumes that because a whole has a particular property, the parts forming the whole have the same property.

*IBM is a reputable organization, so all of its employees must be reputable.*

**False Alternative:** The writer only presents some of the alternatives for solving a problem when more possibilities exist because the writer assumes that the list of alternatives created is exhaustive.

*In the United States, one can vote for either Democrats or Republicans.*

### IRRELEVANT CONNECTIONS

Some writers' arguments fail not because of the information given, but because of the type of connections established between the parts of the argument. If the logical structures are not valid, the argument will fail, even if all of the premises are true and correct.

**Consecutive Relation:** The writer assumes that because two events occur consecutively or concurrently, they are causally related.

*I believe in supernatural beings because every time I drive past the cemetery where my grandmother is buried, a light on my dashboard flashes. Her spirit causes this because it never happens otherwise.*

**Slippery Slope:** The writer bases the claim on the assumption that if a particular event occurs, so will other undesirable events. However, there are no reasons to believe that the subsequent events will occur. This fallacy is usually caused by fear.

*If we put limits on the right to bear arms, soon all of our Constitutionally- given rights will be taken away.*

**Two Wrongs Make a Right:** The writer defends an action on the grounds that someone else has done something similar.

*Residents of St. Cloud should not have to recycle plastics because those who live in Waite Park are not required to.*

**Wrong Analogy:** The writer reasons by analogy, using a similar, known situation as the basis for the argument. Extended analogies tend to lose their direct connection with the actual topic of discussion, leading to erroneous conclusions.

*Having a television rating system is like being in prison. Both infringe on one's rights.*

**Circular Reasoning:** The writer defends the claim by using the conclusion as one of the premises to support the conclusion.

*God exists because the Bible says so. The Bible is a reliable source because it is the word of God.*

**Affirmation of the Consequent:** The writer uses an "If...then" statement in the argument's reasoning. Then, the writer confirms the then part of the statement and derives the "If" part, thereby committing a serious logical flaw.

*If one is 16 years old or older, one can drive an automobile in Wisconsin. I saw your niece driving through Wausau yesterday. She must be at least 16.*

**Denial of the Antecedent:** Again, the writer employs an “If...then” statement, but in this case, the writer denies the “If” part so that the negation of the then part can be concluded. However, just because the “If” part does not happen, it does not follow that the “then” part will not happen. The “then” part could result for some other reason.

*If the ozone layer is destroyed, many people will get cancer and suffer from other illnesses. The ozone layer is being protected, not destroyed. So, many people will be spared the pain of cancer and other illnesses.*

### Sources

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## The Basics of Argument

### A Well-Defined Issue

What exactly is being argued in the paper? What is included or not included?

As a writer, it is your job to set parameters around your argument. Be sure to clearly explain the main argument of the paper. For example, if you were writing an anti-abortion paper, you might set the parameters around third trimester. This defines exactly what will be included and what will not be included. In this example, the paper is against third trimester abortions only, not abortion in general.

### Compelling Evidence

What kinds of evidence are utilized in the paper? Is the evidence sound? Does it come from authoritative sources? Be sure to use reliable sources. Do not just Google the topic and grab the random information that may pop up. Google Advanced and Google Scholar help you filter some of the information, but be sure to evaluate the sources you choose. In addition, use journal articles when possible because they are usually written by authorities in a specific field. They will provide multiple sources for their information because they must cite their sources. Remember to include a variety of evidence, including facts, data, examples and subject matter expert opinion.

Much of this evidence is now accessed on the Internet. However, when using Internet sources, pay attention to the URL. What is the domain name? Is it a .edu, .net, .com, .org, .gov, .mil? How does this influence the information being provided? Also, be sure to examine further by answering the questions: Who is the author? What is the author's background?

A part of what makes your argument compelling is the variety of sources that you use and the credibility of those sources. You cannot win an argument with random information. Do not rely heavily upon a single source to carry your paper. A variety of sources shows that you have done your diligence as a writer and increases your credibility.

## Refutation

Does the author anticipate the opposition's main arguments? Is the author prepared with counterarguments and compelling evidence that can persuade the opposition to adopt a different view?

Refutation or rebuttal is incredibly important to your argument. You cannot write a one-sided argument.

You must first briefly identify an opposition's point. Then immediately address it with counterarguments and compelling evidence. When writing an argument, expect that you will have opposition. Skeptical readers will have their own beliefs and points of view. When conducting your research, make sure to review the opposing side of the argument that you are presenting. You need to be prepared to counter those ideas. Remember, in order for people to give up their position, they must see how your position is more reasonable than their own. When you address the opposing point of view in your essay and demonstrate how your own claim is stronger, you neutralize their argument. By failing to address a non-coinciding view, you leave a reason for your reader to disagree with you, and therefore weaken your persuasive power. Methods of addressing the opposing side of the argument vary. You may choose to state your main points, then address and refute the opposition, and then conclude. Conversely, you might summarize the opposition's views early in your argument, and then revisit them after you've presented your side or the argument. This will show how your information is more reasonable than their own.

As stated earlier, it is the opposition that you are trying to convince. So, how well you handle this section of your paper will determine its effectiveness as an argument.

## Persona

What is the author's attitude toward the topic? Is it hostile, sarcastic, irate, or reasonable? What kind of language and tone are being used? We touched on this when we talked about the ethical appeal. Your tone needs to be calm and reasonable. Your language needs to be honest, clear and respectful. Avoid aggressive, confrontational or biased language and tone. It is important to clearly state and support your position. However, it is just as important to present all of the information that you've gathered in an objective manner. Using language that is demeaning or non-objective will undermine the strength of your argument. This destroys your credibility and will reduce your audience on the spot. For example, a student writing an argument about why a particular football team has a good chance of "going all the way" is making a strategic error by stating that "anyone who doesn't think that the Arizona Cardinals deserve to win the Super Bowl is a total idiot." Not only has the writer risked alienating any number of her readers, she has also made her argument seem shallow and poorly researched. In addition, she has committed a third mistake: making a sweeping generalization that cannot be supported."

## How to Write an Argument Essay

First, you need to determine what kind of argument you are writing. Are you writing a position paper? Sample topics would include illegal immigration, wolf protection programs, paying college athletes. Or, are you writing a solution paper, solving a problem? Sample topics include bullying,

homelessness, pollution. Next, identify what you already know about this topic. Write a brief outline establishing what you want to argue on this topic. Establish the purpose of your argument. Establishing this before you start researching the topic will make it easier for you to determine what you need to cite in your paper. Next choose an appropriate format.

## Organizing the Argument Essay

The two most common organization methods for the argument essay are as follows:

1. Block
2. Rebuttal Throughout - only works with pro/con topics

### Block

- I. Introduction & Thesis Statement
- II. Background information - this section is necessary for solution arguments but sometimes unnecessary for position arguments.
  - A. Define key words and terms that will help to define the parameters of your argument
  - B. Provide background information. If I want to solve global warming, I first need to explain what it is and how it works, so I can show readers how my solution will fix it.
  - C. Establish the severity of the problem. In real life, solutions cost money. If you want taxpayers to pay for it, you need to clearly establish that the problem is severe and must be addressed.
- III. First claim: For death penalty because it will stop overcrowding
  - A. Give statistics on overcrowding
  - B. Give statistics on future problems if no solution is provided
  - C. Explain how the process will help
  - D. Explain how if appeal process is limited this will further help the situation
  - E. Transition
- IV. 2nd claim: For death penalty because it will stop repeat offenders
  - A. Give statistics on repeat offenders who commit murder
  - B. Give statistics if this is not stopped
  - C. Explain how process would work if implemented
  - D. Explain how this would also stop overcrowding because repeat offenders would not be imprisoned
  - E. Transition
- V. 3rd claim: for death penalty because it costs less money
  - A. Give statistics on the cost of housing
  - B. Compare that to the cost of a limited appeal process
  - C. Explain how this will work if implemented
  - D. Explain how this too relates to previous info
  - E. Transition
- VI. Rebuttal: Rebuttal of antideath penalty arguments
  - A. List a few of the opposition's counterarguments (three)
  - B. Take each one, one at a time, and supply statistics to prove it wrong, example would be to prove that innocent people won't be executed

- D. #2 Rebuttal: No other democracy uses it, their side, your side with statistics to prove them wrong
- E. #3 Rebuttal: Death penalty cheapens value of life: their side, your side with statistics to back it up.
- F. Transition

## VII. Conclusion

## Rebuttal Throughout

- I. Introduction and thesis
- II. First Rebuttal -Death penalty is barbaric
  - A. Opposition's side
  - B. Your rebuttal argument
  - C. Statistics to support your side and prove them wrong
  - D. Explanation of how this will help society
  - E. Transition
- III. 2nd rebuttal - death penalty no other democracy
  - A. Opposition's side
  - B. Your rebuttal argument
  - C. Statistics to support your side and prove them wrong
  - D. Explanation of how this will help society
  - E. Transition
- IV. 3rd rebuttal - killing innocent people
  - A. Opposition's side
  - B. Your rebuttal argument
  - C. Statistics to support your side and prove them wrong
  - D. Explanation of how this will help society
  - E. Transition
- V. Conclusion

## From Prewriting to Rough Draft

The argument is often the most difficult of essays for students to begin. We are many times as unsure of our positions as we are of our reasons for our positions on controversial topics. "Because that's what I believe" is only the starting point. Explaining why you believe in your position is the task of the argument. In exploring a topic for a strong argument, solid reasons and sound evidence are keys to convincing your audience of your position. The following steps should help you work through the process of moving from belief to argument.

### Step One

Choose a topic that you can argue either a position or a solution. For example, to argue a position would be to argue for or against something, like the death penalty. To argue a solution is to argue how to solve something, like how to solve the air pollution problem in Phoenix.

Example: The Effects of Political Correctness on Higher Education

## Step Two

On a blank sheet of paper, write your topic down and at least five reasons in support of and five reasons against your topic. Or, if you are writing a solution paper, look at least five different solutions for the problem.

## Step Three

See how the pros and cons relate. Decide which you want to write about. Do you want to focus on the pros or the cons? Pick the one you feel offers the most possibilities for exploration. Or, choose the solution that seems the most logical, the most doable.

## Step Four

Freewrite. Look at Chapter 1 and follow the prewriting process.

## Step Five

Transform your chosen topic into a “Guiding Question” and write it down. What is the main question that your essay will answer?

Example: What are three main effects of Political Correctness on Higher Education.

## Step Six

Find a variety of initial sources to help you answer your guiding question. You must use these sources in your work either in a quote, paraphrase and/or summary.

- Use database sources and web pages. Be sure and turn in copies of your resources with your final paper. Print and annotate them. And keep them handy: many instructors will not accept any paper without the sources turned in as well.
- Create a Works Cited page from your sources.

## Step Seven

Now that you have gathered your information and collected new information, create an outline of your paper.

## Step Eight

Answer your “Guiding Question” directly with your thesis statement.

Example: Why are literary works being banned when their overall theme is positive?

Because of over-zealous proponents of Political Correctness, once celebrated literary works like Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* are being banned despite their important universal themes.

## Step Nine

Check your outline. Place your thesis at the top of the outline followed by the causes and/or effects: I. II. III. Under each main point, place two main specific points that will support the general topic sentence and the thesis. Use capital letters for the specific points.

## Step Ten

Write the rough draft.



## Step Eleven

Revise the rough draft using the tips in Chapter 4. If your instructor schedules a peer review, be present. You may also visit your college's writing center and work with a tutor. Revise again and edit your draft until you have a solid, well developed and unique argument.

## Sample Student Essays

Penny Grimes

Prof. Polliard

English 101

28 April 2016

### Restrooms for All

On June 26<sup>th</sup> 2016 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality, making same sex marriage legal in all 50 states (Somander). This was a huge step for the LGBTQ+ community, giving many individuals the courage to “come out,” many also felt encouraged to publically identify with a

sexual orientation other than heterosexual or a gender other than the one assigned to them at birth. While marriage equality has opened many doors for change and the ability to raise social consciousness and awareness, there are still many unresolved issues.

2 One of the most overlooked communities in the LGBTQ+ acronym is the transgender community. “Transgender is an umbrella term for person whose gender identify, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth” (“Answers to Your Questions”). Above many issues and discriminations that the transgender community faces, one has caused much of a controversy over the past couple of years. Should transgender individuals be allowed to use the bathroom of their choice? Many argue that allowing transgender individuals to choose bathrooms based on their personal gender identification could be a dangerous advantage to predators and although it is a reasonable concern, the reasons why transgender individuals should be allowed to use the bathroom of their choice outweigh this concern. Helping them with transition, paving the road to end discrimination against the transgender community, and ending the stigma that surround transgender individuals are just a few of the reasons why we should give them the right to choose the bathroom of the gender they identify with.

3 According to Lambda Legal, for a transgender individual in transition, using a public restroom is an essential part of transitioning.

The most critical aspect of gender transition, according to the internationally-recognized medical protocol set by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, is to ensure that a transgender person is able to live, be seen and be treated by others in a matter consistent with the person’s gender identity. Getting used to using the appropriate restroom is an important part of this process. Moreover, transgender people must take this step well before proceeding—if at all—to medical interventions involving hormones or surgery. (“FAQ”)

Before a transgender individual decides to seek medical intervention, it is essential for them that society sees them as the gender they identify as. By not allowing them to choose the bathroom they feel the most comfortable in, we are adding to the psychological damage the misgendering can cause; it is a reminder that the world doesn’t see them as the gender they feel comfortable in.

4 By giving the transgender community the right to choose, society would be taking a big step forward in paving the road to ending the discrimination that the transgender community faces daily. According to a survey held in 2011 by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, it was found that “26 percent of transgender students had been denied restroom access in educational settings, and 22 percent of transgender employees reported being denied restroom access at work” (Stringer). Highlighting and eliminating the discrimination that the

transgender community faces would be an enormous step to creating an accepting and welcoming society to not only transgender individuals, but also every other community that falls in the LGBTQ+ acronym.

Additionally, by giving transgender individuals the right to choose, we would be helping destroy the negative stigma that surrounds this community. Many people often fear things that they do not understand, and when this fear is let run rampant, the actions that lead are in many cases severe. “In 2009, 17 percent of all reported violent hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people were directed against those who identified themselves as transgender, with most (11 percent of all hate crimes) identifying as transgender women. The remainder identified as transgender men, gender-queer, gender questioning, or intersex” (“Responding to Transgender Victims”). It is vital, for the safety and overall well-being of transgender individuals, that society takes action sooner than later. It is time to destroy this box that we have placed the LGBTQ+ community in and move forward into a more accepting society.

Eighteen states, including California, Colorado, and Oregon, have “employment laws that explicitly protect employees on the basis of gender identity” (“FAQ”). However, it does not mean that the fight is over. There are still many concerns from the general public; some believe that giving the transgender community the right to choose will give predators an advantage, and that women will be at a higher risk of being sexually harassed, but these myths can easily be debunked; “there is no evidence that gender-segregated bathrooms are ‘safer’ for cisgender women than unisex bathrooms. And besides, there are laws protecting people from criminal conduct in public restrooms” (FAQ). These harassment concerns that the general public have about gender neutral bathrooms are incidents that transgender individuals face every day of their lives; “53% of 6,450 transgender people reported being harassed or disrespected in a place of public accommodation in a recent survey conducted by the National Center of Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force” (FAQ). Though fear of the unknown and bigotry can be hard to correct, it is time society starts making more of an effort to improve the everyday life of transgender individuals.

By taking this monumental step forward, we will open a million and one opportunities to bring social consciousness and awareness to the numerous amounts of flaws the system has when it comes to members of the LGBTQ+ community. We will help eliminate the stigma surrounding the transgender community and pave the road to ending overall discrimination for transgender individuals. This step is essential if we want to evolve as a society. Discrimination is harmful; equality is not.

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\*This student essay includes access dates and URLs which MLA 8<sup>th</sup> edition leaves up to the writer or instructor.

### Grader's Comments

- Good use of a two-paragraph introduction strategy
- Strong thesis with corresponding topic sentences to direct the flow of ideas.
- Although a rebuttal is present, the writer could have expanded on it.
- Minor errors in conventions—commas, apostrophes, representation of dates/days (e.g. change “12<sup>th</sup>” to 12)
- Avoid first person (e.g. “We”)

### Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. Where is the thesis statement and is it placed effectively?
2. What opposing viewpoints are included in the essay? How could the writer have countered those concerns more effectively?
3. Evaluating the writer's use of sources, were the scholarly and credible? Why or why not?

Paulina Garcia

Prof. Marianne Botos

ENG101

5 May 2016

### Denied Justice for All

A Wisconsin man, Jeffrey Dahmer, “removed [his victims] flesh with acid, bleached the skeleton and kept it in his wardrobe, he also kept the victims biceps and placed them in a freezer for later consumption” (Blanco, “Jeffrey”). Another Wisconsin man, Edward Gein, decapitated a woman, then hung her upside down by ropes at her wrists in his shed, only to later stash her head in a burlap sack in his house along with human face masks, skulls on bedposts, organs in the refrigerator, and a lampshade made from the skin of a human face (Blanco, “Edward”). Then, there is also the case of Robert Hansen, a man from Idaho who abducted woman and released them naked into the Alaskan woods, only to hunt them down and kill them (D’Oro). All three were cases where the defendant did not receive the capital punishment. Instead, two were given a life sentence for the 38 known victims’ lives that they took, and the second Wisconsin man was found not guilty by reason of insanity. Those cases and similar cases have caused massive controversy throughout American history. Was the punishment appropriate? Could they have been deterred? Should their past be taken into consideration? It’s fair to say there has been no common ground regarding cases as extreme as those mentioned before.

Capital punishment means inevitably taking someone else’s life and speculating about what a life is worth and how much value it truly possesses. Is life really priceless or is it in the range of \$7 million to \$9 million as the U.S. Office of Management and Budget states (Partnoy)? Taking into account Dahmer’s 17 victims would mean he took an equivalent of \$119 million to \$153 million worth of human life. In Arizona, that would have made him worthy of capital punishment 43 times since the death row cost according to the Arizona Department of Corrections is \$3,523,012.85 (Rummell). Even though the death penalty puts into question a person’s values and morals, the benefits it produces and the awareness it brings to a person’s life is ultimately more significant.

Those against allowing capital punishment to be permitted view it as a heinous crime, and in a way it is. It’s robbing individuals of their right to live a long and meaningful life. Then, there exists the possibility of rehabilitation, giving the defendants a second chance at life and steering them into the right direction. That would be the ideal outcome of every situation, having criminals reevaluate their lifestyles and becoming model citizens within their society. Supreme Court Justice Stephen G. Breyer has been vocal on his standpoint, in which he argues that the death penalty is “flawed,



expensive, subject to manipulation, applied disproportionately to minorities, not an effective deterrent and, at the end of the day, irreversible” (Qtd in Sainz). However, there have been proven studies in Texas from Duke University that affirm “from 1994 through 2005, each execution... was associated with... a decrease of up to 2.5 murders” (Mulhausen).

4           That being the case, Edward Koch, who served as mayor of New York City for three terms, stated, “If government functioned only when the possibility of error didn’t exist, government wouldn’t function at all.” Even though there’s a small chance of someone getting convicted by error, it does not stand on enough grounds to stop the death penalty all together. Koch later on conducted a study of 7,000 executions throughout 78 years in this country, concluding that the record fails to show a case of an innocent person being executed. This type of punishment gives a certain value to the defendant of the victims’ life and what could have been of it. Therefore, if there is no example set as to the value people’s rights have or their life value, then a murderer might not think twice about the decision to kill, thus causing families to not receive the closure or justice they hope for and deserve. Koch highlights how much “Human life deserves special protection, and one of the best ways to guarantee that protection is to assure that convicted murderers do not kill again.” In part it produces a greater outcome for the community as it deters criminals from repeating heinous crimes and bringing harm to others.

5           Then there are those who use the Eighth Amendment against using capital punishment. The amendment states that “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted” (*U.S. Const. Amend XIII*). The lethal injection that is given consists of three drugs: “sodium thiopental (a barbiturate to induce anesthesia), pancuronium bromide (a muscle relaxant that paralyzes all the muscles of the body) and potassium chloride (a salt that speeds the heart until it stops)” (Greenemeier). At one point the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “lethal injection did not create an unacceptable risk of severe pain and did not violate the Eighth Amendment...” (Hudson). Later on, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia pointed out how “If the death penalty did not violate the 8th Amendment when the 8th Amendment was adopted, it doesn’t violate it today” (Qtd in Sainz). All death row inmates go through a trial and are indicted by a jury of their peers, meaning they are given the same rights as any other defendant. Also, death row inmates are typically given the choice of their capital punishment unless the state they reside in only has one option for capital punishment. For example, Arizona provides the option of lethal injection or the gas chamber. Lethal injection consists of the exact same three drugs used in euthanasia (“Methods”). Lethal injection is legal in four states and various countries (“Where”). Thus, it should not be considered a cruel nor unusual punishment.

The death penalty is not something light and simple that any case should be eligible for. There are factors that have to be met for eligibility for the death penalty. First, at least in the state of Arizona, there must be a first-degree murder, including pre-meditated and felony murder. Then, it must be accompanied by at least one of the considerable aggravating factors (Kirchmeier). A few of the factors listed include committing the offense in an especially heinous or cruel manner, the murdered person was fifteen years of age or older than seventy, done with the intent of promoting criminal street gangs, there was no moral or legal justification, or it was committed for payment of anything of pecuniary value (Kirchmeier). The list goes on, and the factors mentioned do not paint the picture of a model citizen or the possibility of becoming one. Even when committing such a despicable crime, the Constitution ensures that no person shall be deprived of life without due process (*U.S. Const.* Amend V). It gives the defendant a chance to defend his actions against his peers, but nonetheless, some crimes are too barbarous to deserve a second chance when the victim was not given that equal opportunity.

Most importantly, people are punished for the crime(s) they committed, not for the person they claim to be after the incident. For example, a criminal can claim to be rehabilitated and a changed person after the crime has been done, but that does not necessarily mean it is true. It does not eliminate the fact that the crime has been done, a life has been taken, and there is no rehabilitation for bringing back a victim to their family, friends, or life. Criminals should be given a punishment proportional to their crime and actions. Robert Blecker, a New York Law School professor and death penalty advocate, constantly reaffirms in his documentary, *Robert Blecker Wants Me Dead*, that the past counts and defendants should be connected to their crime, serving whatever punishment seems proportional to the offense. This documentary portrays a Tennessee man, Daryl Holton, who murdered his three sons and their half-sister. All throughout the film Holton is visited by Robert Blecker and seems to ignore that what he did was wrong. In Holton's mind, his actions were justified because he would rather they go up to heaven than live in the horrible conditions they were in and possibly grow up to be criminals. Holton was a stern believer that he did the right thing; he never budged on his standpoint (Robert). For a case as extreme as Holton's, it is clear that rehabilitation would not have been the best option because it was tied into his values and morals. Capital punishment is not meant for just any criminal but neither is the opportunity of a second chance.

If a crime is so despicable and inhumane that capital punishment would be proportional then that is the justice that needs to be served. It is unjust for those who have to live in the aftermath of the crime, the victim's family and friends, to see their loved ones' murderer given more rights than the person they'll be putting in a coffin and lowering into the ground. Worse is the knowledge that after twenty-five years, the murderer might be released into society and live the life their victim did not get

a chance to or even again bring heinous tragedy to others. It is an unjust non-punishment for criminals whose crimes are so heinous it makes them eligible for capital punishment. It gives them something their victim does not have nor will he or she ever have, a life.

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*U.S. Constitution*. Amend. V.

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## Grader's Comments

- Good use of probing questions
- Excellent variety of sources
- Smart use of specific and graphic examples to gain readers' attention
- When an error exists in the original source, MLA requires the writer acknowledge the error by inserting "[sic]" after the error

## Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. According to the essay, what is the definition of capital punishment?
2. What four reasons does the student argue in support of the thesis?
3. List three different types of experts used and cited in the essay.
4. After considering the argument, what is your position on capital punishment? Explain, providing your own reasons.

Ima Student

Professor Good

English 101

18 June 2016

### Stars and Stripes Forever and the Freedom to Light It on Fire

An artist sticks a U.S. flag in a toilet bowl and entitles her work "The American Dream Gone To Pot." Another artist drapes a flag on the floor and asks the question "What is the Proper Way to Display the U.S. Flag?" while encouraging viewers to make a choice whether to step on the flag that is spread on the floor. In 1969, a man protests the shooting of civil rights activist James Meredith, by publicly burning a flag while declaring, "If they did that to Meredith, we don't need an American flag" (qtd. in Ponessa, "Flag" 1510). Congress is upset by the lack of respect for the greatest symbol of this nation, and it now wants to pass an amendment which would prohibit flag burning or desecration. It proposes a constitutional amendment that would give Congress and the states the

authority to pass laws prohibiting flag desecration (Ponessa, “House” 1646). Despite apparently overwhelming popular support, the measure still has many vocal critics who say it will infringe on the First Amendment right to free speech. “We’re going to the heart and soul of the right of freedom of expression as protected in the Constitution,” ranking Democrat John Conyers Jr. of Michigan said. “It is difficult to conceive of a more poorly drafted proposal” (qtd. in Ponessa, “House” 1646). Barney Frank, D-Mass., who has said that the Constitution should not be amended frivolously, added, “I think we are making a well-intentioned mistake” (qtd. in Ponessa, “House” 1646).

2 Just what is this well-intentioned mistake all about? It is about the American flag: a piece of material but more than just a vivid scrap of material; it is an icon of freedom, liberty, and justice for all. The American flag is a piece of cloth with thirteen red and white stripes and fifty white stars on a blue square, a piece of cloth that has been through two World Wars and numerous other battles; a piece of cloth that was even flown to the moon. The flag stands for everything America is. It is as American as America itself. The Stars and Stripes wave for both the respectful and disrespectful citizens of this country. It stands for liberty and justice for all, for freedom of speech, freedom of expression, perhaps even freedom to burn and desecrate this beloved symbol. Although the American flag is worthy of great esteem, the government cannot take away the right to desecrate the flag without taking away all that it stands for – freedom.

3 Opponents of the amendment view physically defacing the flag as a despicable act, and indeed it is. It brings dishonor to the memory of those who have given their lives to defend its ideals. The flag stands for all that America has been through – its hopes and its dreams. It is a symbol of unity, or at least the stated desire to be united. “Mankind lives by symbols, and the flag is worth respecting. It represents our shared experience, our connection to America’s past and future and our responsibility for one another, regardless of class, age or race” (Leo 17). However, flag desecration is a form of expression, and the government cannot strip away the right to express oneself, simply because the act is vulgar. As the Supreme Court stated in 1989, “If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable” (Apel).

4 Therefore, society must strive to see that flag burning and desecration cannot demolish the true glory of the flag. Attempts to mock the flag through crude art work and brazen acts of desecration cannot destroy the real power that stands behind this American symbol. The Webster’s Dictionary definition of desecration is to take away the sacredness of, to treat as not sacred; to profane. Setting “Old Glory” on fire, or stuffing it in a toilet bowl and calling it “art” are acts of desecration. However, as the Arizona Republic observes, “It takes more than harsh words and nasty graphic art to dilute [the flag’s] power. It is clearly one of the strongest symbols ever created” (“Old

Glory”).

Furthermore, people are burning the flag less and less frequently. Talk of banning flag desecration seems to be happening more than actual flag burnings. Thus, it would be easier to just ignore the occasional flag burnings, rather than write a prohibition against it into the constitution. For example, there are only 45 such occurrences on record since 1969... and since the Supreme Court in 1989 overturned a verdict against a flag burner in *Texas v. Johnson*, not more than eight occurrences per year have been recorded (Buckley 75). William F. Buckley, Jr. sarcastically cracked, “Why go to the Constitution to prohibit something that happens as rarely as an eclipse of the sun?” (75). The number of people eager to burn a flag to call attention to a cause or to themselves is very small. By one account, only three flag burnings are known to have occurred since 1993 (Leo 17). As John Leo, reporting for *U.S. News & World Report* points out, “It is politically much smarter to ignore the occasional flag burner. Without an arrest and big emotional reaction, the burning comes to nothing” (17). “We need to be explaining to people that amending the Constitution is a radical solution to a very small problem,” said Paul McMasters, Freedom Forum’s First Amendment ombudsman (qtd. in Hernandez 13).

Beyond being merely a radical solution, the proposed amendment to prohibit flag burning and desecration would suffocate freedom of speech. This right is guaranteed to anyone on U.S. soil (including illegal immigrants). “...the anti-flag amendment violates the right to free expression guaranteed of the First Amendment (Hernandez 13). The Supreme Court considers burning the American Flag an act which is protected by the First Amendment right to free speech. The only way Congress could make such anti-flag desecration laws pass constitutional muster is to amend the very document that protects these rights (Apel). Senator Ted Kennedy stated, “The words of the first amendment are simple and majestic: ‘Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech.’ The proposed constitutional amendment would undermine that fundamental liberty” (Apel). “It [the proposed amendment] would devalue the Bill of Rights that for two centuries has encouraged tolerance of all views and the freedom to speak one’s mind without fear of going to jail,” states Bill Ketter, editor of the *Quincy, Mass., Patriot Ledger* (qtd. in Hernandez 13).

The most important argument for not banning flag desecration is that respect for the flag cannot be legislated. It has to grow out of the lives of its citizens (Leo 17). For example, not everyone in America loves, respects, and honors their country, but that is what makes this nation so dynamic. People can be who they want to be and think what they want to think. The very essence of America is that people are not stifled or bound by chains to love her. People have freedoms. And the right to free speech and free-expression is one of those freedoms. Sen. Bob Kerrey, D-Neb. Observes that “...although flag burning is a despicable act, respecting the right of

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individuals to express themselves is part of patriotism” (qtd. in Ponessa, “Flag” 1510). The proposed amendment would not change anyone’s thinking concerning the flag, for rules do not change minds – rules just set new standards. Those that want to desecrate the flag will continue to do so, and those that respect the flag will continue to do so. “...the critics fail to recognize that the United States was born on dissent. Our country is great, unlike other nations, because we have allowed our government to be criticized and we safeguard freedom of speech for everyone” (“Old Glory” B6). The irony behind saying that people cannot deface the flag is that the government has to come up with a rule, a ban, a law – whereas the whole philosophy behind the flag is liberty and justice for all.

- 8 To see someone blasphemously “rip” the flag to pieces can be shocking and quite sad, but by passing an amendment to prohibit flag burning, the government unravels all that the flag stands for. An amendment would only punish those that desecrate the flag, it would not change their hearts or sway them to view the flag in a more respectful manner. It is only a “Grand Old Flag” as long as it waves for the free and the brave, and both the respectful and disrespectful citizens of this nation. It is stars and stripes forever as long as those stars and stripes represent true freedom.

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#### Grader’s Comments

- Strong opening with good attention grabber
- Clear thesis with strong assertion of position
- Well organized progression of four reasons
- Respectful tone throughout essay with food pathos, logos and ethos
- Conclusion could be stronger

## Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. What is the thesis of the essay?
2. Look up and write down the definition of “desecrate.” What is your opinion about whether or not an individual or group has the right to desecrate the American flag?
3. Of the reasons presented, which is the strongest? The weakest? Explain why.

## Tips for Writing the Argument Essay

Just as in causal analysis, students often attempt to address issues that are more suited to a 10-page research paper. Think about setting boundaries on your argument. For example, most people when they hear the term “gun control,” begin an argument about the meaning of the Second Amendment and whether or not guns should be banned. This happens before the term “gun control” is even defined. Instead of writing about the larger topic, focus on the specific topic under the larger umbrella of the issue, e.g. smart guns, universal background checks, gun licenses, and disqualifying factors in ownership (mental illness, suspected terrorist ties, and felony convictions).

## Topic Ideas

- Self-driving cars and legal implications
- Legalizing prostitution
- Marijuana and federal vs local laws
- Concealed weapons and permitting
- Guns on college campuses
- Homeschooling

## Chapter Questions for Comprehension

Answer the following questions regarding developing the argument.

1. Describe in one or two sentences the types of evidence you need for a convincing argument essay.
2. Describe the three types of appeals: rational, emotional and ethical. Why does a good argument use all three?