



Argumentative Techniques

The techniques of argument are not foreign to you. You use them all the time. You might just not take notice of them. For example, it's Friday night and you ask your Dad for the keys to the car. His reply is, "Why should I?" You then have to *argue* or *persuade* him to let you have the keys.

What you may not be as familiar or comfortable with is making arguments in writing.

It is important to remember that ***reasons are the foundation of any argument***. Arguments without reasons are weak and would never be accepted in an academic essay.

Here are some argumentative approaches a writer could use:

- Theorize about causes and effects
- Present arguments based upon analogy, precedent, or example
- Assert facts
- Assert shared beliefs or values
- Cite an authority

Here are two argumentative techniques that if incorporated into your essay will make your writing more persuasive and effective. These techniques are "Focus and Emphasis" and "Point-Counterpoint."

Focus/Emphasis:

When using this technique, you present one reason as being the strongest and most important, and you spend more time developing and emphasizing it. Perhaps you have three to five good reasons for your position. By focusing and emphasizing on one, you give your argument something like a left hook a boxer saves for his opponent. Also, it is best to present the strongest reason last so that you leave your reader with your strongest argument freshest in his or her mind.

Here are two examples of topic sentences setting up the last body paragraph of an essay. Each signals focus and emphasis. Notice how the character of the argument would be different, depending upon which reason is emphasized.

- *Last, and most importantly, we need to continue funding for the space program because space is our last frontier and questing to reach into the unknown is part of the American spirit.* (Focusing and emphasizing this reason in the last body paragraph of the essay would give this essay a strong emotional appeal.)
- *Finally, and most compellingly, funding for the space program must be continued because important scientific knowledge is gained from space.* (The presentation of this last reason would provide the essay with a logical and practical appeal.)

Thinking carefully about the sequencing of your primary supports puts a "spin" or accent on your argument.

Point/Counterpoint (Concession-Refutation):



Point/Counterpoint (sometimes called "concession-refutation") is an extremely persuasive and effective technique for arguing. To do Point-Counterpoint, the writer first "fairly summarizes" or even temporarily accepts (concedes) an opponent's argument. Then the writer *REFUTES* this argument with an argument of his or her own.

Most of us have been exposed to this technique if we have ever been approached by a salesperson trying to make a quick sell. These salespersons are trained in how to "overcome objections." For example, you are sitting at home minding your own business when the phone rings and you have this conversation:

Hello," you say.

"Hello, Mr. Jones. This is Tom with the Daily News. Would you like to get a subscription to our paper?" says the salesman.

"No," you reply. "We don't have the spare money right now."

"Well, Mr. Jones. I can certainly understand not having enough money. Times are tight these days and money doesn't go as far as it used to. But did you know that with all the coupons in the Sunday edition alone you could save fifty dollars a week. Plus, with this one time offer, you will receive a 10% discount off the normal subscription rate," says the salesman.

Notice how the salesman acknowledges the other person's argument, and tries to overcome it with counterarguments of his own.

This technique is effective because it communicates that you understand both sides of the issue. It makes you sound more credible and knowledgeable on the topic, and therefore more believable.

Here are some examples of Point-Counterpoint statements:

- *Although the space program yields important scientific discoveries, the cost in dollars and diverted resources does not make these discoveries worth the high price.*
- *Some argue that the space program costs too much, saying that the prices for scientific discoveries made by the program are too high. However, the worth of many of these discoveries does not always come in the form of immediate monetary return. What price can we put on learning how to save the ozone layer?*
- *Some believe that the current warning messages are enough, but excessive violence is still being shown. The ax-murderers, gangsters, rapists and serial killers still fill the TV screen, and many times parents aren't home to prevent their children from watching it.*

Notice that the refutations are signaled with transition words like "however," "but," or "although."

Here are some suggestions for addressing opposing viewpoints in an argument:

- Begin each body paragraph with an opposing view, and then make the contents of that paragraph be the counterpoint to that opposing view.
- Have two of your paragraphs present reasons for your position, and then in the third, summarize an opposing view and counter it.
- You also could have a point-counterpoint inside the secondary support of a paragraph.

REMEMBER that when you do point-counterpoint, you fairly summarize an opposing view and always follow that summary with your counterargument which refutes that opposing view.