

Course: Written Comprehension and Expression

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Week Six: Argumentation

ARGUMENTATION

In argumentation, you state and defend your position on an issue. Look at the underlined issues in the following examples:

1. I am against experimentation on animals.
2. Steroid use in professional sports should be legalized.
3. College professors should be required to dress professionally.
4. I am in favour of granting driver's licenses to illegal immigrants.

Defending your position means providing your *best reasons* for being for or against an issue. Look at the reasons given for this position on steroid use:

- Steroid use in professional sports should be legalized because . . .
 - ✓ it results in better performance.
 - ✓ it helps athletes recover from injuries.
 - ✓ it helps athletes have longer careers.

When explaining your reasons, try to keep in mind *counterarguments* that might be used to challenge your position. Anticipating how others might oppose your argument can help you explain your position more carefully. For example, some readers might have concerns about the negative health effects of steroids. The writer might acknowledge these concerns in a statement like the following:

- Although some people are concerned about the negative health effects of steroids, moderate use of them can actually help athletes recover from injuries.

The key to successful argumentation is to state your position clearly, to give sufficient reasons for it, and to provide precise details to illustrate your reasons.

A Student Writer Uses Argumentation

In the following paragraph, a student writer makes a convincing argument for workplace-provided daycare.

To benefit workers and improve performance, businesses should provide onsite daycare. First, onsite daycare reduces absenteeism and improves productivity. According to a report by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), 80 percent of the companies they surveyed said that child care problems cause reduced workdays among their employees. With onsite daycare, employees would be able to work full, productive days. Also, knowing that a company cares enough to provide daycare is a morale booster. When morale is high, workers tend to be more productive and more willing to work harder in their jobs. Second, onsite daycare helps to attract and retain workers. In a personal interview, Helen Dobbs, president of Maywood Technology, said, "There's no question that our daycare facility has helped

us to attract top talent, both men and women. It sets us apart from the competition in a tight market for highly skilled technology workers.” Dobbs and other employers report that onsite daycare also contributes to worker satisfaction, meaning less employee turnover. Finally, onsite daycare may actually benefit companies’ financial health. The biggest argument against such a benefit has been that it is too expensive and that only the biggest and most profitable businesses can afford it. However, in their recent book *Kids at Work: The Value of Employer-Sponsored On-Site Child Care Centers*, Rachel Connelly, Deborah S. DeGraff, and Rachel A. Willis argue that onsite daycare can actually be profitable for companies. Two daycare-providing companies studied by the authors saved \$150,000 and \$250,000 in wages. The authors also found that workers were willing to contribute up to \$225 per year to help pay for company daycare, whether or not they themselves would make use of it. These workers seemed to realize that onsite daycare would help to make everyone happier and more productive. Although setting up onsite daycare facilities certainly takes effort, the evidence suggests that it pays off in the long run — in both human and financial terms. Notice that the writer mentions an important counterargument. You might want to underline this counterargument and then the reasons and details that the writer provides to address it.

Task 1:

Working from the previous paragraph, complete the following outline. (Part of it has already been filled in for you.) The outline will help you see how the writer clearly states a position, provides reasons for the position, and then gives detailed explanations for each reason.

MAIN IDEA

REASON 1

Onsite daycare reduces absenteeism and improves productivity.

An NCSL study indicates that child care problems cause reduced workdays; onsite daycare would eliminate this problem, improving productivity.

REASON 2

Living Alone

1 Living alone is quite an experience. 2 People who live alone, for one thing, have to learn to do all kinds of tasks by themselves. 3 They must learn—even if they have had no experience—to change fuses, put up curtains and shades, temporarily dam an overflowing toilet, cook a meal, and defrost a refrigerator. 4 When there is no father, husband, mother, or wife to depend on, a person can't fall back on the excuse, "I don't know how to do that." 5 Those who live alone also need the strength to deal with people. 6 Alone, singles must face noisy neighbours, unresponsive landlords, dishonest repair people, and aggressive bill collectors. 7 Because there are no buffers between themselves and the outside world, people living alone have to handle every visitor—friendly or unfriendly—alone. 8 Finally, singles need a large dose of courage to cope with occasional panic and unavoidable loneliness. 9 That weird thump in the night is even more terrifying when there is no one in the next bed or the next room. 10 Frightening weather or unexpected bad news is doubly bad when the worry can't be shared. 11 Even when life is going well, little moments of sudden loneliness can send shivers through the heart. 12 Struggling through such bad times taps into reserves of courage that people may not have known they possessed. 13 Facing everyday tasks, confronting all types of people, and handling panic and loneliness can shape singles into brave, resourceful, and more independent people.

About Unity

1. The topic sentence in "Living Alone" is too broad. Circle the topic sentence that states accurately what the paragraph is about.
 - a. Living alone can make one a better person.
 - b. Living alone can create feelings of loneliness.
 - c. Living alone should be avoided.
2. How many reasons are given to support the topic sentence in this paragraph?

About Coherence

3. What are the three main transition words in this paragraph?

Writing an Argumentative Paragraph

Develop an argument paragraph based on one of these statements:

1. _____ (name a specific athlete) is the athlete most worthy of admiration in his or her sport.
2. Television is one of the best (or worst) inventions of this century.
3. _____ make the best (or worst) pets.
4. Cigarette and alcohol advertising should (or should not) be banned.
5. Teenagers make poor parents.
6. _____ is one public figure today who can be considered a hero.
7. This college needs a better _____ (cafeteria or library or student centre or grading policy or attendance policy).

Teamwork

With classmates, list reasons to support each of the following arguments. Then, select one of the topics and brainstorm for ten minutes, getting down all the details you can.

1. College students should (or should not) have an attendance requirement because . . .
2. America is (or is not) the greatest country because . . .
3. Medical marijuana use should (or should not) be legalized because . . .
4. Magazines should (or should not) discuss the private lives of celebrities because . . .
5. Non-math majors should (or should not) be required to take math classes in college because . . .