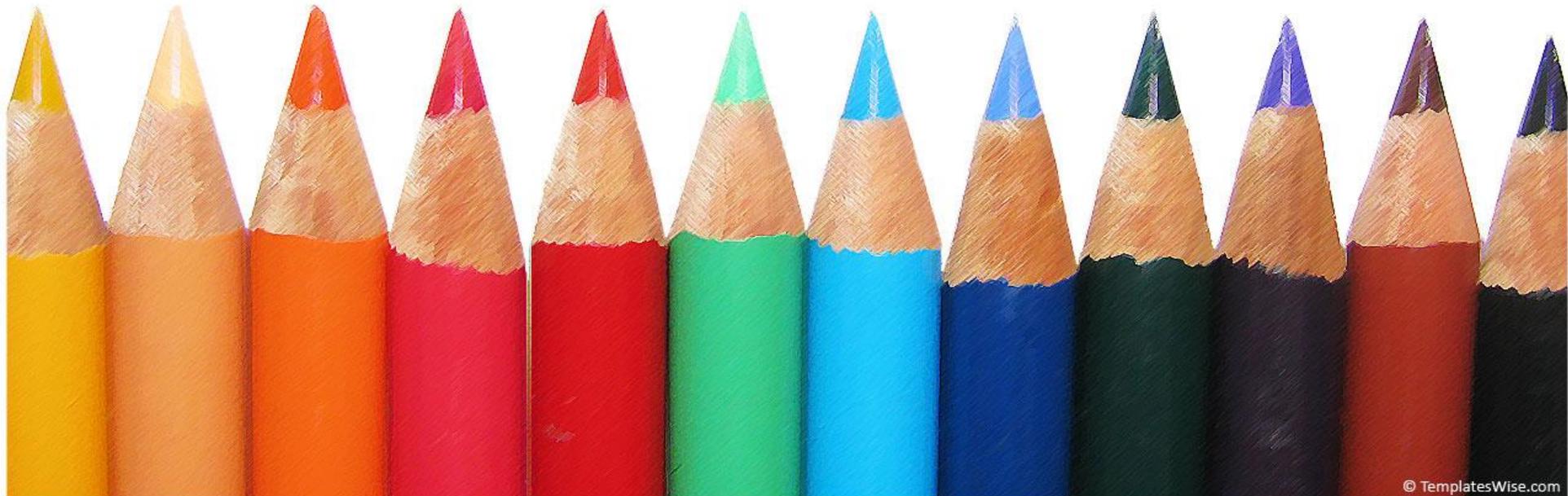


# Writing the Argument Paper:

## The Basics



# What is the argument essay?

- The argument essay requires you to make a claim and offer reasons and evidence to support that claim.
- Just like the synthesis paper, you need to make sure you take a clear position in your paper and stick to it from beginning to end.
- The main difference between the two types of essay is that with this one, you are not given any sources on which to help form your claim.

# Types of Arguments

- The AP English Language & Composition persuasive essay question can ask you to do any of the following:
  - ❖ Defend, challenge, or qualify a quotation about, or particular take on, a specific topic.
  - ❖ Evaluate the pros and cons of an argument and then indicate why you find one position more persuasive than another.
  - ❖ Take a position of whatever debatable statement is provided in the prompt.
- No matter what you are asked, you must clearly and logically support your claim.

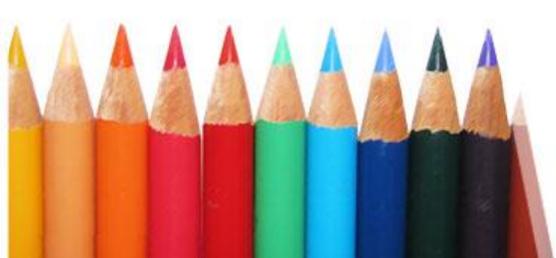
# Overview: How do I argue a point or position?

The classical formula for writing an argument essay is the following:

- 1) Present the issue/situation/problem.
- 2) State your assertion/claim/thesis.
- 3) Support your claim (using evidence from other sources)
- 4) Acknowledge and respond to real or possible opposing views.
- 5) Make your final comment or summary of the evidence, extending it to the “real world.”

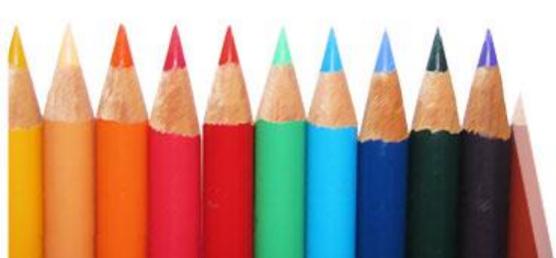
# Step 1: Understanding the Prompt

- Carefully read and deconstruct the prompt.
  - A successful essay will depend on your thorough understanding of what is expected of you.
  - Look for keywords in the prompt and use them to determine the specific task you are being asked to perform.
- Keywords are often action words such as “support,” “refute” or “qualify” that signal what kind of critical argument the prompt is asking for.



# Step 1: Understanding the Prompt

- Defend, refute, qualify questions ask you to consider a statement and respond with your own opinion.
- Your opinion may:
  - agree with the statement (defend)
  - disagree with the statement (refute)
  - agree with the statement, but only under certain circumstances or for a different reason (qualify) – this one is the most challenging





# For example...

Tenzin Gyatso (1935 – present) once said:

« From a certain point of view our real enemy, the true troublemaker, is inside. »

In a well-developed, multi-paragraph essay, defend, refute, or qualify this statement. Use evidence from *To Kill a Mockingbird* to support your reasoning.

# Defend, Refute, or Qualify...

- Defending argument:

The most difficulty people face in life comes from their own negative qualities.

- Refuting argument:

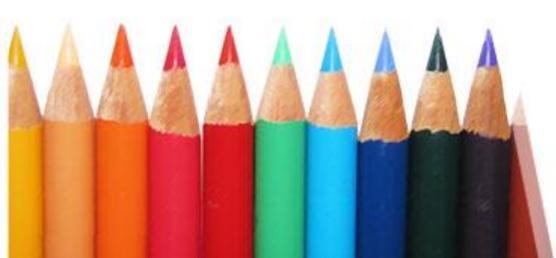
People encounter the most trouble when they must face off against an external enemy that they cannot control.

- Qualifying argument:

People's own negative qualities, which they often learn from others, cause them the most turmoil.

# Step 2: Writing the Introduction

- Create an introduction that explains why the topic is important, states your thesis, and outlines your argument.
  - The introduction serves to spark readers' interest in your paper and shows them what to expect from your argument.
  - Create a thesis sentence that embodies your argument.
    - This sentence must be simple to understand, yet make your position on the topic clear.

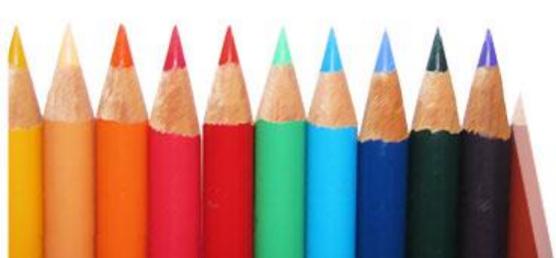


# Tips for the Introduction

- The following are some ideas on how to begin your introductory paragraph:
  - A short anecdote that deals with the “big idea” of your argument
  - A concession
    - Where one acknowledges a point made by one's opponent.
    - It allows for different opinions and approaches toward an issue, indicating an understanding of what causes the actual debate or controversy.
  - An interesting or controversial fact or statistic
  - A question or several questions that will be answered in your argument
  - Relevant background material
  - An analogy or image that you can sustain (revisit) throughout the argument
  - A definition of a term or idea that is central to your argument.

# Step 3: Writing the Body of the Paper

- Build your argument using three or four paragraphs in which you adequately develop and support your position with specific examples and elements of support.
- Your support should be rational and logical, not emotional. It should be objective rather than biased.
- Everyone can come up a list of reasons to support an argument, but here are some questions to consider:
  - What will you use as evidence to support your position?
  - What are the best arguments against my position; how will I address those?
  - What can you show your audience to convince them that they should value your position?



# Specific Illustrative Examples

- Unlike the synthesis essay where you are provided sources to back up your argument, you need to provide your own examples for the argument paper.
- Focus on two or three well-chosen, well-developed, specific examples to use in your paper.
- This is often preferable to, and more efficient than, giving tons of examples that all prove the same thing but in less detail.
- Don't just summarize your examples; make sure that they directly connect and support your claim.

# Where Can I Come up with Illustrative Examples?

- Your examples can come from just about anywhere, as long as they support the point you are trying to make.
- Here are possible places to consider when coming up with two or three main examples to support your claim:
  - Current Events: What is happening in the world today that connects to your topic?
    - Make sure you know what you are talking about.
    - If you are not well-versed in the details of the example, don't use it!
  - Personal Experience: Have you experienced or witnessed a relevant matter yourself?
    - This is usually told as narratives or anecdotes.
    - Be sure that when using personal examples, you show that the lesson of the example extends to your audience and not just to your particular situation.
  - History: These often provide excellent support if explained fully and accurately.
    - Make sure you know what you are writing about; otherwise, do not use the example.



– Literature: This is useful especially for exploring concepts and ideas.

- Be sure to show that the example also applies to “real-life,” though; otherwise, the audience may say “but it’s only a book...”

– Film and TV: The same applies as with literature.

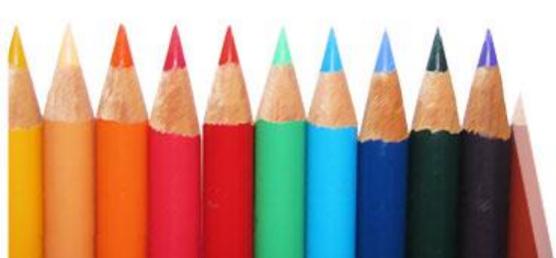
- Avoid pop culture unless it’s highly relevant to the prompt.
- Avoid using science fiction or fantasy examples because often they don’t relate to real life.

– Hypothetical: Use your imagination to create a reasonable possibility.

- Think through any potential gaps by understanding the views of the “other side” of the argument.

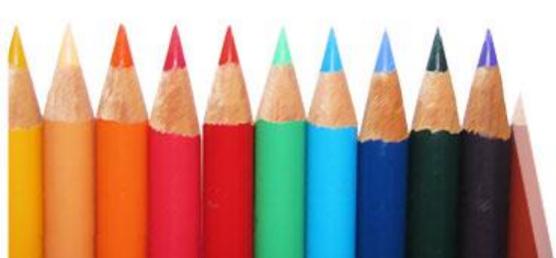
## **Step 4: Acknowledge and respond to real or possible opposing views.**

- The topics given are—by nature—argumentative.
- There are no “correct” answers—only reasoned opinions.
- In this, it is essential to show your awareness of opposing viewpoints.
- This can be done in the following ways:
  - a thesis statement
  - a concession
  - refuting the opposition.



## Step 4: Acknowledge and respond to real or possible opposing views.

- Thesis Statement: Word your thesis statement in a manner that shows awareness of reasonable alternatives.
  - “Although government intervention may be necessary in times of crises, monitoring of the Internet by federal authorities should—during times of peace—only be conducted through legal, judge-approved searches.”
  - Agreeing before disagreeing is a great way to draw your reader in; use phrases such as
    - It is true...but
    - Proponents realize/agree...yet they believe...
    - Supporters recognize....; still they do not acknowledge
    - Indeed....however,....
    - Certainly....despite these claims
    - Granted...in contrast...



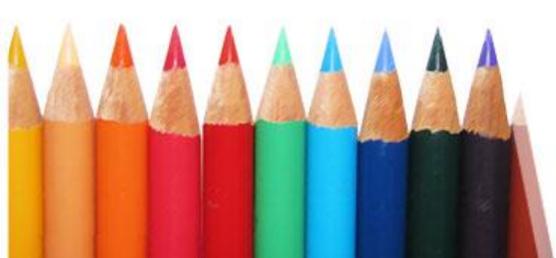
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- Concession: In your argument, acknowledge that the other side has a valid point.
    - Concede that they are right.
    - However, then draw the conclusion that—despite this—your position holds greater merit.
    - Recognize that just because opposing arguments make valid points that does not mean that their argument is strong.

– Refute the Opposition: Bring in an opposing viewpoint, but this time explain how the opposition is incorrect in holding this stance.

- Have an appropriate and respectful tone when first introducing the opponent's possible objections.
  - Avoid any hint of disrespect for the reader's view; this will cause you to lose "points" in your reader's mind.
  - This is a "fair fight/discussion" in which you listen and hear what your opponent says before you begin.
  - You must show that you heard them by addressing their specific concerns with specific evidence and details.

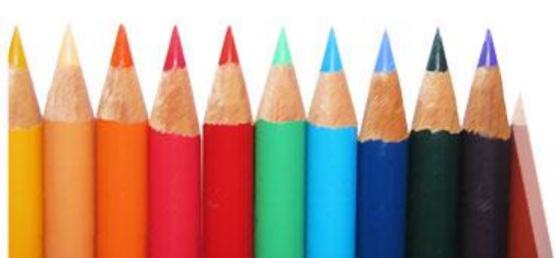
## Step 5: Writing the conclusion

- Conclusions wrap up what you have been discussing in your paper.
- After moving from general to specific information in the introduction and body paragraphs, your conclusion should begin pulling back into more general information.
- However, make sure your conclusion offers a new interpretation of your thesis, rather than just summarizing your argument.



# Step 5: Writing the conclusion

- Conclusion strategies:
  - Ask a pertinent question
  - Present a final vivid and memorable image
  - Provide an accurate and useful analogy
  - Dismiss an opposing idea
  - Predict future consequences
  - Call for further action
  - Return to a scene or anecdote from the introduction



# Common Problems Noticed by AP Graders

- Not taking a clear position or wavering between positions
- Substituting a thesis-oriented expository essay for an argumentative essay
- Being reluctant to engage in verbal combat because "everyone's entitled to his or her own opinion," so there's nothing to argue about
- Slipping out of focus by discussing imagery in general
- Lacking clear connections between claims and the data, and the warrants needed to support them
- Trying to analyze rhetorical strategies or style instead of arguing a point