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Organizing Your Argument

Summary:

These OWL resources will help you develop and refine the arguments in your writing.

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Last Edited: 2014-02-25 11:38:54

How can I effectively present my argument?

Use an organizational structure that arranges the argument in a way that will make sense to the reader. The **Toulmin Method** of logic is a common and easy to use formula for organizing an argument.

The basic format for the Toulmin Method is as follows.

Claim: The overall thesis the writer will argue for.

Data: Evidence gathered to support the claim.

Warrant (also referred to as a bridge): Explanation of why or how the data supports the claim, the underlying assumption that connects your data to your claim.

Backing (also referred to as the foundation): Additional logic or reasoning that may be necessary to support the warrant.

Counterclaim: A claim that negates or disagrees with the thesis/claim.

Rebuttal: Evidence that negates or disagrees with the counterclaim.

Including a well-thought-out warrant or bridge is essential to writing a good argumentative essay or paper. If you present data to your audience without explaining how it supports your thesis your readers may not make a connection between the two or they may draw different conclusions.

Don't avoid the opposing side of an argument. Instead, include the opposing side as a counterclaim. Find out what the other side is saying and respond to it within your own argument. This is important so that the audience is not swayed by weak, but unrefuted, arguments. Including counterclaims allows you to find common ground with more of your readers. It also makes you look more credible because you appear to be knowledgeable about the entirety of the debate rather than just being biased or unformed. You may want to include several counterclaims to show that you have thoroughly researched the topic.

Example:

Claim: Hybrid cars are an effective strategy to fight pollution.

Data1: Driving a private car is a typical citizen's most air polluting activity.

Warrant 1: Because cars are the largest source of private, as opposed to industry produced, air pollution switching to hybrid cars should have an impact on fighting pollution.

Data 2: Each vehicle produced is going to stay on the road for roughly 12 to 15 years.

Warrant 2: Cars generally have a long lifespan, meaning that a decision to switch to a hybrid car will make a long-term impact on pollution levels.

Data 3: Hybrid cars combine a gasoline engine with a battery-powered electric motor.

Warrant 3: This combination of technologies means that less pollution is produced. According to ineedtoknow.org "the hybrid engine of the Prius, made by Toyota, produces 90 percent fewer harmful emissions than a comparable gasoline engine."

Counterclaim: Instead of focusing on cars, which still encourages a culture of driving even if it cuts down on pollution, the nation should focus on building and encouraging use of mass transit systems.

Rebuttal: While mass transit is an environmentally sound idea that should be encouraged, it is not feasible in many rural and suburban areas, or for people who must commute to work; thus hybrid cars are a better solution for much of the nation's population.