DEWC
Debby Ellis Writing Center

TIPS FOR ANALYZING YOUR ARGUMENT

Figuring out what type of argument you're making can help you ensure that you're hitting all the necessary points to convince your readers of your thesis. Below, you'll find a chart that lists several common types of arguments, explains what each does, provides examples of each, and provides common components of each type. Of course, the best theses are frequently a combination of several argument types, but this chart will hopefully provide you with a checklist to ensure you're covering your bases.

Argument Type	Key Features
Definition Arguments: These arguments make a claim about **classification**, arguing that the topic fits into (or does not fit into) a certain category. *ex: Sharing your HBO Go password with a friend isn't an innocent kindness; it's a crime.* *ex: Jean Toomer's* Cane, *although classified on Wikipedia as a novel, actually shares more in common with contemporary American long poems.* Sometimes definition arguments suggest that the category only fits when certain restrictions or conditions apply. *ex: When public safety is a legitimate concern, as when a severe hurricane is approaching, mandatory evacuations are not an example of government overreach.*	**Definition Arguments should include:** A definition of the category itself independent of the topic. *ex: What constitutes a crime? What constitutes a long poem? What constitutes a novel? What constitutes government overreach?* An explanation of how, exactly, the topic fits (or resists) these criteria. An engagement of possible counterarguments. An explanation of why this classification matters.
Evaluation Arguments: These arguments make a **judgment** about a topic, often with an implied comparison. *ex: Beyoncé is the best performer of her generation.* *ex: The current practice of confining juvenile offenders to solitary confinement is both unethical and counterproductive.*	**Evaluation Arguments should include:** A thesis that makes a judgment about a topic. An explanation of the criteria by which that judgment was made. *ex: How do we measure a "good" performer? What is the goal of the prison system (i.e. how do we know that solitary confinement is counterproductive?)* Evidence that shows the reader how your topic either meets or fails to meet the criteria you laid out.

Causal Arguments: These arguments suggest that the topic either **caused** or **is an effect** of something else. *ex: We're facing more intense storms this year because of global warming.* *ex: One underreported effect of the recent economic crisis is an increase in the number of students who spend their time volunteering.*	**Causal arguments should include:** Evidence that shows how your topic is the result or the cause of something else. A consideration of counterarguments (other possible causes, other possible, contrary effects). A nuanced consideration of multiple causes or effects *ex: While the relatively quick adoption of Twitter in this country is certainly due in part to its innovative platform, we must also recognize that its popularity corresponds to a sharp uptick in the number of Americans who own cellular phones. As cell phones reach a saturation point, we can assume that the number of new Twitter accounts will slow dramatically.*
Proposal Arguments: These arguments present a **plan of action**. *ex: We should cap in-state tuition at $2,500/ year.*	**Proposal arguments should include:** An explanation of the problem that the proposal will address. Evidence that shows how the proposal is **feasible** (how it can be accomplished). Evidence that shows how the proposal will be **effective** (how it will solve the problem).
Rebuttal & Refutation Arguments: These arguments are primarily responses to an earlier argument, and show how it is wrong. *ex: Original Claim – "We should not teach grammar in elementary and middle schools."* *ex: It's important that we teach grammar in schools because it provides students with a common vocabulary that can be used to discuss writing.* *ex: Although for years elementary and middle school teachers maintained that the teaching of grammar was unnecessary, this argument is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the studies it cites.*	**Rebuttals & Refutations should include:** A fair account of the argument you'll be pushing against. An explanation of why it matters that this argument is incorrect. **Rebuttal arguments** don't dispute the truth of the original claim, but instead present compelling counterarguments as to why the original claim should be disregarded. (see first example). **Refutation arguments** point out errors or flaws in the methodology or facts of the theory they are arguing against (see second example). **The best counterarguments often blend elements of rebuttal and of refutation.**

Sources:
Lunsford, Andrea A. et al. *Everything's An Argument. 4th ed.* Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007.