

Notes on Argumentative Writing

Part One: The Argument

Before starting on any question, ask yourself:

1. Do you have **enough knowledge** for this question? (in terms of the examples you can give)
2. Do you feel for the topic of the question? **Is it interesting** to you?
3. Do you have at least 3-4 **solid** arguments for the question?

· The parts of an argumentative essay:

- v The Introduction
- v Your Arguments/Points
- v Your Conclusion/wrap-up

è The bulk of your focus should be on providing well thought-out and strongly substantiated arguments, but your introduction and conclusion makes a *huge* difference in creating a strong impression on the examiners as well.

ð This set of notes (and the subsequent argumentative practice worksheets/questions) that we will go through and analyse will therefore target each part in detail and see how we can strengthen them.

WHAT MAKES A STRONG ARGUMENT?

In this segment, we discover:

1. The four main segments of an argument in a typical essay
2. What each segment requires of us to write about
3. What is a logical gap and how can we avoid it

SEGMENTS OF AN ARGUMENT

1. Point/Topic Sentence

Ø A topic sentence is usually a concise summary of what your argument will be

Ø Essentially, ask yourself: *what do you want this paragraph to be about?*

Ø Your topic sentence should *directly answer* the question (make sure you check that it does!)

2. Elaboration/Explanation

- This segment of the argument is meant to explain further on your topic sentence
- How do you convince others that your point is valid?
- A strong explanation is one that is well thought-out, logical and well-supported
- There should be no logical gap in your explanation!

3. Examples

Examples are to support your points and convince your readers that they are valid

Requirements of a good example:

Accuracy

as much information and details about the example as you can

Representativeness

✓ Are your examples mostly only from Singapore/one country?

✓ If the scope of your arguments are not limited to only Singapore, it would be good to broaden the examples you're using)

Relevance

Does your example support your point? Or are you merely putting it there for the sake of filling up your argument?

Q: BUT WHAT IF I CAN'T THINK OF ANY EXAMPLES?

Often, examples are not like Math formulas that you can memorize and apply it to questions given in the papers

Maintaining a bank of general knowledge is important to help you use the correct examples in the exams

Read more of current news to stay aware of global/national affairs – you don't always have to read the newspapers: you can always get bite-sized, digestible news articles through newspaper apps, or Facebook, Twitter and even humorous websites like 9GAG or 4GAG

Even if your examples are limited in scope, including it into your essay is better than completely leaving out any examples at all

4. Link

ways wrap up your argument by linking it back to your topic sentence

Link usually goes like this.... “Hence, (summary of your point) **is how it supports** (your topic sentence)”

Link helps the readers remember what is your initial point, and therefore make better use of your argument

Some common words that are used to indicate the link include: *hence, therefore, as a result, thus*

LOGICAL GAPS AND HOW TO AVOID IT

- Logical gaps refer to flaws in your reasoning/explanation, especially when you miss out certain important elaboration/linkage in your argument
- Logical gaps makes your explanation less convincing and credible, because the gaps creates room for readers to question whether your argument is indeed true

Let's look at a certain paragraph to figure out what a logical gap means:

Question: **‘Violent computer games tend to make children who play it become more aggressive.’ Do you agree?**

Explanation 1	Explanation 2
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<p>nt computer games often contain erous killing scenes, or shooting es. Bloody murders and gunshots are components of such games and when g children play these games, they to eventually behave more essively. Hence, violent computer es do create more aggression in ren who play it.</p>	<p>nt computer games are often saturated with ple killing scenes and gruesome murders, n are essential components of the games. n young children play these games frequently, become desensitized to the violent images and dy scenes contained in the games. The concept ing violence has become increasingly alized and acceptable to them. Additionally, g children are often easily influenced with their essionable minds, and thus this exposure to nce in video games could have a stronger tive impact on them. Therefore, children tend to me more aggressive when playing violent ounter games.</p>
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Q: Which paragraph do you think had logical gaps and why?

Ø Paragraph 1 had logical gaps – what were they?

Think about it:

1. Does a child automatically become more aggressive *simply by playing violent video games?*

à Because if it is so, I could also say that watching thriller/action-packed movies like the James Bond series can make the viewers become more aggressive

2. So there is a gap between: how playing violent games à lead the child to become aggressive

à Paragraph 1 only highlighted that violent video games had numerous killing scenes but it does not explain how that leads to aggression, and logically, we understand that there is a process involved

3. Comparing to paragraph 2, the logical gap is being filled:

à It is able to explain: the need for **frequent** playing of the violent computer game to **desensitize/normalize** the presence and concept of violence in children’s minds

à It also added in the crucial information about children being **impressionable** and therefore **easily influenced by the media content they are exposed to**

An example of an argument paragraph, following the same question:

'Violent computer games tend to make children who play it become more aggressive.' Do you agree?

Stand: Yes, I agree to a large extent that computer games tend to make children who play it become more aggressive.

A possible argument structure will be:

Ø **Topic sentence:** Playing violent computer games frequently can lead children to become more aggressive, especially when they are at such an impressionable age.

Does it answer the question directly? Is the statement clear?

Ø **Explanation:** Violent computer games are often saturated with multiple killing scenes and gruesome murders, which are essential components of the games. When young children play these games frequently, they become desensitised to the violent images and bloody scenes contained in the games. The concept of using violence has become increasingly normalized and acceptable to them. Additionally, young children are often easily influenced with their impressionable minds, and thus this exposure to violence in video games could have a stronger negative impact on them.

Are there any logical gaps in the argument presented?

Ø **Example:** In August 2015, the American Psychological Association reviewed over 100 research studies on the link between violent video games and aggression, published between 2005 and 2013. From their review, they conclude that playing violent video games *is* linked to aggression in children, and often lower their sense of empathy and sensitivity towards the use of aggression in situations.

Remember the 3 criteria: is the example relevant, representative and accurate?

Ø **Link:** Therefore, playing violent video games do increase the tendency for children to be more aggressive.

Notes on Argumentative Writing

Part Two: The Introduction

v A good introduction will:

1. Helps to capture your reader's attention and lead them on to continue reading your subsequent arguments
2. Create a positive first impression in the reader's mind on your essay
3. Allows readers to understand your position and argument better

The importance of writing an effective conclusion should not be neglected!

v Components of an introduction:

1. **Lead-in:** how are you going to introduce the topic you're writing about? There are many ways to do a lead in, and an effective lead-in will be the first crucial step in engaging the reader's attention.
2. **Definitions/clarifications:** There could be certain key words/terms that you'd want to clarify in your introduction. For instance, if there a question is related to the "social media platforms" – you may want to list down a few examples of these social media tools like Instagram or Twitter just to showcase your understanding about the topic at hand.
3. **Your stand + listing down your points briefly:** In your introduction, you should state your stand (do you agree/disagree and to what extend) and also the points you will be arguing in your essay (briefly)

Ways to do a lead-in

1. Humour

You can make light of a particular situation, trivialize it, or quote a funny line you've read somewhere before

Only use it for an appropriate topic! (For instance, you most likely wouldn't want to make fun of a serious global trend like terrorism)

2. Quoting famous people

Depending on the question, you can quote from famous/renowned individuals (could be a celebrity, politician, religious leader, etc.)

It could be difficult because you wouldn't be able to remember all the quotes, so only opt for this when you clearly remember what the person has said

For instance: you could quote Martin Luther King's speech if there is a topic on racism

3. Discussing the significance of the topic

Why is it important that we discuss about this issue?

What is it about the modern world/societies today that can highlight the importance of the topic?

What are the consequences of not debating about this issue?

What are the effects on the individual, community and society?

This is probably the most common way of lead-in because it is straight-forward and rather easy to write compared to using humour or quoting

For instance: a question on cyber-bullying being on the rise today, discussing the significance of cyber-bullying could involve:

1. Writing about **the effects of cyber-bullying** and
2. How the trend **will become more prominent** in an **digital age** if we do not quickly resolve it

4. Use a rhetorical question

A rhetorical question can be interpreted as a question that *isn't meant to be answered by the reader, but rather it prompts the reader to think further about the topic at hand*

This is a good way to engage the reader by leading them to think about more the issue

For instance, if the question is:

Everyone has a part to play in conserving the environment. Do you agree? a rhetorical question in line with this subject could be:

“Since we human beings all collectively share and need the earth’s resources to live and exist, shouldn’t everyone take up their respective roles in conserving Mother Earth to ensure that she is well and healthy?”

- **Note:** These techniques can be used together to create an even better lead-in for your introduction

2. STATING YOUR STAND

1. Your stand simply means *how you personally feel about the question* – do you agree or disagree?
2. Always check if the question given is an *absolute* question.

Examples of absolute questions:

“The modern use of technology has always resulted in negative consequences.”

“Poverty can be eliminated.”

“Teenagers are definitely more work-ready than older workers.”

- v So, what makes an absolute question *absolute*? It is the terms used, such as “always”, “must”, “will definitely”, “never”, etc
- v In most of the cases, you reject an absolute statement because the majority of the issues we deal with cannot be taken absolutely.
- v So what you have to do is: ***SET CONDITIONS***

- v So what in the world are conditions?
- v “Conditions” simply mean: **When does this statement apply? And when does this statement prove to be false?**
- v Your conditions **MUST** appear in your stand.
- v While setting conditions are mainly for answering absolute question types, you can set conditions whenever you feel the need to.
- v When taking a stand, simply ask yourself: **Is the statement true for ALL cases? If not, then under what situations does it not apply?** And from there, you can derive your conditions.