



Where Good Arguments (and Papers) Go Bad: A Far From Exhaustive List

- (1) Is the evidence acceptable? The evidence might not be:
 - (a) true/accurate: “You got your facts wrong.”
 - (b) sufficient: “You don’t have enough evidence.”
 - (c) precise: “It’s too vague and general.”
 - (d) representative: “It doesn’t accurately reflect the data available.”
 - (e) current: “It’s out of date.”
 - (f) authoritative: “It comes from an unreliable source.”
- (2) Is the claim supported by adequate reasons and evidence? Are they plainly clear?
- (3) Does the argument rely on a weak warrant? Or perhaps a warrant that must be defended for the argument to be successful?
- (4) Does the argument contain an adequate rebuttal and response? Does it address the strongest alternative position or simply defeat a “straw man” argument? (Throw in some weak rebuttal that’s easy to defeat.)
- (5) Is the claim contestable enough? If not, does that undermine the meaningfulness of the argument? Does it rely too heavily on platitudes or plot summaries, informing rather than arguing?
- (6) Does the argument cohere stylistically and structurally so the logic is clear to the reader? Is the structure of the argument easy (or at least possible) to discern?
- (7) Do the individual paragraphs follow an issue/discussion format? Do they allow the reader to see how the topic of each paragraph relates to the major claim? Or is the logic of the argument confusing because the writer tries to discuss too many issues in a single paragraph or single argument?
- (8) Is the cogency of the argument undermined by sloppy syntax, grammar, or spelling?
- (9) What is the writer’s ethos like? Is the tone of the argument appropriate to the audience? That is, does the writer sound reasonable, knowledgeable, and fair, or is the writer just venting, ranting, grinding an axe?
- (10) Are essential portions of the argument stated clearly and specifically, or are they in too general or ambiguous a fashion?
- (11) Does the argument use its sources well? Since you can either agree or disagree with a source’s argument, using an outside source allows you to do one of two things: (a) if you agree with the source’s argument, you could possibly use it as evidence for the truth of your claim; or (b) if you disagree with the source, you could use that disagreement to shed some light on the issues related to your argument and form a rebuttal-response. Whatever the case, it is never okay to let the source make your argument for you. Then your argument becomes a lame footnote to someone else’s work.



Addressing Issues in the Draft

Ethos, or Establishing your credibility/authority

All arguments use ethos because all arguments are written by someone who must demonstrate that s/he is trustworthy, knows what s/he's talking about, is someone worth listening to. Ethos appeals to shared character, which may include ethical values or beliefs, as well as common interests, traits, and abilities. Ethical argument uses language, reasons, and evidence, such as the writer's background, expertise, or affiliations, to convince the audience the writer is credible.

- Put a star next to the places where you show your knowledge about the issue (i.e., where you speak in a confident voice, where you give evidence for your claims, etc.). Where might you need to offer more information for the reader? Where might the reader doubt your credibility?
- Mark the places where you show "fairness" to other views, respecting opposing views and/or conceding to counter-arguments. If you don't find many places where you do this, consider the effect on your readers: will they trust you? Will they feel listened to? Consider how you might show more respect and fairness to others' views.
- Mark the places where you build a bridge to your audience. Where do you ground your arguments in shared values and assumptions of your readers? This quality of ethos is clearly connected to pathos and logos, so you'll look at this issue again.

Pathos, or Appealing to beliefs and emotions

Pathos is used to make the audience feel emotion. Pathetic argument may appeal to deeply held beliefs that are strongly linked to emotion. It uses language, reasons, and evidence that raise an emotional response.

- Look for places where you have considered your readers' questions, beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes toward your subject. Where do you need to ground your argument more in the values and beliefs you and your audience share?
- Consider how well you use concrete language, images and details which create positive feelings (or negative feelings, if that is what you believe the audience needs to feel)
- Consider how well you use specific examples and illustrations that aren't simply dry facts and statistics, but "real" examples that have emotional power and significance
- Consider how well you use narrative to evoke certain feelings about the subject—if you want your readers to sympathize with one group of people in your argument, how might you reflect that in narrative?
- Look closely at metaphors, words, and analogies you use. Do they have the connotations you want them to, that reinforce your argument and evoke emotions that are consistent with your argument?

Logos, or Organizing your argument logically

Logic is a formal system of analysis used to invent, demonstrate, and prove arguments. Logos makes the audience consider the argument through reasoning by using facts, observation, experience, testimony and interviews, experts, etc. The core of the argument is its logical structure or *syllogism*, a logical sequence that points the audience to the conclusion, or claim. Don't assume the audience will follow your logic. Lead them to where you want them to go by: 1) laying out each reason clearly; 2) providing evidence for each reason; and 3) drawing a clear connection to the conclusion, aka claim. Think: Aristotle's syllogism:

Premise 1 (reason): All men are mortal.

Premise 2 (reason): Socrates is a man.

Conclusion (claim): Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Premise 2 is tested against premise 1 to prove the conclusion. If both premises are considered valid, the *logical conclusion* is that Socrates is mortal.

Logical arguments may have an objective, scientific tone that, combined with evidence, seems especially trustworthy.

- Consider your organization: how effective is it? You have many structures to choose from. (See *CW*, pg. 279-280)
 - unknown to known and vice versa
 - problem to solution
 - cause to effect or effect to cause
 - narrative
 - question to answer
 - simple to complex
 - general to specific or vice versa
 - comparison contrast
 - least important argument to most important
 - classical argument structure
 - delayed thesis
- Consider how well you lay out your arguments: are your claims clearly stated and explained with reasons and/or evidence from personal experience, observations, interviews, facts and examples, summaries of research, testimony of experts? If you have to use reasons that aren't supported with specific "facts," consider how well you have explained those reasons and offered the necessary qualifications.
- Choose two of your main claims and play the doubting game: fastwrite for at least five minutes, doubting as much as you can about your claim, reasons, and evidence. Do this for at least two claims, if not more. Then, respond to the doubts you've raised. Which of those might need to be in your essay and why?