**Aspects of Argumentation**

In writing, an argument is not a debate or conflict, but can be defined as a good or bad piece of logical reasoning. When writing an essay, one needs to be able to construct arguments. This might sound obvious, but I have read hundreds of essays and papers that don’t contain arguments. Instead, they contain statements, summaries, reflections. They may even go as far to contain quotations and transitions, but none of these create an *argument*. *The mere presence of information does not make an argument*.

What *does* make an argument, then, and how does one go about constructing an effective argument in a paper?

First, we have to understand what an argument looks like. When writing an essay, each individual argument will be basically divided into three parts: assertions, examples, and explanations.

**ASSERTIONS**. In an argumentative essay, an assertion is a statement that the writer needs the reader to believe, often because of evidence and logic that will then be provided, but sometimes just because of common experience. Thesis statements are assertions. Topic sentences are assertions. Concluding sentences are assertions. Conclusion paragraphs are assertions.

Not all assertions are created equal. Thesis statements assert an opinion that is to be supported by the entire paper that follows. Topic sentences assert an opinion that will be supported by just the paragraph that follows. Concluding sentences and conclusion paragraphs assert an opinion that has been logically argued by what came before. Assertions may be general (UAIS provides a high-quality education) or specific (The implementation of Brain-Based and Reading Apprenticeship strategies at UAIS serve to provide a high-quality education). Once students can weed out unnecessary summary, they tend not to have difficulty making assertions, but they often fail to provide both the examples and the explanations to back up their assertions.

**EXAMPLES**. In an argument, an example is a piece of information that helps to demonstrate the assertion that is being made. Examples might be quotations taken from a text, or descriptions of events, situations, beliefs, and so on, either from the work in question or from the real world. The best examples are specific ones. “King Arthur fought a lot of important battles” is not a specific example. “King Arthur fought in the battle on the Day of Destiny” is better, for it is a specific example.

Examples ARE NOT proof of assertions, unless the assertion is simply that something exists. Such an assertion is rarely a useful one. Read the following: “King Arthur was indeed a brave warrior. He fought in the battle on the Day of Destiny.” Here, you have one assertion and one example but no explanation. The example itself does NOT support the assertion because it is lacking an explanation. Many incoming freshmen believe these two sentences alone form a logical argument. They do not.

**EXPLANATIONS and RE-ASSERTIONS**. In argumentation, an explanation is a set of logical statements that shows how an example or a set of examples support an assertion. Explanations require logic applied to examples to support assertions, so they are almost always the hardest parts of an argument for students to write. Explanations often include terms like “because,” “as a result,” and “since”. For example,

“King Arthur was indeed a brave warrior when he fought in the battle on the Day of Destiny. He and his men were outnumbered by half, but he committed to the battle even though the distinct possibility existed that he and his men might die. Since bravery often means fighting when the odds are not in one’s favor, King Author undoubtedly possessed great courage.

Here is another argument, which needs additional examples to support the assertion:

“Alfred is a good student. One reason for this is that he never misses an assignment. Alfred has turned in every book report, every take-home quiz, and every formal paper that the teacher has assigned. Because being successful in school hinges, in part, on the ability to meet deadlines, Alfred is as reliable and consistent a student as any teacher will find.”

Explanations connect your ideas so that readers or listeners can follow your line of thinking. Note, too, that rarely can your assertion, example, and explanation be crammed into one or even two sentences. In the example below, it takes four. The first (red) is the assertion. The second (green is the example). The third (blue) is the explanation. The last sentence is a re-assertion of the original assertion, which is why it is colored red. Reassertions bring an argument full circle. Note that they often use words like therefore, certainly, consequently, undoubtedly, obviously, and so on:

“Alfred is a good student. He completes all of his assignments on time and to the highest quality. As any teacher would certainly attest, strong students consistently demonstrate good work ethic. Therefore, it’s clear that Alfred is a good student.”

Note that the development of a sound argument takes time and proper pacing. To apply these concepts, we’ll start with something familiar. On the entrance survey for English class, you were asked to list an IB Learner Profile trait that you considered a weakness or that you could improve upon this year. (Don’t worry if you don’t remember exactly which one you put on your survey.) Either way, it’s time to consider that trait more carefully. Copy and paste the following web address into your browser or simply open the link:

<https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/recognition/learnerprofile-en.pdf>

Read over the trait you believe represent your weakness or area of perceived growth. When you are confident that you understand that IB Learner Profile definition, you may proceed with your assignment below.

**APPLICATION/ASSIGNMENT I.**

Directions: Open up a word document. Autosave it to the OneDrive and name it “Week 3 Argumentation Homework.” Then:

**Paragraph 1 Directions:** Write an assertion about an IB Learner Profile trait that you consider to be a weakness or area of perceived growth for you this school year. Provide a specific example and an explanation that logically supports your original assertion. Bring your argument full circle by closing it with a reassertion. When you are done, use the font paint feature in MS Word (it’s the capital A with a black bar underneath it near the top of the page) to change the font for your assertions and reassertions (red), your examples (green), and your explanations (dark blue). Note that in the examples on the previous page, one sentence may share two parts of an argument depending on how you write your sentences.

**Paragraph 2 Directions**: Write an assertion on how you’d like to improve on this area of perceived growth this school year. Provide two examples of what you might do to improve and, provide an explanation that shows how those examples will help you improve upon that IB Learner Profile Trait. When you are done, use the font paint feature in MS Word (it’s the capital A with a black bar underneath it near the top of the page) to change the font for your assertions and reassertions (red), your examples (green), and your explanations (dark blue). Note that in the examples on the previous page, one sentence may share two parts of an argument depending on how you write your sentences.

Finally, some additional points to consider:

1. When you write an analysis in English, you typically avoid using the first-person pronoun “I.” For this assignment, however, it is perfectly acceptable to use the first-person (I, me, my, mine) in your paragraphs because this is a personal reflection about you.

2. You may use the sample arguments on the previous page to guide you, but strive to write the sentences in your own style.

3. Remember that a great argument can be undone by poor sentence structure and mechanics. Avoid run-on sentences and fragments as well as spelling errors, all of which undermine your ability to convince your reader (hey, that’s me!) of your argument. One benefit to a global pandemic is that you get to avoid impromptu writing, which doesn’t offer you a spell-check or editing software. Go to “Review” and click on “Editor” near the top left-side of your screen.

Good luck!