



Argumentation in Academic Writing

An academic argument is your stance, claim or take on a given topic. This stance or claim is your input on a given topic, or conversation, and is necessary in order to provide your readers with a certain point of view on your topic. An academic argument is also based on rigorous research, what we call ‘evidence based’. This means that you must support your argument with evidence to back it up. Well-reasoned and researched arguments are the backbone of a well-written academic essay.

For the purposes of this article, I will be using the example of climate crisis. My thesis statement/claim hence is that in the 21st century, the term ‘climate change’ is no longer fitting, for the effects are so adverse and dire that it must be called a crisis and thus, be addressed with some urgency in Pakistan

Features of an Effective Argument

1. It is well grounded and supported by relevant data.
 - The first step to formulating an argument is to conduct preliminary research. This can be done using a simple google/google scholar search. The purpose of this is to gather and understand foundational information on a topic. For instance, you can read news articles from reputable sources on the climate crisis.
 - The second, more advanced step is to conduct a thorough search on different data bases such as JSTOR, EBSCO Host, Taylor & Francis etc. Here you will find journal articles, and book reviews i.e. scholarly sources on the topic.
 - Note that I want to narrow my argument down to the context of Pakistan. This means that the overarching topic is climate change but its effects will be explored within the Pakistani context. This is important for two reasons. One, by having



an umbrella topic you can read up expansively on it to understand the scope of the issue. Two, by narrowing it in the third step, your argument has a clear and focused direction.

Climate crisis in the 21st century is an urgent and glaring reality. Within Pakistan its effects can be seen in the form of recent heatwaves (2016, 2017) in Karachi and flooding in interior Sindh (Ajani, 2019). Keeping these realities in mind, there is a dire need to analyse the government's current policies on sustainable climate reform.

The above example shows the broader topic: Climate crisis. It is then narrowed down and made relevant to Pakistan's context and supported by relevant sources.

2. A good academic essay takes into account counterarguments by experts in the field in order to present a holistic and balanced perspective.
 - As in view of the above example, my intention is to support and bring attention to the climate crisis. However, I can include another perspective here: that of people considering it to be a hoax. This perspective can be included as a counterargument to provide a nuanced understanding of the topic.

There have been numerous global efforts to mitigate the hazardous effects of climate crisis, such as Alexandria Occasio Cortez pressurizing congress to approve the Green Deal (Friedman, 2019), and Germany completely becoming world's first renewable energy economy with 46.3% consumption in 2019 (Welle, 2020). However, there is a flipside to this important aspect. There are elected officials such as Donald Trump who still consider it to be hoax and dismiss scientific evidence as can be seen in his tweets. (Cheung,2020). The discourse on climate crisis in 2020 can be understood by analysing these two opposing viewpoints in relation to one another.

In the above example, we can see both aspects – those paying head to the issue and those opposing it in order to provide a prelude to a nuanced analysis.



3. If the topic allows, mix examples with theoretical knowledge.
 - With reference to climate change, there will be tons of scientific data by think-tanks and governmental organizations available. You can definitely use this but to take your paper a step further, you can also include examples of social movements such as FridaysForFuture and the work of climate change activists.

The director of WHO, Dr. Margaret Chan, has highlighted the adverse impacts of climate crisis on health, food, air and water. In addition, a contributing factor to the growing awareness regarding this issue is due to the on ground work by climate activists such as Greta Thunberg. She started a protest call throughout the globe called FridaysForFuture- a protest for climate change reform. Many countries, including Pakistan, participated in this mass call for action.

In the above example, we can see theoretical knowledge being included with relevant examples of activism.

Note that even though this handout uses a specific example to illustrate the points, these guidelines can be applied to any given topic in your assignments.

Components of a weak Argument

1. It is not well researched.

When writing academic papers, do not rely on surface level knowledge, i.e. a simple google search. You will need to find academic sources so that your arguments are sound and verifiable. In light of this, never use Wikipedia as a reference; it is an open source and you cannot be sure of the validity of the information on it.

2. It is a fight, battle or a negative confrontation

An academic essay is not a platform for your personal beliefs and opinions. The purpose of the essay is to test your ability to understand and present a nuanced version of the topic



in written format. They are not polemic essays, so refrain from personal opinions and attacks on a specific author/perspective.

3. It is focused on a single person's point of view.

Lastly, a well formulated argument is multifaceted. It contains more than one scholarly work in favour of the topic or against it.

The Difference between an Argument and an Explanation

It is imperative to distinguish between an argument and an explanation. As noted earlier, an argument is an amalgamation of assertions provided in support of a central claim. In contrast, an explanation is a description of circumstances or an interpretation of given information. Therefore, one cannot use an explanation to support a claim. For instance, it can be said that climate crisis has been exacerbated by multimillion dollar companies and their hazardous waste. Although, this explanation is clearly interesting and may even be true, it is not evidence. One will have to go further and provide empirical evidence to support the claim in order to make an argument.