

**6 VWO**  
**English – writing**  
**Argumentative essay**  
**2018/2019**

*“The essay, as any dictionary will tell you, is an attempt. This definition itself ought to be reassuring if you have ever worried about how you would be able to write an essay. You can’t fail as long as what you write is a sincere attempt to come to terms with a particular subject. The finished essay succeeds insofar as it is an honest attempt to elucidate some aspect of your topic.*

*An essay need not fail as long as your ideas are treated fairly, honestly, and in a spirit of thorough and intensive investigation - and you have communicated these ideas to the reader! If the essay seems an especially burdensome assignment, it may be because most of us are not accustomed to independent thought. Try to think of the essay as an opportunity to stretch your intellectual muscles and to think your own thoughts. To write an essay is to engage in a creative process, to bring an idea to life. The essay itself, however, is a finished product, not a record of the process by which you wrote it”.*

*(from: Fit to Print by Joanne Buckley)*

## **On writing essays**

Essay writing can seem like an insurmountable task, and students often wonder if it is possible at all to get five hundred words on paper coherently. Luckily, writing is a skill you can learn to master, and before long you will be able to enjoy the pleasure of completing an essay. The key is getting to know the three steps that are essential to successful essay writing. They are inventing, drafting and editing.

The first phase in any writing process is inventing, which can be divided into generating ideas and organising them. The first step in generating ideas is picking a subject for your essay. Once you have decided what you will be writing about you start brainstorming. The goal of the brainstorm session is to get all your ideas onto paper. Once you have exhausted the subject, you select three ideas that are most suitable for your essay. These three ideas are your topics and will form the core of your paragraphs. The final invention step is creating a thesis statement. This is one sentence which states the main idea of the essay and it will form the basis of your essay. Once you have gone through all the invention steps and have managed to get your ideas onto paper, you are ready to start drafting.

The second part of the process, drafting, focuses on the actual writing of your essay. In the first phase you have organised your ideas, and now you need to start expanding them into a five hundred word essay. After your brainstorm session, you picked three topics, which you will now use to create paragraphs. The core of a paragraph is the topic sentence, which clearly states your topic and links it to the thesis of your essay. The rest of the paragraph expands on the topic sentence and should end with a transition sentence, which allows you to introduce the topic of the next paragraph in relation to the content of the previous paragraph. You have now finished drafting, but you still need to dot the i's and cross the t's.

The final and maybe most important step in the writing process is editing. This last step basically consists of correcting and improving your work. As you can imagine it is very important to hand in your work without any spelling or grammatical errors. Editing also gives you a chance to review your essay and ask yourself whether your thesis covers the content, your paragraphs are properly linked, your use of language is clear and unambiguous, and you have not written wordy, rambling sentences. It is also advisable to ask a fellow student to read your essay and give you feedback.

The three key steps to essay writing will give you something to hold onto when you are in the process of writing your first essay assignment. Once you have gone through the inventing phase, drafted your work and carefully edited it, you are ready to hand in your essay.

500 words.

(Marlies Vos teacher at HU)

## What will we be doing?

At the end of this period, you will be writing a **five paragraph argumentative essay**, also known as an **persuasive essay** or a pro/con essay. In this reader, we will discuss the characteristics of the argumentative essay. Over the next few weeks, you will practise with writing (parts of) argumentative essays on a range of subjects. As you may presume the essay will be on a topical issue in which you will be expected to **persuade** the reader (in this case your teacher) that your ideas on a certain subject are correct.

There are a number of steps which you will be taking to achieve this:

- How to narrow the subject down to a topic which can be worked out efficiently and effectively within 500 words
- How to write an introductory paragraph with an 'icebreaker' and a thesis statement
- How to work out the 'body' of your essay so that all paragraphs are relevant to your thesis statement' and linked together.
- How to bring your essay to a relevant conclusion.
- Which 'register' of language to use.

Furthermore, you will familiarise yourselves with the topic of *global citizenship*. In groups, you will each explore a subtopic of sustainability (see Wikiwijs project for the topics). With your group, you will research your topic and write a (research) paper.

In other words, it is your own responsibility to educate yourselves and your classmates properly. You will need this to gain information and form your opinion on the topics, in order to write a well-informed essay. You can find instructions on the content of your paper on Wikiwijs.

## Learning goals;

By the end of this period,

- You will be familiar with the structure and form of the *argumentative essay*;
- You will be aware of the conventions of formal writing in English;
- You will have educated yourselves and each other on topics related to *sustainability/global citizenship*
- You will be able to use your substantive knowledge of a range of sustainability topics to form an opinion and present it in a structurally solid, well-argued and nuanced manner on the written test.

# What is an argumentative essay?

## Goal

The argumentative essay is a genre of writing that requires the student to investigate a topic; collect, generate, and evaluate evidence; and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner.

In this kind of essay, we not only give information but also present an argument with the PROS (supporting ideas) and CONS (opposing ideas) of an argumentative issue. We should clearly take our stand and write as if we are trying to persuade an opposing audience to adopt new beliefs or behavior. The primary objective is to persuade people to change beliefs that many of them do not want to change.

Argumentative essay assignments generally call for extensive research of literature or previously published material. Detailed research allows the student to learn about the topic and to understand different points of view regarding the topic so that she/he may choose a position and support it with the evidence collected during research. Regardless of the amount or type of research involved, argumentative essays must establish a clear thesis and follow sound reasoning.

## Structure

When writing an essay it is important that you strive to achieve unity within your essay, otherwise your essay is incomplete. Therefore it is good to keep in mind that to do justice to your arguments and support an essay should include these basic elements:

1. ***an introduction***: moving from general topic to specific thesis, perhaps including a preview of its content;
2. ***a body***: consisting of three paragraphs in which you develop your main points in order to support your thesis statement;
3. ***a conclusion***: reinforcing and/or summarizing what has been the focus of the essay and suggesting further implications.

The structure of the argumentative essay is held together by the following.

- **A clear, concise, and defined thesis statement that occurs in the first paragraph of the essay.**

In the first paragraph of an argument essay, students should set the context by reviewing the topic in a general way. Next the author should explain why the topic is important (**exigence**) or why readers should care about the issue. Lastly, students should present the thesis statement. It is essential that this thesis statement be appropriately narrowed to follow the guidelines set forth in the assignment. If the student does not master this portion of the essay, it will be quite difficult to compose an effective or persuasive essay.

- **Clear and logical transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion.**

Transitions are the mortar that holds the foundation of the essay together. Without logical progression of thought, the reader is unable to follow the essay's argument, and the structure will collapse. Transitions should wrap up the idea from the previous section and introduce the idea that is to follow in the next section.

- **Body paragraphs that include evidential support.**

Each paragraph should be limited to the discussion of one general idea. This will allow for clarity and direction throughout the essay. In addition, such conciseness creates an ease of readability for one's audience. It is important to note that each paragraph in the body of the essay must have some logical connection to the thesis statement in the opening paragraph. Some paragraphs will directly support the thesis statement with evidence collected during research. It is also important to explain how and why the evidence supports the thesis (**warrant**).

However, argumentative essays should also consider and explain differing points of view regarding the topic (hence, pro/con essay). Depending on the length of the assignment, students should dedicate one or two paragraphs of an argumentative essay to discussing conflicting opinions on the topic. Rather than explaining how these differing opinions are wrong outright, students should note how opinions that do not align with their thesis might not be well informed or how they might be out of date.

- **Evidential support (whether factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal).**

The argumentative essay requires well-researched, accurate, detailed, and current information to support the thesis statement and consider other points of view. Some factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal evidence should support the thesis. However, students must consider multiple points of view when collecting evidence. As noted in the paragraph above, a successful and well-rounded argumentative essay will also discuss opinions not aligning with the thesis. It is unethical to exclude evidence that may not support the thesis. It is not the student's job to point out how other positions are wrong outright, but rather to explain how other positions may not be well informed or up to date on the topic.

- **A conclusion that does not simply restate the thesis, but readdresses it in light of the evidence provided.**

It is at this point of the essay that students may begin to struggle. This is the portion of the essay that will leave the most immediate impression on the mind of the reader. Therefore, it must be effective and logical. Do not introduce any new information into the conclusion; rather, synthesize the information presented in the body of the essay. Restate why the topic is important, review the main points, and review your thesis. You may also want to include a short discussion of more research that should be completed in light of your work.

## The five-paragraph essay

A common method for writing an argumentative essay is the five-paragraph approach. This is the format you will be using. If it sounds straightforward, that is because it is; in fact, the method consists of (a) an introductory paragraph (b) three evidentiary body paragraphs that may include discussion of opposing views and (c) a conclusion.

Before starting writing, it is imperative to make a list of these ideas and choose the most suitable ones among them for supporting and refuting.

There are three possible organization patterns:

### Pattern 1:

Thesis statement:

PRO idea 1

PRO idea 2

CON(s) + Refutation(s)

Conclusion

### Pattern 2:

Thesis statement:

CON(s) + Refutation(s)

PRO idea 1

PRO idea 2

Conclusion

### Pattern 3:

Thesis statement:

CON idea 1       -----> Refutation

CON idea 2       -----> Refutation

CON idea 3       -----> Refutation

Conclusion

## Dos & don'ts of essay writing

### Watch out for fake news!

# HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS



## CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



## READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?



## CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?



## SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.



## CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.



## IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.



## CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.



## ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

## - **Avoid logical fallacies**

**(Logical) fallacies** are common errors in reasoning that will undermine the logic of your argument. Fallacies can be either illegitimate arguments or irrelevant points, and are often identified because they lack evidence that supports their claim. Sweeping statements often lack nuance. Avoid these common fallacies in your own arguments and watch for them in the arguments of others.

**Assignment in class (10 minutes):** below you can find a list of the most common logical fallacies. Make groups of 2/3 and divide them among the group so that each pair/group is responsible for researching one of the fallacies. With your group, see what you can find about them. Come up with a definition and at least two examples, preferably one made up yourself and one from internet publications/discussions/advertisements/twitter..

Present your findings to the rest of the class, including the real-life logical fallacy you encountered.

- Post hoc ergo propter hoc
- Argumentum ad ignorantiam
- Genetic fallacy
- Begging the claim
- False cause
- Circular argument
- Either/or fallacy (black or white)
- Ad populum
- Red herring
- Straw man
- False analogy
- Moral equivalence
- Slippery slope argument
- Sweeping generalisation
- Appeal to authority
- No true Scotsman

### **Assignment: which logical fallacies are these?**

Write down which logical fallacies you think these are.

1. "Providing daycare for toddlers is like herding cats."
2. "We shouldn't even bother interviewing that applicant. He has tattoos."
3. "Slim-fast worked for me, so it must work for you, too!"
4. "In the future, everyone will be wearing Design Plus sunglasses. Why wait until then?"
5. "Many people who eat meat are overweight. Eating meat causes obesity."
6. "Becoming a member of the Wildlife Foundation is the best way to show you care about the environment."
7. "Don't worry about eating fast food. After all, millions of Americans eat it every day."
8. "Relaxing in a Ritz hot tub is like a mini-vacation to a tropical island."
9. "Either finish school or look forward to an unsatisfying life and a low-paying job."
10. "Three out of four dentists recommend Zippo Dental Floss."
11. "All homeless people are lazy."
12. "Playing video games is a waste of time because that time could be spent more productively."

13. "Why should we be concerned with spending money on public health in this state when terrorism threatens all of us?"
14. "It's common knowledge that mothers who work don't care about their children's well-being. Therefore, mothers shouldn't work."
15. "If you allow one person to borrow your car, then everyone will start asking. Eventually someone will wreck it, and then you won't have a car."

## **Use formal register**

An argumentative essay is a formal text. This means you should avoid using contractions, spoken language/slang, and addressing the reader directly. Additionally, you should avoid using the first-person perspective as much as possible. Attempt to use formal linking words to add structure to your essay.

---

## **Writing a practice essay**

Now that you have a general idea on what an argumentative essay should contain, and what to avoid, you will delve into the topic for the practice essay. The topic will be plastic/plastic soup, which you will research yourselves. Using the steps below, you will write a practice essay on which you will get (peer) feedback in terms of form, content, register, etc.

## **Step 1: Getting organised**

### ***Devising a thesis:***

Usually when you begin to write an essay you will have an idea what to write about.

However, most of the time, your topic will be too broad and you will need to narrow it down. In order to write a successful essay, you must find the focal point of your discussion - the centre of your thoughts. This focal point is the thesis statement!

### ***Steps that have to be taken:***

1. Ask yourself questions about the general topic
2. Use whatever you have at your disposal (your fellow students, internet, books etc.)
3. Consider your topic in conjunction with something else (but, or, and,so)
4. Think of key words that form part of the topic

5. Make several drafts. Writing is a process!

**Exercise 1:**

Brainstorming involves free association, or rapidly generating ideas on a topic. Try these two different ways of brainstorming.

*Free writing;*

This is where you quickly write down every idea you have that could be relevant to the topic. You can write a list or draw a mind map. The aim is to produce lots of ideas, so the form is not important.

*Group brainstorming;*

This is where all the members of a group contribute their own ideas on the topic, 'bouncing' their ideas off each other.

1.1 **Use free writing to brainstorm the following topic:** *plastic soup*. You have two minutes.

1.2 **Compare** your notes with your **neighbour**.

**Organising your ideas.**

Now that you have a set of ideas they need putting together in an organised way. One method is to use a mind map to try to represent your ideas in a visual form. This can be very useful when you want to quickly see the relationship between your main topic, main ideas and supporting ideas. You write the main topic in the middle of the page and place ideas around it, connected with lines or arrows. Similarly you write the supporting ideas around the main ideas, connected with lines or arrows.

1.3 In a **plenary session** gather input from the entire group in a **mind map or word spider** on the white board.

1.4 Using your mind map, work in groups to discuss the possible content of your essay, the introduction and main points.

## **Step 2**

### **Getting started: introduction and outline**

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Start writing an essay
- Write a thesis statement
- Write an effective introduction

Once you have begun to organize your ideas in a logical way, you need to decide

- How to structure your ideas
- How (and where) to include these ideas.

In other words, you need to make decisions about the main sections of your essay.

#### **Exercise 2:**

**2.1** Decide which ideas should appear in your essay.

**2.2** Decide in which order these ideas should appear. Which idea will you need to spend the most time on?

Compare your answers with a partner's.

#### **Arousing interest: The Introduction**

The *introduction* acts as a window to the rest of your writing. A good introduction should make your reader want to read your work. You can encourage interest by using a variety of different techniques.

For example you can use one or more if these techniques:

- 1 a surprising or interesting fact
- 2 a question
- 3 a quotation
- 4 a definition
- 5 some important background information

**2.3** Write 5 sentences to use as an introduction for an essay on plastic. using each one of the techniques (1-5). Try to interest the reader so as to encourage him/her to read the rest of your essay.

Usually the best introductions are short and comprehensive. In order to get your readers' attention you need to break the ice. Here are some tactics for opening the essay:

**1. Take the straight and narrow path**

State your thesis bluntly and follow it with a brief statement of the steps in your argument.

**2. Try shock treatment**

Give your reader an icebreaker, perhaps shocking example, statistic, or statement to get him or her interested in reading further.

**3. Engage your reader**

Tell a story or start with an amusing example.

**2.4** Read the following introductions and identify the tactics used. Compare your answers in your group and try to reach an agreement.

**1.** Flying through the snow-enveloped countryside, I could only get a glimpse of the soaring oak and maples that littered the perfectly groomed trail. I had the throttle wide open to keep up with my dad, for he had a more powerful sled than I did. But as I thought about some stories I had recently heard about the abuse of snowmobiling by inexperienced drivers, I let up a little and eventually my dad realized and he let up as well. I continued to think about the stories of younger drivers drag racing and speeding and it really made me more cautious. There are no seatbelts. One little bump in the trail could throw my sled to the side and I could hit a tree or roll my sled. I have been in this sport since I was 12, when I got my very own sled for Christmas, yet I do not believe the laws regulating snowmobilers are suitable for the danger of the sport.

**2.** To deal with disagreeable people you need a cool head, a blank face and an icy stare. If you possess these three attributes, you will be guaranteed to outface the opposition and emerge triumphant, even in the most awkward situations.

**3.** How do you deal with disagreeable people? Do you punch them in the nose, trip them as they go downstairs, or threaten to pinch, kick or bite them? Or are you more inclined to hurl abuse at them - curse, scream or mutter invective? While these methods have their advantages - the chief one being that they allow us to vent our

rage - such tactics usually fail to get us what we want. Instead of resorting to violence or profanity next time, consider these alternatives: a cool head, a blank face and an icy stare.

**An effective introduction should generally move from the general to the specific.**

*Introduction checklist:*

- *Is it likely to interest the reader? Why?*
- *Does it start with a general statement related to the topic and gradually become more specific?*
- *Is there a thesis statement that tells the reader what the essay will be about? Can you easily identify it?*
- *Does the introduction give you an overview of the essay structure?*
- *Are ideas clearly linked between sentences or is it sometimes confusing?*
- *Does it include a definition? Do you think a definition is necessary or would it be helpful?*

### **Writing a thesis statement**

An introduction should also contain information on how you will develop the topic in the essay title. You write this in the *thesis statement*. This is a statement of your standpoint or the view taken in the essay. It should be concise and convincing. Your thesis statement is the controlling idea of your essay that you will develop in the main body.

You normally follow the thesis statement with a clear indication of how you will structure the main body of your essay.

**2.5** Look at the ideas you brainstormed. What is your own view about possible solutions to the problems you noted? Identify your main idea and write it as the controlling idea in a single sentence (e.g. “*The key to coping with rising sea levels is education on its effects and the accurate forecasting of its hazards*”..) This will be your thesis statement. Final Step: Swop your statement and your notes with a fellow student. Comment on each other’s work! Then: rewrite your thesis statement.

**2.6** What will you focus on? How will you develop your thesis in the main body of your essay?

Write a following sentence beginning: “This essay will.....”

### ***Designing an outline:***

After you have thought of a thesis statement you will need to design an outline. In order to sort through your ideas keep the following steps in mind:

1. Make sure you have established your thesis statement and your purpose.
2. Gather your notes.
3. Classify your material and order it in a logical way.
4. Rank your points according to their importance.

#### **2.7** In pairs you are going to:

- develop an outline, complete with thesis statement.
- After you have finished you have to swop your outline with the other pair in your group in order to comment on each other's work.
- The final step is to look at each other's remarks and revise your work.

### ***Choosing a pattern of argument:***

After you have established your thesis statement and your outline, you have to choose the patterns of argument that will do your essay justice. The following tactics may serve as structural guidelines in order to prove your argument:

1. Definition/Description
2. Example
3. Comparison/Contrast
4. Cause/Effect

#### **2.8** You are going to develop one of your outlines by using at least two appropriate patterns of argument:

- You will have to do this assignment individually.
- After you have finished, swop your draft with someone else in order to comment on the appropriate patterns of argument. Keep the following questions in mind:
  1. What kind of patterns did your fellow student choose?

2. Are the arguments convincing?

### **Step 3: The body of the Essay**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Structure the main part of an essay
- Plan and write effective paragraphs

If you want to write a successful academic essay, you need to have

- An outline plan
- A clear structure
- A strong introduction
- Logical and meaningful paragraphs
- A development of an argument or discussion
- A conclusion

A paragraph must be about one thing. There should be unity! Each paragraph is a small step in your total argument, meant to lead the reader through your mental process. Each paragraph should contain the following elements:

1. a topic sentence that reveals the controlling idea (explain what the paragraph is about)
2. support for the topic sentence (show and tell)
3. unity of focus
4. a smooth transition to the next paragraph, to do this you can use one of the linking devices mentioned underneath or an implicit strategy.

#### **Linking devices:**

Here are some examples of various linking devices

<b><i>to add</i></b>	<b><i>to qualify</i></b>	<b><i>to enumerate</i></b>	<b><i>to illustrate</i></b>
and	often	first(ly)	for example
also addition	generally usually	second(ly) the last, finally	for instance in other words
Furthermore	specifically	next	
Moreover			

<b><i>to change direction</i></b>	<b><i>to summarize</i></b>	<b><i>to draw a conclusion</i></b>	<b><i>to establish cause</i></b>
However	To conclude	Therefore	because
Although	In short	as a result	for
Even though			As/Since

**3.1** Read the essay on animal testing (add..) and identify the topic sentences and linking words. Match the linking expressions with their function.

**3.2:** Do the exercises on the vaksite to learn more about the appropriate use of linking devices.

### **The topic sentence and supporting sentences**

The topic sentence is usually at the beginning of a paragraph. When you write a paragraph, you should try to develop this initial idea and not change or add too many new ideas.

**3.3:** Look at the outline for your essay. List the topics you want to cover in each paragraph. Practise writing the first paragraph of your essay. Make sure you start with a clear topic sentence! Share your paragraph for peer review.

**3.4:** Finish writing the body of your essay and again use topic sentences and linking words.

## Step 4

### Drawing a conclusion:

Your concluding paragraph is not only your last word on the subject but also an opportunity for you to reinforce your argument. The essay that builds towards a powerful conclusion will not fade out but will reverberate in the reader's ears. Listed below are two techniques that will help you to end your essay convincingly.

#### 1. Retrace your thought

Retracing does not mean repeating! All you need to provide in your conclusion is a reminder of the steps of your journey. Use key words, different from the ones you have mentioned in your argument, so paraphrase the ideas and the language not copy.

#### 2. Refocus your argument

Take a broader view! Include a suggestion for change or a solution to the problem you have so carefully outlined in your essay.

**4.1** Look back at the thesis statement you wrote in which you stated the focus of your essay. Draw your argument to a close with a concluding sentence which refers back to your introduction. Try to use synonyms, paraphrases and different grammatical structures.

**4.2** sometimes it may be useful to draft a rough conclusion first, so that you know what you will say at the end of the essay. Can you think of any advantages or disadvantages of this approach. Discuss them with your neighbor.

Complete and perfect your essay at home. Do not forget to [edit, evaluate and revise](#).

**More links:**

<https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-write-an-essay-p2-1209096>

<http://www.eslflow.com/Brainstorming-Worksheet-Cluster-Diagram.html>

<http://my-english-writing.com/>

**4.3:**

You have to comment on someone else's essay.

Make sure you comment on:

- thesis statement and introduction
- arguments
- transition
- conclusion
- grammar and spelling (use your handbook)