

# Essentials of ARGUMENT



Georgia State University Edition

# Essentials of **ARGUMENT**

**Georgia State University Edition**

Taken from:  
*Essentials of Argument*  
by Nancy V. Wood



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Taken from:

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by Nancy V. Wood

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# English 1102: Argumentative Writing

Georgia State University



## INTRODUCTION

For many of us, the first image that comes to mind when we hear the word “argument” is of two people yelling at each other. But every argument does not involve yelling, of course; any time you assert a position and try to prove it, any time you try to persuade someone, even yourself, you are making an argument. If you want to yell at yourself that’s fine, but most people do not respond to being yelled at very well, nor do they respond well to reading a written argument that consists of unsupported statements of opinion, that insults them, or that isn’t connected to the situation at hand. To construct a persuasive written argument, you first need two things: some kind of point to make, a *thesis* or *claim*, and an awareness of the *audience* you are trying to persuade. If you have no thesis, you have nothing to prove, and if you construct your argument for the wrong audience, they will be unable to see the merits of your argument, no matter how sound it might be. In addition, the language you use has to fit the situation as well as the audience. For example, you would not write an essay for your history professor the same way, with the same language, that you might IM a friend, and you wouldn’t compose a resume by writing about your favorite movie stars.

In academic writing, presenting a clear, well-reasoned argument is the best way to convince or persuade the reader, most often the instructor, and to get a good grade. This skill will also serve you well in your professional career and in your life outside of your career. Most jobs these days include some form of writing, from email to grant proposals, and the writer who can persuade his co-workers with a clear, well-reasoned argument will have a clear advantage over those who cannot. Outside of your career, you will no doubt find yourself writing letters, blogs, diary entries, response cards, instructions to your babysitter, poems, stories, speeches, and genealogical histories, just to name a few of the genres you might engage in. All of these kinds of writing can be used to persuade, and the

more practice you have persuading people in writing, the better you will find yourself at formulating an argument when speaking face-to-face with someone. Just as there is much more to argument than yelling, there is much more to writing than just scribbling your thoughts down on a page.

At Georgia State University, you will be faced with many different kinds of audiences for your writing, and thus with many different kinds of arguments. Our University is among the most diverse in the state, having hosted students from more than 100 countries and every other state in the USA, and this diversity makes for many different points of view. Learning to coexist with such a variety of classmates and professors—and to persuade them—will help your skills at argumentative writing grow even more, and it is this diversity that gives Georgia State University a distinct advantage over many other Universities in the state. Enjoy the difference!

## A SAMPLE ESSAY

Each instructor for English 1102 has the freedom to teach argumentative writing in the way that works best for her. The following sample of student writing illustrates one way that instructors might go about getting students to the “final argument,” that is, the draft that finally gets the grade for the paper. Some instructors ask students to read several essays or articles to gather ideas, then write a draft of two, then conference with peers and with them, and then turn in the final draft of the paper for a grade. Others will give you a topic or brainstorm topics as a class or ask you to come up with your own topic on an issue that you care about or are interested in. Then the drafting will occur. These drafts may be directed by the teacher, or you may just write one or two drafts on your own. But at some point the draft that you turn in for a grade will need to be as polished as you can make it. The example provided here includes the assignments, the drafts, and the final paper that the student turned in. We have removed the name of the student on the paper so that you can see that this is a sample, written by a real person in a real English 1102 class, with proper MLA citation form. We have also left the comments that the instructor made to the student, so that you can see what instructors might think or say about various aspects of the essay. Again, this sample essay represents the way one of our instructors teaches argument by having students choose a topic early in the semester and develop it along the way. However, each instructor has his or her own style and way to proceed. Your class could use this sample to talk about many aspects of writing argument. We hope it is helpful.

Finally, I wish to thank those who make our program and this introduction to the text so successful: Michael Gevontmakher, Marc Pietrzykowski, and the folks from Pearson Publishers and their affiliates, particularly Heather Colley, Kara Clark, and Glen Spenser.

Marti Singer, Associate Professor of English  
Director of Lower Division Studies  
Georgia State University  
Atlanta, GA



STUDENT WRITING SAMPLE:  
ONE TOPIC, STUDENT CHOSEN, DRAFTED SEVERAL TIMES,  
AND BUILDS TOWARD THE FINAL PAPER

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## **Assignment 1**

### **Essay 1: Getting Approval on Your Theme**

For this assignment, you will outline your theme, suggest some research areas, and pose questions you are interested in. Then you will try to convince me that the theme you have chosen is a good one and that I should approve it. Be sure to consider some counterarguments to your proposal, both from your point of view and from mine; the “cons” you wrote in our previous brainstorming assignment are probably general counterarguments and so are useful, but what might I (or another professor), as a teacher and representative of GSU, object to? Other questions to ask yourself: Is my theme too broad? Too narrow? Will I be interested in writing about my theme for 16 weeks? Where is the “gap” in your own knowledge of the theme? And so forth.

Audience: Me (generic university professor)

Length: 500-1000 words

Citations: If need be, not required





Student Name  
Instructor Name  
English 1102  
Date

### My Theme: Fishing

Good job getting a counterargument in here right away. I'm not sure if the myth you speak of haunts "Western Society," however; try toning it down a bit.

Nice—your illustration of one typical image of the fisherman helps make the view you argue against more concrete.

What makes it "real"? How are you using this word?

Actually, the phrase "a walk in the park" is the opposite of the "literal" meaning. It is figurative, not literal.

Also try Thoreau's book *Walden and The Compleat Angler*, by Izaak Walton. Good preliminary cataloging of sources.

A fine idea. I wish I

1 Fishing, is known by many as the sport for loafers, after all it doesn't require much physical ability, right? This myth about fishing haunts not only the mind-frame of Western Society, it also is partly true. Fishing is without a doubt one of the most calming activities that people can do. At the same time it can also become one of the most exciting and difficult activities.

2 I chose fishing as my theme for this semester for a number of reasons. I believe fishing is a sport that has been underestimated by the western culture and deserves much more respect. Although this might be difficult to prove to someone whose image of fishing is of an old guy with a beer and bucket of worms smoking at the lake's pier, it will be a worthy challenge. I believe by choosing this topic I will not only be able to convince the general audience of my papers that a fishing trip should be their priority for a weekend getaway, but also make people understand that fishing is a real sport.

3 In order to convince people of certain things facts must be presented, facts that are backed by research. To research fishing seems a fairly difficult task to the untrained eye, but to someone who fishes and is interested in fishing it is a walk in the park, literally. Where one sees a boring stack of magazines, I see *In-Fisherman*, *Field and Stream*, and *Bass Pro*. These are only a few examples of magazines that I can utilize in explaining idea of pro-fishing to "city folk." In these magazines are endless articles that explain methods of fishing, give advice, and discuss pro fishing.

4 Magazines are not the only modern way of researching fishing. There are also television shows. OLN, the outdoor network has over fifteen shows devoted to fishing alone. Both the ESPN and the newly established SPIKE channel show fishing documentaries daily. Besides watching television shows, I can easily research fishing by reading numerous books that are written about it. Fishing has been the topic of many famous books such as *Moby Dick* and Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*.

5 Books, magazines, and television shows are all good ways to research the activity that is fishing, but one of the main reasons I chose fishing as my theme has to do with one of my main ways of research. I believe hands on research is the best and that is why I am actually going to go fishing myself a number of times, to get

could do that sort of research all the time...

An interesting idea; you also might try interviewing experienced and novice fisherman.

Understatement is a useful rhetorical technique, but be careful not to overuse it.

Seems like you ran out of steam here at the end. Be sure to finish strong; just restating your intro briefly won't make the cut in college writing.

various facts about my theme. By going fishing myself I will be able to appreciate the art that is the sport of fishing a lot more. It will help me draw many conclusions about the sport and will keep my writing interesting.

Another great way to research my theme is by doing a poll around campus. The poll will constitute of simple questions that will ask everyday teenagers whether they have ever been fishing. Would they ever go fishing and if so why? Such questions will lead me to real evidence about actual young people of the twenty-first century and their outlook on my theme.

While fishing may seem as a one sided topic without much backbone, it surely is not. While proving that fishing is a sport in one of my papers I can also talk about different variations of fishing. For example, spin cast fishing is a lot different from fly-fishing and is usually aimed at completely different fish. Another variation in the sport of fishing is the surroundings and water type. Fresh water fishing is a lot different from salt water fishing and requires different methods. Finally, I can discuss how fishing can both be a relaxing pastime, and an adventurous sport in which the fisherman gets both an adrenaline rush and a fish.

All these reasons succumb to one great theme fishing. It is not only a great sport, pastime and activity, it is also a great theme.

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## Assignment 2

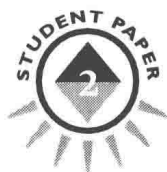
### Essay 2: Researching Your Theme

In most academic research papers, one of your first research tasks is to see what other people have written about your subject. Often called a “review of the literature,” this research design is meant to impress upon the reader your knowledge of the subject in question, as well as to show you professor that you did the work necessary to understand the conversations people are having about the subject. To that end, this research paper will contain no less than 5 cited sources; since your final paper will have more than that, researching more than the minimum is recommended. For this assignment, write a “review of the literature” about your topic or theme.

Audience: Me

Length: 500-1000 words

Citations: At least 5.



Student Name  
 Instructor Name  
 English 1102  
 Date

## How to Have a Good Fishing Experience

Ok, good, you have two main points sketched out. Keep in mind that you are doing research for the final paper as well, so be sure not to limit your inquiry too much.

The "author" here is DataSport, a corporate author, so they should be in the parenthetical and also should come first in your work cited for this source.

Way to tie your two main points together! Your citation is not in the correct format, however. Check them all and be sure you have it down before working on your next papers.

Why not? You need to give the reader a little more information here.

Aren't you repeating your point from the previous paragraph here?

1 Fishing: a day wasted or time well spent. Most of the time, the enjoyment a fisherman receives from a day on the lake depends on both the weather and his equipment. The weather and the equipment can both work either in the favor of, or against the fisherman. In my numerous experiences in fishing I have realized that well prepared equipment will a lot of times have nothing to do with the amount of fish someone will catch, but it will make your fishing experience a lot less stressful. The weather on the other hand has a great effect on how much fish you will catch and how frustrating your day will be.

2 The weather can work either in the favor of or against the fisherman. Although you can't always predict the weather successfully, you can check the fish-and-game forecasts for that day. The "DataSport's Fish & Game Forecast" from the Real Tree website puts up new and updated fish-and-game forecasts every day at midnight. Although these "scientifically calculated" predictions may not always guarantee a catch, they will most likely make your day at the lake more enjoyable. (<<http://www.realtree.com>>)

3 The equipment the fisherman chooses also depends on the weather and the season. This does not necessarily mean that baits that worked on fish in the summer will not work on fish during the winter, but it is useful to have seasonal baits. "True fall fishing begins after turnover in waters that stratify, or when water temperatures drop into the 50F range" (<<http://www.in-fisherman.com>>). Even when you change summer lures to winter ones, using the same monotonous bait during the winter will not get you any fish. "Think of it this way" says Joseph Raines from Ultimate Bass Fishing "Each lure is like a tool. It has certain abilities for certain jobs. You wouldn't use a hammer every time you needed to tighten a bolt would you? Then you won't need to use a jig or spinner-bait all winter long" (<<http://www.bassresource.com>>). Baits and lures are not the only equipment that a fisherman has to be conscious of.

4 After you check the fish and game report and finally decide that it is worthwhile to head out to the lake, you must choose proper equipment. According to the Ohio DNR Fish Basics article "the type of rod the sportsman uses depends on the conditions in which you will be fishing and the type of fish you are trying to land"

(<http://www.ohiodnr.com>). Spinning and bait casting rods will be the two most common rods that a beginner fisherman should have to choose from. A good rod choice depends on the type of fish and the method of fishing the fisherman is pursuing.

- 5 The spinning rod is usually used for the sit-and-wait method of fishing, while casting rod is used for the "cast and jig" method. The sit-and-wait method is fairly simple; it requires a strong line, usually fifteen to thirty-pound test line, and a type of "stink bait". "A stink bait is anything that omits a strong enough odor to attract fish and is also small enough to fit a hook" (<http://www.catfishin.net>). In this method of fishing the fisherman has to sit and wait for the fish to come to the bait, instead of trying to put the bait next to the fish. Such a method is common for lake and pond fishing, but for running water, a different method of fishing has to be applied.

Transition here is little clunky. Don't repeat the last line of the previous paragraph, add to it.

- 6 The "cast and jig" method is a bit different; it requires for you to obtain spinner, flash, and noise baits. These are baits that spin, flash, or make a clicking or swooshing sound while the fisherman reels and jigs the line. Fly-fishing is the most common term for a type of "jig" fishing that uses a reinforced line and a longer rod for better casting capability. Imitation flies (fake larvae or flies made out of colored cloth and other manufactured products) are used as bait; imitation water bug larvae are not unusual as well. These two methods of fishing are made to target specific fish. At the lake, Bass and Brim are the target fish, while at the rivers and streams, Trout and Pike are not atypical catches.

For a citation this long, use a "block quote" format. Also, don't let the citation do your work for you—add your own take to the cited information, explain a bit for the reader or give your opinion.

- 7 According to the Division of Wildlife in Ohio "spin-casting equipment is the easiest to operate, causes the least problems, and is the most fit for beginners. A spin-casting reel spooled with 6, 8 or 10 pound test line and mounted on a light to medium action 5 1/2 to 6 foot casting rod will work well for most types of fishing. Rod and reel combinations, already spooled with quality line, can be purchased pre-packaged. More experienced anglers may prefer spinning or bait casting tackle." (<http://www.ohiodnr.com>)

The conclusion needs work—what is the "fun factor"? Why do fisherman forget this goal? Where does the fun factor fit into your argument that fishing should be considered a "real" sport?

- 8 Although equipment and weather are very important aspects of fishing, the fisherman, must keep one thing in mind in order to determine how positive the fishing experience will be. This is the "fun factor" and it is the most important thing you must attain. Most fishermen forget that that their true goal is to enjoy the fishing experience as a whole, which sometimes means going home empty handed.

## Works cited

Make sure you get your citations correct; also, many professors will require you do some library research in addition to internet research. I made no such stipulation in the assignment, but keep it in mind.

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### **Assignment 3**

#### **Essay 3: Research, cont'd**

Now that you have surveyed some of the literature on your topic, you can begin to branch out and do other kinds of research, either field research or a more concentrated examination of the literature. If you choose to do field research, you need to figure out what kind(s) of data you want to get, and how you will use it. Yes, you can interview someone, but what data will you gain by it? Will it be relevant to your research, or a waste of time? How will it help support your argument? Figure out what you want to know before you decide on a research method. Some examples of field research include: personal interviews, either in person or via email/phone; surveys; participant-observation; collecting a glossary.

You are not required to do field research. If you want to continue using texts as research, the same provisions apply as for the previous paper, but now you must focus your research on some specific aspect of your topic. Whatever type of research you choose, now is also the time to begin thinking about your final paper: What is your thesis? Do you have one argument to make, or several? How will all these parts and pieces fit together in a persuasive manner?

Audience: A general academic audience

Length: 500-1000 words

Citations: yes





Wow, will you tell her afterwards that you used the wrong bait?

that I knew wouldn't land any fish. I did this to find out whether my grandmother would enjoy the trip without catching any fish. After the trip I gave my grandmother a brief interview.

Me: Have you ever been fishing before this trip?

Innesa: Only once when I was very little, it was too long ago for me to remember.

Me: Did you enjoy it?

Innesa: I don't really remember how it was, but it didn't leave a lasting impression.

Me: Do you think you will enjoy this trip?

Innesa: I believe I will.

Me: Do you think you will enjoy it even if we don't catch any fish.

Innesa: I don't think I will, that's the whole reason for it isn't, the fish I mean?

4 After the trip:

Me: Was the fishing trip everything you expected it to be?

Innesa: Actually it was not, I was hoping to catch more fish, but even though we didn't catch one single fish I had a lot of fun. It was nice and relaxing. The fresh air and the scenery were amazing.

Me: Do you think you will like to take more trips like this in the future even though we didn't catch any fish?

Innesa: I would love to take more trips like this one; it really helped me get away from things. It was like watching a movie, my attention was so set on those darn fish, I forgot all my problems.

Good interview, and your conclusions are improving; I still would like to know more about why fishing is better than videogames and TV. When you make interesting and provocative statements like that, you need to follow through with proof.

5 After interviewing my grandmother, I felt more safe in claiming that fishing is not only a sport but also a very relaxing, therapeutic activity, and that catching fish isn't the most important thing. After this research experiment I now believe even more that people go on fishing trips to relax and clear their mind. Their only problem is the fish; everything else becomes secondary and evaporates from their mind. Fishing relaxes away tensions that the modern world puts on people; it also gives people a pastime that is beyond videogames and television. This is why I believe the "trip" is more important than the "fish."

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