DEVELOPING ESSAY ARGUMENTS

What is an academic argument?
It is a series of connected statements which lead the reader from your thesis statement to your conclusion.

What’s next?
Once you know which ideas you want to use to develop your argument, decide in what order you want to present them.

Ordering your ideas
Plan the most effective way to present your ideas as they will not all be as strong or as effective as each other. There are a number of options, e.g.
- Begin with your strongest point.
- Finish with your strongest point.
- Intersperse strong points and weak ones.

It’s probably best to begin and end with strong points.

Effective ordering of your ideas will help convince your readers of the worth or strength of your argument.

How do you convince your reader?
You will be most convincing if you:
- develop one main point in each paragraph,
- elaborate each point using e.g. referenced definitions, explanations, examples and evidence from the research literature

and always
- introduce and then evaluate or comment on your referenced material by explaining how it adds to your argument.

The role of your ‘critical voice’
When you comment on the quotes and paraphrases used in your essay, you are demonstrating your ‘critical voice’.

Your critical voice should be evident in all your academic essays.

How do I develop an academic argument?
First you need a thesis statement, i.e. a statement of the position you will argue for throughout your essay.

Once you have determined your position, continue researching and critically reading the academic literature for relevant information to substantiate your position.

Reading critically involves some or all of the following:
- comparing and contrasting research on your topic,
- noting why the same or different conclusions were reached by different authors,
- discussing different ways the same methodology has been used,
- commenting on the strength of the evidence presented in each text,
- forming an opinion on why theoretical perspectives used by different authors have resulted in different conclusions,
- commenting on authors’ biases,
- being aware of your own biases.
Dealing with counter arguments
In longer essays and, word limit permitting in shorter ones, it’s a good idea to acknowledge that you are aware that there are positions counter to the one(s) you are arguing for. However, if you present a counter position, you will need to discount or refute it, that is, argue against it. Doing this, will show your reader that you have considered other options but decided your position is much stronger.

Tip
Don’t spend too many words on your counter argument. Your main focus should be on arguing for your position.

Anything else?
Thinking critically and having good ideas, examples, quotes and explanations is not enough to develop a good argument. You also need to arrange your ideas so that they flow in a clear, easy to follow and logical sequence.

Make sure you use appropriate linking words
- between ideas,
- within a paragraph,
- between paragraphs,
- between sections.

Final points
Following all the ideas above will help you develop a well-ordered, logical and convincing argument.

Developing an essay argument is easier said than done but the more often you do it and the more you become familiar with the topic of your essays, the easier, and more enjoyable, it will become.

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