

Argument

ENG 180, Spring 2007

Summary: Write a four to five page essay which makes an interesting and timely argument, using rhetorical techniques of your choice. Proof and polish your work carefully.

This assignment is designed to allow you to practice argumentation and persuasion, perhaps the most important of all forms of writing. Phone calls asking for money, job applications, and proposals written at work are all persuasive. For this assignment, your genre shall be the essay and your style should aim for clarity, brevity, and simplicity. However, the other four components of writing—audience, purpose, content, and structure—are up to you.

Some examples from last year:

- ✓ WIU should replace all the elevators in all the dormitories immediately;
- ✓ the city of Aurora, IL needs to redevelop its downtown to take businesses seriously;
- ✓ college professors should allow excused absences for students in the national guard.

Find a topic which, like these, avoids hackneyed debates and calls upon your knowledge to minimize necessary research (like the how-to assignment). Some *Western Courier* editorials are good models—they focus on local issues which matter to most WIU students, use personal experience, and build *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* equally. On the other hand, some are tired repetitions of commonplaces filled with logical mistakes—demonstrations of what *not* to do. We'll look at both good and bad arguments in class as we work on this assignment.

Schedule

item	date	points
Prospectus (email to me)	Feb 27	20
Draft (bring two copies to class)	Mar 8	60
Peer review (bring two copies to class)	Mar 20	20
Final (bring to class)	Mar 29	150
	Total	250

Milestones and assessment

Prospectus: The prospectus should describe your topic (what you wish to write about), possible claims (what you plan to argue), and at least three rhetorical techniques you might use (look to *Reading Rhetorically* and the “Critical Readings” handout on the course web site for types of arguments). Explain why you are considering each one of these items. If you are not sure, write out several topics, claims, and methods, and I will help you select your best ideas. Email this to me by February 27. I will return comments to you by email and request more work or approve your topic so you can begin to write. See the course web site for an example prospectus.

Draft: The draft should be a complete draft of the essay. You will be assessed on persuasiveness, soundness of argument, and development of beginning, middle, and end. Strive for accurate formatting and pay attention to correctness and style. I will mark up these elements, though you will not be graded on them. If you are having trouble with any particular parts of your essay, feel

free to add annotations {in braces like this} or as a separate page. I will make sure to address those sections in my review.

Peer review: I will provide a specific prompt which builds on our previous peer review.

Generally speaking, everyone needs to work a bit harder on this. I will put a high-quality peer review on the course web site.

Final: The finished essay. Turn in your draft as well.

Requirements

- ✓ Identify a topic which is relevant and interesting to you. Narrow the scope to something manageable. Develop a claim which is arguable and avoids entrenched topics—abortion is (not) evil, the USA should (not) be in Iraq, etc are *not* acceptable. I highly recommend a local angle; a topic in which you have a specific interest.
- ✓ Begin early enough so you can avoid last-minute requests for topic changes.
- ✓ Formal research is not required. However, you need to do enough research to ensure you enter the conversation intelligently. Consider research as a tool to build your *ethos*, to verify claims you make, and to help you find good arguments. Do cite any sources you call upon using MLA format and the citation guidelines in *Reading Rhetorically*.
- ✓ Your essay should have a beginning, middle, and end, as defined by Hjortshoj.
- ✓ Apply the critical reading questions in Chapter 3 and 4 of *Reading Rhetorically* to your own essay, ensuring it is up to the standards they develop. Call upon techniques they present to make your essay both persuasive and sound logically.
- ✓ Follow MLA format as described in my formatting handout and *Reading Rhetorically*. If you have a question not answered in those references, try the *MLA Handbook* (sixth edition) by Joseph Gibaldi—if you don't have a copy, visit the University Writing Center, the library, or my office.
- ✓ Correctness and style count! Use *Style* and the paramedic method to polish your prose. Print and re-read your final draft carefully, and spell-check it as well.

Strategies

- Put my comments on your previous assignments to work—learn what parts of writing you do well, and which you need to spend more time on. Plan accordingly. Feel free to ask for more help evaluating your writing skills and talents.
- Because style matters on this assignment, give yourself enough time to print and proof every draft carefully. Trying to finish the night before all but guarantees problems. Polish takes time!
- If you visit the library and ask library reference staff for help, follow the suggestions I presented in class—don't make the librarians think you're trying to get them to do the assignment for you.
- Visit the University Writing Center for help with any part of this assignment. Make an appointment (and keep it)—UWC tutors are always very busy.
- Please ask me for help when you need it. I'm always happy to oblige.