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**Unit 3 Opinion Essays**

**3.1 Definition**

One key skill to composition is learning how to make a successful argument. The argumentative/opinion essay brings all of the argument-related skills – research, support, critical thinking – together into one project. The argumentative essay is one of the most important essays in university composition because it develops skills that will be used frequently in other classes and even beyond the university classroom.

This is because argument and persuasion are part of everyday life: advertisers try to convince you to buy their products, political candidates try to convince you to vote for them, and that one friend on Facebook tries to convince you that vaccines are some deep-seeded government conspiracy. Winning an argument or debate is not a matter of who is smarter: it is a matter of authoritative, well-supported presentation. It is a matter of not simply having a strong opinion, but being able to support that opinion.

**3.2 Sample**

*(In the following page)*

**The Best Medicine**

Last week, I noticed that my son had a bad cold. I took him to the paediatrician, and she told me that he had an infection. Then she gave me a prescription of antibiotics. After two days, my son was happy and healthy thanks to this important medicine. Every day doctors prescribe antibiotics to help thousands of patients around the world fight infections. I do not like to think about what might happen if we did not have antibiotics.

Antibiotics are one of the greatest medical inventions in human history for several reasons. First, infections are frequent. Almost everyone has experienced an ear infection or a sinus infection. These common illnesses cause pain and discomfort to millions of people around the world every year. In addition, infections can be life-threatening. For example, sepsis, a dangerous infection in the blood, is responsible for one out of every one hundred hospitalization. The victims are usually very young, old, or weak. Another reason why antibiotics are important is that they stop an infection from spreading to others. Infection diseases can quickly travel from person to person if they are not treated right away. Antibiotics are the most effective way to control the spread of these serious illnesses. Recently, many people have argued that doctors prescribe antibiotics too often and that the bacteria that cause infections are becoming stronger as a result. This may be true; however, this evidence does not mean that antibiotics are not important. It simply shows that we must learn to use them wisely.

Infections can attack anyone at any time. They can also attack entire populations. While many infections create minor discomfort and suffering, some are quite dangerous. Antibiotics are the most effective way to treat infections. Without antibiotics, many more people would get seriously ill, and others would die.

**3.3 Organisation**

There are many different ways to organize an argumentative essay. The most important thing to remember about an argumentative essay is that you must show both sides of a contentious issue. In other words, your topic must be debatable:

1) You have considered both sides of the argument before choosing your position.

2) You are able to anticipate and refute any opposing arguments.

*A. Introduction*

In the introduction, you should not include too much detail. The introduction is a three-step process:

Get the reader’s attention (hook).

Introduce the issue being discussed (background information).

State where *you* stand on the issue and why (thesis statement).

*B. Body*

1. Supporting the argument: The body is where you’ll make your key points and support them with research. You need a transition of some kind so the reader knows exactly which point you are discussing. This transition sentence functions as the topic sentence for a body paragraph.

*E.g.: One of the main reasons gun owners should need a license is because it would make it much easier for the state to prosecute gun crime.*

From that sentence, your reader knows exactly what the next paragraph or two will discuss. From there, you have to support your statement. The first thing to do is present research.

*E.g.: An article in the Chicago Tribune describes the difficult legal challenges, saying that Congress often fails to create gun legislation because it would be too complex to enforce without substantial legal hurdles (Ingram).*

Simply stating the research, however, is not enough. You also have to explain how it applies to the argument.

*E.g.: Requiring a gun license would solve this problem because it would substantially answer the question of whether the offender had a right to a gun. If there were a federal gun license that everyone had to go through the same process to get, it would get rid of the state-level patchwork of regulations that makes gun crime so hard to prosecute.*

The above example does not need; the previous example already had a sourced statement with a citation, and this example is the writer’s analysis. When research and statistics are used to support a point, *every* cited statement needs to be similarly analyzed and deconstructed.

2. Refutation: Usually when you are assigned to write an argumentative/opinion essay, one of the requirements is that you have to “give at least one opposing view.” Writers often mistakenly believe this to mean they have to give *support* to the other side or “play fair,” but that is not the case. The reason for presenting an opponent’s viewpoint in your essay is so you can explain why it does not work. You have to show your readers that you have examined both sides of the argument, but you also have to explain why your opponents have not changed your mind about the topic. The best way to begin is by simply and briefly presenting the other side’s argument.

*E.g.: Opponents of stricter gun control laws argue that making guns harder to obtain will endanger law-abiding citizens because only criminals would have guns.*

The reason for presenting the above statement is *not* to support the other side, but to explain it. At this point, you have to explain why you do not agree. Deconstruct the argument and point out the flaws in it, using research as needed.

*E.g.: The problem with this thinking is that it assumes guns will be easy to get illegally. This isn’t true; when Australia banned firearms, the black market costs for semi-automatic handguns went from $2000 to over $15000 (Tanquintie-Misa), meaning that criminals will need large amounts of money to purchase a gun, making crimes of passion much less likely.*

*C. Conclusion*

Once you have supported all your main points with research and personal analysis, you have to bring everything back together and leave *all* of your points fresh in the readers’ minds. This is your last chance to make an impression on the audience, so you want to make the conclusion especially convincing. However, there is a balance in this; writers often make the mistake of including overt moralizations or introducing new points that were not discussed anywhere in the body. Another frequent mistake is being repetitive. Because of the nature of the conclusion, it frequently mimics the introduction in form, but it is completely different in function.

Just like the introduction, the conclusion should not include any details; presumably, all of the important details have already been given in the body. This means that you should not need to include any sourced information. The conclusion should take on a tone that provides a sense of resolution. You know what this tone sounds like: you have likely read a magazine article or listened to a public speaker (such as a politician or a preacher), and you can usually tell when they are almost finished saying what they are going to say. Your conclusion needs to take such a tone.

**3.4 Language**

**Using Quantity Expressions in Opinion Essays**

In an opinion essay, writers often make general statements about a group or a category. It is important to avoid making a statement that is true for some, but not all for members of a group or category. This is called overgeneralization. Compare the following statements.

Cats hate water.

Most cats hate water.

The first statement suggests that all cats in the world hate water. It is untrue because some cats, such as tigers, are good swimmers and enjoy being in water. In the second statement, the writer uses the quantity expression *most*. The quantity expression qualifies, or limits the generalization, so that the statement is true.

The following patterns guide the use of quantity expressions:

*Most*, *a lot of*, and *some* are used with both plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns. For example,

*Most* dormitories have internet access.

*Some* cafeterias offer healthy alternatives to traditional student food.

*Much* and a *little* are used with uncountable nouns. (*Much* is not usually used in affirmative statements. Use *a lot of* instead). For example,

Some people have *a lot of* intelligence, but they do not have *much* common sense.

Students might have *a little* money left for entertainment after paying expenses.

*Many*, *several* and *a few* are used with plural nouns. For example,

Many web sites charge a fee for information.

A few uncooperative participants can destroy a meeting.

**3.5 Practice**

**Activity 1: Circle the correct quantity expression in each sentence.**

1. (Many/A lot of) creativity is necessary for certain types of technology jobs.

2. There are (a few/a little) places where the sea level is rising.

3. (A little/Several) bills in Congress have tried to protect Internet users from fraud.

4. In the history of the Internet, only (a little/a few) computer viruses have created serious damage.

5. (Many/A lot of) time is spent doing research on cures for cancer.

6. Did you know that (a little/ a few) sleep-deprivation can harm a person’s judgment?

**Using Connectors to Show Support and Opposition**

When we explain an opinion, we can use connectors to clarify the relationship between ideas. Connectors can be used to signal that the second idea will support the first in some way. They can also be used to contrast the first idea with an opposite or very different idea. When they introduce an independent clause, the connector is followed by a comma.

*A. Connectors that Show Support*

One way to support an idea is to give an example that illustrates the idea. Connectors like *for example* and *in particular* introduce examples.

E.g.: Most people are willing to spend money to make their lives easier; *for example*, nearly every new house has automatic garage door opener.

E.g.: Children should avoid junk food; in particular, they should stay away from sugary snacks.

A second way to show support is to add facts or explanations that clarify the idea.

E.g.: The automobile industry is responding to consumer demands for more fuel-efficient cars; in fact, the number of available models has tripled in the past three years.

*B. Connectors that Show Opposition*

It is sometimes difficult for the writer to show that two ideas are opposed to each other. Connectors like however, in contrast, on the other hand help the writer focus the reader’s attention on differences. For example,

I am late every morning; however, I never get into trouble.

Many people enjoy listening to CD’s; in contrast, live concerts are more exciting.

**Activity 2: Each of the sentences below has two clauses joined by a connector. Write *O* for opposition if the clauses show opposing information and *S* for support if they show supporting information, such as an example or a similar idea.**

1. The Western calendar is used around the world; however, many countries have a traditional calendar that they also use. …………

2. Most people say that they want to exercise; however, only one in ten adults works out three times a week or more. …………

3. Frank Lloyd Wright was an architect who liked straight lines; in contrast, Antonio Gaudi preferred bends and curves in his designs. …………

4. Surgeons try hard to protect their hands; for example, they avoid sports such as baseball that might cause an injury on their fingers. ………..

5. The place where I grew up only has two seasons; however, my new home, New York, has four. ………..

6. Men often buy a house before getting married; in fact, single men purchase approximately one in five homes. ………..

**Writing an Opinion Essay**

*Step 1: BRAINSTORMING*

Topic: Would you consider marrying someone from another culture?

Consider this topic and write down ideas and vocabulary for your essay on a separate piece of paper.

*Step 2: OUTLINING*

Write an outline for your essay.

**Introduction**

Hook: ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Background Information:

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Thesis Statement:

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**Body Paragraphs**

Topic Sentence:

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Example Reasons:

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..........................................................................................

Counter-argument: ……………………………………………………………………………………

Refutation: ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**Conclusion**

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*Step 3: WRITING*

Use your brainstorming notes and outline to write your first draft on a separate piece of paper.