Developing Arguments in Your Writing

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Learning Objectives

• Identify components of arguments
• Consider aspects of critical, analytical writing
• Look at the structure, signposts and direction of argument
• Look at writing samples
• Relate ideas of developing critical arguments to your own writing
Small group exercise

- In groups of 2 or 3, discuss the importance (or not) of the statements in the brown envelopes in terms of the development of critical arguments
- Work as quickly as you can
- Some of the statements are completely incorrect
Why is argument important?

Examiner comment on the literature review in Ph.D. theses.


http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03075070701346899#tabModule
What is an argument?

• Main claim or premise
  – What follows from other statements

• Reasons or evidence
  – Statements that support claim
Recognising Argument Structure

- This
- Because of
- Those reasons
- Conclusion/claim
- Inference
- Reasons/evidence

Smoking should be banned because it is harmful to everyone’s health.
Exercise

If any government becomes tyrannical, then the people under that government have a right to revolt. The government of England has become tyrannical. Therefore, the people of these colonies have a right to revolt.

Conclusion?
Reasons?
Example

From O'Toole (2009)

Argument:
School-based management must be implemented because it empowers school teachers which leads to improved student outcomes

Conclusion:
School-based management must be implemented...

Inference Statement:
...because...

Claim or premise 1
...it empowers school teachers
Inference statement
...which leads to ...

Claim or premise 2
...improved student outcomes (which are desirable).
Sample: There should be no control over the right of newspapers to publish photographs and stories about public figures. The lives of people who are public figures are of considerable interest to the general public. People have a right to information about how public figures conduct their lives.

Rewritten: The lives of people who are public figures are of considerable interest to the general public. People have a right to information about how public figures conduct their lives. Therefore, there should be no control over the right of newspapers to publish photographs and stories about public figures.

(From Dunn, 2007, p.5)
Building up your argument

An alternative feminist approach suggests that women may stay in violent relationships even when they are not ‘weak’. **[Claim/thesis]** For these women a constituent of being a woman involves being there for their men and being able to maintain a relationship despite obstacles. **[Evidence/explanation]** These women tried to understand their violent partners and felt duty bound to cope the best way they could, for walking out would have been an admission of failure. **[Further evidence/elaboration]**
Assertion versus Argument

Assertion/Opinion
Between 1945 and 1980, the Australian Senate prevented the Labor Party from governing effectively by persistently failing to pass important legislation.

Supported Statement
Between 1945 and 1980, the Australian Senate prevented the Labor Party from governing effectively by persistently failing to pass important legislation (Brown, 28; Smith 36-6).

Argument
Between 1945 and 1980, the Australian Senate prevented the Labor Party from governing effectively by persistently failing to pass important legislation. For instance, in 1974 the Senate blocked eighty pieces of important legislation (Smith, 23). McGuire’s analysis of Senate voting between 1950 and 1980 shows that the Senate blocked 850 Labor bills but only five of the non-Labor party bills (41).

(From Dunn, 2007, p. 7)
“As you take notes on others’ work, you are writing about your topic and experimenting with your academic voice before your internal critic awakens, before your self-doubts kick in, and before the perdition of writer’s block can stop you.” (Single, 2010, p.56)
Model to generate critical thinking

Description

Topic / Issue

- What?
- Who?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- What if?
- So What?
- What next?

Analysis

Evaluation

Learning Development   University of Plymouth
Questions

- What is the main point or result? Is the point supported or not?
- Which text, artwork, source or data did author analyse? How get?
- Which theoretical/conceptual approaches did author apply?
- Which research methodologies, discursive methods, methods of synthesis etc used?
- How does this relate to my interests, projects, plans?

(Single, 2010, p.63)
Interactive reading in practice

- Skim
- Read before you take notes
- Marginal notes and underlining
  - Use a pencil!
- Read actively – answer your questions
  - Thoughts in margins
  - Underline relevant passages
  - Code sentences
- Preliminary notes on a sticky note
“Research has long pointed to the dramatic power of peer influence in adolescence and young adulthood, but what has not been adequately considered in previous research and prevention strategy is whether this peer influence comes simply from what other peers actually believe is the right thing to do and how they behave, or from what young people think their peers believe is right and how they think most others behave.” (p. 8)
Shape of thesis/argument

Draft and edit, draft and edit

Only final will be clearly written and well-structured!
Sample: Smith (1970) reported that bilbies come out at night and eat chocolates. Jones (1972) described the variety of beetles eaten by bilbies on their daytime trips. Wheeler (1974) reported that bilbies eat only apples.

The writer asks questions of the text:
- What is the conclusion about bilbies that can be drawn from these facts?
- What is the common denominator?

To rewrite, find the important point in the information and place it in a theme sentence in the beginning of the paragraph. What thoughts / new research / speculations do the data suggest?

To rewrite, think of the implications of the literature and develop these ideas at the end of the paragraph.
Rewritten:
The elusive bilby has provoked considerable disagreement over such essential facts as whether it is diurnal or nocturnal, and what constitutes its staple diet. Smith (1970) considered them to be nocturnal whereas Jones (1972) reported that they are daytime foragers. Smith (1970) also reported bilbies had a fondness for chocolate but his findings were rejected by both Jones (1972) and Wheeler (1974). Jones believed bilbies eat beetles, and Wheeler thought that apples were the staple food. However, neither chocolate nor apples are indigenous to the bilby habitat and it seems improbable that they are the main foodstuffs for bilbies.

Eucalyptus leaves, on the other hand, are widely available in the bilby region ….
Tips

“The story makes an interesting comparison between the upper and lower classes”

Filler sentence without specific information. Add **why** you consider the comparison interesting.

**Explain** what makes your argument or topic interesting!

**So What??**
Arguments in critical writing

- Sense of purpose
- Central idea with reasons for it
- Presents a case or viewpoint
- Writing constructed in a particular way
- Ideas constructed in a way that is clear to the reader
Structuring an argument

• Start in the introduction
  – Outline arguments to be presented
  – Arguments for & against; advantages & disadvantages

• Body – sections that elaborate points with explanations or examples

• Conclusion
  – Sums up major arguments
  – Informed opinion of issue based on arguments and evidence presented
## Plan Your Argument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One sentence for each:</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction (area of study)</td>
<td>&quot;A Ph.D. Is examined by submission of a thesis...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem (that I tackle)</td>
<td>&quot;Many students fail to complete their theses within the regulation four years...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the literature says about this problem</td>
<td>&quot;Empirical studies indicate that late submission is highly correlated with delaying the start of the write-up...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How I tackle this problem</td>
<td>&quot;A model of PhD study that encourages an early start to the thesis writing task is clearly desirable...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How I implement my solution</td>
<td>&quot;Such a model encourages the student to plan a structure for the thesis and collect material for each chapter throughout their study...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The result</td>
<td>&quot;Application of this model dramatically improves submission rates&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Easterbrook (2005)  
Plan Your Argument

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<tr>
<td>The result</td>
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Easterbrook (2005)
Figure 2.1 Visual representation of the structure and flow of literature review chapter.
Strategies for critical writing

• Sense of audience
• Selection
• Sequence
• Order
• Grouping
• Conventions
• Signposts
Signposting your line of reasoning

• Indicator words for claims
  – Therefore, thus, hence, so, as a result

• Indicator words for reasons
  – Because, since, on account of, for, in view of, for the reason that

• Tentative or ‘hedging’
In large gene families with tandem repeats, as is the case for nrDNA, unequal crossing-over may be more important than gene conversion in the concerted evolution process (Li, 1997). For example, the number of repeats can fluctuate without having any adverse effects. With a larger number of repeats being exchanged, the rate of concerted evolution increases as well. Correspondingly, homogeneity increases as the number of repeats increases. Rate then increases as homogeneity among the copies increases, leading to a self-feeding repetition. As a result of this process, it is believed that nrDNA is found in up to thousands of copies in the nuclear genome (Baldwin et al., 1995).
Several factors make the ITS region valuable for use in phylogenetic analyses (Baldwin et al., 1995). First, the ITS region is highly repeated in plant nuclear genomes, along with other components of the nrDNA multigene family including a highly variable region between the ribosomal repeat, the intergenic spacer. The high copy number of the nrDNA repeat facilitates the amplification and sequencing of the nrDNA.

Secondly, the nrDNA multigene family undergoes rapid concerted evolution as described above (Baldwin et al., 1995). This property of the ITS region is most important from a phylogenetic standpoint and promotes accurate reconstruction of species relationships from sequencing. However, non-homologous copies are occasionally present with point mutations and/or insertion/deletion events, causing small variation among the copies within a species.

Lastly, the ITS region is relatively small (ca. 700 bp) and is flanked by highly conserved sequences, the 18s and 26s nrDNA genes (Baldwin et al., 1995). Because of this, universal primers can be used to amplify and sequence the ITS region. Primers were originally designed for amplification of fungal rRNA and derived from sequences of fungi (Saccharomyces), animals (Drosophila), and plants (Oryza sativa and Hordeum vulgare) (White et al., 1990). These primers have been used successfully with members of the Liliaceae, Asteraceae, Rosaceae, and Araliaceae.
Neutral reporting verbs - summarising

Followed by “that”:

- acknowledge
- conclude
- comment
- confirm
- demonstrate
- observe
- propose
- establish
- explain
- find
- indicate
- note
- point out
- report
- show
- suggest
- state

http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/researcherdevelopment/PGR/resources/academicwriting/unit8.html
Neutral reporting verbs

Followed by ‘noun phrase’:

analyse     explore     study
define      focus on    survey
describe    identify    
discuss     investigate
examine     list        
mention     present     
question    review
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion reporting verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advocate</td>
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<tr>
<td>assert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasise</td>
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<tr>
<td>agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>assume</td>
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<tr>
<td>highlight</td>
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<tr>
<td>allege</td>
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<tr>
<td>believe</td>
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<td>refute</td>
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<td>allude to</td>
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<td>challenge</td>
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<td>suppose</td>
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<td>argue</td>
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<td>claim</td>
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<td>contend</td>
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<td>imply</td>
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<td>insist</td>
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<td>criticise</td>
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<td>maintain</td>
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</table>
In academic writing, the strength of the claims researchers make is dependent on the amount of evidence there is to support the claim or the degree of certainty felt by the researcher. The words used to indicate these degrees of certainty are words such as the modal verbs would, should, may, can, the adverbs and adjectives possibly, possible; the verbs believe, suggest, consider; and nouns such as belief, possibility, assumption, and claim. These words and constructions allow you to signal a degree of uncertainty in the claims you put forward, or to signal higher degrees of certainty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic ‘tools’ to help signal levels of certainty/uncertainty</th>
<th>Example sentences</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>any unqualified verbs Is/are</td>
<td>The results <em>indicate</em> that …</td>
<td>High degree of certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>The present results <em>are</em> evidence that…</td>
<td>High degree of certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>The present results <em>suggest</em> that …</td>
<td>Medium degree of certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could</td>
<td>The present results <em>can</em> also be used to address Piaget’s (1959) claims.</td>
<td>Medium degree of certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>may</td>
<td>The findings <em>could</em> indicate that…</td>
<td>Low degree of certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possibly</td>
<td>The findings <em>may</em> suggest that ….</td>
<td>Low degree of certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The work is <em>possibly</em> indicative of…</td>
<td>Low degree of certainty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Checklist for good arguments

• Are the reasons adequate to support the conclusion?
• Are there any hidden assumptions in this argument?
• Are there any central words ambiguous or slanted to incite prejudice?
• Are there fallacies in its reasoning?
• Is any important information or evidence omitted?
• Is any information false, contradictory, irrelevant or irreconcilable?

Dunn, 2007, personal communication
Summary

• Persuasive argument is a conclusion with reasons and evidence
• Build your argument by developing a line of reasoning that is clear to your reader
• Use structure and signposts to guide your argument
• Draft & edit & draft & edit & draft…
RESOURCES/REFERENCES

• http://port.igrs.sas.ac.uk
• http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~sme/presentations/thesiswriting.pdf
• http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/researcherdevelopment/PGR/resources/academicwriting/
• www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk
• http://learning.uow.edu.au/resources
• Dunn, R. (2007). James Cook University, personal communication
Our details

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