

Writing and Presenting Organized Arguments

Module 6, From Evaluating to Enacting

The College Board's Introduction to Task 2, Stimulus Materials

In early January each year, College Board will release academic, cross-curricular stimulus material (texts) focused on a theme representing a range of perspectives from each of the following domains:

- Natural Sciences, Technology, Mathematics, Environment
- Social Sciences, Politics, Economics, Psychology
- Arts (Visual Arts, Music, Dance, Theater)
- Culture, Languages, Linguistics
- History
- Literature, Philosophy, Critical Theory/Criticism

The following will be represented in the texts:

- Multimedia text (e.g., photographs, artwork, video, music)
 - Quantitative data
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The College Board's Introduction to Task 2, Individual Written Argument (IWA)

Students read and analyze the provided stimulus materials to identify thematic connections among them and possible areas for inquiry. Their inquiry must be based on a thematic connection between at least two of the stimulus materials. Students then compose a research question prompted by their analysis of the stimulus materials; gather additional information through research; analyze, evaluate, and select evidence; and develop a logical, well-reasoned argument of 2,000 words. The final paper must integrate at least one of the stimulus materials as part of the response.

Students must avoid plagiarism by acknowledging, attributing, and/or citing sources throughout the paper and including a bibliography or works cited (see the AP Capstone Policy on Plagiarism and Falsification or Fabrication of Information).

The College Board's Introduction to End-of-course Exam, Part B

Suggested time: 90 minutes

Four sources provided

Students are asked to build their own arguments using at least two of the four provided sources. Each of the four sources will explore a common theme through a different perspective, allowing multiple entry points for students to approach the topic.

Directions: Read the four sources carefully, focusing on a theme or issue that connects them and the different perspectives each represents. Then, write a logically organized, well-reasoned, and well-written argument that presents your own perspective on the theme or issue you identified. You must incorporate at least two of the sources provided and link the claims in your argument to supporting evidence. You may also use the other provided sources or draw upon your own knowledge. In your response, refer to the provided sources as Source A, Source B, Source C, or Source D, or by the authors' names.

Constructing an Argument

STEP 1

Know what you are going to be arguing for. What thesis or conclusion will you defend?

You will often need to research your subject's differing positions before you can fully determine this.

STEP 2

Determine your premises, which comprise the reasons or evidence that support your conclusion.

Selecting Evidence

To support your position, you may rely on many different types of evidence including measurements, statistics, authority, reasoning, observation, and experience. It is helpful to consider the strengths and limits of the different types of evidence when choosing what to include.

Consider:

- Which pieces of evidence are available?
- What type of evidence is most appropriate for the assignment or course?
- How do the different pieces of evidence support each other?
- Which piece(s) of evidence best support(s) the conclusion?
- What is the strongest evidence? The weakest?

In general, arguments rely on premises or evidence about what is known (or less controversial) in order to draw conclusions about the unknown (or more controversial). If your premises are debatable, you may need to support them with additional evidence.

Organizing Evidence

This comes in three *common* forms...
But this is by no means an exhaustive list.

The way that you organize your evidence determines the type of argument. For example, developing the logical connections between premises will produce a **deductive argument**, while relying on particular observations or measurements to infer conclusions will lead to an **inductive argument**.

Arguments from analogy are constructed by determining the similarities between two comparable issues and showing that what is known about one is likely to be true for the other. **Abductive arguments** are, generally speaking, the most complex because they are created by bringing together diverse pieces of evidence in different ways to determine the most likely explanation for an issue or state of affairs.

Note...

- A few strong and well-developed arguments are stronger and more persuasive than many weaker and undeveloped ones.
- Evidence does not speak for itself. It is crucial to explain how each piece of evidence supports your conclusion and what makes it credible.
- The strongest points are most effective at the beginning and end of your argument.

#1, The Toulmin Method

Structure

Building an argument through support

- ▶ Claim
- ▶ Data/grounds
- ▶ Warrant (justification)
- ▶ Backing (foundation/context)
- ▶ Counter-argument
- ▶ Rebuttal

Example

- ▶ Hybrid cars help fight pollution
 - ▶ For most private citizens, cars are most serious pollutant
 - ▶ Switching to hybrid will impact individuals' carbon footprint
 - ▶ This can be shown by specific statistics (give)
 - ▶ However, one might argue that driving culture is the real problem
 - ▶ And it may, but mass transit should also move to electric, and may not be entirely feasible in our culture around cars; may not be possible for suburban commuters
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When to Use the Toulmin Method

Great for most argumentative situations; follows something of a scientific method and is generally based on strong research and evidence accumulation.

#2, The Rogerian Method

Structure

Controversial Topics

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Opposing view
- ▶ Established validity
- ▶ Own position
- ▶ Contexts
- ▶ Benefits of reformed view

Example

- ▶ Issue of school uniforms
 - ▶ Often supported by schools and parents, and maybe even some students
 - ▶ Fosters inclusivity, removes the burden of trends and potential bullying based on looks, socio-economic status
 - ▶ Mandatory uniforms are problematic
 - ▶ Inclusivity is less the aim than conformity and compliance
 - ▶ This stunts identity growth, which may bring the potential for bullying, but real benefits outweigh potential costs--instead, have a dress code.
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When to Use the Rogerian Method

Rogerian is great for controversial topics in which the researcher is looking for common ground between two extremes, or if the argument is supporting a generally less widely-accepted view or a newer interpretation of a well-known problem.

#3, The Classical Method

Structure

Definition and Application

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Background/current scholarship
- ▶ Claim/proposed view
- ▶ Argumentation and evidence
- ▶ Refutations
- ▶ Conclusions

Example

- ▶ Minimum wage discussion, too many viewpoints on how much to pay
 - ▶ Currently, too many workers unable to secure basic necessities without a living wage
 - ▶ Raise the federal minimum wage
 - ▶ 80.4 million Americans work for an hourly wage, but nearly 1.3 million receive wages less than the federal minimum (raising federal will help encourage state increases)
 - ▶ Cost of living and inflation problems, even if raising the wage
 - ▶ Worth it for mental health and well-being; no decrease in productivity
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When to Use the Classical Method

Also applies across subjects and types, but is best for more theoretical, analytic work where definitions of terms and narrowing concepts or scope is a big part of the equation (think issues of interpretation, qualitative work based on perspectives, analysis of art, philosophy, etc.)

The Major Difference in these New Practices?

Acknowledging the Counter-arguments:

An argument that is entirely one-sided will not be persuasive. In order to successfully convince someone that your claim is correct, you need to be able to anticipate objections and develop responses to them. This requires awareness of the evidence and reasons that contradict your conclusion, and the ability to find the flaws in them

Ask:

- Who might disagree with my position? Why?
- What gaps or omissions are there in my evidence (or reasoning)?
- What evidence would support an opposing position?

Important!



Always treat opposing positions respectfully and fairly. This will make your own argument much stronger because it (a) forces you to attend to the very precise reasons why someone might hold another point of view, and (b) leads you to think more carefully about why you disagree.

