

Strong Thesis Statements for Argument Essays

A strong thesis statement for an argument essay states a clear position on the issue. The thesis often includes a word or phrase that signals an opinion, such as **should**, **ought to**, **need to**, **have an obligation to**, or even **must** or **had better**.

In addition, a thesis statement sometimes uses general phrases such as **for a number of reasons**, **for a number of important reasons**, or **in many ways**. Sometimes a thesis statement may list the actual reasons for supporting or opposing an idea or say how many reasons will be discussed in the paper.

Finally, a thesis statement can use hedging words such as **some** or **some people** as well as **may**, **might**, **can**, **seem**, or **appear** with the verb to limit or qualify an unsupported statement. These thesis statements often use a contrasting connector such as **although**, **while**, or **despite**.

| Type of thesis | Example thesis statement |
|--|---|
| simple thesis | It is easy to demonstrate that pets help humans in many ways . School uniforms should be required for three reasons . |
| stronger thesis, listing reasons | College students should be encouraged to pursue a career in science because of the large number of job options and the higher salaries . Taxes are a necessary part of our society; without them, we could not pay for our roads and bridges or our schools . |
| stronger thesis including possible counterargument | Although some may object to the death penalty, this punishment is a necessity to control public order and ensure people's safety . While some people think paying taxes is unfair, all of us should pay taxes because we all benefit from what they provide in our daily lives . |

- The thesis statement for an argument essay cannot be a fact. A fact is not a good topic for this kind of essay because a fact cannot be argued. For example, "the number of people in the United States" is not controversial. "The population of the United States is increasing every year" is not a good thesis statement because it is a fact, and there is no way to argue this point.
- A thesis statement should not be a personal opinion that cannot be proved. For example, "Popcorn is more delicious than peanuts" cannot be proved because this is based on one person's opinion.
- The thesis statement must state or imply a position on the issue, and the position should be very clear. For the topic of "cigarette smoking," a possible thesis statement is "The manufacture of cigarettes should be stopped." In contrast, the statement "Cigarette smoking isn't a very good idea" is too vague and general to be a thesis.

ACTIVITY 6 Writing Strong Thesis Statements for Argument Essays

Write a pro thesis statement and a con thesis statement for each topic. When you finish, compare your answers with a partner's.

1. Topic: University education for everyone

Pro thesis statement: _____

Con thesis statement: _____

Pro thesis statement: _____

Con thesis statement: _____

3. Topic: Using alternative energy sources

Pro thesis statement: _____

Con thesis statement: _____

Strong Counterargument and Refutation Statements for Argument Essays

The most important technique in persuading readers that your viewpoint is valid is to support it in every paragraph, but another strong technique is to write a good **counterargument** that goes against your thesis statement. Introducing this counterargument adds credibility to your essay. It shows that you understand more than one point of view about your topic.

After you provide a counterargument, you must give a **refutation**, or a response to the counterargument, that either disproves it or shows it to be weaker or less important than your point.

In simple terms, imagine that you are having an argument with a friend about your topic. She disagrees with your opinion. What do you think will be her strongest argument against your point of view? That is your counterargument. How will you respond to her counterargument? Your answer is your refutation.

Look at the following excerpt from “The Best Classroom” on pages 167–169. The counterargument is in italics and the refutation is underlined.

Though studying abroad offers many advantages, *some may argue that a semester or a year abroad is nothing but a vacation.* Yes, it is true that some students choose to treat studying abroad as a vacation rather than the rich academic experience that it can be. The bad actions of a few students should not invalidate study-abroad programs as a whole. In fact, in a long-term study of 3,400 students, Dwyer and Peters (2004) found that a large number said studying abroad had an impact on their world view (96 percent), increased their self-confidence (96 percent), and gave them the skill sets they needed for the career they chose (76 percent). Clearly, studying abroad is not just a party.

As you can see, what begins as a counterargument ends up as another reason in support of the writer’s opinion.

ACTIVITY 7 Writing Refutations for Counterarguments

For each counterargument, write a one-sentence refutation. Remember to use a contrasting connection word (*although, while, despite*) to begin your refutation.

1. Topic: Mandatory retirement for pilots

Thesis statement: Pilots should be required to retire at age 60 to ensure the safety of passengers.

Counterargument: Some people may believe that older pilots' experience can contribute to flight safety.

Refutation: While this may be true for a handful of pilots, the vast majority of people report weaker eyesight, hearing, and motor skills as they age.

2. Topic: National identity cards

Thesis statement: A national identity card would make life better for everyone, especially when voting, applying for a job, or paying taxes.

Counterargument: Some people might oppose national identity cards because they are afraid of the government having too much control in their daily lives.

Refutation: _____

3. Topic: Teachers' salaries

Thesis statement: Teachers' salaries should be tied to their students' test scores.

Counterargument: Some people may believe that a teacher's role in a student's test score is not that important.

Refutation: _____

Transitions and Connectors in Argument Essays

Transitional phrases and connectors in argument essays help the reader to follow the logical development of the argument. These transitions can be used to connect sentences, ideas, and paragraphs. Here are some common transitions and connectors for developing support in your argument and for addressing a counterargument.

Transitions and Connectors That Develop a Point Further

| | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|
| additionally | correspondingly | furthermore | moreover |
| also | for example | in a similar manner | similarly |
| besides | for instance | likewise | what is more |

Transitions and Connectors That Address a Counterargument

| | | | |
|------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------|
| although | even though | nevertheless | still |
| but | however | nonetheless | though |
| conversely | in contrast | on the other hand | while |
| despite | in spite of | some people might say | yet |