

Analyzing an Argument

Directions: To prepare for writing your own argument, it is helpful to analyze the arguments of others. For this activity, read an argument (article, essay, speech, etc.) and attempt to answer the following questions. These questions will help you understand the writer’s argument—how it is developed, and the unstated assumptions he/she might be making. They will also help you “dissect” an argument so you can better determine your own position to the writer’s claim.

Title: _____ Author: _____

Source: _____ Date: _____

Position and Purpose

What is the writer’s position or claim? Why does he/she think it is important?

What does the writer hope to accomplish with his/her claim? What benefits would be realized or what problems would be eliminated?

What arguments does the writer offer FOR his/her claim (the pros)?

What evidence (facts/statistics, personal examples, expert testimony) does the writer offer in support of his/her arguments?

What arguments AGAINST his/her claim does the writer recognize? What are the counterarguments? What does the writer say in rebuttal to these counterarguments?

Writer

What are the writer's qualifications for discussing this issue? What is the writer's knowledge of the subject?

What are the limitations of the writer's knowledge?

What is the writer's personal stake in the argument's outcome?

Other relevant information about the writer:

Reader

What does the writer assume about the reader's age, educational background, occupation, marital status, and political preference?

How does the writer appeal to his/her audience (with logic, emotion, and/or ethics)? How effective are these appeals? Did you respond to them positively?

What might the reader stand to gain or lose?

Other relevant information about (writer's apparent assumptions about) the reader:

Your Opinion

Based on your answers above, how credible is this writer's argument? What would the writer need to do in his/her argument to make it more convincing?