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HIGHER EDUCATION LANGUAGE AND PRESENTATION SUPPORT

Developing Arguments

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Workshop objectives

- To understand and appreciate that the development of an **argument is a key feature** of successful writing in academia
- Recognise the **important stages** in the development of an argument
- To practice **applying logic** in the development of an argument

ARGUMENT

The development of an argument is the overarching aim of essay writing

ESTABLISHING YOUR OWN POSITION

Students who already have a “view” are likely to be more selective and purposeful in their use of information

IDENTIFY WHICH SOURCES ARE RELEVANT

**Evaluate which/how evidence and ideas can be used
(apply critical thinking skills)**

COMPARING/CONTRASTING EVIDENCE/IDEAS FROM SOURCES

- Finding support for your position
- Ideas need to be 'discussed' rather than 'reported'
- Showing rather than telling

DEVELOP A THESIS STATEMENT

- Consider the issue or topic that relates to your assignment (this could be an essay, report, case study or literature review)
- Develop a thesis statement about that issue which reflects a strong viewpoint – this is your argument
- Sometimes the question may include two opposing viewpoints about the same issue – you may need to discuss both **OR** choose one side

THINK

- Questions you should think about for an argument or argumentative piece of writing often begin with: “WHY?”
- Think about the justification for your response to an assignment question.
- Now think about the **structure** to organise the argument in your writing.

STRUCTURE OF AN ARGUMENT

- **Confirmation**
- **Concession**
- **Refutation**

This is a classical structure and just one way to build an argument. There are many other ways too! If you are not sure or lack confidence, then try this structure first.

The Structure of an Argument

It is important to note that a confirmation, concession and refutation may be presented in **separate** paragraphs in a piece of writing or **within the same paragraph** or even **within a single sentence** depending the writer's intended structure.



Think About It - Discussion

Discuss with your partner or group the **benefits** of structuring an argument in the form:

confirmation → concession → refutation.

CONFIRMATION

- **Supports the thesis statement**
- **Strong, explicit topic sentences**
- **Directly answers the question**
- **Persuasive**

- A **confirmation** supports the thesis statement
- Ensure you develop **strong, explicit topic sentences** that can be used for confirmation paragraphs
- They must answer the assignment question/s **in a direct way**
- The argument must be **persuasive**

CONCESSION

- Discuss opposing views
- Recognise and concede
- Think critically
- Examine differing perspectives
- Choose the strongest opposing idea
- Explain the main points

- A **concession** discuss the opposite point of view
- Recognise and concede that other people have different opinions
- Apply critical thinking
- Examine differing perspectives about an issue
- Choose the most important and strongest idea that disagrees with your point of view (it disagrees with the “confirmation”)
- Explain the main points of this opinion and provide details and examples

- Be careful that your concession does not result in the reader ignoring your confirmation

REFUTATION

- Explain why the concession is less valid
 - Must be convincing
 - Use clear topic sentences and transition signals
 - Keep target reader in mind
-
- Refutation (or rebuttal) explains why the ideas in the concession are not as good as the opinions in your confirmation
 - If you refute the strongest opposing idea convincingly you will persuade the reader to agree with you
 - Use clear topic sentences and transition signals to guide the reader
 - Always think of why the reader should not

believe or accept this idea

Example of a Confirmation

The use of NAPLAN school results on the *My School* website can have unintended consequences. This essay argues that the way that the NAPLAN test results appear on the *My School* website gives a very narrow picture of the school, with no information about its quality in relation to important aspects of education such as social and cultural outcomes (Harris et al. 2013; Hickey 2013; Reid 2010; Snartt 2012). **Furthermore,** ‘many school communities are being publicly labelled and stigmatised through comparisons with other schools made on the basis of such limited information’ (Reid 2010, p. 12).

Source: Charles Darwin University n.d., *Academic Essay Writing*, CDU, Darwin, pp. 22-25.

Example of a Concession

As claimed by supporters of NAPLAN, such test results could be strategically used to improve school performance by identifying under-performing schools and teachers. **This notion seems to be based on the premise that** if students are under-achieving, it is because of poor teaching, and once individual teachers have been identified, measures can be taken to improve their teaching, thus resulting in higher student achievement in NAPLAN tests.

Source: Charles Darwin University n.d., *Academic Essay Writing*, CDU, Darwin, pp. 22-25.

Example of a Refutation

However, this is problematic because research has shown that many factors influence student learning, for example: socio-economic conditions and poverty; health issues; sociocultural and linguistic factors; student aspirations and learning needs; out-of-school learning experiences; and peer, family and community factors (Harris et al. 2013; Ladwig 2010). **Moreover,** schools do not start with a 'level playing field' which **negates the validity of** standardised national testing as a measure of school performance. Test results alone **are insufficient** as a motivational factor.

Source: Charles Darwin University, n.d. *Academic Essay Writing*, CDU, Darwin, pp. 22-25.

Example of a paragraph containing a confirmation, concession and refutation. *(note the order may be changed)*

While it can be argued that NAPLAN's objectives relating to driving improvements in student outcomes, and providing increased accountability to the community are clear, this paper argues that the objectives are too general. Furthermore, it asserts that *how the information can be used is not clear*. The stakeholders such as the government education authorities, schools, teachers and parents, have different and sometimes conflicting views on the objectives of NAPLAN, and the use of its data. However, for NAPLAN to be effective the Government must begin by clarifying the purposes for which it is to be used, and what it is not to be used for.

- Confirmation
- Concession
- Refutation

Source: Charles Darwin University, n.d. *Academic Essay Writing*, CDU, Darwin, pp. 22-25.

Example Essay

For an example of confirmations, concessions and refutations that run throughout an entire essay, visit:

<https://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/acike/docs/academic-essay-writing-resource.pdf> (pp. 22-25)

PRESENT YOUR POSITION IN A COHERENT MANNER

- Formality of academic writing
- Structure
- Signposting
- Style/Register
- Referencing

PRACTICE: PLAN YOUR ARGUMENT IN REAL TIME!

- On your handout sheet, write down how you intend to develop **your argument** in your next academic assignment.
- Be prepared to **explain/justify your argument** and logic to someone else.

REFERENCES

Thoreau, M. 2010, *Write on track – a guide to academic writing*, Pearson Education, Rosedale, North Shore, New Zealand.

Wingate, U. 2012, "Argument!" Helping students understand what essay writing is about', *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, vol. 11, Elsevier Ltd., pp. 145-54.

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