

9 Putting an argument together – Part 1

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Recall

- You have written an essay that was three good paragraphs and no argument.
- You know an essay can be correct and unpersuasive.
- You have finished a piece and not been sure what it proved.

New ideas

Read these first. Each idea has a short worked example. Then do the Practice below.

■ 1 The whole shape

A complete argument has a defensible thesis, a line of reasoning, evidence with commentary, and a conclusion that says what follows. Missing any one leaves the others doing work they cannot do.

Worked example. Strong evidence with no line of reasoning is a collection of facts about the topic.

■ 2 Checking the joins

Read only the thesis and the topic sentences. If they form an argument on their own, the essay has a structure; if they are a list of subjects, it does not.

Worked example. “X happened. The cause was Y. Y also explains Z. So the usual account is wrong” reads as an argument without any of the evidence.

■ 3 Sophistication

The strongest essays place the argument in a wider context, take a rival reading seriously, or make a distinction the prompt did not supply. All three add something the prompt did not ask for and the argument needed.

Worked example. Noticing that two of your own examples pull in opposite directions, and explaining why, is worth more than a third example.

Watch out: Sophistication is not longer words or more devices. It is doing something with the argument that a competent but ordinary answer would not have thought to do.

Practice

2.1 Name the four parts of a complete argument. [2]

2.2 State the test using only the thesis and topic sentences. [2]

2.3 Explain what strong evidence without a line of reasoning amounts to. [2]

2.4 Name two things the strongest essays do. [2]

2.5 State what sophistication is not. [2]
