

## STUDY SKILL 1: How to present an argument

Everyone knows what an argument is. But when you're at uni writing essays and giving presentations, the word 'argument' has a particular meaning and you're being asked to do something quite specific. It's worth taking the time to develop the skills of presenting an argument, as it's something you'll use throughout your degree. This guide takes you through a four-step process to presenting an argument in the way your lecturers and tutors will expect.

### An argument: what you need to know if you are an undergraduate

An argument aims to persuade people to accept your conclusion because you have given them convincing reasons to agree with you, whether they are reading what you have written or listening to you speak.

You want to aim for these three **p**'s:

- **put forward** the reasons for your argument, backed up with examples and evidence
- **provide reasons** for your audience to reject the views of people who take a different view to yours
- **persuade** your audience to accept your conclusion.

### What makes a well-presented argument?

When you present an argument, you are taking your audience on a journey. Your readers and listeners will be looking out for:

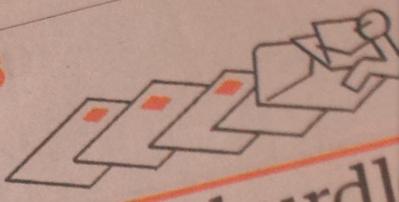
- a clear structure
- a fact-based rebuttal of the arguments of other people, showing why their arguments are wrong – and yours are right
- reasons for agreeing with your conclusion, based on examples and evidence.





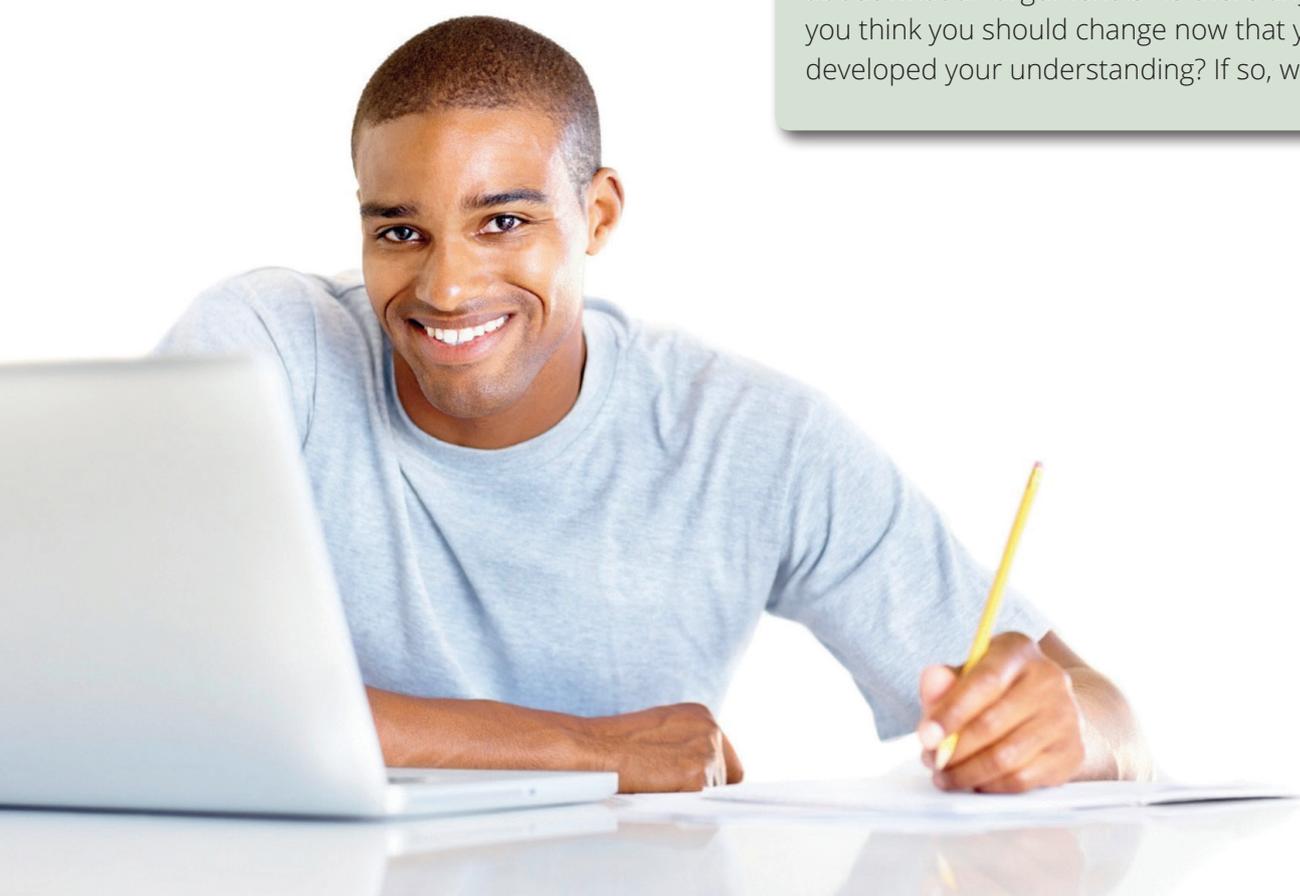
took  
chers  
kers?"

letters



Hopes and hurdles

Paul Mason relies on tired old cliches -  
and, bizarrely, his dislike of the Belgian  
justify his claim that there is  
over the Europea  
was



## How to recognise a good argument

**Exercise 1:** Start by making some notes about what you think the key components of a good argument are.

Polish your skills at presenting an argument by analysing and evaluating arguments presented by other people. Understanding what persuades you to agree with someone else's argument is a great way to get better at presenting your own arguments. Here's a simple way to do it:

- visit the letters page of a national newspaper. *The Guardian* ([www.theguardian.com/theguardian/mainsection/editorialsandreply](http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/mainsection/editorialsandreply)) and *The Telegraph* ([www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/)) are both good sources of letters from readers
- read a number of letters and select examples which present an argument
- starting at the end of the letter, identify the components that make up the argument
- ask yourself whether or not the writer has persuaded you of their argument and why

**Exercise 2:** Now that you have worked on some letters, go back to the notes you wrote for exercise 1. Do you agree with your original view about what an argument is? Is there anything you think you should change now that you have developed your understanding? If so, why?

## Step 1: GETTING STARTED

📌 **Brainstorm ideas** – make notes on your tablet or phone, write them on scrap paper, jot them down on post-it notes, scrawl them on a white board.

*Why?* To help you organise your thoughts.

📌 **Throw out some ideas** – get rid of the weaker ideas and the ones that are too vague.

*Why?* To keep your audience interested.

📌 **Put the remaining ideas in order** – not forgetting to include any counter arguments. You can change the order if you want to once you start writing your essay or presentation.

*Why?* To create a structure for your argument.

**Key question  
when you are  
brainstorming:**

**Which are my strongest  
ideas and which are  
weaker?**

## Step 2: WRITING YOUR FIRST DRAFT

📌 Get your thoughts down on screen or paper, thinking about the journey you want to take your audience on. Don't worry too much at this stage about creating a polished draft. You can spend time later checking the spelling, grammar and punctuation.

📌 Examples of words that will help you structure your argument:

- **because, as, since, the reason for this is, the first reason is** – use to introduce reasons
- **many people believe, some may argue, although, it is often claimed that** – use to introduce counter arguments
- **however** – use as a transition between a counter argument and the main argument
- **therefore, so, so it follows that, hence, we can see that** – use to draw attention to and highlight conclusions.

**Key question  
when writing  
your first draft:**

**What will make most  
sense to my  
audience?**



## Step 3: REVIEWING YOUR FIRST DRAFT

Look critically at the argument you have presented. One way to do this is by asking these questions as you read it through:

- Is there a clear route through my argument?
- Is there an obvious weakness in my argument? If so, what can I do about it?
- Have I provided examples and evidence to support the reasons I give for my argument?
- Do the examples I have chosen directly support the reasons I have given?
- Have I given enough evidence to support my argument and is it credible evidence?

- Have I acknowledged counter arguments and countered them strongly?
- Do the reasons I have given for my argument support my conclusion?

**Key question  
when you review  
your first draft:**

**If I were the audience,  
would this argument  
persuade me?**

## Step 4: PRODUCING THE FINAL DRAFT

Now you have the key points of your argument in place, you can turn your attention to working on the final draft. Here are some of the things you can do to help you keep your audience with you, from the opening sentence right through to the concluding words.

- **Use clear and concise language.**  
Check the spelling and meaning of any words you are uncertain about in a dictionary. A thesaurus will give you alternative ways of expressing words and phrases you need to use frequently to present your argument.

- **Start a new paragraph for each new idea.**  
This will help people navigate your argument and absorb it bit by bit. You don't want people to be overwhelmed by too many ideas squeezed into a single paragraph.
- **Check spelling, grammar and punctuation.**  
If they are sloppy and inaccurate, some members of your audience will be distracted and will lose track of your argument.

**Resources to help you:** Oxford Dictionaries ([www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)) and Cambridge Dictionaries (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>) both offer a free online combined dictionary and thesaurus.

**Key question  
when you produce  
your final draft:**

**Does everything I have written  
work together to keep my  
audience involved – evidence,  
examples, counter arguments,  
vocabulary, spelling  
and punctuation?**

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