

Oxford EAP

A course in English for Academic Purposes

9B

Writing Argument essays

OXFORD

Argument Essay: Organizing Ideas

- 1 Look at the essay title and approaches 1-8, which could be used to persuade people to change their lifestyle. Select what you think are the best three approaches. Give reasons for your selections.

TITLE: *In the pursuit of ever higher standards of living, the human race is in danger of destroying what has already been achieved by its consumerist lifestyle and selfish behaviour. Some people think that the best approach to persuade people to change their lifestyles is through financial incentives or disincentives. Argue for or against this approach.*

Possible approaches to encourage a change in lifestyle

- 1 providing more education (at primary and secondary school) about the way we live
- 2 imposing taxation on certain goods, not just on foods and activities
- 3 showing TV programmes on lifestyle change (both in documentaries and as storylines in soap operas)
- 4 encouraging individuals to take more responsibility for their actions
- 5 discouraging consumption generally, not just of goods but also of energy
- 6 encouraging engagement with local people through groups and community action
- 7 giving vouchers to encourage people to buy healthy food
- 8 promoting individual and group awareness of selfish actions

Perspectives

Decide on the perspective of each approach:

Example: *1 educational*

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Sample Answers:

Sample answers

- 1 educational (behavioural / social / group / financial / national)
- 2 financial (economic / medical / social / national)
- 3 behavioural (psychological / social / group / communal)
- 4 individual (psychological)
- 5 behavioural (psychological / social / group / communal)
- 6 behavioural (psychological / social / group / financial)
- 7 financial (social / individual / psychological)
- 8 social (individual / communal / group / behavioural / psychological)

Evaluate the approaches using the following questions:

- 1. Do you think the best strategy for persuading people is to use one approach or a range of approaches?**
- 2. Are all the approaches equally effective and sound, or are some of them difficult or even impossible to achieve?**
- 3. Are the approaches short-term or long-term strategies?**
- 3. Will the approaches work equally effectively in every country?**
- 5. So, when you write an argument essay, trying to persuade the reader, do you think you should use only one approach or multiple approaches in your essay?**

Sample Answers:

Sample answer

- 1 The best strategy is probably to use a range of approaches because one strategy is unlikely to work with everyone, no matter how sound it is.
- 2 All of the approaches are effective and sound, but some of them may be difficult to achieve or implement. For example, approach 2 might prove difficult because it would affect people financially, and hence affect politicians' popularity. Approach 4 could also be problematic from a behavioural or psychological perspective. However, such approaches need to be considered.
- 3 Different answers are possible. They could all be long-term, except approaches 3 and 7. As regards approach 3, over-emphasis in the long-term might be off-putting, so a periodic approach might be advisable. Approach 7 is primarily a short-term measure.
- 4 It is unlikely. It is also unlikely that the approaches will work with all groups of people within any one country.

Body Paragraph Structure

- 1 In an argument essay, the main argument is usually stated in the introduction. Each body paragraph then contains an argument with supporting arguments, evidence, explanation, and evaluation. Look at the three possible structures for a body paragraph of an argument essay. Work in pairs and discuss which structure (A, B, or C) seems most logical to you. Give reasons.

STRUCTURE A

- **Supporting argument 1**
Evidence and explanation against
- **Supporting argument 2**
Evidence and explanation for
- **Evaluation in favour of supporting argument 2**

STRUCTURE B

- **Supporting argument 1**
Evidence and explanation for
- **Supporting argument 2**
Evidence and explanation against
- **Supporting argument 3**
Evidence and explanation against
- **Evaluation in favour of supporting argument 1**

STRUCTURE C

- **Supporting argument 1**
Evidence and explanation against
- **Supporting arguments 2 and 3**
Evidence and explanation for
- **Evaluation in favour of supporting arguments 2 and 3**

Sample Answers:

Sample answer

Structure A seems most logical because the stages within the paragraph are clear. To argue for the overall argument there are two supporting arguments. Supporting argument 1 is against the main arguments and is followed by evidence and explanation. This sequence is repeated for supporting argument 2, which is for the main argument. The last stage is the evaluation in support of supporting argument 2, which acts as conclusion.

3 Look at the outline of a body paragraph. Which structure from 1 does it use?

- **Supporting argument 1** - giving vouchers to encourage people to buy healthy food
- **Evidence and explanation against** - financial approach: incentive / what is to stop people selling vouchers for less money? / buy more unhealthy foods / short-term solution / wasteful initiative
- **Supporting argument 2** - encouraging engagement with local people through groups and community action
- **Evidence and explanation for** - group action to improve conditions / individuals follow / people with different experts / responsibility for own actions / growing own food / long-term behaviour change
- **Evaluation in favour of 2** - long-term behaviour change

Answer:

Answer

3 Structure A

Stating and supporting the main argument

- 1 Read the introduction and body paragraph 1 of an essay written in response to the title in Task 1.1. Answer the questions below.
 - 1 Identify the thesis statement in the introduction.
 - 2 Is the writer arguing for or against financial incentives?
 - 3 Does the thesis statement present the writer's stance regarding the overall argument clearly and effectively? Give evidence.
 - 4 Identify the approaches the writer uses in their argument in body paragraph 1. Match them to the list in Task 1.1.
 - 5 Identify and describe in your own words the evidence and explanation for each approach.

Introduction

The world we live in is suffering from the consequences of our lifestyles, which are becoming essentially more selfish. This phenomenon is not restricted to any one country or region of the world. For the purposes of this essay, lifestyle is defined as the way in which a person or a community, or group of people, lives and works, and includes not just diet and exercise, but also living conditions, general consumption, financial and social behaviour; in fact, every action that is involved in an individual's life. A considerable amount of research has been done into persuading people to adapt their lives and lead more responsible lifestyles and there is a wealth of literature as to strategies to engage communities to do so. This essay argues that the most effective way to involve people in making decisions about their lives is not through financial inducement or penalties, but through strategies that engage not just individuals but also communities and families in taking responsibility for their actions.

Body paragraph 1

A recent government initiative in the UK suggests giving individuals £50 vouchers to buy healthy goods at participating outlets. This is perhaps a waste of public money. Harrison (2010, p.025) claims that this is not an effective use of public funds, as it is open to abuse. For example, supposing people want cash rather than vouchers. The vouchers can be sold for less than their full value. Further, if the value of eating healthily is not understood, then giving out vouchers is hardly likely to have any lasting effect. Johnson (2001, pp.126-7) criticizes such schemes for their focus on short-termism and not dealing with the issue. Perhaps, as Gonzalez and Parker (2003, p.074) propose, a better option would be community involvement, not just individual involvement. If the people around an individual or group like a family or community take action to improve their conditions, an individual is then more likely to follow, as Cooper (2007, p.204) points out. Let us imagine people in a community are invited to a local meeting with various experts on changing behaviour. They can be shown how to take responsibility for their own behaviour, through perhaps growing their own healthy food communally with children and adults being involved. With proper encouragement and support, this strategy is much more likely to lead to long-term behaviour change than the distribution of vouchers.

Answers:

Answers

- 1 *This essay argues that the most effective way to involve people in making decisions about their lives is not through financial inducement or penalties, but through strategies that engage not just individuals but also communities and families in taking responsibility for their actions.*
- 2 *Against financial incentives: is not through financial inducement or penalties, but through strategies that engage not just individuals but also communities and families in taking responsibility for their actions.*
- 3 Yes. It is clear that the focus is non-financial. The writer emphasizes that they are not arguing for a financial approach by putting it first and using a negative word (*not*) and then introducing their own approach after *but*.
- 4 Approaches 7 and 6 are used. The writer argues against approach 7 in the first sentence of body paragraph 1: *A recent government initiative in the UK suggests giving individuals £50 vouchers to buy healthy goods at participating outlets.* The writer argues for approach 6: *Perhaps, as Gonzalez and Parker (2003, p.074) propose, a better option would be community involvement, not just individual involvement.*
- 5 Students' own answers. For approach 7, the evidence and explanation are in sentences 2-7 of the body paragraph. For approach 6, they are in sentences 9-12. Sentence 12 contains the writer's overall evaluation of the two approaches and reiterates the writer's stance in the thesis statement. The evaluation acts as conclusion to body paragraph 1.

Read the sample and match the terms to relevant sections of the essay:

Title: *Consider whether human activity has made the world a better place.*

History shows that human beings have come a long way from where they started. They have developed new technologies which means that everybody can enjoy luxuries they never previously imagined. (1) However, the main stance of the essay is to illustrate that opposite is true as technologies that are temporarily making this world a better place to live could well prove to be an ultimate disaster due to, among other things, (2) the creation of nuclear weapons, increasing pollution, and loss of animal species.

The biggest threat to the earth caused by modern human activity comes from the creation of nuclear weapons. This is what poses constant threat to the nations worldwide. (3) Some may argue that countries need nuclear weapons to defend themselves, which cannot be denied, (4) but the kind of weapons that some of them currently possess are far in excess of what is needed for defence. (5) If these weapons were used, they could lead to the destruction of the entire planet.

Another harm caused by human activity to this earth is pollution. People have become reliant on modern technology, which can have adverse effects on the environment. For example, reliance on cars causes air and noise pollution. Even seemingly innocent devices, such as computers and mobile phones, use electricity, most of which is produced from coal-burning power stations, which further adds to environmental pollution and cause. (6) If we do not curb our direct and indirect use of fossil fuels, the harm to the environment may be catastrophic.

Animals are an important feature of this earth and the past decades have witnessed the extinction of a considerable number of animal species. This is the consequence of human encroachment on wildlife habitats, for example deforestation to expand human cities. (7) The main argument put forward by the animal extinction sceptics is that loss of species is natural and has occurred throughout earth's history. (8) However, the current rate of species loss far exceeds normal levels, and is threatening to become a mass extinction event.

In summary, there is no doubt that current human activities such as the creation of nuclear weapons, pollution, and destruction of wildlife, are harmful to the earth. It is important for us to see not only the short-term effects of our actions, but their long-term effects as well. Otherwise, human activities will be just another step towards destruction.

Answers:

(1) - Thesis statement:

However, the main stance of the essay is to illustrate that opposite is true as technologies that are temporarily making this world a better place to live could well prove to be an ultimate disaster due to, among other things, the creation of nuclear weapons, increasing pollution, and loss of animal species.

(2) - Perspectives:

the creation of nuclear weapons, increasing pollution, and loss of animal species.

(3), (7) - Counter-arguments

Some may argue that countries need nuclear weapons to defend themselves, which cannot be denied,

The main argument put forward by the animal extinction sceptics is that loss of species is natural and has occurred throughout earth's history.

(4), (8) Refutation/rebuttal

but the kind of weapons that some of them currently possess are far in excess of what is needed for defence.

However, the current rate of species loss far exceeds normal levels, and is threatening to become a mass extinction event.

(5), (6)- Prediction / Consequence

If these weapons were used, they could lead to the destruction of the entire planet.

If we do not curb our direct and indirect use of fossil fuels, the harm to the environment may be catastrophic.

Note:

A counterargument and its refutation can be placed immediately after the main argument, within the frames of the same paragraph, as it was shown by the sample above:

The biggest threat to the earth caused by modern human activity comes from the creation of nuclear weapons. This is what poses constant threat to the nations worldwide. Some may argue that countries need nuclear weapons to defend themselves, which cannot be denied, but the kind of weapons that some of them currently possess are far in excess of what is needed for defence. If these weapons were used, they could lead to the destruction of the entire planet.

Animals are an important feature of this earth and the past decades have witnessed the extinction of a considerable number of animal species. This is the consequence of human encroachment on wildlife habitats, for example deforestation to expand human cities. The main argument put forward by the animal extinction sceptics is that loss of species is natural and has occurred throughout earth's history. However, the current rate of species loss far exceeds normal levels, and is threatening to become a mass extinction event.

Counterargument & rebuttal can be placed in a separate paragraph:

<h1>Introduction</h1> <p>Introduce the topic, give background information, provide a rationale, and the thesis statement</p>	
Your first argument /claim + evidence, Your second Argument /claim + evidence, Your third argument/claim + evidence	B O
Counterargument + Refutation: other side's arguments + your rebuttal	D Y
<h1>Conclusion</h1> <p>Restate your premise and summarize the claims/reasons your thesis makes sense</p>	

And the corresponding organization / structure is

- A. Introduction:** Introduce main topic, mention opinion 1 vs opinion 2, and state your own opinion.
- B. Body 1:** Introduce your **first reason**. Support it with examples, details and facts from your personal experience and knowledge.
- C. Body 2:** Introduce your **second reason** and support it as in body 1.
- D. Body 3:** Introduce the **counterargument** and refute it, or show its weakness.
- E. Conclusion:** Summarize your arguments and restate your opinion (already stated in the introduction).

Whatever the structure, there must be:

CLAIMS

- **Your opinion or position on an issue, approached from different perspectives**
- **supported with evidence (facts, data, quotes)**
- **Evidence/facts explained**

COUNTER CLAIMS

- **Consider the opposite side or**
- **turn against your argument to challenge it**
- **Refute / rebut the counter argument to reaffirm your position**

Prediction/consequence can be included

Practice:

Work in groups of three and write an essay about one of these topics:

- **Climate change is a result of human activities.**
- **Education is the key to reduce crime**
- **Social media is changing how we communicate**

Write approximately 150 words.



Feedback