Developing and communicating your argument

# Introduction

In this guide you will explore how to develop a strong argument and communicate it effectively, whether in writing or in an oral presentation.

The sections we will cover are:

1. Understanding arguments and their purpose
2. Developing your argument
3. Structuring and communicating your argument.
4. Checking your argument and more support

You can go through the sections in order, or you can choose the sections which match your needs by using the menu. While we have set out the resource in linear steps, the process of constructing an argument won't be neatly linear! You will likely circle back from one stage to a previous stage as you develop your ideas.

# Understanding Arguments and Their Purpose

## What is an argument?

When defining an argument, we all have our own ideas. However, when it comes to writing an academic argument, we often simplify it as merely presenting a set of reasons to support a particular theory or conclusion. This definition doesn't quite encompass the complexities of planning and writing an academic argument, which we discuss in this guide. Below are the insights of students sharing their perspectives on what an academic argument entails.

### Student 1: Definition of an argument

**Definition:** "An argument is a 'point' - when somebody says, 'you have a point' in a discussion, they mean 'you have a valid argument that seems to be proven.'"

**Example:** Let's break that down:

Jack: "We should have tacos for dinner; they're cheap"

Tamara: "We shouldn't; they're unhealthy."

Explanation: Jack'sproposal has is to have tacos; the argument is that they're cheap.

Tamara's proposal is to not have tacos, and her argument is that she thinks they're unhealthy.

Of course, academic arguments are much, much more in-depth, but this serves to highlight what they mean.

The thing to notice is that the arguments are relative and subjective. Tacos are not factually cheap - it's cheap for Jack. Tacos might be termed unhealthy, but compared to fried chicken, they're healthier. They aren't facts by the outright; they have to be supported by other implied conditions.

### Student 2: Definition of an argument

**Definition:** "When someone isn't convinced about a proposal, then you can provide more arguments or give different arguments."

**Breakdown:** Let's break that down:

Jack: "They taste great though"

Tamara: "They're also not the cheapest thing closely - Subway's cheaper.”

**Explanation:** Jack is providing another argument for the proposal, and Tamara has refuted Jack's original argument by proving there's something cheaper.

So that's how academic arguments are made - a proposal, academically, and it requires many arguments to prove in a structured and clear manner.

There is no single "right" response to a given question or problem, but many different, possible ones. A successful academic argument is one which is clearly structured and developed, drawing on a robust evidence base.

Below are some further possible definitions of “argument” from members of our Library Student Team.

### Sonia Year 2, Mathematics undergraduate

"Argument is a form of reasoning that proceeds from one thought to another by inferences”.

### Szaffi, Final year Law undergraduate

"An argument is getting one's point across in an attempt to convince the other party of something specific."

**Tabby, Final year English undergraduate**

"An argument builds towards a larger thesis to prove a point or establish a critical angle on a text or concept."

**Raheel Year 2 Mechanical, Engineering undergraduate**

"An argument is a reasoned/logical justification or explanation used to support a specific decision, design choice, or analysis."

An academic argument exists in tension between the subjective and objective. An argument is based on subjective opinion. Therefore, different people can come up with very different responses to the same question or prompt due to their different backgrounds, values and life experiences. However, in an academic context, an argument should be presented in the most objective way possible. Each point made must be substantiated with evidence and analysis explaining how that evidence supports the overarching argument being made.

# Argument in varying contexts

Most non-practical assignments require you to present some kind of argument, though the format can vary across disciplines. For example, one of the most universally understood forms of an argument is found in a standard academic essay. In this context, you are usually given a question or choice of questions relating to the course material. Your essay must then present an argument that directly addresses the question. These short-form arguments usually range from 1500-3000 words long.

A dissertation or thesis is a much longer piece of work constructed in response to a research question or topic designed by the researcher, rather than in answer to a set question. At postgraduate level, arguments are required to go beyond clarity and logical coherence: master's dissertations and doctoral theses are expected to make a new contribution to the debate in a particular area, whether it be an original experiment or the application of an existing theory in a new context. To achieve this, a dissertation or thesis needs to comprehensively assess the existing literature (often through a literature or systematic review), which highlights the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the particular field of research. This assessment serves as evidence and justification for the thesis project, which should aim to fill an identified gap in current knowledge.

In scientific disciplines, you might be asked to produce a report that communicates the results of an experiment. While scientific reports are structured slightly differently compared with standard essays, they still require you to produce an argument. Reports usually include an introduction, methods section, results section, discussion, and conclusion. The results, along with the raw data and analysis from the experiment, form a fundamental part of your evidence base. In the discussion section of the report, you interpret the results and construct an argument about their meaning and significance within a broader cultural, clinical, or professional context.

The expectations will vary slightly in how you format and construct an argument across different subject areas. For example, law assignments and reports often include references to case law and examples which form the evidential basis for arguments. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider both your assignment brief and the specific requirements of your discipline before starting to put together an argument. For each assessment you should be given an assignment question and instructions. Similarly, in your online learning environment provided by your course or course handbook, you should have a marking criteria which sets out the skills and competencies needed to achieve each grade. Use this information to help you tailor your argument and make sure you answer all aspects of the question. Start by breaking down your assignment question, noting the key instruction words which indicate how you are expected to approach your argument.

Below are some examples of common instruction words used in assignment questions and their meaning.

## Discuss

This instruction is often used in conjunction with a quote or statement which sets out one side of a debate. In this context you are being asked to construct an argument outlining how the extent to which you agree with the statement and why.

## Summarise or outline

These questions ask you to provide a clearly organised description of the area of study. You will need to demonstrate your understanding through selecting the key points/issues whilst giving evidence to support their importance.

## Compare and contrast

These instruction words can appear separately or together. Compare and contrast questions ask you to identify and explore key similarities and differences between two topics of discussion.

## Examine

This instruction often appears in questions asking you to look at the development of debate or the factors contributing to a particular problem or outcome.

In this context you are being asked to establish key facts and issues related to the topic, providing clear justification for their importance and role in the development of a problem or debate.

## Illustrate

This instruction calls upon you to demonstrate and provide evidence for a particular process or position. For example, "Illustrate how the treaty of Versailles ultimately led to the second world war". In this context you need to produce detailed evidence and examples to demonstrate your in-depth knowledge of the subject.

## Analyse

This instruction asks you to critically deconstruct the topic of interest, breaking down its key parts and different sides of the debate. Make sure you don't just describe these debates but adopt a position of your own based on what the evidence is telling you.

## Define

This instruction challenges you to provide a clear definition of the subject question. Often the topic you are asked to explore will be abstract or the definition of it will be contested in the literature. Therefore, you will need to explore the different definitions and examine their utility, probably with reference to real life examples.

For more support on breaking down your assignment question, check out [our workshops](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/training/my-learning-essentials/workshops/?tags%5b%5d=Writing) on developing your writing structure.

# Building a strong argument

Arguments can vary widely in style and tone, but they should always be clear. Each step of your argument should be explained to the reader and supported by published scholarship.

It might be helpful to think of academic writing as persuasive writing: you are trying to convince readers what you say is true. To keep your readers in agreement with your argument you need to carefully lead them through your thought processes and analysis. It is important to show how you are making connections between the sources, how you are interpreting them, and what they mean to your overall argument.

An argument can be thought of as a chain, with each link as a point or idea. Like a chain, each point should interlink, following on from the one previously, and connecting to the one after.

Before you start to draft your assignment, writing down your main argument or thesis may be worthwhile. This can be loose to begin with but will need to be refined as you develop your assignment drafts. Once you have an overall argument, then try to itemise the points or steps you will make to move along the chain from the beginning to end.

Ensure you are clear on what your points are, and how they build and link to one another before you start writing.

## Evidencing your argument

Your points need to be accompanied by supporting evidence. Note down the evidence you have for this next to your point. When building a strong evidence-based argument, starting with the sources you intend to use can be beneficial. It can also help you to tighten your argument to suit the sources - what are the sources arguing and how might you challenge, develop or build upon them in your own argument?

Make sure to check that you are not making an unsubstantiated claim. If you find you have a point without any evidence to support it, you will need to find some or not include the point. If the evidence you've provided doesn't really support the point you're making, change the point. If you notice that the evidence doesn't support the claim you're making, it will also be obvious to your reader!

When constructing your overall argument, it's a good idea to reference any key debates in your field, your analysis of those debates, and why you will, or won't, be referring to them in your points.

## Counterarguments and reasoning

Strong arguments should demonstrate an awareness of the field in which they are situated and can include counterarguments and rebuttals (your response to the counterargument). Counterarguments can either be imagined or already published and, as the name suggests, are often in opposition or contrast to the argument being forwarded.

Imagined counterarguments can be introduced to shut down possible future critiques of your argument. They can also be used to show why your argument is the best approach or interpretation.

Imagined counterarguments are complex and sophisticated moves in a piece of writing. These require the author to use their critical analysis skills to identify where in their own argument other authors might try to disprove it, point out the weaknesses, or offer an alternative interpretation.

Potential counterarguments can be raised and then disproved in your piece of writing in order to shore up your argument against future critiques. For example, an alternative method could be discussed, but only to show why it would not work and your chosen method is preferable, or another interpretation of a source could be discussed, but only to show why your own interpretation is the correct way to understand it.

However, counterarguments can also be arguments already put forward by other authors. These counterarguments can be dealt with in the same way as the imagined counterarguments: they need to be shown to be lacking, insufficient or not applicable compared to your proposal.

## Toulmin Method

One formalised method of constructing an argument is the Toulmin Method. Below is a version of the Toulmin Method. We have changed some of the terminology.

### State point

Claim your argument for the paragraph.

### Evidence

Provide the facts your argument is based on. 'Evidence' refers to the sources from which you develop your argument. There are different types of evidence, including published material such as journal articles, books and book chapters, but also photographs and moving image works, archival materials, case studies, statistical data, and experimental results. You may need more than one type of evidence in a paragraph, including, for example, secondary literature and examples from a case study showing the idea in practice.

### Evaluate

Demonstrate how the evidence supports your claim. Don't assume the reader will interpret the evidence in the same way as you.

### Extension

Additional reasoning to support the point you are claiming, or a wider implication which connects the data and your evaluation of the point of your argument.

### Counterargument and response

An idea or theory that you have put forward as a counterargument that opposes the original point of your argument alongside your response to it.

### Qualifier

Not all arguments may need to use qualifiers, but these words or phrases state the extent to which the claim is true and establish the parameters of the argument. Parameters can be helpful in strengthening the argument. Loose arguments - those which are general and apply broadly - are much easier to critique and prove null.

# Examples of a strong argument

Following the Toulmin Method, any argument at its most basic level should include:

* A State Point
* Evidence
* Evaluation

Below is an example of an assignment question and response using the Toulmin Method.

**Example Assignment Question: Discuss how artificial intelligence impacts information gathering and research practices.**

The rise of artificial intelligence embedded in search engines demands that information access practices be updated and developed **[State Point]**. Shah and Bender (2024) argue Large Language Models running searches for users could be at the detriment of controlling which information is retrieved and produced, and user knowledge of how to search databases for information. **[Evidence]** The replacement of user input and control for the black-boxes of LLMs governing searches and their outputs therefore requires a new understanding of how to identify and verify LLM produced information. However, it also calls for a new theory of information to be able to determine the parameters of what is being considered 'information' in an age of artificial intelligence **[Evaluate]**.

Good scholarly writing should be able to move between this basic level and more complicated arguments which also include 'Extension', 'Counterargument and response' and 'Qualifier', and may also include multiple 'State points', 'Evidence', and 'Evaluate'.

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However, despite advocating for new search practices Shah and Bender (2024) do not go so far as outlining a new theory of information. How information is being identified as information is vital given the prevalence of algorithmic bias **[Reasoning]**. As Ruha Benjamin (2019) points out, the human decisions which have gone into the creation of algorithms should not be overlooked **[Evidence]**. The belief that information presented is neutral or purely a 'fact' exacerbates current biases and social, cultural and racial inequalities **[Evaluate]**; even such practices as data labelling and categorisation have a history, and are therefore culturally, socially and historically embedded (Lampland and Star, 2009) **[Evidence]**. As such, any new theory of information and information access should also encompass attention to what happens and has happened 'behind the screen' **[Evaluate]**. While it could be argued that the practices of standardisation which come with any kind of automation is nothing new in itself, as Lampland and Star's collection attests **[Rebuttal]** what should nevertheless be taken into account with AI's embeddedness in searching practices is the proliferation of misinformation. Answers are created by LLMs due to their inability to critique or challenge assumptions embedded within submitted questions (Kim et al., 2021) **[Evidence for Counterargument and response]**

# Parameters of your argument

No argument or piece of work can explore every aspect of a topic. Therefore, all research should have a clearly defined scope including set parameters and limits. If you are responding to a question set for an assignment, often your assignment brief will include parameters set by your module leader. For example, you may be asked to include a certain number of examples in your work exploring the impact or principles under study. Similarly, you may be asked to explore a certain phenomenon in a particular context or look at particular areas of a topic.

In addition to the instructions from the module leader, you may want to introduce your own parameters and limits, focusing on a particular angle of the question. So long as you acknowledge the limitations of how you've defined the scope of the question, this approach can strengthen your argument: your narrow focus allows you to explore the topic in sufficient depth to make your reasoning convincing.

If you are conducting a piece of original research or a longer project, then you will be expected to set your own research parameters and outline these clearly in an introduction. Usually, original research involves conducting a thorough review of the existing literature to identify strengths, weaknesses and gaps in its scope or evidence base. The original piece of research is then justified as filling one or more of those gaps. In this case, the existing literature helps to define the parameters of future research. These parameters could include the clinical, professional or geographical context in which the research is conducted, the interventions or methods, or the theoretical model or definition of a central concept being used in the research.

# Planning, strategies, and tools

## Planning and outlining your argument structure

The Toulmin method is a good way to ensure that your argument is supported by evidence and that you are engaging critically with that evidence.

Often academic arguments require an overarching narrative. Planning the steps by drafting a loose outline can help you to navigate both searching for literature to support your points, and also to understand what it is you are going to argue. The first draft can be adapted and refined the more you research and gather literature.

In the initial planning or drafting stages, a good place to start can be through breaking down the question or topic of research. This can help to identify what the question is asking of you if you have been set one in an assignment.

If it your own research project, have a think about any sub-sections you may need to include and how you will lead your reader through your research: what do they need to know? What are the main points of reference? If there are contentious issues in the field that relate to your research, where do you stand on these and why?

When you have noted down all the points, list all the sources found which support each point. This can be a good gauge to see if you have sufficient evidence.

At this stage, it can also be helpful to think about how one idea connects to another. You could ask yourself which makes most sense to come first. Can you justify this? If not, maybe think about rearranging the order.

## Strategies and Tools

It is worth trying out different methods in the planning stage, as different methods will have different foci. Some methods are listed below:

1. **Mind Map:** A mind map may help to make the connections between sources explicit. Try writing the connection along the line joining them.
2. **Write your assignment abstract:** This is a succinct summary of your study. It can be written either at the beginning or the end of writing your assignment. This can help with providing a framework of where the argument is going and to crystallise your thoughts.
3. **Post-it notes:** Post-it notes can be used to write each element down and can then be moved around, grouped or ordered depending on how you see each element connecting to the others.
4. **Talk it through with someone:** Whether this is explaining your ideas to someone at home or using your tutor's office hours, being able to clearly lead another person through your ideas can be a great way to clarify what points you will be making.
5. **Rubber Duck method:** When you aren't able to talk to an actual person about your ideas, it's still helpful to say them aloud. Some people find it useful to explain their argument to an inanimate object (like a rubber duck, your childhood teddy bear, or a houseplant!). This might be particularly helpful if you're not yet comfortable enough talking about your ideas with someone else - you can make mistakes, see how things sound, and take your time working out the best way to phrase something. You can also try recording yourself talking about your ideas so that you can listen back and check how your ideas link together.

Generative Artificial Intelligence tools can appear helpful if a task seems daunting or you are unsure where to start. These tools are tempting, but as information and communication scientist [Arthur Perret](https://www.arthurperret.fr/blog/2024-11-14-student-guide-not-writing-with-chatgpt.html) writes, GenAI can't actually understand and evaluate information in the way humans can. Developing an argument is part of the practice of developing your voice and thoughts on a subject; it's about coming up with new ideas. The algorithms for ChatGPT for example only turn to what has previously been associated with any key words put into the prompt to produce an answer. It does not therefore contribute anything new. More crucially, an assignment should be your work.

Take this opportunity to contribute to conversations in your field. Using AI may take away your chance to learn key skills that you'll need not just at university, but in the wider world.

# Frameworks for thinking about argument

You might find it helpful to think about the relationship between the individual point you are making in each paragraph and your overarching argument. Some people find it helpful to use a framework to understand what the argument needs to do and to visualise how individual paragraphs fit into the larger whole. Often this framework or approach is a metaphor: an idea that helps explain what your argument needs to do or look like. Some people don't find metaphors helpful and prefer to focus on describing how the argument works more literally in terms of logic. Both approaches are valid.

There are many different frameworks out there. We've picked one - the red thread metaphor - to explain below. After this discussion of the read thread approach, you can find a podcast in which members of the Library Student Team discuss the frameworks for thinking about argument that work for them.

Remember, different approaches to argument work for different people. If these frameworks and metaphors don't work for you, you might want to look for other examples: how do academics in your discipline talk about developing their argument? Alternatively, you might create your own framework, based on what makes sense to you. It doesn't matter which approach you take to thinking about argument, what's important is that it works. If you find that the framework you're using isn't working well, try talking with others on your course or academics in your department to see what they do.

## Red thread approach

This approach is also referred to as the ["golden thread"](https://uk.gingerleadershipcomms.com/article/the-golden-thread-approach-to-writing-a-great-speech) approach. According to Tamsen Webster, the idea behind the [Red Thread](https://medium.com/find-the-red-thread/what-is-the-red-thread-anyway-and-how-do-you-use-it-2fe13e5c91fc) comes from the story of Theseus and the Minotaur in Greek mythology: Theseus uses a red thread to find his way out of a labyrinth to escape the Minotaur.

The Red Thread approach is about ensuring your overall argument is threaded through each paragraph of your writing: it should be clear in every paragraph how the point you make there relates to the overall argument you're making in the work as a whole. You need to keep your argument in your audience's mind throughout, not just at the beginning and the end. Your argument is a throughline that connects all the points you make from start to finish, holding the work together. Without this connecting thread, your ideas fall apart!

If your reader or audience "loses the thread" of your argument, then they're not able to follow the overall idea: you might have made a point that isn't clearly related to the other points you're making, or you might have started to waffle, including material that isn't directly relevant to your argument. To thread your argument through, you can use signposting techniques. It will also help when you're editing your work to check that at the end of each paragraph, you have a sentence or two that explains how the point you make in that paragraph backs up your overall argument: this is where your overall argument reappears - you remind your reader what the overall point is that you're making so they can follow what you're trying to argue.

Making sure your audience can hold onto the thread of your argument is especially important in longer pieces of writing, like dissertations and theses. The longer the piece of work is, the easier it is for your audience to get lost in your ideas and confused about what overall point you're making. For dissertations and theses, academic writing expert Pat Thomson advises using your contribution (what your research found out) as "the line of argument that holds things together". To check your argument is threaded through your work, you might find it helpful to use reverse outlining.

## Student Team Podcast

Listen to the podcast or read the transcript below, to hear from members of our Library Student Team about how they think about developing and communicating arguments in their work.

### Developing Argument: A Conversation Share, Transcript

**Tabby:** Hi everyone. I'm Tabby and I'm a member of the Library Student Team. I'm here with Szaffi.

**Szaffi:** Hi guys!

**T:** And today we'll be talking about how we develop arguments and how we approach thinking about them. There are a few key points we'll be addressing today, including how to craft your argument and how to think critically. And you can use any of these ideas and tips alongside your own workshop materials. To kick things off, Szaffi, what's the first thing you think of when you start to craft your own argument?

**S:** Well, to me, when I think about an argument, I think about weighing different options to decide on a specific outcome I would want to conclude on.

**T:** That's such a great approach, especially when we need to convince someone of a point or an opinion.

Academic work can make it so difficult to truly present your own thoughts and interpretations, and it’s helpful to be able to argue your corner while still appreciating that there are two sides to a question. That's definitely one of the easiest ways to get a First.

**S:** Oh, 100%. However, I think having the balance of your argument established is just as important as being able to introduce and pitch your argument, especially in essays and reports where there's a standard introduction, main body, and conclusion structure. It's like being a lawyer. You have to give an overview of your case while still being able to prove your own point, whether it be defence or prosecution. The marker becomes a jury too.

**T:** I've never actually thought about it like that, but you're right! If you want to be convincing and when you need to be coherent, and supporting yourself with evidence, whether this be data or report from an expert, is really helpful. All of these things add up to a really great, structured argument, and you'll be well on your way to impressing the jury, or, in this case, your seminar tutor.

**S:** I think it's also important to remember that you can't just simply rewrite the information you have learnt, because that is not furthering or adding anything to the discussion. You should have an idea of what you want to convince the reader of, and once we've decided what we're going to argue, we need to think about how to develop this. Tabby, do you have any thoughts on how to start this process, or maybe any strategies that you use to help develop your own arguments?

**T:** I think the first thing that I tend to think about are, what are the strongest points that I can make. So, if I can come up with two or three strong points about something, they're definitely much more impactful than, kind of, five smaller or mediocre reasons. For me as an English student, and I imagine a lot of this will apply to humanities as well, we're always told "depth over breadth". So if you can delve into a point and back it up with critical materials like journal articles or interviews, even if you're using these as points to disagree with to further your argument, it shows that you can evaluate information clearly and concisely. It also makes it easier to make your argument more original, which definitely increases your chances of a higher mark. Szaffi, do you have any other ideas about this?

**S:** Yeah, that makes complete sense. After all, it is quality over quantity. What's important for me in crafting a strong argument is acknowledging the other side of the argument. It's more persuasive and impactful to pay attention to other ways of thinking and their validity, but then to present your own arguments as the overarching winner, to demonstrate how your argument is better in comparison to the alternatives, making it overall stronger.

**T:** Yeah, that's really important, and let's not forget to include evidence. You can't just say things without supporting them with proof, even if they do seem like common sense to you. For me, that's quotations from my texts and clearly marking when these are from primary texts or secondary texts. But for you, Szaffi, what kind of evidence do you tend to include in your essays?

**S:** Yeah, it really depends on the subject that you're studying. For example, a STEM student might use statistics and case studies to back up their own research, whilst for me, in Law, I would use cases and dissenting judgments to explain my own reasoning to support my conclusions. The point is not to be too subjective and to stay close to the marking criteria. Unless, of course, you're asked to write something like a reflective essay or your own opinion forms to answer the answer itself.

**T:** So, when you've got a good, strong argument on all this evidence as well. How do you like to put them together?

**S:** I like to think about structuring my argument like a sandwich by thinking of introductory and closing statements like bread and the evidence as the filling.

**T:** That's such a good analogy. It's a great step by step process for making sure every point is well explained. You can use it when you're planning to which I do in that structure as well. I also think it's worth mentioning now, but don't be afraid to shift paragraphs around if it makes more sense this way, especially when you're in, kind of, the redrafting stage. And it’s also important to think about how we deliver our arguments. Szaffi, have you got any thoughts?

**S:** Well, the way I like to structure each argument is by making sure the first part clearly states the point I am arguing. I then like to refer to sources that share the same view and insert these in by paraphrasing direct quotations or simply signposting the relevant sources. I then refer these back to my stated point and use it to academically validate my argument. I then rinse and repeat until all my supportive arguments are ticked o? my essay plan and, helpful tip, by the way, try to link each argument for a more cohesive sounding essay.

**T:** And always try and link your points back to your question.

**S:** Oh, definitely. Now let's talk about presentations as another way to get your arguments across. Tabby, what's involved when you're coming up with those?

**T:** I think before I talk about the prep, I think it's really important to talk about how written essays and presentations are actually quite similar. For everyone listening, presentations, while they do seem scary and very different to a typical written essay, should definitely be approached in the same way. So, with fully developed and supported points, but just in a verbal version. Before presenting, I tend to prepare properly, because I think a lot of people forget that we still need strong arguments in spoken work too. I personally use cue cards with my key points, including quotes and evidence, and I practice these to really get used to talking about them without much help. It's also super helpful to put effort into making your cue cards more detailed than the slides you've created. This is because if you just read every single word on each slide and you don't include anything else, it definitely becomes more scripted and robotic when you should definitely inject your personality while still maintaining a strong argument, like we mentioned earlier.

**S:** I see you. I think it's also helpful to read around the subject, should any unexpected questions come up during or after the presentation. This personally helps me to flow better during a presentation, as it helps me reword my points in relevant ways that get my point across whilst also sounding less robotic. Workshops on presenting confidently, drafting arguments, and more, are offered by the library, and you can sign up on the library website.

**T:** I also think that after you've completed writing a draft of your argument or signed and prepped your presentation, it's really important to proofread and ensure that your points and your evidence are clear and cohesive. Personally, to check my arguments, I use a model called "It says, I say, and so" from the referencing workshop, which can be found on the library support for writing page. It refers to the process of outlining your argument to emphasize how your point is relevant and useful. If an idea doesn't work in the "It says, I say, and so" context, I'll return to the drawing board and restructure my points or change my ideas. Just remember that you're trying to convince people with your points and ultimately be as persuasive as possible.

**S:** Interesting. I also sometimes ask a friend or colleague to proofread what I've written, or use my flatmates as a practice audience so that they can give their opinions, because sometimes we can't see the mistakes in our own writing, and it’s good to get a second opinion.

**T:** Definitely, I do that all the time, too. And how do you tend to close your arguments?

**S:** So, in my experience, closing your argument is - it's a chance to remind a reader or your audience of the points that you've argued using supporting evidence. This is your chance to really convince them. It's not a good idea to introduce anything new in this section. But yeah, so you would summarize and include any overarching ideas and really try to think whether you've properly satisfied all the claims that you've made throughout your arguments and in your introduction as well.

**T:** Yeah, definitely circling back to the introduction by answering all the claims and concluding with condensed answers, is always a good idea, because it shows that you've really engaged with your topic and that you've got a real understanding of what you've argued. This makes it more convincing, and obviously helps you get a better mark, too.

**S:** Oh, that's so true. Thanks for listening, everyone. We hope we've helped you build your own arguments and that you now feel ready to draft your own. Please remember that the process of crafting an argument is a learning curve and that it takes time, and every mistake is simply an opportunity to build upon your skills for next time.

**T:** Definitely, and just as a reminder for everyone listening, the library website has extra information, and the team run even more workshops and drop ins. So, if you've ever got any more questions about developing your argument or even searching systematically, critical analysis, proofreading, and much more. There are plenty of in person and online resources to choose from.

**S:** Now you're ready to draft your own argument, and even if you need further support, the library team is always here to help you.

**T:** Thanks everyone.

**S:** Thank you!

# Communicating your argument

There are different ways you might be asked to communicate your argument. Often it will be in the form of a written argument, but you may also be asked to present your argument orally or visually using something like a poster. In the next section we will explore tools and strategies to help you communicate your argument, first looking at written arguments, then oral presentations before finishing with visual projects.

## Writing your argument

When planning out your written argument it's helpful to break things down into individual paragraphs. Each paragraph should introduce a distinct point in your argument, supported with evidence and analysis, whilst building on the points made in previous paragraphs. If you ensure that the paragraphs in the main body of your work include all of these elements, then you are likely to produce a strong critical argument. Consider your word count and use this to gauge the number of points you can include in your argument. A 1,500-word essay may only allow space to develop four or five main points, whereas a 10,000-word dissertation will require you to put forward a much more detailed response to the research question.

There are several different models you can use to help structure your paragraphs. It doesn't matter which model you use, simply choose the one which makes most sense to you. One example is the Point, Evidence, Evaluation and Transition model (PEET).

**Point:** Start each paragraph with a statement introducing a new point in your argument, which will be the subject of the paragraph.

**Evidence:** Always include evidence which supports the point you are making. This evidence might take many forms, depending on your discipline or the type of work you are producing. For example, if you are writing the discussion section of a scientific report, you might refer to graphs or data from your results section in order to make a point about their significance for the field of research. If you are writing a systematic or literature review then the "evidence" you include could be a summary of the findings of several papers, supporting a point about the strengths or weaknesses of the current literature.

**Evaluation:** To demonstrate critical skills in your work, you must evaluate the evidence, explaining how and why it supports the point you are making.

**Transition:** Finish your paragraph with a transition sentence, which links the conclusion of your current point to the point discussed in the next paragraph. Using transition sentences helps to create flow within your writing, providing clarity for the reader at each stage of your argument.

Another model you might find useful is It says, I say and So

**It says:** The "it says" element of your paragraph is where you report on the evidence. For example, you might include some evidence from another scholar or secondary source.

**I say:** The "I say" element of your paragraph is your analysis. This is where you draw out your own critical voice to achieve higher level marks. Make sure that your analysis links the evidence to the point you are making - how does it support your argument? Remember to include reference to counter arguments in your work, providing a clear justification for why these are less plausible than your own position.

**And so:** The "and so" element of your paragraph is where you make a case for the significance of the evidence and your analysis. How does it support your overarching argument? What does this mean for the sector/professional or clinical context?

As long as your paragraph includes all of these elements it doesn't matter if they don't appear in this neat linear order. It might be that you go through several cycles of "it says, I say and so" in one paragraph to fully develop your point.

## Preparation and presenting your argument

An oral presentation actually follows a very similar structure to a written piece of work, with an introduction, several main points, and a conclusion. However, these are communicated using spoken rather than written words. When planning an essay, you can use the word count to predict how many points you need to make. When planning a presentation, use the time slot you have been allocated to gauge the number of points you will be able to cover.

For example, in a five-minute presentation you might need a one-minute introduction and a one-minute conclusion, with time to cover two to three main points in between. It is unlikely that you will be able to cover all the details of your argument or include everything you have researched in your oral presentation, so it is important to spend some time prioritising which points are the most important. You could use something like a mind map to visualise all the different points and evidence and start to piece them together. Another strategy you might find helpful is trying to write an abstract for your argument.

An abstract is a short summary, usually provided at the start of an academic paper, highlighting its research aims/question, methods, key findings, main argument and any limitations. Depending on what your task/assignment is you might not be able to provide all of this information in great depth. For example, if you are producing a presentation based on a set question for a humanities subject, you might not have a set methodology you are using. It can be tempting to try and include everything you have read to showcase your knowledge. However, any other supporting research you have done is not wasted - this background knowledge is what allows you to make critical decisions about what is most pertinent to include and it will help you to answer any further questions effectively. Use your introduction to set the parameters of both your argument and your presentation - outlining what you will cover and in what order.

Just like in a written argument you can use models like "It says, I say, and so" to structure and develop your key point slides. It may help to think of each slide like a paragraph in an essay. In order to present a convincing argument, each slide in your presentation will need the same key elements - a statement to introduce the point being made, evidence, analysis and a transition to link it to the next slide.

# Refining and editing your argument

## Maintaining clarity

While it is very helpful to have some form of plan before starting to write, it is normal for your argument to develop and change through the process of writing. Therefore, see your plan as a guide, reviewing and tweaking it as you go along. If you find yourself stuck when writing a particular section this might be a sign that you need to return to the planning stage. Maybe the paragraph you are trying to write is no longer necessary, due to additions or changes you made to previous points. Each paragraph and piece of evidence you include in your work should be essential to your argument to the point that your argument would not make sense without it. Sometimes, if you are struggling to edit a particular section or figure out where it fits in your work, it is because it doesn't belong there at all.

## Refining your argument

When you check over and edit your work, you will want to refine your argument. As mentioned in the section on Building a strong argument, if your argument is too broad or general, it will be easier to refute and less likely to convince your audience. If your argument is specific, nuanced, and carefully worded, your argument will be harder to disprove.

The philosopher of science Karl Popper used the example of the claim "all swans are white" to explain his theory of falsifiability: the only way to verify this claim would be to find every single swan that has ever existed, but to disprove the claim, you only need to find one black swan. To strengthen this argument, you would have to be specific about which swans are white ("the five swans currently swimming in this pond are white") or add more nuance to the claim ("some swans are white").

For more examples of ways to introduce nuance and caution into your arguments, check out the [Academic Phrasebank](https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/).

When you check your argument and the points you give to support it, ensure that your argument is more than a statement of facts ("dogs exist" is not really an argument, because no rational person would disagree with you that dogs exist) but narrow enough that your argument can stand up to scrutiny ("Some dogs have shown the capacity to understand sign language").

## Reverse Outlining

When you have a draft, or even when you're partway through a draft, reverse outlining can help you check the structure and flow of your argument through your writing or presentation. Reverse outlining is like writing a plan after you've started working on the project: it helps you visualise the work as a whole, understand the direction your argument is going in, and identify any sections that need changing.

Using the PEET or "It says, I say, and so" models discussed in the section on Writing your argument, you go through your work and pull out the key points you make in each paragraph. It might help to print out your work and use highlighters and sticky notes to

label the key point you make in each paragraph - usually this will be the first sentence. Alternatively, you might find it helpful to use the highlighter function and comments in Word. You then write out the key points as a bullet point list, so you can easily see the flow of your argument as it develops across your paragraphs. If the points don't logically follow on from one another, or a point seems out of place, you can easily move around, change, add, or remove key points from this reverse outline. If you're partway through writing, this might help you think about where your argument needs to go next, which points you still need to make and in what order. You then apply this reverse outline to the drafted work, making changes where you've identified they need to be made.

# Summary and further resources

## Summary

In this guide, we've covered a range of different strategies and approaches to developing and communicating argument in your writing. We've examined what an argument is, what it might refer to in different disciplines and formats, and how to create a strong and convincing argument. Because "argument" is a complicated concept to understand, we've explored ways to think about argument in relation to your work, as well as practical techniques for checking and adjusting your argument.

If you've received feedback on developing argument in your work in the past, hopefully you now feel more able to act on that feedback in future work. If you still have questions about how to work on this skill, check out the suggestions in our Further Resources section.

* Does each paragraph include a transition sentence which links the conclusion of one point to the start of the next point in your argument?
* Does each paragraph include further analysis which highlights the significance of the point made in the context of your overall argument?
* Does each paragraph include analysis, where you outline how the evidence supports the individual point you are making?
* Does each paragraph include evidence such as: facts, statistics, secondary literature, primary sources, case studies or the results of an experiment"?
* Does each paragraph include an opening sentence introducing the point being made?
* Return to your plan, have you including everything you set out to? Your plan may have changed throughout the process, which is okay, but make sure you are clear on the reasons why something in your original plan is no longer in your draft.
* Does your argument include reference to and a rebuttal of possible counter arguments?
* Make sure to check that you are not making an unsubstantiated claim. If you find you have a point without any evidence to support it, you will need to find a source which supports it.
* Have you reviewed your argument?
* Is your argument specific and nuanced enough to be convincing?
* Have you created a reverse outline of your work?
* Have you checked your argument is threaded through your work?