

Researching the Argumentative Essay

What Is an Argumentative Essay?

The argumentative essay (also called the pro/con essay) starts with an introduction in which the writer clearly introduces the topic and informs his audience exactly where he stands on a controversial issue; this stance is often identified as the [thesis statement](#). The goal of the argumentative essay is to persuade the reader to agree with your position on an issue or controversial topic. Keep in mind, that to argue intelligently against people who disagree with your point of view, you must first become an expert on all aspects of the issue - including all points of view that disagree with your view. Research becomes vital, and you must discover appropriate, credible information to understand the history of the problem, the extent of the problem, solutions that have been suggested, and the ramifications if the problem remains unsolved. A persuasive argument must be backed up by factual data and expert research in the field.

Pro/Con Resources - Choosing a Topic, Researching an Issue

Good pro/con resources present various points of view in historical context. Many also include statistical information, research studies, interviews, and testimonials. [Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#), [Issues and Controversies on File](#) and [Justice Talking](#) are great places to see lists of interesting and controversial topics, plus find background or current information and a variety of points of view. If you're having trouble coming up with a topic, think about recent newspaper editorials, news magazine headlines, watch *Dateline* or *60 Minutes* on television, or listen to National Public Radio. Your topic must be one that is arguable – and one that can be discussed in depth. Be aware that many instructors don't want you to choose an over done topic like abortion, euthanasia, gun control, or freedom of speech. In addition to the pro/con resources mentioned here, our online databases contain scholarly full-text journal articles that can also lend authority to your argument. See [Find Articles and Research Information](#) for a complete list of available databases.

Below are comparisons of some basic pro/con sources in our CSN libraries.

Source	Why Use This Source?	Location
Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center	Discover difficult to find, opposing points of view on issues. You will find magazines, journals, books, and newspapers, and position papers.	Online and in-print
Issues and Controversies on File	Find objective, in-depth information on the most prominent and hotly debated issues of the day with clear explanations of opposing points of view.	Online and in-print
Congressional Quarterly Researcher (<i>CQ Researcher</i>)	Find information on argumentative topics since 1991, including viewpoints, detailed background information, chronologies, and bibliographies in about 20 pages.	Online and in-print
<i>Contemporary World Issues</i>	Find chronologies, statistics, glossaries, organizations, bibliographies, and biographical information about important figures.	In-print
<i>Taking sides</i>	Find topics written in the style of debates with useful introductions and postscripts for each issue	In-print
<i>Current Controversies</i>	Find issues with exhaustive survey of the argument, diversified opinions, bibliographies, and a list of organizations to contact	In-print

Statistics - Make Your Point with Numbers

Used carefully and appropriately, well chosen statistics can sometimes emphasize your point of view better than words alone. These sites will help you locate statistics:

Source	Why Use This Source?
Fedstats	Find statistics from more than 70 Federal government agencies
Statistical Abstract of the United States	Find current and historical United States statistics
NationMaster.com	To create customized charts using selected statistics
Statistical Resources on the Web	Find statistics-oriented web sites by subject
U.S. Census	Find statistics kept and analyzed by the U.S. Census Bureau: housing, income, foreign trade, etc.
Population Reference Bureau	Find U.S. population data covering areas such as "Children," "Education," "Marriage and the Family," "Migration," "Income and Poverty," etc.
City-Data.com	Find statistical profiles of U.S. cities
Bureau of Labor Statistics	Find economic (labor force) statistics, ("Inflation and Consumer Spending," "Wages, Earnings, & Benefits")
Nevada Statistical Abstract	Statistics about Nevada

Web Sites - Evaluate Information Carefully

Web sites are easily found for controversial topics. Exercise caution in using information from web sites. Be critical and ask important questions: who wrote the information, what are their qualifications, where did they get their information? Many web sites, especially sites dealing with controversial topics, are created by individuals and organizations trying to promote their special interest and bias, and they are not giving you a balanced view on the topic. See [Evaluating Web Sites](#).

Cite Your Sources

Your essay may require a specific citation format. Refer to your course syllabus, assignment notes or handouts from your instructor for specific citation instructions on your assignment. For guidelines on works cited pages and quotation formats, see the appropriate CSN Style Guides:

- [MLA Guide](#)
- [APA Guide](#)