

Essay Writing

Unit 4A – Developing an Argument: Being Persuasive

INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning Centre



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

This unit's place in the whole module:

Unit 1A How to be analytical:
What is analysis?

Unit 1B How to be analytical:
Setting up a taxonomy

Unit 2A How to structure an essay:
Developing an essay structure

Unit 2B How to structure an essay:
Writing introductions and conclusions

Unit 3A How to use evidence:
Developing an argument out of the evidence

Unit 3B How to use evidence:
Supporting your argument with the evidence

Unit 3C How to use evidence:
Avoiding plagiarism

**Unit 4A How to develop an argument:
Being persuasive**

Unit 4B How to develop an argument:
Being critical

UNIT 4A. How to develop an argument: Being persuasive

OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT

After you have finished this unit, we hope you will be able to

- identify the difference between analysis without argument, and analysis with argument
- develop and present an argument of your own based on evidence

IDENTIFYING YOUR PROBLEMS WITH DEVELOPING AN ARGUMENT

If you have been having difficulty in developing the argument of your essay, your marker may have made a comment on your writing similar to these:

- *"Your bibliography is quite extensive and you appear to have read fairly widely. However, I can't see what line you are taking. What is the argument?"*
- *"You have made some good critical comments about the readings, but there does not seem to be an overall argument flowing through your discussion."*

INTRODUCTION TO THIS UNIT

This unit deals with how to develop your argument in an essay. So far in this module, we have looked at how to be analytical in the way you process information and ideas for an essay, how to structure your essay, and how to use evidence. However, even after carrying out all these processes, you may still find that you have not written a good essay. The reason for this might be that you have not developed your argument clearly and adequately.

1. ADDING ARGUMENT TO ANALYSIS

Most types of academic writing that you will have to do will require you to be analytical rather than simply descriptive. They will also require you to use evidence to support your points. Finally, in most types of writing in the humanities and social sciences, you will also need to develop a particular point of view which is your way of seeing the topic.

Exercise 1

Read the following short text, written in response to this question: "Analyse the relative advantages of cars and buses for transporting people within cities." Is this a very convincing comparison of cars and buses? Would you refer to it as a persuasive piece of writing?

- a) A car, like a bus, is a vehicle for transporting people. Cars can usually carry a maximum of 5 or 6 people whereas buses can carry many more. Most cars use petroleum or diesel fuel as do buses, but there are some cars and buses which are electric. Many people are killed or injured each year in car accidents. Bus travel, by contrast, is a very safe form of travel, although just one serious accident can claim many lives. In Australia, most people drive cars, and the roads of many urban centres are choked with this form of private transport. Buses can reduce the*

amount of traffic on the road because they can carry more people, and therefore they save on fuel and other costs. Buses generally operate on urban, suburban, or inter-urban routes. As well as buses operated by the government, there are some private bus companies, particularly for long distance travel.

☺ **KEY** Before going on to reading the next text, you should read the notes in the Key to make sure that you have understood the structure and purpose of this text.

Exercise 2

This redraft of the text is the one we looked at in the first unit, when we looked at how to be analytical. Read the text again and discuss the same question - is it a very convincing comparison of cars and buses? Is it a persuasive piece of writing?

- b) *Two of the most common vehicles for transporting people are cars and buses. Whereas the capacity of the car is usually limited to about 5 or 6 people, the greater passenger capacity of the bus brings savings on fuel and other costs as well as reducing the amounts of traffic on the road. The ownership of buses is usually governmental or business which ensures that bus travel is generally safer than travel by privately owned cars, although just one serious accident can claim many lives. However, public ownership also means that buses are often not as convenient as private cars in terms of their accessibility to all areas.*

☺ **KEY** Before going on to the next text, you should read the Key to clarify your understanding of this text.

Exercise 3

Now here is another redraft of the text, this time written in a more persuasive way. Underline the words or phrases which you found most useful in showing that it was a persuasive argument.

- c) *Of the two main forms of transport for people, buses are more effective than cars for a number of reasons. The greater passenger capacity of the bus ensures savings on fuel and other costs as well as reducing the amounts of traffic on the road. Secondly, the increased safety of bus travel as a result of ownership being governmental or business ensures that deaths and injuries from accidents are minimal, compared with the numerous deaths and injuries from car accidents. Finally, the accessibility of buses to most areas is strategically possible because buses use the established road system, so that little development is needed in order to extend a new bus route. Indeed, the potential for a bus transport system to be as convenient as private cars, combined with the other advantages of buses over cars, provides a convincing argument for the expansion of the bus transport system, rather than the continuation of a costly, inefficient and unsafe system based on privately owned vehicles.*

☺ **KEY** Check with the key once again before you go on.

2. THE LANGUAGE OF ARGUMENT

To help you understand how these three texts are different, we will focus on how we have added argument to the analysis. The important words or phrases showing the argument in Text c. have mostly come at the beginnings of the sentences. These beginnings of the sentences, which are referred to as the Themes in linguistics, are very important in helping to show you what the text is about. When we make comparisons between different texts, it is very useful to look at their Themes in order to find out what the writer is most concerned with. This exercise is designed to show you the way that the argument has been added to the analysis by putting the key words of the argument into the Themes.

The following table summarises the Themes of the the three texts. (Each sentence beginning, up to the main verb, has been listed in the Table.)

THEMES IN THE CARS AND BUSES TEXTS A, B, C.

<u>Text a</u>	<u>Text b</u>	<u>Text c</u>
A car, like a bus cars	Two of the most common vehicles for transporting people	Of the two main forms of transporting people, buses
Most cars	Whereas the capacity of the car	The greater passenger capacity of the bus
Many people	The ownership of buses	Secondly, the increased safety of bus travel as a result of ownership being governmental or business
Bus travel, by contrast	However public ownership	Finally, the accessibility of buses to most areas
In Australia, most people		Indeed, the potential for a bus transport system to be as convenient as private cars, combined with the other advantages of buses over cars
Buses		
Buses		
As well as buses operated by the government, there		

Perhaps the most noticeable difference between the three texts is the number of words in the Themes. Text a. has mostly very short Themes, Text c. has very long Themes, and Text b. is in the middle. Secondly, the themes in Text a. are mostly cars and buses, which is exactly what you would expect of descriptive writing. The purpose of this text is to tell us the characteristics of these two things. In comparison, the themes in Text b. are mostly the categories that provide us with an analytical comparison of cars and buses. This is exactly what we expect of a piece of

writing that aims to analyse the relationships between the two things.

In Text c, the Themes are essentially the same analytical categories, but with extra words that show the point the writer is making. We can see the argument here in the foreground. Instead of just showing that "capacity" is a category for comparing cars and buses, we discover that buses have greater capacity, and so we know at the beginning of this statement that the writer thinks buses are better in terms of capacity. Likewise, instead of just finding out that cars and buses can be compared in terms of their "safety", we discover that this writer is putting an argument that buses are safer than cars. To summarise:

Descriptive writing	Analytical writing	Analytical Persuasive writing
Short Themes about the Things being described	Longer themes about the analytical categories used to show relationships between Things	Even longer themes about the interpretation of the analytical categories to develop an argument

Exercise 4

Here is a different text for you to critically evaluate in terms of whether it is persuasive or not. You should easily recognise this material by now, since you have been reading it and working with it through this whole module. The questions you have to ask when you read this piece will help you to review all the units in the module:

- a) Is this piece of writing persuasive? Does it develop a particular point of view?
- b) Does this piece of writing have an analytical structure, or is it merely descriptive?
- c) Is the evidence used appropriately to confirm a point of view?

Tobacco becomes a net cost to society when a large enough proportion of the population smokes enough to suffer the impact of tobacco-induced diseases (NSW Cancer Council, 1985: 21), resulting in lost production from sickness, health care, loss of life and property destroyed by fire (Miller, 1982: 182). However, tobacco has a nett advantage to the economy by maintaining employment levels (Small Retailers' Association, 1982: 42; Gray and Walter, 1986: 267) and providing an easily grown cash crop (UNFAO, 1978: 290). The majority of governments extract huge taxes from the tobacco industry, particularly at the point of sale (Mathews, 1978: 17) whilst the tobacco manufacturers continue to make large profits in spite of the economic recession (Prices Surveillance Authority, 1985).

Exercise 5

Using all the information you have been provided in this module on tobacco use, construct a short essay on the topic "Discuss the economic effects of tobacco use". Your essay should be analytical, based on evidence, and persuasive of a particular point of view.

ANSWER KEY ESSAY MODULE

Unit 4A

How to develop your argument: Being persuasive

Exercise 1

Text a) is not a persuasive piece of writing. It is merely descriptive. If you thought it is persuasive, then this is just because you are reading a point of view into it. Instead, this piece just provides statements about the characteristics of cars and buses.

Exercise 2

Although this text provides an analysis of the topic, by contrasting cars and buses in terms of some significant categories (capacity, ownership, and accessibility), there is still not a particular point of view being expressed. We only find out the objective analysis, in answer to the question "how are cars and buses different?" But we do not find out what the writer's judgement is, in answer to the question "which is better for an urban transport system - cars or buses?"

Exercise 3

In this text, the writer's point of view is clear. The writer is making a judgement and presenting a strong point of view.

Exercise 4

This text does not develop a particular point of view. It merely summarises some evidence relevant to the topic, but it does not use that evidence to support a particular argument.

Exercise 5

Bring your essay along to your next Individual Learning Program appointment for discussion with your ILP tutor.