

Module 7: Structuring an Argument

Aims of this module:

- to explain the beginning to end structure of an essay
- to identify the purpose and parts of an introduction
- to show how the body of an argument essay is structured
- to identify the purpose and parts of a conclusion

In this section we will look at the structure of an argument essay – both in terms of the whole essay and in the individual arguments which are used to support the thesis. This module should be read in conjunction with Modules 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9.

Beginning to end structure

When we think of the larger scale of a whole essay, it is useful to capture the relationship between the beginning, the middle, and the end in a simple way:

Part	Purpose	
Introduction	to tell the reader what the essay <u>is going</u> to be about	“Tell me what you’re going to tell me.”
Body	to tell the reader what the essay <u>is</u> about	“Tell me”
Conclusion	to tell the reader what the essay <u>has been</u> about	“Tell me what you’ve told me.”

Structure of the introduction

The introduction of an essay is a very important part of your essay because it is here that the reader expects to find out what the essay is about. Typically, the introduction to an analytical essay contains at least some (but not necessarily all) of the stages shown in the table below.

Possible Stages	Function
Orientation to topic	To give a general background to the essay topic
Purpose statement	To state the purpose of the essay
Thesis or Issue statement	To state the position the essay will argue or to state the issue to be debated.
Outline	To state the stages through which the essay will develop
To state the scope	To state what the limits of the essay will be

Clearly, these stages of an introduction cannot be written until you have planned your essay and you really know how you are going to structure it. A common problem for essay writers new to university studies is that they labour over the introduction long before they really know what they want to write. More experienced writers often leave their introduction until last.

Exercise 1

Using the table of possible stages above, identify the stages of this introduction.

Reconciliation, as Reynolds's (1996) statement illustrates, is a complex issue with a range of perspectives as to its meaning and terms. There is no doubt that the process has at least partly addressed these issues and resulted in significant benefits in a number of areas. This essay will discuss some of the key benefits which the reconciliation process has brought in the legal, political, social and cultural areas.

Structuring arguments within the body of an essay

Essays persuade the reader by developing one or more arguments to support the thesis. Firstly, you have to decide how to group your information to form strong arguments.

Exercise 2

Choose an argument type essay question from one of your courses. Write a list of the arguments that support your thesis.

Next, you need to develop each of these arguments. For this you need to structure the information to present information which supports your thesis and to defend against arguments which contradict it.

Arguments are organised and sequenced from the analytical framework (see Module 5) and are developed through using points and evidence.

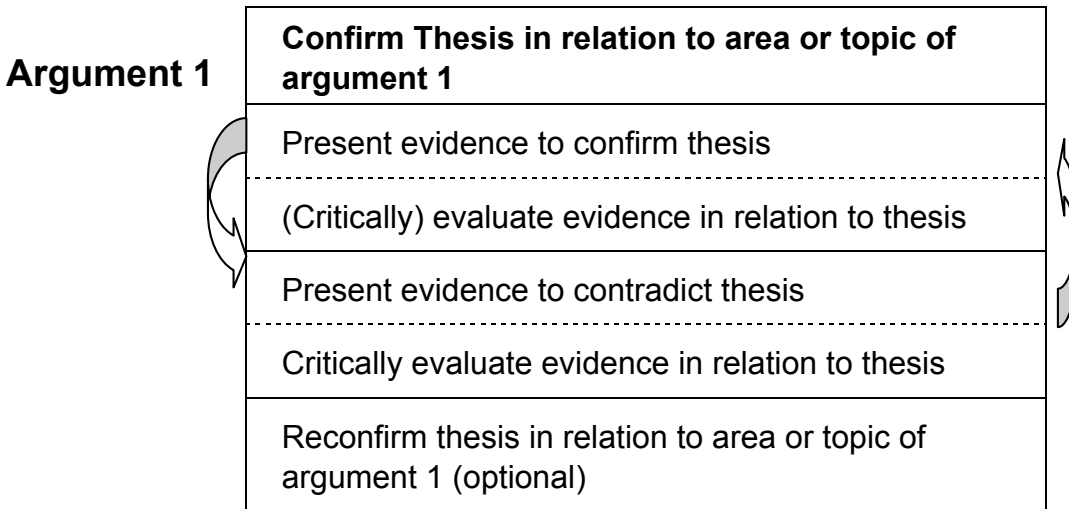
It is helpful to think of how arguments are presented to win a case in a courtroom. In order to defend a client against a charge of murder, for example, the defence lawyers may have gathered a great deal of evidence from a range of sources (e.g. witnesses, reports, weapons or other objects). While there are many ways of organizing these sources (e.g. alphabetically), barristers generally group the information around factors which can most

strongly defend their case. Here is one typical way of organizing and sequencing the arguments to defend a murder charge:

- Motive (e.g. The accused did not have any reason to murder the victim)
- Scene of the crime (e.g. The accused man was not seen by eye witnesses)
- Forensic (e.g. There were no finger prints on the gun)
- Character witnesses (e.g. The accused was a kind and loving family man)

Defence lawyers (and essay writers) typically sequence the arguments according to which are the strongest. However, they must also argue against the case being put by the opposing side. In the court room they do this by cross-examining witnesses and other evidence brought forward.

Here is a possible structure for the individual arguments, incorporating evidence which both supports and contradicts the thesis.



Exercise 3

Choose one of your arguments and write a paragraph about it using this structure.

Argument title _____

Confirm Thesis in relation to area or topic of argument 1	
Present evidence to confirm thesis	
(Critically) evaluate evidence in relation to thesis	
Present evidence to contradict thesis	
Critically evaluate evidence in relation to thesis	
Reconfirm thesis in relation to area or topic of argument 1 (optional)	

Structure of the conclusion

The conclusion of your essay serves the general purpose of telling the reader what the essay has just been about. More specifically, the conclusion to a persuasive analytical essay may contain the following elements:

Possible Stages	Function
Summary of outline	To state what stages the essay developed through
Confirmation of thesis statement	To restate the thesis of the essay
Qualification of thesis statement	To identify limitations of your thesis statement or conditions under which the thesis statement might not be valid
Recommendation (optional)	To recommend action or further investigation

Exercise 4

Using the possible stages above, identify the stages in this conclusion.

In conclusion, the process of reconciliation has brought some benefits to Aboriginal communities. This essay has explored the benefits of reconciliation in legal, political, social and cultural areas. Despite the often hostile socio-political climate, a growing number of people within the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities have continued to realise the goals of the Council for Reconciliation. It is important for more non-indigenous people to realise that they have nothing to fear from Aboriginal rights, so that the process of reconciliation can gain impetus.

Answers

Exercise 1

	Stage
Reconciliation, as Reynolds's (1996) statement illustrates, is a complex issue with a range of perspectives as to its meaning and terms.	Orientation to the topic
There is no doubt that the process has at least partly addressed these issues and resulted in significant benefits in a number of areas.	Thesis
This essay will discuss some of the key benefits which the reconciliation process has brought	Outline
in the legal, political, social and cultural areas.	To state the scope

Exercise 4

	Stage
In conclusion, the process of reconciliation has brought some benefits to Aboriginal communities.	Confirmation of thesis
This essay has explored the benefits of reconciliation in legal, political, social and cultural areas.	Summary of outline
Despite the often hostile socio-political climate, a growing number of people within the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities have continued to realise the goals of the Council for Reconciliation.	Qualification of thesis
It is important for more non-indigenous people to realise that they have nothing to fear from Aboriginal rights, so that the process of reconciliation can gain impetus.	Recommendation