

Module 6:

Writing an Argument

Aims of this module:

- To understand the features of argument and evaluation types of essays
- To explain how to develop and write a thesis statement

Argument and evaluation essays

In many cases, an essay question which requires a persuasive analytical response could be answered by an evaluative or an argumentative structure of essay. If you are familiar with basic roles in a courtroom, it is useful to think about these essay structures being similar to the following roles:

The **argumentative** type of essay can be compared to the role of the barrister. Barristers open their case by putting forward their position or point of view. They then call witnesses to give evidence supporting their point of view and countering or arguing against the evidence presented by the other side. Finally, they sum up the arguments and put forward their position very forcefully again.

The **evaluative** type of essay has a similar role to the judge or jury. Firstly, the issue or case is identified, barristers from both sides give their position and then call witnesses to give evidence. Witnesses are cross-examined and finally, the jury and/or judge give their verdict as to which position has the best argument and evidence.

Both of these types of argument and evaluation essays persuade the reader about a position or point of view.

Exercise 1

Read the following short text.

Is it a convincing comparison of cars and buses? Yes [] No []
 Would you refer to it as a persuasive piece of writing? Yes [] No []

TEXT 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.

Exercise 2

This is a redraft of Text A. Read the text again and discuss the same question:

- Is it a convincing comparison of cars and buses? Yes [] No []
- Is it a persuasive piece of writing? Yes [] No []

TEXT 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.

Exercise 3

This is a further redraft of Text A. Read the text again and discuss the same question:

- Is it a convincing comparison of cars and buses? Yes [] No []
- Is it a persuasive piece of writing? Yes [] No []

TEXT 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 amount 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.

This is a persuasive text. Draw a circle around the thesis statement. Underline other words or phrases which show that it was a persuasive argument.

Exercise 4

To help you understand how these three texts are different, this exercise will get you to focus on how to add argument to an analytical text. The important words or phrases that you underlined in TEXT C have mostly come at the beginnings of the sentences. These beginnings of the sentences, which are referred to as the Themes, 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 Theme.

Table 1 summarises the Themes of the three texts. (Each sentence beginning, up to the main verb, has been listed in the Table.) Here are some steps to help guide you through your analysis.

- (a) Underline the key words in the Themes of the three texts.
- (b) How do the Themes in TEXT A show the way the writing is developed?
- (c) How do the Themes in TEXT B show the way the writing is developed?
- (d) Draw a circle around the words or phrases in the Themes of TEXT C which show how the writer's argument is structured.

Table 1 Themes in the cars and buses TEXTS A, B, C

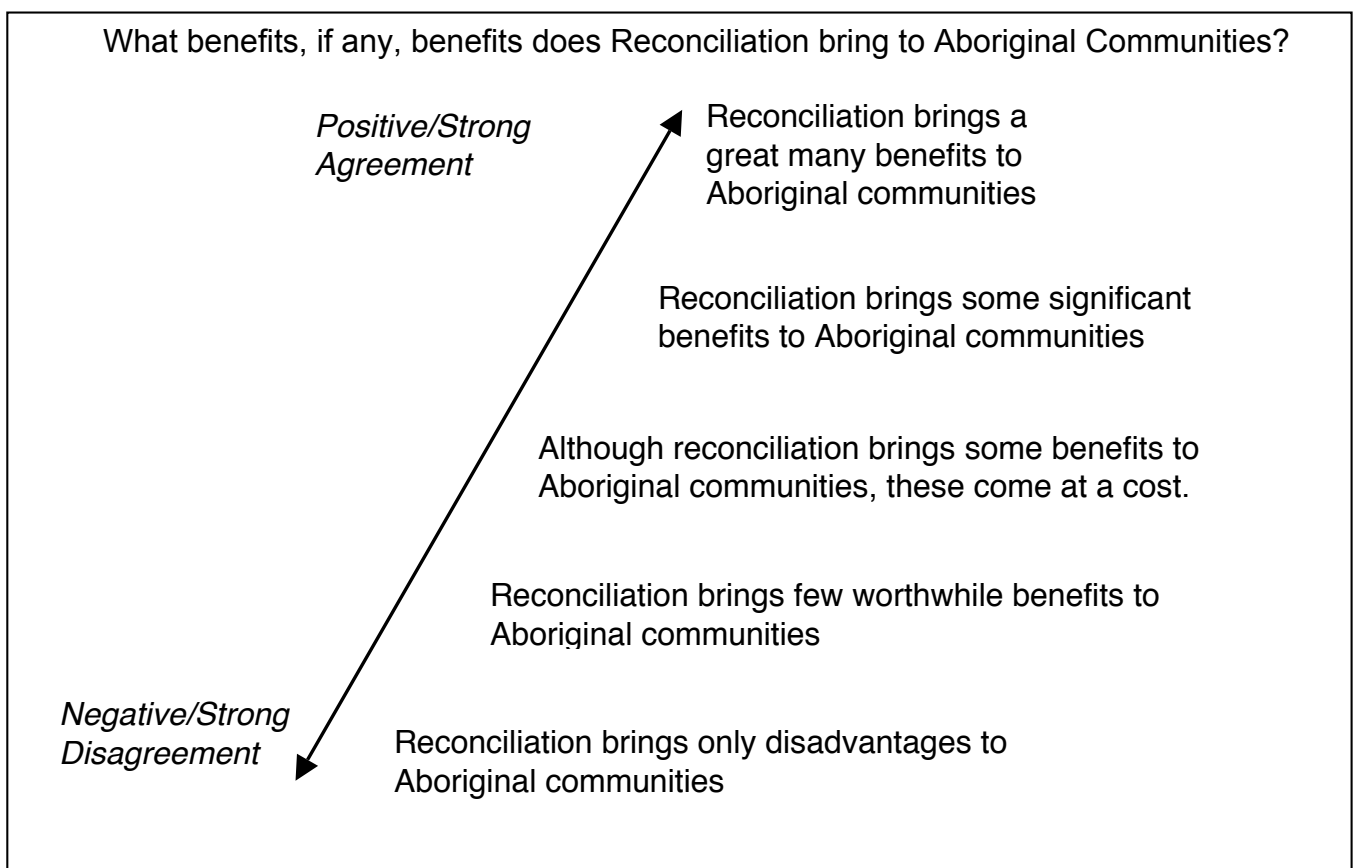
<u>TEXT A</u>	<u>TEXT B</u>	<u>TEXT C</u>
A car, like a bus	Two of the most common vehicles for transporting people	Of the two main forms of transporting people, buses
cars		
Most cars	Whereas the capacity of the car	The greater passenger capacity of the bus
Many people		
Bus travel, by contrast	The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

Presenting a thesis statement in an essay

In an argument essay, the writer must show whether they agree or disagree with the proposition presented in the question. This position is given in a clear **Thesis Statement** towards the beginning of the essay. The example is from the essay on Reconciliation introduced in Module 4.

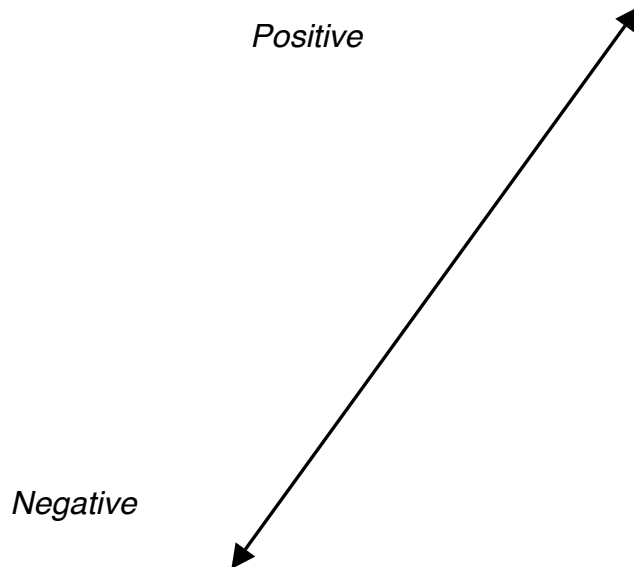
There is no doubt that the process has at least partly addressed these issues and resulted in significant benefits in a number of arenas.	Central thesis statement
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While writers can choose to challenge the proposition – i.e. argue that reconciliation has **not** brought benefits, disagreeing can be a difficult choice. The position you take up needs to be supported by the evidence you have been given in your course readings. Some other positions which might be taken on this issue are shown in the following diagram



Exercise 5

In this exercise, you will need to use an essay question from one of your courses. Pick a question that asks you to create an evaluative / argumentative type essay. What are the possible positions for your essay?



Answers

Exercise 1

Is it a very convincing comparison of cars and buses? Yes [] No [✓]
 Would you refer to it as a persuasive piece of writing? Yes [] No [✓]

Exercise 2

Is it a very convincing comparison of cars and buses? Yes [✓] No []
 Would you refer to it as a persuasive piece of writing? Yes [] No [✓]

TEXT B is more convincing because the arguments are grouped in abstract categories: capacity, safety and accessibility. This makes the argument seem more sophisticated. It is somewhat persuasive as it is evaluating cars and buses according to the analytical categories, however it is not making an overall judgement.

Exercise 3

Is it a very convincing comparison of cars and buses? Yes [✓] No []
 Would you refer to it as a persuasive piece of writing? Yes [✓] No []

The thesis statement is: buses are more effective than cars for a number of reasons.

Words and phrases that show a persuasive argument have been underlined.

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 amount 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.

Exercise 4

- a) Themes to be highlighted are shown in Table 1.
- b) The themes in Text A show that the writing develops in a mostly descriptive way, using concrete themes (cars and buses).
- c) In Text B, the themes are longer and more abstract (i.e. capacity, ownership). This helps make the argument more analytical.
- d) Of the two main forms of transporting people, buses

The greater passenger capacity of the bus

Secondly, the increased safety of bus travel as a result of ownership being governmental or business

Finally, the accessibility of buses to most areas

Indeed, the potential for a bus transport system to be as convenient as private cars, combined with the other advantages of buses over cars