

## What Does the AP Expect Me to Be Able to Do with an Argumentative Essay?

Most frequently, the AP exam will present you with a prompt that could be

- a brief excerpt
- a quotation
- a statement
- an anecdote



You will, then, be directed to defend (agree with), challenge (disagree with), or qualify (agree with some and disagree with other parts of the text) the

- author's position
- statement's main idea
- the narrative's main point

Other types of argumentative prompts will ask you to

- write an essay indicating which idea among a given set is more valid
- explore the validity of an assertion

No matter which type of argumentation prompt is given, the AP expects you to be able to

- take a position on the issue or situation
- support your position using your own experience, reading and/or observations

## How Do You Argue a Point or Position?

Basically, support for your position on an issue should be rational and logical, not emotional. It should be objective rather than biased (one-sided). This support can be developed using any of the rhetorical strategies and devices we've reviewed for you in Chapter 6.

The classical formula for an argument is:

1. Present the issue/situation/problem.
2. State your (writer's) assertion/claim/thesis.
3. Support your claim.
4. Acknowledge and respond to real or possible opposing views.
5. Make your final comment or summary of the evidence.



The order of the presentation can be varied, and any of the rhetorical strategies can be employed. You must make certain that your support/evidence is appropriate and effective.

## THE ARGUMENT

Your argument can be:

- **ethical**—an appeal to the reader’s good sense, good will, and the desire to “do the right thing”
- **emotional**—an appeal to the reader’s fear, patriotism, etc.
- **logical**—an appeal to inductive and deductive reasoning

—*Induction*—forming a *generalization* from a set of specific examples. (example: Margo has 17 stuffed teddy bears, 3 stuffed cows, 11 monkeys, 4 camels, and 6 stuffed elephants. Margo loves to collect stuffed animals.)

—*Deduction*—reaching a probable *conclusion* based on given premises. A *premise* is a proposition that is proven or taken for granted. (example: All high school seniors at this high school must write a research paper. Sean is a senior at this high school. Therefore, Sean must write a research paper.)

Be aware that conclusions can be drawn from implicit premises. These can include:

- universal truths
- possibilities that the reader will readily accept
- familiar sayings
- facts everyone, including the reader, knows

Deduction uses the syllogism. A syllogism is the format of a formal argument that consists of a

<i>Major premise:</i>	<i>All A are C.</i>	<i>“All lions are cats.”</i>
<i>Minor premise:</i>	<i>B is A.</i>	<i>“Leonard is a lion.”</i>
<i>Conclusion:</i>	<i>Therefore, B is C.</i>	<i>“Leonard is a cat.”</i>

You could also say, “Because Leonard is a lion, he is a cat.” In this instance, you have suppressed one of the premises. However, you are confident that most people would agree that all lions are cats. Therefore, you would feel confident in leaving out that premise. But, you must be very careful, because you could end up with what we call a logical fallacy.

Logical fallacies are mistakes in reasoning and fall into several categories.

- *Non sequitur argument*: This Latin phrase means “does not follow.” This is the argument with a conclusion that does not follow from the premise. (example: Diane graduated from Vassar. She’ll make a great lawyer.)

- *Begging the question*: Here is a mistake in which the writer assumes in his or her assertion/premise/thesis something that really remains to be proved. (example: Taking geometry is a waste of time. High school students should not be required to take this course.)
- *Circular reasoning*: This mistake in logic restates the premise rather than giving a reason for holding that premise. (example: I like to eat out because I enjoy different foods and restaurants.)
- *Straw-man argument*: Here is a technique we've all seen and heard used by politicians seeking election. The speaker/writer attributes false or exaggerated characteristics or behaviors to the opponent and attacks him on those falsehoods or exaggerations. (example: You say you support allowing people under eighteen to drive alone. I'll never be able to understand why weak-willed drivers like you are willing to risk your life and the lives of all other drivers with these crazy teenagers on the road.)
- *Ad hominem argument*: This literally means to "argue against the man." This technique attacks the person rather than dealing with the issue under discussion. (example: We all know Sam has several speeding tickets on his record. How can we trust him to vote for us on the issue of a trade agreement with Europe?)
- *Hasty generalization*: A person who makes a hasty generalization draws a conclusion about an entire group based on evidence too scant or insufficient. (example: The veterinarian discovered a viral infection in five beagles. All beagles must be infected with it.)
- *Overgeneralization*: This is what we call stereotyping in most cases. Here, the writer/speaker draws a conclusion about a large number of people, ideas, things, etc. based on very limited evidence. (example: All members of group A are not to be trusted.) Words such as *all*, *never*, *always*, *every*, are usually indicative of overgeneralization. It's best to use and to look for qualifiers (*some*, *seem*, *often*, *perhaps*, *frequently*, etc.) that indicate that the writer has an awareness of the complexities of the topic or group under discussion.
- *Post hoc argument*: This fallacy cites an unrelated event that occurred earlier as the cause of a current situation. (example: I saw a black cat run across the street in front of my car five minutes before I was hit by a foul ball at the ball park. Therefore, the black cat is the cause of my bruised arm.)
- *Either/or argument*: With this fallacy, the writer asserts that there are only two possibilities, when, in reality, there are more. (example: Tomorrow is April 15; therefore, I must mail in my tax return, or I will be arrested.)