

Getting the basics of argumentative writing right

В статье рассматриваются сущность и особенности аргументативного письма. Раскрываются виды доказательной базы и аргументирования, с акцентом на индуктивном аргументировании.

Ключевые слова: аргументативное письмо, доказательная база, аргументирование, обобщение

The paper dwells upon argumentative writing and concentrates on its basics. The types of evidence and reasoning are revealed, with a particular stress on inductive reasoning.

Key words: argumentative writing, evidence, reasoning, generalization

Argumentative writing demands clearness as one of its prime requisites. Its purpose is not merely to inform and explain but to convince or persuade. The writer uses facts or ideas to prove his or her point. The aim is to win others over to his or her conclusions by showing how every one of the assertions provided has reasonable ground for acceptance [1; 4; 5].

In the opening topic sentence, a learner should state what he or she wishes to prove. Having selected every detail which vitally contributes toward the truth of the proposition, a student should arrange this material in its most convincing order in the sentences which follow. The writer should reserve the most intriguing point until the end. When it comes, it seems to clinch all the preceding points with powerful effect.

Argumentation should consist of the three essential elements [2]; [3]; [6]:

- 1) argument;
- 2) supporting facts;
- 3) conclusion (the establishing of proof).

The argument is the writer's opinion and assertion on the topic argued about. The argument should be correct and reasonable, and should conform to scientific truth in order to be feasible to solve problems in reality. It should be clear-cut what it approves of. In contrast, what it is against should not be ambiguous. It should have a definite aim.

While providing proof, however, a mere assertion does not convince another of its truth. It must be supported by facts that lend evidence or proof. Evidence is of various sorts, and its weight is determined by the source from which it comes. We have:

- 1) Evidence of expert testimony, produced by those who have become authorities in any given calling of pursuit.
- 2) Evidence of senses: seeing, hearing, etc.
- 3) Evidence of official documents, reports, statistics, correspondence, etc.
- 4) Evidence of unofficial correspondence, diaries, etc.

Students have to learn to gather evidence and arrange it in the most convincing order.

The establishment of proof is the process and way of using facts to prove the argument. The proving should reveal the logic relation existing between the argument and the facts so as to conform to the inevitability of reaching a conclusion from the facts. The establishment of proof is done by inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, and cause-and-effect reasoning. Inductive reasoning begins with the specific and moves to the general; deductive reasoning starts with the general and moves to the specific; cause-and-effect reasoning analyzes results growing out of a given set of circumstances. Those terms are simple labels for reasoning processes that are familiar to everyone.

In every experience, the inductive-deductive process commonly works in a chain. People generalize, for example, either from their experience or from that of others, that small, hard and green oranges are sour. Working with this generalization, learners note that a shop sells hard and green oranges, so they conclude, by deduction, that they are sour. If a person buys a pair of shoes from a particular factory and finds that they hurt his or her feet, and the same problem occurs with subsequent pairs, one can conclude that the shoes made by that factory are of poor quality and people should not buy them anymore.

Some important things in employing inductive reasoning are that a sufficient number of cases must be considered and that no one case proves or disproves that conclusion. Yet, a conclusion may seem to follow logically from a single fact.

Fact: My employer has promoted me.

Conclusion: My work has been satisfactory.

Fact: Kevin is always there to help.

Conclusion: Kevin can be relied on.

But in many cases conclusion can't be drawn from a single fact.

Fact: Jack's father was president of his company and he never went to college.

Conclusion: College education is no use in business.

Then how much evidence must we have before we are justified in making a generalization? The answer is not very conforming: It depends. The more evidence we have in support of a generalization, however, the more we can rely on it. Gathering evidence is often hard work and the temptation is to quit before we have enough. Yielding to this temptation leads to what we call "hasty generalization" or "rash generalization" – the lazy person's way of thinking. It takes one of the following forms:

- 1) Generalization from single or isolated instance.
- 2) Generalization from selected instances.
- 3) Generalization arising from ignorance or prejudice. For example, if one aspirin cures a headache in 20 minutes, then two will cure headache in ten.

All the evidence must be considered, not just that which supports a desired generalization. It is all too easy to reach such generalizations as "shiftlessness is the cause of poverty" and "women make poor drivers" by noting the instances that support the generalization and ignoring those that do not.

Obviously, nobody can himself gather enough evidence. This means that students must ask somebody else's word for most of what we know. But whose word should be accepted? Who shall be our authority? We usually use statements from experts to support a line of reasoning. They must be reputable, recognized authorities, and up to date. The exact words of authorities must be enclosed in quotation marks or let off from the rest of the text by indentation. Authorities should be identified by name. Vague references to authorities are not acceptable in formal argument.

The hints mentioned above are simply building blocks for constructing information groups. A student's academic writing goal in using examples and illustrations is to clarify abstract material by making them more concrete. The clearer the material a learner presents, the more effective his or her writing is likely to be.

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