

Class Exercise:

Making an Argument About School Uniforms

What is an argument?

An argument is an assertion about something with evidence that is intended to support the assertion.

What are some examples of arguments?

We can look at a resume, list of references, and job-application (or cover) letter as an argument. The conclusion is that the writer of these documents will be a capable, responsible, and pleasant (able to get along with other employees) employee for the organization that the writer is writing to. The resume, list of references, and job-application (or cover) letter will provide evidence that the writer is in fact capable, responsible, and pleasant.

We can look at a problem-solving letter as an argument. The conclusion of the argument is that if the reader of the letter accepts the writer's recommendations(s), then the problem will be fully or partially solved. The body of the letter will provide evidence that a problem exists, that the problem ought to be solved, and that the recommendation will solve or partially solve the problem.

We can look at an evaluation (or review) as an argument. The conclusion of the argument is that something is good or bad (or in the middle). The evaluation will provide evidence that something is good or bad.

Of course, everyone should recognize classic arguments. Here are some conclusions of classic argument papers: Abortion is always morally wrong. Abortion is sometimes morally wrong. Abortion is sometimes morally permissible. Euthanasia is sometimes morally wrong. Euthanasia is always morally wrong. Euthanasia is sometimes morally permissible.

What is a way to organize an argument paper?

One way to organize an argument paper is this:

- Introduction with Thesis
- Arguments for What You Believe
- Arguments Against What You Believe
- Rebuttal of Arguments Against What You Believe
- Conclusion (Repeat Thesis)

A thesis is a short statement of the position you are arguing. These are examples of theses:

- Abortion is always morally wrong.
- Abortion is sometimes morally wrong.

Abortion is sometimes morally permissible.
 Euthanasia is sometimes morally wrong.
 Euthanasia is always morally wrong.
 Euthanasia is sometimes morally permissible.

To rebut something means to show that it is not true. It is a good idea to bring up arguments against what you believe and then to rebut them. Chances are, the reader will think of these counterarguments, and so you need to show that these counterarguments are not good.

Can I use personal experience in an argument?

Yes, of course. Here are some reasons why you may use personal experience:

The reader's job is in part to be interesting, and personal experience is interesting.
 Your experience may help you to recognize what is right and what is wrong.

Writing Exercise: Personal Experience

Let's take School Uniforms as our topic. Some schools require a school uniform. Students will all dress the same way.

Write for five minutes on this topic: What is your experience with students' clothing at your high school. Did (or do) students have to wear a school uniform? If so, did you like or dislike this? Why? Did (or do) students have to follow a dress code? If so, did you like or dislike this? Could students wear pretty much whatever they wanted? If so, did you like or dislike this? You may also write about the experience of friends or relatives with school uniforms.

Sample Writing Exercise (By a Teacher)

I graduated from Zanesville (Ohio) High School in 1972. We did not have to wear school uniforms, although probably the students at the Catholic High School, Rosecrans High School, did. I suppose that we had a dress code, although I don't remember any details. I can't remember any problems that we had, probably because it was so long ago. (I am writing in 2009.)

My sister now lives in Florida, and her kids attend a school with a school uniform. However, it is not a complete school uniform. The kids have to wear T-shirts with the name of their school on them. My sister does think that the T-shirts are expensive; however, she is able to go to thrift stores and buy them more cheaply.

At Ohio University, students (and faculty) wear pretty much what they want. (I wear jeans when I teach.) The only problem is that some of the T-shirts that students have double entendres. Some of the female students also wear tops that I think are too low-cut (or skirts that are too sort) for class.

Sharing Exercise

After everyone has written for five minutes, students should share what they have written. This may be done orally, and students can trade papers with other students. Students who have worn school uniforms before attending college should share their experiences because they are relative experts on the subject.

Brainstorming Exercise

Students should brainstorm the pros and cons of school uniforms. They may do that in small groups. After a few minutes of brainstorming, the teacher can ask for the pros and cons that the students have come up with. Here are a few ideas:

Pros

School uniforms may save money. Clothes are often expensive, but once the student has a few school uniforms, the student would not need a lot more clothing. The students would simply need some casual clothing for the weekends and after school.

School uniforms may save time. Students who have to wear school uniforms don't have to think about what to wear to school. They can simply wear the school uniform.

School uniforms mean that everyone is dressed the same. Students will not be embarrassed because their parents cannot buy them expensive faddish clothing.

School uniforms mean that everyone is dressed the same. Students will not be judged by their clothing.

School uniforms mean that everyone is dressed the same. Members of gangs would not be able to wear gang clothing to school.

Baggy clothing can be used to hide weapons and drugs. If the school uniforms are not baggy, they may not provide good hiding places for weapons and drugs.

School uniforms teach kids that they are in a place of learning. When they wear that uniform, their job is to learn.

School uniforms make it easy to tell whether a kid should be in the school.

School uniforms build school spirit.

School uniforms mean that kids spend more time on their studies than on their clothing. Schools should not be locations for fashion shows.

Cons

School uniforms are expensive and often they cannot be used outside of school.

School uniforms take away an expression of individuality. People may express themselves by the way that they dress.

School uniforms teach students conformity. The message that they get is that everyone ought to look alike and to think alike.

School uniforms take away creativity. Dressing well is an expression of taste. When students dress alike, students are unable to be creative in their dress.

School uniforms would make it difficult to identify victims of a disaster. One way to identify a dead person is by their clothing. If all the students are wearing the same clothing, identifying their corpses will be more difficult. (In some disasters, a person's face can be destroyed.)

Not all people will be like school uniforms.

These ideas are based on the ones at http://www.youdebate.com/DEBATES/school_uniforms.HTM and other sources.

Writing Exercise: Writing an Argument FOR One Side of the Argument

It may be a good idea to have students divide up into pairs. Each student may take one side of the argument. One student may be for school uniforms, while the other student may be against. Have each student write an argument for his or her position.

Typical Pro Argument

I am in favor of school uniforms because I believe that it will result in students getting better and not forming cliques that hate each other. If everyone is wearing the same clothing, no one will be judged by his or her clothing. Instead, everyone will have to talk to each other to find if they have common interests and if they like each other. Mean girls with rich parents will no longer be able to stick their nose up in the air because a classmate cannot afford a \$200 pair of in-style jeans. If the girls have to talk to each other, they may discover that they actually have interests in common and actually like each other.

Typical Con Argument

Let's face it. We have way too much conformity in our society. Forcing students to wear school uniforms will teach them to be even more conformist. Dressing well can be a work of art, as anyone can see by looking at women's magazines. We should allow students to

dress as they please. After all, if you can't be a work of art, you may as well dress like one.

After writing their argument, students should exchange papers and read what the other student wrote.

Writing Exercise: Writing a Rebuttal of an Argument on the Other Side of the Argument

Students who are paired together can now write a rebuttal of the other student's argument. They should restate the other student's argument (people will argue that ...) and then rebut that argument (however, this is not a good argument because ...).

Rebuttal of a Typical Pro Argument

People may argue that if students wear school uniforms, they will not be able to judge each other by their clothing and so will not reject someone simply because the person cannot afford to buy jeans that cost \$200. However, students will be able to judge other students on other ways. For example, students may wear expensive accessories. By looking at the accessories, students will know whether another student's parents are rich or not.

Rebuttal of a Typical Con Argument

People may argue that if students wear school uniforms, then they will become conformist. However, true originality does not lie in the clothing that one wears. No one can purchase originality off the rack or even have it made specially. True originality comes from within. True originality lies in feelings and thoughts, not in what one puts on his or her body.

Students can then exchange papers and read the other student's rebuttal of their argument. Is anyone convinced by the rebuttal?

Research Exercise

Everything that we have done so far involves thinking off the top of our head. This can be OK. We need to find out what we think. However, we can also research to see if any evidence exists that would help us to make up our minds. If research showed that school uniforms are good or that school uniforms are bad, then we need to seriously consider that evidence.

Ask students what are some questions whose answers we could research to find out whether school uniforms are good or bad. Here are some possible answers:

Some people may argue that school uniforms are expensive. We can research how much school uniforms cost.

Some people may argue that school uniforms will keep students from judging each other by their clothing. We can research whether schools that require uniforms have more or fewer problems with mean girls and with negative cliques (cliques that tear each other down).

Some people may argue that students learn more in schools that require uniforms. Is this true?

By the way, books have been written on this topic:

Brunsma, David L., editor. *The School Uniform Movement and What It Tells Us About American Education: A Symbolic Crusade*. Lanham, Md.: ScarecrowEducation, 2004.

Brunsma, David L., editor. "School Uniforms: A Critical Review of the Literature." Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa International, 2002.

Brunsma, David L., editor. *Uniforms in Public Schools: A Decade of Research and Debate*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2006.

Gereluk, Diane. *Symbolic Clothing in Schools*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008.

Hamilton, Jill, editor. *Dress Codes in Schools*. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, c2008. 25 leaves.

Harrington, Valerie. *The Effects of Middle School Attendance Rates with a Uniform Policy*. 2003. 25 leaves. Thesis.

Levin-Epstein, Michael D. *Dress for Success: Dress Codes Get Put to the Test*. Boston, Mass.: Quinlan Publishing Group, c2005.

Long In-Class Writing Exercise

Ask students to write an argument paper about school uniforms, using the classic argument outline:

Introduction with Thesis
 Arguments for What You Believe
 Arguments Against What You Believe
 Rebuttal of Arguments Against What You Believe
 Conclusion (Repeat Thesis)

Of course, the introduction should be interesting. One way to make it interesting is to make it relevant. Most students will eventually have families, and they can write about whether they would put their child in a school that requires uniforms, and why they would or would not.

Collect the papers. Read them outside of class. Do not mark them, but give students credit for class participation.

If any students are willing to do research, they may use this topic for an out-of-class research paper if the teacher so desires.

What is the Right Answer?

Does this argument topic have a right answer? Maybe. Maybe not. If research indicated that students learn much more at schools that require uniforms, then the answer may be that yes, uniforms ought to be required at all schools. However, a counterargument would be that the uniforms don't make the schools good, but something else does.

Personal preference may play a factor, too. If a student really, really hates to wear school uniforms, then perhaps that student ought to attend a different school.

Chances are, when most parents choose which school that their children will attend, school uniforms will play only a minor role in that decision. Other factors will also be considered—the location of the schools, the price of tuition, the quality of the teachers, etc.

This may be very well a question of diversity. Students and teachers are not all alike. Some will like school uniforms, and some will not like school uniforms. We don't want all schools to be Catholic (or Protestant), and we don't want no schools to be Catholic (or Protestant). Perhaps it should be the same way with school uniforms.

Some Books by David Bruce (1954-)

Author: Discussion Guides Series

Dante's Inferno: A Discussion Guide

Dante's Paradise: A Discussion Guide

Dante's Purgatory: A Discussion Guide

Forrest Carter's The Education of Little Tree: A Discussion Guide

Homer's Iliad: A Discussion Guide

Homer's Odyssey: A Discussion Guide

Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice: A Discussion Guide

Jerry Spinelli's Maniac Magee: A Discussion Guide

Jerry Spinelli's Stargirl: A Discussion Guide

Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal": A Discussion Guide

Lloyd Alexander's The Book of Three: A Discussion Guide

Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Discussion Guide

Mark Twain's The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: A Discussion Guide

Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: A Discussion Guide

Mark Twain's The Prince and the Pauper: A Discussion Guide

Nancy Garden's Annie on My Mind: A Discussion Guide

Nicholas Sparks' A Walk to Remember: A Discussion Guide

Virgil's Aeneid: A Discussion Guide

Virgil's "The Fall of Troy": A Discussion Guide

Voltaire's Candide: A Discussion Guide

William Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV: A Discussion Guide

William Shakespeare's Macbeth: A Discussion Guide

William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Discussion Guide

William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: A Discussion Guide

William Sleator's Oddballs: A Discussion Guide

(Oddballs is an excellent source for teaching how to write autobiographical essays/personal narratives.)

Retellings of a Classic Work of Literature

Dante's Inferno: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Purgatory: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Paradise: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Divine Comedy: A Retelling in Prose

From the Iliad to the Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose of Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica

Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose

Homer's Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose

Jason and the Argonauts: A Retelling in Prose of Apollonius of Rhodes' Argonautica

Virgil's Aeneid: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV, aka Henry IV, Part 1: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's As You Like It: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Macbeth: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Othello: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Tempest: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night: A Retelling in Prose

Children's Biography

Nadia Comaneci: Perfect Ten

Personal Finance

How to Manage Your Money: A Guide for the Non-Rich

Anecdote Collections

250 Anecdotes About Opera

250 Anecdotes About Religion

250 Anecdotes About Religion: Volume 2

250 Music Anecdotes

Be a Work of Art: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

The Coolest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in the Arts: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

Create, Then Take a Break: 250 Anecdotes

Don't Fear the Reaper: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Dance: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 4: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 5: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 6: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Neighborhoods: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Relationships: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Television and Radio: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Theater: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 1: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Maximum Cool: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Religion: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Reality is Fabulous: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Resist Psychic Death: 250 Anecdotes

Seize the Day: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Academic Writing

Bruce, David. "Teaching Problem-Solving Through Scenarios." *Classroom Notes Plus: A Quarterly of Teaching Ideas*. April 2004.

Bruce, Bruce David, David Stewart, and H. Gene Blocker. Instructor's Manual and Test Bank for Stewart and Blocker's *Fundamentals of Philosophy*, 5th edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001.

Bruce, Bruce David, and Michael Vengrin. Study Guide for Robert Paul Wolff's *About Philosophy*, 8th edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000.

Bruce, Bruce David, and Michael Vengrin. Study Guide for Robert Paul Wolff's *About Philosophy*, 7th edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998.

Bruce, Bruce David. Study Guide for David Stewart and H. Gene Blocker's *Fundamentals of Philosophy*, 4th edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.

Humorous Quizzes

Bruce, David. "Quarterly Quiz." *The Opera Quarterly*. Vol. 21. No. 2. Spring 2005.

- Bruce, David. "Quarterly Quiz: Tenors." *The Opera Quarterly*. Vol. 20. No. 4. Autumn 2004.
- Bruce, David. "Quarterly Quiz: Sopranos." *The Opera Quarterly*. Vol. 20. No. 3. Summer 2004.
- Bruce, David. "Shakespeare Quiz." *The Shakespeare Newsletter*. 52:1. No. 252. Spring 2002.
- Bruce, David. "Quarterly Quiz: More Singer Anecdotes." *The Opera Quarterly*. Vol. 18. No. 1. Winter 2002.
- Bruce, David. "Mystery Quiz." *International Gymnast*. March 2002.
- Bruce, David. "Mystery Quiz." *International Gymnast*. February 2002.
- Bruce, David. "Mystery Quiz." *International Gymnast*. November 2001.
- Bruce, David. "Shakespeare Quiz." *The Shakespeare Newsletter*. 51:1/2. Nos. 248-249. Spring/Summer 2001.
- Bruce, David. "Mystery Quiz." *International Gymnast*. June/July 2001.
- Bruce, David. "Mystery Quiz." *International Gymnast*. March 2001.
- Bruce, David. "Quarterly Singer Quiz." *The Opera Quarterly*. Vol. 16. No. 4. Autumn 2000.
- Bruce, David. "Shakespeare Quiz." *The Shakespeare Newsletter*. 50:1. No. 244. Spring 2000.
- Bruce, David. "Dancer Quiz." *Attitude: The Dancers' Magazine*. Vol. 14, No. 3. Fall/Winter 1999.