

# Critical Thinking

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MGM115

## Lecture 10



# Writing Argumentative Essays

Mostly from Critical Thinking, Bassham and others

# Writing Argumentative Essays

**This lecture includes:**

- **Before you write**
- **Writing the first draft**
- **After writing the first draft**

**Writing takes place in three very broad stages: what you do before you begin the first draft, what you do during the writing of the first draft, and what you do after you have completed the first draft.**

## **Before You Write**

**Know yourself**

**Know your audience**

**Choose and narrow your topic**

**Write a sentence that expresses your claim**

**Gather ideas: brainstorm and research**

**Organize your ideas**

## Writing the First Draft

Provide an interesting opening

Include a thesis statement

Develop your body paragraphs

Provide a satisfying conclusion

## After the First Draft

Read what you have written and revise

Consider what you have not written and revise

Show your work

Edit your work

Hand it in

### Know yourself

**If you want to write about a topic you don't know very well, take the time to learn as much as you can about it. If you feel strongly about an issue, you should be willing to defend it intelligently and rationally. That doesn't mean, of course, that you must know all there is to know about an issue before you begin to formulate your opinion and take your stand or that you must present your case in an absolute or exhaustive manner.**

### Know your audience

Some writers present arguments as if the reader were either an enemy or a devoted fan. Neither is usually the case, but let's suppose for a moment that one or the other is true. **Take the first hypothetical reader, our enemy.** If our purpose is to be understood and to present a well-reasoned argument in support of our claim, does it make sense to antagonize the person we hope will judge us fairly?

**The second hypothetical reader**—our loving champion—may agree with everything we say and, at the end of our presentation, tell us that we have presented a beautiful argument, full of truth and well structured, but there is very little to be gained from being evaluated by someone who is predisposed to compliment us.

### Know your audience

Knowing who will be reading your argument will help you decide what tone to use, how sophisticated your word choices can be, how much background you must provide, and how much detail you need to go into. In the business world, even your position in a company or firm can dictate how you write your argument or proposal. Are your readers highly skeptical, or are they open to even the riskiest proposals? Do they hate to spend a dime on new ideas, or do they enjoy taking a gamble on costly innovations? Are you in a position of some authority so that your readers must implement your suggestions, or do you have to work hard at proving your case?

### Anticipate Your Readers' Reactions

**On the basis of what you know about your topic and your audience, try to determine how your audience might react to your claim and its defense. When you consider how your audience will react to your claim, you almost automatically begin thinking about their reasons for reacting that way. You begin considering their points of view, their claims, their counterarguments. Predicting what an audience might say in response to your claim will help you to create a stronger argument.**

### Anticipate Your Readers' Reactions

**Often you can predict your audience's reactions by considering how you would feel as a reader. For example, people generally don't like to be told that they are wrong about something; so, instead of telling your readers that they are wrong, try to discover what values you and they have in common and show that your approach is based on those values, not detrimental to them. If you want to correct what you believe to be dangerous behavior, point out to your readers what you see to be the terrible consequences of continuing to act as they are.**

## Anticipate Your Readers' Reactions

**In the absence of information about your readers, or when writing for a general readership, there are a few things you can assume. First, assume that your readers are slightly skeptical, that they do not necessarily agree with everything you say, but that they are open-minded and fair.**

**Assume that your readers are intelligent, rational, and humane.**

**if a close-minded, prejudicial audience refuses to listen to you, if you have defended your claim with solid evidence and clear reasoning, you have done your job.**

## Choose and Narrow your Topic

**it is better to work at developing a focused topic than to leave a large issue undeveloped. And as you improve your writing and arguing skills, you will usually find that you have too much to say even about the most slender of topics.**

### **Write a sentence that expresses your claim**

Once you have decided what you want to write about, formulate a single sentence that presents the central claim of your argument and write it on a blank sheet of paper: “I think . . . ,” “People should . . . ,” “We must . . . ,” “It’s time for . . . ,” “It is true that . . . ,” and so forth. State your claim as forthrightly as you can and be sure that your claim is debatable, something with which someone could disagree.

## Gather Ideas: Brainstorm and Research

**Writers generally get their ideas from two sources: their own heads and the heads of other people, usually other writers.**

**Some writers do a great deal of reading and research before formulating ideas and approaches for a paper; others record their own thoughts first and then look for additional ideas and support; still others combine the two approaches in a variety of ways. The approach you take will depend on your own habits, your familiarity with the topic, and your need for facts and expert opinion to back you up.**

### Gather Ideas: Brainstorm and Research

**Brainstorming** is a method for generating ideas for a paper. When you brainstorm, allow your ideas to flow freely. Write down whatever occurs to you, and don't censor any ideas as irrelevant or uninteresting. Don't worry about being incorrect or even sounding foolish. No one will judge your argument on your brainstorming. It is like a dialogue with yourself. You can always cut ideas after you have listed them.

## Gather Ideas: Brainstorm and Research

**First, List Supporting Premises** when brainstorming for an argument, list as many reasons as you can to support your claim

**Second List Opposing Premises**, write down as many premises as you can think of to oppose your claim. What would someone who disagreed with you say?

**Think Critically about Your Claim** Are you overgeneralizing in any way? Are there any exceptions to your claim? Are you creating false alternatives?

**Think on Paper** Now write down what you know or think you know about your topic. In this part of brainstorming, you are simply trying to create and gather ideas from your own mind; in other words, you are thinking on paper

## **Gather Ideas: Brainstorm and Research**

**Methods of Development** A very productive method for generating ideas is to think about the ways we usually develop and detail our communication with one another:

**Narration** A narration tells a story in chronological order. Are there any stories associated with your topic? Do you know of anyone whose experiences would be worth recounting?

**Description** A description gives concrete details to paint a verbal picture of a person, place, or thing. There may be in your topic something that can be described

## Gather Ideas: Brainstorm and Research

### Methods of Development

**Cause** Causes are reasons for the occurrence of an event, a decision, an action, and so forth. Look at your topic and ask, “Why did this happen?” “What caused this?”

**Effect** Effects are the results of an event, a decision, an action, and so forth. What effects are associated with your topic? Ask yourself, “What will happen if . . . ?” and “What has happened?” “What has the outcome been?”

**Classification and Division** When we classify, we take a large group and break it down into smaller, more manageable, groups. All the students in a college can be grouped by class (freshman, sophomore, junior), major, living status, and so forth.

## **Gather Ideas: Brainstorm and Research**

### **Methods of Development**

**Contrast** When we contrast two things, we show them to be dissimilar in important ways. Could you develop your topic through contrasts?

**Comparison** When we compare two things, we discuss the similarities between them. Is there anything in your topic that calls for a comparison? Can you defend your claim by comparing the situation under study to something similar?

**Illustration** When we illustrate, we provide examples to help clarify a point and defend a general comment.

**Definition** When we define a word, we tell our readers or listeners exactly what we mean by a word or a concept.

## Organize your Ideas

**Organize by Premises** In deciding how to organize your argument, keep in mind that each paragraph in the body of the argument will be related somehow to your central claim. In most cases, the body paragraph will present a topic idea that is a premise for the claim made in the thesis.

### **Gather Ideas: Brainstorm and Research**

**Do Some Research** The support you seek will generally fall into two broad categories—facts and opinions. You can draw from a wide variety of reliable sources, including experts in the field, statistical abstracts, textbooks, encyclopedias, journals, and reliable Internet sites.

**Facts** are very useful for supporting an argument. A fact is something that has objective reality; it is not a matter of perception or opinion. Facts include statistical data, reports of observations, and examples of actual occurrences and events.

Unlike facts, **opinions** can be so subjective that they are sometimes based on nothing more than prejudice or wishful thinking.

# Writing the first draft

### Provide an Interesting Opening

**You don't have to begin with your claim, but you can if it is startling, very controversial, or attention-grabbing. Otherwise, start with some background on your topic or show why the issue is an important one. Start with some surprising statistics, an apt quote, a little-known fact, or an interesting story relevant to the topic.**

# Writing the first draft

## Include a thesis statement

**If you haven't already done so in the opening sentence or two, give a clear, carefully worded statement of your claim (sometimes called a thesis statement ) somewhere in the opening paragraph. You can give your statement in its own sentence or include it as part of a larger sentence. Your thesis statement can also give some idea of how you plan to defend your claim or some idea of how your paper is organized.**

### Provide a satisfying conclusion

**Almost every example of human communication has a beginning, a middle, and an end. You do not want your readers to feel that you have hung up without saying good-bye, which is the purpose of a conclusion. It lets your readers know that the essay is complete, that there are no missing pages, and that you have said what you intended to say.**

**Most writers like to set their work aside for a short time before they begin revising or editing. Doing so will help you get some distance from your own words, which can seem too familiar if you read them too soon after writing them. It is easy to miss errors if our minds are filling in what we meant instead of what actually appears on the page.**

### **Read What you Have Written and Revise**

**After you have written a draft of your essay and given your brain time to cool, return to your essay and read it again with a critical eye. Don't look only for clumsy expressions, grammatical problems, meaningless or repetitive sentences, and the like. Look for the large issues and evaluate your argument from the point of view of someone who disagrees with you. Be honest with yourself; question your evidence. Ask yourself if you are simply repeating what you have heard or what you assume to be true. Check your logic. Put your essay through the same rigorous test you have put other arguments through. Revise your draft to correct any problems.**

## Consider What you Have Not Written and Revise

**Consider what you have not said. When you look critically at your essay, try to disagree with what you have written by finding a way to reject each of the premises you have offered as support. You don't have to abandon what you have written; you may simply have to defend it better.**

### Show your Work

Show your draft to someone—a friend, a family member, a professor, a tutor in the writing lab—someone who will do you the favor of critically reviewing your essay. Don't let a friend tell you what you want to hear: "It's great. Hand it in." Ask if anything is confusing or undeveloped. Ask your reader to show you where the argument may be weak or unconvincing. Ask if the organization is clear and effective, if the opening paragraph is interesting, and if the conclusion is satisfying. Never hesitate to get advice from a reader. It is not a sign of weakness or insecurity but of strength and intelligence to ask for a critique on a draft. Not even a professional writer considers a piece finished until it has been reviewed by one or more people who can offer advice for improving the writing.

### **Edit your Work**

**When you have revised your argument several times and are happy with the content and organization, look over your sentences very carefully one last time for grammatical mistakes, misused or missing punctuation, misspellings, and typographical errors. And, again, there is no shame in seeking help if you are unsure about things such as comma usage and sentence fragments. Finally, try reading your paper out loud to hear how it sounds. Doing so can sometimes help reveal awkward phrases or repetitive sentence structures.**

### **Hand it in**

## 5-Paragraph Argumentative Essay

**A 5-paragraph essay is basically a formatting style for essay writing. It has the following five parts:**

- **Introduction**

**In the introductory, the writer introduces the topic and provides a glance at the collected data to support the main argument.**

- **Body paragraph 1**

**The first body paragraph discusses the first and most important point related to the argument. It starts with a topic sentence and has all the factual data to make the argument convincing.**

# 5-Paragraph Argumentative Essay

- **Body paragraph 2**

The second body paragraph mentions the second most important element of the argument. A topic sentence is used to start these paragraphs. It gives the idea of the point that will discuss in the following paragraph.

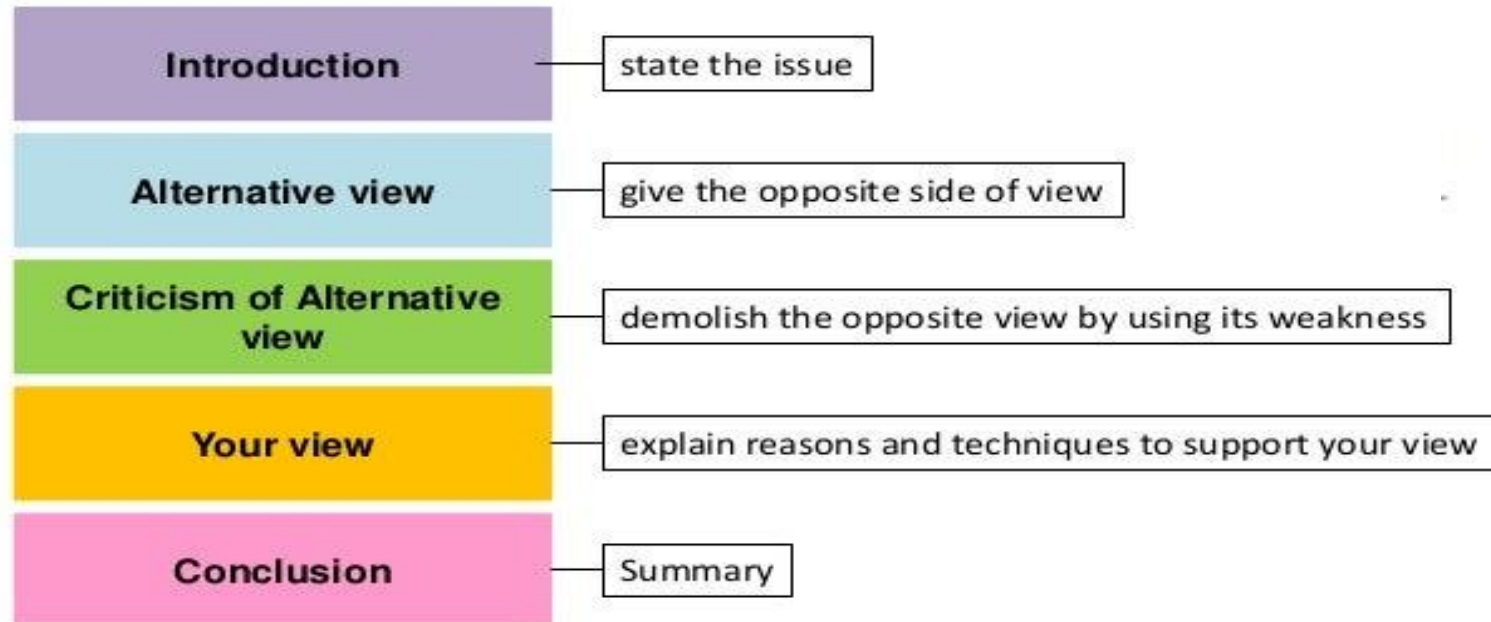
- **Body paragraph 3**

The third paragraph discusses all the miscellaneous points. Also, it uses a transitional sentence at the end to show a relation to the conclusion.

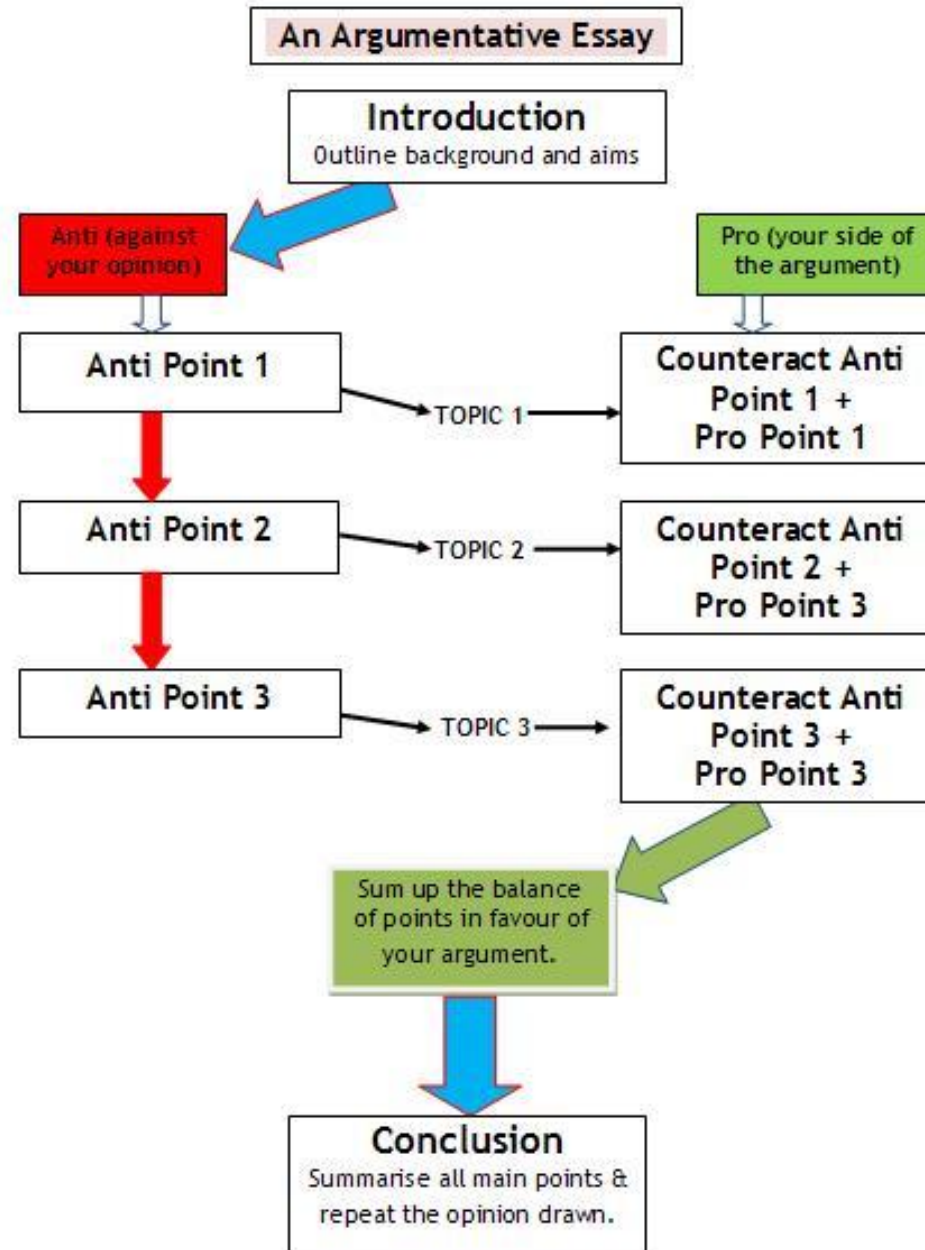
- **Conclusion**

The conclusion of a five-paragraph essay reiterates all the major elements of an argumentative essay. It also restates the thesis statement using a more convincing choice of words.

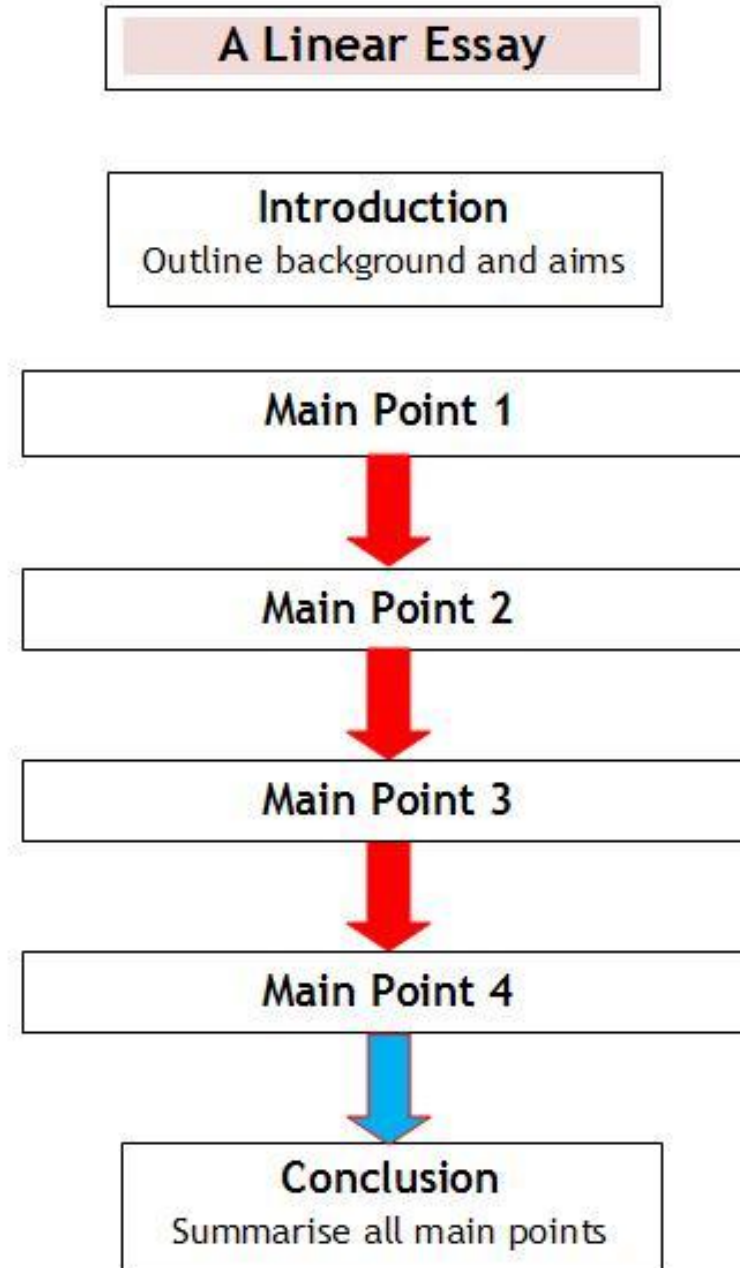
## Paragraphing



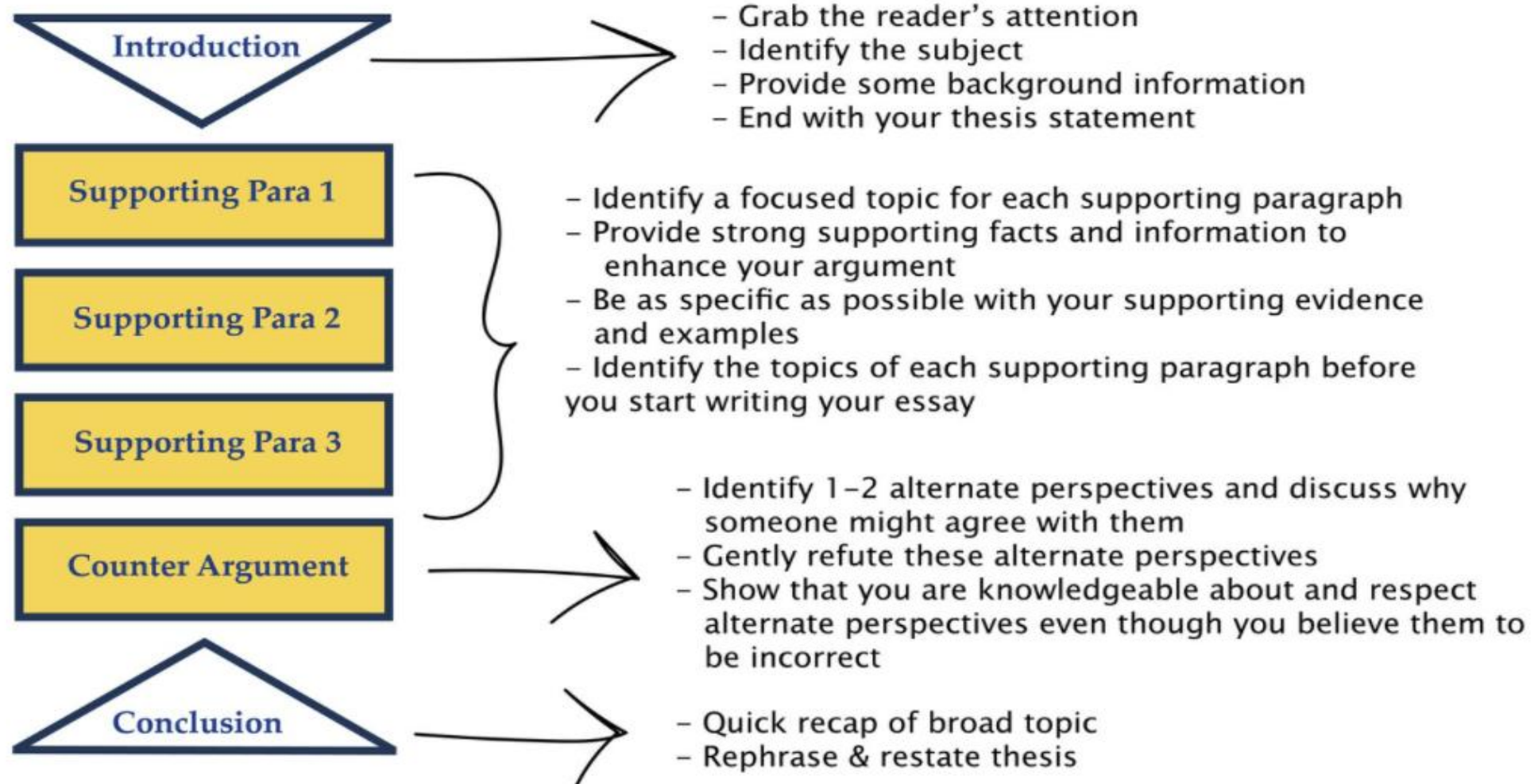
# Lecture 10



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### Example: paragraph 1: introduction

**Internet does more harm than good. What is your view?**

**To majority of teenagers and working adults, the Internet has been regarded as one the most innovative achievements of humankind. Since the invention of the internet, its pervasive and life-altering influences can be felt in many aspects of people's daily lives. While mostly beneficial in areas such as communication, trade and research, the internet has also caused a proliferation of vices such as pornography and hacking. Despite the negativity associated with the internet, I strongly believe that Internet does better than harm.**

**Communication all over the world has been considerably improved thanks to the Internet. With the widespread availability of messengers and social networks like Yahoo and Facebook, people can easily communicate irrespective of their geographic locations. Gone are the days when international communication meant a delay of several days to months. Today, interaction through the Internet is not only much cheaper and more convenient than traditional modes of communication, it also has options to allow face to face interaction such as through the use of Skype. Now, family members and businesses can not only have instantaneous communication, they can also have the added personal touch even if they are in different continents or in any remote part of the world.**

**The Internet is one of the key contributors to the global free trade. When the transnational corporations want to open business in the other countries, they first have to contact partners in those countries before officially making a deal. In such case, the Internet certainly does a great job. Furthermore, the internet is instrumental in reducing operation costs for businesses where employees can be easily hired from developing countries and work remotely from their native land. For example, many transnational companies set up call centres in countries like Philippines or India where workers are cheaper to employ. The same benefits are applied to people's daily lives. With the omnipresence of online shops, many people are able to save their precious time shopping. Instead, they have more time to do other important things such as helping their children do homework or having a short visit to their parents' house.**

**On the other hand, objectors of the Internet argue that it spoils the young generation by spreading pornography and violence, which is considered rampant nowadays. There is no doubt that pornographic websites and violence videos are ubiquitous online, but whether the young are spoilt by it depends on the young themselves. Owing to the continual warning of using the Internet on many cyber education programs, the youths are supposed to know about all the boon and bane effect of surfing webs. Thus, once they have heightened awareness, there is likelihood that they will not be attacked by cyber hackers. Moreover, there is a variety of information for their researches online. Instead of spending hours of flipping over hundreds of books in the libraries, one may easily obtain necessary documentation within a second of mouse click.**

**Similar to any other technological inventions, the Internet has both pros and cons; nonetheless, its benefits far outweigh its harms. With recent upgrading Internet security software and substantial improvements on its use, I am firmly convinced the Internet is more a blessing than a curse.**

**Thank You**