SUU Writing Center — Argumentation

Argumentation is the expression of a point of view on a subject and the support of that expression with evidence. Argumentation means more than simply presenting information you have gathered or regurgitating what was discussed in class. You need to select **your** perspective, provide evidence that supports your view, and offer an interpretation based on evidence. Professors often look for the following features as they evaluate your arguments:

1. Proof you understand the material
2. Demonstration of your ability to use or apply the material beyond what you read or heard.
3. Demonstration of your ability to support your ideas with academically credible evidence.
4. Indication of in-depth understanding of the issues at stake through a consideration of opposing viewpoints.

Useful questions to ask yourself as you prepare your argument:

Audience: "Whom am I trying to convince?"	
It's important to know your audience to create an effective argument. For example, some audiences are more convinced by facts and figures, while others are impressed by logic or personal experiences. Your audience probably knows quite a bit about your topic already, so your opinion needs to have credible proof. State your point and give evidence without assuming that the reader has already read the material.	
Thesis Statement: "What's the point?"	*Examples:*
The first step to developing an effective argument is to decide on your main point (thesis statement). Without a thesis statement, there can be no argument. Your paper becomes an "information dump" without a real purpose or direction. When selecting a point to argue, avoid simple, general statements. Be specific.	**Too simple:** Dogs make better pets than cats. **More specific:** Dogs make better pets than cats because they are more playful and fun.
Reason: "Why do *you* feel the way you do?"	*Example:*
Once you have a point to argue, the next step is telling your readers why *you* feel the way you do. These reasons will become the body of your paper. They are the first line of defense for your argument. They are *your* reasons, not someone else's.	My dog loves to play fetch and wrestle with me while my cat just sits in the chair and sleeps.

[1] Much of the information included in this tipsheet is adapted from:
 "Argumentation." *The Writing Center.* University of North Carolina. 16 June 2005
 <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/argument.html>.

Evidence: "What are the experts saying?"	*Example:*
Once you have stated the reasons for your opinion, find evidence that proves your theory. Use other sources to back up your opinion. Quote experts and authorities on the topic; give statistics, facts, and examples. This means you will have to do some research on the topic.	Dr. Joe Blow of the Imaginary Veterinary Clinic states, "Cats are very independent animals. For the most part, they prefer to be left to themselves" ("Non-Existent" 45).
Counter-arguments: "What do people with differing viewpoints believe?"	*Examples:*
Counter-arguments strengthen your argument and build your credibility. By anticipating what the opposition may say or how people who disagree with you might respond to your views, you show that you have thought about the topic seriously and have done some research. Bringing up reasonable counter-arguments allows you both to test your ideas to make sure they are credible and to explain to your audience the weaknesses you see in those opposing ideas. You may want to respond to opposing viewpoints in one of these two ways: 1. Accept the opposing viewpoint as credible, but explain why yours is better 2. Reject the opposing argument altogether with an explanation as to why. Be fair and objective, not critical and rude. Show you have seriously considered both sides, but don't change sides (unless you discover that your position isn't as strong as you first thought!) One more tip: It is usually more effective to look at one or two counter-arguments in depth rather than to create a long list.	1. Some people say cats are better pets. While cats do make good pets, dogs are better because they are more willing to play with their owners. 2. Some people say cats are better pets, but they are not as playful as dogs. They are quite independent and oftentimes lazy.