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# Introduction

Do any of these comments look familiar? You may have seen feedback like this on your essays and assignments.



But what exactly do comments like this mean?

What your tutor really wants is for you to *have something to say*. It may be that you have included lots of information about your topic, but that your essay needs a stronger perspective running through it, leading to a clear ‘take-home’ message for the reader.

It can be challenging to present a perspective while sticking to academic conventions such as objectivity. This book will show you how to build a convincing academic argument based on thorough research. We will reveal techniques for communicating your argument to a reader, from planning a logical structure to conveying your ideas in precise language. The book follows the assignment-writing process from first steps to final edit, showing how you can develop and communicate your argument at each stage.

In this book we will refer to assignments and essays, meaning any normal length piece of academic writing. But our advice can be applied more generally to most kinds of academic writing.

## GETTING STARTED

Tutors tend to use the word 'argument' when they mean:

- ▶ **making a series of claims**
- ▶ **constructing a logical case**
- ▶ **presenting a point of view.**

Constructing a logical case means:

- ▶ having an **overall point of view**
- ▶ making a **series of points** to justify that point of view
- ▶ providing **evidence to support those points.**

An assignment is an invitation to put forward a thoughtful response to a question. You should:

- ▶ tell the reader what you want to say in answer to the question, and what they will take away from the essay
- ▶ help them to follow the logic of what you are arguing, step by step
- ▶ convince them that it is a valid perspective.

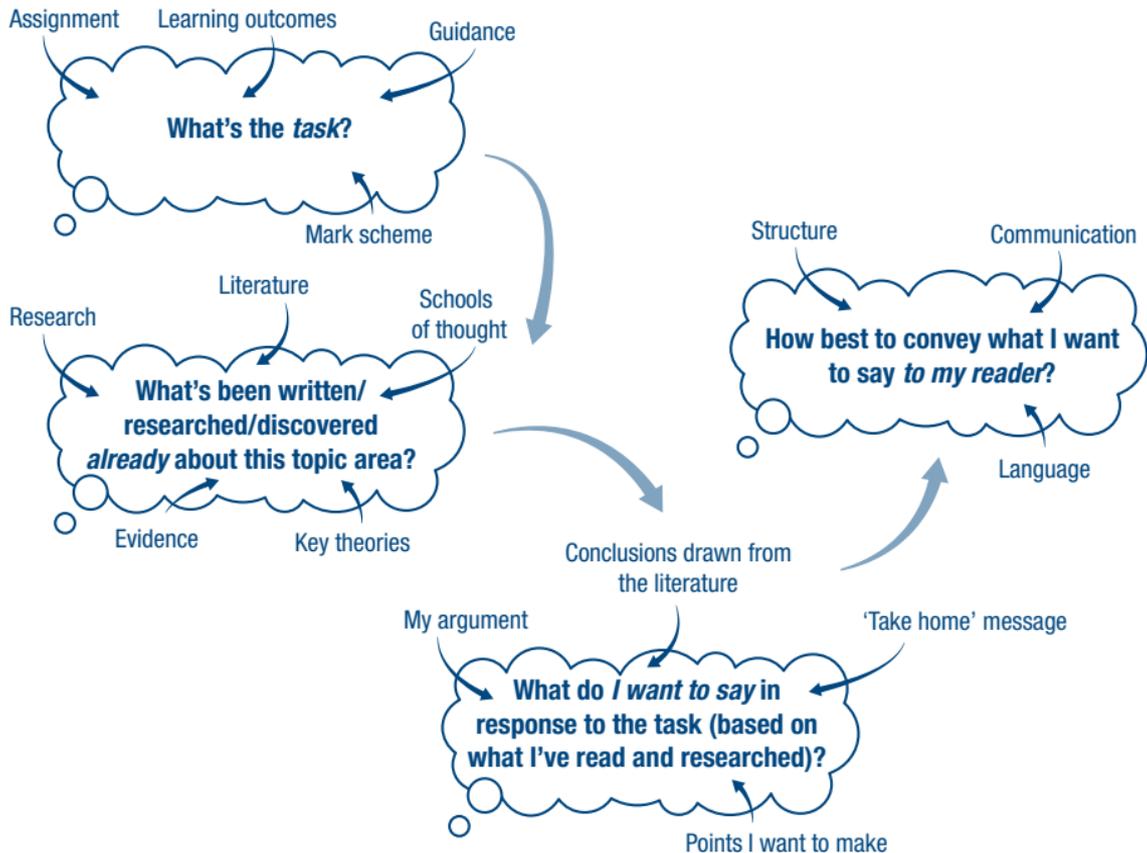
Your argument is not something that should be stuck on the end, nor sectioned off in one part of the essay. It is *your* unique response to the question, based on research, evidence and critical thinking.



We will demonstrate how to build your argument at each stage of the assignment-writing process. This chapter, and the diagram over the page, give an overview of that process. You will find more information and advice about each stage as you progress through the book.

## **Understanding the task (Part 1)**

Before building your response, you need to be clear what you are responding to, and what your reader (i.e. your tutor or marker) wants. An argument is a communication from writer to reader, within the confines of a specific task. So, begin by thinking about that task and what it requires. Your assignment question, assignment guidance and learning outcomes will help.



## Finding information and forming ideas (Part 2)

To argue effectively, you must become knowledgeable about your topic and familiar with key literature relating to it. *Your* perspective will emerge from reading critically and reviewing existing evidence. This is a key part of the process, and requires you to keep an open, inquisitive mind before you decide on your main argument.

## Building your argument (Part 2)

Once you are well informed, and have evaluated all the available evidence, you will be able to develop a response to your assignment question. You will ask yourself: *What does the evidence show? Now that I have explored the topic, what do I want to say about it?*

## Planning and structuring (Part 3)

When you know what you want to argue, and why, it's time to think about how to communicate that to a reader. Set aside time between researching and writing to consider these important questions: *How best to present all my ideas to somebody who can't see inside my head? How can I guide them through my line of reasoning? What do I want to leave my reader thinking and feeling about this issue, and how can I achieve that?*

## Writing (Parts 3 and 4)

Everything you do up to this point – considering the question, researching, planning – should make it easier to get your argument onto the page. The challenge is making sure the reader understands it and is convinced. You are writing for somebody else, showing them the relevance of your ideas and demonstrating why your perspective is valid.

## Redrafting and editing (Part 5)

The redrafting and editing stage is all about the reader. You are making sure your writing is clear, your transitions are smooth, and the focus on the question is obvious throughout. Effective communication will ensure your tutor never needs to ask ‘where’s your argument?’

It’s important to plan your time so that you can research, structure, write and edit an effective argument. For more on planning timescales, see *Planning Your Essay* (Godwin, 2014) and *Time Management* (Williams and Reid, 2011).

Next, find out how to get to grips with your task.

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