

Writing Right
**Introduction to Academic Writing:
Make Your Case**

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The best leaders are thinkers.
– William Deresiewicz

A university is an institute of higher education: a place of study, learning, and research. It is a place where complex ideas are examined and where new innovations are developed. Whatever your discipline, the university is a place where thinking is paramount, where the leading edge of your field is explored. And what that means for you is that you're not just here to memorise and regurgitate information. You are here to learn how to think.

So what has any of that got to do with writing? The answer is that writing is the most fundamental means by which ideas are exchanged and debated at university level. Because the ideas discussed at this level are so complex, they need time and careful study before they can sink in. Writing allows such ideas to be considered, examined, critiqued, discussed, shared, referenced, and responded to in the way they deserve. And so by learning how to write you are learning how to think — how to carefully evaluate and work with the ideas of others, how to develop your own point of view, and how to express your thoughts in a way that others can understand.

The *Writing Right* Introduction to Academic Writing guide will introduce you to three core elements of good writing at university level: crafting arguments, expressing yourself clearly, and paraphrasing the work of others. Mastering these three will allow you to participate more fully in the intellectual life of the university, and to excel in your studies and beyond.

If people cannot write well they cannot think well, and if they cannot think well others will do their thinking for them.
– George Orwell

MAKE YOUR CASE: Building Arguments

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- *Explain* what an argument is
 - *Identify* the difference between an argument and a mere listing of information
 - *Describe* the argumentative structure of a typical academic essay
 - *Create* academic arguments of your own
-

What Is an Argument?

In popular usage an *argument* means a quarrel, an angry disagreement between at least two parties. However, in academic writing the word means something quite different:

In academic writing, an argument is a carefully considered point of view supported by reasons and evidence, which can then be defended or refuted.

An argument is more than just an opinion. What makes an academic argument special is that it is always supported by several pieces of evidence, which are then analysed to show how they strengthen and support the point of view (or *thesis*).

The *thesis statement* in the introduction to an essay presents your main point of view, making it clear what your essay is going to be about. As such, the thesis statement acts as a summary of your argument as a whole.

Views, Not Just News

Many students accidentally confuse *evidence* with *argumentation*. Their essays thus include plenty of relevant information, but say very little about how to interpret that information. This is a serious mistake.

Without a clear point of view — an original opinion, interpretation, or perspective — you don't have an argument; all you have instead is a listing of facts. Any decent newspaper can give you facts. However, academic essays are about *analysis*: explaining what the facts mean, why they are important, and how the reader should understand them. Your point of view thus matters more to your essay than the evidence you use to support it.

Ideas, Not Emotions

Remember: university research is all about ideas. Academic writing naturally seeks to deal with ideas and not emotions, so any argument you make should seek to be *emotionally neutral*.

For this reason, avoid using strong emotion-laden words in your writing (such as “disgusting”, “evil”, “hate”, “awesome”, “incredible”, and so on). Such words have no place in an academic essay.

You should also avoid making personal attacks on individuals, since such attacks inevitably arouse strong emotions (e.g. “Dr Alice Beng-Choo has no idea what she is talking about” or “Professor David Everyman is a liar and a fool”).

An Outline of Essay Structure

Argumentative styles sometimes vary across disciplines: for example, English Literature and Economics essays tend to flow slightly differently. However, academic essays at the undergraduate level typically include four distinct phases. We can call these phases

- 1. Declare**
- 2. Support**
- 3. Defend**
- 4. Conclude**

Phase 1: Declare.

The writer states her point of view and the reasons why she has taken that position. This typically occurs in the first paragraph of the essay.

Phase 2: Support.

The writer goes through each of her reasons in turn, backing them up with evidence and explaining why that evidence supports her point of view. This constitutes the main portion of the essay, with each reason typically getting a paragraph of its own.

Phase 3: Defend.

The writer examines alternative points of view she has encountered over the course of her research, and explains why her own point of view presents a better interpretation of the facts.

Phase 4: Conclude.

Having carefully explained herself, the writer reiterates her point of view.

Much more could be said about how to develop each of these phases, but if you keep this flow in mind you should be well on your way to producing good academic essays of your own.

Paragraph structure

Let's take a closer look at how to structure each of these phases in your essay.

Phase 1: Opening paragraph, or introduction

A good introduction typically includes:

1. an *introductory sentence*, which tells the reader what the topic of the essay is;
2. a line or two of *development*, which says a little more about your topic;
3. a *point of view*, also known as a *thesis statement*;
4. A list of *reasons* to support that thesis.

Take a look at the following paragraph. Can you spot all four of these?

Today's global supply chains are connected as never before. Product design, manufacture, and assembly frequently involve facilities in many different countries, and sophisticated developments in artificial intelligence (AI) allow these operations to be coordinated globally for maximum efficiency. It is true that recent geopolitical developments such as the US-China trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic have caused many to question the wisdom of such an intense degree of supply chain interconnectedness. However, this essay takes the view that highly integrated global supply chains are here to stay. This is due to the significant cost savings they bring to firms, an increasing shortage of raw materials, and the need to explore opportunities in different global markets.

1. *Introductory sentence:*
*Today's **global supply chains** are connected as never before.*
✓ This tells the reader what the essay will be about (global supply chains).
2. *Development:*
Product design, manufacture, and assembly frequently involve facilities in many different countries, and sophisticated developments in artificial intelligence (AI) allow these operations to be coordinated globally for maximum efficiency. It is true that recent geopolitical developments such as the US-China trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic have caused many to question the wisdom of such an intense degree of supply chain interconnectedness.
✓ These sentences give the reader more information about the topic (i.e. global supply chains).
3. *Thesis statement:*
*However, this essay takes the view that **highly integrated global supply chains are here to stay.***
✓ This sentence clearly states a *point of view* about the topic.
4. *List of reasons:*
*This is due to the **significant cost savings they bring to firms, an increasing shortage of raw materials, and the need to explore opportunities in different global markets.***
✓ This sentence lists three reasons in support of the point of view given in the thesis statement. Each of these reasons will become the topic of a new paragraph.

Paragraph structure

Phase 2: Supporting paragraphs, also known as main body paragraphs

These paragraphs will form the bulk of your essay. Each of them examines one of the different reasons listed in the introduction.

Good supporting paragraphs typically include:

1. A *topic sentence*, stating the relevant reason given in support of the thesis;
2. *Evidence* to back up that reason;
3. An *explanation* of how that evidence supports that reason;
4. A link back to the thesis sentence given in the introduction.

Try to spot all four of these in the following paragraph:

It is no secret that highly integrated global supply chains bring significant cost savings to firms. The greater the degree of global integration, the easier it becomes for companies to optimise costs by leveraging price differentials across different countries. A high degree of global integration makes it possible for companies to minimise labour costs, acquire raw materials more cheaply, and decrease shipping expenditures for components between factories. For example, labour costs are lower in India than they are in Switzerland, while the dense proximity of factories to one another in some parts of China makes it significantly cheaper and faster to transport components between them. Cost efficiency is one of the most important factors behind a company's success, especially as margins are steadily being eroded worldwide; as such, any move away from maximal cost efficiency could easily put a company into loss-making territory. This means that, for their own survival, companies simply cannot afford to move away from a high degree of global supply chain integration. Thus, we can expect that supply chains will remain globally integrated; in fact, we are likely to see even more global integration in future in spite of political headwinds.

1. Topic sentence:
*It is no secret that highly integrated global supply chains **bring significant cost savings to firms.***
✓ This presents the first reason cited in the introduction.
2. Evidence:
*The greater the degree of global integration, the easier it becomes for companies to optimise costs by leveraging price differentials across different countries. A high degree of global integration makes it possible for companies to minimise labour costs, acquire raw materials more cheaply, and decrease shipping expenditures for components between factories. **For example**, labour costs are lower in India than they are in Switzerland, while the dense proximity of factories to one another in some parts of China makes it significantly cheaper and faster to transport components between them.*
✓ Evidence provided backs up the reason given in the topic sentence with specific details.

3. Explanation:

*Cost efficiency is one of the most important factors behind a company's success, especially as **margins are steadily being eroded worldwide**; as such, any move away from maximal cost efficiency could easily put a company into loss-making territory. This means that, **for their own survival, companies simply cannot afford to move away from a high degree of global supply chain integration.***

✓ This section provides an analysis of *why* the evidence provided supports the reason given in the topic sentence.

4. Link:

*Thus, **we can expect that supply chains will remain globally integrated**; in fact, we are likely to see even more global integration in future in spite of political headwinds.*

✓ This concludes the supporting paragraph by making an *explicit link* between this paragraph and the *thesis statement* given in your introduction.

Paragraph structure

Phase 3: Defence, also known as counterargument

In this section, you defend your thesis by **mentioning contrary viewpoints** and **explaining why your own point of view is superior**.

Good defence paragraphs typically include:

1. Mention of *a contrary viewpoint* you've encountered
2. A brief *explanation of this viewpoint*
3. A *rebuttal of this position*
4. *Reiteration of your own point of view* (linking back to the thesis sentence in your introduction)

Try to spot all four of these in the following paragraph:

In their article "Supply Chain Decoupling in a Protectionist Age" (Lee & Oh, 2020), Lee Min-soo and Oh Nam-gi posit that the increasing dominance of right-wing parties around the world will halt or even reverse the trend towards supply chain globalisation. Such parties frequently come to power on protectionist agendas, making it politically imperative for them to attempt to preserve jobs for their own citizens. Lee and Oh argue that top-down policy initiatives by these parties will limit or break up global supply chains in an attempt to "bring jobs home". However, this is not proving to be the case. To cite the most prominent global example, the US-China trade balance has remained remarkably stable in recent years even amid an openly declared "trade war". We must remember that the primary driver of business is always economic, not patriotic. It would simply take too much time and effort for firms that have already invested heavily in supply chain globalisation to undo those networks now, and any attempt to do so would in fact put them at a competitive disadvantage. Thus, we can expect that global supply chains will remain highly integrated in spite of political injunctions; in fact, firms are likely to further enhance and streamline those networks by the implementation of new paradigms such as Industry 4.0.

1. *Mention of a contrary viewpoint:*
*In their article "Supply Chain Decoupling in a Protectionist Age" (Lee & Oh, 2020), Lee Min-soo and Oh Nam-gi posit that **the increasing dominance of right-wing parties around the world will halt or even reverse the trend towards supply chain globalisation.***
✓ This demonstrates that you have done your research and are able to highlight challenges to your own point of view.
2. *Explanation of this viewpoint:*
Such parties frequently come to power on protectionist agendas, making it politically imperative for them to attempt to preserve jobs for their own citizens. Lee and Oh argue that top-down policy initiatives by these parties will limit or break up global supply chains in an attempt to "bring jobs home".
✓ Any contrary viewpoint you cite needs to have some substance and backing. Explain it here in order to show that you have properly understood this opposing point of view.

3. Rebuttal of this position:

However, **this is not proving to be the case**. To cite the most prominent global example, the US-China trade balance has remained remarkably stable in recent years even amid an openly declared “trade war”. We must remember that **the primary driver of business is always economic, not patriotic**. It would simply **take too much time and effort** for firms that have already invested heavily in supply chain globalisation to undo those networks now, and any attempt to do so would in fact **put them at a competitive disadvantage**.

✓ By providing a reasoned rebuttal, you carefully show why your own point of view is superior to this contrary position.

4. Reiteration of your own point of view:

Thus, we can expect that **global supply chains will remain highly integrated** in spite of political injunctions; in fact, firms are likely to further enhance and streamline those networks through the implementation of new paradigms such as Industry 4.0.

✓ Just as with your supporting paragraphs, conclude by making an explicit link between this paragraph and the thesis statement in your introduction.

Paragraph structure

Phase 4: Conclusion

Your concluding paragraph aims to give your reader a sense of closure as you finish your essay. You should therefore not introduce any new concepts or arguments in this section.

A good conclusion typically includes:

1. *Reiteration* of your thesis statement
2. A brief statement conveying *the significance or possible implications* of your conclusion

Which of these can you spot in the following paragraph?

Globally integrated supply chains are here to stay. They are an inalienable part of the international economic landscape due to the significant advantages and efficiencies that they confer. As such, rather than attempting to unravel these supply chains in pursuit of localised short-term growth, governments should be partnering with industry to deepen and strengthen these global networks. Given that manufacturing is a key driver of global economic growth, the net benefit of investment in global supply chains far outweighs any short-term protectionist gains.

1. *Reiteration of your thesis:*
Globally integrated supply chains are here to stay. They are an inalienable part of the international economic landscape due to the significant advantages and efficiencies that they confer.
2. *Possible implications of your thesis:*
As such, rather than attempting to unravel these supply chains in pursuit of localised short-term growth, **governments should be partnering with industry to deepen and strengthen these global networks.** Given that manufacturing is a key driver of global economic growth, **the net benefit of investment in global supply chains far outweighs any short-term protectionist gains accruing to individual nations.**

Exercises

Based on what you have read, define what an argument is, explaining how it differs from a mere listing of information. Write your answer in the box below:

Tick the correct answer:

Which of the following best describes the 4-phase structure of a typical academic essay?

- A) Declare, Support, Defend, Conclude
- B) Describe, List, Quote, Conclude
- C) Introduction, Body, Conclusion
- D) Point, Evidence, Elaboration, Link

Editing Exercise:

Take a look at your most recent essay. How closely does it adhere to the paragraph structures provided in section 1.6? How can you improve it? Try editing a soft copy of your essay to make it fit better.

For more resources on Academic Writing or English Language support, you may scan the QR code below.



<https://www.suss.edu.sg/academic-research-writing-resources>

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