

ANCIENT LITERATURE SUPPLEMENT

with Grammar and Composition

Sample

MY FATHER'S WORLD[®]

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A Guide to Critical Writing, Grammar, and Style by Robert W. Watson

A Student's Companion to *The Epic of Gilgamesh* by Robert W. Watson

A Student's Companion to *Greek and Roman Mythology (Bulfinch's Age of Fable)* by Abigail E. Schoolfield

A Student's Companion to *Odyssey* by Dori Anne Abbott

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Lesson One
The Argumentative Paper

These first few lessons will help you to construct and to organize an effective argumentative paper. The writing that you will experience in this program is called **argumentative**, or **point-driven writing**, which is by far the most common writing assignment in college courses. This kind of writing requires you to take a position and to stand your own ground. Generally, when discussing literature, your chief purpose for writing will be **interpretation**.

You must carefully understand the purpose of argumentation. Whenever young writers are asked to write an argumentative paper, oftentimes they approach the task with many misconceptions as to what is expected. First, the argumentative paper is **not a biographical sketch** about an author. If your topic is about a literary work, then focus on the **ideas** of the author and not his life. Second, the argumentative paper is **not an elaborate definition**. If you are writing an argument against abortion, then do not spend two pages spewing forth words explaining what abortion is. Very few people are ignorant about what an abortion is; therefore, do not waste precious words on defining terms that need not be defined. Your concise language should clarify the meaning of any terms. Finally, the argumentative paper is definitely **not a plot summary**. For some odd reason, most inexperienced writers have this compelling urge to write a summary about the work. However, if the urge is too great and you must write a plot summary, then write it. Once you have finished the summary, file your masterpiece away, forget about it, and get down to some serious writing.

If you are like I am, you hate to be disagreeable. My dislike for getting into petty squabbles goes back to my teenage years when I knew a fellow named Confrontational Charlie [the name has been changed for the sake of argument]. Of course, everyone has encountered Charlie. This guy knows anything about everything and relishes the idea of matching wits with the best of his fellows. However, Charlie tends to have very few friends because people avoid him. Alas, Charlie just is not very friendly.

Many of us have learned that to have friends, we must show ourselves to be friendly. This means that we should not see every conversation as a chance to beat a person mentally with piercing words. Also, this means trying to tolerate imperfect people with their peculiar quirks and weird ideas. Whether your community is your family, school, church, or country, you experience peace whenever all the members dwell together with some sort of understanding.

Fortunately, writing an argumentative paper will not require sacrificing your easy-going disposition on the altar of muckraking. A good argumentative paper has a positive tone that represents your logical, unemotional, and reasoned approach to a subject that is open to debate. Emotional outbursts are not only unnecessary, but are inappropriate for the responsible, intelligent writer as well. Any fool can resort to name-calling, temper tantrums, and shouting. Whenever someone gets angry about a topic, his loss of emotional control generally indicates that his position is weak. If you cannot discuss a controversial topic with calmness and presence of mind, then you should reevaluate what you believe about the topic. If you can discuss your position with passionate conviction, yet without anger, then other people will value your thoughts even though they may disagree with you.

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As you have already learned during your young life, people disagree on a host of ideas. Some issues are unimportant; others are extremely important. Some of these issues happen to be the current, passing fad. Other issues are steadfast convictions of the soul for which you would rather give your life before you would change your mind. An implied trait of the responsible writer is a respect for another's viewpoint. This is not to say that you should agree with the viewpoint. However, reasonable people do differ and they have their reasons for believing the way they do. Your task as a responsible writer is to study both sides of an issue, to point out the weaknesses of the contrary position, and to show how your point of view is superior.

Your purpose for argument is not to strip your adversary of his dignity, but to help him to become enlightened and to understand the truth as you understand it. Of course, this is no small task. Approach this task of enlightenment with humility and grace and not with pride and boorishness.

Do Not Use Secondary Sources

A primary source is the text that you are studying. For an example, if you are reading *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens in order to write a paper about the epic, then Dickens' work is the primary source. However, if you find a book called *Analysis and Criticism of Great Expectations*, this work is a secondary source that is written about the primary source. Argumentative papers do not use secondary sources. **Do not** refer to sources other than the primary source when writing your papers. The purpose of the argumentative paper is for you to use your own opinions, analysis, and conclusions about the literature.

The Audience

Always consider your audience as you write. Your audience may consist of millions of readers or only one person. Naturally, you would write differently for a group of first graders than you would for a teacher who has a college degree. The inexperienced writer tends to forget about his audience as he sets out to write his paper. Of course, this does not mean that you must use a pretentious vocabulary. A logical argument expressed in simple terms will convert more people to your position than any *grandiloquent, elocutionary verbosity*—get the point? At least in the academic context, you can assume that your intended audience will have a basic knowledge about your topic.

The Topic

Normally, you will be given a broad subject and you will be responsible to narrow the topic. The teacher could assign a two-page paper about Aristotle's *Poetics*. The first step is to limit the topic. You could write about the concept of the tragic flaw, or you could write about Aristotle's view about the ideal tragedy. On the other hand, perhaps you could discuss the nature of the epic poem.

Do not try to say too much in your paper. Keep the topic focused with a good thesis statement. The importance of narrowing the subject with your thesis statement is discussed in Lesson Two.

Exercises

Circle the number of the following items that would make a good topic for an argumentative paper. Remember, the topic ought to be one in which reasonable people may disagree.

1. The gods in the *Iliad*
2. Computers
3. The value of computers
4. Homer's life
5. The plot of the *Odyssey*
6. The true meaning of life according to the *Odyssey*
7. The importance of studying history
8. The history of religious poetry
9. The Greek army
10. Why the righteous suffer
11. The symbolism of warfare in the *Iliad*
12. Eve as a model of the ideal woman
13. Eve in the garden
14. Job's children
15. The conflict between good and evil in the book of Job

Note: Answers to Exercises are found at the back of this book.

Writing

Choose a topic for the argumentative paper you will write this week. You may choose any topic that would make a good argumentative paper. Remember, this is a topic about which reasonable people might disagree, such as "The Most Important Rules in a Family" or "The True Definition of Success." If you have recently read a book, choose a topic based on the book, such as "Lessons to Be Learned from *Gulliver's Travels*."

You will be guided through the steps of writing an argumentative essay this week.

Lesson Two

The Thesis Statement

All writing has purpose. Therefore, you are solely responsible to ensure that the reader knows your purpose for writing. Without a predetermined direction, you will be wandering a little over here and a little over there. If the reader fails to see where you are heading, he may be smart enough not to become lost with you and will stop reading.