



# Formulating and developing arguments

This chapter focuses on argument: what an argument is and how it is constructed. Good persuasive writing usually shows a clear sense of *what* it wants to convey, as well as *how* it can best do so. A poorly articulated or structured piece of writing will not win over many readers! Writers and speakers go to great lengths to craft compelling **content** and logical structure to communicate their views and it is important for you to be able to analyse these aspects of a persuasive text.

## ISSUES AND EVENTS

When analysing an argument of any kind, it is important to be able to distinguish between an **event** and an **issue**. An event is *something that happens*, such as the 'facts' that are reported in news media. An issue can be defined as *a contentious or complex problem, situation or moral concern*, and usually has its origins in an event. For example, a group of malnourished horses discovered by the RSPCA at an abandoned farm constitutes an event, which might be reported by the media. A group of animal activists might get together to protest the treatment of these horses, arguing about the issues of neglect, cruelty and exploitation.

Many difficult issues (climate change or asylum seeker policy) have been with us for many years. However, each time a new event occurs (such as the implementation, and subsequent repeal, of a carbon pollution reduction scheme, or the arrival of a group of refugees by boat), a range of issues is stirred again, with new arguments and debates surfacing as well as old ones being revived in a fresh context.

If a journalist only writes about the *events* that have occurred, as we would expect from a balanced news report, only the *facts* would be reported. However, the *issues* that might be raised as a consequence of these events are many and varied, as people debate the issues they feel most strongly about. With the issue of duty of care for asylum seekers, some people feel that border protection issues outweigh humanitarian concerns. Others will feel strongly about an individual's right to appropriate medical treatment, regardless of their social circumstance. It is these differences of *opinion* that create issues, as there is often no clear-cut solution that pleases everybody!



➔ **Your turn**



2.1 Decide whether each of the following is an issue or an event, then match each event to its resulting issue.

	ISSUE OR EVENT?	CORRESPONDS TO ...
a	a principal suspends a cohort of Year 12 students for poor behaviour on 'muck-up day'	
b	sexual discrimination in the workplace	
c	the impact of technology on language	
d	Beijing authorities shut down a website that denounces the use of police violence on Tibetan monks	
e	the morality of the death penalty	
f	an English teacher asks students to write a poem in the language of text messages	
g	a woman is harassed after requesting a salary increase to match that of her male colleagues	
h	human rights and freedom of expression	
i	'mob mentality' behaviour	
j	three Australian drug smugglers are executed after a string of unsuccessful appeals by lawyers	

2.2 Choose two events from the table and identify another issue that might be debated as a result.

2.3 Now do the reverse: for two of the issues listed in activity 2.1, imagine one other specific event that might have sparked the debate.

2.4 One event can spark any number of issues, and in a range of areas. Consider the following news report, about the death of an Iranian asylum seeker who was being detained at Australia's Manus Island detention facility in 2014. Identify all of the facts that are reported objectively.

2.5 Despite being a news report, there are a number of aspects of the article that position readers to see the event, and its related issues, from a particular perspective.

- a What is the perspective? What does the article imply happened?
- b How many persuasive features can you identify? How do they position readers to see the events in a particular light?
- c Do you think this is an example of balanced (fair) – or biased – reporting? Discuss as a class.

Part 2

SAMPLE

- 2.6 How many issues can you and a partner identify as emerging from an event like this? See if you can come up with at least 10.
- 2.7 What is your opinion in relation to this event and some of the issues you identified in 2.6? Write three to four sentences to explain your opinions. Alternatively, debate the issue with your classmates and teacher, establishing clear arguments in support of your views.

## ASYLUM SEEKER BRAIN DEAD AFTER CUT TURNED TO SEPTICAEMIA IN 'SHOCKING' DETENTION CONDITIONS



There are reports Hamid Kehazaei, a 24-year-old Iranian asylum seeker who had been detained on Manus Island, has been declared 'brain dead' after suffering a heart attack.

According to the Refugee Action Coalition, Hamid Kehazaei was transferred to the mainland

on August 27 to receive urgent medical treatment in a Brisbane hospital.

He was suffering from septicaemia developed from a cut in his foot, and was admitted into intensive care at the hospital where he suffered a heart attack.

Septicaemia occurs when disease-causing bacteria enters the bloodstream.

Yesterday, the Immigration Department and the hospital informed Mr Kehazaei's family that he has been declared brain dead.

The hospital told his family a legal guardian will be appointed to make the decision about the withdrawal of life support.

Mr Kehazaei formed part of the first group of asylum seekers transferred to Manus Island by the then Labor Government in September 2013.

Refugee advocates say in the last few days 'P block' in the Foxtrot compound where Hamid and 140 others were living has been evacuated and closed.

'Hamid is a victim of the shocking conditions and medical neglect on Manus Island. It is inexcusable that he developed septicaemia on Manus Island,' Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, says.

Mr Rintoul says the Australian Government is responsible for the conditions that led to Mr Kehazaei's illness.

'There are scores of infections on Manus Island, and many complaints of the lack of medical attention. Asylum seekers on Manus Island are often forced to walk through raw sewage.'

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SBS, 3 September 2014 (excerpt only)

### ➔ Your turn

- 2.8 Select an event you have seen in the media recently that has sparked controversy.
- Give a brief, 2-minute presentation to your class about the event and the range of issues it raised. Include your own opinion; argue your beliefs by incorporating some supporting explanations or **evidence**.
  - Which class member offered the strongest point of view? Why? What does this tell you about how an argument can be constructed effectively and persuasively?

Pair 2

# POINTS OF VIEW

Have you ever heard people arguing about any of the following topics?

- the place of religion in government schools
- public versus private education
- the use of drugs in professional sport
- marriage equality

Why do people argue about these topics? Usually because they have an opinion – or a **point of view** – to share. A point of view is a *broad opinion or belief on a topic, based on prior knowledge and experience*. In a democratic country such as Australia, people have a right to express their point of view freely. As a society, we frequently debate serious issues of public concern in order to work through their complexities. They spark public debate and do not have clear solutions. Usually, an issue has two or more contrasting points of view that can be strongly supported; this is why easy solutions are not available. Debating an issue forces us to explain, and justify, the reasons behind our beliefs. Sometimes we might even change our point of view as a result of a debate, when we come to understand that we have not considered all the aspects of an issue.

## ➔ Your turn

**2.9** Think about the issue of drugs in professional sport. What different points of view do you often hear expressed? Outline them and then compare with a partner or as a class.

**2.10** Now, choose one of the other topics listed under 'Points of view' and consider which groups or individuals would be likely to debate the topic, what their viewpoints might be and why they might hold these views. Prepare a table with the following table column headings. Try to do this exercise with a partner to get another point of view.



TOPIC	WHO MIGHT DEBATE THIS ISSUE?	WHAT VIEWPOINT MIGHT THEY HOLD?	WHY?

## CONSIDERING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

When exploring an issue, consider the full range of views that might be expressed. By understanding another point of view, you can strengthen your own argument. Similarly, if your knowledge of a particular issue is broad, you can evaluate the quality of another person's argument more effectively. Considering opposing viewpoints is a strategy applied by students in debates; it can be extended to any situation in which you must develop your own viewpoint and it will help you to construct your own reasoned response.

## ➔ Your turn

**2.11** Consider the issue of adults using a social media site such as Facebook at work. What is your personal point of view in relation to this issue? Can you justify your position with reasons or arguments? Write 2–3 sentences explaining your position.

**2.12** Use this table to list all of the arguments for and against adults using social media sites during work hours.

IN FAVOUR OF USE OF SOCIAL-MEDIA SITES AT WORK	AGAINST USE OF SOCIAL-MEDIA SITES AT WORK

Part 2





2.13 Now discuss activity 2.12 with a partner using these questions.

- a What is your partner's point of view, and what arguments can they use to support this view?
- b Can you add any new arguments to your table as a result of your conversation? If so, why do you think you were unable to identify these arguments yourself?
- c Compare the relative quality of your (and your partner's) various arguments. Do any of them need to be altered, in terms of ideas or expression? If so, address this.
- d Which side of the debate appears stronger at this point? Can you suggest any possible reasons why this might be the case, in terms of audience?
- e Look back at the sentences you wrote for activity 2.11. Has your viewpoint changed in any way? What new knowledge now influences your point of view, if any? What benefit was there in sharing information with others?

## CONTENTIONS

What is the difference in meaning between a **point of view** and a **contention**? The two terms can be used interchangeably but there is a difference. If a point of view is a broad **opinion** or belief, then a contention can be seen as *the central idea an author is trying to persuade an audience to accept* in light of that broader view. If it is your belief, for example, that culling sharks is wrong, your contention would be your **key argument** in support of this view (e.g. shark culling is a cruel reflection of arrogant human authority over other species). In a more complex or detailed argument, a contention will often be developed with a number of supporting arguments and appropriate explanations and **evidence**.

It is important to be able to identify a writer's or speaker's broad point of view as well as their more specific contention and supporting arguments. If you can do this accurately you will find it easier to analyse the language used and how the writer or speaker is **trying to influence your opinion**. You will be able to identify how and why they use particular language features or **strategies to support their arguments**, or how they tailor and manipulate their language to frame their arguments. You will also be able to construct your own points of view more coherently and persuasively if you can break your opinion down into its more specific components.



### ➔ Your turn

- 2.14 Consider the example of shark culling. What is your broad opinion on this issue? Can you create a specific contention in support of this view?
- 2.15 Think of two more contentions for each of the points of view in the table, and write them in the appropriate space. An example for each contention has been done for you.

POINT OF VIEW	CONTENTION 1	CONTENTION 2	CONTENTION 3
Shark culling is wrong.	<i>Shark culling is a cruel reflection of arrogant human authority over other species.</i>		
Shark culling is necessary.	<i>The risk to humans is too great to ignore the threat posed by sharks.</i>		



**2.16** Look at the following excerpt from a **letter to the editor**. Summarise the writer’s contention in one sentence, in your own words, in the space provided.

How nice it must be for the privileged few to enjoy gourmet culinary delights while kicking back in a comfy corporate box up high at the footy. Meanwhile, the sweaty masses (who actually pay for their seats) are forced to endure lukewarm pies and soggy chips, and end up missing half a quarter for the privilege. How about letting those of us in the ‘cheap’ seats have access to the same food and service?

Contention: \_\_\_\_\_

**2.17** Consider the following issues. For each, write one sentence to outline your broad point of view and one sentence that provides a more specific contention in support of this viewpoint.

- same-sex relationship education in schools
- capital punishment in the twenty-first century
- no-homework policies in Victorian primary schools

**2.18** Find a partner and, using your answers to activity 2.17, discuss your points of view. No doubt you will have different broad opinions on at least one issue!

**2.19** Choose one issue about which you and your partner have different points of view. Have a mini-debate in which you both state your contention and give reasoned arguments and evidence to support it.

## CREATING A STRONG CONTENTION

A good contention is **reasoned**: factual, plausible or sensible and supported by strong logic. It should reveal an author’s broad point of view but should also provide specific detail and a good level of insight with respect to the issue at hand. Put simply, a good contention should make it clear that the author knows what they are talking about!

### ➔ Your turn

**2.20** Read the following contentions and explain exactly what is wrong with each one. The first one has been done for you.

CONTENTION	WHY IT IS INEFFECTIVE
Reality television is just <b>trash</b> (1) and if we keep watching this <b>rubbish we’ll lose all perspective and won’t know what’s real and what’s not</b> (2). <b>They</b> (3) should be offering us much better shows than these.	<p>1 <i>This is a simplistic value judgment, not grounded in fact or logic; the language is also unsophisticated.</i></p> <p>2 <i>This is exaggeration and unrealistic speculation; again, it is not based in fact or logic.</i></p> <p>3 <i>Not specific. It does not clearly state at whom the criticism is aimed, and it shows a lack of insight.</i></p> <p><i>Overall, the contention is not clearly stated, the language lacks polish, and no specific or workable alternatives are offered.</i></p>
The issue of climate change is a difficult and controversial one. Some say we must accept its existence and act now; others feel we should not make any rash decisions with respect to trading schemes or emissions targets.	

**CONTENTION****WHY IT IS INEFFECTIVE**

The only way to deal with these feral teenagers is to lock them up. They are all well overdue for some tough love.

Greenies need to get a grip and just accept the fact that cars are here to stay.



### ➔ Your turn



**2.21** Choose an issue that you feel strongly about. If you cannot think of one, choose from this list.

- euthanasia
- scientific whaling
- police corruption
- renewable energy alternatives
- live animal export trade
- graffiti in Melbourne's laneways – art or eyesore?
- Indigenous health and life expectancy
- Year 12 'muck-up' days and 'schoolies'
- genetically modified food
- freedom in the press

**2.22** Research your issue on the internet using newspaper webpages and online research sites.

- a** Write a summary of the issue (about 100 words). Be sure to outline:
  - the **background** – how did the issue arise or what events sparked it? What are people arguing about?
  - the major arguments on various sides of the debate
  - your particular viewpoints and beliefs.
- b** Summarise your viewpoint in a one-sentence contention. Make sure it is reasoned: factual, sensible and logical.
- c** Finally, list your major arguments and the specific evidence you could use to support each argument.
- d** Present your issue to the class in the form of a brief oral presentation. Be sure to outline the background, your contention, the key supporting arguments and evidence for each argument.

# ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

When authors create persuasive texts they can use many different structural approaches. An effectively structured point of view often has an introduction or orientation, with a clear contention and carefully sequenced supporting arguments and evidence, as well as a conclusion. However, there are many other structural options available to authors. They might open with an **emotional appeal** in order to 'hook' the audience before moving on to a rational and evidence-based case with key arguments and evidence. Or, they might adopt a humorous or satirical approach throughout, in order to critique or undermine an idea or person. Another author might choose to bookend a piece with an **anecdote** designed to personalise the issue and make the facts more appealing. Good writing is often about manipulating established conventions rather than following them unquestioningly.

Whatever the approach, there is often a multitude of purposes at play, beyond the obvious intention of convincing the audience of the contention. An author might also desire to:

- embarrass a rival
- undermine an opposing viewpoint
- entertain the audience by making them laugh
- shock people into a new awareness of a particular problem
- infuriate or enrage readers about a particular event.

In order to achieve these different purposes, authors think carefully about the most effective structure for their argument. Ideas and language do not exist separately – they **mesh together** to create an impact on audiences, which can be manipulated with careful planning.

## METHODS OF ARGUMENT

There are two well-established methods of argument familiar to many people accustomed to arguing a point of view: the Aristotelian and the Rogerian models. Each offers an excellent method of structuring and developing a viewpoint. They are not the **only options**, but they are discussed here because they are commonly used.

### The Aristotelian (classical) model

The classical approach was devised by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. His method is commonly used in persuasive argument. The Aristotelian model relies on the use of **ethos**, **logos** and **pathos** appeals:

- *ethos*: an appeal that **relies on the credibility** or authority of the writer/speaker
- *logos*: an appeal to **logic**, supported by valid and relevant evidence
- *pathos*: an appeal to **emotions**; motivating an audience through the emotional quality of the language and ideas.



### The Rogerian model

The Rogerian model is based on Carl Rogers' work in psychology and uses the notion of **consensus**. When a writer uses this approach, they find common ground with their audience and those who oppose their view. This fair-minded approach presents a balanced exploration of all aspects of a debate and accepts that people may disagree with elements of it. The Rogerian model is less argumentative than the classical model, but there are benefits to pursuing a measured approach, particularly when it comes to sensitive debates, for example those around abortion or sexuality.



The following table gives an overview of the structure of the Aristotelian and Rogerian models.

ARISTOTELIAN (CLASSICAL)	ROGERIAN
<b>Introduction</b> – capture audience attention, introduce issue	<b>Introduction</b> – state problem to be resolved, raise possibility of positive change
<b>Statement of background</b> – supply context, give audience necessary backstory	<b>Summarise opposing views</b> – neutrally state opposition’s perspective; show non-judgmental fairness
<b>Proposition</b> – state contention (thesis), outline major points to follow	<b>Statement of understanding</b> – accept that, at times, opposing views are valid; show when, why
<b>Proof</b> – present reasons, supporting claims and evidence; explain and justify assumptions	<b>Statement of position</b> – state your personal position after consideration has been shown for opposing views
<b>Refutation</b> – anticipate and rebut opposing views; show thorough consideration of issue	<b>Statement of contexts</b> – explain when, why your position makes sense; acknowledge people won’t always agree
<b>Conclusion</b> – summarise most important points; make final appeal to audience’s values, emotions	<b>Statement of benefits</b> – appeal to self-interest of opponents by showing how they might benefit from your position

### ➔ Your turn

2.23 Work with a partner. Take it in turns to speak about an issue of interest using both the Aristotelian and the Rogerian methods of argument. Speak for 2–3 minutes, without substantial preparation.

- a Which method was easier to follow? Why?
- b How well did you perform overall? What does this suggest about the role of planning and research in the development of an argument?

2.24 Jump ahead to Part 5 and read Chris Hey’s opinion piece ‘Who’s ready to help?’

- a Identify some of the key stages of the Aristotelian model in this piece. Are they effective? Why? Why not?
- b Does any stage appear to be missing? Do you think the piece could have been improved if they were included? Write another paragraph to insert into this piece that adds the missing stage(s).

Part 2



## ARGUMENT DEVELOPMENT

The structure and development of a text is based upon the interplay of context, purpose, audience and form. For example, a broadsheet newspaper editorial is built in an entirely different way to a website advertisement for a product. The editorial would likely rely on a version of either the Aristotelian or Rogerian models to uphold its newspaper’s reputation for intellectual rigour and journalistic integrity. The website advertisement has far more creative flexibility in its online context and can be constructed very differently.

Part of your work in this Area of Study involves carefully scrutinising the overall shape and direction of an author’s argument, analysing how and why a text is structured as it is and how the various arguments, stages or approaches work together to achieve a persuasive whole. The more you consider how the various arguments and language features work together, the more coherent and reasoned your analysis will be.

Consider this example of a web-based infomercial selling gap-year opportunities, which illustrates how argument and language features work together.

**Part 2**

**GAP Experience** Contact us | About us | My Account

Congratulations... on taking the first big step towards your life-changing gap year experience!

»Destinations »Volunteering »Work »Advice »Special Offers

Display images of happy young adults in exotic locations to appeal to Year 12 students who are feeling 'trapped' by their studies

Incorporate an introduction from the company that **uses flattery and exaggeration to generate enthusiasm and motivation** in potential new customers

Make an appeal to a sense of adventure to capitalise on this enthusiasm

Include some 'satisfied customer' testimony to accompany these photographs, to convince the target audience of the validity and benefits of the product from the perspective of people similar to the target audience

Contrast this possibility of adventure with the alternative option: another dreary year chained to your desk at university, after an exhausting Year 12 VCE experience

Deepen this sense of dissatisfaction by focusing on the current challenges young people face in the job market. Use economic data to deepen the sense of concern or anxiety about the future

Strategically follow this with more expert testimony from a satisfied customer talking about how their gap year made them more employable. This alleviates a potential client's unemployment concerns and sells the travel product as a 'solution' to joblessness

Just imagine yourself cruising the streets of Bangkok in a local tuk-tuk, then venturing out into the dense jungles of Borneo to see some wondrous wildlife, before settling into your life-changing role as an aid worker in Nepal.

And what's your alternative? Another year of study, after the most gruelling year of study you've experienced to date? Another winter of work at your desk, spent surfing the internet and scanning the Facebook pages of those friends who took the gap year plunge and are living it up in the tropics?

The ABS has released its annual youth unemployment update, and it's not looking good. There has been a spike in the overall unemployment rate, and an increase also in casual rates, meaning that more employers are choosing to hedge their bets when it comes to offering security to inexperienced younger employees...

Trust me guys – this is the BEST decision you will ever make. Just do it. Simone, 19 – gap year success story

After my volunteer work in Burma, finding temp work as a teacher's aide back home became a breeze – suddenly I was more employable, thanks to the gap year adventure!

**SIGN UP NOW!**

Close with a number of tempting hyperlinks, which use imperatives – 'Click here', 'Sign up NOW', 'Take the plunge' – to capitalise on all of the strategies outlined above

## ➔ Your turn

**2.25** Work with a partner. Imagine you have started a business tutoring Year 12 English students and you want to design a web-based infomercial. Create an overview of your argument and language approach. Aim for six to eight stages or features and use language – including visual elements – in a range of ways to achieve your aims. Think about the order and sequence.

**2.26** Re-read Elizabeth Jackson's opinion piece 'A lesson in the power of words (and censorship)' in Part 1 and then answer these questions.

- Why do you think Jackson uses the words 'spastic' and 'gay' in the opening sentence?
- How does the central anecdote involving her son help Jackson create a more persuasive point of view? Would this piece have been as effective without this detail?
- Jackson also includes some contrasting 'evidence' – an extract from her son's speech, and later, a paraphrased version of the teacher's feedback. Why do you think she includes both of these 'voices', and how do they contrast? What is the overall intention here?