

UNIT 2:

HOW IS THE ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT STRUCTURED?

OBJECTIVES:

- 1 Students understand and are able to analyse the text structure of the argumentative text.**
- 2 Students recognise the types of introduction of the argumentative text.**
- 3 Students recognise the elements of the body of the argumentative text.**
- 4 Students recognise the forms of the conclusion of the argumentative text.**

UNIT 2

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TEXT COMPONENTS

To begin with, the text must contain the writer's thesis. The thesis reflects the writer's position or opinion on the issue at hand. It may or may not be explicitly stated. In the latter case, we would have to draw it on our own. Secondly, the writer must provide arguments to lend support to his view. An argument is defined as 'a set of reasons that show that something is true or untrue, right or wrong (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). They consist of a) the claim or the conclusion which is the statement reflecting the writer's view that draws on the given premises and b) the premises which are the statements leading to the 'logical' conclusion/claim.

To make a compelling case, the writer usually puts forward more than one argument. Each argument aims at making the writer's thesis logical, sound and/or persuasive. The premises often come in form of evidence, which, in turn, has its own different types (See 2.1.2.1.1 Evidence). Compelling pieces of evidence make the writer's arguments sound and can effectively strengthen the writer's position, which eventually convinces the reader. Last, the writer may offer a suggestion or recommendation on the issue.

Now that we have some understanding about the text components, let's see how each component fits into a piece and creates a piece of argumentative text.

EXAMPLE 1

People love to blame the media for eating disorders: Magazines glamorize emaciated bodies! TV news keeps telling us how fat we all are! Facebook puts diet ads on girls' pages! (1)

Enough. Yes, all those statements above are true. I've been a victim of those Facebook ads myself. ²"MUFFIN TOP??" asks one ad, which then tells me the hottest new supermodel diets are just a click away. And as of 2004, 8 million people—7 million of them women—had an eating disorder (anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, etc.). But consider this: According to the American Psychiatric Assn.'s Diagnostic & Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders, people who suffer from anorexia typically have an underlying personality disorder and seek more control over their environment. Anecdotes from former sufferers indicate that discipline and control, rather than thinness, were their true goals. (2)

We are a fat-obsessed society, probably because about two-thirds of Americans are either overweight or obese, and the media likes to give such numbers a lot of play. But think about it: Even with the daily barrage of skinny imagery and finger-wagging, 66% of Americans do not even come close to conforming to that supposed ideal. Meanwhile, less than 3% of the U.S. population suffers from an eating disorder. (3)

We know Barbie is anatomically impossible. We know magazine covers featuring celebrities have been airbrushed, and that those celebrities sculpt their bodies with the help of personal trainers, nutritionists, and plastic surgeons. The media gave us this information. Yet some girls still starve themselves, and others eat their feelings away. At this point, blaming the media for eating disorders is a lot like laying the blame for underage smoking on TV characters who smoke. By now, everyone knows smoking is unhealthy, but people do it anyway. (4)

Enough of this nonsensical blame game. It's time to let personal responsibility back into the picture. (5)

www.businessweek.com

Glossary

1 Very thin and weak because of illness or hunger standards 3 To behave according to the usual standards

2 Excess flesh hanging over the waistline photographs 4 A machine used to improve work on photographs

Practice

1 What is the author's thesis?

- a. It is not the media but rather the consumers who have themselves to blame for their eating disorders.
- b. Not only the media but also the public opinion which upholds the ideal figures are the reasons for teens' eating disorders.

2 Which paragraph(s) does the following? (Mark X if there is no answer).

- a. Introduce the controversial issue.
- b. State the writer's view on the issue.
- c. Give evidence to support the writer's view.
- d. Make a suggestion on the issue.

EXAMPLE II

As a college student who's visited a variety of schools, I have no trouble quickly listing the top shows watched by female college students: Gossip Girl, Project Runway, and America's Next Top Model. Likewise for magazines: Vogue, Seventeen, and Allure. (1)

The media I've listed contribute to shaping what society considers beauty. The common **denominators** are tall, desperately skinny women who look fabulous. It should come as no surprise the media is to blame for today's artificial standard of beauty. (2)

Executive producers would argue "the shows focus on fashion and drama," and magazine editors would scream "it's about the clothing." Please, the intent might be about the fashion statement, but psychologically it digs deeper. (3)

A report by the Media Awareness Network states that "over three-quarters of the female characters in TV situation comedies are underweight, and only one in 20 are above average in size. Heavier actresses tend to receive negative comments from male characters about their bodies ("How about wearing a sack?"), and 80% of these negative comments are followed by **canned audience laughter.**" (4)

Every day there is some form of access to a model's diet and exercise plan that keeps her extra skinny for an entire year. There comes a point when women compare themselves to these supermodels and start feeling pressure to conform. (5)

The constant bombardment of skinny models and diet plans will certainly have an effect on women whose bodies are just not meant to be that small. Low self-esteem and eating disorders are the side effects from the media's portrayal of artificial beauty. (6)

Adapted from www.businessweek.com

Glossary:

1. The number below the line in a fraction ≠ numerator
2. Recordings of laughter played during the show when something amusing is said or done

1. What is the author's thesis?

- a The media has shaped up the ideal norm of beauty.
- b The media has undeniably contributed to women's eating disorders.

2. Which paragraph(s) does the following? (Mark X if there is no answer).

- a Introduce the controversial issue.
- b State the writer's view on the issue.
- c Give evidence to support the writer's view.
- d Make a suggestion on the issue.

The argumentative texts, similar to other types of essays, are composed of the three basic elements: the introductory, the body and the concluding paragraphs. Let's examine each part in details.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction may take shape in varied forms. The followings are common forms of the introduction.

2.1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION THAT LEADS TO A FOCUSED THESIS STATEMENT

Generally with this type of introduction the writer assumes that the reader has no knowledge on the issue or wants to give the reader the updates on the issue.

EXAMPLE III

During the dot-com bubble, the Internet was seen as something that was going to change everything, with the traditionalist dinosaurs becoming extinct overnight and the new kids dominating the new economy. (1)

Some years on, much of the hype has turned into dust. But the online revolution is still firmly, if quietly, under way. Since the dot-com crash of 2000, online retail shopping has grown by 210%, at an average annual rate of 21%, and accounted for a \$130 billion market in 2008, according to comScore (SCOR). The trend is set to continue: In the fourth quarter of 2008 online sales grew at 41 of the 50 largest U.S. chains, while their in-store sales declined. (2)

The reasons for this inexorable growth can be summed up in one word: convenience. For a whole category of purchases, it is simply easier and faster to buy online, and prices are often lower. Comparing prices, finding discounts and promotions, having your loyalty rewarded, and not having to travel to get the exact product you want are saving money in the downturn. But above all you love the convenience. (3)

Also, sometimes you don't want to have a salesperson hassling us. You want to do independent research, read reviews, and stay in control of the process. (4)

This shows, too, in your intolerance for anything but good service online. Painful online checkout processes are met by abandoned shopping carts. And you like the freedom to switch at the click of a mouse. It keeps the retailers honest—that's why they offer their best prices online. (5)

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2.1.2 AN ANECDOTE, A QUOTATION, A QUESTION OR AN INTERESTING FACT

The writer may choose to introduce his issue by using either of the above. Setting out in this way, the writer is able to draw readers' attention to the issue he will embark on.

EXAMPLE IV

One young lady who was interviewed by Deutsche Press Agentur in Berlin revealed that her whole life revolved around computer games. She is just one among hundreds of thousands of youths who become so immersed in computer gaming worlds that they lose control of their real lives and become addicted. (1)

The increasing problem of addiction to computer games among youths of course is not a problem in Germany alone. In Thailand, we have seen all-too-familiar stories of youngsters committing crimes such as robbery to get money to play computer games. And you suspect that certain games can breed violence in some. (2)

Computer games can be an entertaining leisure activity, but too much exposure to the medium can be counter-productive. Children in particular should be taught about appropriate time allowances for playing computer games compared to other time spent on creative activities to encourage analytical and creative thinking when they are still young. (3)

The DPA report reiterates that computer gaming addiction can emotionally affect young people later in life. It has been suggested that some people may have communication problems if they have allowed virtual relationships to become more important than those in the real world. (4)

Parents and schools need to provide children and youths with resources - such as in sports and music - to encourage them to spend time more constructively. Alternative creative gaming is one area in which children should be encouraged to immerse themselves - by solving practical problems with real-life applications. (5)

www.nationmultimedia.com

2.1.3 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE OPPOSING VIEW

The upside of this form of introduction is that readers are informed of the opposing view, hence, they can instantly infer the writer's position, which essentially is to the contrary of the position presented in the introduction. Equipped with the writer's thesis from the beginning, the readers are good to go and explore the arguments the writer is proposing.

EXAMPLE V

Whilst one may be sympathetic to the plight of transsexuals the debate seems to be more about the hole rather than the doughnut. The military is not a social service organisation. Its members are selected for the purpose of fighting capability or potential should be the criteria. If it so happens that some sensitive people are offended by the process, then so be it. They are unsuitable for a military career and should accept that fact. (1)

It is unfortunate that recruiting such people will be bad for morale. Similarly they are unsuitable for recruitment in the dedicated female branches of the military. They are neither male nor female so they are excluded from both categories. The public bleating of their plight does not inculcate wide spread public sympathy nor is it only in the military that they will face behaviours that they see as offensive. They should just learn to cope with it the same as blind people have to cope with their blindness. (2)

2.1.4 A JUMP INTO THE THESIS

It is not unusual for the writer to state clearly or implicitly imply his position on the issue. When the issue is widely known and discussed, the writer may opt to jump right into what he thinks of the issue and gets on with arguments in support of his view.

EXAMPLE VI

Online shopping is mostly a bad experience. Even the best of the online stores are pretty awful when compared with real-world brick-and-mortar shops. (1)

In a physical store you are not asked to register before you are allowed buy anything. Neither do you have to read a “terms and conditions” agreement before you can go through checkout. In a real-world store, you don’t have to run through a list of payment options first and give your name and address and all your contact details. (2)

Online stores ask us to do all these things. As a result, people actually dislike shopping online and use it for only two reasons—convenience and to find deals. A recent survey by the British pollsters YouGov (YUGVF) found that half the people who do shop online are prepared to give up buying once they get to the checkout. If that happened in a physical store, the management would be sacked without debate. Online store owners just seem to accept it. (3)

The high rate of shopping cart abandonment is a warning signal to Internet retailers that their customers don’t like their stores. Furthermore, a deep fear over the security of credit card details continues to plague shoppers. Online retailers are not addressing the key issues: making the shopping experience more convenient and ensuring the security of the information you give them. Until they do that, online shopping will continue to be second-rate. (4)

...

http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom/archives/2009/10/online_shopping.html

We can see that the writer sets out with his negative view of online shopping. The example evidently illustrates the ‘jump-into-the-thesis’ kind.

2.2 BODY

The body of the text constitutes the largest portion of the text. It is where the writer employs persuasive techniques to convince the readers. Also, the writer effectively convinces the reader by rebutting the opponent’s view. This is another crucial element of a good argumentative text. Let’s address the persuasive techniques first.

2.2.1 PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

The three modes of Persuasion introduced by Aristotle consist of **A. LOGOS** (Logics or Reasoning), **B. ETHOS** (Authority or Credibility) and **C. PATHOS** (Emotions). Theoretically, good argumentative text relies solely on arguments, yet it is not uncommon to see many writers employs the three modes of persuasion to their benefits. Look at the following transcript of President Obama’s address to The Congress on Syria on September 10, 2013. He called for military

attack postponed and sought diplomatic path in disarming Assad's chemical weapons.

EXAMPLE VII

...

The situation profoundly changed, though, on August 21st, when Assad's government gassed to death over a thousand people, including hundreds of children. The images from this massacre are sickening: Men, women, children lying in rows, killed by poison gas. Others foaming at the mouth, gasping for breath. A father clutching his dead children, imploring them to get up and walk. On that terrible night, the world saw in gruesome detail the terrible nature of chemical weapons, and why the overwhelming majority of humanity has declared them off-limits -- a crime against humanity, and a violation of the laws of war. (A)

...If we fail to act, the Assad regime will see no reason to stop using chemical weapons. As the ban against these weapons erodes, other tyrants will have no reason to think twice about acquiring poison gas, and using them. Over time, our troops would again face the prospect of chemical warfare on the battlefield. And it could be easier for terrorist organizations to obtain these weapons, and to use them to attack civilians. (B)

That's my judgment as Commander-in-Chief. But I'm also the President of the world's oldest constitutional democracy. ... (C)

Obama's speech illustrates the use of logos, ethos and pathos. These appear in the body of the text. Firstly, in (A) he draws on emotional appeal (PATHOS), portraying the distressing pictures of innocent civilians affected by Syria President Assad's chemical weapons. Then, in (B), he presents his reasoning (LOGOS) as to why the U.S. must step in, Assad's possession of chemical weapon posing threats not only on his ground, but also international security. Finally, in (C) he establishes his authority (ETHOS), reiterating his position as the President of the U.S. and Commander-in-Chief in making a decision to act.

When properly employed, the three persuasive techniques render an argumentative text a powerful and convincing one.

2.2.1.1 LOGOS (REASONING)

As stated above, argumentative texts that we shall examine rely on logos or reasoning. Let's now get started with it. In everyday life, we give reasons to make our point. In doing so, we are presenting our argument.

Look at the structure of reasoning in the simplest form.

EXAMPLE VIII

- A Ploen won't be taking EG 221.
- B Ploen got 370 for the reading part in TU-GET.
- C To qualify for EG 221 exemption, ones must score at least 350 on the reading part of TU-GET.

Statements A-C are related. Which is a logical conclusion? Which are the statements that lead to such conclusion?

Statement A is a conclusion that is drawn from the fact in Statement C, which in turn controls the fact in Statement B.

This type of reasoning is called DEDUCTIVE REASONING. In deductive reasoning the logical conclusion or the claim (A) is drawn from establishment of the truth in the given statements (Statements B and C).

EXAMPLE IX

Ploen needs to make a photo copy at 10 p.m. and she doesn't know what time the copier service is closed. What she does know is that all other shops are closed at 9 p.m. For this reason, she probably probably decided against going out because there is a fat chance that the copier service is closed as well.

In deciding not to go out, Ploen has gone through the process of inductive reasoning. In a Inductive Reasoning the generalisation is made from the observation of a limited set of data. Employing this mode, the writer presents a 'likely' assumption based on the given set of information.

The writer uses these techniques of deductive and inductive reasoning to construct his arguments to support his views. Generally, the writer needs a few arguments to make his case compelling. Deductive and deductive reasoning will be discussed in details in 3 Reading Skills (*Understanding inductive and deductive reasoning*).

Now notice that in advancing an argument the writer needs a set of statements, one of which is the claim or the conclusion, and the other(s) is the claim. If the writer has constructed three arguments to convince the readers, he would basically need three conclusions. What forms are the other statements that warrant the conclusion? They are evidence that lend support to reasons which serve to back up the claims. It's high time we checked out the types of evidence, then.

2.2.1.2 Evidence

Evidence can be divided into three basic types; **examples, authoritative opinions, and statistics**. The common types of examples are real events—these may come in the form of facts or anecdotes, invented situations and analogies. A hypothetical question as to how low-income parents are going to deal if their children's tuition fee is to hike by 50% is an invented situation. Analogies are a kind of comparison in which two things are compared based on their common qualities. Christine Rosen, for instance, made her point about how people in the digital age portray themselves as they wish by drawing an analogy of the rich and the powerful commissioning their portraits with common people today self-portraying themselves on Facebook, Myspace and other social networking websites.

We already discussed Ethos, authority or credibility, as one of the persuasive techniques. Argumentative writers may not by themselves claim authority in order to convince the readers. Therefore, he has to cite authoritative opinions. The authoritative opinions may be eye-witnesses, or experts in the particular discipline he writes about.

Finally, concrete data in the form of statistical evidence usually come in the form of studies or survey reports where numbers are shown. For example, in the text *Less Airbrushing, More Reality*, the writer cites the 47% rise in under-18s admitted to hospital for anorexia or bulimia treatment as evidence supporting her argument.

Let's now look at how evidence plays out to support the writer's argument.

EXAMPLE X

...(1)

In a physical store you are not asked to register before you are allowed buy anything. Neither do you have to read a "terms and conditions" agreement before you can go through checkout. In a real-world store, you don't have to run through a list of payment options first and give your name and address and all your contact details. (2)

Online stores ask us to do all these things. As a result, people actually dislike shopping online and use it for only two reasons—convenience and to find deals. A recent survey by the British pollsters YouGov (YUGVF) found that half the people who do shop online are prepared to give up buying once they get to the checkout. If that happened in a physical store, the management would be sacked without debate. Online store owners just seem to accept it. (3)

What is the set of evidence the writer has put forward for her argument—
People dislike shopping online?

- a When shopping online, customers have to register.
- b Shopping online requires customers to read "terms and conditions" before checkout.
- c Shopping online makes customers go through a list of payment and then requires them to give their personal details.
- d People discard their shopping carts when proceeding to check-out.

All of the above are facts the writer has listed to support her argument.

2.2.1.3 Rebuttals

Next comes the other crucial element of the body—**REBUTTALS OR REFUTATION**. However much the writer offers his compelling arguments, the reader may still hold on to his views unless such views are proven wrong, weak, or illogical. In a good piece of argumentative writing, the writer offers refutation or rebuttals which essentially proves the flaw in the set of arguments that the readers or the writer's opponents rely on. We shall investigate **3.XX REBUTTALS OR REFUTATION**.

2.2.2 PATHOS

Next, let's explore another persuasive technique—**PATHOS**.

EXAMPLE XI

Right now, millions of mice, rats, rabbits, primates, cats, dogs, and other animals are locked inside barren cages in laboratories across the country. They languish in pain, suffer from extreme frustration, ache with loneliness, and long to be free.

Instead, all they can do is sit and wait in fear of the next terrifying and painful procedure that will be performed on them. The complete lack of environmental enrichment and the stress of their living situation cause some animals to develop neurotic types of behavior such as incessantly spinning in circles, rocking back and forth, pulling out their own fur, and even biting themselves. They shake and cower in fear whenever someone approaches, and their blood pressure spikes dramatically. After enduring a life of pain, loneliness, and terror, almost all of them will be killed.

<http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-experimentation/animal-testing-101/>

In this particular text, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) calls for a ban on animal testing. Here, the writer relies on emotional appeals. He portrays the situation in which these lab animals live. Visualising these poor fellows, the reader is likely to feel for them and support PETA's cause.

2.2.3 ETHOS

Ethos has to do with 'authority'. Authority may refer to those who have expertise in the field or those who have first hand experience in the issue. It's not always that the writer is an expert in the field he writes about. Indeed, most articles we read are written by reporters who have gathered, analysed data from various sources before producing a piece of article. Certainly, in the process, the writer relies on authority in the field.

EXAMPLE XII

While education, degrees, and certification are important for scoring an interview, a new study by the HR software provider iCIMS finds that recruiters place a higher value on soft skills. From an ability to communicate well to being organized, these intangible qualities can be tough to measure, but they affect everything from productivity to collaboration.

"Hard skills are what you do, and soft skills are how you do it," says Susan Vitale, chief marketing officer for iCIMS. "Unfortunately, one in three recruiting professionals believe job candidates' soft skills have gotten worse in the past five years."...

<https://www.fastcompany.com/40520691/these-are-the-five-soft-skills-recruiters-want-most>

2.3 CONCLUSION

The last section of the text is the conclusion, the writer usually either makes a suggestion as to how the problem can be dealt with, explicitly states or implies the thesis and or restates the thesis.

EXAMPLE XIII

...

The high rate of shopping cart abandonment is a warning signal to Internet retailers that their customers don't like their stores. Furthermore, a deep fear over the security of credit card details continues to plague shoppers. Online retailers are not addressing the key issues: making the shopping experience more convenient and ensuring the security of the information we give them. Until they do that, online shopping will continue to be second-rate. (3)

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The writer concludes his piece by giving suggestions – in a somewhat aggressive tone—as to how retailers can build online shopping pleasant experience.

EXAMPLE XIV

The Online Experience Is Improving

Also, sometimes we don't want to have a salesperson hassling us. We want to do independent research, read reviews, and stay in control of the process. (4)

This shows, too, in your intolerance for anything but good service online. Painful online checkout processes are met by abandoned shopping carts. And we like the freedom to switch at the click of a mouse. It keeps the retailers honest—that's why they offer their best prices online. (5)

A careful examination of the last paragraph should reveal that the author has implied the suggestions for improving online business to ensure impression of shoppers. In short, this text also follows the conclusion writing convention, though not as obvious as other texts.

EXAMPLE XV

Computer games

... (1,2,3, 4)

Parents and schools need to provide children and youths with resources - such as in sports and music - to encourage them to spend time more constructively. Alternative creative gaming is one area in which children should be encouraged to immerse themselves - by solving practical problems with real-life applications. (5)

The writer gives several suggestions for coping with computer game addiction. He talks about provision of alternative resources like sports and music for children and encouraging them to play creative games.

It is unfortunate that recruiting such people will be bad for morale. Similarly they are unsuitable for recruitment in the dedicated female branches of the military. They are neither male nor female so they are excluded from both categories. The public bleating of their plight does not inculcate wide spread public sympathy nor is it only in the military that they will face behaviours that they see as offensive. They should just learn to cope with it the same as blind people have to cope with their blindness. (2)

In his closing, the writer suggests transsexuals learn to deal with 'offensive' behaviours, which are fairly common not only in the military but also in other places.

Before we move on to **UNIT 3: WHAT READING SKILLS ARE NEEDED?**, let's take note of the following.

Argumentative text is composed of the introduction, the body and the conclusion.

2.1 The introduction usually comes in four forms.

2.2 The body of the text reflects the writer's persuasive techniques. Most writers rely on reasoning along with evidence in supporting his view. He also offers rebuttals to make his case more solid.

2.3 The conclusion of the text often comes in the form of the restatement of the thesis or the suggestion on the issue.