

A Guide to Expository Analysis: Argument, Thesis & Introduction

Argument

1. An argument is a group of sentences advocating a position. An argument proposes a position and then uses evidence— a series of reasons— to support the proposed position.
2. A good argument about one of the readings will suggest a position that is distinct from the positions advanced by the author. A weak argument will substantially repeat the author.
3. The strength of an argument lies not just in what is said, but also in how it is said and the reasons which support it.
4. The main point of the argument, or the position that is to be proved by the argument, is the most important element of the argument. This point should be absolutely clear to anyone who reads the argument.
5. This main point of the argument should be found in a succinct (1 sentence) statement of the argument's aim. This sentence is known as a thesis.
6. The best arguments are logically ordered, with a chain of reasoning connecting the evidence to the thesis. A reader who follows this chain will be led to agree to the thesis.

Definition of a Thesis

1. A thesis is a significant statement made by the writer about the topic of the essay.
2. A thesis can be proved or disproved.
3. A thesis is controversial, in the sense that all who had read the source material wouldn't automatically agree with the thesis.
4. A thesis is structured in such a way that, if proved, it forces the reader to change or re-organize his views regarding the topic.
5. A thesis should be complex; in other words, it should have multiple components that are necessary to its success. The reader should be able to guess these components, or should be told them.

The Thesis and the Essay

1. The thesis is the controlling idea of the essay, meaning that everything in the essay works to prove the thesis.
2. An introduction should be organized such that the information needed to understand the topic is given first, the information needed to understand the thesis should be given second, and the rest of the essay is dedicated to proving the thesis to an uneasily convinced reader.

Definition of the Introduction

The introduction introduces the moderately informed reader to both the topic and the thesis. It allows a reader to enter into the argument knowingly, able to understand what is to be proved.

The Introduction Consists of 3 or 4 Parts

1. First, a hook to the reader. This sort of hook necessary depends (a) on the topic chosen for the essay and (b) on the readers anticipated to read the essay. The first few sentences should be aware that they are the first sentences a reader attempts in the essay, and some effort should be made to capture the reader's interest in the essay. Before the reader can be convinced of the thesis, he must be convinced to read the essay.
2. Second, an explanation of the topic of the essay that also introduces a reader to the source materials. It would be a mistake to presume that a reader is already familiar with either the topic or the sources, since that is a dangerously close step to presuming that the reader already agrees with the thesis. Instead, an introduction to the topic should be crafted that could appeal to both the knowledgeable reader (one who has read all of the source materials) and the moderately informed reader (one who hasn't read the material).
3. Third, and after the reader has been introduced to the topic, the thesis is stated. It should be apparent from the phrasing of the thesis that (a) this is a significant statement regarding the topic, and (b) this is the thesis that will be proved in *this* essay. If a reader misses the importance of the thesis, he is likely to miss the essay entirely.
4. Fourth, and after the thesis has been given, it may be wise to relate the necessary components of the thesis that need to be proved and the order of their appearance in the essay. This need not be present in all introductions, since the thesis may make apparent its necessary components.

A Warning Regarding the Introduction

The introductory paragraph not only introduces the reader to the topic, the essay, and the argument, but it also defines the scope of the essay. It says to a reader what is going to be present in the essay and also what is not going to be present: everything not mentioned or entailed in the argument outlined should not be in the essay.