

How to Write an Argumentative Research Paper

An argumentative essay requires you to make an argument about something and support your point of view using evidence in the form of primary and secondary sources. The argumentative essay is a common assignment, but teachers may present it...

Sample Outlines

Picture 1 of How to Write an Argumentative Research Paper

Sample Argumentative Research Paper Outline

Picture 2 of How to Write an Argumentative Research Paper

Sample Argumentative Essay Outline

Part 1 of 4:

Getting Started



Learn the basic features of an argumentative essay. Argumentative essays have some basic features that you should include in your essay. In general, argumentative essays require you to support the argument you are making using logic and support from your research. You should also be sure to include

in your argumentative essay:^[1]

1. a thesis statement that makes a clear argument (provided in the first paragraph)
2. claims that help prove your overall argument
3. logical transitions that connect paragraphs and sentences
4. support for your claims from your sources
5. a conclusion that considers the evidence you have presented
6. in-text citations throughout your essay to indicate where you have used sources (ask your teacher about what citation style to use)
7. a works cited page with an entry for each of your sources (ask your teacher about what citation style to use)



Ask for clarification. While most argumentative essays share these basic features, your assignment might have some special requirements or guidelines. Therefore, it is important to make sure that you understand your assignment before you get started. As soon as your teacher assigns the paper, read the guidelines carefully and highlight anything that you do not understand. Ask your teacher to clarify the instructions if anything seems unclear or if you just don't understand the assignment.

1. Make sure that you understand how to cite your sources for the paper and how to use the documentation style your teacher prefers. If you're not sure, just ask.
2. Don't feel bad if you have questions. It is better to ask and make sure that you understand than to do the assignment wrong and get a bad grade.



3.

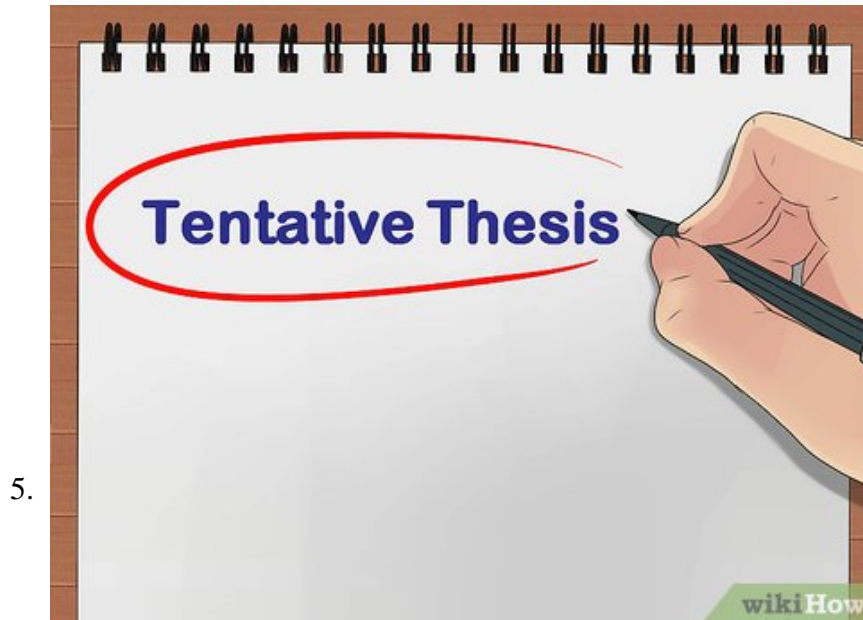
Generate ideas for your argumentative essay. It is important to take time to explore your ideas before you choose a topic and start your paper. Take some time to explore your ideas and get some things down on paper by using an invention activity. Invention activities like listing, freewriting, clustering, and questioning can help you to develop ideas for your argumentative essay.^[2]

1. **Listing** List all of the ideas that you have for your essay (good or bad) and then look over the list you have made and group similar ideas together. Expand those lists by adding more ideas or by using another prewriting activity. ^[3]
2. **Freewriting** Write nonstop for about 10 minutes. Write whatever comes to mind and don't edit yourself. When you are done, review what you have written and highlight or underline the most useful information. Repeat the freewriting exercise using the passages you underlined as a starting point. You can repeat this exercise multiple times to continue to refine and develop your ideas.^[4]
3. **Clustering** Write a brief explanation (phrase or short sentence) of the subject of your argumentative essay on the center of a piece of paper and circle it. Then draw three or more lines extending from the circle. Write a corresponding idea at the end of each of these lines. Continue developing your cluster until you have explored as many connections as you can.^[5]
4. **Questioning** On a piece of paper, write out 'Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?' Space the questions about two or three lines apart on the paper so that you can write your answers on these lines. Respond to each question in as much detail as you can.^[6]



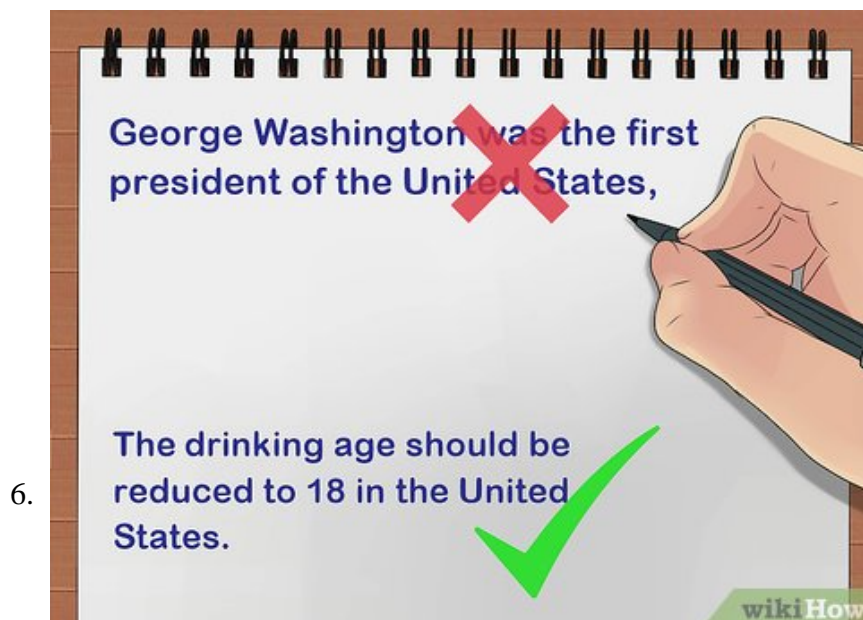
Think about how you will incorporate ethos, pathos, and logos. An argumentative essay requires you to demonstrate your understanding of three basic rhetorical concepts: ethos, pathos, and logos. You will need to be aware of these concepts as you write your paper and demonstrate your knowledge of them through your writing. Here's what you need to know about ethos, pathos, and logos:

1. **Ethos** refers to a writer's credibility or trustworthiness. To convince your readers that your argument is valid, you need to convince them that you are trustworthy. You can accomplish this goal by presenting yourself as confident, fair, and approachable. You can achieve these objectives by avoiding wishy-washy statements, presenting information in an unbiased manner, and identifying common ground between yourself and your readers (including the ones that may disagree with you). You can also show your authority, another aspect of ethos, by demonstrating that you've done thorough research on the topic.
2. **Pathos** refers to your use of emotional appeals. Emotional appeals have a place in argumentative writing, but overuse of them may lead a reader to reject your argument. Make sure that your use of emotional appeals is minimal and appropriate. Some ways that you can incorporate pathos into your paper without turning off your readers includes using descriptive language that evokes the desired reaction (positive or negative) to your subject, especially when you use other people's language—such as quotes—to do so (which avoids damaging your ethos with overly emotional language). You can also invoke pathos by providing relevant examples that evoke an emotional response in your readers and using figurative language (such as metaphors) to help your readers understand and sympathize with your point of view.
3. **Logos** refers to your use of logic, reasoning, and sequencing. This means setting up your argument in a way that uses logic to achieve your desired endpoint or reaction, often through inductive and deductive reasoning. For example, you can appeal to your readers' desire for logic by organizing your examples in a way that shows your argument in the best light and is easy to follow, such as chronologically, by cause and effect, or by problem and solution.



Develop your tentative thesis. Once you have developed your ideas for your argumentative essay, you should be ready to write a tentative thesis statement.^[7] A tentative thesis statement can help you to move forward with your ideas while reminding yourself that you are open to changes to the thesis statement. In other words, the tentative thesis statement is not set in stone. Effective thesis statements let readers know what the main focus of a paper is going to be. For an argumentative essay, the thesis should state an arguable claim. A thesis should not be more than one sentence in length.^[8]

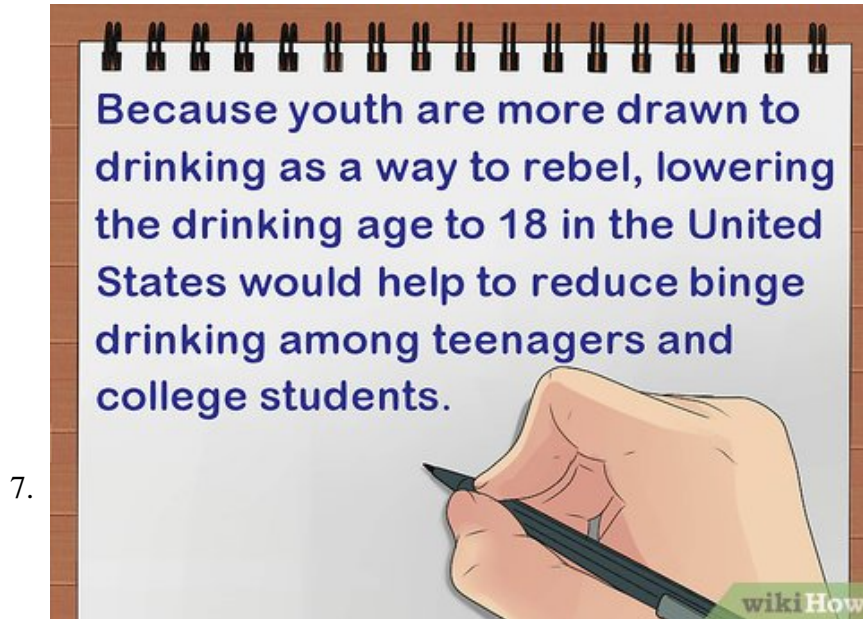
1. Place your thesis statement at the end of your first paragraph unless your instructor tells you to place it elsewhere. The end of the first paragraph is the traditional place to provide your thesis in an academic essay.



Make sure your thesis is arguable. Your thesis should express a clear position on your topic that can be supported using evidence from your sources. Do not state facts or matters of taste. For example, something like "George Washington was the first president of the United States," would not be a good thesis because

it states a fact. Likewise, "Die Hard is a great movie," would not work because it expresses a matter of taste.^[9] Consider whether your thesis statement is arguable before you move forward.

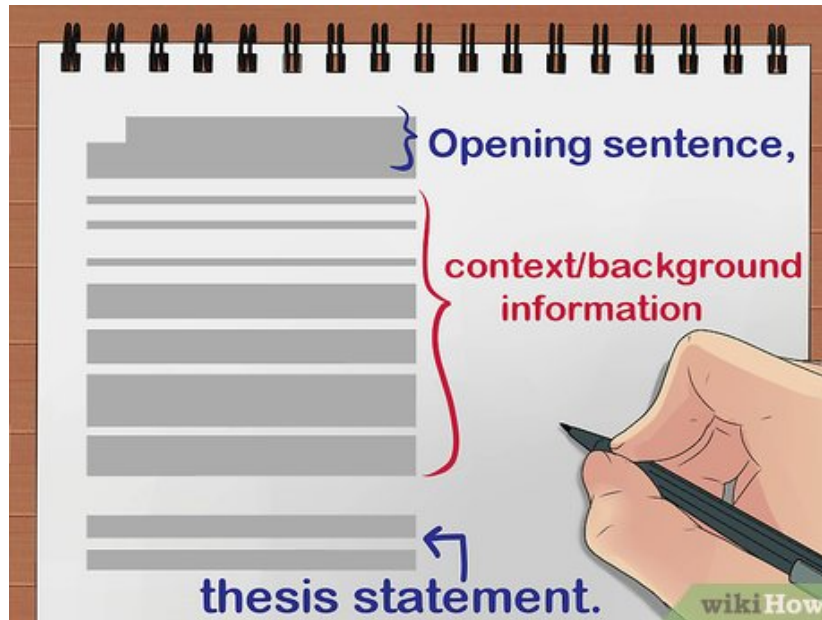
1. For example, an arguable thesis statement might be something like, 'The drinking age should be reduced to 18 in the United States.' This statement is arguable because it presents a position that others might debate by saying 'The drinking age should not be reduced to 18 in the US.' Or, others might argue that the drinking age should be abolished altogether or even raised. There are many possibilities for a counter argument, which makes this topic arguable.



Make sure your thesis provides enough detail. In addition to having a thesis that is arguable, you should also include some details about why you hold the position. In other words, you should avoid simply saying that something is bad and should be changed and provide a bit of detail about why it is bad and should be changed.^[10] What is wrong with the current drinking age? Who would benefit if it was changed?

1. For example, a detailed thesis statement might be something like, 'Because youth are more drawn to drinking as a way to rebel, lowering the drinking age to 18 in the United States would help to reduce binge drinking among teenagers and college students.' This thesis still provides a position that could be debated, but it also explains the reasoning behind the position. Providing this detail gives readers a good sense of what the rest of the paper will discuss.
2. Your thesis should tell your reader why your argument matters, and for whom.

8.



Develop a rough outline based on your research notes. Writing an outline before you begin drafting your argumentative essay will help you to organize your information more effectively. You can make your outline as detailed or as scant as you want. Just keep in mind that the more detail you include in your outline, the more material you will have ready to put into your paper.^[11]

1. Organize your outline by essay part and then break those parts into subsections. For example, part 1 might be your introduction, which could then be broken into three sub-parts: a)Opening sentence, b)context/background information c)thesis statement.

Part 2 of 4:

Research Your Topic

1.



Generate key terms and phrases to help you with your research. Before you head to the library or log on to the library's webpage, it is important to take a moment to develop some key terms and phrases that will make the process of finding relevant sources a bit easier. You can use these key terms and phrases to search your library's databases for relevant books, articles, and other sources. As you develop key terms, keep your topic and your position in mind.

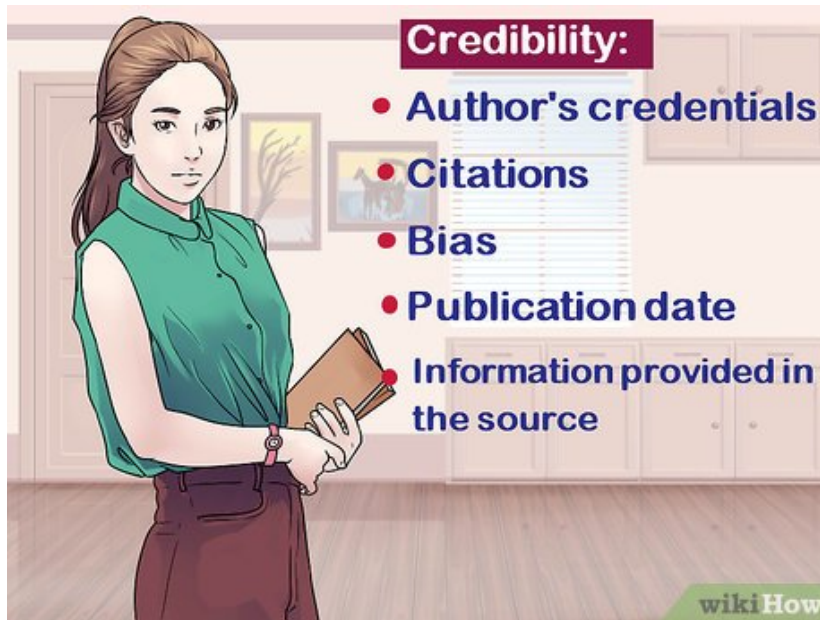
1. For example, some relevant key terms and phrases for a paper on lowering the drinking age to 18 might be: 'drinking', 'underage', 'minors', 'binge', 'rebellion', 'drinking age', 'binge drinking culture', 'countries with low drinking age', 'drinking and rebellion', etc.

2.



Find appropriate secondary sources for your argumentative essay. In order to find support for your argument, you will need to gather a variety of sources. See your assignment guidelines or ask your instructor if you have questions about what types of sources are appropriate for your assignment. Books, articles from scholarly journals, magazine articles, newspaper articles, and trustworthy websites are some sources that you might consider using.

1. Use your library's databases rather than a general internet search. University libraries subscribe to many databases, such as EBSCO and JSTOR. These databases provide you with free access to articles and other resources that you cannot usually gain access to by using a search engine. Schedule an appointment with a librarian at your school's library if you are not sure about how to use the library databases.
2. If your university doesn't subscribe to any databases, use Google Scholar.



Evaluate your sources to determine their credibility. Use trustworthy sources only in your argumentative essay, otherwise you will damage your own credibility as an author. Using the library's databases will also help to ensure that you are getting plenty of trustworthy sources for your paper. There are several things that you will need to consider in order to determine whether or not a source is trustworthy.^[12]

1. **Author's credentials** Choose sources that include an author's name and that provide credentials for that author. The credentials should indicate something about why this person is qualified to speak as an authority on the subject. For example, an article about a medical condition will be more trustworthy if the author is a medical doctor. If you find a source where no author is listed or the author does not have any credentials, then this source may not be trustworthy.^[13]
2. **Citations** Think about whether or not this author has adequately researched the topic. Check the author's bibliography or works cited page. If the author has provided few or no sources, then this source may not be trustworthy.^[14]
3. **Bias** Think about whether or not this author has presented an objective, well-reasoned account of the topic. How often does the tone indicate a strong preference for one side of the argument? How often does the argument dismiss or disregard the opposition's concerns or valid arguments? If these are regular occurrences in the source, then it may not be a good choice.^[15]
4. **Publication date** Think about whether or not this source presents the most up to date information on the subject. Noting the publication date is especially important for scientific subjects, since new technologies and techniques have made some earlier findings irrelevant.^[16]
5. **Information provided in the source** If you are still questioning the trustworthiness of this source, cross check some of the information provided against a trustworthy source. If the information that this author presents contradicts one of your trustworthy sources, then it might not be a good source to use in your paper.^[17]

4.



Read your research. Once you have gathered all of your sources, you will need to read them. Make sure that you read your sources very carefully and that you stay focused on your topic as you read. Read the sources multiple times if necessary and make sure that you fully understand what each source is about. You should be able to summarize the source in your own words and generate a response to the source.

1. To be certain that you understand your sources and that you are capable of responding to each of them, try writing a paragraph summary and response after you finish each one. Some people find keeping notecards on their sources to be a helpful way of organizing their ideas about each one.^[18]
2. Misunderstanding and misrepresenting your sources can damage your credibility as an author and also have a negative effect on your grade. Give yourself plenty of time to read your sources and understand what they are saying.

5.



Take notes while you read your sources. Highlight and underline significant passages so that you can easily come back to them. As you read, you should also pull any significant information from your sources

by jotting the information down in a notebook. Indicate when you have quoted a source word for word in your notes by putting it into quotation marks and including information about the source such as the author's name, article or book title, and page number.^[19]

1. Be careful to properly cite your sources when taking notes. Even accidental plagiarism may result in a failing grade on a paper.

Part 3 of 4:

Drafting Your Essay



Begin your essay with an engaging sentence that gets right into your topic. Your introduction should immediately begin discussing your topic. Think about what you will discuss in your essay to help you determine what you should include in your introduction. Keep in mind that your introduction should identify the main idea of your argumentative essay and act as a preview to your essay.^[20]

1. For example, an argumentative essay about lowering the drinking age might begin with something like, 'Binge drinking culture is killing teens in the United States, but it hasn't always been this way.' This sentence offers a compelling statement and it also acts as a launch pad for you to provide some background on your topic.

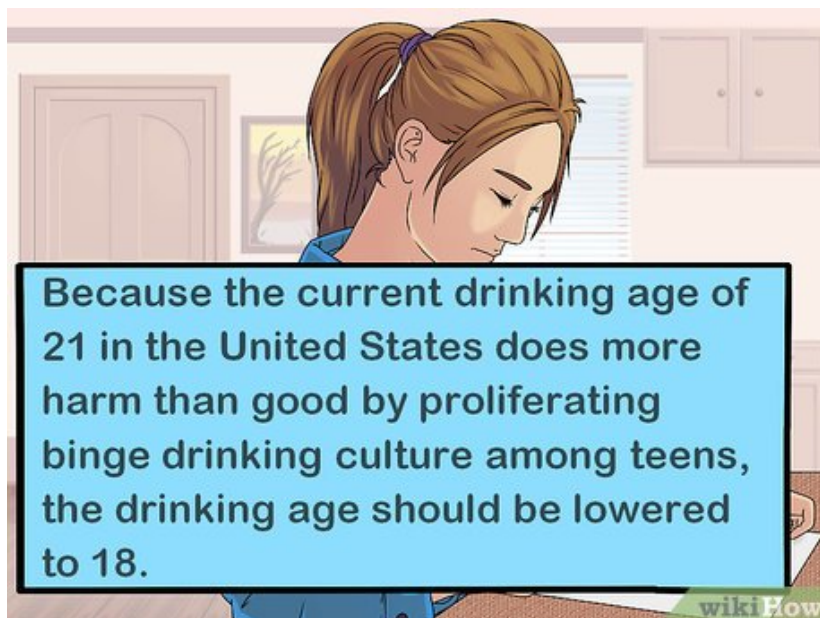
2.



Provide background information to help guide your readers. Providing adequate background information or context will help to guide your readers through your essay. Think about what your readers will need to know in order to understand the rest of your essay and provide this information in your first paragraph. This information will vary depending on your argument topic.^[21]

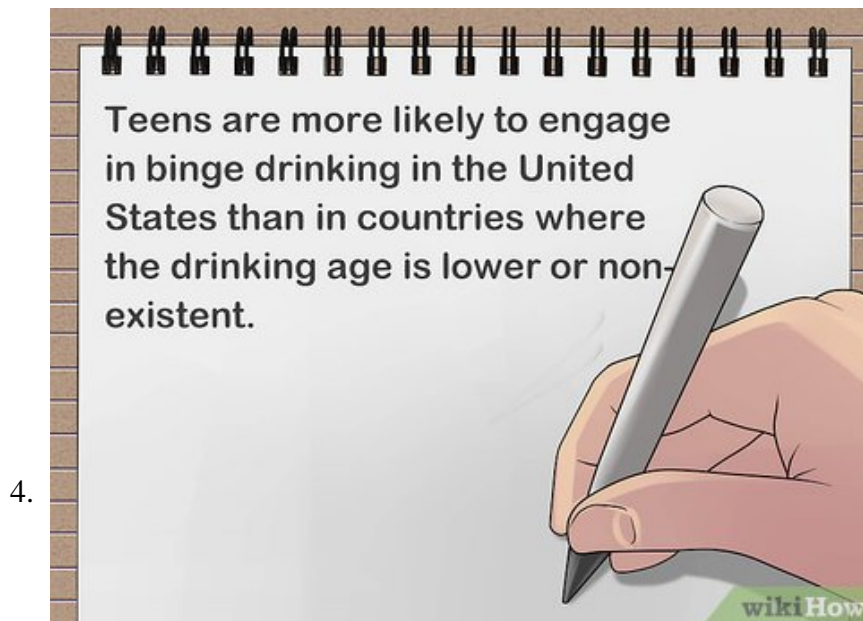
1. For example, if you are arguing that lowering the drinking age would help to counter binge drinking among teens and young adults, your introduction should talk about the damage that is being done by binge drinking. Tell your readers about this problem in more detail so that they will begin to see why something needs to change.
2. Keep in mind that your background information in the first paragraph should lead up to your thesis statement. Explain everything the reader needs to know to understand what your topic is about, then narrow it down until you reach the topic itself.

3.



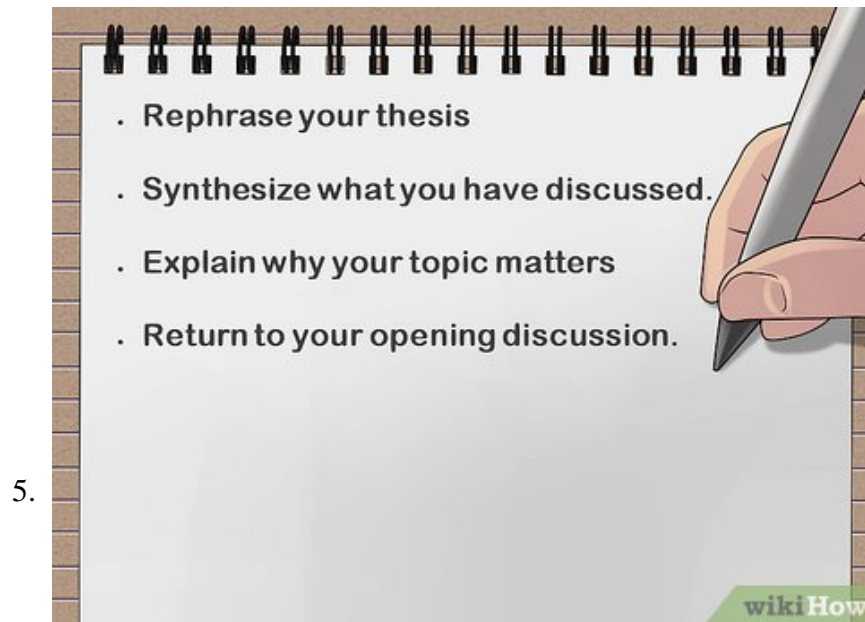
Provide your thesis statement at the end of your first paragraph. After you have given your readers some information on the topic and captured their interest, you should provide your thesis. Providing your thesis at the end of your first paragraph will help to guide your readers through the rest of your essay. Make sure that you state your thesis in a very direct manner, so there is no mistaking that this is your position.

1. For example, a thesis statement for a paper on lowering the drinking age might look something like, 'Because the current drinking age of 21 in the United States does more harm than good by proliferating binge drinking culture among teens, the drinking age should be lowered to 18.' This thesis provides a straightforward position and reason for that position that readers can easily identify as the author's main argument.
2. In your thesis, you should also address how you'll support your argument and why your argument matters.



Use your body paragraphs to discuss specific parts of your argument. Rather than trying to talk about multiple aspects of your argument in a single paragraph, make sure that each body paragraph focuses on a single aspect of your text. Your discussion of each of these aspects should contribute to proving your thesis. For each body paragraph, you should provide a claim at the beginning of the paragraph and support your claim with at least one example from one of your sources.

1. For example, one of your body paragraphs might begin with something like, 'Teens are more likely to engage in binge drinking in the United States than in countries where the drinking age is lower or non-existent.'
2. You might then follow up this claim with evidence from your sources. For example, you could provide statistics on teen drinking in other countries where the drinking age is lower, or you could summarize an interview with an authority of the subject, or cite an article that explains the psychological basis of this phenomenon. Whatever source(s) you choose, make sure that they are relevant that they offer convincing support for your claim.



Develop a conclusion for your essay. Concluding an essay is the hardest part of writing for many people, but it may make more sense if you understand the purpose of the conclusion. Your conclusion should emphasize what you have attempted to convince your readers about your topic and either frame or reframe the stakes of your argument. In other words, it should offer a final statement that touches on the major points that you have made in your essay. Before you write your conclusion, spend some time reflecting on what you have written so far and try to determine the best way to end your essay. There are several good options for ending an argumentative essay that might help you decide how to format your conclusion. For example, you might:

1. **Rephrase your thesis.** It is often helpful to remind your readers of the initial argument, but don't simply restate your thesis if you do this. Rephrase it so that it sounds different but has the same meaning. Summarize some of the most important evidence you have offered in your essay and say remind readers of how that evidence has contributed to supporting your thesis.
2. **Synthesize what you have discussed.** Put everything together for your readers and explain what other lessons might be gained from your argument. How might this discussion change the way others view your subject?
3. **Explain why your topic matters.** Help your readers to see why this topic deserve their attention. How does this topic affect your readers? What are the broader implications of this topic? Why does your topic matter?
4. **Return to your opening discussion.** If you offered an anecdote or a quote early in your paper, it might be helpful to revisit that opening discussion and explore how the information you have gathered implicates that discussion.^[22]

6.



Make sure that you have cited all of your sources. Before you finish working on your essay, you will need to make sure that you have cited all of your sources using the proper format. Not citing your sources using in-text citations or a works cited page may be considered plagiarism by your professor and lead to failure of the assignment or even the course.^[23]

1. Ask your teacher what documentation style he or she prefers that you use if it is not mentioned in the assignment guidelines.
2. Visit your school's writing center for additional help with your works cited page and in-text citations.

Part 4 of 4:

Revising Your Essay

1.



Put aside your paper for a few days before revising. By taking a break after you have finished drafting your paper, you will give your brain a rest. When you revisit the draft, you will have a fresh perspective. It is important to begin writing a paper far enough ahead of time to allow yourself a few days or even a week to revise before it is due. If you do not allow yourself this extra time, you will be more prone to making simple mistakes and your grade may suffer as a result.^[24]

2.



Give yourself plenty of time to revise. Revision is just as important, if not more important, than the drafting phase of writing a paper. Therefore, you will need to give yourself time to do a thorough revision of your paper. Plan to finish writing your draft at least a few days before the final version is due. Giving yourself plenty of time can help you avoid simple mistakes like typos and punctuation errors, as well as major problems such as poor logic or faulty arguments.

3.



Consider your paper from multiple angles as you revise. As you revise your paper, you should consider multiple aspects of your writing to make sure that your readers will be able to understand what you have written. Consider the following questions as you revise:

1. What is your main point? How might you clarify your main point?
2. Who is your audience? Have you considered their needs and expectations?
3. What is your purpose? Have you accomplished your purpose with this paper?
4. How effective is your evidence? How might you strengthen your evidence?
5. Does every part of your paper relate back to your thesis? How might you improve these connections?
6. Is anything confusing about your language or organization? How might you clarify your language or organization?
7. Have you made any errors with grammar, punctuation, or spelling? How can you correct these errors?
8. What might someone who disagrees with you say about your paper? How can you address these opposing arguments in your paper?^[25]

4.



Proofread a printed version of your final draft. Read your paper out loud to make sure that it is polished and ready for your teacher to read it. Use your final read through as a chance to weed out any typos, grammatical errors, wordy or incomplete sentences, and other minor mistakes that may have a negative effect on your grade. Highlight or circle these errors and revise as necessary before printing your final copy.

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