

HOW TO PRESENT AN ARGUMENT

Oral or Written Arguments

Key Stage 4



Whether you are taking part in an informal discussion or a formal debate, or whether you are preparing to write an essay, you need the skill of presenting an argument.

There are rather bad ways of doing this, and some very good ones. The following is a quick overview of how best to present that argument.

Bad arguments:

For fun, you might want to have a look at the following list of bad arguments:

<http://www.don-lindsay-archive.org/skeptic/arguments.html>

Click on the first one (Argument ad hominem) and the whole lot comes up.

You might also like to have a look at the very entertaining rant by the former Australian Prime Minister against the Leader of the Opposition:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeGeooZOUdE>

20 minutes later the Leader of the Opposition leaves the debating chamber, thoroughly humiliated.

Or you might want to listen to a radio interview with Irish president Michael D Higgins:

<http://www.upworthy.com/a-tea-partier-decided-to-pick-a-fight-with-a-foreign-president-it-didnt-go-so-well>

However, whilst very entertaining, these are not arguments, they are rants. We are looking at academic argument here.

In other words, a good argument has very little to do with Prime Minister's Question Time. It is factual and unemotional. It convinces through quality, not insult.

So how to get it right?

Step 1:

Understand your topic. You need to know your issue well. Read up on it, make notes, clarify anything about which you have been unsure.

We will use the example of “The right to vote in General Elections in the UK should be extended to 16- and 17-year-olds”.



Step 2:

Put your issue into a framework.

Why is it topical? / Why is it of historical importance?

What do the key words in the question mean?
Try defining them.

Step 3:

List all the arguments for one side of the debate
(16/17-year olds should have the right to vote)

- Ethical / legal arguments
- Who would gain an advantage / be disadvantaged
- Costs to the individual / government / society
- Very important: 3 recent examples (something about voting and interest in politics as shown by young people).

Try to find such arguments with a partner.

Step 4:

List all the arguments for the other side of the debate
(16/17-year olds shouldn't have the right to vote)

- Ethical / legal arguments
- Who would gain an advantage / be disadvantaged
- Costs to the individual / government / society
- Very important: 3 recent examples (something about voting and interest in politics as shown by young people).

Try to find such arguments with a partner.

Step 5:

Now, and only now, do you come to your own conclusion. Would you give the vote to 16/17-year olds? Say yes/no and why/why not.

Con**clusion**

A magnifying glass with a black handle and a silver rim is positioned over the word "Conclusion". The lens of the magnifying glass is centered over the word, and the word is slightly larger and bolder within the lens area, emphasizing the concept of reaching a conclusion.

Step 6:

Think about language.

You need to present your argument *unemotionally*. This needs to be reflected in your language, particularly in the vocabulary which you use.

