Classic Model for an Argument

No one structure fits all written arguments. However, most college courses require arguments that consist of the following elements. Below is a basic outline for an argumentative or persuasive essay. This is only one possible outline or organization. Always refer to your handbook for specifics.

I. Introductory Paragraph

- Your introductory paragraph sets the stage or the context for the position you are arguing for.
- This introduction should end with a thesis statement that provides your claim (what you are arguing for) and the reasons for your position on an issue.

A. Your thesis:

- states what your position on an issue is
- usually appears at the end of the introduction in a short essay
- should be clearly stated and often contains emphatic language (should, ought, must)

B. Sample Argumentative Thesis

- The production, sale, and possession of assault weapons for private citizens should be banned in the U.S.

II. Body of your Argument

A. Background Information

- This section of your paper gives the reader the basic information he or she needs to understand your position. This could be part of the introduction, but may work as its own section.

B. Reasons or Evidence to Support your Claim

- All evidence you present in this section should support your position. This is the heart of your essay. Generally, you begin with a general statement that you back up with specific details or examples. Depending on how long your argument is, you will need to devote one to two well-developed paragraphs to each reason/claim or type of evidence.
- Types of evidence include:
  - first-hand examples and experiential knowledge on your topic (specific examples help your readers connect to your topic in a way they cannot with abstract ideas)
  - Opinions from recognized authorities
  - The tipsheet on the three logical appeals covers the types of evidence you can use in argumentation.

1. **Claim**: Keeping assault weapons out of private citizens' hands can lower the increasing occurrences of barbaric public slayings
   - **Evidence**:
     - Jul 93 Law firm murders
     - Columbine School Shootings
     - University of Virginia incident

- How did these individuals gain access to weapons?

2. **Claim**: The ban on assault weapons is backed heavily by public opinion, major organizations, and even law enforcement.

- **Evidence**:
  - 12% favor ban (Much 92 Timetable News)
  - Organizational endorsements
  - Nat'l Sherriff's Assoc./Intn'l Assoc. of Police Chiefs

3. **Claim**: The monetary and human costs incurred by crimes committed with assault weapons are too great to ignore.

- **Evidence**:
  - 10,561 murders in 1990 by handguns
  - Study of 131 injured patients' medical expenses paid by public funds

III. Addressing the Opposite Side

- Any well-written argument must anticipate and address positions in opposition to the one being argued.
- Pointing out what your opposition is likely to say in response to your argument shows that you have thought critically about your topic. Addressing the opposite side actually makes your argument stronger!
- Generally, this takes the form of a paragraph that can be placed either after the introduction or before the conclusion.

A. ***1st Opposing View****: Strict gun control laws won't affect crime rate*

- Refutation: Low murder rate in Britain, Australia (etc., where strict controls are in force.

B. ***2nd Opposing View****: Outlaws would still own guns*

- Refutation: Any effort to move trend in opposite direction would benefit future generations

IV. Conclusion

- The conclusion should bring the essay to a logical end. It should explain what the importance of your issue is in a larger context. Your conclusion should also reiterate why your topic is worth caring about.
- Some arguments propose solutions or make prediction on the future of the topic.
- Show your reader what would happen if your argument is or is not believed or acted upon as you believe it should be.