

## College Composition II

### Paper 2: Definition, Causal, Evaluative, or Ethical Argument

#### **Guidelines**

- Length of 900-1300 words.
- Minimum of four academically credible sources.
- Original title.
- Proper header on first page, and last name and page number in upper-right corner of all pages. In the header, label the type of argument you are doing (e.g., Causal Argument).

#### **Goals**

- To place your argument within an ongoing textual conversation; it should be clear to the reader that you are joining an existing debate. (Core Value 2)
- To demonstrate the ability to write within a specific argumentative genre. (Core Value 2)
- To select the most appropriate and best quality sources for your purpose. (Core Value 4)
- To integrate sources into your writing effectively by introducing sources with signal phrases, deciding when it is best to paraphrase vs. quote, and citing sources properly. (Core Value 5)
- To demonstrate an awareness of audience by providing necessary background information, anticipating objections, and recognizing potential differences you hold in beliefs and values. (Core Value 3)
- To acknowledge that though writing may be persuasive, it may be impossible to draw indisputable conclusions. (Core Value 5)

#### **Prompt**

For this essay, you will construct a definition, causal, evaluative, or ethical argument. Consider your audience neutral, unless you are aware that you are taking a position contrary to popular belief. But even an educated, neutral audience will be skeptical; that is, they may not yet adhere to any one viewpoint on the issue, but they will be reading critically. No matter what, you should anticipate possible objections and carefully include appropriate acknowledgements of alternative views, along with necessary refutations and/or concessions. As part of your attempt to persuade your audience, remember to clearly state what is at stake in resolving your issue.

See next page for details on each type of argument.

### **Option A: Definitional Argument**

There are two possible ways to construct a definitional argument based on your research:

- 1) Identify an important, but potentially disputed term within your subject, and argue for the adoption of a specific definition of it. Explain what is at stake (i.e., the consequences of different definitions), and offer examples or cases to support your argument. This approach focuses on the criteria of a category. An example is the term “consent” used in part for classifying actions as sexual assault.
- 2) Identify a controversial case you have encountered where the status of a person or thing within an important category is debatable. This approach focuses more on whether or not a specific phenomenon is a “match” for the criteria of a category, but it likely will mean interpreting those criteria. An example of this would be whether or not putting a child in beauty pageants constitutes “child abuse.”

In either case, you need to put thought into the source of your definition. If you are using an existing definition, it should be from a source or authority that your reader will respect and that gives you an edge (so consider a few before choosing one). If you must create your own definition, indicate to your reader why it is necessary to do so.

### **Option B: Causal Argument**

Within your general topic, identify an issue about the causes or consequences of a particular phenomenon and create a thesis that asserts which cause(s) or consequence(s) seem most relevant for better understanding and responding to the problem. Be careful to distinguish between types of causes (direct vs. indirect), to acknowledge other important causes/contributing factors, and to avoid inductive fallacies in your reasoning. To generate ideas, consider the causes or consequences of trends related to your topic, or the consequences of actions being taken or proposed.

### **Option C: Evaluative Argument**

Identify a controversy in your topic that involves deciding if something is effective or ineffective, good or bad. Create a thesis that takes a position on the issue by 1) identifying the category of evaluation, 2) developing the criteria that compose that category, and 3) seeing if the case you are studying does or does not meet the criteria. Examples:

- Is the current MPAA ratings system a *useful* system for parents to make decisions about the movies they allow their children to see?
- Does a specific film use violence *responsibly*?
- Are video games a *good way* for people to socialize?

Bear in mind that contrasting the thing you are evaluating with another might help: what are other games with which to compare video games in order to determine how well they promote socializing? What is an example of irresponsible violence in a movie?

### **Option D: Ethical Argument**

First, identify a moral or ethical issue within your research. Next, attempt to identify both the relevant principles that underlie the issue and the possible consequences that will/might follow a decision on the issue (measure the benefits vs. the costs). From there, take a position based on principles or consequences (if you do both, be careful not to get caught in irreconcilable contradictions). As part of the argument you construct, acknowledge alternative positions and explain why the principle(s) or consequence(s) on which you are basing your position should take priority over others.

Notes:

- An ethical argument based on *principles* can follow the structure of an evaluative argument; the principles are the criteria.
- An ethical argument based on *consequences* (something is right or wrong because it leads to A, B, C) represents an overlap between an evaluative argument and a causal argument.
- An ethical argument that utilizes *both principles and consequences* (or weighs them against one another) might offer criteria for the desired outcome, then consider the various principles or consequences and determine which will produce that outcome. For example, we may want a fair playing field in baseball. In principle, we might oppose PEDs as a form of cheating that hurts the integrity of the game and creates an uneven playing field. But if in practice, we cannot actually rid the game of PEDs, it may be that lifting the ban on them gives everyone the option of using them and, counterintuitively, creates an even playing field.