

Session 3: Argumentative Writing

(approximately one hour)

A. Overview of Part 2 (5 min.)

At the end of our last session, you selected a Part 2 topic that interested you. You should have a copy of the exam you selected in front of you. Once again, you'll be using my annotated copy of the January 2019 exam as a guide as you annotate your texts and plan your argumentative essay. But first, let's remind ourselves what to expect on Part 2 of the exam.

For this section, you will need to read **four informational texts**, totaling about 2,600 words. Unlike the three passages in Section I, these texts will all deal with a common topic. Then, you will need to **write an argumentative essay defending your position** on the topic question. This topic will always begin with "Should...?", so you will always need to respond with either "Yes... should".... or "No...should not".... *

Ex. Topic: Should cash currency be eliminated?

Your position is either: "**Yes**, cash currency **should** be eliminated" or "**No**, cash currency **should not** be eliminated."

- * You can also craft a more nuanced position, such as "Cash currency **should not** be eliminated, **but we should** use less cash in our society." If you take this route, make sure you articulate your position clearly and support it appropriately.

When you support your position, you will need to support it with at least two **claims**. You also need to identify and rebut a **counterclaim** – an argument that opposes (disagrees) with your position. It's very, **very** important to remember that you must cite specific evidence from at least three of the four texts while supporting your position. Usually, at least one of the texts will show both sides of the argument, and there will be at least one strongly for and one clearly against.

Important Reminders for Part 2

- You should budget about an hour and a half for this section.
- Make sure you clearly state your claim; in other words, are you answering "**should**" or "**should not**"?
- You **must** use specific evidence (i.e. quotes) from at least three out of the four texts!
You will lose 50% on this section if you do not cite **evidence from three different texts**.

- You need to appropriately cite the evidence you use.
Ex. “Quote” (Text 1, lines 2 - 4) or According to Text 1, in lines 2-4, “Quote”.

B. Part 2 Reading Strategies (30 min.)

Before Reading

Make sure you read the topic **before** you read through the passages. You do not need to decide whether you want to answer *yes* or *no* right away, but you should have the question in mind as you read the texts.

Also take a minute before you start reading to create a “T” chart on a piece of scrap paper. This is a convenient spot for you to gather evidence from the texts that supports either a *yes* or a *no* position on the topic. Refer to the **Evidence T-Chart Example** to see an example of a T-Chart. We’ll talk about how to use this in a little bit, but first, you’ll need to draw one. This chart is designed to be quick and easy to create during the exam, when you will not have access to any templates or notes.

Create a T-Chart

- 1. Fold a blank piece of paper *hot-dog style* (lengthwise); unfold and press flat.**
- 2. Trace a line on the crease.**
- 3. Draw horizontal lines mimicking the example: one near the top for the column headings, and then three more to carve out a section for each of the four texts.**
- 4. Title each column; instead of just writing *Yes* and *No*, indicate what exactly each side is arguing. This will help cement in your mind the perspectives of each side and prevent you from becoming confused. For instance, instead of just “Yes”, write “Yes, cash currency should be eliminated”.**

Titles

Before you read each passage, take a look at the title. A good title will give you a clue as to the author’s perspective on the topic.

Reading for Gist

The first time you go through each text, I recommend you use a strategy called *reading for the gist* [soft *g* (*gel*), not hard (*get*)]. As you may have discussed before in English class, the *gist* of something, such as a paragraph, is its main idea or concept. As you read the text, try to circle words in each paragraph that you think are important for understanding the gist. You can write these keywords in the right-hand margin. Take a look at the copy of the January 2019 Regents as an example. You might notice that not every paragraph has the gist written next to it; sometimes, no easy gist jumps out at you. It’s ok if not every paragraph has the gist written

next to it; if many or most paragraphs have nothing written, that may be a sign you're not reading carefully enough.

With the Part 2 in front of you, read Text 1, noting the gist of each section in the right margin.

When you finish reading, you might want to make a note up by the title of whether the piece seems to mainly support a *Yes* or *No* position, or whether it appears to be *Neutral* (not favoring either side), or whether it argues for something in between.

With the Part 2 in front of you, identify the position of Text 1.

Identifying Evidence

Once you've gotten a sense of the gist, it's time to locate some pieces of evidence contained in the text. Skim back through the text, and when you see any sentences or phrases that you think could support **either** a *Yes* or *No* position, underline them. Then, in the left-hand margin, write a little *Yes* or *No* with an arrow pointing towards the text you've underlined. Then, make a note on your T-Chart of the line numbers, making sure that you write the information in the appropriate column and row. Next to the line numbers, make a note of what the gist of that section is saying, using your margin notes to assist you. **Aim to find at least three pieces of evidence in each text.**

With the Part 2 in front of you, find at least three pieces of evidence each text and record them on your T-Chart, along with their gists.

C. Introduction of an Argumentative Essay (25 min.)

An essay's introduction is a roadmap for its argument. A good introduction captures the reader's interest and lets them know what you, as the author, intend to prove. Using the pieces of evidence that you pulled from the texts, you're going to craft an introductory paragraph that does exactly this.

Conventions of Standard Written English

Part of your essay's grade **will** be based on your command of the conventions of standard English; i.e., grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. This is only one part of your score, but it's still important to write conscientiously. In other words, **don't be careless**. To the best of your ability, make sure that your writing is polished and clear.

Hook

Your introduction’s opening sentence should make the reader want to keep reading. However, it’s always important to remember that writing is situational; in other words, you always have to adjust your writing to your purpose and your audience. If you are a professional essayist, and your paycheck depends on getting people to read your essay, the opening hook is incredibly important. On the exam, however, you have a captive audience. The individual grading your essay will read it regardless of how clever your hook is.

That said, **it will make your essay stronger to have an interesting and engaging opening sentence.** However, you shouldn’t spend a ton of time stressing about it. The meat-and-potatoes of your essay is your claim and the evidence you use to back it up.

Here are two simple tricks to come up with a serviceable hook, with examples using the topic of the January 2019 exam, which asks whether we should get rid of cash.

Ask a Question

Ask the reader a question related to the topic.

“Can you imagine a world without cash?”

or

“Do you prefer to use cash or card?”

Paint a Picture

Use descriptive detail (i.e. **imagery**) to put a relevant mental image in the reader’s mind. Put the reader in the situation.

“Imagine a world where you never again feed a crumpled dollar bill into a vending machine, where you never find a lucky penny on the sidewalk.”

Using one of these tricks, come up with an opening hook for your introduction.

Background Information

After you hook the reader’s interest, you’ll need to fill them in on the important facts they need to know to understand the argument you’re about to make. To do this, you’ll want to answer the following questions. Make sure you provide at least two sentences worth of background information.

Sentence 1: What is going on? → “As credit cards and electronic payments become more common, there is a debate in today’s world about whether it is time to get rid of cash.”

Sentence 2: Why do we care? → “A cashless world would dramatically change the lives of people across the globe.”

Write at least two sentences of background information that answer the questions above.

Claim

The last sentence in your introduction should be your claim. This is, in some ways, the most important sentence in your entire essay. It’s also the easiest to write! You’ll need to decide which side you want to argue. Don’t feel you need to argue the side you actually agree with; if you think you can better support the opposite view with the evidence you’ve found, go with that. Remember, you need to specifically cite at least three of the four texts, so be sure that you can draw evidence from a variety of the texts.

Once you’ve picked a position, you’ll need to identify three reasons to support your position. Your claim should then follow the formula below:

_____ **should/should not** _____
because (1) _____, (2) _____, and
(3) _____.

For instance:

Cash currency should not be eliminated because it is (1) private, (2) secure, and (3) helps people spend less than they do with credit cards.

Now, write a claim that articulates your position and gives THREE reasons to support that position.

That’s it! You’ve successfully begun an argumentative essay with an introductory paragraph that does all of the jobs it needs to. Great work!