

HOW ARGUMENTS GROW FROM QUESTIONS

The word *argument* has negative associations these days because it evokes images of people shouting at one another. In this kind of argument, the goal is to win, to bludgeon or intimidate one's opponent into assent or silence. But a research argument isn't like that. It is more like a conversation with a community of receptive but skeptical peers. Such readers won't necessarily oppose your claims (although they might), but they also won't accept them until they see good reasons based on reliable evidence and until you respond to their questions and reservations.

When you make (not *have*) an argument in a face-to-face conversation, you cooperate with your listeners. You state your reasons and evidence not as a lecturer would to a silent audience but as you would engage friends sitting around a table: you offer a claim and reasons to believe it; they probe for details, raise objections, or offer their points of view; you respond, perhaps with questions of your own; they ask more questions. At its best, it's an amiable but thoughtful back-and-forth that develops and tests the best case that you and they can make *together*.

In writing, even when done collaboratively, that kind of cooperation is harder. You must not only answer your imagined readers' questions but *ask them on their behalf*—as often and as sharply as real readers will. Your aim isn't to think up clever rhetorical strategies that will persuade readers to accept your claim regardless of how good it is. It is to test your claim and especially its support, so that you offer your readers the best case you can make. In a good research paper, readers hear traces of that imagined conversation.

When you make a research argument, you must lay out your reasons and evidence so that your readers can consider them; then you must imagine both their questions and your answers. Remembering how arguments work in everyday conversations will help you.

As you build your argument, make sure you can answer these five questions:

1. **Claim:** What do you want me to believe? What is your point?
2. **Reason:** Why do you say that? Why should I agree?
3. **Evidence:** How do you know? Can you back it up?
4. **Acknowledgment and Response:** But what about . . . ?
5. **Warrant:** How does that follow? Can you explain your reasoning?