

## **Persuasion- Types of Arguments**

### THREE TYPES OF ARGUMENTS: SUBSTANCE, QUALITY, POLICY

When you are making any kind of sustained, complex argument, it is crucial to understand and differentiate between three main types of argument: substance arguments, quality arguments and policy arguments.

#### SUBSTANCE ARGUMENT

A substance argument is an argument where you define the substance of something. What are the definitions of the things about which you are arguing? Abortion is a great example of an issue about which two sides disagree on the substance of the argument; or in other words, they define things differently. Many people who are for legal voluntary abortion, define abortion as the choice of a woman to do as she wishes with her own body. People who are against legal voluntary abortion often define abortion as the killing of an individual, separate from the pregnant woman's body.

It is very important that in your paper you are very clear about how each side defines the substance of the issue you are discussing.

The first set of questions you need to answer for this assignment are:

1. Substance Argument: What are the main issues, terms, or points you are discussing in your paper? How do those who disagree with you, define those issues, terms or points? How do you define those issues, terms or points?

#### QUALITY ARGUMENT

A quality argument is an argument about the morality of an issue. This is where people discuss right and wrong, good and evil, how things "should" be and why, etc. If opposing sides do not agree on the substance of an argument, it can be difficult to discuss the quality of the argument.

For example, if two people disagree about whether abortion is a woman's choice, or the killing of an individual, they may have difficulty discussing the morality of abortion. While most people agree that a woman should be able to choose what she does with her own body, AND most people agree that the killing of an individual should not be allowed, these same people may argue about whether abortion is morally right because they define abortion differently.

I once observed two students in one of my classes debating this very issue. We were practicing the Rogerian Argument interview in which you ask questions, merely seeking to understand before attempting to persuade.

The student who was against abortion finally ended up saying to his fellow student, "I don't agree that abortion is only about a woman's right to do as she wants with her own body, BUT IF

I DID believe that was all that was at stake, then I would absolutely agree with your pro choice stance 100%.”

The student who was for abortion then responded, “I don’t agree with your belief that abortion is murder. BUT IF I DID, I would be absolutely against it 100%, except in case of emergencies, just like you.”

These two students were then able to move on to the third type of argument: policy. In your paper it will be important for you to show that you at least understand, if not respect, why the other side believes what they believe to be morally right. It will also be important for you to show what you believe to be morally right and why.

The second set of questions you need to answer for this assignment are:

2. Quality Argument: What do those who disagree with you on your issue, believe is the morally right stance in this issue and why? Does it have anything to do with how they define the substance of the argument? If so, why? What do you believe is the morally right stance in your chosen issue and why? Does it have anything to do with how you define the substance of your argument? If so, why?

## POLICY ARGUMENT

A policy argument is the discussion of what to do in a society or community with regards to a specific issue. This includes what laws should be made, what systems and policies should be put into place, etc. Hopefully by now, you can see that if two or more groups disagree on the substance and the quality arguments surrounding a specific issue, it will only be that much more difficult to reach an agreement about policy. Policy arguments are discussed at the end of your paper and you do your best to reach a solution or compromise that can be appreciated by all perspectives on the issue.

When the two students I mentioned earlier, who were discussing abortion, reached the point when they were ready to begin talking about possible laws around abortion, they still had a difficult time. BUT, they had a mutual respect for each other’s beliefs, enough that they were willing to work toward possible compromise.

The third set of questions you need to answer for this assignment are:

3. Policy Argument: What are the current policies those who disagree with you would like in place in regards to your chosen issue? What are the policies you would like in place in regards to your issue? Is there any overlap? Where do you feel those policies come closest together? Can you think of any possible compromises?

If you write your paper well, those who disagree with you will feel heard and understood in the first section of your paper where you describe what they believe and why. They will hopefully then be willing to listen to what you believe and why, and hopefully respect it even if they disagree. Then in your last section when you discuss policy arguments, with possible

compromises that are at least attempting to help all parties feel satisfied, they will hopefully be willing to consider them. This is your goal.

So, for this assignment, answer the following three sets of questions:

1. Substance Argument: What are the main issues, terms, or points you are discussing in your paper? How do those who disagree with you, define those issues, terms or points? How do you define those issues, terms or points?
2. Quality Argument: What do those who disagree with you on your issue, believe is the morally right stance in this issue and why? Does it have anything to do with how they define the substance of the argument? If so, why? What do you believe is the morally right stance in your chosen issue and why? Does it have anything to do with how you define the substance of your argument? If so, why?
3. Policy Argument: What are the current policies those who disagree with you would like in place in regards to your chosen issue? What are the policies you would like in place in regards to your issue? Is there any overlap? Where do you feel those policies come closest together? Can you think of any possible compromises?