THE CONCEPT OF ARGUMENT

What does developing an argument mean?
What do the lecturers want?

They want you to:
- read the literature in the field (be a researcher)
- analyse it (apply objective reasoning) and
- use it to think critically about the questions in the course
- adopt a position within an argument/decide what YOU think (be scholarly).
Important Terms

- Argument: a piece of work that presents evidence in order to persuade the reader to accept the same position as the writer.
- Position: where the writers put themselves in relation to the argument (for, against)
- Thesis statement: is where writers declare their position and ‘flag’ or ‘signal’ the argument they will make in the paper
An academic argument has...

1. Clear statement of position
2. Evidence or Proof
3. Credit to sources (references)
4. Logical cohesion – steps can be followed
Taking a position/side

Spectrum of academic opinion
Field of debate within which arguments are shaped
The range of opinion in the literature

There is no “right” position

The question is whether your position is supported by the evidence
An academic argument is a critical argument

**Critical argument**

- investigates the issue
- evaluates the evidence
- takes position
- uses evidence to support position
Your Argument ‘Inhabits’ the Whole Essay

- **Title** → communicates essential concepts
- **Introduction** → has a developed thesis statement
- **Body** → researched evidence presented
- **Conclusion** → reiterates your position
- **Bibliography** → provides references as evidence
Q: What is a thesis statement?
A: Clear statement of position

- The MOST IMPORTANT SENTENCE in your essay
  Place it in your Introduction
- Lets the reader know the main idea of the essay
- Answers the question: “What am I trying to prove?”
- Not a factual statement, but a claim (ie a thesis or idea) that has to be supported.
A Sample Framework for Developing your Argument

- My argument/position:
- Reasons for my position:
  - Evidence & examples:
    - 1
    - 2
    - 3
    - 4
- Opposing arguments, reasons and evidence:
  - weaknesses in reasoning or
  - evidence of opposing arguments:
- Reasons why my position is stronger:
Offering a Counterargument

- Counterarguments may be located at various locations within your body paragraphs.
- You may choose to
  - build each of your main points as a contrast to oppositional claims.
  - offer a counterargument after you have articulated your main claims.
Evidence or Proof

Support & develop your position:

- Use facts, quotes, research, experience, other people’s work, examples, statistics
- Aim: to show that your position is well reasoned, logical & worthy of consideration

What counts as proof depends a great deal on your academic area as well as the focus & goals of your essay.
Evaluating Evidence
Sources of Acceptable Proof

✓ Academic journals
✓ Reliable web sites
✓ Authors with strong publication record
✓ Academic books
✓ Factual evidence
✓ Logical evidence

✗ Popular magazines
✗ Unreliable web sites
✗ Authors with little or no publication record
✗ Popular books
  - not referenced, no index
✗ Personal belief
✗ Anecdotal evidence & emotional appeals