

How to Structure and Organize an Argument

First, determine what you have to say about the subject and draft a thesis statement. A **thesis** is a one to three sentence statement most explicitly stating the argument of your essay. An **argument**, on the other hand, is the overall focus or direction of your paper. Arguments are built with the claims, or main points, that support the thesis. An example of a thesis could be: *“Peanuts are a better alternative to popcorn in movie theaters.”*

There would then be multiple **points** in your paper to support this thesis. These points are often stated in **topic sentences** at the beginning or end of body paragraphs. Topic sentences function like mini-thesis statements, letting readers know what the paragraph is about and how it connects back to your thesis. They state reasons your audience should believe you. One section could argue that *“Peanuts have more vitamins than popcorn.”*

Peanuts can be better than popcorn in multiple ways, but it is important to focus on one thing at a time when going from point to point. Each body paragraph should focus on one main point of your argument. Also consider **evidence**, or supporting facts, that will build on your point. What kind of vitamins do peanuts have? How many? How many vitamins does popcorn have, in comparison? Once those are addressed, you may move onto your next point: *“Peanuts are easier and cheaper to produce than popcorn.”*

Evidence would then support this point, as well. Think about whether introducing an opposing viewpoint would be appropriate for your paper. Strong papers often include counter-arguments and the writer’s response.

Sketching a brief outline of your paper can visually show you how you are supporting your thesis and if you have enough support. For our example paper, an outline might look like this:

Thesis: Peanuts are a better alternative to popcorn in movie theaters.

1. *Peanuts have more vitamins than popcorn.*
 - a. Describe nutritional value of peanuts
 - b. Compare with nutritional value of popcorn
 - c. Connect to benefits for moviegoers
2. *Peanuts are easier and cheaper to produce than popcorn.*
 - a. Describe the production process of peanuts
 - b. Compare with production process of popcorn
 - c. Explain how lower production costs mean lower costs for moviegoers
3. And so on...



In sum,

- Formulate the thesis
- Think of smaller points that will support your thesis and constitute your argument
- Compile evidence for each point
 - Weave in quotes, statistics, and/or data while maintaining your own voice
- Keep your thesis in mind as you develop the main points of your argument
 - Ask yourself, “Does this argument support my thesis?”
- Keep each paragraph focused on one main point or claim
- Do not limit yourself to a single paragraph per point or claim

- Some need just a sentence or so of evidence, some benefit from pages of discussion