The Argumentative Essay

This type of essay, also called a *persuasive* or *illustration* essay, is one of the most useful in the real world. It is your job to make a controversial claim about a particular issue and then support that claim with persuasive evidence. This evidence may take the form of personal experience, concrete examples, expert testimony, or really anything to get readers on your side.

**Purpose:** to convince readers of a claim and possibly persuade them to take action

**Perspective:** third-person (*he, she, it, one, they*...)

**Organization:** in order of importance (least to most), with each point leading logically into the next

**Typical Structure:**

1. **Introduction:**
   a. Attention-getter focusing the reader on a particular issue?
   b. Background information providing context for the issue
   c. Relevance of the issue to readers
   d. *Thesis:* A strong, arguable claim with a hint of the supporting points to come

2. **Body (each paragraph):**
   a. *Topic sentence:* Major point supporting the thesis statement
   b. Evidence for this point using *logos* (logic), *ethos* (authority), or *pathos* (emotion)
   c. Example(s) illustrating this point?
   d. Transition to the next major point

3. **Conclusion:**
   a. Concise summary of the main claim and supporting evidence
   b. Overall significance of this claim
   c. Prediction or advice for readers?

**Notes:**
- Your thesis should make a claim that many people would disagree with. It is your job to convince these people that your argument is in fact valid.
- Know your *audience.* Do they probably disagree with you, agree with you already, or have no opinion one way or the other? You may need to provide several examples to *illustrate* your point.
- Experts can be quoted in support of your argument to give it greater credibility.
- Opposing arguments may be acknowledged, but they should be downplayed and discredited if possible. Their inclusion should only strengthen your argument, not make you seem uncertain or wishy-washy.
Sample Essay

It is decidedly indisputable that the works of William Shakespeare are the most enduring and universal writings of humanity. But did he really write them? How could an uneducated man, an actor from the small farming community called Stratford-upon-Avon, write with such knowledge of philosophy, history, and the inner workings of noble society? Since the 19th century, the Shakespeare authorship question has been argued principally by two groups—the Stratfordians and the Anti-Stratfordians.

The Stratfordians hold that Shakespeare was indeed the author of the Shakespearean canon. Their argumentation, however, is weak through their lack of true documentation that Shakespeare indeed was the creator of the plays. Arguments that the Stratfordians use include simply that his name was on all of the plays; the actor William Shakespeare and the man William Shakespeare (who lived in Stratford-upon-Avon) were the same person, and that same person was the sharer of the Globe Theater and was granted a coat of arms. How much can one attest to merely a name in terms of the authorship of some of the most nuanced writing in history? Not much.

The Anti-Stratfordian argument is that William Shakespeare, the actor from Stratford-upon-Avon, sharer of the Globe Theater, was a possible front for others of the British nobility, who did not wish to draw unwanted attention. In a time when beheading was popular with the monarchy, a noble person may have wanted to publish their writing in a manner that maintained the safety of themselves and their good name. The Anti-Stratfordians hold that this is the case. After all, how could an uneducated man of low social stature write such articulate and elevated prose on the nuances of courtly life, history, French and Italian grammar, and philosophy? Where would someone like Shakespeare have picked those things up? While there is no evidence that Shakespeare, who may have been illiterate due to his upbringing in the rural Stratford-upon-Avon, was indeed the front for a noble man or woman (or group thereof), it makes more sense that this was the case.

The argument between Stratfordians and Anti-Stratfordians over the Shakespearean canon is rather quixotic due to lack of solid evidence. The Anti-Stratfordians, however, seem to have a better explanation behind the educated and fiercely literate writing. That a member of the nobility would want to protect themselves, yet see their work published, seems very likely. All that remains of William Shakespeare are legal documents, which do not attest to character, and the plays themselves. Due to lack of further evidence, likely destroyed by time, this mystery may remain unresolved.