The art of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire. Contrary to popular opinion, it’s not enough to simply have an opinion, even a strong one. Writers often forget that the primary purpose of an argument is to “win” it – to persuade your readers to accept your point of view. Argument essays are an opportunity for us to find out what we really believe about a topic, issue, or proposition. Even wise, honest, caring people don’t always agree on what is true or fair. That’s why argumentation is found everywhere: congress, courtrooms, corporate board rooms and, of course, in countless essays written by college students throughout the world!

Choosing a topic
If you are able to choose your own topic, avoid issues that cannot be won, no matter how strongly you might feel about them. Gun control, abortion, capital punishment, freedom of speech, and euthanasia (right to die) -- avoid these, if possible. They are almost impossible to “win” because each touches on matters of faiths and beliefs that are, for many people, unshakable and deeply private. Instead, choose a well-defined, controversial issue. News magazines, 60 Minutes, and National Public Radio can help you generate ideas. Make sure the issue is something your readers can understand and which is arguable.

Stating Your Position
Once you have a sense of your argument’s overall scope and direction, you can draft an argumentative proposition to state your main point and help direct your thinking while writing. Like a thesis statement, an argumentative proposition should be scrutinized and (if necessary) modified throughout your writing process. At first, proposition are often hunches or good guesses about what you will finally claim. Make sure your proposition defines your argument’s scope and make a debatable assertion. It shouldn’t be self-evidently true (“asparagus is a vegetable”) nor should it claim something that’s purely a matter of opinion (“asparagus tastes great”). Instead, your proposition should have some uncertainty, yet make a claim that your readers can assent to in the end (“Our country agricultural agent should encourage valley farmers to plant more asparagus”).

Anticipating Your Opposition
It’s not enough to simply explain your position on a topic and expect readers to accept or reject your ideas based on the merit of the argument. One essential characteristic of an argument essay is addressing the active opposition to your proposition. To win acceptance, you must anticipate and overcome objections that the opposition might raise. To get an overview of the opposition’s case as it relates to your own, make a pro and con chart regarding the issue. Plotting your argument helps you anticipate crucial points that may determine your success or failure. And don’t try to look good by only mentioning your opposition’s weaker arguments! Your readers (and instructor) will know you’re taking the easy way out. Instead, see the issue through your opponent’s eyes and deal with the most compelling arguments they could use against you. You may need to revise your proposition at this stage.

See ARGUMENT page 2
Remember, we argue not because we’re angry, but because arguing causes us to examine our own and others’ ideas carefully. We must weigh conflicting claims, make judgments about the nature of evidence and methods of investigation, state our thoughts clearly and honestly, and consider—respectfully and critically—the ideas of others.

Compiled from “ABrief Guide to Writing Argumentative Essays” (handout available in the Writing Center) and the Paradigm Online Writing Assistant (http://www.powa.org/argument/)

Stump the Grammar Goddess

When I write the sentence, “The mayor as well as his brothers are going to prison,” Microsoft grammar check tells me the verb choice is incorrect. Why? Since more than once person is going to prison, shouldn’t the verb be plural?

~Confused in Chandler

Dear Confused:
The basic premise is indeed that singular subjects need singular verbs while plural subjects need plural verbs. However, it’s how you phrase your sentence that determines whether the subject is singular or plural. Phrases such as together with, as well as, and along with are not the same as and. The phrase introduced by as well as or along with will modify the earlier word (mayor in this case), but the earlier word remains the sole, singular subject. So the sentence should be:
The mayor as well as his brothers is going to prison.

HOWEVER, the word and does compound the subjects, so the sentence should read:
The mayor and his brothers are going to jail.

Mere mortals can address the Grammar Goddess with questions by emailing her at dl-cgc-grammar-goddess@cgcmail.maricopa.edu. Not all questions will be answered; if you need specific help, please stop by the Writing Center.

Redundant Phrases – Pleonasms

How often have you heard a friend say something like this: “It was an unexpected surprise when a pair of baby twins was born at 12 midnight”? What is a surprise if not unexpected? What are twins if not a pair? Who can be born but a baby? When is midnight if not at 12? The expressions we use are full of redundancy. Your friend could just as well have said: “It was a surprise when twins were born at midnight” with far less repetition.

These redundant expressions are called pleonasms. Some common ones are in the list below. Remove the superfluous words (in brackets) and you will not subtract from the overall meaning of the expression.
Did You Know?
Finding Your Own Mistakes

If you attended our December workshop, “When ‘The End’ Isn’t... Tips for Revising and Proofing Your Own Paper”, then you already know the one factor that prevents good reading is familiarity with your own text. We tend to get caught up in the flow and momentum of our paper and end up glossing over our own mistakes.

One really effective way to revise your paper is to see your text differently -- your computer can help! Here’s how you can use Microsoft Word to separate your text into individual sentences, making it easier to catch the errors within your sentence.

First, save your text!!!

Click on the EDIT menu and select REPLACE. The program will bring up a dialogue box with fields: one labeled FIND WHAT and the other labeled REPLACE WITH.

In the FIND WHAT field, just type in a period and one space (assuming you’ve followed the convention of putting one space after the end of a sentence). In the REPLACE WITH field, type in the following, exactly as it appears here:

```
.\p\p
```

The ^ is on the 6 key. Each ^p will function as a carriage return, so you’re really telling the computer to separate your sentence by two carriage returns.

Then click the REPLACE ALL button. Presto! Your sentences are now broken up so that each begins on a new line, and they are separated by a blank line. Don’t worry! You can change it back just as easily.

To change it back, go through the same procedure but in reverse. In the FIND WHAT field, type .\p\p. In the REPLACE WITH field, type in a period and one space. Click REPLACE ALL, and your text will go back to the way it was.

Once your text is broken up, you can check for important errors like sentence fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences. The Writing Center has dozens of handouts to help you identify and correct these common errors.

We do not write because we want to; we write because we have to.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Redundant Phrases Section (seems to be missing the list of phrases)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• (actual) experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (advance) planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (advance) reservations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (advance) warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• all meet (together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (armed) gunman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• at (12) midnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• at (12) noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• autobiography (of my life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (awkward) predicament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (baby) boy was born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• (basic) fundamentals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cease (and desist)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• cheap (price)  
• (close) proximity  
• cold (temperature)  
• commute (back and forth)  
• consensus (of opinion)  
• (difficult) dilemma  
• each (and every)  
• (empty) space  
• (end) result  
• estimated (roughly) at  
• filled (to capacity)  
• (free) gift  
• (frozen) ice  
• (general) public  
• green (in color)  

• join (together)  
• (natural) instinct  
• never (at any time)  
• (null and) void  
• (pair of) twins  
• (past) experience  
• (poisonous) venom  
• (pre-)recorded  
• reason is (because)  
• (regular) routine  
• (small) speck  
• (suddenly) exploded  
• surrounded (on all sides)  
• (unexpected) surprise  


---

**Upcoming Writing Center Workshops**

Wednesday, February 25: Strategies for Integrating Research, 12:30 - 2 p.m., L228  
Wednesday, March 24: Anatomy of an “A” Paper, TBA  
Wednesday, April 14: Citing Research, TBA

**Resources from the Web**

**Research Skills**  
Conducting research and integrating it effectively takes practice, but learning effective research strategies can strengthen your research-supported arguments.

**Writing Research Papers**  
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/index.html#writing

**The Research Essay**  
http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/Pages/ResearchEssayType.html

**Webwizard: Your Guide to Becoming an Effective Web Researcher**  
http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/infosrv/lue/webwizard/