

# Argue Your Point! Argumentative Prompts and Practice



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# Argue Your Point!

## Argumentative Prompts and Practice

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## Introduction

In this book, you will find twenty argumentative writing exercises. Each exercise presents an argumentative prompt accompanied by three questions or tasks which will generate critical thinking skills, discussion, and debate. Some of the topics require the students to acknowledge and distinguish a claim from alternate or opposing claims. Some questions require students to choose relevant and sufficient evidence to support a claim, and others require students to develop their own claims with reasons and evidence to support them.

Thinking of valid reasons and finding sufficient evidence are two of the greatest challenges for middle school students when developing arguments. It is crucial that we as teachers provide ample time discussing how to develop effective arguments, but as all English language arts teachers know, we do not have a ton of time! These short exercises provide a way to tackle many argumentative topics and teach students the art of arguing in an essay.

You may choose to use these exercises as springboards for writing assignments, challenging your students to organize their reasons and evidence logically in an essay. Or, you may simply choose to use each task as a way to discuss and talk through how to argue a topic with valid reasons. These handouts can be used as classwork or homework. They could even be used as the preface for class debates. With twenty of these handouts, you can do one a week for an entire semester!

## What Are the Elements of an Argument?

In order to have an argument, you must have some specific ingredients.

- Claim – This is a statement that you believe. It is the answer to the question “What are you trying to prove?” Your claim is also your “thesis statement”.
- Evidence – The evidence must be relevant and verifiable. Your evidence should answer the question, “How so?” This is where you “Prove it!”
- Warrant- Explanation of how evidence supports the claim; This is often common sense, rules, laws, or research
- Counter arguments – acknowledgment of differing claims. You should always be aware of the “other side” of the argument. This way, you can develop reasons to “shoot down” the opposing side.

**ARGUE YOUR POINT #1**

**If it could be made possible, should NASA send humans to Mars to live?**

**1. Read each of the following facts. Decide whether each fact would help you argue for sending humans to Mars or against sending humans to Mars. Then, explain your answers.**

<b>Fact</b>	<b>For or against?</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Earth's population is projected to hit more than 9 billion by 2075.		
It could take up to 10 months to travel to Mars.		
Scientists have found that when humans spend a lot of time away from Earth's gravity, the human body can suffer.		

**2. List two of your own reasons for or against humans living on Mars.**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Write your thesis statement for this writing prompt.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Should the school day be shortened by 90 minutes?**

**1. Complete the following chart to list pros and cons for this issue.**

**Pros**

**Cons**

**2. Write a thesis statement (topic sentence) for this prompt.**

**3. What three reasons would you use to support your thesis statement?**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Should drivers be banned from using their cell phones while driving?**

1. **If you were writing an argumentative essay on this topic, and your claim was that the drivers should not be banned from using their cell phones while driving, which of the following would you not include in your essay?**
  - a. statistics that show a rise in fatal accidents due to cell phone use while driving
  - b. the fact that eating, putting on makeup, or changing a radio station can also distract a driver
  - c. the fact that police do not have enough manpower to catch drivers using cell phones while driving
  - d. stories of drivers calling in emergencies or calling in to help police officers find a wanted suspect or missing child

2. **If your claim was in favor of banning cell phones while driving, what reasons could you use to support it? (List three reasons below.)**

Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3

Each day in the United States, more than 9 people are killed and more than 1,060 people are injured in crashes that are reported to involve a distracted driver.

-National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Facts and Statistics. <http://www.distraction.gov/content/get-the-facts/facts-and-statistics.html>. Accessed February 13, 2013.

3. **If you were going to use the information above, what would your claim be?**
  - a. Drivers should be banned from using cell phones while driving.
  - b. A cell phone ban during driving is not a good call.

**ARGUE YOUR POINT #4**

**For her English class, Cameron has to write an argumentative essay on why kids should receive an allowance from their parents. Read her ideas, and then answer the questions.**

*Every child should receive an allowance by the time he/she is six years old.*

- *Children will learn the value of money at an early age.*
- *Money should be given for chores done around the house and for good grades.*
- *Kids can learn how to keep a budget and be better at math.*
- *Parents should stick with a regular schedule, whether it's weekly or monthly, and let their children plan for and anticipate their "income."*

**1. Choose one of Cameron's ideas and elaborate on it by developing two supporting details.**

**2. A counterargument is an argument in opposition of the argument presented. In other words, it is the "other side" of the argument. Which of the following would be a counterargument to Cameron's essay?**

- Instead of being driven by self-motivation, children learn to work hard just to earn the extra cash.
- Kids can be taught to save, spend, donate, and invest with their allowance.
- Through a regular chore routine, kids will grow to understand that they have to be responsible and that they have obligations that are counted upon by others.
- Not all children receive an allowance.

**3. Using Cameron's ideas, and the counterargument you selected in number two, write a paragraph arguing Cameron's point.**



**Should all Americans have the right to own firearms?**

- 1. If you were writing an argumentative essay on this topic, and your claim was that owning fire arms is wrong, which of the following would you not include in your essay?**
  - a. statistics showing high murder rates by guns
  - b. the fact that sometimes guns are used for self defense
  - c. that you have a better chance of staying safe by putting up no defense when confronted by a criminal
  - d. statistics that show that people who own guns are mostly responsible

- 2. If your claim was in favor of Americans having the right to bear arms, what reasons could you use to support it? List three reasons below.**

<b>Reason 1</b>	<b>Reason 2</b>	<b>Reason 3</b>

Data from the Centers for Disease Control show us that in 2010, there were a total of 31,672 deaths caused by firearms in the United States, of which only 11,078 were homicidal acts.

- 3. If you were going to use the information above, what would your claim be?**
  - a. Gun control is necessary.
  - b. All Americans should have the right to bear firearms.

**ARGUE YOUR POINT #6**

**Should students be required to take state standardized tests?**

**1. Read each of the following facts. Decide whether each fact would help you argue for students taking standardized tests or against students taking standardized tests. Then, explain your answers.**

<b>Fact</b>	<b>For or against?</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Standardized tests are designed to enable teachers to compare student performance.		
On average, around six million dollars are spent in each state annually on standardized testing.		
Children as young as six and seven years old are tested in many states.		

**2. List two of your own reasons for or against students taking standardized tests.**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Write your thesis statement for this writing prompt.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Should students be allowed to “grade” their teachers?**

**1. Complete the following chart to list pros and cons for this issue.**

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>

**2. Write a thesis statement (topic sentence) for this prompt.**

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**3. What three reasons would you use to support your thesis statement?**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Should people be fined if they refuse to recycle?**

1. **If you were writing an argumentative essay on this topic, and your claim was that people should not be fined if they refuse to recycle, which of the following would you include in your essay?**
  - a. The average person generates over 4 pounds of trash every day and about 1.5 tons of solid waste per year.
  - b. We generate 21.5 million tons of food waste each year. If we composted that food, it would reduce the same amount of greenhouse gas as taking 2 million cars off the road.
  - c. Americans throw away 25,000,000 plastic bottles every hour.
  - d. A tremendous amount of resources would have to be used to monitor recycling habits in order to fine people.

2. **If your claim was against fining people who do not recycle, what reasons could you use to support it? (List three reasons below.)**

Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3

3. **Write an introduction for this prompt. Make sure you include a lead that grabs your reader's attention.**

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**ARGUE YOUR POINT #9**

**For his English class, Nate has to write an argumentative essay on why the voting age should be lowered to thirteen. Read his ideas, and then answer the questions.**

*The voting age should be lowered to thirteen.*

- *This would increase voter turnout now and in the future.*
- *This would encourage teachers to inform students more about politics and the voting process, which would help students into adulthood.*
- *Thirteen year olds are affected by who is elected so they should have a say so in the voting process.*

**1. Choose one of Nate’s ideas and elaborate on it by developing two supporting details.**

**2. A counterargument is an argument in opposition of the argument presented. In other words, it is the “other side” of the argument. Which of the following would be a counterargument to Nate’s essay?**

- Adult voter turnout would increase because they would be driving their kids to vote.
- Thirteen year olds are neither responsible nor mature enough to vote.
- Some schools already hold mock elections so that students can vote.
- Not all children would want to vote.

**3. What do you think? Should thirteen year olds be allowed to vote? Why or why not?**

**ARGUE YOUR POINT #10**

**Should students be provided with a snack to eat in class?**

**1. Read each of the following facts. Decide whether each fact would help you argue for providing students with a snack in class or against providing students with a snack to eat in class. Then, explain your answers.**

<b>Fact</b>	<b>For or against?</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
According to the National Peanut Board, food allergies of all types affect approximately 4 to 6 percent of school-age children.		
48.8 million Americans—including 16.2 million children—live in households that lack the means to get enough nutritious food on a regular basis. As a result, they struggle with hunger at some time during the year.		
Crumbs on the floor can cause roaches.		

**2. List two of your own reasons for or against students receiving a snack during school.**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Write your thesis statement for this writing prompt.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Should students as young as fourteen be allowed to hold jobs?**

**1. Complete the following chart to list pros and cons for this issue.**

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>

**2. Write a thesis statement (topic sentence) for this prompt.**

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**3. What three reasons would you use to support your thesis statement?**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Are professional athletes paid too much money?**

1. **If you were writing an argumentative essay on this topic, and your claim was that professional athletes are not paid too much, which of the following would you include in your essay?**
  - a. According to an article in *Bloomberg Businessweek*, numerous athletes have had to file for bankruptcy due to poor choices with their money.
  - b. The National Basketball Players Association estimates that 6-to-8 percent of NBA players end up broke.
  - c. A career-ending injury is a potential outcome every single time athletes take to a court, a track, or a field.
  - d. Athletes are cool and they need a lot of money.

2. **If your claim was that professional athletes are paid too much, what reasons could you use to support it? (List three reasons below.)**

Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3

3. **Decide what your claim would be for this prompt. Then, write an introduction.**

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**ARGUE YOUR POINT #13**

**For her English class, Zya has to write an argumentative essay on why art and music classes should not be cut from school. Read her ideas, and then answer the questions.**

*Art and music classes should never be cut from school.*

- *Arts and music education programs are mandatory in countries that rank consistently among the highest for math and science test scores, like Japan, Hungary, and the Netherlands.*
- *Multiple studies have concluded that curricular and extracurricular art studies and activities help keep high-risk dropout students stay in school.*
- *New brain research shows that not only does music improve skills in math and reading, but it promotes creativity, social development, personality adjustment, and self-worth.*
- *For some students, art and music is a strength, and they should have the opportunity to develop this strength at school.*

**1. Choose one of Zya’s ideas and elaborate on it by developing two supporting details.**

**2. A counterargument is an argument in opposition of the argument presented. In other words, it is the “other side” of the argument. Which of the following would be a counterargument to Zya’s essay?**

- Growing technology requires extra funds. Eliminating music and art from school could provide more money for technological advances in the classroom.
- There are many schools that do not offer art or music.
- Children who play music learn there are rewards from hard work, practice and discipline.
- Children can also explore emotions through music, which may help them better understand who they are.

**3. Can you think of one more reason for or against keeping art and music in school?**

**Should animals be kept in zoos?**

**1. Complete the following chart to list pros and cons for this issue.**

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>

**2. Write a thesis statement (topic sentence) for this prompt.**

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**3. What three reasons would you use to support your thesis statement?**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Should students in America attend school year round?**

1. **If you were writing an argumentative essay on this topic, and your claim was that Americans should not go year round, which of the following would you not include in your essay?**
  - a. statistics that show a decrease in students' retention of information over extended school breaks
  - b. the fact that teenagers will not be able to use a summer job to save money for college
  - c. the fact that families will be able to take vacations during off-peak times to save money
  - d. reports that year-round calendars will help with overcrowded schools
  
2. **If your claim was in favor of year-round schools, what reasons could you use to support it? (List three reasons below.)**

Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3

Summer provides children with educational opportunities that they may not get while in school. This includes things such as enjoying a library summer reading program, learning to swim, attending summer camp, or vacations. Summers off give children time to explore their world and learn without being graded.

Dr. William White (1988)

3. **If you were going to use the information above, what would your claim be?**
  - a. Year-round school should not be considered in America.
  - b. Year-round school would offer many benefits for students, their parents, and school communities.

**ARGUE YOUR POINT #16**

**For his science class, Davis has to write an argumentative essay on why the United States should rely on alternative energy sources instead of fossil fuels. Read his ideas, and then answer the questions.**

*Not only are fossil fuels harmful to the environment, one day the world's oil and gas reserves will run out.*

- *Alternative energy sources, like solar power, is clean and environment friendly.*
- *Traditional sources of energy (gas and petrol) cause enormous problems for the environment.*
- *Alternative energy is never ending and renewable because natural resources like the sun and water will never be exhausted.*
- *Research in alternative energy would help create a pollution free environment.*

**1. Choose one of Davis' ideas and elaborate on it by developing two supporting details.**

**2. A counterargument is an argument in opposition of the argument presented. In other words, it is the "other side" of the argument. Which of the following would be a counterargument to Davis' essay?**

- To build and maintain facilities that produce renewable energy, millions will be given job opportunities.
- The burning of fossil fuel contributes to global warming.
- Research will work to reduce the costs associated with alternative energy.
- The cost of using solar power to generate energy is much higher when compared to processing petroleum.

**3. Using Davis' ideas, and the counterargument you selected in number two, write a paragraph arguing Davis' point.**

**ARGUE YOUR POINT #17**

**Should recess continue into middle school?**

**1. Read each of the following facts. Decide whether each fact would help you argue for middle schools including recess or against middle school recess. Then, explain your answers.**

<b>Fact</b>	<b>For or against?</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Recess provides children with the opportunity to socialize and use real communication skills.		
Studies show that students that are physically active have improved academic performances, higher test scores, and have better attitudes about school.		
To add time for recess, many schools may find a need to lengthen the school day.		

**2. List two of your own reasons for or against middle schools having recess.**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Write your thesis statement for this writing prompt.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Are we too dependent on computers?**

1. **If you were writing an argumentative essay on this topic, and your claim was that we are too computer dependent, which of the following would you not include in your essay?**
  - a. statistics that show computers provide an escape from problematic social or family life
  - b. the fact that teenagers often find themselves glued to the computer waiting on a notification from a friend
  - c. the fact that “gamers” gain a sense of control in cyber worlds that they cannot experience in their own world
  - d. reports that computers make our lives easier

2. **If your claim is that we are not too dependent on computers, what reasons could you use to support it? (List three reasons below.)**

Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3

Computers may cause children to be more focused on the vents in an artificial world rather than real life. Children could develop an intolerance for human interaction.

Brod, C. (1984) *Technostress: The Human Costs of the Computer Revolution*. Michigan: Addison-Weley.

3. **If you were going to use the information above, what would your claim be?**
  - a. Computer dependency can become a problem for many.
  - b. We cannot become dependent on a computer; an addict is dependent on a drug, and a computer is obviously not a drug.

**ARGUE YOUR POINT #19**

**For her government class, Janie has to write an argumentative essay on the role the government should play in the American diet. Read her ideas, and then answer the questions.**

*Obesity is a national problem, so the government needs to help solve the problem.*

- *Fast food restaurants are used daily by over 25% of Americans.*
- *Soft drinks in a 16 ounce size rather than larger options would reduce 60-80 grams of sugar in one sitting.*
- *Like tobacco products, food labels should include warnings if they have high quantities of salt, fat, and/or sugar.*
- *One in three American adults is obese.*

**1. Choose one of Janie’s ideas, and elaborate on it by developing two supporting details.**

**2. A counterargument is an argument in opposition of the argument presented. In other words, it is the “other side” of the argument. Which of the following would be a counterargument to Janie’s essay?**

- What a person eats is a personal choice – a social issue, not a government one.
- A poor diet develops chronic health problems.
- Americans eat 200 calories more a day than they did in the 1970s.
- Obesity costs society an estimated \$117 billion in direct and indirect costs.

**3. Using Janie’s ideas, and the counterargument you selected in number two, write a conclusion for Janie’s argumentative essay.**

**Should animals be kept in zoos?**

**1. Complete the following chart to list pros and cons for this issue.**

**Pros**

**Cons**

**2. Write a thesis statement (topic sentence) for this prompt.**

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**3. What three reasons would you use to support your thesis statement?**

● \_\_\_\_\_

● \_\_\_\_\_

● \_\_\_\_\_



# Brainstorm Argumentative Topics

School Issues	Local Issues	State Issues	National Issues	Global Issues

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