

WRITING CENTER

Strengthening Your Argument

Identify your Thesis

What is your claim or thesis? Can you identify a sentence or set of sentences that articulate this thesis? If so, underline them. If you cannot identify a specific central claim for the paper, you will probably need to do some work on this aspect of the paper. The lack of a clear thesis can make your entire discussion unfocused.

Suggestion: Summarizing each paragraph in your essay and then putting the summaries in outline form can help you to clarify your major claim.

Characterize your audience

What does your audience think, feel, and know about the topic?

- Has your audience chosen sides on the topic?
- What emotional response (if any) will your audience have to your argument?
- What is your audience's level of expertise?

What do you and your audience have in common?

- Do you share common values?
- Do you understand the same set of facts?
- Do you share similar experiences?
- Do you use similar terminology?

Will you have multiple audiences to consider?

- Will your audience have varying levels of expertise?
- Will your audience have different areas of concern?
- Will some members of your audience need more/less information than others?

Analyze how you characterize yourself in the essay

What type of character have you created?

- Do you present yourself as an expert or a novice?
- Are you humble, respectful, or arrogant?
- Are you intellectual or just "plain folk"?
- Do you use authorities to support your claims?
- Do you try to draw an emotional response from your audience?

Decide how to develop common ground with your audience

Which of your audience's characteristics/attitudes can you draw on to develop common ground?

What is your tone of voice?

- Do you vary your language to match the expertise levels of audience members?
- Are you formal or informal?
- Do you use the terminology of the discipline?
- Are you respectful of the audience's attitudes and/or feelings about the topic?

Consider the opposition

Put yourself in the shoes of someone who disagrees with your claim. What objections/questions/arguments would he/she have after reading your argument? Write as many of them as you can think of.

Brainstorm how you address these objections. Will you need to do additional research? How will addressing the opposition change the way you develop and defend your claim?