

# Argument-Essay Checklist

**Directions:** Use this guide to check your own essay, or exchange papers with a classmate and use the list to check each other's essays. In the margins of the essay you are checking, make notes about anything that needs to be revised.

## Introduction

- ✓ Does the first sentence grab readers' attention?
- ✓ Does the first paragraph provide a general overview of the essay's topic?
- ✓ Does the first paragraph include a claim statement that strongly and clearly states your point of view? Does the claim clue readers in as to what the essay is going to be about?

## Body Paragraphs

- ✓ Do they contain a total of at least three reasons that support the claim?
- ✓ Do they provide details to further explain each of the reasons?
- ✓ Are the reasons presented in order from weakest to strongest?
- ✓ Do you acknowledge an opposing point of view and then explain why you think it isn't strong enough to change your point of view?

## Conclusion

- ✓ Does the last paragraph remind readers of the main points of the essay, without going into *too* much detail and repeating everything readers just read?
- ✓ Is the conclusion free of new information (such as another supporting point)?
- ✓ Does the last sentence leave readers with a strong final impression?

## General

- ✓ Does one idea flow smoothly into the next?
- ✓ Do the sentence structures and lengths vary?
- ✓ Does every sentence relate to the claim?
- ✓ Does everything make sense?
- ✓ Is the essay convincing?
- ✓ Are the grammar, punctuation, and spelling correct?

# USING “I” OR “I THINK” OR “YOU” IN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

Academic essays differ from personal essays; they use a more formal tone.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Person Singular

Let's review the 1st person. **1st person uses I or We**, as in “I am upset” and “We ran away.” **Also stay away from using me, us, my, mine or ours.**

Some say not to use the word *I* in an essay. Others say it is fine. If you do use it, it is best to **use I only in an introduction** (and to a lesser extent, the conclusion), **rather than in the body of the essay**. But use it sparingly; otherwise you can come across as too self-important.

However, statements like **“I believe” or “I think” tend to weaken writing** and are better when written in the third person. (example: “The U.S. government needs to pass this law” is better and stronger than “I believe the U.S. government needs to pass this law.”)

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Person

Let's also take a quick look at 2nd person. **Second person uses you and your**. When you use 2nd person point of view, **you are directly addressing the reader**, kind of like I am doing right now. While this is okay when writing a personal letter, **it is not okay in formal writing**, especially essays or research papers. Avoid using this pronoun at all costs because you never want to communicate directly with the reader.

**Don't use you in an essay**. In spoken English, this is used for generalization: ‘*You would expect that...*’ or ‘*You don't win by giving up*’. The word *you*, however, tends **to pull the reader into your argument** and distracts from what you are saying. ‘*You must not disrespect the gods.*’ *Me specifically? Who told you I disrespected them? Oh, wait. I see now. Carry on.* This sort of confusion can be avoided by using ***the person***: ‘*A person must not disrespect the gods*’. It may sound strange, but that's just because it's more formal, which is what an essay should be.

Let's apply this rule to a few examples:

- Instead of “I cannot believe how much tuition has increased,” try, “Tuition has drastically increased.”
- Instead of “Don't text while you drive,” try, “Don't text and drive.”