

The ISARC Format for Argumentation



The ISARC Five-Part Format for Persuasive Arguments

See Kennedy, George A. *Progymnasmata*. Atlanta: SBL, 2003. 132-3.

1.	Introduction
2.	Statement
3.	Antithesis
4.	Refutation
5.	Conclusion

ISARC format: Detailed Explanation

- The Introduction** includes a specific, opinionated and deniable thesis statement, and a very brief explanation of why this is so. For most non-antagonistic (friendly) situations, the thesis statement should be right at the beginning of the introduction (Hit'em first and hit'em hard!). "**The Introduction** [prooemion] is language preparing the hearer and making him well disposed toward the proposed discourse. The function (ergon) and end (telos) of the prooemion ... is to create attention, receptivity and good will." In the introduction you may also wish to briefly establish your own "right to write" on the subject by mentioning your knowledge or experience, or what research you have done. Only if your audience is hostile to you or to your standpoint should you begin with a general statement that the audience is sure to agree with—otherwise such a general starting sentence is pure "fat," is a sure sign of a childish writer, and may turn your readers away from you.
- The Statement** is where you state the facts, evidence, and data and briefly present the logical arguments that prove why your standpoint is right. Be as specific as possible, and do not repeat what you put in the introduction. "**The Statement** or *Narration (diegesis)* is an exposition of the facts in the hypothesis favorable to the speaker's side of the case or in the best interest of the speaker; and ... it is defined as an exposition of things that have happened or as though they had happened. Its function and end is to provide the hearer with an account and clarification of the action."
- The Antithesis** (anti-thesis) is a brief, clear statement of your opponent's thesis and major arguments, stated in a way that even they could not disagree. If you do not know what your opponent is going to say against your viewpoint, try to imagine in advance what someone could say against your point of view. "**The Antithesis** is an objection from the opposing person, rebutting credibility in us and misdirecting the hearer to a more specious thought." You may wish to begin this part of your paper with a phrase such as, "My opponents allege that..." "Those who disagree claim that..." or "Some people argue that..." Never use the "straw-man" tactic of painting opponents' arguments as so weak, ridiculous or stupid that they can be knocked down with the wave of a hand, but do not make their case for them either. Simply and very briefly state the main objections to your standpoint. Here, just tell what they say against you—do not yet say why they are wrong!
- The Refutation** is where you put down those opponents' arguments that you just gave, one by one, proving they are wrong and telling your readers why they should not believe your opponents. "**The Refutation** or *Solution (lysis)* is the removal of harm done by the objection and the returning of the hearer to the original proposition, persuading him to come to agreement about the question at hand." Never just call opposing arguments "crazy" or "stupid"—name-calling is not refutation. Instead, if appropriate, point out how their best opposing arguments are unclear, intellectually behind the ball or confused on the facts, unbelievable, lies, impossible in the real world, illogical or involving a fallacy, morally wrong, discriminatory, just not fitting or decent in a civilized country, or a waste of time or money. Be careful not to simply call their arguments

"confused," "impossible," or "a waste of money." Instead, you need to explain to the reader exactly WHY the opposing arguments are confused or impossible or unprofitable, and exactly why they should not be believed.

5. **The Conclusion** should never begin with "In conclusion," "To conclude," "To sum up," or phrases like that. Just conclude! Your conclusion is where you reaffirm your thesis statements in other words (never repeat what you wrote in the introduction!), and then ask your readers to do or believe something specific as a result of reading your paper. " **The Conclusion or Epilogue (epilogos)** is language introduced after the demonstrations have been given, providing a summary of subjects and characters and emotions. Its function, Plato says (*Phaedrus* 267d), is, at the end (of a speech), to remind the listeners of what has been said." Here you may wish to explain to your readers exactly how more good than bad can come from agreeing with your standpoint, or show how accepting your proposal is "risk free" to the reader. You may wish to end up your conclusion with a catchy slogan that the reader will remember (e.g., "Forward ever, backward never!") or you can appeal to the reader's emotions (e.g., "Men are dying over there! What are you going to do about it?). Never just stop because you run out of things to write—instead, make the reader say "Wow!" as they walk away.

Quotes from Hermogenes of Tarsus and Nicolaus the Sophist, in Kennedy as cited above.

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