

Writing to argue, persuade or advise: 2. Writing to argue

This audio bite is about writing to argue.

ELIOT: If you choose to write an argument in the exam, you'd think it would be straightforward. You've had loads of arguments with friends, so you shouldn't need any advice about how to go about it. But exams are different. You are not writing one side of an argument, you aren't just telling someone they're wrong and saying what you think.

ALIX: In fact the other side of the argument won't be heard if you don't write it. So you have to give a balanced argument. That means you need to write about the ideas for something, and the ideas against it. And you need to come to a conclusion, saying what you think about it all.

ELIOT: That's not too difficult. Suppose the question you've chosen is to write a magazine article about whether footballers are paid too much or not. In your plan write down both sides of the argument (even the bits you don't really agree with).

ALIX: For instance, on one side you could say that they deserve to get a lot of money because they work hard, they make money for the clubs, their agents often take a lot of what they earn and their working life is short.

ELIOT: On the other side, you might write down that they don't need all this money, they don't do important jobs like nurses and doctors and they spoil football by making it so expensive.

ALIX: Once you have this plan, you can start writing. You need to include all the ideas you can, and show reasons why different ideas might be good, but you must come to a conclusion at the end. Eliot?

ELIOT: Yes, it's important to give examples and evidence for each point – anything from something you saw on TV to what your friend told you. But it's also important to link the ideas together.

ALIX: The easiest links are using words like 'but', 'because', 'however', and 'therefore' – these words force your readers to compare ideas. They also help you to argue, because you can make the ideas you like stronger, and the ideas you don't like weaker. And this helps you reach a conclusion. Like this...

ELIOT: Some pop stars make millions of pounds a year because they are really good and work hard. In fact, a recent TV programme showed one group working over 60 hours a week and spending most nights away from home. However, do they really deserve to earn 200 times more than a nurse? The nurse will also work

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long hours, often at night as well. But the nurse deals in life and death, not just songs.

ALIX: This sounds good because it includes evidence and links the ideas together. It makes it a good argument, because it's obvious which side we should agree with. And that's important – if you are writing to argue, you must lead your readers to a conclusion – never let them decide for themselves.

ELIOT: So, a good answer must give both sides of the argument. Plan your answer carefully and think about all the points that could be made. For example, you might have to write a speech arguing whether people should give money to charity or not. It's easy to write one side, but think about the negative ideas too – is the money wasted? Does it go to the wrong people?

Then give evidence and examples in your writing. This makes the ideas seem better and shows that you have thought about your essay.

Link the sentences, paragraphs and ideas together with words like 'so' or 'however'. And make sure you come to a definite conclusion and that you tell people what they should believe.