

# Academic Argument

writing to learn



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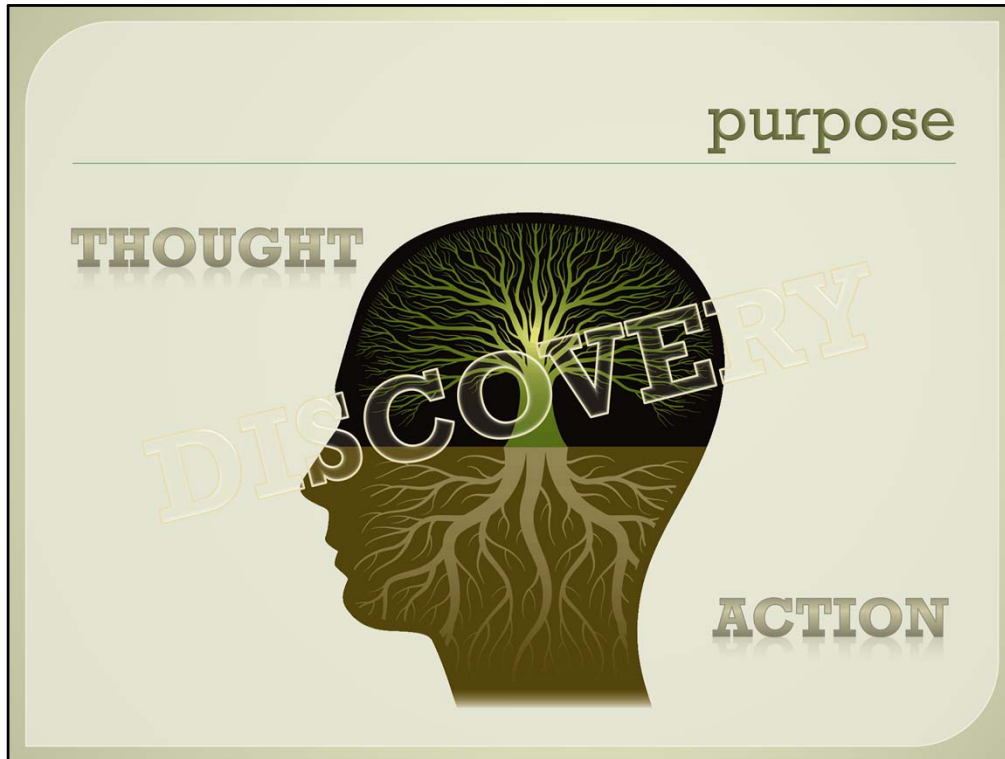


## definition



What comes to mind when you think of ARGUMENT? Is it a couple people yelling at one another trying to get the other person to give up and give in? That's certainly the most common understanding of the term. There are other definitions, though, and for the purpose of our class, the one we will use is this:

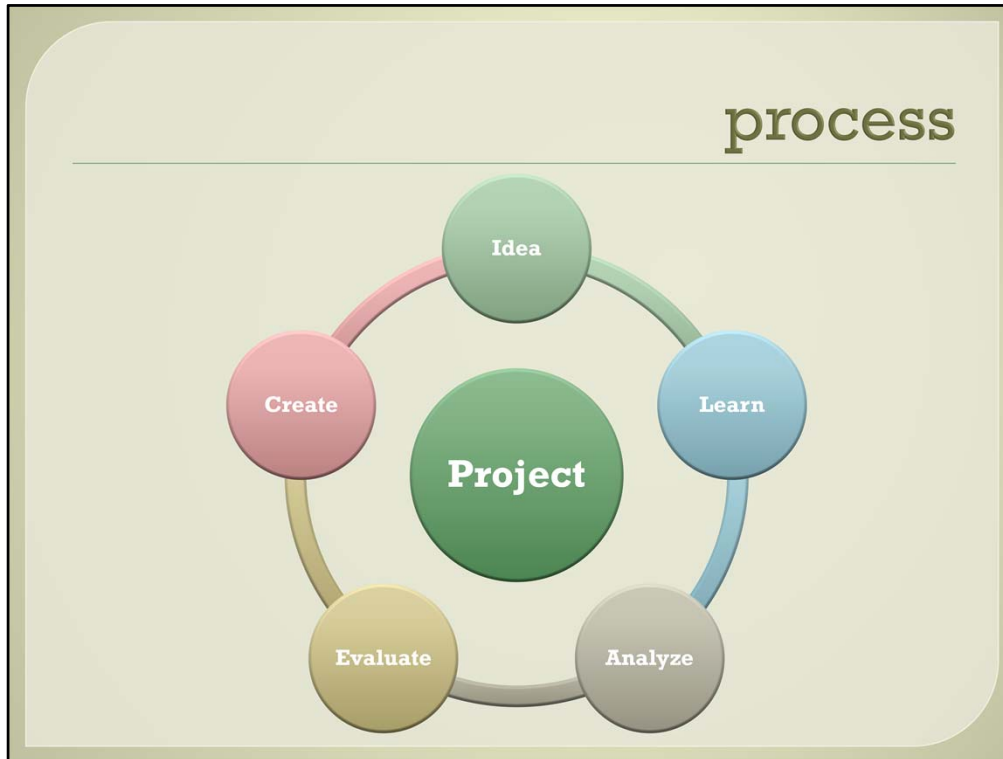
“A reason or set of reasons given with the aim of persuading others that an action or idea is right or wrong.”



The primary purpose of an academic argument is to better understand. It may be a desire to understand a literary passage, a scientific experiment, a mechanical process, an art form, or anything else. Academic argument is for the purpose of learning.

One **learns**, then conceives of an idea, tests the idea, and then presents a conclusion based on evidence. If the resulting argument is accepted, it may help others to understand or it may impact the decisions and actions others make.

Have you been asked to write an argument or persuasive essay in the past? How did you approach it? Did you choose a subject about which you already had a strong opinion? Then did you write the essay to support that opinion? If so, I'll bet you were asked to take a position on some issue, to write a thesis, and then to **support the thesis**, right? That means you did exactly as you were asked to do.



However, what you wrote was not an **academic** argument because that process is slightly but critically different.

When beginning an exploration for an academic argument, you may start with an idea, perhaps even a tentative position. Just as likely, you will begin only with a topic and will have to learn something about the topic before you can begin to 'take a position.' After all, if one doesn't know what debate has been going on, how can one know which side has the stronger evidence?

Once you have a tentative position it's time to do the serious research that will determine whether the thesis is actually supported by the evidence. This is another point of difference in the process. You'll be looking not just for a way to **support your opinion** but also **whether or not your opinion is valid**. And if you discover your opinion is **NOT** supported by the evidence, you'll be asked to change your position.

That type of change can happen at any point in the research process if you discover clear and compelling evidence that contradicts your premise... even if you have nearly completed the final project. Don't let it throw you if it happens to you. As long as you are open to learning and rely on fact-based evidence, you will do fine. And, it is perfectly okay to write a conclusion that shows why your original thesis does not work!

## resources

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- ◉ **Argument**

- <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/argument.html>

- ◉ **Academic Arguments**

- <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/documents/argueoverview/academic.cfm>

- ◉ **Thesis Statements**

- <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/thesis.html>