

# English Composition

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English Composition is a subject aimed at helping develop critical thinking and writing skills. This study guide will look at how to develop a convincing argument, how to synthesize sources and analyze rhetorical devices in a text.

Here is a general overview of the topics that will be discussed:

## *Units*

- Rhetorical Appeals
- Rhetorical Devices
- Effective Argumentation
- Using Sources in Writing
- The Main Idea and Supporting Details



# Rhetorical Appeals

Rhetorical appeals are modes of persuasion and communication that help the audience more effectively connect, relate to, and understand writing. There are **three** major appeals writers make to the audience that are often said to form *The Rhetorical Triangle*:

- Logos

- Appeals to *logic* or reason
- Highly persuasive and moving by using strong and clear claims as well as reasons for those claims
- Uses many pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, personal experiences, etc.) to support an argument
- Tells you how something works or the function of a product, service, or idea
- In a well-reasoned order

- Ethos

- Appeals to *ethics* or morals
- Appeals to the reader's character, values, or beliefs
- Establishes authority and/or credibility through argument(s) presented
- Shows that writer is well-informed about the topic and is looking at an idea from various perspectives

- Pathos

- Appeals to *emotions* or feelings
- Appeals to the reader's sympathetic imagination
- Tends to “pull on readers’ heartstrings” by using powerful and emotion-evoking language
- Uses examples, stories, imagery, and vivid language convey audience
- Can be thought of as the audience’s role in the argument

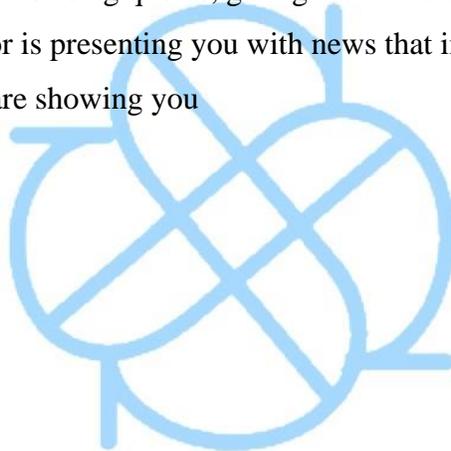
## How to Identify the Type of Appeal

Below each bullet are ways in which you can identify rhetorical appeals the writer makes in their writing:

- Logos
  - When presented with (but not limited to):
    - Solid statistics
    - Diagrams
    - “Cause and effect” examples
    - Syllogism ( $X + Y = Z$  argument)
  - When author is using their rationale and enabling readers to use their critical reasoning or problem-solving skills
  - When author is using the definition of a term or explaining a complex process
  - When the author is logically explaining, analyzing, or reflecting on an idea
  - When author presents a counter argument or rebuttal
  - When the author is drawing from philosophy and enabling you to draw conclusions from your intellect
- Ethos
  - When the author is appealing to the speaker's qualifications, character, skills, titles, or other background information
  - When the author is using credible sources
    - This is true especially from prominent people such as experts and/or scholars
  - When the author cites reliable sources, as this shows that they are presenting real, factual ideas
  - When the author talks about their personal experience or specific experiences from others
  - When the author shows humility, confidence, and compassion, and interest in the topic at hand
  - When the author is seeking to persuade the reader that they are reliable and are noble by giving their background information or in the way they are delivering their ideas

### **How to Identify the Type of Appeal (continued)**

- Pathos
  - When the author is appealing to the heart
  - When the author is providing details that come from subjective information
  - When the author is using diction to establish a strong bond with the reader
  - When the author is either making their audience cry, make jokes, show outrage, smile, or show emotion in another way
  - When the author is providing stories or testimonials
  - When the author is addressing the audience's presence as a human being; essentially, they are trying to speak to your heart and make you feel something
  - When the author is drawing from spirituality or religious doctrines
  - When the author is using visuals, charts, diagrams
  - When the author is using quotes, giving motivation
  - When the author is presenting you with news that inspire you to empathize with whatever they are showing you



## Cons of the Appeals

Now let's consider the downsides of the appeals and why they may actually *weaken* the argument.

- Logos
  - The numbers or facts presented may be confusing, boring, and/or hard to follow. This can lead the audience to become irritated or puzzled. So, if authors are planning to appeal to logos, they have to take into consideration the audience and be very selective about the data they are using for their argument.
    - An overwhelming or confusing abundance of statistics may not interest the reader. Lack of interest will make the reader not want to hear the rest of a speech or read the rest of an article. This weakens the effectiveness of an argument's delivery.
  - The facts presented also may be inaccurate or may be controversial.
- Ethos
  - Ethos may not be effective if the audience members do not know or like a celebrity or prominent figure discussed. This may actually enable audience members to have the opposite reaction as the writer or speaker may have intended them to have. For instance, if the argument is centered around a certain figure or if a figure is heavily discussed in the argument, and that figure is not respected by the audience, the audience may actually not listen or care about what the writer or speaker is presenting.
- Pathos
  - Pathos may backfire when only few facts are given and credibility isn't established by the author. This is true especially when the author becomes over emotional as well and seems "pathetic" because a clear line of reasoning is not established. This also makes it easier for the audience members to disprove the speaker or writer. If they are able to or if the audience does not react positively, this will severely undermine the writer or speaker's argument

## **What Will Happen if Appeals are Used Improperly?**

- Logos
  - When logos is not used well, over-generalized claims may be established. When facts aren't given and the audience is not able to intellectually connect with the presenter and see specific cases regarding the information discussed, claims may be too broad. This may cause claims to weaken.
  - Additionally, when logos is used poorly, the claims may not be fully supported. If the speaker or writer is unable to defend their claims, it's likely that the audience won't see the broader implications of them and will not trust the presenter.
  - Additionally, the improper use of logos may undermine the sophistication and complexity of an argument. If no line of reasoning is established and if the presenter is not able to acknowledge opposing views of counter arguments and speak out against them, they may be misunderstood.
  - If evidence is taken out of context or is used poorly, this will greatly undermine the presenter's argument as well.
- Ethos
  - When ethos is used improperly, the speaker or writer may be viewed as dishonest. This means that certain information the presenter may provide may not be believed or may be overlooked.
  - If the speaker or writer is misinterpreting certain evidence or turning and twisting it in a way that is inaccurate, that will also provide way for a lack of credibility.
  - When the author seems passionate about and is advocating intolerant ideas, that can also enable the audience to believe that the presenter doesn't have the best ideas or perspectives on issues in mind.

## **What Will Happen if Appeals are Used Improperly? (continued)**

- Pathos
  - When pathos is not used well, and a majority of information is conveyed through emotional stories or examples, the author may offer a simple solution or reaction to a seemingly complex problem. This means that the author is overlooking many obstacles or many other factors, and thus does not seem credible.
  - Also, if the author takes advantage of the audience's emotions to promote an immoral idea through manipulative action, emotional appeals will virtually have the opposite effect of that intended. The writer or speaker may tend to use *extreme* words, such as “never” and “always” to explain processes or ideas about concepts that do not behave this way 100% of the time. This conveys inaccurate information to the audience and makes the presenter untrustworthy and unreliable.
  - Additionally, when used improperly, emotional appeals may be guided by emotions instead of facts, which can also be proven inaccurate.
  - A lot of real world examples actually misuse appeals to pathos! We can see such misuse in advertisements, such as those promoting cigarettes or other harmful behaviors. Those that promote cigarettes, for instance, often appeal to the audience's emotions by glorifying how smoking helps cope with stress, but provide little facts to substantiate this reason. Because of this, this claim can be easily disproved, as there is a wealth of information on why cigarettes are inherently bad. Thus, this argument is weak as it relies *way* too much on emotion rather than establishing reason. This is also why many people today are aware that cigarettes are harmful.

## Examples of Each Appeal

Now that we've discussed each appeal comprehensively, let's look a little deeper into specific examples of each one. How are these appeals actually used effectively?

- Logos Example

- “Deforestation harms trees, which harms the environment and many living species in turn. This harm also poses a threat to creatures that live in nature. For instance, scientists estimate that 80% of Earth’s terrestrial species lives in forests, which intensifies this risk.”

- This is a good example of the author’s appeal to the reader’s intellect.
- By posing a cause-and-effect incident by postulating that the cutting of trees is correlated with harmful impacts on the living and nonliving parts of the environment, the author is efficiently persuading the audience that deforestation is a big issue.
- The author is also providing statistics to substantiate this information, which enables the audience to empathize with the life being harmed by deforestation.

- Ethos Example

- “As a doctor with more than twenty years of experience in the area of heart surgery, I’m sure that the treatment my team and I will provide will ensure that Sarah’s heart becomes healthy and starts to function well.”

- This is an excellent example of ethos, considering its persuasiveness.
- Not only is the author stating that they are *sure* the patient is in good hands, as such an extreme word restores confidence in the patient, but they are also establishing credibility. They are doing this by providing background information about the experience the doctor has in terms of medical work, considering the extensive work he’s done and the experience he has.
- This emphasizes that this doctor is well-prepared and trustworthy as he shows that he knows what he’s doing.

## Examples of Each Appeal (continued)

- Pathos Example

- “We need to, as a society, agree to be nicer to people. The suicide rate in the United States has increased 35% from 1999 to 2018. We need to start being there for people. I’ve suffered from depression for years, and I know what it feels like to feel alone and empty. Please sign the petition below, and potentially save a life.”

- Here, the author appeals to pathos by presenting an idea and backing it up with statistics as well as powerful language and personal stories.
- The statistics enable people to feel sad and to have pity for those suffering with mental illness to the point where it has done the undoable.
- By the author sharing their personal information and how they also suffered from mental illness, the presenter is able to invoke emotional feelings from the audience.
- So, the author is able to find a good balance between persuasion with logic and facts and persuasion based on emotions. This makes the author credible and much more likely to sign the petition aforementioned.

## Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical devices are techniques used to deliver a message or persuade an audience. We've already looked at *appeals* the writer may make to do this, but now let's look into the specifics and look at the techniques the author may use to achieve this.

Here are a few rhetorical devices that are quite common and important to know:

- Alliteration
  - Alliteration is the recurrence of consonant sounds at the beginning of words. It's a technique that improves the way a phrase or sentence may flow and/or sound.
- Antiphrasis
  - Antiphrasis is the technique of writing the opposite of what was intended. It is usually done for humorous or ironic purposes.
- Antithesis
  - Antithesis is where two contrasting ideas are placed in conjunction. This is often done for a contrasting effect.
- Hyperbole
  - A hyperbole is the use of exaggeration to convey a point. Hyperboles are usually not meant to be taken literally.
- Metaphor
  - A metaphor is used to make a comparison directly.
- Simile
  - A simile makes a comparison that uses the words *like* or *as*
- Onomatopoeia
  - Onomatopoeia is the process of creating a word that imitates or resembles the sound that it is describing. It is used to enable readers to hear the sound the words are reflecting and thus be able to connect to and engage with the text better.

## Examples of Rhetorical Devices

Now that we have considered the definition of some of the most important rhetorical devices, let's look at examples of each.

- Alliteration
  - “The sluggish, slow snake slept soundly.”
    - The repeated use of the “s” consonant sound draws the attention of the readers to that section of the text, if we imagine that this sentence was part of a larger literary work.
    - In addition to this, this repeated consonant suggests an eerie, quiet, snake-like quality, suggesting slyness.
    - Overall, it makes readers want to read on and creates a musical effect in the text.
- Antiphrasis
  - “Cake, ketchup, and lasagna all in one dish? Yup, sounds appetizing!”
    - This represents antiphrasis because the combination of all three foods combined definitely sounds disgusting, but by saying that it actually sounds delicious, you are using irony.
    - This brings humor to the sentence.
- Antithesis
  - “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind, :”
    - This is an example of antithesis because the two parts of the sentence are alike in grammatical structure although they have different meanings.
    - Both parts of the sentence are looking at the first step on the moon but in different lenses.
    - This makes the contrast of the parts of the sentence clear.

## Examples of Rhetorical Devices (continued)

- Hyperbole
  - “I’m so busy, I have billions of errands to run today.”
    - This is an example of a hyperbole because it is not meant to be taken literally.
    - It is an extreme exaggeration because the author does not *actually* have to do a *billion* things.
    - It emphasizes how busy the author is at that time, considering the amount of errands that the author of the sentence has to do.
- Metaphor
  - “Kelly’s eyes were blue pools of water.”
    - This is a metaphor because it is establishing a connection between “eyes” and “pools of water” by comparing the two.
    - Although it is not meant to be taken literally, it serves as a figurative relationship between two identical entities.
    - Because readers are familiar with what *blue pools of water* look like, it’s easy for them to understand what Kelly’s eyes looked like as well.
- Simile
  - “You are as fast as a cheetah.”
    - This is a simile because it uses one of the words (“like” and “as”) to establish a comparison between the two terms.
    - This comparison is not to be taken literally, considering the incredible
    - We do not know exactly how fast the subject of the sentence is, but because we know that cheetahs are fast, it is reasonable to conclude that the subject is very speedy.
- Onomatopoeia
  - “*Zap! Beep! Bop! Boing!*” said the machine.
    - The words “zap,” “beep,” “bop,” and “boing” are common machine noises.
    - These words serve as useful descriptions because they help readers visualize exactly what sounds the subject is making.

## Effective Argumentation

Effective Argumentation is one of the most important skills you need to develop.

- You might not realize it, but you are making many arguments in a day. An *argument* can be described as a written text or a visual that describes a point of view or the utilization of evidence to support or discover a truth or claim.
- Every time you are making a decision, you are essentially posing an argument.
  - For instance, if you are deciding where to go out to eat lunch, you may ask “Where should I eat today -- *McDonald’s* or *Burger King*?”
  - In your head, or out loud, you are then coming up with reasons as to why *McDonald’s* is a better choice or as to why *Burger King* is a better choice.
  - Let’s say you were finally set on going to *Burger King*. Maybe you thought that Burger King offered better prices and had the food you were craving at that moment. The latter two reasons are essentially the *reasons* why *Burger King* was a better choice at the time.
  - Here, you are making an argument -- you have a central claim that *Burger King* is the place you should eat lunch, and you have reasons supporting that argument.

Let’s now look at how to make a *good* argument.

A good argument typically..

- Takes a defensible position
  - Make it clear what side of the issue you are taking and make sure you can substantiate this.
- Presents a well-established line of reasoning, or reasons used to reach a conclusion
- Make sure the reasons you provide are related and connected to each other AND to the central argument
- Provides specific and clear facts, examples, statistics, etc. to prove their point

## Effective Argumentation (continued)

- Takes the other side of the issue into consideration
  - This part of the argument is important because acknowledging opposing views and being able to explain why these views are wrong or not as important as your own beliefs shows complexity of thought and sophistication.
    - It also shows that you are looking at the side from all angles and that you are making a well-informed decision
  
- Uses captivating language to arouse interest
  
- Has a strong opening and closing
  - This factor is also important because the opening and closing are what summarize your argument and restate your claims.
    - The opening is what draws readers in.
      - Your opening can be an important statistic, quote, fact, etc.
    - The closing is the final words or message the reader takes away.
      - Your closing restates your argument and summarizes your claims.

## **Argument Construction Example**

Now that we've studied the characteristics of a good argument, let's look at an example.

The topic of this argument will revolve around paper bags and whether they should be banned or not. The side that will be taken is that "Plastic bags should not be banned, as their alternatives are worse."

- The first step to crafting a well-developed argument is forming an outline. Consider these questions when doing so:
  - *What are your main claims?*
  - *What will be the structure of your argument?*
  - *What type of reasoning will you use?*
  - *What rhetorical appeals will you make?*

#### Outline:

- Plastic bags should continue being in use
- A quote by Sir Jagadeesh Kumar will be used as a hook: "Plastic is the most destructive weapon than a nuclear bomb or an atom bomb, its impact shall remain for centuries on the future generation"
  - Retrieved from "20 Quotes on Plastic Pollution" <https://naturaler.co.uk/quotes-on-plastic-pollution/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CPlastic%20is%20the%20most%20destructive,Kumar%2C%20Scientist%2C%20professor%20and%20engineer>
- Disprove this quote in argument.

### **Argument Construction Example (continued)**

- 3 Claims
  - Claim 1
    - Paper bags require more resources to make
  - Claim 2
    - Reusable bags are unsanitary
  - Claim 3
    - Washing reusable bags puts a strain on the economy
- Evidence Pieces to Back Up Each Claim
  - Claim 1
    - “About 10 percent more energy is used to produce a paper bag versus a plastic one, and about 4 times as much water.”
    - <https://www.cleanwateraction.org/2018/06/25/paper-or-plastic-why-answer-should-be-%E2%80%9Cneither%E2%80%9D#:~:text=Second%2C%20the%20production%20of%20paper,4%20times%20as%20much%20water.>
  - Claim 2
    - “Academic researchers recently tested 84 reusable grocery bags from shoppers in California and Arizona: More than half the bags contained some sort of coliform bacteria, a category that includes Escherichia coli.”
    - <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2010/06/25/128105740/plastics-industry-funded-study-finds-bacteria-in-reusable-grocery-bags>

## Argument Construction Example (continued)

- Claim 3
  - “A plastic bag ban wouldn't only affect the environment. It would have an economic impact as well. A summary of a report from the National Center for Policy Analysis found that stores inside ban areas in Los Angeles saw a six percent decrease in sales whereas stores just outside of those areas saw a sales growth of nine percent over the course of a year.”
    - [https://greenliving.lovetoknow.com/Why\\_Should\\_We\\_Not\\_Ban\\_Plastic\\_Bags](https://greenliving.lovetoknow.com/Why_Should_We_Not_Ban_Plastic_Bags)
  - “Banning plastic bags on a large scale could also endanger at least some of the 30,000+ plastic bag manufacturing and recycling jobs in the United States.”
    - [https://greenliving.lovetoknow.com/Why\\_Should\\_We\\_Not\\_Ban\\_Plastic\\_Bags](https://greenliving.lovetoknow.com/Why_Should_We_Not_Ban_Plastic_Bags)

Note that this is only an outline, so providing only one piece of evidence per claim is sufficient.

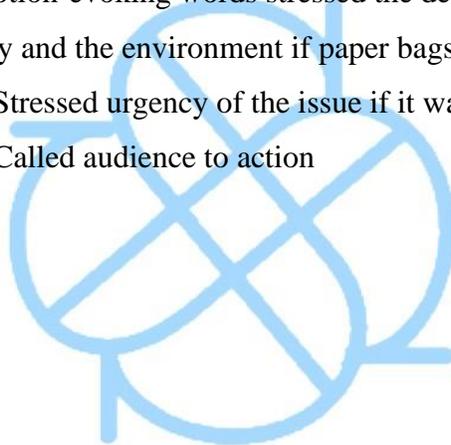
- Conclusion
  - Restating that plastic bags should not be banned
  - Emphasizing the negative impacts that arise from the three claims

## Argument Construction Example (continued)

- Now that the outline is complete, it is possible to combine these components into an essay, which starts off with a strong opening, and then transitions into each of the three claims.
  
- Then, follows the reasons supporting those claims.
  
- This part incorporates the evidence as well as the *commentary*, which explains the evidence's significance to the argument and emphasizes how the claims are connected to each other and how they are connected to the overall argument
  
- Incorporation of Rhetorical Appeals
  - Because rhetorical appeals are so powerful and help persuade readers, it's important to address the appeals made in the above argument.
  - Because statistics were given throughout, this helped appeal to **logos**.
    - Specific information was used to strengthen the argument
    - The information came from credible sources
    - The data was then used to reiterate the argument and explain how it shows that plastic bags should not be banned

## Argument Construction Example (continued)

- Because we were able to discuss the ethical values behind the banning of paper bags and were able to address counterarguments and why they are weak, we appealed to **ethos**.
  - We were able to explain why paper bags and reusable bags did not do a good job of helping the environment
  - We explained how, in certain aspects, plastic bags were more helpful and cost-efficient
  
- Because we used powerful language throughout our argument, we appealed to **pathos**.
  - The emotion-evoking words stressed the detrimental impacts on the economy and the environment if paper bags were banned
    - Stressed urgency of the issue if it was posed
    - Called audience to action

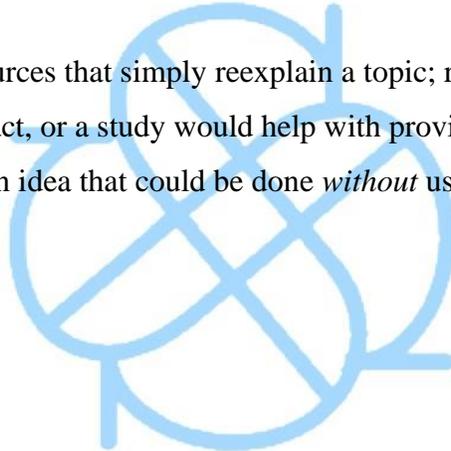


## Synthesizing Sources

- Synthesis is a piece of writing that integrates a combination of information from various sources.
- Synthesizing sources deals with choosing the correct and most helpful pieces of evidence and fusing them into your argument.
- It's important to be able to know which sources to choose when having to support a claim

When coming up with which sources to use...

- Use sources that *directly* support, expand on, reflect on, defend, or explain, your argument
- Avoid pulling from sources that simply reexplain a topic; rather, choosing a source that explains a statistic, a fact, or a study would help with providing specific information instead of explaining an idea that could be done *without* using those sources



# Synthesizing Sources (continued)

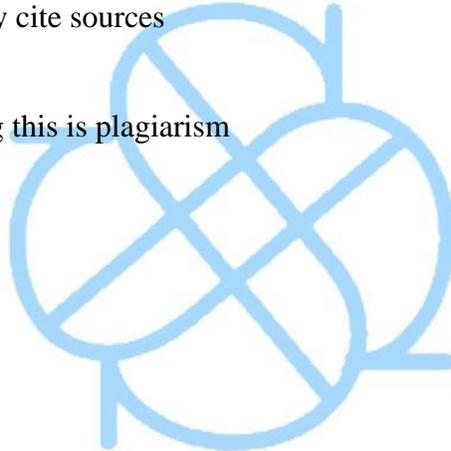
## Writing a Synthesis

- When synthesizing source material, try to discover connections among topics, such as themes, within the different material
  - This may not always be clear cut!
  - The theme may be underlying, so think more broadly and generally instead of looking for a specific common characteristic, as that being the shared factor is uncommon.
  - Here are some questions you should ask yourself when writing a synthesis and trying to discover connections between source materials, relationships between variables, processes or ideas involved in the text, etc:
    - *How are these materials similar?*
    - *How are these materials different?*
    - *What stances do these source materials take on issue x?*
    - *What observations can I draw from these materials?*
    - *What are the styles and tones of the passages in these sources?*
    - *What key words or phrases do these sources identify, define, and reflect on?*
    - *How do the sources organize and structure their main idea(s)?*
      - The topic of the *main idea* as well as finding the main idea is discussed later in this guide!
    - *What is the theme of this text?*
      - Ask yourself this question for every piece of text you may come across. Then, at the end, it will be easier to identify a common theme.
    - *What details do these sources provide?*
    - *What does the author want me to understand from each material?*

## Synthesizing Sources (continued)

Developing Your Points:

- This process takes quite a bit of time because it enables you to analyze the source materials, identify connections between them, and represent those connections in points or claims
  - Use your sources as support in this process! Keep track of repeated ideas, words, phrases, or sentences.
- Be fair and avoid bias
- Document and properly cite sources
  - Failure to doing this is plagiarism



## Two Types of Synthesis

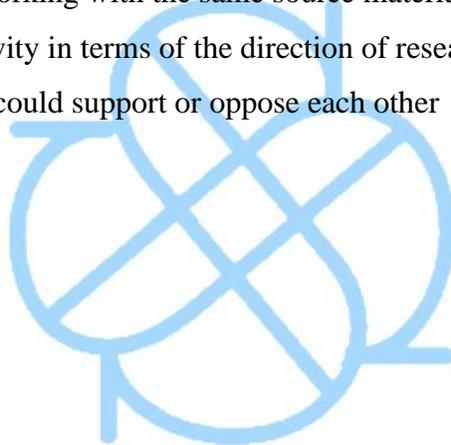
- The two primary types of synthesis are the **explanatory synthesis** and the **argumentative synthesis**.
- The boundaries regarding the definition of each synthesis is not always clear-cut, meaning there's considerable room for overlap.
- This depends on the purpose of your analysis, however, and your synthesis may choose to incorporate one or both of the synthesis types.

Let's look into what these synthesis types are:

- Explanatory Synthesis
  - Identifies, defines, and explains concepts to enable readers to..
    - Clearly see connections between ideas
    - Understand and reflect on ideas
  - This synthesis type is mainly used to inform and mostly provides facts and establishes relationships throughout a text
    - Focuses more on presenting facts and figures and establishing credibility and understanding between reader and writer as opposed to persuading
  - Writers are able to help their readers better understand a topic by dividing a subject into its parts to make presentation and delivery effective
  - Explains similarities and differences between similar texts
  - Does not express bias, personal views, and/or judgement
  - Emphasizes delivery and audience's understanding
    - This is ensured through explanations of objects, places, events, ideas, phenomenon, processes, etc.

## Two Types of Synthesis (continued)

- Argumentative Synthesis
  - Persuades readers to accept and view an issue from a certain perspective
    - Allows for writers to present their own point of view
      - These claims are presented in an organized and logical way
    - May convince readers to take a position on a highly debated, controversial topic
  - Often appeals to logos to support claims
  - Although this synthesis type is centered on presentation of writers' individual perspectives on an issue, proper justification is necessary
  - Thesis is debatable
  - If writers are working with the same source materials, this synthesis type allows for more creativity in terms of the direction of research and writing
    - Theses could support or oppose each other

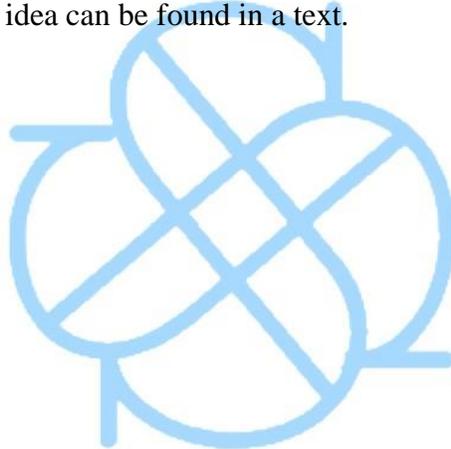


## Main Idea and Supporting Details

- The main idea, also known as the central idea, is the primary idea or point of a passage, text, or paragraph.
- Main ideas are a key element in texts because they are the most important takeaway message from a passage.
- In argumentation, it is important to make sure your main idea is clear, so that your audience knows exactly what position you are taking on something and the reasons you have for doing so.
- The main idea can be stated between the beginning and middle of the text. Usually it can be summarized into one sentence, sometimes two or three.
- Supporting details can be referred to as the “helpers” of the main idea. Supporting details are specific examples that further explain the main idea and provide reasons and insight that support the author’s argument. To find the main idea, think about the central theme of the passage.
  - What does the author want me to take away?
  - What is the issue here?
- “It is often said that lightning never strikes twice in the same place, but this isn’t true. Go ask the forest rangers. Rangers who spend their summers as fire-fighters will tell you that every thundershower brings several bolts of lightning to their lookout stations.”
  - Retrieved from MAIN IDEAS - This Paragraph  
(<https://www.mdc.edu/Kendall/collegeprep/documents2/MAIN%20IDEASrevised815.pdf>)
  - The underlined sentence in the example above is the main idea. Notice how all the other details, such as “Rangers who spend their summers as fire-fighters will tell you that every thundershower brings several bolts of lightning to their lookout stations.” support the idea that the myth that lightning never strikes twice in the same place is not true

## Main Idea and Supporting Details (continued)

- “Costs were low that year and the output high. There was a good person for each job and the market remained firm. There were no losses from fire. All in all it was the best years in the history of the company.”
  - Retrieved from MAIN IDEAS - This Paragraph (<https://www.mdc.edu/Kendall/collegeprep/documents2/MAIN%20IDEASrevised815.pdf>)
  - The underlined sentence above states the main idea. Pay attention to the details such as “There was a good person for each job and the market remained firm.” and how it supports the main idea that it was the best years of the company. Also, notice that the main idea is in the last sentence. This is a different example of where the main idea can be found in a text.



## Sources

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