

writing to argue

Writing to argue is a popular and important choice of exam question. If you choose this question in the AQA/NEAB syllabus exam (Paper One Part B), it will account for a quarter of your English exam marks. By carefully following the advice below you should be able to improve your grade.

ARGUMENT OR PERSUASION?

Argument and persuasion are very similar and use many of the same techniques; however, they do each have their own style and approach. Argument offers a well-reasoned point of view that recognises and tries to counter other valid and reasonable views, whereas persuasion has the single-minded goal of changing another person's thought or behaviour. Argument generally succeeds through reason alone, whereas persuasion tends to be more one-sided and personal and often succeeds by trying to gain an emotional response.

EFFECTIVE ARGUMENT

1. Plan

- make brief notes to remind yourself of what is required for the **form** in which you are being asked to write (e.g. letter, speech, magazine article), also the **register** (i.e. the most suitable way to address your audience) and the **tone** (i.e. the most suitable "voice" in which to win over your audience, e.g. formal, friendly, confiding, etc.).
- Brainstorm to create a list of points in favour of your topic.
- Choose four or five of the strongest, making sure they are major and **separate** points.
- Use this list to help create an equivalent list of opposing points - ones you can counter to help win your argument.
- Add authenticity to your case by giving a sound and sensible reason why you are a sound and sensible person - one who is knowledgeable about this topic and whose views are worth hearing (for example, you have been involved in this area through helping a charity, or a school society, etc.).
- You could now go on to create a series of opening ("topic") sentences for each paragraph, one for each of your points. These will each become the lead sentence for the body (i.e. central) paragraphs in your essay. Sort these sentences into a logical, progressive and persuasive order.
- Consider how you could support some of your points or counter opposing points: make up an effective anecdote or a suitable piece of research (such as a survey) or "expert" opinion.

2. Write

- Use each of the topic sentences from your notes to build up a series of effective, and effectively structured, paragraphs. Leave your strongest point till last.
- Successful arguments are composed of points fully and convincingly developed from an introduction (in the opening topic sentence); every point must move smoothly and fluently on to the next in a new paragraph.
- Link your sentences by using "discursive markers". There are many of these, for example "however", "it follows that...", "consequently...", "therefore...", "and so...", "but if...", "this means that...", "although...".

- Where possible, end each paragraph with a subtle "hook sentence" - a final sentence that subtly and smoothly links into the topic of the next paragraph.
- Add **authority** to your argument by providing support for your main points. Make up some useful and believable support such as a class or school survey, or some outside "expert's" opinion, anecdotes (true accounts), etc.
- Add **authenticity** to your argument by providing evidence such as (made up) surveys, anecdotes (true accounts), etc.
- Add **power** to your argument by using "rhetorical devices" such as the list of three, parallel structures and contrast, emotive language, personification, anecdotes, humour, irony, similes, and repetition.
- Show balance and understanding by mentioning the opposing view but never support these, use them solely to show that whilst they seem wholly reasonable, go on to show how your views are stronger.
- Avoid excess emotion, but do show (when the topic allows it) how passionate you feel about your own beliefs.
- Conclude strongly and interestingly by restating your argument in a slightly different way and by summarising your strongest points.

3. Check

In this part of the exam, you gain marks for writing in an accurate, clear and fluent way. Each year the examiner's report mentions that many students failed to achieve a higher grade because they failed to check and correct their work. Always give yourself time to check your writing thoroughly before handing in the exam paper.

- Read each sentence after you have written it

Write using a variety of sentence types and styles but remember especially that shorter sentences are often more interesting because they are crisper and clearer. An occasional ultra-short sentence can add real impact to writing.

Never fail to re-read your sentences after writing them to check that they are **complete** in their sense, **accurate** in their grammar and spelling and follow on logically and smoothly from the last.

Check every paragraph.

A paragraph is a written discussion that covers a single topic - one topic among the many that are needed to cover the subject matter of the whole piece of writing. One of the sentences in the paragraph, and quite often the first one, is called the "topic sentence". This is the sentence that introduces, or tells "in a nut shell", what the paragraph is going to be about. The remaining sentences do no more than expand and explore the ideas raised by the topic sentence in more depth. No points that are unrelated to the main topic should be covered in the same paragraph.

Each paragraph should flow smoothly from its predecessor. This is achieved by the use of a subtle "hook sentence" at the end of the paragraph; this is a sentence that "hooks" into the new topic of the next paragraph.

To correct a missed paragraph simply put this mark where you want in to be: // then, in your margin write: // = new paragraph. The examiner will not mark you down for this so long as you have not forgotten all of your paragraphs.

Examine each comma

Over, or misuse, of commas is a common and important error that can lose many marks. Many of you will occasionally use a comma instead of a full stop to end some of your sentences. You are failing to recognise where the end of the sentence should have been. Too much of this leads to a dreary and difficult-to-read style because it destroys the clarity and crispness that is a necessary part of all good writing.

A sentence is a group of words that is about one main idea or "thought". It should seem "complete" to its reader. Sentences that drift into several ideas, or which seem incomplete, are less clear and interesting to read. Ending a sentence with a comma (or even nothing but a space) instead of a full stop will allow it to "run on" or drift in this way. Try to use commas only to mark off **parts** of a sentence so that the sentence reads more smoothly or makes clearer sense.

Look at every apostrophe.

Look at the words you have used that end in "s". Are they plurals? If so the chances are they do not need an apostrophe. Apostrophes are used to show when a letter has been missed out (as in: *shouldn't*) and when two nouns belong to each other (as in: *the school's entrance*). Also... make sure that when you write "it's" you do mean "it is" (as in *it's cold*) not "belonging to it" (i.e. as in: *its surface*).