

How to write an argument essay

You have been talking about space and space exploration in your English class. Now your teacher has asked you to write an essay on the following topic:

“Manned space missions should now be replaced with unmanned missions. Discuss:”

Before you start

- This type of essay requires you to present a reasoned argument on a particular issue. This will often be based on your reading and research into the topic, but some questions may ask you to give your opinion.
- In both cases your argument must be clearly organized and supported with information, evidence and reason.
- The language tends to be formal and impersonal.
- **Brainstorm your ideas** on the question. Use whatever methods suits you best:
- **mind maps,**
- **lists** of interesting concepts, facts, questions, etc.,
- **tables.**
- Read and research the topic (unless in an examination) and gather information from a variety of sources: books, the media, websites, interviews, questionnaires, scientific studies.
- When researching, take detailed notes and keep an accurate record of each source.
- Which do you think are the strongest arguments? Decide what your viewpoint will be.
- Select 2 or 3 strong ideas on each side, with supporting examples, ideas or evidence. For some questions you can use evidence from your personal experience.
- Decide roughly how many words you will give to each part of your essay.
- Note down some useful vocabulary on the topic.
- Decide how to organize your notes into the framework.

Before you start

- **Choose the organization structure.** (*See below*). Here **Structure 1** was used in the model essay.

Structure 1	Structure 2
<p>Para. 1. Introduction</p> <p>Paras. 2, 3, 4 Arguments for your case + supporting evidence, examples or reasons;</p> <p>Para. 5 Arguments against + evidence</p> <p>Evaluation of arguments</p> <p>Para. 6 Summary and Conclusion</p> <p><i>N.B. It is possible to reverse arguments for and against.</i></p>	<p>Para. 1. Introduction</p> <p>Para. 2. Argument 1 + supporting evidence, examples or reasons;</p> <p>Para. 3. Counterargument</p> <p>Para 4. Argument 2 + supporting evidence, examples or reasons;</p> <p>Para 5. Counterarguments (and so on)</p> <p>Evaluation of arguments</p> <p>Para. 6 Summary and Conclusion</p>

Tips

- Look carefully at the **title or question** and make sure you really answer it.
- Use **general statements** to convey the main ideas, and then provide **evidence, examples, details** and **reasons** to support these statements.
- Use **paragraph divisions** and **connecting words and phrases** to make the structure of your essay clear to your readers.

How is this essay organized?

- Below is the **framework /structure** that was used to create this essay.
 - **Title**
 - The title of your essay.
 - **Introduction**
 - Introduce the topic and state the focus of the essay.
 - **Arguments for your case 1**
 - Make your first point and give supporting evidence, examples or reasons.
 - **Arguments for your case 2**
 - Make your first point and give supporting evidence, examples or reasons.
 - **Arguments against (counterarguments)**
 - Make points against your case, with evidence.
 - **Evaluate/refute**
 - **Evaluate or refute the counterarguments.**
 - **Summary and conclusion**
 - Summarize the points you have made and state the conclusion you have come to on the question or title of the essay.
- **Paragraph 1 - introduction**
 - **Paragraph 2 - arguments “for”**
 - **Paragraph 3 – Development**
 - **Paragraph 4 – Development**
 - **Paragraph 5 – Counterarguments**
 - **Evaluate/refute**
 - **Paragraph 6 – Conclusion**

Choose your language

- Use formal and impersonal language
- To make your writing more formal, consider these points:

1. Word choice

It is usually best to use standards English words and phrases, that is, those with no label in the Dictionary. Avoid anything marked *informal*, *slang*, *offensive*, etc. Some words are marked Formal. Only use these if you are sure they are appropriate and you know how to use them.

You may need to use the technical or specialist vocabulary of your subject or profession (e.g. investment portfolio, liquid nitrogen bath). When you read, note when and how this language is used.

2. Short forms

Avoid contracted forms (e.g. haven't, he's, can't, I'm) and abbreviations (e.g. pls – please, ad – advertisement)

3. Sentence structure

In formal writing you are likely to be expressing complex ideas. To do this you will need to write sentences using linking words (e.g. relative pronouns or “although, because, if) and coordinating conjunctions (e.g. and, but, or). Very long sentences with many clauses can be difficult to understand. Aim for clarity rather than complexity.

Choose your language

While you are writing

- **Use connecting words and phrases** to make the structure of your essay clear to your readers.
- **Give quotes** or mention sources to support your points.
- **Make it clear which words/ideas are yours and whose words /ideas you have quoted.**
- If you use the words or ideas of another person in your academic writing, you must always say where these have come from. If you do not, you might be accused of **plagiarism** (= copying another person's ideas or words and pretending that they are yours).
- It is usual to **mention the author briefly in the essay** and then at the end **write a full reference in your bibliography** (= an alphabetical list of all the books, magazines, websites and other sources you have consulted) or in your list of **references.**
- Different institutions have different styles for this, so you should check with your tutor, college or university to see the method and punctuation you use and be consistent.

Language bank

When you write an argument essay, you can show what your opinion is on the issue or question without using personal phrases such as “*I think ...*” or “*in my opinion...*” You can do this by choosing words carefully as you write. Some examples have been given below.

Adjectives

important, major, serious, significant

e.g. **An important** point to consider is;

This was a highly significant discovery;

Pattern with “It + adjective”

clear, likely, possible, surprising, evident

e.g. **It is clear that** the study of space is expensive.

Important, difficult, necessary, possible, interesting

e.g. **It is important to** consider the practical effects of these measures.

Verbs

These help show how certain you are about a point or an argument.

Modal verbs: can/could; may/might; will/ would ; (the first of each pair is most certain). Compare: “*I argue that ...*” (very certain); “*I would argue that ...*” (not so certain).

It + verb + that: It appears that / it seems that ...

It + passive verb: it can be seen that ...; it should/must be noted/emphasized that ...;

Showing verbs: show, indicate, demonstrate, suggest, imply (*these verbs have a non-human subject*).

Arguing verbs: argue, suggest, consider, conclude (*these can have a human subject*).

Adverbs and phrases

Clearly, indeed, in fact, of course,

Generally, usually, mainly, widely, perhaps, probably, certainly, possibly, rarely, sometimes, often

e.g. **Clearly,** this is a serious issue that deserves further study.

This book is generally held to be her greatest novel.

Connecting words and phrases to make the structure of your essay clear to your readers.

Firstly (= I have several points to make)

Furthermore ...; In addition, ...; Moreover,; (= I have another important point);

However, (to introduce a counterargument);

Thus, Therefore, (to introduce a conclusion)

How was it planned?

In order to plan the essay, the writer decides what to cover in each paragraph and *takes notes*.

- Title
- The title of your essay.
- “Manned space missions should now be replaced with unmanned missions. Discuss”.
- Introduction
- Introduce the topic and explain the scope of the essay.
- *The study of space and planets is expensive. Must balance costs with research benefits.*
- *Are the benefits of manned space flight worth the costs?*
- Arguments for your case 1
- Make your first point and give supporting evidence, examples or reasons.
- *Steven Weinberg (use quotation): Humans are not useful in space -radiate heat, very expensive and want to come back.*
- *Unmanned missions are cheaper:*
- *- don't need to support human life (airtight compartments, food, life support).*
- *- lighter, so less fuel and launch equipment needed.*
- Arguments for your case 2
- Make your second point and give supporting evidence, examples or reasons.
- *Unmanned missions produce more data - have explored almost whole solar system. Manned missions can't go so far, stay away so long or collect so much data.*
- Arguments against (counterarguments)
- Make points against your case, with evidence.
- *BUT - only manned missions inspire people and attract money and interest.*

Focus on the introduction

- The **purpose** of an introduction is to **explain the subject of your essay** (the situation or problem, etc.), and **how you intend to deal with it.**
- A typical introduction moves **from a general statement to a more specific focus.**
- In this model, sentences 1 and 2 introduce the topic in a general way.
- *Sentences 1 and 2 catch the reader's interest.*
- *Sentence 3 states the focus of the essay.*
- *“Manned space missions should now be replaced with unmanned missions. Discuss.”*
- **Introduction**
- **Introduce the topic and state the focus of the essay.**
- *It is clear that the study of space and the planets is by nature expensive. Scientists and politicians must constantly attempt to balance costs with potential research benefits. A major question to be considered is whether the benefits of manned space flight are worth the costs.*

Look at the main paragraphs

Each paragraph presents a specific argument or counterargument, supported with evidence, examples or reasons. In this model the writer decides from the evidence that he/she agrees with the statement 'Manned space missions should now be replaced with unmanned missions' so puts the main arguments first with evidence and quotations to support them. Arguments against are then given and shown to be unconvincing. **Factual data is given to support the writer's point of view. A quote from an expert adds authority.**

- Arguments for your case 1

- **Make your first point and give supporting evidence, examples or reasons**

- For Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg the answer is clear. As he noted in 2007 in a lecture at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore. **'Human beings don't serve any useful function in space. They radiate heat, they're very expensive to keep alive, and unlike robotic missions, they have a natural desire to come back, so that anything involving human beings is enormously expensive.'**

Unmanned missions are much less expensive than manned, having no requirement for airtight compartments, food or life support systems. They are also lighter and therefore require less fuel and launch equipment. According to NASA, **the 1992 manned Space Shuttle Endeavor cost \$1.7 billion to build and requires approximately \$450 million for each launch. In contrast, the entire unmanned Voyager mission from 1972 until 1989, when it observed Neptune, cost only \$864 million**

- Arguments for your case 2

- **Make your second point and give supporting evidence, examples or reasons.**

- In addition to their relative cost effectiveness, unmanned projects generally yield a much greater volume of data. While manned flights have yet to extend beyond the orbit of Earth's moon, unmanned missions have explored almost our entire solar system, and have recently observed an Earth-like planet in a nearby solar system. Manned missions would neither be able to travel so far, be away so long, nor collect so much data while at the same time guaranteeing the astronauts' safe return.

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- Arguments against (counterarguments)
- **Make points against your case, with evidence.**
- **Some may argue that only manned space flight possesses the ability to inspire and engage the general population, providing much-needed momentum for continued governmental funding and educational interest in mathematics and the sciences.**
- Evaluate/refute
- **Evaluate or refute the counterarguments.**
- **However, media coverage of recent projects such as the Mars Rover, the Titan moonlander, and the Hubble telescope's photographs of extra solar planets demonstrates that unmanned missions clearly have the ability to attract and hold public interest.**

Focus on the conclusion

The purpose of a conclusion is to clearly and confidently express your point of view on the question at hand.

The conclusion may move from a specific statement of your viewpoint to a more general final discussion. It may also summarize briefly what the essay has been about.

'Manned space missions should now be replaced with unmanned missions.'
Discuss.

- Summary and conclusion
- Summarize the points you have made and state the conclusion you have come to on the question or title of the essay.
- *Thus, taking into account the lower cost, the greater quantity of data and widespread popular support, I would argue that for now, at least, unmanned space missions undoubtedly yield the most value in terms of public spending.*

Useful Language

The writer uses key words or phrases to **structure the argument**, **show his/her position on the topic**, **sound objective**, **introduce quotes from other people**.

'Manned space missions should now be replaced with unmanned missions.' Discuss **It is clear that** the study of space and the planets is by nature expensive. Scientists and politicians must constantly attempt to balance costs with potential research benefits. **A major question to be considered** is whether the benefits of manned space flight are worth the costs.

For Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg the answer is clear. **As he noted in 2007** in a Lecture at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore. 'Human beings don't serve any useful function in space. They radiate heat, they're very expensive to keep alive, and unlike robotic missions, they have a natural desire to come back, so that anything involving human beings is enormously expensive.'

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In addition to their relative cost effectiveness, unmanned projects **generally** yield a much greater volume of data. **While** manned flights have yet to extend beyond the orbit of Earth's moon, unmanned missions have explored **almost our entire** solar system, and have recently observed an Earth-like planet in a nearby solar system. Manned missions would **neither** be able to travel so far, be away so long, **nor** collect so much data while at the same time guaranteeing the astronauts' safe return.

Some may argue that only manned space flight possesses the ability to inspire and engage the general population, providing much-needed momentum for continued governmental funding and educational interest in mathematics and the sciences. **However,** media coverage of recent projects such as the Mars Rover, the Titan moonlander, and the Hubble telescope's photographs of extra solar planets demonstrates that unmanned missions **clearly** have the ability to attract and hold public interest.

Thus, taking into account the lower cost, the greater quantity of data and widespread popular support, I would argue that for now, at least, unmanned space missions **undoubtedly** yield the most value in terms of public spending.