

# Moving from “THEY SAY” to “I SAY”: Writing Arguments

Remember that an argument, at its most basic, is built like a table. It has a main claim, several points or sub-claims, and various types of evidence or support (in the form of rhetorical strategies). In a research paper, the information you find is the work of others; what “THEY” say. The paper itself, however, will be your own argument, or your defense of a position. It will finally be your presentation of what YOU say about a topic.

## Cicero’s Features of an Argument: Invention, Arrangement, and Style

### Invention: What to Say?

Thesis statement/Main Claim:

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Why is your thesis statement/argument true?

Because \_\_\_\_\_

Because \_\_\_\_\_

Because \_\_\_\_\_

Because \_\_\_\_\_

More possible questions to help you brainstorm potential points:

- What is the problem?
- Why is the problem a problem?
- What goals must be served by whatever action or solution is taken?
- What goals have the highest priority?
- What procedures might attain the stated goals?
- What can be predicted about the consequences of each possible action?
- How do the actions compare with one another as possible solutions?
- Which course of action is best?
- What group of things does \_\_\_\_\_ seem to belong to?
- How is \_\_\_\_\_ different from other things in this group?
- What parts can \_\_\_\_\_ be divided into?
- What would the potential opposition say to this claim?
- How would I address the audience’s concerns about the opposition?

## **Arrangement: When Should I Say It? What Structure Should I Use?**

1. “Explanation before Contribution”: As a rule, summarize the topic of your analysis BEFORE you offer your own opinion. If there’s anything important to your argument that your reader might not know, such as a key term, an event, or a person, introduce it first. (Always present the “THEY SAY” before the “I SAY.”) Your reader needs to be able to follow your sequence of thought.
2. “Obvious before Remarkable”: Especially when offering your own sub-claims, structure them so that the most obvious answer is presented first. You will build your reader’s trust, and your more creative ideas will be welcome later in the paper.
3. OUTLINE, but keep in mind that you may come up with a better arrangement once you start writing.

*(Borrowed from “Identifying and Teaching Rhetorical Plans for Arrangement”, JoAnne M. Podis and Leonard A. Podis)*

## **Style: How Should I Say It?**

1. Remember coherence (UNITY) and cohesion (FLOW). Your paragraphs should each feature a single focus (sub-claim), and everything in that paragraph should be supporting that sub-claim. Eliminate unneeded sentences, and make sure to use cohesive ties between sentences so that your reader follows your ideas from sentence to sentence.
2. TRANSITION SENTENCES. These need to occur at the beginning of each paragraph, and each section of the paper should indicate that it is changing focus.
3. Use academic language and write as clearly as possible. Eliminate words that make your writing clunky.

*NOTE 1: You will need to fully consider all three of these features when you are making your own argument. You will need to provide good claims (invention) that are well organized in your paper (arrangement) and well supported/worded (style).*

*NOTE 2: This is not a step-by-step list. Often, you will come up with an idea while you are structuring your paragraphs, or you may decide to restructure your essay while editing a paragraph for style. Remember, writing is a RECURSIVE PROCESS! EVERYONE revises and rethinks his or her writing.*