**The Writing Lab**

# Formal Outlines:
# Analyzing an Argumentative Topic and Outlining an Argument
*Handout courtesy of Dr. Sue Kuykendall*

Analyzing a topic means to break it down into logical component parts.  When you write an argumentative essay, you must analyze the topic that is expressed in your thesis (position) statement.  Each part of your analysis becomes a sub-point in your essay.  Each sup-point is a body paragraph that develops and supports your thesis; if a sub-point is complex and needs to be broken down further, it may be written as two or more paragraphs (sub-sub-points).  A typical academic argument includes three basic parts:

• **information** about the topic—this helps your reader understand the topic and accept your opinion on it.  Background information tells your readers what they need to know in order to read the rest of the essay; you can also use background information to prove that a problem actually exists if you think your readers may not believe it does.  Information may be
statistics, description of the problem, definition of the issue, history of the issue, classification of parts of the topic/problem (*types* of something), or causes of the problem.

• **arguments** to support your position—this is the main part of the essay and is usually two to four body paragraphs in a short essay.  Arguments for your opinion may be effects of a problem, positive effects if we accept your position/solution, comparison to similar cases in other places or at another time to clarify the issue or to show why your solution may be expected to work, or contrast to a different issue to show what would *not* work or what you're *not* including in your argument.  Arguments may also include description of solutions to problems.

• **counter-arguments**—in this part of the essay, you mention an <u>opposing position</u>, make a <u>concession</u> to the opposing position (explain this position to show your understanding of it) and <u>refute</u> (argue against) those other positions to show why they are illogical or unethical or simply wrong (perhaps based on unreliable data or outdated data).  Including counter- arguments and refutations in your essay will strengthen your position by showing that you're open-minded and by taking the opportunity to defeat an absent reader's resistance to your ideas.  An opposition/concession/refutation argument should not simply repeat one of your main arguments; it should address a specific concern of your readers in response to your position.

All the parts of an essay include specific examples, and you may, of course, use facts and statistics to support the arguments and counter-arguments sections of the essay.


**Outline Format (continued on the next page)**

A formal outline uses Roman numerals, upper-case English letters, Arabic numerals, and lower-case English letters to show discussion points in descending order of generality.

I.  Introduction

    A. context/background

    B.  Thesis—state both your specific <u>focus</u> and your <u>position</u> on the issue; use clear, precise, and powerful vocabulary

II. First supporting point:  information related to the topic (either the problem or your solution).  Consider what your reader needs to know in order to understand/accept your argument.  Make sure that your information is strongly related to your position on the topic.

   A.

      1.
      2.

   B.

III. Opposition/concession/refutation argument (below is shown the basic format of this argument)

   A.  Some people may argue that . . .

   B.  I understand why they say that because . . .

   C.  However, that argument is only partly true/not true today/illogical/unethical because . . .

IV. Your first argument point

   A.

      1.
      2.

   B.

      1.
      2.

         a.
         b.

V.  Your second argument point (show your sub-points, sub-sub-points, and sub-sub-sub-points as above)

VI.  Your third argument (show your sub-points, sub-sub-points, and sub-sub-sub-points as above)

VII. Conclusion

**Note:  The opposition/concession/refutation argument may be either before or after your argument points, or between two argument points.  You should place it where it will have the strongest effect on your reader.**