

Rubric Category	N/A: This TWR is intended to help during the planning process.
Argument Type	Primarily literary

# Planning Your Argument: Exploring or Persuading?

*Students consider possible claims for their argument and determine whether their argument will more “persuasive” or “exploratory” in nature. This is for planning stages.*

## Understanding the Expectations

Writing arguments, especially arguments about literary texts, involves making interesting and insightful claims and backing them up with evidence. But with a whole universe of options to consider and write about, getting going can be a real challenge, especially when it comes to making a claim about a piece of literature. The goal of a literary analysis essay is to take a deep, careful look at a text and to make an argument about what it says or how it says it. Those arguments typically fall into one of these two categories:

- The essay explains and explores something insightful to its readers that they wouldn't realize without reading all of the claims, evidence, and analysis.
- The essay persuades its readers of something they wouldn't agree with until they are convinced by all of the claims, evidence, and analysis.

There are many variations on these two ideas, and some great essays will involve parts of both, but as you look to get started with your argument, it can help to zero in on one or the other.

## Exploring and Deepening

The challenge in this kind of argument is to always be pushing yourself to a deeper, more arguable place. It's not worth spending time writing—or reading—an essay that explains things that most readers would already understand. There's no point in an essay that explains that a bad character is bad because he makes bad decisions. Strong literary essays in this category typically connect the techniques used by the author to the themes about human nature and life that are found in the text. A strong essay wouldn't just explain that a bad character is bad; rather, it would reveal insights into what those evil actions have to say about us as human beings or how the author uses literary techniques to make that comment about human nature.

If you are “exploring” an idea about a text, you won't necessarily have an exact *counterclaim* to respond to. Instead, you'll want to show how your ideas are different from *other possible positions or interpretations*, even if those positions are *similar* to the one you are writing about.

## Persuading (This, But Not That)

This kind of argument offers its own unique challenges and opportunities. Strong literary essays in this category adopt a surprising point of view and attempt to convince the audience that it's true. The challenge here is not to pick something that everybody would already agree with while also making sure that the argument is provable. A strong essay might convince us of something surprising, like that the hero is responsible for his or her own problems.

Addressing counterclaims in this style of argument is often fairly direct: you want your reader to believe *this* (your claim) and *not that* (a counterclaim). The claim and counterclaim can often look like mirror images of each other: “The main character is motivated by love, not by greed,” versus the counterclaim, “The main character is motivated by greed, not love.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See material in “Agree and Disagree: Introducing Counterclaims,” as well as the sessions on clear claims—“Choosing and Writing Arguable Claims” and “Refining Claims for Specificity”—for additional practice in counterclaims and addressing alternate positions.

## Playing the Game

Playing the “Two Ways to Begin” Game:

1. Jot down your main claim and then below it write down other possible claims or positions. To come up with this list (short or long), look back in your notes or on any artifacts like paper charts or shared digital documents the class created that might contain alternate positions. It’s OK if not all of your claims agree with each other or are consistent. In fact, it’s great if they conflict, since you are going to be categorizing your claims and evaluating which ones might be worth developing and pursuing.
2. Once you have your list of claims, gather together your evidence. If you already have notes, shared digital documents, or paper charts, you can review them. If you are working on a draft of an essay, you can highlight or otherwise gather the claims and evidence you have already incorporated.
3. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and make three columns. Label one “Exploring,” one “Persuading,” and one “Not Sure.”
4. Organize your claims by writing or pasting them into the column they best fit.

Your notes should look something like this:

<b>Exploring</b>	<b>Persuading</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
Claim #1	Claim #3	Claim #2
Claim #4	Claim #6	Claim #5

Your claims may only fit into one column at this point in the process, and there’s nothing wrong with that. The idea here is to help expand your options and give you different ways to approach an essay.

5. Now, engage in one of these three options:
  - a. Option #1: Get exploratory. If your “Exploring” column has few or no claims in it, try writing claims that would fit that column. Review your evidence for ideas about literary techniques the author uses or comments about life or human nature and draft some claims that connect those observations.

- b. Option #2: Get persuasive. If your “Persuading” column has few or no claims in it, try writing claims that would fit in that column. This kind of exercise can help you find new, unfamiliar ways to engage with literary arguments as you try to come up with something a bit unorthodox or surprising. Don’t forget to review your evidence for insights.
- c. Option #3: Get sure. Take some of the claims from the “Not Sure” column and rewrite them so they can be moved to one of the other columns. Some of your “Not Sure” claims, upon reflection, might not be very good claims at all, so either improve them or delete them. If you have a claim that you really like, and it doesn’t fit any category very well, that’s OK.
- d. Option #4: Strengthen a claim. Take a claim and revise it so it fits its column even better. If you have a claim that’s somewhat persuasive, make it a firmer, tougher argument. If you have a claim that’s solidly exploratory, revise it to make it deeper and more interesting. As you engage in this option, it can really help to review the evidence you’ve gathered that can support the claim. Evidence is where you will get your best ideas for strengthening or deepening an argument.

These options are simply variations on the same concept: there are different ways for a literary claim to be an argument, and they’re all equally valid so long as they’re insightful, unobvious, and worth writing—or reading—an essay about. By choosing a priority to focus on and by reviewing your evidence for ideas and inspiration, you can push your argument to a more interesting, meaningful place.

## Writing It Up

Now, review the deeper and strong claims you developed during the game and choose at least one to work with. If you are early in the writing process, pull at least one piece of evidence to go with your claim and write a body paragraph that continues the process of deepening your explanation or strengthening your argument. If you are working on revising a completed draft, review either your main claim (your thesis) or your body paragraphs until you find a claim that isn’t as deep or strong as it could be. Use the work you did during the game to revise.