

# A Guide to Writing in Classics and History

<http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/WritingGuide/00intro.htm>

## Part 2: Content

F. Choosing a Topic

G. Structuring and Organizing Your Paper

H. Argumentation: What to Include  
and How Much

# Topics

21. Stick to the Question/Topic

22. Positive Themes

23. Narrow Themes

# Topics

**21. Stick to the Question/Topic:** Every sentence in your paper or essay should pertain directly to the theme at hand.

- Use words from the question or thesis topic to remind the reader of the theme
- If you do that, there is no need to put the question or thesis topic at the top—it should be obvious

# Topics

**22. Positive Themes:** Argue in favor of—not against!—something.

- This Section and the next (Section 23) pertain only to situations in which you are not assigned a theme
- Negative themes are almost impossible to manage because the writer must anticipate and counter every imaginable exception

# Topics

**23. Narrow Themes:** Focus your theme on an issue which is manageable.

- Center your argument on one aspect of an issue and encourage the reader to see that what you say applies more widely
- You can always extrapolate your theme outside the narrow boundaries of your theme, if you like

# Structure and Organization

24. Introduction and Conclusion

25. Rough Transitions

# Structure and Organization

**24. Introduction and Conclusion:** In persuasive argumentation, the reader needs to know the conclusion you are aiming at from the very first sentence.

- This is *not* a murder mystery! No secret revelations and unexpected twists!
- More likely than not, your reader will *not* go over your argument twice
- You have to win round one!

# Structure and Organization

## 24. Introduction and Conclusion

- Like a lawyer arguing a case in court, you have only one chance:
  - to lay out your argument
  - to defend it with evidence
  - to convince the jury before they vote
- That suggests a three-part structure:  
Introduction, Body and Conclusion



# Structure and Organization

## 24. Introduction:

- Introductions should be full and detailed
- They need to outline what's to follow in the body and conclusion of the paper or essay
- Most important of all, they need to make sure the theme is clear so the data cited in the body of the paper has a context

# Structure and Organization

## 24. Conclusion:

- In the last paragraph, reinforce the theme by driving home the major subsections of data underlying it
- If you are going to persuade anyone to see things your way, it is in the conclusion!
- However, do not repeat your own words verbatim in the conclusion

# Structure and Organization

**25. Rough Transitions:** Use the theme to bridge sections of your argument.

- This is a natural extension of the rule that everything in your paper or essay should pertain directly to the theme
- Go back to the theme frequently, especially at the end of paragraphs
- But tailor the theme to each section of the argument and don't be repetitive!

# Argumentation

26. Narrative

27. Repeated Phrases and Facts

28. Specific Facts

29. Technical Terms

30. Length

# Argumentation

**26. Narrative:** Do not recite facts which do not pertain directly to your theme.

- Do not tell “stories”! Assume the reader knows the facts.
- Instead, use the data you have chosen to prove your point, your theme.
- Cite a fact as concisely as possible, and make sure its relevance to the theme is readily apparent.

# Argumentation

**27. Repeated Phrases and Facts:** Whenever possible, avoid citing a fact twice, especially in the same language.

- Repetitious wording makes your argument look shallow and your preparation hasty
- Worse yet, repeated facts leave the impression there is no other evidence to support your theme
- Either that or you didn't bother to find them

# Argumentation

**28. Specific Facts:** Marshall details. They will fight for your theme best.

- Gross generalities seem vague and are easily challenged with exceptions
- Instead, cite specifics and ground your argument in recognized facts
- Construct your argument by using the common repository of data that all historians share

# Argumentation

**29. Technical Terms:** Use technical terms in a way that shows you have some understanding of the general field surrounding the issue under discussion.

- For example, the Roman Empire is a specific period of Roman history
- Follow the terminology used in your textbook or any reputable source



# Argumentation

**30. Length:** Do not go on and on under the misapprehension that the sheer bulk of your words will persuade anyone that your opinion is valid and should be supported especially when you have failed to provide sufficient corroborating evidence for your theme but instead think your readers will concede the point just to shut you up, which they may do but only if you're lucky.

- Less is more

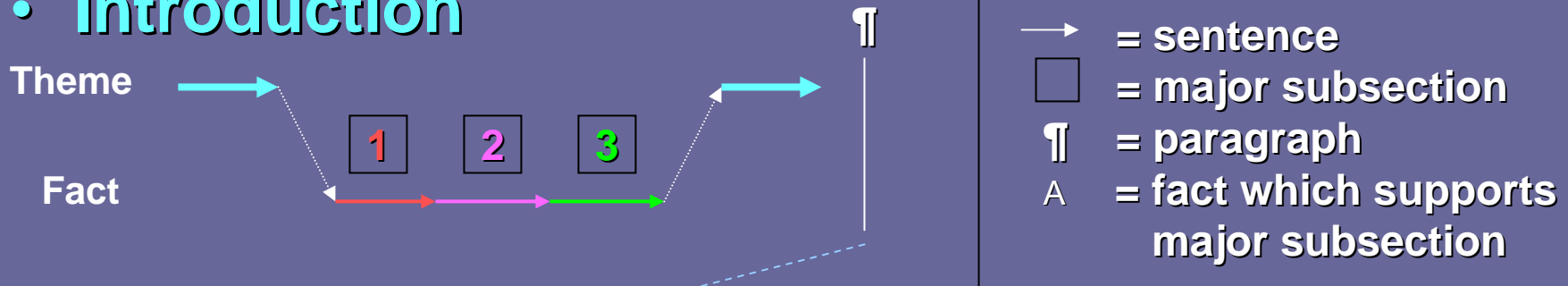
# Argumentation

## 30. Length:

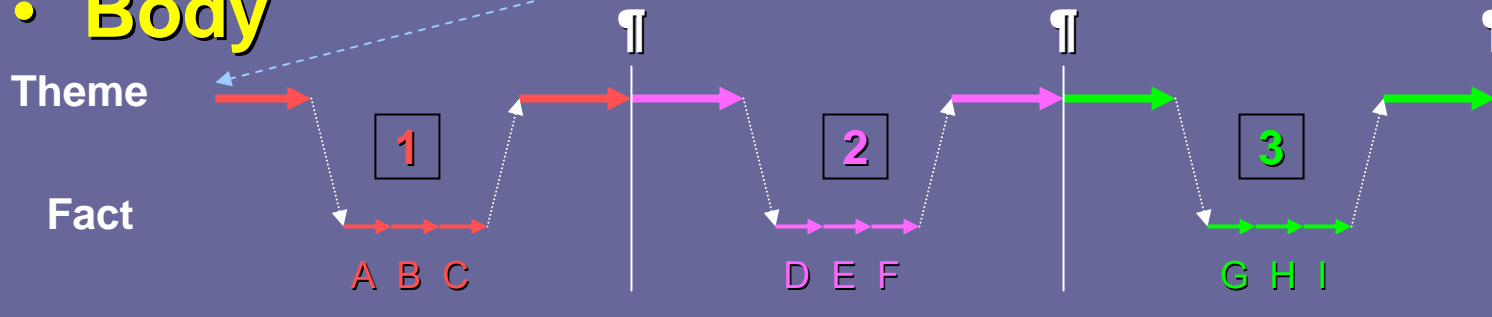
- Write as much as necessary to drive home your theme
- When you feel you have done that, stop!
- But make sure you have fully utilized the data at hand
- The absence of obvious corroborating details will not help you persuade anyone that your case has merit

# Structuring Persuasive Papers

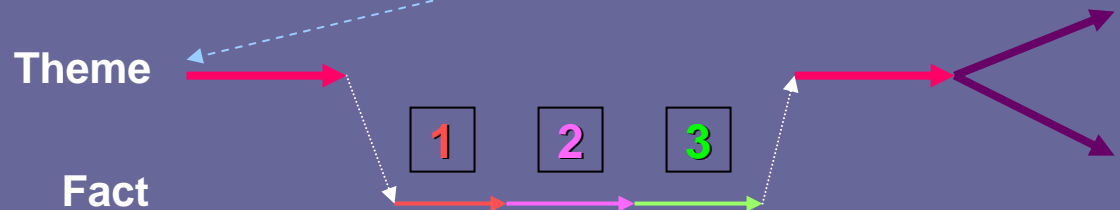
## • Introduction



## • Body



## • Conclusion



Best Argument = 3

Second Best Argument = 1

Third Best Argument = 2