

Make Your Argument Matter

Find the thing that's not like the others.

When you consider a literary text, an argument, a data set, or research findings, look for an inconsistency, a loose end, or something that isn't easily explained. This will give your paper a sense of purpose.

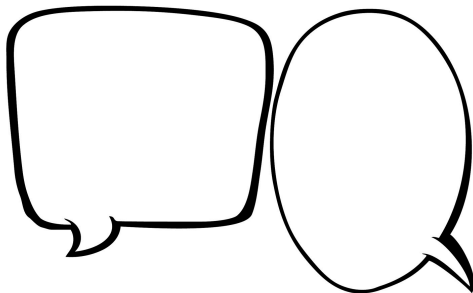


Start small and dig deep.

For short papers, you are usually better off limiting your discussion's scope and going into some depth. Look at a phenomenon in a narrowly-defined way to reveal a broader trend. Explore a specific example or use a case study to understand a larger idea. Or look at one small portion of a text as an example of something important about the text as a whole. You'll show that something small can have big implications.

Use counter-argument to your advantage.

In the simplest sense, "counter-argument" means a position directly opposed to your own. It can also mean an alternative interpretation that isn't necessarily the opposite of your own. Either way, by addressing the merits of other possible explanations, you make your own argument more sophisticated and meaningful. You don't have to discredit a counter-argument in order to make your own argument valid.



Join a conversation.

If other scholars have written about your subject, then the topic probably matters. This scholarly conversation can provide a context for your own discussion. It's ok if no one has taken exactly the approach to the subject that you want to take: in fact, that's often a good thing.

