

## Step Up to Masters: Structuring your argument (transcript)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXCD0DStml8>

### What makes for a well-structured argument in a piece of academic writing?

Jackie: I think the first thing you have to do is to make sure that you've clearly defined the context in which you're having your discussion so you need to set the parameters in which your thinking and your argument is going to take place and within that it's really important that you provide clear definitions of the terminology that you're going to use, so if you are going to use the term, make sure that the reader understands exactly how you're going to be using that term in your discussion and once you've got that set down then the ambiguities start to disappear.

I then think it's really important for you to have a clear idea of where you're taking your discussion and your discussion or your argument needs to explore different perspectives it needs to look at different aspects of the areas that you're wanting to talk about from different perspectives and it also needs to look very carefully at the sources you're using and for you to be able to give a clear indication to the reader of why you're convinced by those, so in creating an academic argument you're going to explore a number of different perspectives I'm not going to say two sides of an argument, I'm going to say a number of different perspectives of different ways that you could view a particular situation through that you're going to draw through your voice and you're going to finally in your conclusion reach your voice that you've justified and you're going to explain and justify why you have reached that particular conclusion your conclusion may not be on one side or the other but what you have done is you've taken the reader through a very structured pathway through to provide an answer to the question that you initially set out to discuss.

David: So the foundation to developing a good academic argument at the Masters level is being able to synthesise and record evidence from a lot of background literature and using that in a strong way to develop your own voice and message about what the research is that you're going to do and there is various support for this throughout the University your supervisor and library services will be more than happy to help you develop those skills.

### How do you read a student's assignment (e.g. in what order)?

So generally I'll read if there's an abstract, I'll read that first to get an understanding of what it is I'm expecting to read for the rest of the essay or dissertation so getting an idea of okay this is the methods that they've used and the results they're saying they found which have led to these conclusions and then I read pretty much front to back and as I'm reading through I want to make sure that what I'm seeing in the bulk of the paper is what I read in the abstract and making sure that it is that same, that there is evidence to prove what they've said and concluded in their abstract but also making sure that they have followed the same method and had the results that they are set out to do.

Helen: Yes I'll often look at the reference list very early on, perhaps even at the start to get a feel for how well read the students is, whether they've read relevant pieces of work, whether it looks like it's been correctly referenced as a starting point in terms of the integrity of the document but that then gives me a sort of an overview of the approach the student might then have taken in their piece of work.

Jackie: Yeah the importance of signposting, that is about helping the the reader as you're working through your thinking to know where you're going and it is really important that you provide those links from one paragraph and from one point to the next to help the reader know which way you're thinking because actually you're thinking could go off in a whole number of different ways and if it takes the reader half the paragraph to work out which way you're going, then they're not following your thinking very well so there's several layers of signposting that you can do you can signpost within the text itself and that is really really important you might find that when you start to do your writing you put lots and lots of subheadings in, but you can then remove those because you put what is guided in that subheading into the text itself but you might want to retain one or two of those subheadings just to break the page up and make it look a bit easier to read and just provide a clearer overview of it but signposting is essential to enable the reader to follow where your thinking is going.