

HELPS Template: An Explanation

Argument writing is fast becoming *the* essential academic skill taught in schools across the country because colleges and businesses say this is the skill students and employees need. Although developing good arguments requires many sub-skills, one of the most difficult aspects of argument writing is creating reasons to support your claim or position. A reason is a general statement that you can use to organize details. For example, an economic reason you may be against wind farms as an energy source is because of the cost. Details are the actual facts about the cost.

The HELPS focus sheet is designed to help you think about reasons and details to develop arguments, especially reasons that go beyond personal feelings and that incorporate knowledge from your studies and reading as evidence to support your claim. The categories of reasons are organized into five groups that can be more easily remembered by using the acronym **HELPS**, where **H** stands for historical, **E** for economic, **L** for literary, **P** for personal, and **S** for scientific. These categories are not meant to be mutually exclusive; there can be overlap among them. Rather, they are designed to give you familiar categories to sort your ideas. Here is a more expansive description of each category:

Historical, legal, and political reasons deal with lessons from the past, established laws, and government.

Reasons in the *H*istorical category include references to the past, laws, or power (political). In an argument for wind power as a solution to global warming, reasons might cover past policies that were developed to solve similar problems (historical), laws that impact the placement of wind turbines (legal), or popular support for the idea (political).

Economic and resource-utilization reasons deal with time, money, or natural resources.

Reasons in the *E*conomic category include not just the cost to do something but also the time and resources required. Will the high cost of wind turbines cause power costs to go up so much that it decreases business competition, therefore causing a loss of jobs?

Literary and aesthetic reasons include art, culture, literature, and appreciation of beauty.

Reasons in the *L*iterary category include references to literature, movies, plays, or poems. You might quote an author or give examples from written or visual work to make your point.

Aesthetic reasons are also in this category, that is, reasons having to do with art or beauty. An aesthetic argument against a wind farm might be about how its appearance or sound may destroy the natural beauty or tranquility of an area.

Personal, ethical, and religious reasons are based on personal experiences as well as ethical and religious beliefs.

Reasons in the **Personal** category include personal experiences or stories told in a persuasive, passionate voice as well as references to ethical and religious beliefs. Personal stories can be convincing, especially if they are included with other, more objective arguments. Ethical reasons discuss what is right or wrong. One could make an ethical argument against wind turbines because they will kill birds or might have a negative health effect on those who live near them. Religious reasons may include beliefs or rules that are accepted as true by organized groups of people but that are not government laws, such as beliefs for or against capital punishment, style of dress, or military service.

Scientific reasons include known facts or reasons that can be proven through observation or scientific methods.

Reasons in the **Scientific** category are supported by known facts, data, studies, or observations, especially if the data is considered accurate and unbiased. A scientific reason to support wind power might include a study that shows minimal harm to birds as a result of using wind turbines.

As good as these five categories are, not every issue will have reasons in every category. They are designed to help you think expansively.