

Building an argument

How you go about deciding on and constructing your argument depends on your preferences:

- Some people prefer to do all their reading first and then to plan what they want to say and write it up. Effective notes are vital for this method as there can be some time between reading and writing.
- Other people feel swamped if they take that approach. The reading never seems to end and/or they have so much information that they don't know what to do with it. If that sounds like you, 'build as you go' maybe an approach that will help.



Build as you go:

Here, you target your reading, building your argument, gathering evidence and thinking critically as you read.

1. Analyse the essay title or assignment brief so you know exactly what it's asking you to do.
 - Look for the topic (the subject)
 - Look for the focus (the limit or particular aspect)
 - Look for the directive (the form the argument should take)
2. Get an overview: read something general; review your lecture notes.
 - Be alert for important aspects/ issues/ themes and so on
3. Write a basic, 'draft' answer to the question in no more than 2 sentences:
 - It doesn't matter whether it is right or wrong as you will change and develop it as you read
 - You just need a starting point

4. Make a list of things you will have to find out in order to test whether or not your 'draft' answer is a good one, for example
 - What evidence can I find in support of/ against this position?
 - What theoretical perspectives does it fit/ not fit with?
 - What do major figures in this field have to say?

➤ *Make these questions more and more specific as you read more*
5. Look for material that will answer your questions and start to read:
 - Critically evaluate the texts themselves
 - Compare them to other texts you have read
 - Use them to modify your hypothesis answer
6. **Modify and develop your hypothesis answer as you read**
 - **How far (if at all) does each reading confirm your answer?**
 - Which parts? In what way? Can you use it in your essay? How? Where?
 - **How far (if at all) does it contradict your answer?**
 - Do you need to modify your answer? Why? In what way?
 - Will you keep your answer the same? How will you deal with this text in your argument?
 - **Does it suggest new questions/ issues you need to address?**
 - How will you build these into your argument?

The interaction between your reading and your thinking lets you develop the steps of your argument as you go, identifying the points you want to make and the evidence you will use.