

ANT 267: Food and Culture
Spring 2008 Tu,Th 10:00 — 11:15 am, Chambers 1006

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Making an Argument

I will be evaluating your review essays in terms of: the strength of your argument, the depth of your argument, and your use of the concepts and theories from the class material in support of your argument.

1. **Take a stand!** Be bold in laying out your position. The strength of your argument does not rest on the position that you take, but the argument that you make. It doesn't matter what argument you make, but how well you support and think through the argument.
2. First introduce the **exact question or problem** you are addressing as precisely as you would in a lab report or mathematical proof. This should come out in your "thesis statement." A strong thesis statement will tell your readers where you are going – in other words, the structure of your argument. Add your conclusions in a nutshell so your readers can assess as they go through your paper how or whether you reach them. By the end of the first page, the reader should have read your thesis statement.
3. Set out the **basic points** you wish to make about your question or problem in whatever order best gets you to your conclusion. Each basic point gets a paragraph or group of paragraphs. Your readers should be able to find your basic points in the first sentence of each paragraph or group of paragraphs. Don't start a paragraph with facts, definitions, explanations, or background material. Start with the basic point you wish to make that explains the purpose of all the supporting evidence – the facts, definitions, explanations, and background material that follow.
4. Once you have set out a point, you must present your readers with the **evidence** from the class material that led you to make that point. You must take your readers through the same evidence so that they can see exactly how you arrived at your point. An argument without evidence is as worthless as a lab report without data. In a short essay, you must choose strategic evidence that best represents the whole – you do not need to summarize the entirety of an author's work, but must summarize enough so that your interpretation of the author's work makes sense.
5. Setting out evidence is not the last step of an argument because facts do not speak for themselves. You cannot assume that your readers will comprehend the evidence in the way you do. Consequently, you must **interpret the evidence** to show your readers what it means to you. You might wish or need to address the interpretations of other people and explain why you believe your own perspectives are more convincing. Finally, you must analyze the evidence to see what insights it yields about the question or problem you are addressing. Setting out your evidence generally answers the questions "who" and "what." Analyzing your evidence generally answers the questions "how" and "why," and analyzing how or why something happened will take your argument a lot farther and deeper than merely explaining what happened. Interpretation and analysis make the difference between a simple recitation of facts, however skillful, and a well-judged and persuasive argument.
6. Make sure the structure of your essay can be mapped onto your thesis statement. A strong argument, however, answers differing perspectives along the way. In the course of your argument, you must also engage the arguments and views of other people in so far as they bear upon your own in the body of your text. Make sure that you provide transitions between your paragraphs or group of paragraphs – one way to do this, and make sure your argument is sound, is to connect your points to the main argument that you stated earlier.
7. Don't hesitate to see me about your essays, but come prepared with a draft or an outline, or at the very least a well-thought out thesis statement with an awareness of the material that you plan to use. I will read and make comments on drafts that are submitted at least **one week** prior to the deadline of the paper.