

THE 4-SENTENCE ARGUMENT TEMPLATE

The 4-sentence argument template allows you to situate your argument as part of a larger, ongoing conversation. This approach acknowledges distinct and differing points of view while also presenting your own.

A general template for this 4-sentence argument is:

1. Many have argued that...
2. In response, a stronger claim...
3. A historian may object to this by...
4. However, this overlooks...

Practice Prompt

Let's revisit an exercise from Chapter 3 of **CROSSCURRENTS** (Application and Conversation 3.7) to see how

the 4-sentence argument could be used to address the practice prompt below.

Develop a position on the following claim:

The National Security Act of 1947 transformed the role of the United States in the world.

Note: You should refer to the documents on pages 77–81 of **CROSSCURRENTS** for reference.

The following examples present a HIGH and LOW response to the prompt using the 4-sentence argument structure.

HIGH Example

Many historians have argued that America's isolationism after World War II was based on the fear of Communism, and given that the United States had already entered on to the world stage with World War II, the National Security Act of 1947 did not transform America's global relationships.

In response, a stronger claim may be made that the National Security Act of 1947 did, in fact, transform America's role by establishing a permanent global commitment in the context of the Cold War.

Historian John Lewis Gaddis would object to this in arguing that the NSA Act of 1947 reflected America's concerns about "over-commitment," and America's need to walk away from the political and economic instability.

Rhetorical Annotations

This claim reflects a widely held argument, one that has a direct cause/effect: fear of communism = the need for isolation. As noted on the "AP Tip" in activity 3.7, the verb "transformed" invites an understanding of continuity and change over time.

This claim notes assumptions of the prevailing argument, and the phrase "national maturity" invites a definitional argument. It also suggests an opposing move to the prior sentence's statement about change.

Moving from the general to the specific, sentence 3 supports sentence 1 with an illustrative example.

HIGH Example (cont'd)

However, Gaddis's perspective overlooks America's competition for economic supremacy, and thus the National Security Act of 1947 created both continuity and change regarding America's international role: continuity with respect to political isolation, but change in by creating an ideological starting line in the race for economic supremacy.

 **Rhetorical Annotations**

Sentence 4 provides a rebuttal to the original claim by focusing on continuity rather than change. The writer uses Circumstance as a way to reframe the reasons for isolationism.

LOW Example

The National Security Act of 1947 was more about continuity, as the United States had always presented itself as a breed apart from the rest of the world.

In response, a stronger claim may be made that the National Security Act of 1947 was more about change. This is an argument implied by John Lewis Gaddis, who writes about America's wish to avoid "overcommitment."

Others would object to this. Just look at America's many examples of xenophobia, such as the Alien and Sedition Act or Chinese Exclusion Acts.

In fact, one could argue that America was still in its adolescence after World War II and was suffering from "stranger danger." So, it was time for a change and America was ready to focus on her own well being.

 **Rhetorical Annotations**

While this answers the prompt, greater focus on Circumstance will permit a clearer definition of "breed apart." The use of the absolute "always" is indicative of vagueness.

While sentence 2 does provide an opposing view, the rebuttal is loose and requires clarity to explain how "overcommitment" replaces "isolationism." What needs to be clarified is that US diplomacy after 1947 pushed aside fears of "overcommitment" after WWII by establishing a national security state during the Cold War.

The focus on historical events without identifying any authors also reflects a greater need to define how these historical events are connected to the claim of America being a "breed apart" (sentence 1).

This definition could be enhanced by clarifying the distinction between xenophobia and isolationism. The student here is applying a "one size fits all" approach, without taking into account the global changes of the twentieth century.

Despite the attempt to define national identity, the reliance upon more metaphoric or informal language (underlined) reveals a space for clearer definitions and context.

When to Use the 4-Sentence Argument Template

This template is an effective approach to all three parts of your essay. You can use the template in your...

...**introduction** in order to establish past precedent and acknowledge to your audience where your argument is headed.

...**body paragraphs** in order to serve as a transition between the prevailing perspectives and the new position you wish to unveil.

...**conclusion** in order to synthesize and recapitulate your argument, especially if presented orally.

Overall, the 4-sentence argument template allows you to position yourself within a parlor room discussion about a given historical issue. You listen to varying and perhaps competing interpretations, you weigh the claims and evidence relative to your own interpretation, and you position yourself to *build* upon the existing arguments to further the debate. While it is possible to agree with an existing interpretation, the challenge remains to create an *original* perspective by understanding all the prior arguments. This 4-sentence argument template allows for historical interpretation to remain a dynamic and relevant tool.

Teaching Tips:

- Provide students competing views on a given topic. This would be a good opportunity to use both primary and secondary sources.
- Ask students to determine which of the perspectives (or views) is more compelling, and have them explain why.
- Provide students the opportunity to use their Historical Thinking Skills as a way of defending their position. For example, examining how cause/effect or continuity/change over time would apply to this exercise.
- Remind students about the application of the 3 I's. In this particular example, students can distinguish between the ideology (fear of communism) and institution (the government's National Security Act of 1947).

More Resources Available at

www.sherpalearning.com/crosscurrents

Use the QR code below to
learn more about CROSSCURRENTS

