

#23) Argumentative Synthesis

What is an Argumentative Synthesis Essay?

Syntheses are used either to explain or persuade. In the case of explanation, you may have experience, as the Explanatory Synthesis essay is the Comp I assignment that precedes the Argumentative Synthesis. The purpose of the Explanatory Synthesis, as you probably recall, is informative. The paper's thesis presents the authors' arguments, and the body of the essay summarizes and synthesizes the authors' evidence and reasoning for their positions. As a writer of the Explanatory Synthesis, you remain an objective and detached reporter.

Just as you made observations and connections between two or more sources in your Explanatory Synthesis essay, you are required to do the same for the Argumentative Synthesis essay. In contrast to the thesis of the Explanatory Synthesis, an argumentative thesis is persuasive in purpose. For this assignment, you will need to develop an original opinion or position on a subject. This statement is your thesis, and is supported by your own evidence and reasoning, and by your analysis of the evidence and reasoning provided by the authors of your sources. The thesis for the Argumentative Synthesis is a claim about which reasonable people could disagree.

As you write the Argumentative Synthesis, not only will you explain your own views, opinions, and position, but you will also be summarizing and responding to the ideas or works of the authors you are synthesizing. Of course, you need to be sure you properly document any paraphrased and/or quoted material according to MLA conventions.

Note: This handout outlines just one type of organization for the Argumentative Synthesis essay, which some refer to as the integrated approach. However, there are other ways of structuring this type of assignment. Be sure to talk with your instructor about his/her guidelines for the Argumentative Synthesis essay before you follow this particular approach.

Illustration

✓ Planning and Prewriting for the Argumentative Synthesis Essay

Before you begin writing the Argumentative Synthesis, it is beneficial to do some planning. This will help you better understand your topic, the debate your topic incites, your position on the topic, and how you will defend your position. Planning and prewriting will also help you develop counterarguments against opposing views. The following steps are designed to walk you through the planning and prewriting stage of the Argumentative Synthesis essay. These steps will guide you to understanding the main ideas in your research, and how to integrate your own position into the discussion.

The following articles on downloading music on the Internet were retrieved from Ebsco Host and Lexis Nexis, two of the Mullins library's online databases. Downloading music on the Internet is one example of

a controversial topic on which you could develop a debatable position (see *Perspectives* pg. 56 for more topic suggestions).

France, Michael and Ronald Grover. "Striking Back." *Business Week* 29 Sept.2003: 94-96.

Miller, Michael. "Music, The Pirates, and Me." *PC Magazine* 11 Nov. 2003: 7-8.

Schwartz, John. "She Says She's No Music Pirate. No Snoop Fan, Either." *The New York Times* 25 Sept. 2003: C3. Late Edition.

1. Locate each author's thesis or main idea. The first step in planning is to identify the thesis of each of your sources.

All of the evidence and reasoning in "She Says She's No Pirate. No Snoop Fan, Either" supports the author's thesis, which is located in the middle of the article: "But those opposed to the recording industry's legal tactics say that the case suggests methods used to track down music pirates are flawed" (Schwartz sec. 7).

Similarly, Michael Miller presents his thesis in the middle of "Music, The Pirates, and Me": "The record companies' obsession with piracy will drive them to impose restrictions that punish people like me who pay for music" (Miller 7).

In the article "Striking Back," the thesis is implied. Although the thesis statement is usually stated directly, sometimes it is implicit, so you will need to summarize the central idea of the text based on the author's evidence and reasoning. "Striking Back" is such a case. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) explored other legal options such as shutting down piracy websites, an action ruled against in court. Suing consumers is the only legal option left for the RIAA (France and Grover).

2. Find the subtopics which develop and support each author's main idea. A subtopic is a specific, narrowed aspect of a subject. According to the integrated approach, the Argumentative Synthesis is organized by subtopics.

- **Effectiveness of tracking methods**

For example, Schwartz uses an anecdote about Sarah Ward, a 66-year old woman falsely accused of music piracy. Schwartz also cites information from Cindy Cohn, the leader of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), an advocacy group for civil rights in the digital age regarding music piracy lawsuits. "In a number of the 261 lawsuits the industry has filed so far, members of the household other than the named defendant might have access to the machines. They [EFF] argue that Mrs. Ward is probably not the only mistaken case in the recording industry dragnet" (sec. 7)

Michael Miller discusses the flexibility of buying music. He also cites a statistic from the NPD group that reports that CD sales have declined despite music piracy. "According to research firm NPD Group, 60 percent of music consumers with access to the Web have not downloaded any music for free, and sales to those people are down 7 percent" (Miller 8).

- **Legal options available to music companies**

France and Grover include an interview conducted with the president of the RIAA which details other legal options the RIAA has explored. The authors also analyze how the industry has attacked music piracy, and the options available to music pirates.

3. Examine evidence and reasoning used to support each individual subtopic (see *Perspectives* Ch. 3 pp. 36-42 for guidelines on how to critique an argument).

For example, Schwartz's anecdote about the wrongly accused senior citizen weakens his argument because it is emotionally charged. Also, his reasoning is flawed. His assessment that "the methods used to track down music pirates are flawed" is a hasty generalization, as he only cites one case. The statistic Schwartz cites about the number of possibly erroneous lawsuits is based on the assumption that because Sarah Ward was falsely accused of music piracy, there are probably many people named in the 261 lawsuits that are also wrongly accused. There is not enough causal evidence to assume a significant number of music piracy lawsuits involve innocent people.

Miller's reasoning and evidence to support his similar claim that piracy lawsuits may be imposed on innocent people is also unconvincing. His evidence does not establish his thesis statement. While he mentions the flexibility of buying music, Miller fails to cite any specific consequences of this flexibility. The evidence he cites from the NPD is questionable, as Miller never identifies who the NPD is, nor does he establish its credibility on the subject.

France and Grover's interview with Cary Sherman details other legal options the RIAA has explored. The authors also analyze the steps of how piracy is attacked and the options offered to music pirates. France and Grover present the strongest argument in their article "Striking Back." The authors describe the other legal options the RIAA pursued, and how those efforts were frustrated. Most convincing is the analysis on how piracy is tracked, and the numerous options and settlements offered to Internet music pirates. France and Grover also include a timeline that traces the buildup to the prosecution of file-trading websites, from 1999 to September 2003, the present time of their article.

4. Pinpoint subtopics common to all sources. Careful annotation and analysis of these subtopics is essential at the beginning stages as it will help you to understand the authors' ideas and construct an outline.

Note: It is important to realize that it's not necessary for each article to cover the same subtopics. You are still able to use a subtopic in your paper that is only mentioned in one of your articles.

- I. Methods used to track music pirates
 - Comcast I.P. numbers (Schwartz)
 - April 2003 ruling (France and Grover)
- II. Effectiveness of tracking methods
 - Sara Ward (Schwartz)
 - Flexibility in buying music= possibility for mistaken identity (Miller)
- III. Legal Implications
 - Amnesty program (France and Grover)
 - The Electronic Frontier Foundation (Schwartz)

✓ Writing the Argumentative Synthesis Essay

Now, that you are familiar with the authors' arguments and reasoning, you are ready to enter the discussion. This involves developing a thesis statement which reflects your position on the issue. For example, your **thesis** might be:

The action taken by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) is a necessary and fair legal action in eliminating music piracy on the Internet.

The focus of the Argumentative Synthesis essay will be your stance on the issue, and the evidence you present to help support your claims. Support for your claims will come in the form of facts and expert opinion (from your articles) and your evaluation of the authors' evidence and reasoning.

Typically, your thesis will come at the beginning of your essay. Once you familiarize your audience with the topic, 1) provide background, and 2) establish the need for the argument, 3) assert your position (your thesis statement).

For example, let's try this with the topic of downloading music from the Internet.

1) Less than a decade ago, it was impossible to imagine the technology we have available to us today. The Internet has made information immediately available at our fingertips. The music industry is no exception. Hard to find music is often available on the Internet. Usually, there is a small fee required, but until recently, individuals have been able to download music for free. The ability to download free music is certainly tempting. Popular musicians are overpaid. CD prices are more expensive than ever. Often, consumers may just want one or two songs from an album. And downloading music doesn't feel like stealing; it's certainly not the same as going into a store and stealing a CD. Actually, downloading music for free, or file-sharing, seems more like sharing with other music fans.

2) Despite its convenience, downloading free music, or file-sharing, is ethically wrong. It's illegal, in fact. Downloading music for free doesn't only affect the record companies. It takes money from everyone involved in the creative process, including and not limited to musicians, producers, and sound engineers. As a lawyer for the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) states, 'Copyright is not a victimless crime' (France and Grover sec. 12). Teenagers to grandparents have been sued for illegally downloading music. The public has become concerned by the methods taken by the RIAA to nab music pirates. 3) **The action taken by the RIAA is a necessary and effective legal action in eliminating music piracy on the Internet.**

One of the main criterion of a sound argument is the ability to present multiple viewpoints and evaluate the evidence and reasoning of those viewpoints. You have already done most of this section in the planning and prewriting stage of the Argumentative Synthesis essay (see #'s 1- 3 from this handout's Planning and Prewriting) section.

1. Locate each author's thesis or main idea. After your introduction, you should introduce your research, and the central ideas the authors present. The underlined phrases are the main ideas, or thesis statements, of each of the following articles.

In the article, "She Says She's No Pirate. No Snoop Fan, Either," writer John Schwartz argues, "But those opposed to the recording industry's legal tactics say that the case suggests methods used to track down music pirates are flawed." Similarly, columnist Michael Miller author of "Music, The Pirates, and Me," argues that "The record companies' obsession with piracy will drive them to impose restrictions that punish people like me who pay for music." "Striking Back" authors Mike France and Ronald Grover interview RIAA president, Cary Sherman, who states that the RIAA explored other legal options such as shutting down piracy websites, an action ruled against in court. Sherman claims that suing consumers is the only legal option left for the RIAA.

The next part of your paper is where you present and refute opposing arguments, as well as integrate support for your argument. When you develop your own argument, offer convincing and credible evidence in support of your proposition (thesis statement). Use the outline you created in the Planning and Prewriting section of the handout. Notice how we integrate our evaluation of each author's evidence and reasoning with our argument. With the integrated approach, this section is organized according to subtopics.

2-3. Find the subtopics which develop and support the author's main idea. Examine evidence and reasoning used to support each individual subtopic; see *Perspectives* (Ch. 3, pp. 36-42) for guidelines on how to critique an argument.

The methods used to track Internet music pirates are objective and technological. Host server companies, such as Comcast, track computers identified as having illegal software used to download free music. File sharing networks like KaZaA and BearShare are examples of illegal software. The RIAA initially attempted to eliminate the software. Although courts closed Napster in July 2001, a federal judge made a surprising ruling that allowed other file sharing networks to stay open in April of 2003 (France and Grover sec. 7). This ruling meant that the RIAA would have to explore other options to prevent music piracy.

In order to establish that the RIAA's methods for tracking music pirates are flawed, Schwartz uses an anecdote about Sarah Ward, a 66-year old woman falsely accused of music piracy. Schwartz also cites information from Cindy Cohn, the leader of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), an advocacy group for civil rights in the digital age regarding music piracy lawsuits: "In a number of the 261 lawsuits the industry has filed so far, members of the household other than the named defendant might have access to the machines. They [the EFF] argue that Mrs. Ward is probably not the only mistaken case in the recording industry dragnet" (sec. 7). Schwartz's anecdote about the wrongly accused senior citizen weakens his argument because it is emotionally charged. Also, his reasoning is flawed. His assessment that "the methods used to track down music pirates are flawed" is a hasty generalization, as he only cites one case. The statistic Schwartz cites about the number of possibly erroneous lawsuits is based on the assumption that because Sarah Ward was falsely accused of music piracy, there are probably many others out of the 261 lawsuits that

are also wrongly accused. There is not enough causal evidence to assume a significant number of music piracy lawsuits involve innocent people.

Sarah Ward's case is an example of mistaken identity. Not only is it unlikely that Mrs. Ward, a 66 year old woman, would download Snoop Dogg's music, her Apple Macintosh is incapable of running KaZaA (Schwartz sec. 10). While her distress is understandable, Mrs. Ward did not suffer any legal consequences. Actually, the RIAA is so careful in suing music pirates out of fear of alienating their consumers, they offer music pirates many options instead of the maximum penalty. The RIAA has also created the amnesty program, which is offered to anyone caught downloading music illegally. Music pirates "can avoid liability by signing an affidavit promising to stop downloading music" (France and Grover sec. 14). It's obvious the RIAA is not seeking money through their lawsuits against music pirates; the real motivation is to stop music piracy for good. The RIAA is trying to make sure that all members of the music industry, not just the wealthy and powerful executives, are rewarded for their talents and efforts.

In his column "Forward Thinking" in *PC Magazine*, Miller discusses the flexibility of buying music. Miller also attempts to establish that the RIAA's methods are flawed, as he supposes the possibility of mistaken identity. He shares his personal experience of purchasing CDs and copying them onto his online Media Center (Miller 7-8). Although Miller worries about the "flexibility" of purchasing music, his concerns seem unwarranted, as he has never been mistakenly accused of music piracy, nor does he mention any specific examples of mistaken identity. Miller also cites a statistic from the NPD group that reports that CD sales have declined despite music piracy. He claims that "according to research firm NPD Group, 60 percent of music consumers with access to the Web have not downloaded any music for free, and sales to those people are down 7 percent" (Miller 8). While he mentions the flexibility of buying music, Miller fails to cite any specific consequences of this flexibility. The evidence he cites from the NPD is questionable, as Miller never identifies who the NPD is, nor does he establish its credibility on the subject. Miller's evidence and reasoning to support his similar claim that piracy lawsuits may be imposed on innocent people is also unconvincing. His lack of evidence weakens his thesis statement. Miller is correct in his observation that because of recent technology, there are many ways to obtain music. However, he fails to convince the reader that this flexibility is potentially harmful to innocent customers.

France and Grover present the strongest argument in "Striking Back." Their argument is the most convincing because of the details France and Grover provide. The authors describe the other legal options the RIAA pursued, and how those efforts were frustrated. Most convincing is the analysis as to how piracy is tracked, and the numerous options and settlements offered to Internet music pirates. France and Grover also include a timeline that traces the buildup to the prosecution of file trading websites, from 1999 to September 2003, the present time of their article. It is clear the RIAA has thoroughly researched a complex plan to end music piracy. Their plan is actually a model for other industries facing the same problems protecting copyrighted material. It is unfortunate that some innocent people were implicated. However, in the case of Sarah Ward, the mistake was remedied before any legal action was taken. Everyone deserves credit and compensation for his/her work. The law states this, and the RIAA is just one industry committed to compensating its members.

In addition to the negative criticism the RIAA's methods have incurred, groups like EFF have gotten involved in piracy lawsuits (Schwartz sec. 8-10). The EFF's interference

actually contributes to the violation of copyright laws, contrary to the civil rights they are trying to protect. The RIAA is often willing to settle cases outside of court despite the evidence of illegal downloading. What seems to be overlooked is the fact that downloading music is an infringement of copyright laws. The fact that anyone who downloads music illegally can be prosecuted is fair. It's especially important for young people to learn the value of intellectual and artistic property, as well as the worth of the law. The EFF seems to be on the wrong side of the law.

Finally, you will bring the paper to an end with your conclusion. This is your final opportunity to convince your audience that your position is valid. Summarize your strongest arguments and restate your position.

Although downloading free music doesn't hurt anyone directly, it is still a crime. Everyone deserves to be compensated for his or her work, despite the industry or pay scale. It's true that many musicians seem overpaid; however, this fact does not justify stealing. **The methods the RIAA have taken are a necessary and fair means of deterring music piracy.** It is evident the RIAA has carefully researched these methods, and considering their lack of legal options, the methods and the consequences enacted are more than fair, especially since the RIAA is willing to work with individual cases of music piracy. Of course, mistakes have been made, but despite the volume of music piracy cases and the difficulty in sorting it out, the mistakes made are few and have been remedied. As time goes on (and the instances of music piracy cases decline), it's certain the RIAA will perfect their methods.

For additional help on writing an effective Argumentative Synthesis Essay, consult Chapters, 3-5 pp. 36-115, in *Perspectives on Contemporary Issues*. Many of the concepts and approaches described in this handout are based on the following sources:

Ackley, Katherine Anne, ed. *Perspectives on Contemporary Issues*. 4th ed. Boston: Thomson and Wadsworth, 2006.

Behrens, Laurence and Leonard J. Rosen, eds. *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*. 8th ed. New York: Longman, 2003.