Argumentative Writing

An argumentative essay sounds like a printed quarrel, but it is not. Students learn that an argumentative essay is designed to convince an audience, or a single person, of the veracity of a point of view. This is a “foundational” skill: many if not most classes include a focus on convincing the instructor that a specific answer is correct.

The argument may follow the path of any or all of Aristotle’s classical categories—the credibility of the writer or source (ethos), logic (logos), or emotional appeal (pathos). Regardless, argumentative essays require the statement of an appropriate, valid thesis, stout defense of that thesis, and a convincing conclusion. Instruction may progress from basic five-paragraph essays—a statement of theme, three paragraphs of support, and a conclusion—to larger projects that back up the student’s argument with research.