

3 How to write an argumentative text

Let's practise a very popular text form at school: the argumentative essay which discusses the advantages and disadvantages of a problem. It consists of:

1. Introduction lead-in to the topic / question
2. Main body
 - a) arguments in favour of (pros) + examples or explanations
 - b) arguments against (cons) + examples or explanations
3. Conclusion rounding off with your personal opinion



How about “Working after school – good or bad?” as the topic of the argumentative text we want to write?

First we need an **introduction**. Three things are most important here:

RULES

1. Make your reader curious and interested in the topic by referring to:
 - ▶▶ a recent event
 - ▶▶ a personal / funny experience (it is perfectly ok to invent one)
 - ▶▶ a well-known person talking about the topic / quotation of a scientist
 - ▶▶ a topical (*aktuell*) article / news report / TV programme
 - ▶▶ statistics
2. State the topic under discussion and establish its importance and relevance by giving e.g. a brief explanation of historical background or by defining central terms.
3. Give a spontaneous personal reaction to the topic.

STEP 1

Look at the following phrases. Pick three or four and write an opening paragraph to “Working after school – good or bad?”

Useful expressions for an opening paragraph:

What comes to my mind when discussing ... is ...

Almost every day you hear ...

Today we are repeatedly confronted with the problem of ...

Some experts say that ...

Recently I have read that ...

A friend of mine said ...

When discussing ... I remember ...

Therefore one should discuss ... / wonder about ... / ask the question if ...

It is interesting to weigh up the pros and cons of / the benefits and drawbacks of ... / the arguments in favour of and against ...

Spontaneously, it seems to me that ...

Quite frankly, I tend to think / believe that ...

STEP 2

Here are two introductions to exactly the same topic that you have just worked on. They were written by a boy and a girl in Year 10.

What comes to my mind when discussing working after school is that I know that many children and pupils have a little job and the others want to have one. Every day there are more pupils who are searching for a job and there are more jobs for them. It shows that these small jobs are very popular.

(...)

Almost every day you see teenagers who are working after school in the supermarket or in a café. Most of them are 16 years old and go to school in the morning and work in the afternoon.

Be a teacher yourself and decide which one you like best. How do they compare with your own attempt?

STEP 3

Obviously, the introduction must be followed by the **main body** of the discussion. Let's prepare this by collecting arguments:

First, list arguments in favour of working after school. Give examples or explanations in brackets.	Second, list arguments against working after school. Give examples or explanations in brackets.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● gain work experience (working under a boss) ● ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● no time for homework (tired in the evening when home from the job) ● ...

STEP 4

Before you start writing the paragraphs, you must decide where you stand. If you argue **in favour of** working after school, start with the **cons**. If you argue **against** working after school, begin with the **pros**. Why? The reader remembers best the arguments that are closest to the conclusion which contains your personal opinion.

Write the **main body** of your argumentation using two arguments for and two arguments against "Working after school – good or bad?" from the list above. The following phrases help you to connect your ideas. Remember two things: each argument plus explanation or examples makes one paragraph, which is introduced by a topic sentence (→ chapter 2).



Argument (1) in favour of	Firstly / In the first place ...	Take for example ...
	Let us start by considering ...	One example out of
	Let us first consider the question of ...	many is ...
	I should like to begin with ...	
Argument (2) in favour of	Secondly / In the second place ...	Just look at ...
	Moreover, ...	This idea can best be
	In addition to that, ...	demonstrated by an
	Furthermore, ...	example: ...
	Another thing is ...	
	On top of that ...	

Argument (1) against Let us now turn to ...
 But on the other hand ...
 Now it would also be interesting to ...
 But one argument against ... cannot be ignored

That is why ...
 because ...

Argument (2) against Another argument not to be ignored is ...
 But on the other hand ...
 ... however ...
 ... on the contrary ...
 A further argument against ... is ...

The reason why ... is ...

STEP 5

Michael from Year 10 wrote a very fine argumentation on the topic. Find his topic sentences and underline them with a red felt-tip.

Let me begin with the arguments against working after school. The pupils will have no time for other activities and for school. That's an important argument against these jobs, because the students need enough time for school. Only then can they get good grades and good jobs in the future. With the real jobs they will get more money than with these small jobs for pupils.

In addition to that, the pupils will have too much stress and this is not good for their health. With other activities they could relax, but they haven't got enough time for themselves because they work for the neighbour, in the supermarket or elsewhere.

But on the other hand, the little jobs for pupils can be very useful. By earning more pocket money, they can buy more toys and things they want to have. They earn this money honestly, hence they needn't steal things from shops. At the same time they are more independent from their parents.

Moreover, on a job the young people learn how to work with other people in a team and this is very important for their future when they have, for example, a leading position.

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▶▶ page 17 **STEP 1**

Opening paragraph

When discussing the question whether working after school is good or bad, I immediately have to think of my friend, who spends several afternoons a week either working for his elderly neighbour or delivering the weekly advertisements for our local grocery store. Statistics also show that many pupils work after school because they need the money to pay for their various needs. I always wonder if this is a sensible way of spending one's time outside of school.

▶▶ page 17 **STEP 2**

Die erste Einleitung beginnt mit einem guten sprachlichen Ausdruck, fällt dann aber inhaltlich ab. Die Aussagen sind sehr ungenau und der Leser weiß nicht, welche Jobs der Schüler oder die Schülerin vor Augen hatte. Die Einleitung ist damit nicht präzise und problemorientiert genug.

Dem zweiten Schüler gelingt es deutlich besser. Der Hinweis auf eigene Erfahrung bzw. eigene Anschauung ist geschickt. Die strittige Frage, ob Teenager am Nachmittag arbeiten sollten oder nicht, erscheint dadurch lebensnah und relevant. Wünschenswert wäre noch ein Überleitungssatz zum Hauptteil, z.B. *Is it possible to juggle (vereinbaren, unter einen Hut bringen) these two responsibilities?*

▶▶ page 18 **STEP 3**

First, list arguments in **favour** of working after school.
Give examples or explanations in brackets.

gain work experience and accept responsibility (working under a boss);
earn money (affording brand-name clothes; paying the bills for one's mobile phone; partying and concerts; buying food and drinks; the latest CDs);
independence from parents (you have got your own money);
get a feeling for the value of money (hard to earn – easy to spend)

Second, list arguments **against** working after school.

no time for homework (tired in the evening when home from the job);
no time for leisure activities (football training in the afternoons; meeting friends);
there are only very simple jobs where you can't learn much (paper round, mowing the neighbour's lawn)

STEP 4

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First, it is certainly true that many pupils have to work after school in order to earn the money for those things that they could not afford with the money they receive from their parents every month. Today many teenagers feel that it is absolutely necessary to have the latest model of mobile phone with sophisticated ring tones, fashionable brand-name clothes or other goods that make you part of the in-group. These things are mostly very expensive and almost force teenagers to earn some extra money.

In addition to that, many young people argue that having a job makes them more independent from their parents. When you have your own money, you don't have to always ask your parents, who might not understand your wishes and needs at that moment. Many parents, for example, don't support their children's craving (*Gier nach*) for brand-name clothes. Consequently, you feel more independent when you can use the money that you have earned yourself.

On the other hand, it is obvious that you lose a lot of time when you accept a job in the afternoon. This is time that you usually spend on your homework or school projects where you have to meet your classmates after school. Consequently, you might do badly at school because very often you will be too tired to work hard for school after a full afternoon of working in a shop, doing a paper round etc.

Another argument that is not to be ignored is the fact that you will have less time to pursue a hobby in the afternoons. Again, it is a question of time management. When you work, you cannot go to football or tennis training or just visit friends.

STEP 8

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From all this I can only conclude that working after school has a lot of drawbacks. Quite frankly, I prefer spending my afternoons with my friends or exercising at the leisure centre. This is, however, a very personal decision which is not difficult for me to make because my parents pay for my cell phone and I'm not at all interested in brand-name clothes. In that way I can probably call myself lucky.