CHAPTER 9
WRITE THE ARGUMENT

Now that you have spelled out the background for your issue, which is the task of the introductory section, it is time to move into the body of the thesis: the argument itself. Constructing an argument is a little like constructing a house; yes, houses may look very different from one another—different in size, layout, and features—but the basic components are pretty much the same. And just as every house has a foundation, walls, and a roof, so there are basic features of every argument: claims, evidence, and analysis.

This back-and-forth of making a claim and providing evidence is the heart of this next section, the confirmatio. As the name suggests, this portion of your thesis has the job of confirming, or proving, the overall argument.

Begin by reviewing what you have determined about your thesis.

1. You have narrowed your interests to a topic, a general area of interest.
   What is your topic?

2. Then you have narrowed your topic to an issue, a controversy within that general topic.
   What is your issue?

3. Next you drafted a thesis statement, a single declarative statement that takes a side on that controversial issue. What is your thesis statement?

You will now consider how to support your thesis statement by constructing the argument. This chapter offers three methods. You should consider all three, but you will choose the one that best fits your thesis issue.

*Consider using a TED Talk to illustrate how a confirmatio can be developed quickly and each piece of it highlighted easily. Contemporary examples remind students of the ongoing relevance of rhetoric and how it plays a major part in the modern world.*

1. Although you will write the confirmatio first, you should consider whether to switch the order of the confirmatio and refutatio within the paper or speech itself. Generally speaking, if your audience is friendly to your thesis, you may confirm and then refute; if the audience is hostile, you should refute and then confirm. In other words, if you think your audience will be antagonistic toward your ideas, you should start on the defensive first by addressing their arguments before asking them to hear your own.
The Question-to-Question Method

One way of structuring the confirmatio of your thesis is by means of questions. If you were having a conversation with someone about your thesis, what questions would they ask, and in what order? You can use this step-by-step format to organize the flow of the entire confirmatio.

For example, if your thesis is whether schools should return to classical education, you could structure the confirmatio by means of the following questions, questions that an audience might naturally ask: What is classical education? What is its history? What does it look like in today's classroom? Why should our school adopt the classical model? Each question could become its own section within the confirmatio.

With the topic of automation, the relevant questions might be these: What is automation? What effects does automation have? What are possible responses to increased automation? Again, these questions would structure the entire confirmatio.²

What questions could structure the flow of your confirmatio? In what order should they be? Ask those questions below. How should you order your questions? Here are some prioritizing schemes: causes to effects, principle to example, antecedent to consequent, commonly known to little known, general to specific, specific to general, small to great, great to small, less significant to more significant, simple to complex, historical sequence, etc.

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________
4. __________________________

² This question method works well for the speech version of the thesis. If you choose to use it for a thesis paper, the questions can be converted to simple statements. (Statements strike a more academic tone.)
THE TABLETOP METHOD

Another way of approaching your argument's confirmatio—its defense—is to imagine it as a table. In order to be stable, a table needs legs of support—not a million legs, and not just one or two legs. Three or four main legs will work just fine. Just as a stool with three legs will not wobble, an argument with three main reasons will seem both complete and stable to your listeners. But, just as a stool needs sturdy legs in order to stand, your argument must have good reasons in order to persuade. Unless you provide good reasons, your thesis will come across as mere opinion. What are the main reasons that support the overall argument of your thesis?

While three reasons might be ideal, occasionally you might need to expand to a fourth. If, however, you find that you have more than four supporting reasons, it is time to group them. Can two be lumped together into a single reason with two supporting points? Can you identify what types of arguments are being made, what major categories of support are at issue? In other words, now that you have done much of your research, can you step back from all the facts, data, and claims in order to see the forest for the trees?

Imagine writing a thesis that touts the merits of family mealtimes. You may have many reasons, for instance, why a family mealtime is important—it is a way for the family members to sync their various schedules, homemade meals are cheaper than six people eating out at six different fast-food joints, a group meal is easier overall than heating up different meals at different times, the kitchen only has to be cleaned once, etc. By taking a step back from this list, one can recognize that all of these are arguments of practicality, and classifying them under the category of "practical benefits" is a helpful way to group them. Doing so may also reveal to you that you need to offer different kinds

of reasons; a thesis built only on practical reasoning can be strengthened when coupled with, say, the psychological effects on the children or the cultural benefits (economic and political, for example) of families spending more time together. Here are some sample categories of claims to choose from: moral, practical, scientific, ethical, aesthetic, legal, theological, psychological, philosophical, historical, literary, economic, political, cultural, individual, conventional, natural, and social.

With the issue of whether some forms of automation ought to be rejected, the following arguments could serve as "legs": the economic problems of automation, the ethical consequences of automation, and the sociological necessity of work.

What reasons (and what types of reasons) will you choose to support your overall thesis? Draw your thesis table here and label the legs. Because it is difficult for an audience to remember more than a handful of main reasons, have a minimum of three legs and a maximum of four.

Here's a trick: In most cases, it's a good idea to bump your strongest argument to the last place, right after your weakest argument. In other words, if you have three arguments, the order presented in your thesis (in terms of their strength) will be #2, #3, #1. Why end with #1? Because the last thing your audience hears will be the most memorable, which means that you'll want to save your best for last.
The Stair-Step Method

The table method of support is not right for every thesis. Another way to think about your thesis is in terms of a staircase.

Whereas the previous method of argument uses three or four main supports for the thesis—which can be compared to independent legs that support a single tabletop—this other method involves a chain reasoning, a kind of stair-step approach. The first step leads to the second, which leads to the third. Before you know it, you have climbed down to a conclusion. Remember back to your education formal logic, when you most likely learned the following three syllogisms.

Hypothetical syllogism
Major premise: If A, then B.
Minor premise: A.
Conclusion: Therefore, B.

Categorical syllogism
Major premise: All A is B.
Minor premise: C is an A.
Conclusion: Therefore, C is B.

Disjunctive syllogism
Major premise: Either A or B.
Minor premise: Not A.
Conclusion: Therefore, B.

You will recognize that this structure is akin to that of a syllogism, but with a twist. Each syllogism’s conclusion will serve as a premise or starting point for the next argument. How would these work in a thesis? It may be that, instead of three or four traditional claims, you will structure your confirmatio in terms of offering premises and then building toward a conclusion. The issue of automation could take the form of the following hypothetical syllogisms:

(A) If automation continues at its current rate, jobs will begin to disappear.
    Automation continues to grow.
    Therefore, jobs will begin to disappear.

(B) If jobs disappear, then people will need to figure out how to spend their time.
    Jobs are disappearing.
    Therefore, people need to figure out how to spend their time.

Use the space below to brainstorm how your thesis could follow the structure of a stair-step argument.

Recall that these syllogisms can take different forms, depending upon the major and minor premises provided. For example, the major premise of a categorical syllogism can also be No A is B, Some A is B, or Some A is not B.

For an excellent illustration of this method, see chapter 2, sections 2.7 and 2.8, in The Office of American by Scott F. Crider. In it, he demonstrates how Jefferson constructs a syllogistic argument in the Declaration of Independence, an argument that compels the reader to concede that a revolution is justified. The argument goes like this:

If the job of government is to secure a people's rights, then they have a right "to alter and abolish it, and to institute new government" when those rights are being violated. Jefferson then goes on to list the ways in which their rights are being violated. The conclusion is clear: "That these united Colonies are . . . Abolished from all Allegiance to the British Crown" (Declaration of Independence).
Now that you have sorted out the main supports of your thesis, it is time to step backward in the thesis itself and construct your *partitio*, which functions as an expanded thesis statement, outlining the major parts—which we will hereafter call “proofs”—of your overall argument. This short distillation of the entire work should state your position on the issue as well as the major supporting lines of argumentation, or proofs. What is the overall argument that you are making in your thesis, and how are you supporting it?

Though you are writing it now, after you’ve considered your *confirmatio*, you will actually place it before the *confirmatio*. Why? The *partitio* functions as a preview—an outline in miniature—of your entire thesis; it gives your reader or audience a sense of the journey they will be taking with you as their guide. Be sure to make the order of your *partitio* follow the order of the thesis arguments themselves. In other words, mention them in the *partitio* in the same order that they occur in the larger thesis.

Below are some sample templates you can use. Go ahead and draft a *partitio* for each template. Doing so can help you determine which method might work best for your thesis: question-to-question, tabletop, or stair-step.

**PARTITIO FOR A QUESTION-TO-QUESTION THESIS:**

Template 1: Concerning the issue of whether _______________ should _______________, one must first ask these questions: _______________, _______________, and _______________.

Template 2: _______________? _______________? And _______________? These are the questions that must be answered in order to understand whether _______________ should _______________.

**PARTITIO FOR A TABLETOP THESIS:**

Template 3: Concerning the issue of whether _______________ should _______________, one must consider the _______________, _______________, and _______________ concerns.

Template 4: Because of _______________, _______________, and _______________, _______________ should _______________.

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PARTITIO FOR A STAIR-STEP THESIS:

Template 5: If __________________, then __________________.
Template 6: In order for __________________ to __________________,
______________ must __________________.
Template 7: __________________ should __________________ in order to
______________ and __________________.
Template 8: One can explore the issue of __________________ by means of
______________, which suggests __________________.

Here are examples of those templates using the issue of automation:

PARTITIO FOR A QUESTION-TO-QUESTION THESIS:

Example 1: Concerning the issue of whether human work should be replaced by machines, one must first ask these questions: What is automation? What effects does it have? and What are possible remedies to rampant automation?
Example 2: What is work? Do people need to work? And what will happen if automation takes over human work? These are the questions that must be answered in order to understand whether people should rethink the importance of human labor.

PARTITIO FOR A TABLETOP THESIS:

Example 3: Concerning the issue of whether automation should be allowed to replace humans in the workplace, one must consider the economic, theological, and sociological concerns.
Example 4: Because of economic stability, ethical consequences, and human need, some forms of automation should be rejected.
**PARTITIO FOR A STAIR-STEP THESIS:**

Example 5: If automation continues to replace humans in the workplace, then people need to find profitable ways of spending their time.

Example 6: In order for humans to flourish and fulfill their potential, they must have meaningful work.

Example 7: Individuals should reject certain kinds of technologies in order to stabilize the economy, provide for the broad spectrum of humanity, and live fulfilled lives.

Example 8: One can explore the issue of meaningful work by means of its necessity for humans, which suggests that automation must not be accepted unthinkingly.

**FLESHING OUT THE CONFIRMATIO WITH CLAIMS, EVIDENCE, AND ANALYSIS**

A proof^5 is a major part of your overall argument; it is one of the answers to the series of questions, one of the main supporting “legs” of the table, or one of the premises in the stair-steps of a syllogism. Now that you have determined the three or four major proofs of your confirmatio, a question remains: How do you develop these proofs into actual paragraphs? Or, in other words, how do you tease out those major points into full-blown arguments? The gist of argumentation is this: (1) make a claim, (2) support it with evidence, and (3) analyze the evidence so that it clearly connects back to the claim.

Each proof will depend upon claims—statements that are not themselves obvious and in fact may be controversial. So why should your audience believe your claims? You must provide evidence that back them up. Evidence is something—a fact, a statistic, a quote from an expert, a conclusion from a scientific study, a definition, a logical deduction, an observation, or another form of support—that proves your claim. Unlike claims, which may be controversial, evidence is generally agreed upon, which is why providing evidence is essential to an argument.

Examples of evidence: a fact, statistic, quote, conclusion, definition, deduction, or observation

But making a claim and providing evidence is supplemented by one more thing: analysis. That is, you should examine the evidence, discuss it, or comment on how it advances your argument. The analysis ties the evidence to the claim and the claim to the overall thesis. In other words, you should always follow up your claims with evidence, and you should always follow evidence with thoughtful analysis.

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5. We will use the word “proof” to signify a main argument—that is, a major section of your overall reasoning. The one Greek word _pistis_ has a number of meanings; Eugene Carver offers these: “proof: argument, reasoning, persuasion, belief, trust, faith, conviction, obligation, and confidence” (*For the Sake of Argument: Reasoning, Character, and the Ethics of Belief* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004], 3).