

The Classical Essay: Based on Ancient Oratorical Structuring

In ancient Greek and Roman society, rhetoricians developed an established method of argument known today as classical oration. Classical oration [in Greek] consists of six parts: the *exordium*, the *narratio*, the *partitio*, the *confirmatio*, the *refutatio*, and the *peroration*, which in composition terms is the following: introduction, narration, partition, arguments, refutation, and conclusion. This method of persuasion is still used in modern classrooms as a model for argumentative papers.

-- *Exordium*: The introduction

- Sets the tone for the rest of the paper: urgent, calm, humorous, satirical etc...
- Reaches out to a specific audience who shares common goals, values, or concerns
- Engages the reader's interest by:
 - Showing the importance of the issue—why is it relevant?
 - Showing how the issue affects people or the community
 - Connecting the topic with the audience's interests

-- *Narratio*: Brings forth the facts of the case

- Often a narration updates the reader on relevant material—lays a foundation
- Briefly provides specific examples and background information
- Offers ample information for understanding topic more thoroughly

-- *Partitio*: The thesis

- A description that directly names the issue in dispute
- Concisely lists arguments to be used in order of their appearance in the paper

-- *Confirmatio*: Writer lays out and supports arguments

- Clearly defines each argument, point-by-point
- Provides proof or evidence for arguments previously listed
- Presents research or results to support thesis
- Offers reasoning for claims of value—explains why something is significant

-- *Refutatio*: Writer looks at counter arguments and demonstrates why they aren't compelling

- First, presents arguments along with research and evidence on opposing viewpoints
- Then, explains why counter arguments are impractical
- Demonstrates any deviations from logic
- Shows how these arguments are weak or points out any flaws
- Overall, show how your argument is somehow better despite oppositions

-- *Peroratio*: Conclusion/resolution of paper

- Summarizes strongest arguments by reminding reader what was proven
- May include emotional appeals or a call to action
- Proposes a solution to the problem
- Leaves the reader with a final impression
- Paints a picture “of what it may be like if the advice of the argument is (or is not) followed

An 18th Century Example of a Classical Oration in the Form of a Written Essay: “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathon Swift

-Introduction: Background on the overcrowded situation in the country, the beggars, and the children.

-Narration: The children are a hindrance on the working population.

-Partition: In order to solve the problem of overpopulation, we ought to sell the children for food and use the skins for handbags and boots.

-Confirmation: Statistics demonstrate this would be a good solution to the population problem. One child would feed a family, and it would lessen the Roman Catholic population. Poor tenants will have something of their own that they can sell to make money. It will help marriage.

-Refutation: Population will be decreased, but speaker views this as good thing. No one else will take an active stance to help the economy.

-Conclusion: Although the speaker will not benefit, the nation as a whole will benefit from taking his suggestions. The people, or “wise men,” are challenged to find an equally effective solution to poverty.

* This guide on writing a Classical Essay was [originally] written by Serena Beetner and Mary Bruinius, former Writing Center Consultants, in fulfillment of an assignment for the Writing Center staff development course, Topics in Composition. [It was later modified by Tonja Nelson, Communications Lab Assistant.] The purpose of this guide is to provide insight into the Classical Essay as well as to provide helpful hints and advice to anyone who may be completing a similar assignment.

Classical Argument Outline

Introduction

Narration/Background

Partition/Thesis/List of arguments

1.

2.

3.

Confirmation/Arguments/Evidence

1.

2.

3.

Opposition/Refutation

1.

2.

3.

Refute/disprove

Conclusion
