

Gens-176-V, Spring 2026

What is a “powerful argument”?

In writing, a “powerful” argument is not just one that states a strong opinion — it moves the reader. It persuades, clarifies, and withstands scrutiny. Here are some typical components of a powerful argument.

1. It has a clear, specific claim

A powerful argument makes a claim that is:

- Debatable (reasonable people could disagree)
- Focused (not vague or overly broad)
- Significant (it matters)

Example:

Weak claim: College is important.

Stronger claim: Public universities should eliminate legacy admissions because they undermine merit-based access.

2. It is well-supported with evidence

- Credible sources
- Relevant data
- Concrete examples

Support should not just be present; it should be carefully chosen and clearly connected to the claim. A common weakness is evidence without explanation. Powerful writing always answers:

Why does this evidence matter?

3. It uses logical structure

A strong argument is organized so that the logical structure progresses through the following:

- Each paragraph advances the claim
- Claims are supported by reasons
- Reasons are supported by evidence

Or more succinctly:

Claim → Reasons → Evidence → Explanation

Readers should never have to “fill in” the logic themselves.

4. It anticipates objections

A powerful argument recognizes alternative viewpoints, then responds fairly and accurately. This increases credibility and demonstrates intellectual maturity.

5. It Is Clear and Precise

“Power” is often confused with emotional intensity. But in academic writing especially, power comes from precision and clarity. For example:

Weak statement: This policy is really bad and harmful in many ways.

Strong statement: The policy reduces funding for rural schools by 18%, disproportionately affecting low-income districts.

Specificity is persuasive.

A Short Working Definition

You might define a powerful argument like this: A powerful argument is one that makes a clear, debatable claim and supports it with logical reasoning, credible evidence, and thoughtful engagement with counterarguments in a way that persuades a specific audience.

Self-Check Summary

Ask yourself:

- Is my claim debatable and specific?
- Does each paragraph clearly support my claim?
- Have I explained how my evidence proves my point?
- Have I addressed at least one strong counterargument?
- Is my writing precise (rather than vague)?