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Notes for Five Argumentative Essays

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These tables outline the main arguments used when debating five controversial topics. The points have been arranged into simple "For/Against" columns.

It is convenient to have a ready-made list of arguments, but to write an effective essay you must decide upon a **structure**. There are two basic options:

Option 1: *Set 'em up and knock 'em down*

Look at my [model essay on zoos](#) for an example of this approach. Using this approach, you present each of your opponents' arguments in turn and demonstrate that it is false or weak - you "knock it down". This is a very effective approach because you acknowledge that other views exist but persuade the reader that *yours* are superior.

Option 2: *The balanced approach*

You will find an example of this approach for an essay about handgun ownership on [the IGCSE Revision page here](#) (produced by the Central European University language teaching centre). Using this approach, you look at both sides of the argument in a more balanced way. In the end, however, you must indicate your opinion. The basic structure is: Introduction >>> Points in Favour >>> Against >>> Conclusion (including your opinion). **WARNING:** This approach can sound weak because the writer seems to be "sitting on the fence", afraid to take sides.

The use of animals in scientific research

FOR	AGAINST
Animals are only used when really necessary and most animal experiments do not involve pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is morally wrong to do things to laboratory animals which we would not do to our pets; lab animals are burned, poisoned, blinded, crippled and driven mad
Brain surgery and "replacement"	

<p>surgery" (e.g. replacing hip joints, heart transplants) requires practice; we cannot practise on humans!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Human and animal brains are very different, so surgeons do not gain much from practising on animals
<p>When surgery is necessary, an anaesthetic is always used so that the animal feels no pain</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We need to test new drugs/chemicals on animals in order to predict whether humans will suffer side-effects; if we don't do this, we will never find cures for AIDS, cancer etc. ○ Lots of research with animals helps to develop new treatments for <i>animal</i> diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Most animal experiments are done for trivial reasons - e.g. to produce cosmetics, household goods, food additives etc. ○ A lot of research turns animals into drug addicts or removes part of their brain, just so we can observe changes in their behaviour! ○ Most new drugs are created in order to make profit for the drug companies; only 1-2% are essential for good health ○ Tests on animals do not give reliable results since animals react differently to humans (e.g. aspirin causes birth defects in cats, dogs & monkeys but not in humans) ○ We should be spending more money on <u>preventing</u> diseases instead of focussing so much on cures (many diseases are linked to smoking, bad diet and pollution)

Should motor traffic be restricted?

<p>FOR</p>	<p>AGAINST</p>
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<p>Cars are a major source of air and noise pollution, as well as numerous accidents that cause death or injury.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Motor vehicles make travel more convenient, contribute to economic development and enrich our leisure; petrol is much "greener" than it used to be. ○ The USA has more cars than any other country, yet its accident rate is less than half that of many European countries. The answer lies in better roads, better driver training and better vehicle maintenance.
<p>Motorways are an eyesore in the countryside and disturb wildlife habitats .</p>	<p>Well-designed motorways blend into the countryside just as much as canals or railways.</p>
<p>Traffic in modern city centres moves at roughly the same speed as it did 100 years ago. The solution is to discourage drivers from entering city centres (e.g. by imposing taxes). The govt. should also improve the public transport system and provide free parking on the outskirts of cities.</p>	<p>Public transport is simply not adequate to handle the volume of people who need to enter cities. The real solution to road congestion is to build more roads and carparks.</p>
<p>Railways are more suitable (faster & safer) than cars for traffic between cities; they are also more suitable than large trucks for carrying goods</p>	<p>Railways are inflexible and do not suit our modern desire for "door-to-door" transport; goods deliveries by rail are often delayed</p>

Capital Punishment (the Death Penalty)

<p>FOR</p>	<p>AGAINST</p>
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<p>It discourages criminals from carrying guns and carrying out serious crimes such as murder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capital punishment is not an effective deterrent: for example, the USA (where the death penalty exists) has a far higher murder rate than the UK (where there is no death penalty) ○ Out of 30 countries that have abolished the death penalty none has reported an increase in murders
<p>Some hardened criminals cannot be reformed; we know that so-called "life sentences" are often reduced, so they are a great risk to society if we do not execute them</p>	<p>The death penalty belongs to a time when punishments were cruel and society was less civilised; the destruction of human life is wrong</p>
<p>It is better for a society to get rid of its enemies than to pay for them to stay in prison</p>	<p>Where the death penalty is used, juries are often afraid to convict someone in case they are wrong; in this way, many criminals escape punishment (if the penalty was imprisonment, juries would be less afraid)</p>
<p>People are not sentenced to death if there is any doubt in the minds of the jury; mentally insane murderers are never convicted</p>	<p>If a jury makes a mistake (and they do!) this cannot be reversed; a civilised society should not take this risk. Also, many prisoners are kept on "death row" for decades; they are often completely reformed individuals by the time they are executed</p>

Euthanasia should be legalised

FOR	AGAINST
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<p>Many people die long and painful deaths from incurable illnesses. We put animals out of their misery rather than let them suffer terrible pain; why should we deny humans the same release?</p>	<p>A doctor cannot draw up a list of incurable illnesses; for example, patients suffering from so-called incurable diseases such as cancer and AIDS frequently are cured and live long, productive lives.</p>
<p>The patient him/herself is the best person to judge when life has become too hard to bear. Suicide ceased to be a crime in the UK in 1961; there has been no increase in the suicide rate because of this, so it is unlikely that large numbers of people would choose euthanasia if it were legalised.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If a physical suffering is a valid excuse for cutting life short, then why not mental/emotional suffering as well? ○ A request for euthanasia might be the result of temporary depression; people in great pain are not always responsible for what they say
<p>If a patient is completely unable to make a decision, doctors should be allowed to make a recommendation and then close relatives could make the final decision.</p>	<p>Doctors do not always correctly estimate a patient's power to recover; they should not have to make the terrible decision to kill a patient. This is a heavy responsibility for relatives too. Some relatives might even misuse their power (e.g. in order to inherit wealth)</p>
<p>If we call it murder to take someone's life with their own consent, then logically it is theft to take a person's property with their consent - which is absurd.</p>	<p>Many religions teach that it is wrong to take away human life; if we are reluctant to kill even murderers, we should be even more reluctant to kill innocent people.</p>
<p>Many unfortunate people are born with severe physical and/or mental defects that mean they will never lead a normal life and will be a huge burden to their families. Relatives should have the right to opt for euthanasia in such cases.</p>	<p>All human lives have equal value. The Nazis, who believed otherwise, killed as many as 200,000 mentally or physically disabled people in a secretive euthanasia programme and called it "mercy killing".</p>

Examinations should be abolished

FOR	AGAINST
Examinations test only a limited range of skills; they favour people who have a good memory and good "exam techniques" even though they may not be very original or imaginative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Passing an examination shows that the candidate can handle unfamiliar problems and communicate effectively; these are important qualities in the workplace. ○ Examinations have changed a lot in the past 20 years; most include coursework today and this helps to test a greater range of skills.
Examinations depress students and deaden their initiative; teachers, too, become less creative as they are forced to "teach to the exam".	The mental effort of preparation for examinations is valuable; no harm is done to anyone. Without the discipline of examinations, teachers could fail to cover some important topics/skills.
Examinations are set as if all children have reached the same mental level at the same age. However, psychologists and educationalists agree that this is not so. Also, girls tend to mature earlier than boys.	The greatest gaps in development occur at primary age; exams are rare there nowadays. The inequality is much less at secondary level.
Examinations encourage competition and favour academically gifted students; the less able (who actually need the most help) get neglected.	The problem of "mixed ability" classes would exist whether we had examinations or not. The solution is to find better ways of organising classes and to employ more teachers.
Research has proven that different examiners grade student papers differently; indeed, the same	Modern examination boards have sophisticated "moderation" systems for ensuring that marking is done

examiner will often give different marks to the same paper after a few months!

fairly. In addition, most examinations include practicals or orals, so a student's result does not depend completely on written work.

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