

SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

Upon successful completion of this lesson, you should be able to:

- recognize an essay’s supporting arguments
- develop (write) main ideas of supporting arguments to support a thesis

Whether you are writing a lengthy paper or answering an essay question for a test, you must have supporting arguments for your thesis statement. Think of supporting arguments as mini-papers with mini-thesis statements (sometimes called main ideas). Supporting arguments “back up” your thesis or help “prove” it—to the extent that it can truly be proven.

In the following essay, the main idea of each supporting argument is bolded and underlined. Notice how the supporting arguments are mentioned in the body of the essay as well as in the introduction and conclusion.

Housing Associations’ Prohibitive Rules Bad for Country

by Joe American

Rules that prohibit the display of campaign signs are common in housing developments throughout the nation, but just because they are common does not mean they are right. *Such rules are bad for America.* All people, regardless of their voter preferences or political affiliation—and regardless of whether they rent or own—should be allowed to display campaign signs on their lawns and in their windows. In addition to violating the First Amendment, **regulations that prohibit campaign signs discourage expression of good citizenship, foster our country’s unhealthy obsession with political correctness, and, quite frankly, threaten democracy.**

Thesis Statement

Supporting argument #1

Supporting argument #2

Supporting argument #3

Today more than ever the country needs people who understand the relationship between citizenship and political awareness, for one of the most unfortunate facts about American society is that far too many citizens have attitudes of apathy and indifference about politics. Because the lack of participation in government is such a colossal problem in America, **housing developments that prohibit the display of campaign signs discourage**

Supporting Argument #1

an important expression of good citizenship. By displaying simple, non-offensive signs with candidates' names on them, citizens create opportunities to engage in healthy political discussions with neighbors and passers-by, some of whom will inevitably be politically apathetic individuals. The more conversations that politically aware citizens have with these people, the greater the chance that the politically apathetic will begin to participate in government. And the more people participate, the closer America moves to the type of people-dominated government that our forefathers envisioned. Therefore, in no small way, displaying a campaign sign is a good civic act.

Another bothersome aspect of this issue has to do with our nation's obsession with political correctness and the fact that Americans are quickly becoming a people who cannot disagree politely. Because feelings about political matters are strong, because more and more people are learning to play the "I'm-offended" card when they disagree with something, and because society is beginning to cater to those who are easily offended, regulating political expression has in itself become a politically correct thing to do. **Unfortunately, housing development boards across the nation are fostering political correctness.** That the campaign-sign police of housing developments are part of the politically correct movement is evident in the fact that housing development officials *selectively* enforce community rules. Housing association boards often turn a blind eye to a number of violations but waste no time enforcing the rules when it comes to political expression. God forbid residents "offend" someone by expressing a political opinion.

Of course, many of the absurd rules and regulations such as the prohibition of campaign signs are imposed for economic reasons. Some people think that a development dotted with campaign signs would look

**Supporting
argument #2**

trashy and therefore push property values down. Common sense, however, says otherwise. A campaign sign in a person's yard is an indication that the resident cares about his or her society. It demonstrates a genuine concern for country and local community, a concern that should increase property values, not decrease them. In essence, neighborhoods with campaign signs attract prospective residents who have something in common with the people who already live in those communities—a concern for America. Furthermore, campaign signs today are usually not eyesores. The majority of people who campaign for public office spend a considerable amount of money on manufactured signs that are decent-looking and durable. Generally, people do not anchor homemade signs of plywood and spray paint in their yards—especially not in housing developments.

Even if signs *were* eyesores, however, a philosophical cost-benefit analysis suggests that allowing them would outweigh the cost of prohibiting them, for **prohibiting them threatens the political system that makes America great.** The prohibition of campaign signs is just one example of how housing developments can take an almost totalitarian approach to government. In some developments, residents must obtain permission to do exterior work as simple as painting shutters. The desire to keep places beautiful is great; however, people usually try to keep up with their neighbors in terms of home improvement and maintenance, especially in housing developments. People don't need to be treated as if they are children. Such an approach to local housing government sends a dangerous message to citizens. That is, residents are not capable of making good decisions; therefore, even the simplest home improvements must be governed by officials. This is not the spirit of democracy. When people grow accustomed to being controlled at the micro level, such as in their housing developments, they become more inclined to accept totalitarianism at the macro level. And

**Supporting
argument #3**

when that happens across the country, democracy as our founding fathers envisioned it will cease to exist.

<u>Housing associations must stop thwarting residents' attempts</u>	← Supporting argument #1
<u>to be good citizens. They must stop catering to the politically correct</u>	← Supporting argument #2
<u>movement of preventing any political opinion with which someone</u>	
<u>might disagree. And they must stop governing as if residents are</u>	← Supporting argument #3
<u>incapable of using good judgment in making even the simplest of</u>	
<u>decisions.</u> <i>Overly prohibitive community rules affect more than just the immediate communities in which they are imposed. They negatively affect the American spirit.</i>	<i>Restatement of thesis in slightly different words</i>

You should think of supporting arguments as mini-papers because the information that follows the main idea of a supporting argument “backs up” the main idea, just as any given main idea backs up a thesis.

Consider, for example, the paragraph in which the sample essay’s third supporting argument is developed.

Even if signs *were* eyesores, however, a philosophical cost-benefit analysis suggests that allowing them would outweigh the cost of prohibiting them, for **prohibiting them threatens the political system that makes America great.** The prohibition of campaign signs is just one example of how housing developments can take an almost totalitarian approach to government. In some developments, residents must obtain permission to do exterior work as simple as painting shutters. The desire to keep places beautiful is great; however, people usually try to keep up with their neighbors in terms of home improvement and maintenance, especially in housing developments. People don’t need to be treated as if they are children. Such an approach to local housing government sends a dangerous message to citizens. That is, residents are not capable of making good decisions; therefore, even the simplest home improvements must be governed by officials. This is not the spirit of democracy. When people grow accustomed to being controlled at the micro level, such as in their housing developments, they become more inclined to accept totalitarianism at the macro level. And when that happens across the country, democracy as our founding fathers envisioned it will cease to exist.

The emphasized statement above supports the essay's thesis, which is that housing development regulations that prohibit the display of campaign signs are bad for America. Then, the text after the emphasized statement backs up the statement itself. That is, it explains *why* such rules “threaten the political system that makes America great.” In short, the paragraph is one argument that contributes to the larger argument, or the thesis.

EXERCISE 1

Read the following essay. Then answer the questions at the end. As you address the questions, work with your tutor if you wish.

The Tomato, Staple of the American Diet

by Sloppy Joe Sauce

Dietary habits in many countries are often rooted in certain “staple” foods that bind most meals together. In Asian countries, rice is the staple. In South America, wheat and flour tortillas are an important part of most meals. The British Isles are known for their mutton. But what about the United States. As a cultural melting pot, does the United States have one particular food that is more important than another?

The answer, of course, is yes. It is a round, vine-grown, red fruit that is frequently and mistakenly referred to as a vegetable. Sometimes thrown at sporting events, the delicious, juicy tomato is the most important food in the typical American's diet. Besides being a necessary ingredient in many American dishes, it is a defining ingredient in three of America's favorite meals. Pizza, spaghetti, and the ever-popular burger-and-fries meal would fail to delight us if not for the tomato.

Can you imagine eating a pizza without tomato sauce? It wouldn't be a pizza—it would simply be a bread pie with some toppings on it. The tomato is the most important ingredient on a pizza. And while toppings vary and dough can be as thick as a book or as thin as a small-town newspaper, pizza sauce always has the same red fruit as its base. In pizza, the tomato is the tie that binds.

Like pizza, spaghetti originated in Italy, but it is an American favorite. Easy to make and fun to eat (most kids love it), spaghetti is a weekly staple in many

household kitchens and school cafeterias. And like pizza, spaghetti is dependent upon tomato sauce. It's true that some people won't eat spaghetti without meatballs, but meatballs without sauce would just be, well, balls of meat—just as pasta without sauce would be boring. Tomato sauce is what brings spaghetti to life.

Of course, one can't discuss the typical American diet without mentioning a hamburger and fries, and one cannot dismiss the tomato's importance in this classic American meal. On a plate containing a hamburger and French fries, the tomato often wears more than one hat. Sliced round and fresh, the tomato graces the space between a patty and a bun like nothing else can. And the burger gets a double shot of tomato when ketchup is added for an extra bit of taste. Moreover, ketchup goes with fries like ice cream goes with apple pie. Without the tomato, the burger-and-fries meal would not have the same appeal.

Clearly, the tomato has a promising future in America. In addition to being a major ingredient in chili, salads, steak sauces, Mexican food sauces, soups, and a variety of main dishes, it is also the staple of some of America's favorite meals, such as pizza, spaghetti, and burgers and fries. Almost everyone in the country regularly consumes tomatoes in some form or another.

1. What is the essay's thesis statement?
2. What are the main ideas of the supporting arguments?

EXERCISE 3

For each thesis statement below, write the main-idea statements for at least two (2) supporting arguments.

1. The amount of financial aid available to students should be proportionate to the earning potential of the career fields for which their majors prepare them.
2. Sterling College should make coffee available to students in every building.
3. The President of the United States should keep all citizens informed about military matters, especially during war time.

4. Americans have a rich history of helping each other when times are tough.
5. Computers do not really save people much time.