Model of a Formal Argument

All formal writing should follow a basic pattern of organization, whether the topic is expository or argumentative in nature.

I. **Introduction** – you will vary the order of the following three components, depending on your chosen organization strategy (general-to-specific, specific-to-general, historical review, review of a controversy, statement of thesis, anecdote, etc).

A. **Context.** This section sets forth background facts in a general way and prepares readers for the main argument. The context, often called *narration*, if it is at all lengthy, should be orderly. Time-order, space-order, and order-of-climax are all likely patterns. The narration answers the question, “What is the topic?”

B. **Thesis.** This crucial element states exactly what is to be proved and clarifies what is at stake. The thesis statement answers the question, “What is asserted about this topic?” The thesis should NOT be self-reflexive, as in “I will show that…” The thesis, as well as the entire essay, should avoid the use of any personal pronouns (e.g., “we,” “our,” “I,” “my,” “you,” and “your”). Most theses are 2-part: assertion and preview of confirmation.

C. **Definition.** Any key terms in your discussion should be clarified in this section. At this point, key words are named and defined by the use of synonyms, stipulation (meaning the author’s own definition, not from Webster or another bland dictionary source), by classification, and/or by negation (what the term does NOT mean).

II. **Confirmation.**

A. **Proofs or Points.** This section sets forth the evidence and provides supporting matter through the use of illustrations, analogies, statistics, authorities, and/or anecdotes wisely gathered and cited from other sources. Each piece of evidence should clearly and directly support the original thesis somehow, and each illustration should contain clear transitions between points. This evidence should be arranged in the order of climax, usually starting with a powerful piece of evidence and ending with the most convincing example.

B. **Counterargument/Antithesis and Refutation/Rebuttal.** This section allows the author to acknowledge any form of opposition. It maturely and intelligently takes an opposing side into consideration without pointing fingers or belittling the opposing point of view. It exposes the weaknesses of other points of view in order to gently push for the author’s perspective as best. It’s an attempt at objectivity.

C. **Transitions.** Logical connections should be made explicit throughout the argument by way of transition words and phrases. A 2-part transition sentence should introduce each new part of the essay: in the first, provide a transition word/phrase and a brief summary of the preceding parts of the essay (a backward glance); in the second, a mini-thesis or topic sentence should preview the next part of the essay (a look forward).

III. **Conclusion.** The final portion of the paper attempts to rouse the reader’s intellectual curiosity by summing up the main points of the author’s logic in a fairly succinct, memorable way, and it should show a confident control of the topic without sounding arrogant. It answers the question, “So what?”

A. **So What?** The last few sentences or paragraphs of any essay leave an impression, so end the paper with the ramifications or implications of your research. If you’ve offered a
problem, the “so what?” section should offer a research-based solution. If you’ve provided a history, predict an outcome.