5.6: Contentions

Through analysis we determine our issues. Using research, we answer our issues. A contention is an answered issue. Contentions form the basis of your argument. They become the reasons why you have your specific position on the claim.

If you were applying for a job the **claim** would be,

**We should hire you for this position.**

One of the **issues** might be,

“Are you qualified for this position?”

Assuming that the answer to this issue is “Yes,” the **contention** would now be,

“I am qualified for this position.”

This contention becomes a reason why you argue that the claim should be accepted and you should be hired.

**Contentions are the main arguments that support your position on the claim.**

Some people call it a reason, a justification, a point of interest, or a main point. They all serve the same purpose, to provide the rational of your case. Both the pro-side and con- sides have the right to introduce their own set of contentions that they feel will best support their position on the claim. At the same time, there is also the argumentative burden to also respond to the contentions of the other side.

**Contentions mostly come from the ultimate issues** that both the pro-side and con- side reached as a result of their
analysis of the claim. Contentions are the main arguments that you feel are the most important and must be argued and backed up with appropriate logic and documentation or evidence.

**Contentions become the justifications for your position on the claim being argued.** Contentions are your reasons why your side of the claim should be accepted. If you were applying for a job and you were asked questions like:

- Do you have the experience needed for this job?
- Are you punctual?
- Do you have the ability to learn?

You would answer them and then to prove you should be hired your contentions would be:

- I have the experience needed to do this job well.
- I make it a habit to always be on time.
- I am always learning to improve my performance.

**Contentions reflect a logical organization of the arguments you are making in support of your position on the claim.** Each contention should assert only one main conclusion at a time. These contentions will be supported by using evidence and logic to convince the target audience to draw the same conclusions as the arguer. Both the pro and the con may present different contentions to persuade a target audience that adherence to their position on the claim should be granted. However, both sides are obligated to respond to and argue against each other’s contentions.

**Contentions organize and logically structure an advocate’s ideas as to why a target audience should accept their point of view.** In addition, explaining why we hold certain positions, and arguing in support of them, helps us to clarify our own thinking as well. If you know your contentions, you won’t get lost in your argument.

One argumentative strategy is the **Rule of 3.** When asked for your opinion don’t just begin talking, think of three reasons, or contentions that will support your opinion. If you are asked in your job interview why you should be hired, pause a moment and think of three reasons like maybe your education, what you did on your last job, and your potential. Look at your audience and tell them, “There are 3 reasons you should hire me.” Then start with your education by making it a full sentence contention. “The first reason you should hire me is I have the educational background to do well.” After explaining that contention you can move to the second one and then the third.

**Contentions should flow from one to the next, advancing the overall case for your side.** All of your contentions should relate to your argumentative stand on the claim being debated. That is, each contention building off the last and ultimately showing why your position is the one that should be accepted.

**Contentions are the foundation of all argumentative presentations.** The process of creating a supported argument leads to the understanding and clarification of advocated ideas. Contentions cause positions to become defined.