

Evaluating Arguments: Critical Articles

Joseph Williams, the author of *The Craft of Argument, Style, and The Craft of Research*, argues most academic articles (75-90%) have four main components four parts. Usually these components appear in the introduction to the article, but sometimes they are woven throughout the article. They are

- (1) **Common Ground:** Establishes a brief context that the author intends to qualify or question. This may be either a commonly held belief (some people...) or a specific argument made by a range of prior specialists in the field.
- (2) **But...:** Introduces a question about something key that is not known or fully understood or contradicts this common ground.
- (3) **So What?** States the significance of the question raised.
- (4) **Thesis:** the answer to problem/question. States the author's main claim.

Decide roughly what these four parts would be for the article you for today:

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

Please also list at least two strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths:

1.

2.

Weaknesses:

1.

2.

Here is an example of an introduction with this format used in *Research and Its Reporting* by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams.

[**Common Ground**] Ever since the sixteenth century, when Girolamo Cardano began thinking about games of chance in quantitative terms (Cardano, 1545), risk has been treated as a purely mathematical problem ... In the twentieth century, researchers shifted their focus ... These problems, too, have been addressed almost exclusively with mathematical tools. **But** researchers who try to communicate risk to a public audience have failed to understand that most people view risk not as a rationally quantifiable question, but rather in ways that seem puzzling, even irrational. [**So what?**] As a result, we do not understand how ordinary people make decisions about risks in their daily lives and so fail to communicate with the public about risk. [**Thesis**] **Among the general public, most decisions about risk include at least six factors that may not be precisely quantifiable but are systematic and therefore predictable.**