Argumentative Essay (A Common Product): Secondary Sources

This document provides some information about at least some of the secondary sources that are available to use when you write the argumentative essay.

Topics:

You will select a common product and write an argument related to it. When selecting topics, avoid ones that are too broad or lack a real argument. The topic of gun control is too broad for an essay of 3-4 pages, whereas the topic of the McCarthy-Lautenberg amendment, which calls for background checks, is more appropriate for an essay of this length. Access this amendment online, and then argue if it in fact provides a viable means for effective background checks. Some topics related to healthy eating and children may actually lack an argument. For example, the majority of Americans agree that children should avoid excessive amounts of fast food; however, few may agree that the federal government should impose a tax on fast food to promote healthy eating.

![C:\Users\James\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\X97E9MUO\MC900198654[2].wmf]()

 Points to Consider:

* Consider the credibility of a source, especially a website.
* Note the objectivity or subjectivity used to report the information.
* Prepare to devote time to the search for information. You may need a few hours to locate some valuable sources, or you may need to read an entire book chapter or article to locate any possible argument.
* Realize that one source may not supply much information about a desired topic but that it may provide terms to guide subsequent research.
* Visit the reference librarians. They can not only identify additional secondary sources but also provide strategies to hone your research skills. Do you know why you would sometimes include quotation marks around the search phrase “George Washington Carver”? A librarian does, and you should as well.

Google:

This website is extremely useful, provided that you enter the correct search terms and that you rely on credible sources, to locate possible topics, to narrow down topics, and to guide subsequent research. The instructor typed the search phrase “dangerous household products” and quickly located the *Green America* website with a list of 12 household products that are quite dangerous. You may want to consider the information in this list when you next apply deodorant or nail polish. Additionally, the instructor typed the search phrase “foods to avoid” and located the *Center for Science in the Public Interest* website with a list of foods to avoid. You may want to consider the information in this list when you next eat garbanzo beans, wild salmon, or unsweetened Greek yogurt. Finally, the instructor typed the search phrase “obsolete objects list” and located an article “A World without Toilet Paper?” in a 2012 issue of the *AARP Magazine* sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons, in which the writer identifies common items that may become obsolete in the next 50 years—snail mail, for example. In response to the contents of this article, you may contemplate the most effective strategy available to the U.S. Postal Service to transform itself into a viable corporation that can survive throughout the 21st century.

Use Google to locate lists of inventions and inventors. When you discover that Alfred Nobel created dynamite, would you argue that his invention has helped or harmed mankind? Use this website to locate lists of companies to boycott. When you discover that some individuals are boycotting Kellogg’s for its use of sugar from genetically engineered sugar beets in its products, would you support or oppose this boycott? Incidentally, this company manufactures Corn Flakes and Frosted Flakes. Would you be willing to forfeit these cereals each morning to support this boycott?

Types of Secondary Sources:

Books:

The library has books related to a specific product (Hershey’s chocolate) and to general products (chocolate). The library has at least two books about Milton S. Hershey and his chocolate. Simply use the search phrase “Hershey’s chocolate” to locate them. In addition, the library has several books about chocolate, such as *The True History of Chocolate*, in which appears information about not only Hershey’s chocolate but also the cultivation of chocolate by the Aztecs and Maya of Mexico and the advertising of chocolate in the 19th century. Use the search term “chocolate” to locate these books.

Besides books about products, the library has books about inventors and the products associated with them. For instance, there are books about George Washington Carver, Thomas Alva Edison, and Henry Ford. Use the name of the inventor to locate any books about them and their products.

In the 19th century, Milton S. Hershey developed a particular business model to promote the well-being of his employees. Learn about this model, and argue if it represents a still viable model in the 21st century for the Hershey or some other corporation.



Databases:

The library subscribes to databases which you can access through the library’s website, and they present sources related to a variety of subjects or just one (economics or nursing). These databases may provide invaluable research:

* *Academic Search Complete*
* *Britannica Academic Edition*
* *Business Source Complete*
* *ConsumerReports.org*
* *New York Times* (Current)
* *NewsBank*
* *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*

The instructor used the *Academic Search Complete* database to locate an article about controversies associated with vitamins and located one in which the author questions the benefits of vitamins for children. If you were a parent and gave your children vitamins on a daily basis, would you argue for or against their continued use?

Government Websites:

These websites furnish you with a wealth of credibly reported information, though you may need the assistance of reference librarians to identify government agencies related to particular products. Some examples of such websites are:

* The Library of Congress—a site with information about all sorts of products, one with details about the 341 motion pictures linked to Thomas Alva Edison
* The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)—a great site for information about the Hubble Space telescope and other products used in outer space (Granted, some products used in outer space are not as common as those found in most homes, but they are common in that most Americans have heard of them.)
* The Smithsonian Museum and Institute in Washington D.C.—a site with information about all sorts of products, including one devoted to the long history of the electric car
* The United States Environmental Protection Agency—a site with information about products related to the environment, such as pesticides
* The United States Food and Drug Administration—a site with information about food- and drug-related products (dietary supplements, for instance)

When some individuals think of the Hubble Space telescope, they may view it as a colossal waste of taxpayer money, whereas others may consider it as the exact opposite. Learn about this telescope, and present an argument in which you support or oppose its use by NASA.

Company Websites:

Each company has a website, and while they differ, they often provide invaluable information. The one for the Coca-Cola Company, for example, supplies historical information about the company and the beverage for which it is best known. The McDonald’s website provides information about products sold at McDonald’s franchises globally, such as a cup of buttered corn in South Africa.

The instructor consumes Coke Zero on a daily basis. After all, this beverage has no calories. Learn about this soda and others like it, and present the instructor with an argument that will influence him to continue his consumption of this soda or to avoid it.

Websites Related to an Inventor or Inventors:

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) presents a page devoted to an Inventor of the Week. One week, Clarence Birdseye was highlighted. You may not be too familiar with his name, but you are probably familiar with his products, especially around mealtimes. The Black Inventor Online Museum offers information about African-American inventors and their products. There is an entry for George Washington Carver and his research which led to the creation of many common products, most notably peanut butter.

On a recent visit to the MIT page devoted to an Inventor of the Week, the instructor learned that American Ruth Handler invented something in 1959 that many American girls have cherished ever since. However, some Americans loathe it. Learn about Handler’s invention, and then argue if it is something to cherish or loathe.

Other Websites:

There are a variety of websites related to a particular product or type of product. For instance, you can visit *The Edsel Pages* at Edsel.com for information about possibly the greatest automotive failure in American history, as well as for information about technology pioneered by the team working to create the Edsel and for thorough descriptions of each vehicle in the series. In addition, you can visit the *Foodtimeline* for information about food and beverages throughout history. You can learn about everything from apricots to zucchini and everything in between, including modern marshmallows and Mexican funnel cake.

Speaking of automobiles, learn about current trends in automotive technology, such as voice-assisted driving, and argue if it represents a reality in the second decade of the 21st century or a dream. Argue if it will make a car a success or failure (i.e. a vehicle such as the Edsel).

