

Three Common Pitfalls in Opinion Paragraph Writing

This document covers the following three common problems or mistakes found in student Opinion Paragraphs in Academic English IV:

- **Hidden Assumptions**
- **Moral Panics**
- **Structure Problems**

Hidden Assumptions

It's very easy to fall into making an argument based on "hidden assumptions." All you need to do is assume something about your topic or your solution without really recognizing you did it, or else to assume something, realize it, but try to hide the assumption. Usually we hide assumptions by skipping over them.

Here's a *simple* example: **"Of course I like kimchi, I'm Korean!"**

Here's a *more complex* example: **"Everyone should adopt cryptocurrency because it is the best way to free ourselves from the oppressive taxation of governments."**

Both of these claims rely on a hidden assumption:

- All Koreans like kimchi. (Not true.)
- Taxation is oppressive. (Is that true? Why is it true? Is it true of *all* government taxation?)

Sneaking assumptions into arguments is common in politics, in business, and even in daily life. We all do it. Sometimes this move relies on stereotypes that many people believe (even if they're not true). Sometimes, the move relies on the audience not knowing enough to recognize the hidden assumption, or relies on the audience not being too careful about noticing them. (This is especially common when the hidden assumption is one that people agree with.)

Since this is basically "cheating" it makes you less credible as a writer, and also makes it easy for anyone who catches the hidden assumption to dismiss your idea. Therefore, we avoid this!

Hidden assumptions are sometimes just someone's personal assumptions, so we have to be especially careful to examine our own assumptions as writers.

Moral Panics

A moral panic is an irrational response to change: people react negatively to some (often irrationally) perceived threat to society, often accelerated by media of some form.

Examples from outside Korea:	Examples from within Korea:
• Witch-hunts. (Many places.) • The “Gin Craze.” (U.K.) • “The Gold Standard.” (USA) • “Red Panic.” (US-allied democracies.) • “The Satanic Panic.” (English speaking world.) • “Illegal Immigrants.” (USA)	• Video game “addiction.” • Smart phone “addiction.” • Online comment abuse (and celebrity suicide). • Motorized kickboards. • Yemeni refugees in Jeju. • “Foreigner crime.”

Usually, moral panics develop around something “new” that older people struggle to understand. Panics over elements of popular culture and especially youth culture are common. Panics also sometimes arise related to minority groups by whom the majority group feels threatened.

Moral panics are accelerated by whatever media is available at the time. Often, in purposefully hidden ways, they are used to develop popular support for whatever benefits rich and powerful individuals or the rich and powerful class, the government, etc. In the old days, gossip and poetry and pamphlets were used. Today, newspapers, the internet, TV, and radio are used for this purpose, especially social media sites.

Typically, promoters of moral panics use statistics, but they are not honest in their use of them. (For example, citing the number of deaths due to motorized kickboards without comparing those numbers to the deaths involving other forms of transportation, or avoiding mention that most deaths involving motorized kickboards also involve cars of some type.)

Also, typically, the “threat” that a moral panic warns about is vaguely defined, if it’s defined at all.

Ways to avoid falling for moral panics:

- **Do your research.** Try to find original source material, and don’t take a reporter’s or friend’s word for it.
- **Question the data.** Even with data that is accurate, people can lie with statistics. Ask yourself what the people fueling the panic are arguing *for*, and who that benefits or suffers if they get what they want.
- **Research the topic in English.** You will have a much, much bigger international pool of data and information to rely on.
- **Place the burden of proof correctly.** People who make a claim need to prove it; we don’t need to disprove it.

Structure Problems

Make sure that you're doing what you're supposed to do in your **Paragraph**. While you might need to provide a little background information for the reader, in general in an Opinion Paragraph, your primary job is to suggest a policy or rule or system (a "solution to a problem") in your Topic Sentence, and use most of the paragraph to explain why YOUR proposed solution is THE BEST solution to this problem.

The Paragraph Skeleton therefore should look like this:

- **(Optional: Explanatory information)**

TOPIC SENTENCE: _____ should/must _____ for a number of reasons.

- **PRIMARY SUPPORTING SENTENCE 1:** The first reason that _____ should/must _____ is because _____.
 - **Secondary Supporting Sentences:** Examples, Evidence, and Explanation supporting this first reason.
- **PRIMARY SUPPORTING SENTENCE 2:** The next reason that _____ should/must _____ is because _____.
 - **Secondary Supporting Sentences:** Examples, Evidence, and Explanation supporting this first reason.
- **PRIMARY SUPPORTING SENTENCE 3:** The final and most important reason that _____ should/must _____ is because _____.
 - **Secondary Supporting Sentences:** Examples, Evidence, and Explanation supporting this first reason.
- **COUNTERARGUMENT/REFUTATION:** Some people might argue that _____, but _____.

CONCLUDING SENTENCE: For all of these reasons, _____ should/must _____.

If any basic background information is necessary, it usually is explained before or right after the **Topic Sentence**, or it is included as part of the Secondary Supporting Sentences.

Remember, your job is to convince us that YOUR proposed policy is the BEST SOLUTION for a given problem. This means your Primary Supporting Sentences MUST EXPLAIN THREE REASONS WHY it is the best solution.