1. Contention(s)

Definition: A statement communicating the author's main point of view: what the writer or writers want you to agree with. The contention is the broadest possible argument, and should be present throughout the whole of the text. All of the arguments presented in the text will support the overall contention.

Be aware: If there is more than one article there might be more than one main contention. This allows you to establish a contrast. Look to determine if the contention in a single article is consistent. Establish if the supporting graphics or headlines support or compete with the contention being put forward.

2. Supporting arguments

Definition: Supporting arguments are the two or three main reasons used to justify the overall contention. These supporting points do not permeate the entire text, but are the main reasons given for the overall argument.

Example: If the article is about allowing girls to play in the local football team, supporting arguments might be:

- The girls (how they are depicted; brave or reckless and irresponsible)
- The parents of the teenagers (how they are depicted - supportive)
- The football club (how they are depicted – out of date or forward thinking)

Be aware: The friction between the points of view will generate the possibility of establishing who has the better argument and where it is most effective.

3. Writer's position

Definition: You need to identify who the writer or writers are and how this influences their views in the debate. This involves their job and political orientation. It may also involve their race, gender, religion, sexuality etc. although you should be careful to refer to these characteristics only if the author makes it clear that he has had an influence on the argument.

Example: Devout Catholics would oppose legalizing abortion. Their faith is influencing their views. By way of contrast, a feminist might be expected to support a woman’s right to choose. The orientation of these individuals is influencing the stance taken.

Be aware: Your task is not to say if the writer’s point of view is correct or incorrect. You are there to establish how effectively the writer has communicated a point of view. Have the techniques employed been effective and appropriate given the topic and nature of the discussion.

4. Tone

Definition: Tone refers to the voice or attitude of the writer. When determining tone, look at what is stated but how it is stated. To identify the tone of a piece, think about how the piece made you feel as a reader and what impressions are generated about the author. Sample list of tone words (of course, there are plenty more):

1. Angry
2. Sarcastic
3. Sweet
4. Harsh
5. Cheerful
6. Pleasant
7. Sharp
8. Disgusted
9. Haughty
10. Nothing
11. Melancholic
12. Depressed
13. Ecstatic
14. Agitated
15. Sympathetic
16. Seductive
17. Hollow
18. Humorous
19. Passive
20. Persuasive
21. Afraid
22. Tired
23. Happy
24. Disappointed
25. Dejected
26. Excited
27. Desperate
28. Superficial
29. Sad
30. Artificial
31. Authoritative
32. Surprised
33. Ironic
34. Content
35. Hurt
36. Confused
37. Questioning
38. Inquisitive
39. Arrogant
40. Condescending
41. Coarse
42. Romantic
43. Upset
44. Paranoid
45. Pleading
46. Numb
47. Cynical
48. facetious
49. Biting
50. Sensitive
51. Loving
52. Scornful
53. Enthusiastic
54. Sweaty
55. Dreamy
56. Lighthearted
57. Humble
58. Instructional
59. Disinterested
60. Uninterested
61. Cheery
62. Manipulative
63. Contradictory
64. Aggravated
65. Serious
66. Calm
67. Proud
68. Spasmodic
69. Encouraging
70. Consulting
71. Friendly
72. Loud
73. Brush
74. Apologetic
75. Appreciative
76. Joyful
77. Miserable
78. Vibrant

Examples:

a) Outraged, angry: This is the most ridiculous proposal I have ever heard! Why should my tax-payer dollars go towards supporting this scheme?

b) Sarcastic: I’m sure that you didn’t mean to hurt him, after all, you did hit him over the head with a bottle while he wasn’t looking. Everyone can see how that would be deemed an accident.

c) Hurt, surprised, dejected: How could you even think I would suggest that? You know I love the Richmond Football Team. I would never ridicule their performance.

Be aware: Establishing the tone provides the general umbrella under which ideas can be grouped. It’s a way of structuring your response. A single writer may transition between several tones or we can contrast the different tones of multiple writers.

5. Audience

Definition: The intended audience of a text is the people the author is targeting. Think about who the author is trying to reach with their message. To identify the audience, think about:

- Whether anyone is being directly targeted: For instance, is the text written or presented to a particular person or persons? Does the text appear in a publication for a specific group of people (such as retirees, movie goers, or fashion devotees)?

- The content: Who is influenced by the content of the article? Whose interests are represented, or whose opinion does the author seek to challenge?

- The tone and techniques used: Who would react to the tone? Are the techniques markers of a particular group – “grouchy dude”? What sort of people would respond to them? Who would be alienated?

Be aware: The audience may well determine the approach and style taken by the writer/speaker. A large public audience will require different techniques and approaches to an individual reading a paper over a morning cup of coffee.