

ARGUMENTS

WORKSHEET 1: DEVELOPING A CONTENTION

As we saw in the lesson, ***all arguments need a contention***. The contention is the proposition (or key idea) that you are trying to get people to accept. It is a bit like a banner, or headline, or title. Without it, the argument is just lots of words about a subject. The contention organises the words into a central idea. **Here's an example:**

Some people are cruel to animals. They tie their dogs up on chains and leave them. They hit them if they're "naughty". They even abandon them once they've got bored.

Is any of this a contention? No! It's just the raw material of the argument. However, by thinking about what the key theme is it's possible to come up with a contention, like:

People should be kind to animals.

Let's outlaw cruelty to animals.

You notice that both of these statements – they are always statements – propose something. It is a call to action. Let's get in some practice now.

ACTIVITY 1

Choose one of the following subjects. Have a think about it, and make a few simple notes. Now develop a **contention** for it.

- (1) The internet – friend or foe?
- (2) Renewable energy – the options and what to do.
- (3) Co-ed schools or single sex schools – which is better?
- (4) Australians are obsessed with sport – good or bad?

ACTIVITY 2

- (1) Open up a newspaper to the "Opinion" or Editorial page, or find someone who writes a "Column" (personal opinion). There is bound to be an argument there. It may even be spelled out in the headline. What is the argument's contention?
- (2) Think about something you feel really strongly about. It might be a political thing, or something about how children are raised, or education. Make some simple notes, outlining the main ideas. Now – create a contention for an argument you might write!