

Planning and Argument: Depth over Breadth

Planning Your Argument: An Example

To understand how a student may focus on depth over breadth, let's look at how one might approach the following essay question:

"The UK government should implement a wealth tax on capital holdings. Discuss." (2000 words)

1. Argumentation Plan: Breadth

The student agrees with the statement in the question and they have created a first-draft essay plan:



Figure 1: A basic plan for a broad but shallow argument

Analysis
There are, however, problems with this plan: • By focusing on five supporting arguments, the student will probably not be able to develop any of them in sufficient detail. Given that an introduction and conclusion could together make up around 15% to 20% of the word count, they will have 1600 words for their main body. That means they will have slightly more than 300 words to describe each point and develop it. • The student has not included any counter-arguments within the plan above, meaning there will be no room for discussion.

- It is not clear that the supporting claims are different from one another. Overlapping supporting claims is a sure way of creating a confusing argument. For example, "addressing inequality" (Point 1) appears to be a broad category of the other four points, but is being handled as a separate point.

2. Argument Plan: Depth

Through reading and evaluating sources, the student determines that two supporting arguments carry more value than the others and adjusts the plan accordingly. Below is a more developed argument, where each supporting argument is supported itself by evidence and/or examples and/or the opinions of other authors:

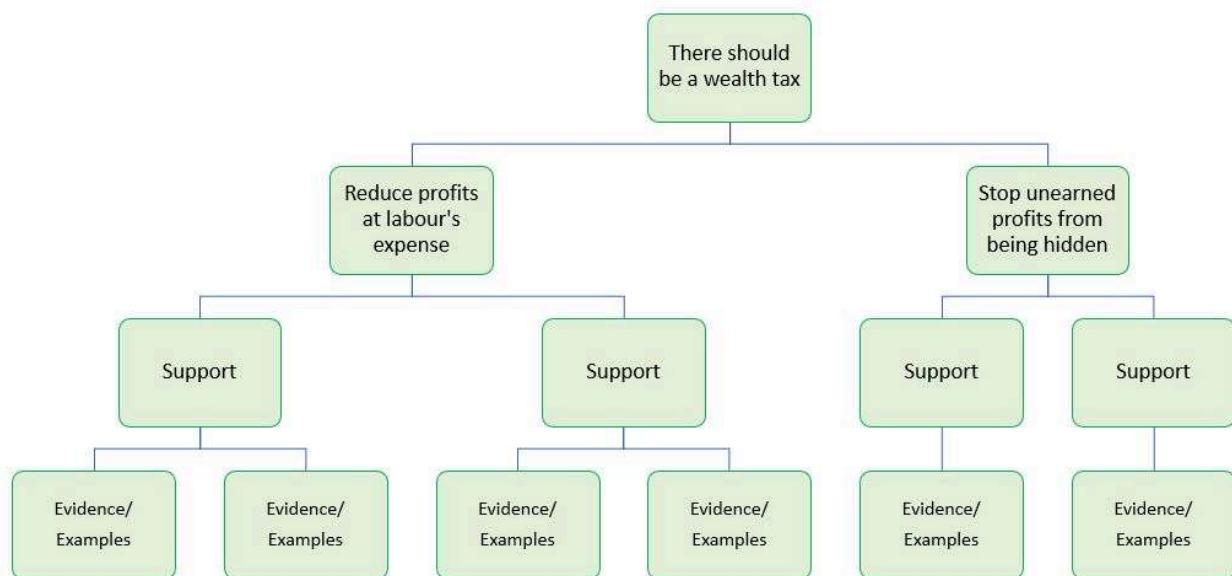


Figure 2: A basic plan for one side of a narrow but deep argument

To complete their argument plan, the student opts to also plan out how they may introduce alternative positions (or counter-arguments) into their response:

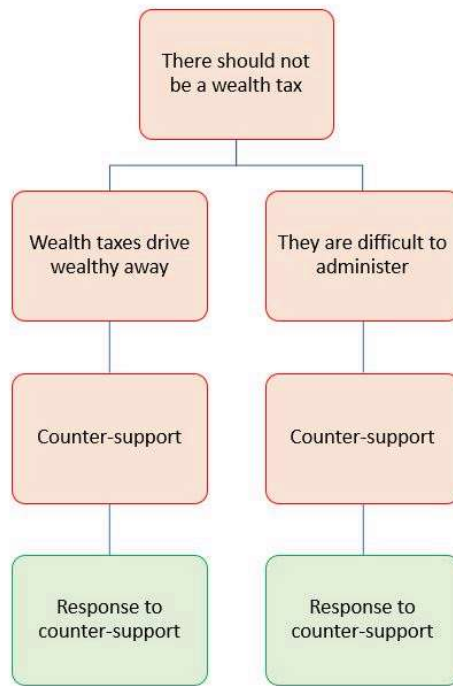


Figure 3: A basic plan for a second side of a narrow but deep argument (Red represents views counter to the writer's own)

Analysis

Using their basic argument plan (Figure 2), and their counter-argument plan (Figure 3), the student can go on to craft a more detailed essay outline where all the details are represented.