How to Develop an Argument
The Goal: An Argument Summary

• Your argument summary will be 2-3 page statement of the argument in your paper
  – Your main points with citations
  – The summary is NOT:
    • a description of the topic
    • an outline
    • a proposal
    • an overview of the issues
Developing an Argument

• The literature you read will address a specific research question
  – By what mechanism does something occur?
  – Why does something occur?
  – Who is something most likely to occur to?
  – What is an effective intervention for X?

• Your argument will be your response to this question given your knowledge of the relevant literature(s)
Examples

• **Research question**
  – Language abilities of the great apes

• **Possible topics for arguments**
  – Spontaneity in apes use of language
  – Methodology in language studies with apes
  – Implications of ape language studies

• **Possible approaches to making an argument**
  – Definitions for language use in apes have been too lenient
  – Researcher have made inappropriate assumptions in choosing their methods
  – Other species have displayed similar, but overlooked, language abilities
Exercise: Developing Arguments

• Research question 1
  – Effectiveness of Treatment X?
  – Possible arguments?

• Research question 2:
  – The degree to which Theory A accounts for a particular phenomenon?
  – Possible arguments?
Developing Arguments (cont’d)

• Research question 3:
  – Unanswered questions about Phenomenon A?
  – Possible arguments?

• Research question 4:
  – Risk factors for Syndrome X?
  – Possible arguments?
Organizing Evidence

• Give yourself time to know and think about the literature

• Outline
  – As you write your paper, outline headings become the **headings and subheadings** of your paper

• Follow the “open bow-tie” strategy
  – Evidence should start broad and get more focused as you systematically support your thesis
  – Implications should start focused and get as broad as your evidence allows (but do not go beyond your data!)
Use of the Literature

• Use the literature to support your argument
  – Be a critical consumer (evaluate what you read)
    • What do you need to evaluate?
    • What makes evidence strong or weak?
  – Integrate what you read in a way that supports your argument, but also addresses counterarguments

• Ultimately, your argument should be a reflection of your view of what the literature says

• Your voice should be heard, not the voices of the authors you have read
  – Don’t confuse this with using the pronoun “I”