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Building a good argument

Alexandra Bulat
PhD Researcher, UCL
AcademiaOne Course Director
Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy



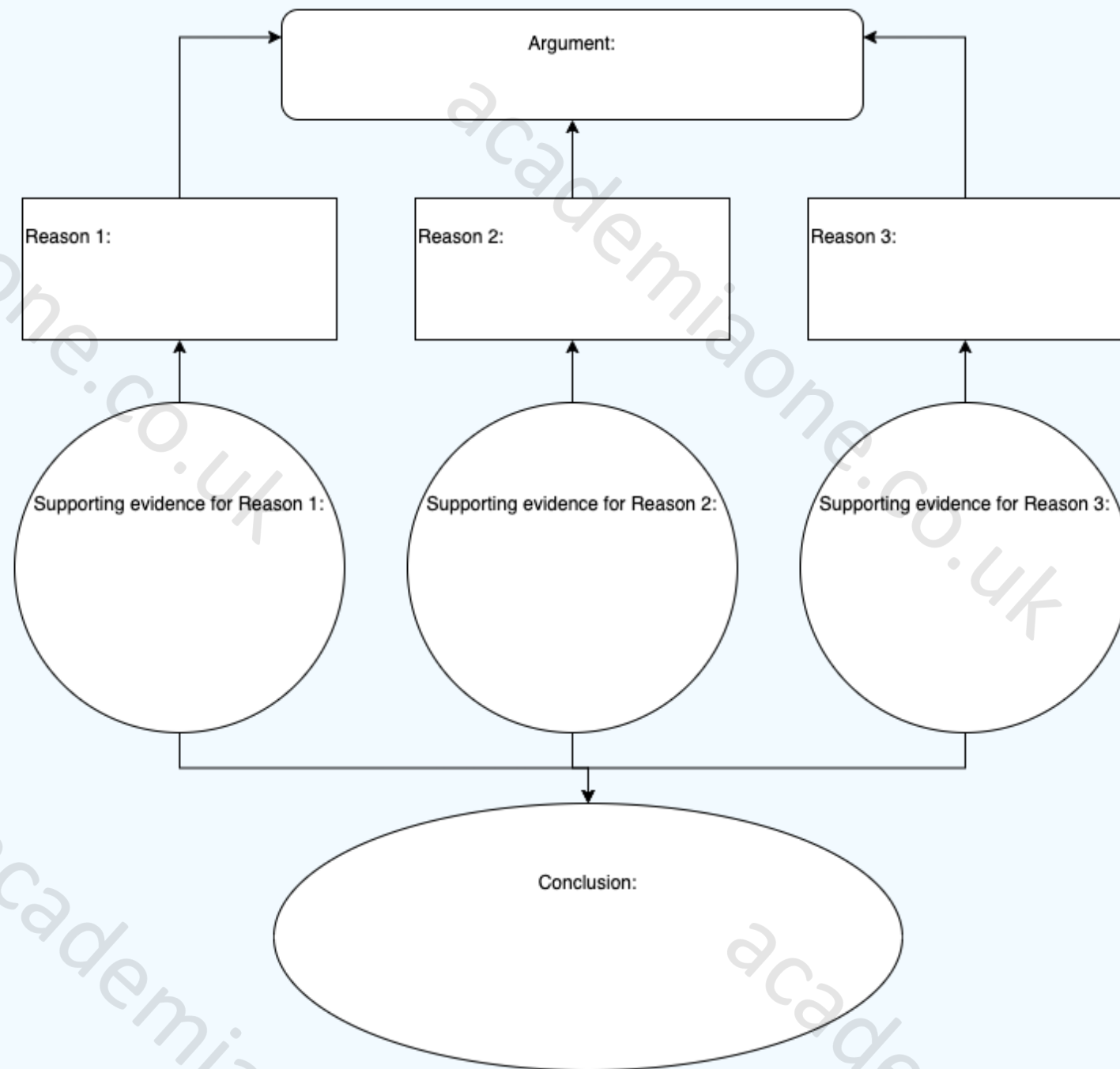
IN THIS SEMINAR...

KEY LEARNING OUTCOME: IMPROVING YOUR ESSAY ARGUMENTATION & ARGUMENT STRUCTURING SKILLS

- group reflections on the home exercise & feedback on 3 examples from you
- theory: what makes a good argument? Top tips for writing up arguments.
- Interactive exercises:
 - Argument mapping using MINDMUP
 - Live marking the argument of a short essay
- Questions and discussion

Argument outline

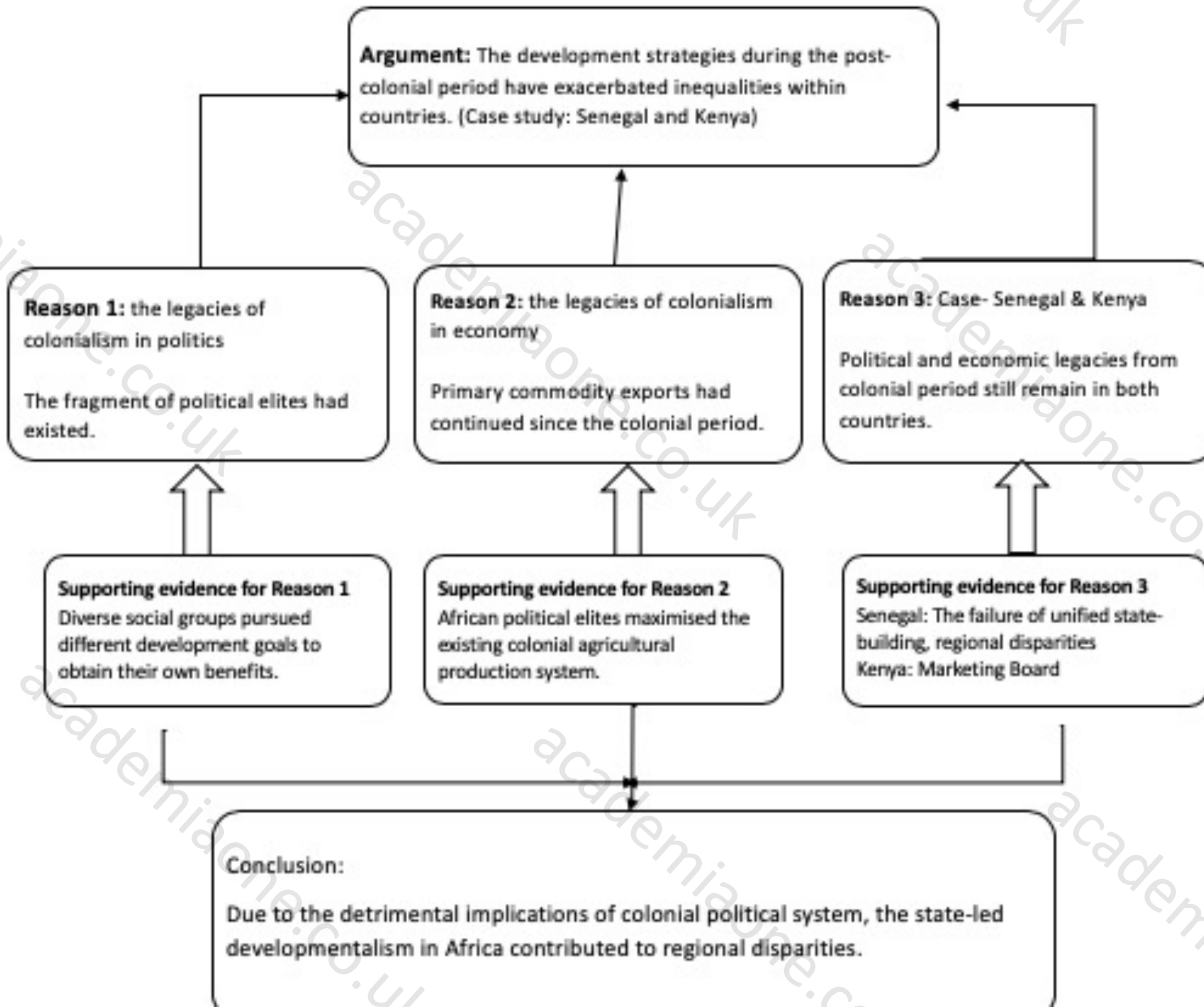
Essay question:



Home exercise - argument building

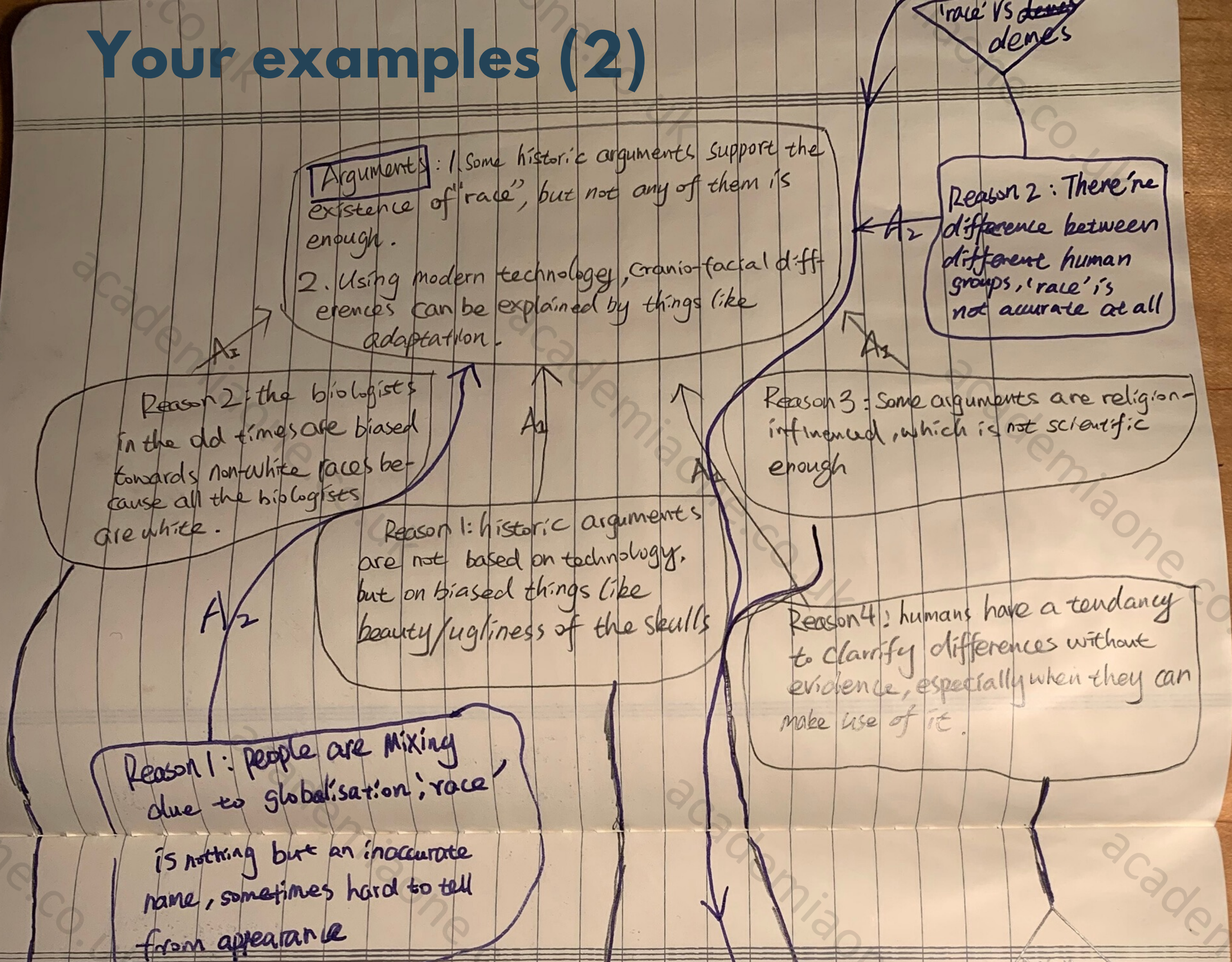
- How do you usually approach the task of building an essay argument? What are the key steps that you usually take?
- Have you found the home exercise helpful to refine your arguments?
- Was the diagram template easy to follow? What additions did you feel were needed for the model? Did any of the content overlap from one box in the diagram to another?
- Has the process of doing the exercise changed in any way your argument?

Essay question: Have development strategies in post-colonial Africa mitigated or exacerbated inequalities within countries? Explain your answer. [Case references are compulsory]



Your examples (1)

Your examples (2)



What makes a good academic argument?

1 st (85-100)	<p>Knowledge and Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Exceptional and/or outstanding comprehension of the implications of the question and sophisticated, nuanced and critical understanding of the theoretical & methodological issues not only pertaining to the subject, but to the field as a whole○ Technical vocabulary, where appropriate: accurate and exceptionally sophisticated usage <p>Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ A critical, analytical and sophisticated argument that is logically structured and extremely well-supported with elements of originality○ Outstanding evidence throughout of independent thought and ability to 'see beyond the question'○ Evidence of reading exceptionally widely beyond the prescribed reading list and creative use of evidence to enhance the overall argument; demonstrates the ability to synthesise appropriate principles by reference, where appropriate, to primary sources and knowledge at the forefront of the discipline. <p>Presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Exceptionally well presented: no grammatical or spelling errors; written in a fluent and engaging style; exemplary referencing and bibliographic formatting○ Level comparable to that expected at Level M and may even be close to publishable standard.
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What makes a good academic argument?

<p>1st (70-85)</p>	<p>Knowledge and Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Excellent comprehension of the implications of the question and critical understanding of the theoretical & methodological issues○ Technical vocabulary, where appropriate: accurate and sophisticated usage <p>Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ A critical, analytical and sophisticated argument that is logically structured and well-supported○ Evidence of independent thought and ability to 'see beyond the question'○ Evidence of reading widely beyond the prescribed reading list and creative use of evidence to enhance the overall argument; demonstrates the ability to synthesise appropriate principles by reference, where appropriate, to primary sources and perhaps some knowledge at the forefront of the discipline <p>Presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Extremely well presented: minimal grammatical or spelling errors if any; written in a fluent and engaging style; exemplary referencing and bibliographic formatting.
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All good arguments are...

CLEAR FROM THE START

Is the argument clear from the introduction? Does the introduction outline how are you going to structure this argument and what types of evidence will you use to support it? Do you have a thesis statement?

EASY TO FOLLOW THROUGHOUT THE ESSAY

The argument stated in your introduction has to be followed throughout the essay and evaluated in the conclusion. All paragraphs have to fit together like a puzzle in building the overarching argument.

BASED ON SOLID EVIDENCE

An argument is expressing a point of view which is supported by evidence. A good argument avoids logical fallacies. Are you using reasoning or evidence, or asserting your personal views only as part of your argument premises? Are you judging evidence based on its substance and content, rather than based on who is making these claims?

CONVINCING FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

Writing has many aims. For example, some parts of your writing will describe a problem, others will be more analytical. The aim of the argument is to convince the reader that 1. you answered the question(s) and 2. you have an original angle to the topic.

Overall essay cohesion - have a good thesis statement

- A thesis statement usually appears in the form of one sentence early in the essay.
- The thesis statement is the main idea of your essay, which you will then support through argumentation.
- It takes a position – it does not present two perspectives as having equal weight.
- After doing critical reading on the topic, start with a *working thesis statement*.
- Think critically about your working thesis statement:
 - *Did I answer my question?*
 - *Is there relevance in my thesis?*
 - *Is my thesis statement too broad?*
 - *Does the body of the essay support the thesis statement? Are there any paragraphs or sections that diverge from the argumentation supporting the thesis statement?*
 - *Have I thought critically about my assumptions?*

Can you give some examples of thesis statements?

Paragraph cohesion - follow the argument throughout the essay

INTRODUCTION

- Include your final thesis statement.
- Contextualise your argument
- Show how you will **answer the research/essay question** through the **argument**

BODY

- Detail on each part of the argument and the evidence
- The body has to demonstrate argument cohesion and flow
- Smoothen the transitions between paragraphs -make it enjoyable to read for the marker!
- Think about word choice for transitions - addition, concession, causation, summation -, but do use them with moderation and only when they add value to the sentence.

CONCLUSION

- Was the argument supported by the body of the essay?
- Remind the marker what your argument was.
- Demonstrate how you supported the argument threads with evidence in order to reach the conclusion.
- Point at any limitations in your argument, e.g. this could be due to data limitations or perhaps not including or detailing certain possible perspectives & explaining why.

Claim

- The conclusion or argument being made.

Grounds

- The data and facts offered to support the claim.

Warrant

- Logically connects the grounds to the claim.

Backing

- Support the warrant.

Qualifiers

- Make a statement about the strength of the claim.

Rebuttal

- Exception to the claim.

**Categorical,
chronological,
mediative...**
**Argument types
depend on your
question and
your writing
aims**

Example: Toulmin type argument (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

LIVE DEMO - MAPPING YOUR ARGUMENT USING MINDMUP

- MINDMUP is a free software you can use for brainstorming in a visual way, including for planning your argument!
- A good strategy to develop your argumentation skills is to think about controversial topics and mind map possible arguments.
- Let's consider the following hypothetical essay question: "Is globalisation a force for good?"

LIVE ESSAY MARKING - HOW MARKERS ASSESS YOUR ARGUMENT

- Essay a Philosophy student
- Question: "Explain and assess functionalism."
- 2,500 words



QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION



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Next week

Seminar 5: Topic sentences and paragraphing

An exercise on topic sentences will be sent via email and discussed in the seminar.
Home exercises will be emailed to you every Monday morning - make sure to check your inbox before the Thursday class.