Argument Builder

Complete this before drafting. An argument that exists in the writer's mind still needs to be constructed on the page — step by step, in a form the reader can follow.

1 — THE CLAIM

State the argument in one sentence. Not the subject — what the piece says about the subject.

If you cannot state it in one sentence, you do not yet have an argument. Return to the notes.

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Can this statement be disagreed with?

If not, it is a subject statement, not an argument. Revise until it can be contested.

2 — THE EVIDENCE OR REASONING

What supports the claim? List the key moves — examples, data, or logical steps that demonstrate rather than assert it.

1.

_____

2.

_____

3.

_____

Is this evidence or reasoning — or assertion?

Assertion states the claim again. Evidence and reasoning demonstrate why it is true.

3 — THE COMPLICATION

A claim without complication is a claim that has not been tested.

What is the strongest objection to this argument?

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How does the argument survive it?

Not by dismissing the objection — by addressing it. If it cannot be addressed, the argument needs revising.

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4 — THE CONCLUSION

The claim as it now stands — having been supported and tested. More precise than the opening claim.

Restate the argument, now with the evidence and complication behind it:

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Is this more precise than the claim in Section 1?

If it is identical, the piece has not done enough work. The conclusion should reflect what the argument has established.
