This is a sample Prewriting 2. Look through it and think about how this student approaches it and then do this thinking about adding your position and point of view into your informative essay to turn it into an argument.

Here's quick access to some of the handouts covering argumentative writing:

- Chapter 8 of A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success in First-Year Writing: Making Academic Arguments
- Moving from Informative to Argumentative Theses
- Source Integration Techniques
- List of Evaluative Language Terms
- Phrases for Introducing Counterarguments
- Using Personal Experience in Academic Arguments: A Guide for Freshman Composition Students
- Argument Essay Rubric

ENGL 1301: Argument Essay

Prewriting #2: From Informative to Argumentative—Developing Your Position & Planning Your Re-Draft

Part A: Analyzing Your Topic

1. What are the main perspectives or positions on your topic?

There are a few different takes on data brokers: (1) Some people think they're helpful because they make ads more personalized and help businesses run better; (2) Others think data brokers are a huge privacy problem because they collect and sell our personal info without really asking us; (3) Some people are in the middle—they think we need some rules but not too many; (4) And then there are people who think the current privacy laws we have aren't strong enough to actually protect us.

2. Which perspective do you find most compelling and why?

I think the privacy problem argument makes the most sense. The evidence really shows that companies are collecting tons of information about us without us knowing about it, and then they use it in ways that can actually hurt us—like affecting whether we get a job or a loan. The fact that we have basically no control over our own information just seems wrong to me.

3. What specific evidence from your sources supports this perspective?

• The FTC report talks about how data brokers get information from all kinds of places we don't even think about
• Zuboff's book shows that literally everything we do online—even just scrolling—gets tracked and turned into money for companies
• The ProPublica investigation found that data brokers are helping companies decide who gets loans and jobs
• The New York Times article showed how our data gets used to manipulate us politically
• Groups like the EFF are pushing for new laws like California's CCPA, which shows people know the current system isn't working

4. What counterarguments exist, and how might you address them?

People who defend data brokers say they give us useful stuff like personalized ads and help businesses work better. My response: Sure, personalized ads can be helpful sometimes, but the cost is way too high. We're losing our privacy, we can be discriminated against, and we can be manipulated—all without really having a choice in the matter. People should get to decide if they want to be part of this system, and right now we can't really say no.

5. Complete this statement:

After synthesizing multiple perspectives on **how data brokers collect and use our personal information**, *I believe that* **data brokers need to be heavily regulated and should have to get our clear permission before collecting our personal information** *because* **they collect data without us knowing, they use that data in ways that can hurt our chances at jobs and loans, and they operate in secret without anyone really checking what they're doing**.

Part B: Developing Your Argumentative Thesis

Your Thesis Transformation:

Original informative thesis: By looking at reports from government agencies, experts, and news outlets, we can better understand how data brokers work, why their actions matter, and what people are doing to stop the misuse of personal information.

New argumentative thesis: While data brokers say they make our online experience better through personalized ads, the data broker industry needs serious federal regulation because these companies collect our personal information without really asking us, use that information in ways that can hurt our job and loan opportunities, and operate with way too much secrecy for a democratic society.

Thesis Strength Check. Does your new thesis:

☑ Yes ☐ No Take a clear position?

☑ Yes ☐ No Provide specific reasons that will structure your argument?

☑ Yes ☐ No Address complexity (acknowledge counterarguments)?

☑ Yes ☐ No Use precise language?

Part C: Restructuring Your Essay Map

Introduction:

Hook: Every time you unlock your phone, click on a website, or scan your loyalty card at the grocery store, you're basically giving away little pieces of information about yourself. These digital breadcrumbs tell a story about who you are—but you're not the one telling it. Companies you've never heard of, called data brokers, are collecting these pieces, putting them together into detailed profiles about you, and then selling your life story to whoever will pay for it.

Background: The data broker industry mostly works in the shadows, collecting information from tons of different sources and making detailed profiles on millions of people. Some people say this helps businesses, but more and more evidence shows it causes real problems—from unfair lending and hiring to political manipulation. The whole debate comes down to one big question: should companies be allowed to make money off our personal information without us really knowing about it or agreeing to it?

Thesis: While data brokers say they make our online experience better through personalized ads, the data broker industry needs serious federal regulation because these companies collect our personal information without really asking us, use that information in ways that can hurt our job and loan opportunities, and operate with way too much secrecy for a democratic society.

Body Paragraph 1: Data brokers collect info without really asking us

Topic sentence: The biggest problem with data brokers is that they collect huge amounts of personal information from places most people don't even know about, and they make profiles on us without getting real permission.

Evidence from source(s): The FTC report shows that data brokers get information from "public records, online shopping, loyalty cards at grocery stores, and social media." Zuboff talks about how "even the small things we do online—like scrolling through a page or clicking a button—are tracked and used to make these profiles" (p. 134). She calls this "surveillance capitalism," which is basically when our everyday actions become something companies can make money from.

Analysis connecting evidence to your claim: This shows that "consent" doesn't really mean anything in the current system. Yeah, we technically agree to terms of service, but nobody actually understands how much data is being collected, how it's being combined from different sources, or who it's being shared with. The tracking just happens automatically and invisibly—scrolling and clicking aren't us deciding to share our data, but that's how companies treat it. That's not real consent.

Concluding sentence: When companies collect information in ways we can't see and make profiles without clearly asking us, they're violating our basic privacy rights—and that's a problem that needs regulation to fix.

Body Paragraph 2: Data brokers cause real harm in people's lives

Topic sentence: It's not just about the idea of privacy—data brokers actually cause real problems in people's lives by helping companies discriminate in hiring, loans, and other important decisions.

Evidence from source(s): ProPublica found that "data brokers also help businesses make decisions about things like loans, insurance, or hiring people." They give a scary example: "someone might be turned down for a job or a loan based on data they don't even know was collected." These aren't just things that might happen—these are actual cases where data broker information messed up people's lives.

Analysis connecting evidence to your claim: This shows that data brokers aren't just collecting information—they're actually part of systems that can take opportunities away from people based on hidden profiles. When someone loses a job opportunity or gets rejected for a loan because of data they didn't even know existed and can't fight back against, that's just not fair. These practices can make existing inequalities worse and create new types of discrimination based on what algorithms think about our data.

Concluding sentence: The real economic and social damage caused by unregulated data brokers makes this more than just a privacy issue—it's about basic fairness and equal opportunities.

Body Paragraph 3: Data brokers are a threat to democracy

Topic sentence: Maybe the scariest thing is that data brokers make it possible for political campaigns to manipulate voters with crazy precision by using psychological profiles of individual people.

Evidence from source(s): The New York Times investigation showed that "political groups use this data to send very specific messages to voters based on their personality, fears, or beliefs." Thompson calls this the "weaponization" of personal data—basically, information that was collected for selling stuff gets used to influence how people vote.

Analysis connecting evidence to your claim: When political campaigns can use detailed profiles to exploit people's individual fears and weaknesses, democracy stops working the way it should. Voters aren't all looking at the same information and making their own decisions—instead, they're being individually targeted with messages designed to push their specific buttons. This changes elections from being about collective decision-making into exercises in mass manipulation. The fact that this is even possible because of data collected by shadowy brokers with no real oversight shows exactly why we need regulation to protect democracy itself.

Concluding sentence: Using data broker information to manipulate voters isn't just bad for individual privacy—it's a genuine threat to democracy, which makes regulation absolutely necessary.

Counterargument Paragraph

Acknowledgment of opposing view: People who defend data brokers argue that these companies provide valuable services for both regular people and businesses. They say data collection lets companies show us ads for stuff we actually want, and it makes online services work better—plus a lot of them are free because of advertising.

Evidence for this view: It's true that personalized recommendations can be helpful—like when Netflix suggests shows you might like, or when online stores show you products you're interested in. A lot of websites and apps we use every day are free specifically because ad money (powered by data collection) pays for them. From this angle, data brokers are just helping a system that works pretty well for most people.

Refutation/response: But this argument ignores the main problem: choice. The current system doesn't ask people if they want to make this trade; it just assumes we're okay with it through confusing terms of service and invisible tracking. Plus, the benefits (slightly better ads, free services) don't come close to matching the problems (discrimination in jobs and loans, political manipulation, complete loss of privacy). Regulation doesn't mean getting rid of all data collection—it means creating a system where people actually choose to participate, understand what they're giving up, and have real protection against misuse.

Transition back to your position: Instead of accepting a false choice between total surveillance or no personalization, we should demand a regulated system that respects both innovation and basic rights.

Conclusion

Restatement of thesis (in fresh language): The way data brokers currently work—collecting information without real permission, enabling discrimination, and helping political manipulation—demands strong federal regulation to protect individual rights and democracy.

Summary of main points: As I've shown, data brokers work through invisible collection methods that make true consent impossible, their data gets used to make decisions that hurt people's economic opportunities, and their services allow the manipulation of democratic processes. While the industry says it provides valuable services, those benefits don't justify the current free-for-all with personal information.

Broader significance/implications: The push for regulation, like California's CCPA and advocacy from groups like the EFF, shows that more and more people recognize that privacy isn't just a personal preference—it's a basic right in our digital world. How we handle this issue will shape what kind of society we become: one where individuals keep control over their own information, or one where corporations know everything about us and can use it however they want.

Compelling final thought: People always say that data is the new oil—a valuable resource that powers the digital economy. But there's a huge difference: oil doesn't belong to anyone until it gets pulled out of the ground. Your data already belongs to you. The question isn't whether data is valuable—it's who gets to decide how that value gets used, and whether you'll have any say in it.

Part D: Identifying Additional Sources

(Note: If your essay already has the minimum required sources, additional sources aren't strictly necessary.)

Source #3 (Optional):

Type of source needed: Research study or legal analysis about data privacy laws

Specific information this source should provide: Comparison of privacy laws (like GDPR in Europe vs. U.S. laws) or proof that stronger data privacy laws actually work better

Keywords for finding this source: "GDPR effectiveness," "data privacy regulation comparison," "privacy law outcomes," "consumer data protection Europe"

Source #4 (Optional):

Type of source needed: Recent news article or investigation

Specific information this source should provide: Current examples of data broker problems or misuse, especially recent cases from 2023-2024 that show the issue is ongoing and getting worse

Keywords for finding this source: "data broker scandal 2024," "personal data leak," "data broker investigation," "privacy violation lawsuit"