# The advanced discussion book
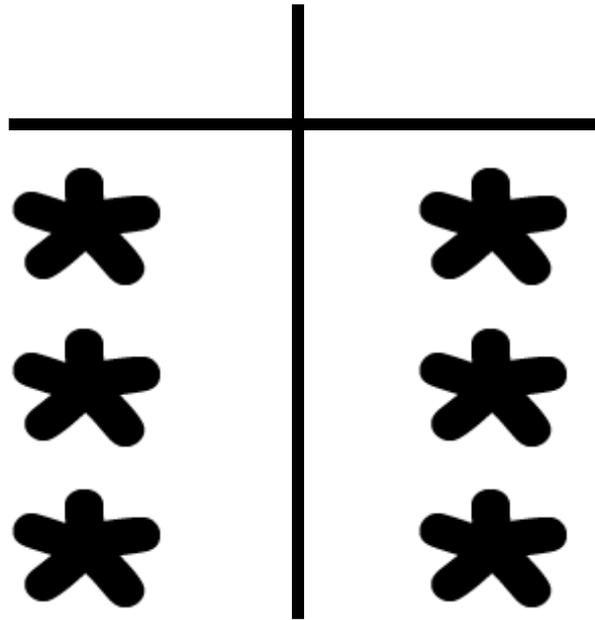
revised

*** | ***

## Sue Palmer

# Discussion text

## presents a balanced argument

i.e. the case **for** and **against** a particular point of view (as in a **debate**).

leaflet or article
giving balanced
accounts of an issue

newspaper
editorial

essay
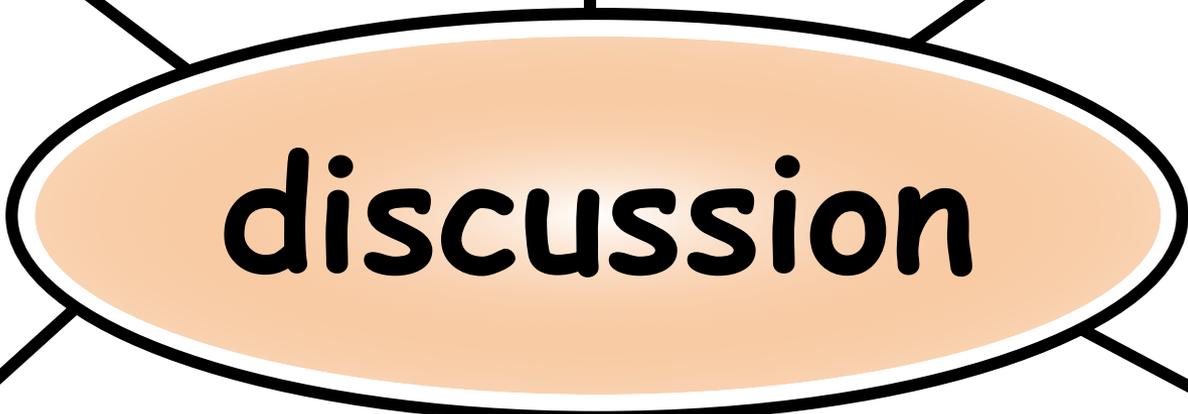
# discussion

write-up of a
debate

non-fiction
book on an
"issue"

(e.g. global warming)

exam answer in
secondary school

# Discussion text    needs

**Purpose**

- to explain the **issue** being debated

- to state **both sides** clearly and fairly

- to help the reader draw **conclusions** based on **evidence**.

The **genre** of text can also affect the purpose.

- **a clear opening statement** of the **issue**
(including definitions of any key words)

- the **arguments** and **supporting evidence** set out clearly

- **layout/language** helping readers **follow the arguments**
(e.g. each paragraph begins with a topic sentence)

- **conclusion** summing up the debate
(and perhaps giving a reasoned opinion)

# Discussion writing

**Audience**

- think about the audience for the **genre**

- how much do you know about them (age, interests, prior knowledge)?

Use what you know about your audience to decide

- how much **background detail** is needed

- appropriate level of **formality**.

If the text is an essay, the audience (marker) wants to know how well you understand the issue
→ be **clear** and **thorough**.

**Where should the text sit along these continua?**

informal ← – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – → formal

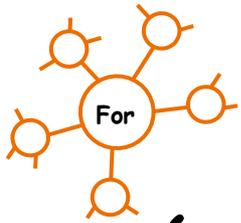personal ← – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – → impersonal

The position on each continuum may be different. Impersonal texts are sometimes written informally, and personal texts may be formal.

# Planning discussion writing
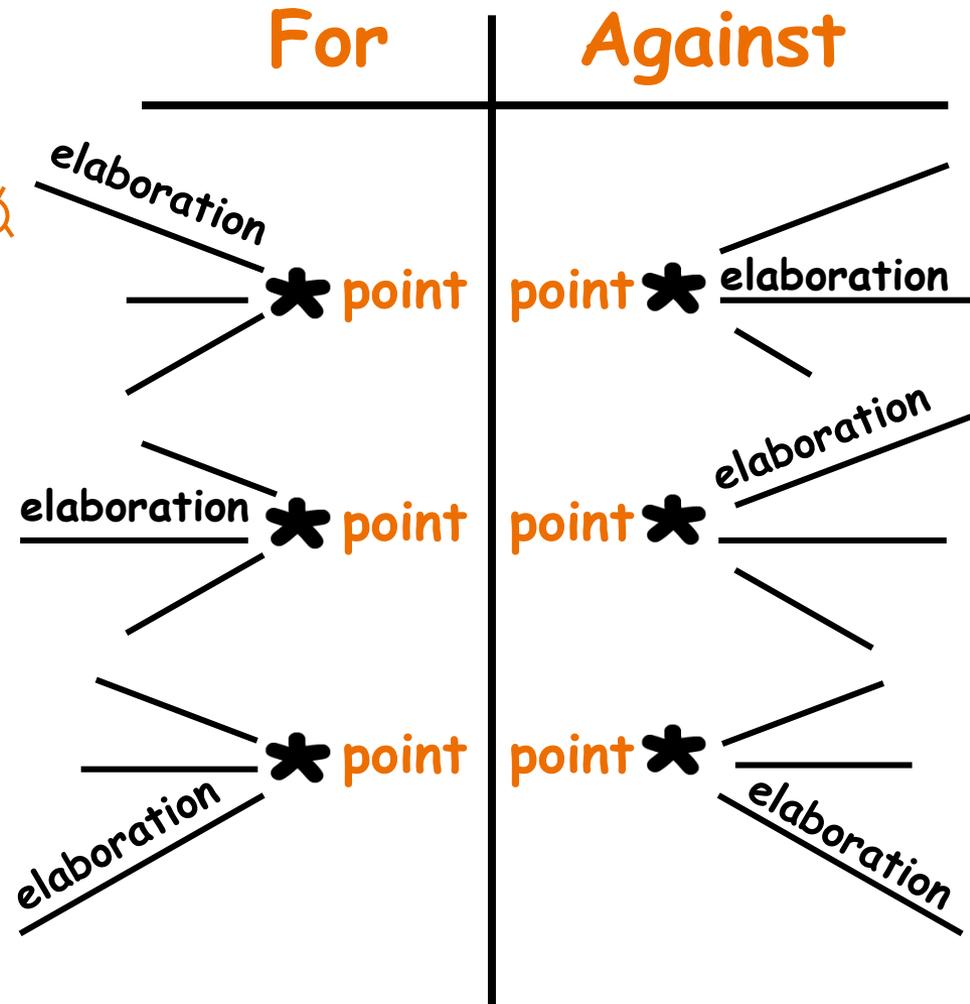
**BRAINSTORM** your ideas, perhaps on two spidergrams (one for each side).

For

Against

**ORGANISE** into arguments each side

- Use a bullet point for each main point.

- On the prongs note any elaboration.

For          Against

elaboration
✱ point     point ✱ elaboration

elaboration ✱ point     point ✱ elaboration

✱ point     point ✱
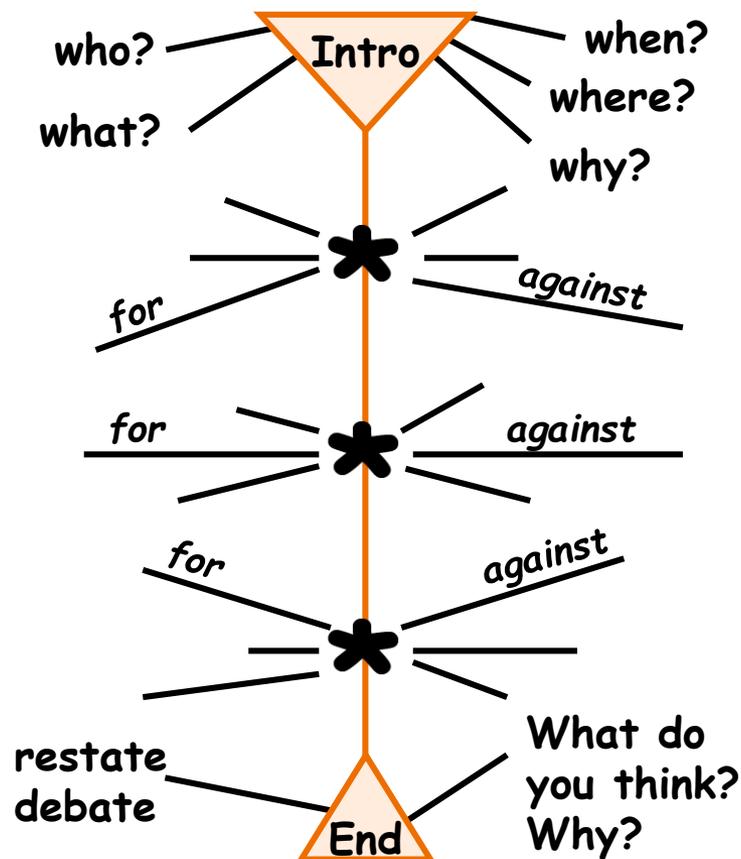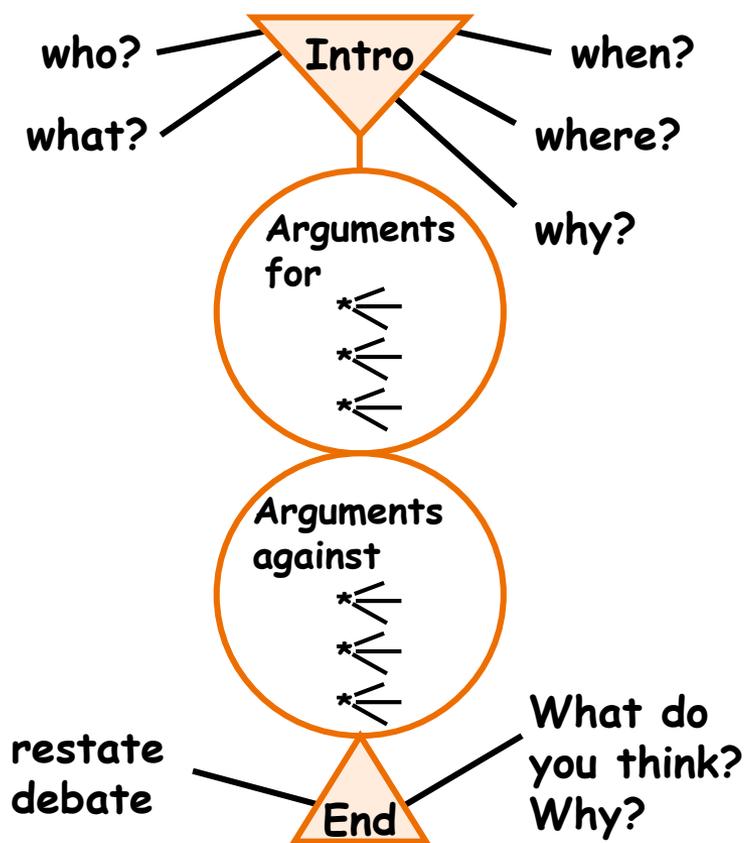elaboration          elaboration

# Organising discussion writing

## To set out arguments clearly choose one of two structures

**arguments for + evidence**
**arguments against + evidence**

**arguments/counter-argument**
**+ evidence, one point at a time**

who?

what?

Intro

when?

where?

why?

Arguments
for

*

*

*

Arguments
against

*

*

*

restate
debate

End

What do
you think?
Why?

who?

what?

Intro

when?
where?

why?

for

*

against

for

*

against

for

*

against

restate
debate

End

What do
you think?
Why?

# Discussion language features

- generally present tense, third person

- abstract nouns

- formal, impersonal style

- logical connectives e.g. Therefore, Consequently

- structural 'signposts' to your main points

- discussion conventions

Things you cannot see or touch, e.g.

truth justice possibility welfare reason

There are three major issues… First… The second key question is… Finally… To sum up…

# Discussion conventions

- Don't take sides – say what "people" think

- Keep it balanced, e.g.
  *On the one hand...*
  *On the other hand...*

Some people maintain…
Others argue…
Smokers would claim that…
Non-smokers reply…

- Don't be too definite -use conditionals (sometimes called weasel words).
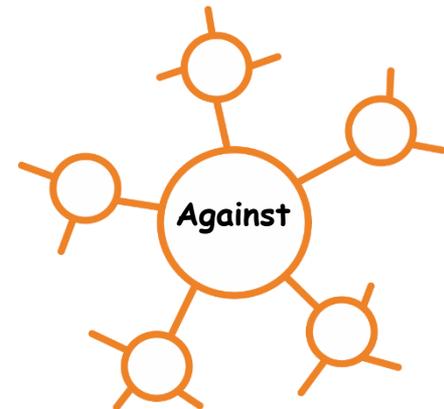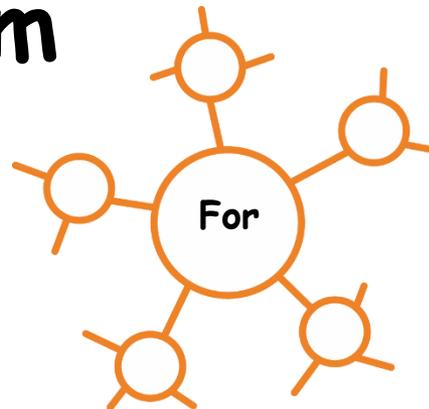
It could be claimed…
This might mean…
possibly     perhaps

# Alternative 'skeleton' note-taking frameworks

* for/against speech bubbles

For

Against
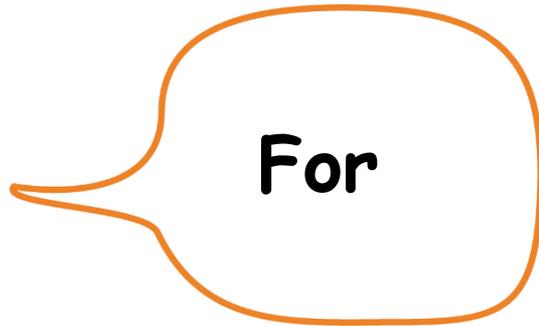
* double spidergram

For

Against

# Example of 'skeletons' in use

Taken from 'How to teach Writing Across the Curriculum' by Sue Palmer, with many thanks to David Fulton Publishers

# Do we still need zoos?

Zoos were originally set up so that people could see and learn about wild animals from distant lands. As more and more people became city-dwellers, never seeing animals in the wild, zoos began to house local creatures too. However, in today's world, are zoos really necessary?
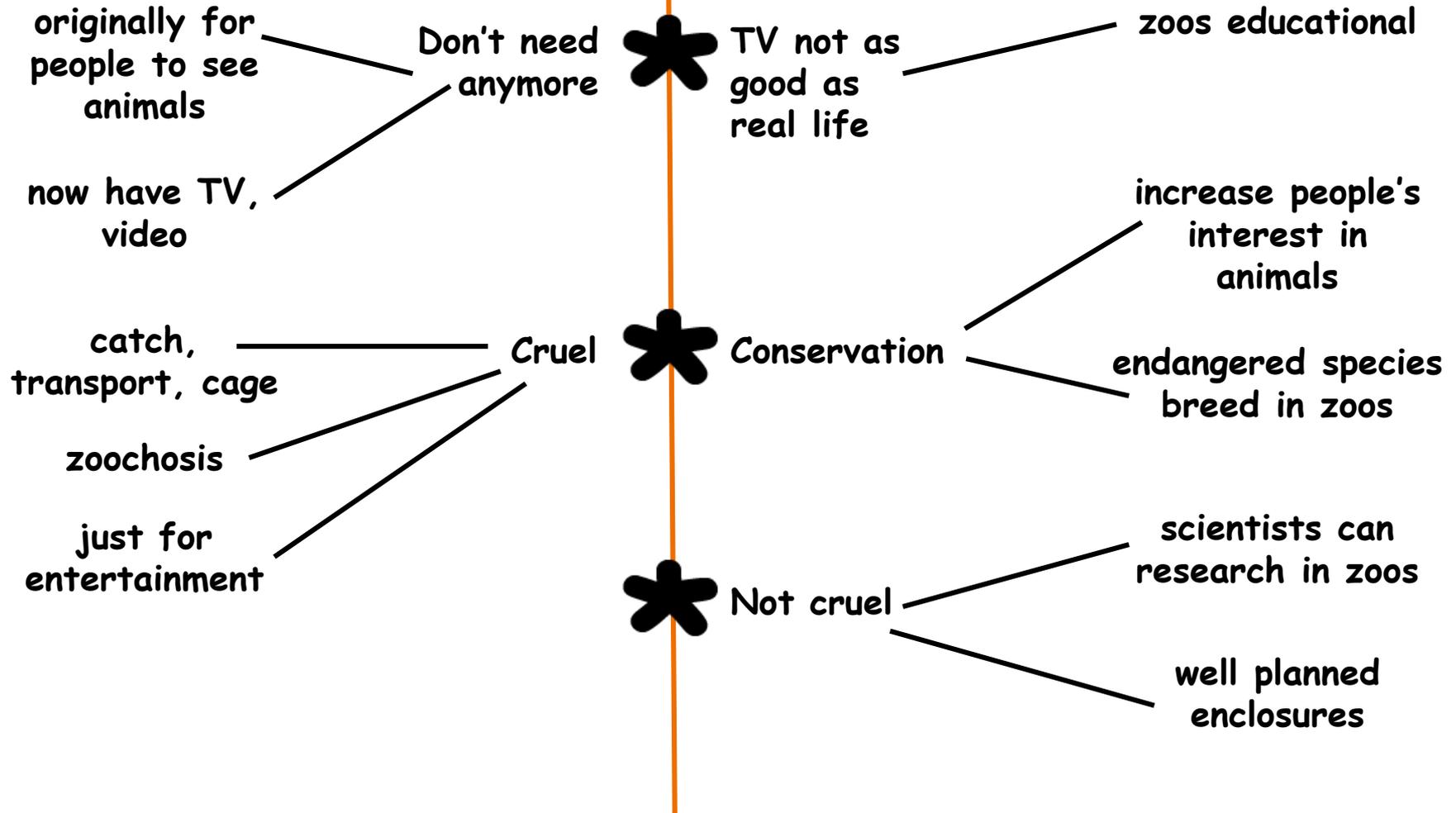
Since people can now see any sort of wild animal in its natural habitat, simply by tuning into a TV programme or buying a video, some animal rights activists claim that zoos are out of date. They argue that it is cruel to capture animals, transport them long distances, and then keep them caged up simply for the entertainment of human beings. Captive animals often develop 'zoochosis' – abnormal behaviour like rocking or swaying – which indicates they are bored and unhappy in their prison-like conditions.
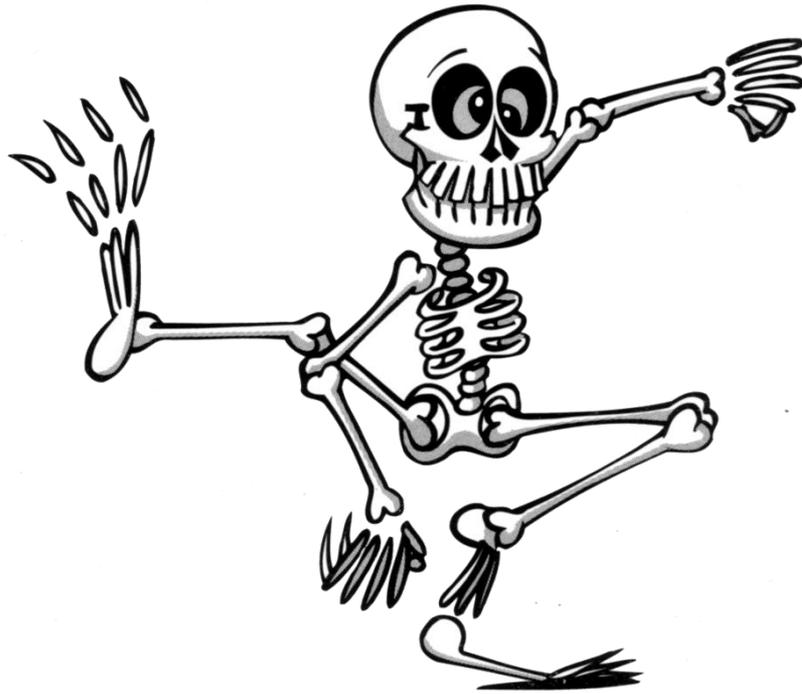
On the other hand, there is a huge difference between watching an animal on screen and seeing it in real life. It could be argued that visiting a zoo is educational, often increasing people's concern for wildlife and conservation, which is of great importance in today's developing – and often overdeveloped – world. Indeed, sometimes the only way to save an endangered species may be to arrange for it to be breed in captivity. Behind the scenes, zoos also provide scientists with opportunities to research into animal behaviour: modern zoos can therefore be much better planned than old-fashioned ones, providing animals with carefully designed enclosures appropriate to their needs.

It seems then, that there are still arguments for retaining zoos. These should, however, be carefully planned with the animals' welfare in mind: in the modern world, there is no excuse for keeping animals in cramped or cruel conditions.

# Against zoos | For zoos

**originally for people to see animals**

**Don't need anymore**

**TV not as good as real life**

**zoos educational**

**now have TV, video**

**increase people's interest in animals**

**catch, transport, cage**

**Cruel**

**Conservation**

**endangered species breed in zoos**

**zoochosis**

**just for entertainment**

**scientists can research in zoos**

**Not cruel**

**well planned enclosures**

Text

# The End