



ISSUES PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Most arguments that are produced for audiences require research. In your opinion editorial you had to research what had been said about your issue before you could authoritatively mount a persuasive argument about it. In that case, it required reading other opinion pieces, newspaper articles, and speaking with people who had knowledge or opinions about the issue. Your rhetorical analysis also involved research beyond analysis of the article itself, including establishing its social and cultural context, background on the writer, and so forth. These experiences are typical of what must happen in the commercial, legal, and political arenas. Advertisers do market research to establish customer wants and needs; lawyers and judges research legal history for precedents; and politicians engage in their own market research of their constituencies as well as prepare for campaign and committee debates by keeping abreast of current events, relevant arguments about them, and historical perspectives on the issues that concern them. In essence, research is the fuel that feeds arguments on all fronts of public life.

Obviously, research can take a lot of time and energy, depending on your skills and the effectiveness of your research strategies. This assignment will provide practice in creating a longer argument that is informed by research. You will draw heavily on your library skills learned this semester and receive further instruction in library research methods, documentation, and the incorporation of the ideas and words of others to serve your purposes and the needs of your readers.

WHAT IS AN ISSUES PAPER?

First, we must make an important distinction between research papers and research-based arguments, what we are calling an issues paper. Research papers are generally meant to draw together various sources to help inform readers about something without making an argument, providing information for information's sake. On the other hand, research-based arguments are meant to persuade readers to view something in a particular way or to take action of some sort. People who make arguments research to help draw conclusions about an issue, to find support for claims, and to learn what others are saying about an issue. Providing information in a research-based argument is secondary to its persuasive purposes. As such, your own voice and purpose must dominate your sources by incorporating them in ways that serve your argument.

You might look at your research as a conversation. Imagine the authors of all your sources sitting in a room discussing your issue. Their published arguments represent their contributions to the discussion. As you listen (read) their arguments, you begin to formulate your own opinions and views. Eventually, you get to a point where you want to enter the conversation. In so doing, you wouldn't merely repeat or restate in your own words what the others have already said. You would want to add something new and unique to the conversation. Your issues paper is *your* contribution. While you will certainly cite a variety of outside sources, remember that it is your paper.

PREPARING TO WRITE

As you research and draft your paper, the three points of the rhetorical situation—issue, reader, and writer—should inform your writing process. How you prepare to write your issues paper will be crucial in producing a persuasive argument.

ISSUE

- 1) Before researching, start with a question or series of questions you want your research to answer.
- 2) Let your question(s), rather than hastily-formed opinions, guide your research, and be prepared to change your opinion as you learn more. For example, perhaps you want to write an issues paper on climate change and at first you conclude that *climate change legislation would harm the economy*. After reading the sources, however, you modify your position and conclude that *though cap-and-trade legislation may have negative economic consequences, in the long run it would reduce carbon emissions and therefore global warming*. Notice how this invention process depends on your ability to continue asking questions about what you want to argue based on the new information you encounter.

- 3) As you find sources, identify concepts, arguments, and quotations that support your argument, challenge your argument, or cause you to modify how you might present your argument.

READER

Now that you have established the argument you wish to make, and have assembled sources to help you develop it, it is time to consider how you will present your argument in the most persuasive way. That is, you will move from the *what* of the argument to the *how*. Fortunately, much of this work has actually been done during the research into your issue. In the various opinions, assumptions, and backgrounds of the writers you've read, you have actually seen a cross-section

of the views your readers are likely to hold. In addition, you need to consider carefully all of the practical and social conditions that motivate your particular audiences—local citizens, interest groups, political pundits, or others—to fall on one side or another of your issue. Such preparation helps you not only anticipate objections, but gives you a deeper awareness of the various sources of those objections. Armed with this information you can delicately refine how and when to introduce your position, what arguments will be the most persuasive, whom you might or might not wish to quote, etc. In addition, you can even more explicitly address concerns in a way that demonstrates your thorough knowledge of the subject and your sensitivity to your audiences.

WRITER

This last point brings us back to your ethos, the character you present to your audience. The audience's response to you will depend on how effectively you demonstrate your trustworthiness, credibility, goodwill, etc. In short, you can now use the knowledge you've gained about your subject, your command of your sources, your awareness of your audience's views and objections, and the social situations conditioning their assumptions to present yourself as having an authoritative, knowledgeable, and trustworthy voice.

ORGANIZATION

An issues paper has no special or unique form, though you will want to organize it in the most effective way possible to achieve your purpose in writing. The following outline is provided as a guideline.

TITLE

Your title should catch your reader's attention. It should also describe the issue and indicate your stance on that issue. A paper that addresses whether Intelligent Design should be taught alongside evolution in public schools might include the following title: "Intelligent Omission: Recognizing the Necessary Absence of ID in the Classroom."

INTRODUCTION

This part of the paper should include background information on the issue, explain why you are addressing it, and present your argument and why you are taking this position. Within these broad parameters, you can use quotations, metaphors, anecdotes, allusions, or other means to engage reader interest. How effectively you introduce your argument will go a long way towards establishing your credibility and expertise. In other words, it is the foundation of an ethical appeal.

BODY

This main part of your argument is where you make and support claims, marshal your sources to good effect, and demonstrate awareness of various reader biases and concerns. You will want to make both logical and emotional appeals, while continuing to establish your ethos. Although most academic arguments rely primarily on logos, emotional appeals can be appropriate and effective when used properly.

CONCLUSION

Here you will want to briefly draw together the elements of your argument in a way that makes its persuasive appeal very clear. Rather than only reiterate the language you've been using up to this point, find a new metaphor, a relevant quotation, or a novel context from which to shed new light on your argument. How you end is, like your introduction, vital to the credibility of you and your argument. A strong conclusion can seal the deal, while a weak or boring one can throw everything that went before into question.

ASSIGNMENT SHEET AND GRADING RUBRIC: ISSUES PAPER

Task: Write an 8–10 page (double-spaced) researched argument on a current, compelling issue related to your focused topic area. Use timely, authoritative sources to support your claims, and use MLA documentation standards for both in-text citations and a works cited page. Your research should include a range of sources, including books, periodicals, scholarly journals, and credible Internet sources. Your audience should include major stakeholders in the issue about which you argue, in addition to your instructor and classmates. Your instructor may require you to use your reflective letter to identify your target audience.

___ The “A” Issues Paper (270–300 points)

In the “A” issues paper, the writer makes a compelling argument on a timely (*kairos*), focused issue appropriate for the audience’s needs and interests. The writer has a clear, arguable thesis supported by good reasons and sufficient, typical, accurate, and relevant evidence (STAR). The writer makes effective rhetorical appeals (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*) and demonstrates that he/she has thoroughly researched the issue, incorporating a variety of credible sources, without being derivative of those sources and their arguments. The writer anticipates and effectively responds to opposing viewpoints (*procatalepsis*). The writer concludes by summarizing the argument and suggesting implications or consequences that engage the reader.

An “A” issues paper is exceptionally well written, in addition to being well argued. The title cleverly indicates the subject, and the introduction effectively catches the reader’s attention, establishes the timeliness and context of the issue, and forecasts the organization of the paper. The writer develops a focused, unified, and coherent argument, and the arrangement of the argument is logical, with smooth transitions from paragraph to paragraph and sentence to sentence. The writer further engages the reader by establishing his/her credibility via his/her good writing: the writer varies sentence length and structure for an easy, flowing rhythm and avoids vague, wordy, or obscure sentences. Diction is clear, concise, and precise, and punctuation, grammar, spelling, and usage adhere to the highest standards of edited American English. Additionally, the writer incorporates sources effectively, citing authority when appropriate; paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting effectively; and adhering to MLA citation and formatting standards both within the text and on the works cited page.

___ The “B” Issues Paper (240–269 points)

The “B” issues paper argues a compelling and timely point that addresses the needs and interests of the audience, and the thesis is generally clear and fairly well supported, though minor lapses or gaps may be evident in the argument. Rhetorical appeals and external sources are used effectively, though perhaps not as convincingly as in the “A” paper. The depth of research may be insufficient in places and/or sources are not always authoritative or used in a balanced way. The argument is, for the most part, original, but may too closely echo arguments and information from the writer’s research. Opposing viewpoints are anticipated but may not be responded to fully and effectively. The writer concludes by summing up the argument but may not explore implications strongly enough.

The “B” issues paper is well written, including a serviceable title and introduction, though may lack the flare of the title and introduction of an “A” paper. The paper is generally unified and coherent, and the arrangement clear, with minor exceptions. The writing is also engaging, though the writer may compromise his/her *ethos* by occasionally including awkward syntax and unclear diction. Sentences generally have clear subjects and verbs. With few exceptions, sources are generally incorporated effectively, though some sources might not be blended

seamlessly, and occasionally the reader may not recognize the authority of the source. A few errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, usage, and MLA formatting and documenting appear randomly throughout the paper, but such errors do not distract from the reader's understanding of the argument.

___ **The "C" Issues Paper (210–239 points)**

The "C" issues paper addresses an issue but may not be fully aware of the rhetorical situation (e.g., the complexities or timeliness of the issue, the needs of the audience, or the writer's purpose in writing). The writer's position may be unclear at times and claims are not fully supported. Rhetorical appeals are used unevenly throughout the paper, and the argument as a whole is derivative of the writer's research; that is, the paper may feel more like a report of the writer's research than an argument. The research is likewise inadequate. For example, the writer might rely heavily on one or two sources. Opposing views are generally ignored or not responded to in convincing ways, and the conclusion merely repeats or summarizes the content of the paper.

The "C" issues paper is readable but requires some effort on the part of the reader. The title and introduction may be uninteresting or may fall a little short in clearly announcing the focus of the paper and establishing the context of the issue, though the focus and context become apparent as the paper unfolds. The paper lacks unity by occasionally introducing information that does not relate to the thesis, and the transitions from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, or idea to idea might be weak. Syntax and diction lack sophistication and may be difficult to follow in places, thereby compromising the writer's ethos. Some errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and usage appear frequently, though the reader is generally able to understand the argument. Errors in MLA formatting and documentation likewise appear with some frequency. Though the writer cites sources, he/she may drop them in without authority, attribution, or explanation. There might be discrepancies between in-text citations and the works cited page.

___ **The "D" Issues Paper (180–209 points)**

The "D" issues paper demonstrates little awareness of the writer's rhetorical situation and/or does not address an appropriate issue. The writer's position and purpose are not clearly defined. Claims go unsupported, and the writer's attempts at ethical, emotional, and logical appeals are superficial, at best, or are unpersuasive. The argument is under researched and/or reliant on a single source or two. Sources are incorporated in ineffective and inappropriate ways, or the paper is a mere report or summary of the writer's research. Counter arguments are wholly ignored.

The "D" issues paper is laborious for the reader. The title is rudimentary and may not indicate the focus of the paper, and the introduction is similarly boring and/or fails to announce the focus or arrangement. The paper lacks unity by bifurcating into tangents, and the flow from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and idea to idea is rough and unclear throughout much of the paper. Syntax and diction are likewise muddled throughout. The paper is riddled with errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, usage, and MLA formatting and documenting. The writer may inadvertently plagiarize by documenting sources incorrectly or not at all.

___ **The "E" Issues Paper (0–179 points)**

An "E" is generally only given to an issues paper that falls well short of the minimum requirements of the assignment, is plagiarized, or violates a policy established by an individual instructor (e.g., a late-paper policy).

COVER SHEET**ISSUES PAPER**

Name _____

Section _____

Paper Title _____

I have included the following documents in my portfolio:

- Assignment Sheet and Grading Rubric
- Reflection on writing process that describes the challenges you found in writing your paper, your paper's strengths and weaknesses, and what you learned about writing and how it will help you in the future
- Final draft of paper for grading
- Annotated bibliography
- Step-by-step research guide
- Rough drafts, including drafts with instructor and peer comments
- Prewriting

— _____

— _____

Note: If your portfolio is missing any of the items listed above, you may be docked points on your grade for this assignment.

If you agree to let future instructors of WRTG 150 use your paper (with name removed) for training purposes, check below:

- I agree to let instructors of WRTG 150 use my paper for training purposes.

Name

Signature

Date