

Writing a Position Paper

A position paper presents an arguable opinion about an issue. The goal of a position paper is to convince the audience that your opinion is valid and worth listening to. Ideas that you are considering need to be carefully examined in choosing a topic, developing your argument, and organizing your paper. It is very important to ensure that you are addressing all sides of the issue and presenting it in a manner that is easy for your audience to understand. Your job is to take one side of the argument and persuade your audience that you have well-founded knowledge of the topic being presented. It is important to support your argument with evidence to ensure the validity of your claims, as well as to address the counterclaims to show that you are well informed about both sides.

Issue Criteria

To take a side on a subject, you should first establish the plausibility of a topic that interests you. Ask yourself the following questions to ensure that you will be able to present a strong argument:

- Is it a real issue, with genuine controversy and uncertainty?
- Can you distinctly identify two positions?
- Are you personally interested in advocating one of these positions?
- Is the issue narrow enough to be manageable?

Analyzing an Issue and Developing an Argument

Once your topic is selected, you should do some research on the subject matter. While you may already have an opinion on your topic and an idea about which side of the argument you want to take, you need to ensure that your position is well supported. Listing out the pro and con sides of the topic will help you examine your ability to support your counterclaims, along with a list of supporting evidence for both sides. Supporting evidence includes the following:

- Factual Knowledge - Information that is verifiable and agreed upon by almost everyone.
- Statistical Inferences - Interpretation and examples of an accumulation of facts.
- Informed Opinion - Opinion developed through research and/or expertise of the claim.
- Personal Testimony - Personal experience related by a knowledgeable party.

Once you have made your pro and con lists, compare the information side by side. Considering your audience, as well as your own viewpoint, choose the position you will take.

In considering the audience, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is your audience?
- What do they believe?
- Where do they stand on the issue?
- How are their interests involved?
- What evidence is likely to be effective with them?

In determining your viewpoint, ask yourself the following:

- Is your topic interesting?
- Can you manage the material within the specifications set by the instructor?
- Does your topic assert something specific and propose a plan of action?
- Do you have enough material to support your opinion?

Organization

Your introduction should lead up to a thesis that organizes the rest of your paper. There are three advantages to leading with the thesis:

1. The audience knows where you stand.
2. The thesis is located in the two strongest places, first and last.
3. It is the most common form of academic argument used.

Sample Outline for a Position Paper

I. Introduction

- A. Introduce the topic
- B. Provide background on the topic
- C. Assert the thesis (your view of the issue)

II. Counter Argument

- A. Summarize the counterclaims
- B. Provide supporting information for counterclaims
- C. Refute the counterclaims
- D. Give evidence for argument

III. Your Argument

- A. Assert point #1 of your claims
 - 1. Give your opinion
 - 2. Provide support
- B. Assert point #2 of your claims
 - 1. Give your opinion
 - 2. Provide support
- C. Assert point #3 of your claims
 - 1. Give your opinion
 - 2. Provide support

IV. Conclusion

- A. Restate your argument
- B. Provide a plan of action