



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.

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Similarly to the other papers you've written, to write a successful issues paper you will need to:

1. Understand the rhetorical situation (your audience, purpose, conventions, and issue),
2. Use an effective writing process (including self-regulating strategies, peer review, and reflection),
3. Find, evaluate, and properly cite important sources to support your argument, and
4. Use effective rhetorical strategies (claims, reasons, assumptions, appeals, organization, style, using other writers, etc.).

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.