Issues Paper

300 Possible Points

Due:

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 he needs of your readers.

What is an Issues Paper?

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.

1. Let your question(s), rather than hastily-formed opinions, guide your research, and be prepared to change your opinion as you learn more. Invention process depends on your ability to continue asking questions about what you want to argue based on the new information you encounter.
2. 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.