**ENG1272 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 about your writing theory need to be carefully examined when choosing your position, developing your argument, and organizing your paper. It is very important to ensure that you are addressing numerous 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 (from your sources) 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 of writing, you should first establish the argument 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?

Is the issue narrow enough to be manageable?

**Analyzing an Issue and Developing an Argument**

Do some research on writing theories (it is highly recommended you use the sources in Chapter 14 of our textbook). While you may already have an opinion 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 or examples of an accumulation of facts

Informed Opinion – opinion developed through research and/or expertise of the claim

Personal Testimony – your personal experience or one 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 questions:

* 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?

Ideas to consider:

* Previous experiences with academic writing: assignments, instructors, results
* What did you think about writing when the class began and what you do you think now?
* What is most important or significant for any writer to know?
* How would you describe your writing process? Think back and project forward to conceptualize your knowledge of writing.
* How does reading and writing contribute to a life of significance and worth?

**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.

Below is a generic sample outline for a position paper: (this is not a required format, just an example)

I. Introduction

\_\_\_A. Introduce the topic

\_\_\_B. Provide background on the topic

\_\_\_C. Assert the thesis (your view of the issue)

II. Counter Argument (this could also be placed after your argument or woven within each 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

*Modified from the UHWO Writing Center, University of Hawaii*

Overall, will this paper convince or change your audience’s mind about this issue?

If yes, why and how? If no, why not?