

The Argumentative Research Paper

An Overview of the Project

The objectives of the research project are to investigate an important and debatable issue in today's world and then to write an argumentative/persuasive paper in which you take a stance on the issue. In other words, you will research and issue that provokes debate or controversy and then write an essay to both inform and persuade your reader, asserting a firm position within the debate.

The issue might be social, cultural, political, educational, technological, environmental, scientific, etc. Put your thinking caps on and start considering the many problems facing us all today and the various controversies that surround these. Your research should grow out of an interest you have in a particular topic and a genuine desire for more information about it.

NOTE: You are not allowed to write on the following: Abortion, Guns, Death Penalty, Marijuana.

These topics are too laden with emotion and essentially at a stalemate in cultural conversations. Plus, they are first things that pop into people's heads when they think about debatable issues. Don't think so simplistically. Think outside the box. There are many issues facing us today that are controversial, and these also merit debate and careful analysis. Put on your thinking caps and come up with something less obvious and more unique.

You will work together to brainstorm more specific topics within the subject areas and then narrow those topics to manageable issues for research. You do this by locating a specific issue to examine. Begin by thinking about the various topics associated with a given subject category; then consider the debatable issues within those topics; then reflect on the differing viewpoints and perspectives; and then develop your thesis. A good way to visualize this is

Subject → Topics → Issues → Debates → Viewpoints → Thesis

The subject areas provided are very broad (and can have some significant overlap). You need to narrow these down in order to be able to craft a debatable claim (a thesis). Remember that you will have to take a stand in the debate; your thesis statement needs to make clear your position and what you are arguing for, so this has to be narrowly conceived.

The essay you write is to be both informative and persuasive. This means that you are expected to fully report on the topic and to stake a position in relation to it. Your essay must proceed from a clear thesis statement (a clearly stated claim, assertion or proposition).

Example:

Subjects:	Environment and Technology
Topics:	Alternative energy sources (e.g., nuclear, solar, hydro, and natural gas)
Issues:	Coal and oil are associated with global warming. Nuclear, solar, hydro, and natural gas power are potentially better alternatives

Debates:	Natural gas production has increased due to hydraulic fracturing (fracking), but this has created concern about the effects of the process on land and water in local communities
Viewpoints:	“Natural gas is a cheap and clean alternative to coal and oil” vs. “Fracking is harmful to the environment”
Thesis:	The process for extracting natural gas—known as hydraulic fracturing—has many negative consequences, including poisoning area groundwater and causing multiple earthquakes, which makes it even more damaging to the environment than the use of oil or coal.

Note that this thesis statement offers a claim that would require you simply to demonstrate, with evidence, that fracking is more damaging to the environment.

You can also write a thesis that is more a claim of policy (i.e., that advocates some action). That might read more like this:

“Although natural gas is a cleaner fuel than oil and coal, the process for extracting it—known as hydraulic fracturing—is ultimately even more damaging to the environment and, therefore, should be banned.”

Your essay must also include a counterargument—a view that is different from your own. You may see words like *opposing viewpoint*, *opposition*, *objection*, and *naysayer*; these are all terms for a counterargument. When you insert a counterargument into your argument essay, you are essentially making a preemptive strike by anticipating objections that an opposing side might bring up and exposing their weaknesses.

Successful counterarguments always include a refutation. A refutation or rebuttal is a paragraph that comes after the counterargument and disproves it. In other words, the refutation paragraph explains why the opposing view is incomplete, problematic, or simply wrong.

You will support and defend your thesis with information and evidence gathered in your research, so be sure to examine your topic from various perspectives and carefully consider the controversies or debates that might surround it. Again, you should choose a topic that you have a strong interest in or opinion about, since you will need to fully support your claims.

Research Paper Proposal

The proposal is a document that describes your project and specifically identifies for me four things:

- your proposed topic
- your personal interest in the topic
- your specific focus or thesis
- a list of specific questions that you want to answer through research.

Your instructor will judge the appropriateness of your topic from this and provide you with feedback to help focus your research. **Refer to the Course Calendar for the due date for this required component.**

Note: your Proposal is a commitment to the topic or issue you are planning to research and write about. You may not change topics later on. You can and likely will have to modify and adjust elements as you progress, depending on the research; that is fine, but you may not completely alter what you are doing midstream. If any concerns arise during the research process, contact me directly to discuss them.

Sources

You are required to have a minimum of six sources for this research project. Your sources must include at least three categories of resource material. To help you achieve this, you are required to have at least:

- Two newspaper articles
- Two mainstream magazine articles
- One scholarly journal article

Note that these can all be accessed through the Electronic Databases available via the library website at: <http://libguides.dcccd.edu/az.php>.

Other categories include subject encyclopedias, specialized reference works, films/videos, and books.

NOTE: Internet websites can be a useful source of information, but they must be carefully evaluated. In general, dot-com sites (i.e., commercial websites) are **not** credible sources of information. Non-commercial sites (with domains such as .org, .gov, and .edu) are usually more credible, but these too must be carefully assessed.

Be sure to record the details about every source you find (authors, titles, publication places and dates, page numbers, etc.) for the Annotated Bibliography and Works Cited list.

Annotated Bibliography

An Annotated Bibliography is merely a standard Works Cited list that includes a brief **summary** and **evaluation** for each source cited. Your Annotated Bibliography shows me what resources you have consulted and how useful they have been. **Refer to the Course Calendar for the due date for this required component.**

NOTE: The class website provides you with guidelines on developing an Annotated Bibliography as well as samples. Please make good use of those materials.

Required Elements

Be sure that your essay has:

- your name, the date, and the course and section number in the upper left corner
- an introductory paragraph—this should provide context for the reader; it should include information about the general topic being addressed as well as the more specific concerns or issues to be examined; it should also include your thesis statement.
- a thesis statement—this sentence should be direct and make clear your position or stance in the debate.

- at least three supporting claims/points—be sure to organize your essay around the concerns and/or supporting claims, and not around the authors or articles.
- At least one counterargument (i.e., a naysayer voice or an opposing viewpoint)
- At least one refutation of a counterargument (i.e, a rebuttal)
- focused and well-organized paragraphs, with clear topic sentences—each topic sentence should offer a claim that addresses a specific concern or issue and functions to support the thesis.
- direct quotes and/or paraphrases, cited in MLA format, from all of the sources used.
- a clear concluding paragraph
- a Works Cited page, in MLA format, listing a minimum of 6 (six) sources

Minimum Requirements

The final draft of your essay will be a minimum of 6 pages long (not including Works Cited), typed and double-spaced with appropriate (1 inch) margins and in standard 12 point font. The essay will include a minimum of 6 sources. The final draft of your essay must also include all of the required elements noted above.

If you do not meet the minimum requirements, you will earn no more than 50% of the allotted points for this assignment.