

*Essays - 7*

# Position Essay

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- Each instructor develops her or his own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts/tutorials for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but they should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.

## Purpose

- Demonstrate the reasonableness of your position on a specific and debatable topic.

## Audience

- In this case, your audience disagrees with your view and is therefore interested in understanding why you believe what you do.
- Do justice to the “other side” of the issue. Work to understand its logic.
- In the paper, take opportunities to acknowledge opposing ideas, especially if you consider them rational. Try to avoid putting down the opposition.

## Topic

- The topic must be something about which reasonable people disagree.

Bad Example: *Objective facts, like “The outcome of the 2008 presidential election, Obama or McCain?”; undisputed opinions, like “Freedom of speech, good or bad?”*

Good Example: *Disputable opinions, like “Obama, good or bad president?”; or, “Censorship, good or bad policy?”*

## Thesis

- Make a statement that clearly communicates your view on the subject. One goal is to be specific about the topic. Try using “should” to guide you toward a specific claim about the topic that you can defend.

Bad Example: *“Censorship is bad.”*

- This does not help direct the reader toward a specific argument; it is a vague claim.

Better Example: *“The FCC should not be allowed to censor television.”*

- This thesis statement outlines a specific space to work within: a specific agency regulating (censoring) a specific realm.

## Argumentation

- To argue in everyday life often entails confrontation and animosity. That is not what academic argumentation is about. Scholars argue by clearly articulating and successfully defending a thesis. It is more like what decent lawyers do than what, say, reality TV personalities do.

## Strategies for Argumentation

(For more on ethos, pathos, logos, see our handout: Rhetorical Appeals)

 **Logos** – The core of your argument—the explanation of why your position is reasonable—needs to be logic, or logos. A series of facts and well-defended opinions can together amount to a successful argument in a position essay.

Example: *In the censorship paper, the argument is that obscenity laws are generally arbitrary and stifle the public's access to diverse points of view and discursive modes (or, styles of discussion).*

*Here are the points involved in that argument:*

- 1) obscenity laws are arbitrary
- 2) obscenity laws stifle the public's access to diverse points of view
- 3) obscenity laws stifle the public's access to discursive modes

## Research

(For more help on sources see our handout: Research and Sources)

 The success of your paper depends on the success of each of your sub-points. The success of each point depends on the value of your research. Try to find scholarly studies that address your points.

Example: *The best sources for the claim that censorship has limited the public's exposure to certain ideas would be an academic essay on certain instances of that phenomenon.*

 At some point, the writer will probably need to defend the idea that exposure to uncensored media is not inherently harmful. Thus, the writer would need to find studies that have tested the effects of media on audiences.

 It is crucial that you do not select only helpful sources. Proper and honest research will involve a thorough examination of the existing commentary within the area of interest.

## Structure

 Organize this paper according to your supporting points. As always, consider the relationships between the individual points and group related points.

Example: *The writer has two things that censorship prevents the public from accessing: "points of view" and "discursive modes." The writer would put those two together.*

 Think about the strongest piece of "evidence" you have and decide choose the best time for it to be presented.