

## The Position Paper

In a position paper, the writer presents their position on an arguable issue. You can think of this paper as the writer presenting their point of view or opinion to an audience to get the audience to agree with or understand their point of view. In a position paper, the writer forms an argument to support their position and often includes a counterargument that the writer will respond to. The writer's response to the counterargument is called the rebuttal.

### Picking an Issue

Not all topics are suitable for position papers. In order to determine what issue you should take a position on in your paper, consider these questions:

- Is the issue genuinely arguable (is there disagreement about the issue?)?
- Are you genuinely interested in or suited to advocating for a position on this issue?
- Is the topic too broad for you to address within the length of your paper?

Think: "Is the sky blue? I say yes!" would not make for a terribly useful or interesting position paper. Think of a topic where you have strong feelings or beliefs, feelings and beliefs you want others to share. Use these strong feelings and beliefs to create your claim about the topic; you can revise your claim as you research and develop your paper, but it's good to start your research with a claim in mind. And remember, the position paper provides you an opportunity to address complex problems and be part of the process of solving these problems; use this opportunity in ways that are meaningful to you.

### Researching the Issue

Your argument will most likely benefit from using reputable sources to support your points. Researching your issue helps you better understand the issue, provides you with material you can use to convince your audience your position is valid, and provides you with potential counterarguments you might want to respond to.

Here's how you might get started: conduct a quick Google search on your issue, taking notes on the different types of results you get. Watch for phrases that are repeated across results. Try adding different terms to your keyword search as you survey aspects of the issue you might address in your paper.

After you have a few different ideas about topics that might be addressed in your paper, access the research databases through the MCC library. Filter your search results using the filter panel on the left

side of the page. Two common sources used for position papers are “peer-reviewed” sources and news articles. (See [Conducting Research](#) handout)

### **Argument, Counterargument, Rebuttal**

Your **argument** is the sum of your claim and the reasons/evidence that support your claim. For more information on what an argument entails, see the “[Persuasion vs. Argument](#)” handout.

A **counterargument** is an argument you provide that disagrees with your position; it also has a claim and reasons in support of that claim. Counterarguments should be attributed to a specific source and cited. You provide a counterargument to show the audience a potential way of disagreeing with your claim (this demonstrates that you have considered other arguments, which makes you more credible). Importantly, you need to respond to counterarguments with a rebuttal.

A **rebuttal** is a critical response to a counterargument that shows why the counterargument is wrong, unsatisfactory, or irrelevant. The rebuttal should show the audience why they should accept your argument, not the counterargument.

Here is an example of a short argument, counterargument, and rebuttal (the counterargument is typically one paragraph, and the argument typically spans across 3 or more body paragraphs):

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[For these reasons], some activists recommend densely populating metro areas using tall ecobuildings and compact grid systems that cater to both pedestrian and motorized traffic. [Name of person responsible for counterargument being cited] disagrees and says that densely populated metro areas exacerbate pollution and distance residents from nature. While [counterargument source] is right to worry about increased pollution, those worries can be erased by taking the proper precautions and designing low-traffic metro areas that prioritize pedestrian travel and public transit. By designing metro areas more compactly and making travel across the city more accessible for carless residents, we can greatly reduce carbon emissions and car-based pollution.

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### **Organizing the Position Paper**

Position papers include the basic parts of an essay (introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion), but often add a counterargument paragraph. There are two common places to put the counterargument: before the body paragraphs and after the last body paragraph.

Introduction  
Counterargument  
Body Paragraph 1, 2, 3 . . .  
Conclusion

Introduction  
Body Paragraph 1, 2, 3 . . .  
Counterargument  
Conclusion

Where you should include the counterargument paragraph is based on the nature of the counterargument (Is it a common argument the audience probably has? If so, consider Option 1) and how you intend to respond to it (Can it be responded to with a few short sentences? If so, maybe try Option 2). Is your whole argument a response to the counterargument? If so, go for Option 1).