

## **Researched Argument Essay – Description and Guidelines**

### **The Assignment**

Your final essay will be a researched argument, an essay that supports a position on an issue that is important and relevant to you.

Since this is likely to be one of your first college research papers, try to choose an issue that you have firsthand experience dealing with, and as such, know something about already.

For example, two effective student essays in your textbook, "Paintball: Promoter of Violence or Healthy Fun?" (pg. 234) and "The Case for (Gay) Marriage" (pg. 249), benefit greatly from the fact that the writers have firsthand knowledge of the issues they are writing about.

As you think about issues, keep in mind that a "researched argument" in an academic sense, means offering reasons and evidence in support of a viewpoint (ideally in a context of acknowledging and addressing the value of opposing views).

The fundamental goal of an intelligent, researched argument is not to debate pro and con; it is to try to solve a problem through truth seeking, factual information, reasoning and persuasion.

A good researched argument attempts to incorporate the best available information and views, and take into consideration that the truth may lie somewhere between two established positions.

Approximate length: 5 pages (1100 - 1300 words) or more.

### **Planning Your Essay - Issue and Ideas (Topics)**

As you consider issues to write about, prioritize issues that you have been exposed to in your life and have some knowledge about.

Consider issues related to your lifestyle or identity – issues that you feel need defending or justifying, as Ross Taylor does in his essay about paintball, or A. J. Chavez in his essay about gay marriage.

We will spend a class or two on ideas and invention, but to get you started, here are a few examples of issues that FIU students have written effectively about:

- Downloading Music Illegally
- Justifying Recreational Drug Use (Marijuana)
- Women Drivers: Are They Better Than Men?
- A Defense of Hip-Hop
- Veganism: Why You Should Consider It
- Porn: Evil, Ugly or Educational?
- Anti-Depressants: Are They Over-Prescribed for Teens?
- Internet Addiction: A Serious Affliction

- Losing Your Religion: A Defense of Atheism

To generate ideas, brainstorm some of the categories of experience that you explored for the narrative essay:

Literacy and Education

Relationships

Employment/Jobs

Lifestyle and Identity

### **Avoid "Big" Issues**

As you consider issues to write about, think beyond obvious, "big" issues like global warming or terrorism. Issues like those tend to be too complex for an essay of moderate length (approximately 4 to 5 pages).

### **Avoid Trite, Moral Issues**

An important criterion in choosing an issue is to make sure that it lends itself to academic argumentation as described above (page one): in other words it needs to be an issue that can be supported empirically (factually) and rationally with research and analysis.

Trite moral issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment or homosexuality, do not lend themselves to empirical research and analysis.

Moral issues like those are not suitable for this assignment and will not be accepted unless they are addressed from an empirical perspective.

For example, whether capital punishment is morally right or wrong ultimately is a personal opinion and does not lend itself to objective research.

However, it might be possible to research whether or not capital punishment achieves some of its intended purposes. Does it deter crime? Does it offer "closure" or consolation to the families of murder victims?

### **Approaching Your Research**

You should approach the research and writing process with a clear research question and/or a problem-solving goal.

Be open-minded and think critically about the facts, information and perspectives that you encounter through your research. Also, be critical of your own views and assumptions.

You should use a minimum of 5 secondary sources in your essay and list them professionally on your works cited page. You may use up to three internet sources (not

including general-information sources like Wikipedia). Make sure to evaluate your sources. You should concentrate on quality.

Use research first and foremost to educate yourself on the issue, so that you can develop a viewpoint based on knowledge and real understanding.

Your research also can help you discover, present and address relevant counterarguments that you and your readers might need in order to fully evaluate the issue and the viewpoint that you will present.

You also may consider doing "field research" – that is, using “primary” sources, such as interviews, or conducting a survey.

### **Organizing the Essay**

Researched arguments usually are organized in a “closed form,” with the central issue and thesis explicitly presented in the opening or introduction of the essay.

Your introduction should get the reader’s attention by identifying the issue that the essay will address and expanding on its relevance.

Your introduction also should express the central view that you intend to support – in other words, your main argument or thesis.

The rest of your essay – i.e. the thesis support or “body” – should present and respond to opposing views that are relevant, and present cogent evidence and reasons in support of your position.

Your argument should have one or more of the following goals:

1. Change the opinion of a reader who holds a different view.
2. Persuade an uninformed reader to adopt your view.
3. Persuade an informed reader to act.

More information about organizing the essay will be given in class. Also see the “Advice for Organizing” file on the course web site.

### **Deadlines**

- Proposal due (TBA in class and posted under “Dates and Announcements”)

See the “Researched Essay Proposal” file for detailed guidelines.

- Final Essay due (TBA)

### **Important notes on submitting the final essay:**

- A late penalty of 5% per-day late will be applied to all essays submitted after the due date.
- No essays will be accepted more than one week late.

- Essays must be submitted in person to the instructor. Essays submitted by email or in the instructor's faculty mail box will not be accepted.

### **Assignment Objectives**

Students will learn:

- How to organize a “closed form” academic argument and incorporate opposing views
- Principles of effective argumentation
- Approaches to primary and secondary research
- How to use research to support a position
- How to document sources

### **Summary of Grading Criteria**

The instructor will be looking for:

- A good introduction that presents the central issue and states a clear and arguable thesis
- An honest and intelligent presentation of opposing views, if applicable
- Convincing thesis support – persuasive reasons and evidence based on serious research
- Credible and relevant sources
- Professional editing and good readability
- Correct documentation of sources in MLA format (your “Everyday Writer” handbook will be an essential resource; you may also obtain help from the University Writing Center (next to Starbuck’s on the ground floor of the library))

### **Essential Readings for this Assignment**

- Allyn & Bacon Chapter 8 – “Writing a Classical Argument” (207 - 233).

It will be helpful to read and reflect on the essays “Paintball: Promoter of Violence or Healthy Fun?” (pg. 234) and “The Case for (Gay) Marriage” (pg. 249).

- A & B Chapter 3 (51 – 58) “Thinking Rhetorically about How Messages Persuade” (pay particular attention to the concepts of ethos, logos and pathos on pages 57 and 58).
- A & B Chapter 20 “A Rhetorical Guide to Research” - pp. 647 – 665

- A & B Chapter 21 "Evaluating Sources" - pp. 667 – 683
- A & B Chapter 22 "Incorporating Sources into Your Writing" - pp. 685 - 699
- *The Everyday Writer* – (pp. 163 - 213) "Preparing a Research Project."