English 1B Winter 2021 Dan Hepler

PAPER #1: POSITION

Choose a topic on which reasonable people can disagree. Your topic needs to be genuinely controversial, not something with an obvious, “no-brainer” answer. You want to be persuading people, changing their minds—not preaching what everyone already believes.

For example, “Cruelty to animals is wrong” would not be a good topic, since only creeps would disagree. On the other hand, “People brought to the U.S. illegally as children should be granted citizenship” would be a good topic, since it’s easy to find reasonable people on both sides.

Your job is not to solve a problem! (That’s the next assignment, the Solution.) For this assignment, you are explaining why you choose to hold one opinion rather than another. In practice, there is sometimes overlap between Position and Solution essays. But remember that for this assignment, the primary focus is NOT on presenting a “how-to-solve-the-problem” argument. Instead, you need to make a “here’s-why-I-believe-what-I-believe” argument. Make sure you remember the difference.

**It is vitally important to consider the opposing side!** Even if you passionately believe, for instance, that no one in the U.S. illegally should ever be granted citizenship, you MUST show that you understand why other people might think otherwise. Do not ignore what the other side is thinking! Remember, you are trying to change someone’s mind, and it’s nearly impossible to do this without demonstrating that you understand his or her point of view. One-sided “rants” will receive failing grades. Papers that ignore, minimize, or present “straw man” versions of opposing arguments are also in danger of not passing.

**It is also critical that you never insult the other side.** As soon as you start calling people “ignorant,” “selfish,” “unpatriotic,” “racist,” “homophobic,” etc., they shut down and aren’t listening anymore. You aren’t going to persuade anyone that way. Instead, you need to show that you understand why they think the way they do (see above), and then politely, respectfully, explain why they are mistaken.

Find at least one academic article in support of your position, and at least one on the opposing side. Your research sources should provide facts that go beyond common knowledge; tell us things we don’t already know. Demonstrate that you fully understand both sides of the argument by citing relevant facts and claims from both articles. We will discuss what an “academic article” is. We will not be using any news stories, or blog posts from random people—only scholarly research articles written by professional experts. Google Scholar is a good place to find such articles. If you have trouble finding appropriate articles, there might be a problem with your topic.

Use MLA format to cite any sources that you use, including parenthetical citations and a works cited page. We will discuss when, how, and why to cite sources. Examples of current MLA format are readily available online; OWL.purdue.edu is a good place to start.