

Issues Paper



An issues paper is a formal argument that seeks to persuade an audience of an academic claim.

While this handout is a general resource for writers, always tailor your work to your specific assignment

Understand the Differences

The Issues Paper is distinct from other assignments in the Writing 150 course, being less personal than the Opinion Editorial while relying on more sources than the Rhetorical Analysis. It also emphasizes provable statements more than personal opinions or individual experience (e.g. “The NIH predicts that Americans spend over \$30.2 billion on alternative medicine” versus “A lot of people spend money on useless medicine”). The Issues Paper isn’t, however, an informative research paper. While it should incorporate plenty of reliable research, its purpose is to **convince the reader of a specific argument**.

Choose a Topic

Choose to write about a topic that you find interesting, relevant, or important. Issues Papers more often **involve rigorous academic discussions** on a variety of topics, from environmental policies to sociology.

Example: The Catholic Church’s condemnation of birth control practices is an ineffective policy for maintaining marital and financial stability in the Northern Region of Uganda.

Find Your Sources

Persuading your audience of an argument on a complex issue involves bringing up credible sources. These sources can vary in their form, from peer-reviewed reports on experiments to governmental surveys. These are easiest to find through databases or peer-reviewed journals. While searching for them, keep these tips in mind:

- Consider the keywords you could use to find relevant documents.
- Look for sources that are more recent—a study from 2016 may be more credible than one from 1983.
- Study the information presented in the source; are the methods, data, and conclusions understandable?
- Organize your evidence to form a cohesive argument supported by reliable experts and studies.

Create a Thesis

Keeping your research in mind, try to form an arguable thesis. Remember that **narrowing a topic** may help expand the depth that your paper can take: writing a 10-page paper about U. S. foreign policy, a broad field, may be more daunting than writing one about U. S.–Saudi Arabian relations during the Iraq War. Keep these tips in mind as you work on your thesis:

- Narrow your topic to a specific assertion and form unified arguments to support it.
- Write an arguable thesis statement. If no one disagrees with your thesis, you will need to rewrite it because an undisputed thesis statement is a fact, not an arguable assertion.
- Think about possible objections to your thesis. If you think of numerous, reasonable counter arguments and solid rebuttals for those counter arguments, your thesis is arguable.

Example: You have read about free higher education in other countries, and you think the United States should also adopt it. Focus this general question to a specific assertion: More subsidized higher education will generate more job opportunities for Americans and improve the global economy.

Questions to consider about your thesis: Is my thesis arguable? Are there at least two sides to the issue? Am I taking a clear stance? Why might my opponents disagree with my thesis, and how will I address opposing viewpoints?

Form Your Paper

With your thesis now crafted, start on organizing your paper. For the issues paper, this involves ordering the structure:

- State the main points in the topic sentences of your body paragraphs.
- Write body paragraphs with specific evidence that supports your thesis.
- Transition from one main takeaway to another.
- Conclude by tying each argument together, **showing why your thesis is now believable**.

Example: Suppose you are arguing that Scientology should not obtain a tax-exempt status. You might support this thesis by using reliable sources to prove that the organization doesn't fit the required standards for U. S. law. This can include tax-law documents from the IRS, court records of the blackmailing of IRS officials, and other countries barring the organization from tax-exemption status. Write a paragraph or more about each of these issues, explaining why each point should convince your audience to support your claim.

Counter the Counterarguments

In researching and writing on this topic, you should come across sensible arguments that disagree with yours. Address these in your paper, and **show why your proposition is still correct**. If you find yourself commonly agreeing with those who oppose your original thesis, consider changing your argument to more accurately reflect your understanding. Keep these tips in mind for counterarguments:

- Imagine what your “opposition” would say after reading each of your paragraphs.
- Consider the core of both sides—where does one argument fail? What makes the other succeed?
- Understand your detractor's differences. Do they value something else or trust other sources?

There are plenty of spots where you can add your counterarguments, but be consistent. Either group them all together, keeping them close to the introduction or the conclusion, or spread them out evenly so that **each main point has a strong rebuttal** for its own counterpoints.

Example: If you were writing a paper about the usefulness of vaccinations, it would be important to address the recent arguments of anti-vaccination organizations. For instance, it would be helpful to argue against the claim that vaccinations can cause autism, both by citing medical officials who deny any logical causation of the condition from inoculation and by highlighting the errors in papers that purportedly show correlations with autism.

Learn from Other Assignments

Remember that the Issues Paper does have similarities to other Writing 150 assignments. Look at the handout for the Opinion Editorial to see more about defining your audience, supporting your thesis, and reevaluating your argument. While the Issues Papers has its differences, you will still need to **form a strong thesis, back up claims, smooth out transitions, and leave readers convinced**—or at the very least, more accepting towards—your argument. Keep these in mind as you look over your writing:

- This paper should have strong support from credible sources.
- Your argument should address and refute serious counterarguments.
- This assignment generally involves a thorough, academic inspection of the thesis and its accuracy.