

Issues Paper



An issues paper uses research and persuasion to **convince a reader of a specific argument**. While this handout provides basic principles, always tailor your work to your audience and assignment.

Choose a Topic

Choose to write about a topic that you find interesting, relevant, or important. Issues papers often **involve rigorous academic discussions** on a variety of topics. **Narrow your topic** to increase the depth of your research and focus of your paper.

Too broad: U. S. foreign policy

More specific: U. S. relations with [specific country] on [specific issue] or during [specific time/event]

Find Sources

Persuading your audience of an argument on a complex issue involves using credible sources (e.g., scholarly articles, government surveys, peer-reviewed research findings). While searching for sources, keep these tips in mind:

- More specific, relevant, and well-articulated search terms/keywords will yield the best results.
- Consider the source of the materials. Is the author or entity reputable?
- Look for more recent sources. A study from last year may be more relevant than one from ten years ago.
- Use only relevant materials. Even if material is interesting, only use material directly related to your argument.
- If you are not finding the useful research results, consider expanding your search, searching with different keywords, or meeting with a library research consultant, faculty member, or TA.

Note: If you find yourself commonly agreeing with the research of those who oppose your original stance, consider changing your argument to more accurately reflect your research and new understanding of the topic.

Create a Thesis

With your research in mind, form an arguable thesis statement. Keep these tips in mind as you write:

- Narrow your topic to a specific argument or claim and form unified sub-arguments to support it.
- Write an arguable thesis statement and take a clear stance. Your thesis is arguable if there are reasonable opposing viewpoints to your stance.

Form Body Arguments

Similar to other papers, your issues paper should have an **engaging and informative introduction, well-supported body paragraphs**, and a **clear conclusion**. Your **body paragraphs** will be key in explaining your stance and persuading your audience. Consider incorporating the following elements into each body paragraph:

- Topic sentences that state the main point (sub argument) of each paragraph
- Specific evidence that supports the main point of the paragraph
- Analysis explaining how the evidence supports the main idea of your paragraph and your overall thesis

Address Counterarguments

In researching and writing on your chosen topic, you should come across sensible arguments that disagree with your own. Address these **counterarguments** in your paper and **show why your stance is still correct**. Keep these tips in mind when addressing counterarguments:

- Treat opposing viewpoints with respect. Represent counterarguments in fair and honest ways.
- Evaluate what those with opposing viewpoints value, which sources they trust, and how they might react to your stance and the context of your work.
- Be consistent in placement of the counterarguments (i.e., grouped together or spread out).
- Don't overwhelm your paper with too many counterarguments—your argument should carry the most weight.