

Ethical Discourses for Communities
Researched Essay¹

2,500-3,000 words

Topic Proposal Due: Friday, 3/9 or Wednesday, 3/21

Annotated Bibliography Due: Wednesday, 3/28

Outline Due: Monday, 4/2

Introduction Due (for peer review): Tuesday, 4/3 – 5pm

Up-draft Due (for peer review): Thursday, 4/12 – 12pm

Dental Draft Due: Wednesday, 4/18 in class and via email

* Prepare and submit an electronic and a hard, stapled, page-numbered copy for the final draft.

Your Assignment – The Abstract Version

For this unit, you will be asked to write a researched essay (2500-3000 words) addressing an issue of interest to you. Identifying a problem associated with a social or political issue at your service site, your task is to craft a proposal or “solution” to this issue. In keeping with our class theme as writing to engage an academic conversation, you should be framing your research around the “They Say/I Say” template. What have previous scholars said about your topic? How are you contributing to the conversation? You can adopt either an analytical or argumentative approach in your essay, but you should craft it such that it demonstrates your abilities to refine and articulate a thesis, synthesize and evaluate claims contained in various outside sources, and engage in a scholarly conversation. In short, you’ll want to define the problem and propose the best solution that you can. You will need to collect a **minimum of eight sources** that help you to better understand your issue, and that will help you to make an informed and complex original argument that comes out of a thorough analysis of your issue.

Your Assignment – More Specifically

A researched proposal argument is a comprehensive response to a specific problem recommending a solution to a relevant audience based on reliable research. In other words, it’s a paper that says, “Here’s what you should do about this problem and here’s why I think this will work.” Such arguments are both informative and persuasive, earning readers’ trust (ethos) by demonstrating significant knowledge of the issue and significant research on possible solutions. Authors must demonstrate logical assessment (logos) of opposing solutions in order to gain support for the proposed solution. It is essential that the proposed solution is scaled to the problem identified. The more specific the problem, the more likely you are to provide a convincing solution. For example, you are more likely to convince readers that you can increase participation in one educational program at an identified homeless center, which in turn may lower recidivism rates, than you are to claim that adding one particular type of program will end homelessness in the United States. Identify a problem you can tackle with available resources and fit your solution to that problem.

¹ Adapted in part from Prof. Connie Snyder Mick’s “Researched Proposal Argument”

A researched argument, then, will first identify a problem. Writers must know their audience well enough to determine whether they already agree with this assessment or if they actually have to be informed and/or persuaded that this problem exists. The amount of attention given to describing the nature and significance of the problem should be directly related to the writer's assessment of the audience's current knowledge and position on this problem. For example, an audience may not think they are affected by homelessness if they themselves have secure housing. In this case, the writer's first priority is to help readers care about this issue based on a diverse portfolio of practical and ethical reasons that connect with them more personally. They need to understand the kairotic urgency of attending to this issue at this time. What is at stake if we do not address this issue now? What is possible if we do? The issue must be framed in such a way that it has local, personal appeal so that the audience has a sense that they themselves are stakeholders in this issue. The audience will become even more invested in the argument if it is framed in such a way that the solution seems feasible. While the ultimate goal may be to address a major issue, such as ending homelessness, the argument must be realistically scaled relative to available resources. The audience will be more attentive to the argument and more motivated to participate in the proposed solution if it seems achievable, outlined through specific, immediate action steps.

Once the audience is engaged, they must also have confidence that the writer has thoroughly evaluated a range of solutions before recommending they accept the solution posed in this argument. Writers must rebut arguments for opposing solutions, both approaches that exist and ones that may still be at the theoretical stage. Again, writers must assess the audience's knowledge of the issue and opposing solutions to know how much attention to give them. If the audience is known to have supported a different solution, then that solution may need to be refuted point by point. If they are less knowledgeable, then writers must summarize and critically evaluate opposing viewpoints fairly and fully without diverting attention from their own position. Including direct quotes and data from opposing arguments suggests that writers are not intimidated by those viewpoints, that they have weighed them and found them lacking in ways their solution will address. By the end of the argument, readers need to feel both informed and persuaded. They need to be able to trust writers' research before they will consider accepting their conclusions. That research, then, must be **full** and **fair**.

Full research is comprehensive and authoritative. Comprehensive research means writers have addressed the issue with breadth, depth, or both if time allows. To research with breadth means that you have looked at the issue from diverse perspectives. That diversity might come in many forms: looking at the issue from a range of academic disciplines, a range of information sources from academic to popular, a range of geographies from the U.S. to international perspectives, a range of time, etc. To research with depth means you have looked deep into the very specialized publications on an issue, reading significant books in the field written over time, and just generally knowing the great thinkers and writers in a focused but deep way. This is the type of research people do as they become more learned in a field, particularly as they do graduate work and are writing for others in the field who have the same deep knowledge and expect writers to be conversant in a deep way.

Authoritative research means that the sources used are generally considered sound and reliable. Peer-reviewed sources are publications that have been reviewed, revised, and accepted by top

scholars with expertise in the field being reviewed. These are selective publications, considered the top form of scholarly knowledge.

Non-scholarly publications such as trade journals and newspapers might also have reliable information, but the standard for review might be lower in the sense that articles may not be peer-reviewed and researched at the same level as scholarly sources. Authoritativeness might also be bound by geographic regions and by time--many a theory that was once accepted has been proven faulty over time, so currency of publication is an essential factor as well. Unless historical reference is called for in the discussion, articles for academic papers should be no more than about five years old. Books are more in depth, take longer to write, and come out less frequently, so they often retain relevance longer and may be about ten years old. Fair research describes the ethics of your research and writing process. Fairness refers to the extent to which you tried to understand an issue fully by considering carefully the range of perspectives on an issue, then how accurately you reflected those positions in your acknowledgement of them in your writing.

Fair research considers the range of opposing viewpoints on an issue, not just those that seem to support the writers' ideas, although it is fair to give more weight to perspectives that have been peer-reviewed as those have already been carefully scrutinized by experts in the field. Fair writing then acknowledges opposing viewpoints to a standard such that those who hold those viewpoints would say they have been accurately represented. In fact, it's a good idea to imagine the authors of those opposing viewpoints reading your writing. Would they think you've been fair to them? If not, then your writing can be improved. Of course just because you have considered the full range of opposing viewpoints doesn't mean you have to represent every one of them. It is fair to omit perspectives that have been generally considered unreasonable outliers, and in fact you may be committing the logical fallacy of creating a straw man if you only include those easily dismantled arguments to represent the opposing viewpoint.

One way to step back from your writing and research to consider how full and fair you've been is to do what many instructors do when they receive a researched argument: start with the works cited, then flip through in-text citations. A quick glance at the works cited page reveals the ratio of scholarly to non-scholarly works, the ratio of articles to books, the range of sources used, and the currency of sources. A quick glance at in-text citations reveals the frequency each source is used, the frequency with which it is paraphrased or quoted directly, and the range of use within a source (is everything from page one?). Compare this among sources that support the writer's argument and those that don't, and you have a significant snapshot of the author's research before you've read the paper. This type of research reverse outlining is an effective strategy for taking a pulse check on the ethics of your own writing.

While we certainly have limits to our research ability--our time for research is limited, our access to resources is limited, and in the end we are limited by our readers' time to consider our work--those who have the power to write and share publicly must consider this a serious responsibility. It is a great privilege to publicize our own ideas and to engage with the ideas of others. Not all people are literate or have free access to public audiences. Those of us who do should be guided by an ethical commitment to contribute to society only such arguments that advance our knowledge and understanding for the well-being of all. If we hold ourselves to the highest standards of research and writing, we have the right to expect the same of others. Ethos refers to the character of a rhetor and indeed we should offer our writings as extensions of our selves, of

our deepest character.

Assignment Goals (i.e., your general tasks in the paper)

- 1) Demonstrate your knowledge of a current issue related to your service
- 2) Cite relevant and reliable scholarly research; if needed, supplement scholarly research with popular sources that provide relevant and sufficient support
- 3) Identify and define key terms used in this issue
- 4) Consider differing viewpoints on causes and solutions both fairly and fully
- 5) Show what's at stake if things stay the same and if things change
- 6) Clearly state your position on this issue
- 7) Provide good reasons for taking your position, supporting all your claims with strong evidence. Rebut differing viewpoints with good reasons, supporting all your claims with strong evidence
- 8) Propose that the audience do something that seems feasible based on your research

Your essay will be eligible for publication in Fresh Writing. Read through the winning essays to gain a clearer sense of how Notre Dame students have composed successful arguments.

Possible Thesis Template:

To address the problem of [*name problem*], [*name of primary actor*] should [*brief description of proposed solution*] because [*brief rationale for why this approach should be taken instead of others*].

Sources

- You are required to cite at least 4 scholarly sources approved by me and to cite at least 8 sources in total (additional 4 sources can be scholarly, popular, or trade, but lean on the side of expertise). When in doubt, cite it out. In addition to your in-text citations, provide full bibliographic citations for each your sources at the end of your paper using MLA format. Consult sections 32a and 32b of your Hacker handbook for in-text and full bibliographic citations use. You may also find the citations in each *Fresh Writing* piece useful as a guide.

***Fresh Writing* Examples**

- Eder's "Improve Education Now to Reduce Homelessness Later" (class handout)
- Bednar's "The Consequences of Human Genetic Engineering"
- Casey's "Near Catastrophe: The Story Behind the Collapse of Wall Street"
- Franchino's "The Value of Payday Lending Reforms and Alternatives"

- Marton’s “Stereotyping in the Admissions Process”
- McMurtrie’s “Bad Romance: Lady Gaga and the Gay Rights Movement”
- Murphy’s “Friending Aristotle and Emerson: A Discussion of Higher Friendship in the Context of Facebook”
- Ochoa’s “Marginalization Among Latinos in the U.S.: The Acceptance of LGBT Individuals in Traditional Latino/Hispanic Culture”
- Golebiewski’s “Real Appeal”

The Writing Process

Stage 1: Pre-Write

STEP 1: Analyze the assignment.

Thoroughly read over the prompt and think about the issues that plague those that you serve. What’s most interesting to you? Where and to whom might you contribute the most in your work?

STEP 2: Plan

What do “they say” about your topic? What do “you say”? Why does it matter? Broadly, what conversation are you entering into, why is it important that you’re entering into it, and how will you contribute to it?

STEP 3: Share your plan

Email me your topic.

STEP 4: Identify and gather initial resources.

Be sure you are clear on the difference between scholarly and popular sources. Determine an appropriate balance of sources. Should they all be scholarly? How will your credibility change depending on who you cite?

Stage I Deadlines

Friday, 3/9 or Wednesday 3/21: Submit to me your plan.

Wednesday, 3/28: Annotated Bibliography

Stage II. Write: Outline. Introduction, body, conclusion. Citations.

STEP 4: Take Note: Critical reading.

Read widely on this topic so that you fully understand what solutions have been tried where and why were or were not successful in those cases.

STEP 5: Creative and critical thinking.

Offering a creative contribution is essential to this assignment. The addition of a new interview, for example, could help with this tremendously. You will have added a new voice to our understanding of the issue, and that is an original creative contribution.

STEP 6: Arrange: Organizing and prioritizing ideas (outlining). Write thesis statement. Define your terms early in the essay. Explain the problem if your audience needs context, acknowledge the range of possible solutions, then forward your recommendation and persuade readers to accept your viewpoint.

STEP 7: Draft Introduction, Body, and Conclusion

Keep the target audience in mind and give them information that anticipates their questions.

Stage II Deadlines

Monday, 4/2: Outline

Tuesday, 4/3 (emailed **by 5pm**): Introduction up-draft for peer review

Stage III: Research

STEP 8: Support.

Follow the advice above and provide ample support to show your expertise on this topic. Surround yourself with strong voices so that your ethos is elevated with them.

Stage IV: Revise, Polish, and Submit

STEP 9: Rethinking.

As you share drafts in class, you may discover additional insights you wish to incorporate into your essay. Make an appointment at the Writing Center to get an outside perspective.

STEP 10: Edit and Proofread. And then do it again.

Stage IV Deadlines

Thursday, 4/12 (emailed **by noon**): Full up-draft for peer review

Wednesday, 4/19: Dental draft

Formatting

- Use an appropriate 12-point font of your choosing.
- Use 1.5 or double-spacing.
- Use 1" margins.
- Include a word count below your name on the first page.
- Cover pages are unnecessary.
- **Number** and **staple** your pages. Seriously.