

PAPER 1: ISSUE PROPOSAL

English 1302: Rhetoric and Composition II



THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Any academic or public policy research project begins by identifying an *issue*, which is simply an unsettled question that matters to a community. In the proposal stage of a project, a writer takes stock of their current knowledge of and position on an issue and develops a research plan. A well-constructed issue proposal serves as a blueprint for the project as a whole and helps define a feasible scope for the project.

Your audience for this paper will be your classmates and I. The content will consist of a proposal for a research project that will span the entire semester.

BRAINSTORMING AND DRAFTING

- You first need to choose an issue that will hold your interest for a full semester and will sustain semester-long research. To come up with such an issue, do some brainstorming on the following questions:
 - What do I enjoy reading about most?
 - What do I know the most about?
 - What am I most curious about?

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- What do I enjoy arguing about most?
- What issues in my community do I care about most?

Once you choose an issue, you won't be able to change your mind later because all the writing assignments in this course build on one another. In other words, choose wisely!

- Before you start drafting, apply the “Twelve Tests of an Arguable Issue.” If you can't answer “yes” to all twelve questions, change or modify your issue until you can.
- Now you're ready to start drafting. Start by constructing a comprehensive overview of what you know about the issue already. As you go, explain how you acquired the knowledge you possess by tracing it back to its sources in as much detail as possible.

If you conduct a thorough inventory of your current knowledge, you should generate at least one or two pages of content in this section.

- Your most important goal in this paper is to construct a specific research plan that will guide your activities throughout the semester. To begin, draft the specific research questions you hope to answer in your final project. (Obviously your research questions might change as you learn more about your issue, but your current questions will get you started.)

Next, draft answers to your current research questions. Your answers will be highly speculative at this point, but they will help build the framework for your research.

You should produce at least a page of content in this section.

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- Next, describe where you will look to find answers to your research questions. Be specific! Name specific authors, books, periodicals, websites, databases, etc.

You should produce at least a half page of content in this section.

- Describe specific audiences that you hope to target with your final project, and identify potential publication venues through which you will reach those audiences.

Also, describe the sorts of people you expect to position as allies and those you expect to position as opponents.

You should produce at least a half page of content in this section.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

As you prepare a draft that you'll share with readers, begin with an introduction (which need not be limited to a single paragraph) that accomplishes three goals:

- Acknowledges what “they say” (see Ch. 1)
- Provides an “I say” (see Ch. 4)
- Answers the “so what?” and “who cares?” questions (see Ch. 7)

For this paper, the “they say” is not a view you're agreeing with or disagreeing with. Rather, it's simply the conversation surrounding the issue you've selected. Begin by summarizing that conversation.

Your “I say” will not be a conventional thesis statement because you're not ready to support a firm position. Instead,

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your “I say” will simply be a preview of the different parts of this initial proposal.

The answer to the “who cares?” question is you, your classmates, and I. To answer the “so what?” question, explain to us why your issue is important to the stakeholders it concerns and why it is complex enough to sustain semester-long research.

Once you have an introduction in place, feel free to arrange the content you’ve drafted in whatever way is most effective. In most cases it will make sense simply to organize the proposal in the sequence laid out in the “Brainstorming and Drafting” section.

CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE STYLE

Your style should be informal yet clear, retaining your own voice but making accommodations for the rest of us (see Ch. 9).

I do insist that you use paragraphs, simply because they make things easier on readers. A strong paragraph usually includes a clear topic sentence that is supported by sentences that cluster around it without going off on tangents.

You don’t need to adhere strictly to Standard English, but don’t be sloppy. Proofread carefully to ensure that your paper reads the way you want it to and that you’ve corrected unintentional errors. The Purdue OWL website (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>) is a terrific resource for information on standard writing conventions.

SPECS

Your paper should be no longer than five pages, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins all the way around.

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Your first submission is due at the beginning of class on _____, and you should think of it as a final draft—something you would be willing to submit for a grade. If your first submission does not address everything listed in this assignment sheet, I will return it to you and count it as late. Both your first and final submissions must be turned in on time; you will be docked a full letter grade for each day either is late.

Peer reviews are due _____.

Final drafts are due _____.

HOLISTIC GRADING CRITERIA FOR THE ISSUE PROPOSAL

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GRADING CRITERIA: C

The UTA Catalog defines a C as “fair,” which means *average*. Since this is a 1000-level Common Core class, a C paper is what a UTA freshman who is writing at an average level typically produces when they give a strong effort.

To earn a C, your Issue Proposal should first indicate the larger conversation to which you’re responding (“they say”) before previewing the different parts of your proposal (“I say”). You should answer the “so what?” and “who cares?” questions, provide an overview of what you know about your issue, and explain how you acquired the knowledge you possess. You should list research questions, provide preliminary answers to those questions, and sketch out a research plan. You should describe the audiences you hope to reach and those you expect to position as allies and opponents. Show that you have responded actively and thoughtfully to peer and instructor feedback on your first submission. The style of your paper should not impede my understanding of your proposal.

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GRADING CRITERIA: B

The UTA Catalog defines a B as “good,” which means *above average*. A B paper is what a UTA freshman who is writing at an above-average level typically earns when they give a strong effort (certainly a student writing at an average level can earn a B with exceptional effort).

To earn a B, first make sure your paper meets all the criteria required to earn a C. Beyond that, you should represent what “they say” more completely and provide more developed answers to the “so what?” and “who cares?” questions by making a compelling case that your issue is significant to a community. You should provide a more comprehensive description of your current knowledge and explain in greater detail how you acquired that knowledge. You should list well-developed research questions, provide substantive answers to those questions, and describe a detailed research plan. You should provide robust descriptions of the specific audiences you hope to reach and name the possible publication venues through which you will reach them. You should also provide detailed descriptions of the allies you might enlist and the opponents you might address. You should revise thoroughly, responding to feedback with great comprehensiveness. Finally, a B paper demonstrates strong command of word choice, voice, style, and grammatical conventions.

GRADING CRITERIA: A

The UTA Catalog defines an A as “excellent,” so an A paper is what a UTA freshman who is writing at an excellent level (80th percentile or above) might produce if they gave

Holistic Grading Criteria for the Issue Proposal

maximum effort. (Again, students writing at an average or above-average level may also earn As with extraordinary effort and sustained hard work.)

To earn an A, first make sure your paper meets the criteria required to earn a C and a B. You should answer the “so what?” and “who cares?” questions in great depth and with keen insight into the significance of your issue. You should provide a thorough, methodical inventory of what you know about your issue and trace that knowledge to specific sources. You should pose several conceptually rich research questions that clearly justify semester-long inquiry, and your preliminary answers to those questions should include reasons for your answers. Your research plan should include numerous specific sources you’ll consult. Provide detailed profiles of interested audiences, potential allies, and potential opponents, and explain why these stakeholders would be invested in your work. Your paper should be lucid, concise, and easy to follow; it should also demonstrate your command of style, voice, mechanics, and usage.

GRADING CRITERIA: D OR F

If you receive a D on your paper, carefully consider the criteria listed above for a C. I give Ds to papers when writers, while demonstrating a general understanding of the topic and concepts, have not fulfilled all the requirements listed on the assignment sheet or have failed to respond to all my comments on their first submission. If you misunderstand the assignment; show little understanding of the required rhetorical concepts; or ignore the technical requirements of topic, length, or format, your paper may receive an F.