

Focusing Your Argument: Updating Your Project Proposal

At the start of the semester, you chose a research topic and decided on some research questions you wanted to answer. Now that you have read and analyzed several credible sources dealing with your topic in your annotated bibliography, it's time to decide what argument you're going to make, and what audience you're going to write to. Once you've made those decisions, it'll be time to start writing your researched argument paper.

Revisiting the Proposal

Looking back at your proposal and your annotated bibliography, decide on a specific, focused argument you want to make regarding your topic. To do that, you'll need to decide who your audience is, and what your goal will be in writing to that audience.

Choosing an Audience

Your audience should be a real-world audience—be as specific as you can when identifying it (e.g. the members of the Richmond City Council; members of the Kentucky chapter of the Sierra Club; your high school principal). Your audience should be one that can be influenced by an academic approach to writing. The audience should also be able to do something about or with the argument you are presenting—so you'll need to think about your audience and your purpose side by side.

Deciding a Purpose

Have a goal for your writing. What result do you want to achieve by making this argument to your audience? Two successful approaches are a **problem—solution** approach or an **education/interpretation** approach.

For a problem—solution approach, you would prove that a problem exists and then offer a solution. In this case, a “problem” could be anything from identifying a social injustice, a flaw in the education system, showing that current ways of doing things are inefficient, and so on. If the problem is not readily apparent, you'll need to convince your audience that one exists, before going on to convince them of what to do about.

If you take an education/interpretation approach, your goal is more focused on changing peoples' interpretation or understanding of something. In this case, you would be persuading them to change their minds about something.

Whatever your approach is, you'll want to focus on persuasion. Avoid just doing an information dump where you regurgitate what you've found—this paper should not be a simple report, but a persuasive document that supports a strong argument (a thesis or major claim).

Respond to the following in your new proposal:

- Who is your audience?
- What is your purpose or goal for the argument?
- What makes that audience and purpose a good fit?
- What makes this audience a good match for an academic-style argument?

- Is this audience likely to trust or respond to a college student writer?
- What kinds of evidence will be useful in keeping that audience's attention and in persuading it?
- What rhetorical strategies will you try?
- Do the sources you've found so far give you enough information and the right kind of information you'll need? Do you need more information still, or other kinds of sources?

Conferences

During individual conferences next week, I'll talk with you about your topics and help you to make a productive match between your audience and purpose. **A draft proposal is due at the time of your conference.**

Due Dates

Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, March 28, 29 & 30: Individual Conferences. **Draft Proposals due.**

Friday April 1: **Revised proposal due.**

Looking ahead to the Argument Essay

Here are some other requirements for your argument paper:

- Specific, focused target audience
- Clear purpose or goal
- Thesis statement
- Well organized with smooth transitions
- Draw from *at least* six sources, at least four of them academic
- Sources cited and documented correctly using either MLA or APA (be consistent)
- 2100–2700 words (about 8 to 10 pages), not counting the works cited page