**English 101—Fall 2016 / Gene Melton**

**PROJECT #1: *Position Paper on a Contemporary Issue (Classical Argument)***

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| **Length:** | 1000-1250 words (4-5 ***full*** pages), correctly formatted in MLA style, not counting works cited list or honor pledge sheet |

**Purpose & Audience:**

For this first unit in the course, we will consider the elements of a classical argument and the nature of argument in general.  This first major writing assignment asks you to apply what you will learn about argument to the composition of a short, original argument in the classical form.

For this first project, you should assume a general academic audience; i.e., the instructor (and students) in an introductory academic writing and research class.

**Focus & Scope:**

Write an argument about an issue related to your intended field of study (or a topic otherwise of intense interest to you).  Choose an issue that is subject to debate—in other words, one that can be resolved in multiple ways—so that you must convince your audience to accept your position on the matter.  Keep in mind, too, that your argument will be limited to 4-5 pages; consequently, you must narrow your topic so that you can present a substantial argument for your position within that very short space.

Although you are generally free to choose your topic, the following issues may **not** be selected:  **abortion, gun control, the death penalty, the existence (or not) of a deity, lowering the drinking age,** and **legalizing currently illegal drugs.**  Having read countless student essays on these issues (and being quite aware of the vast quantities of such essays available online), I am not interested in reading any more papers about them.  Instead of taking the all-too-easy standard topic approach, seriously consider issues that speak to you personally, issues that awaken in you a sense of urgency, issues that inspire your creativity and originality.  Above all, because you will revisit this argument later in the semester, choose a topic that you will want to explore more fully (and within the context of an academic discipline [or disciplines]) when we turn to the researched argument.

**NOTE WELL:**  You will work with some aspect of this topic throughout the term, and you will revisit the argument you make in this project as you develop Project #4.  Thus, you will **NOT** be able to change topics when we reach Project #4.  You will need to think creatively *now* to choose a topic that **REALLY** interests you—and you will need to think creatively *then* to keep that interest alive as you conduct formal, academic research in your final project.

**Method:**

Classical argument.  In short, you will need to set forth a claim that states your position on the issue you have chosen and argue that claim with *at least* three (preferably more) well-supported, original reasons.  For this assignment, you are **not** to depend on outside sources:  think through the issue for yourself and develop *your own* claim, *your own* reasons, and *your own* supporting evidence.  If you do consult outside sources, you MUST document them correctly using MLA style.

As we will discuss, the classical argument specifies a fairly standard structure (although variations are possible—and, given the specific topic, advised).  Consider the following sample outlines (keeping in mind, of course, that other versions are also possible):

VERSION ONE

Paragraph 1:     Introduction, ending with thesis statement (claim)

Paragraph 2:     Background information (may be included in introduction instead of as a separate paragraph)

Paragraph 3:     First reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 4:     Second reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 5:     Third reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 6:     Opposing views and their refutation or concession

Paragraph 7:     Conclusion

VERSION TWO

Paragraph 1:     Introduction, including background and ending with thesis statement (claim)

Paragraph 2:     Opposing views and their refutation or concession

Paragraph 3:     First reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 4:     Second reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 5:     Third reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 6:     Conclusion

VERSION THREE

Paragraph 1:     Introduction, including background

Paragraph 2:     Opposing views and their refutation or concession, ending with thesis statement (claim)

Paragraph 3:     First reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 4:     Second reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 5:     Third reason and supporting evidence (grounds)

Paragraph 6:     Conclusion

VERSION FOUR

Paragraph 1:     Introduction, including background and ending with thesis statement (claim)

Paragraph 2:     First reason and supporting evidence (grounds) and refutation/concession of opposing views related to this point

Paragraph 3:    Second reason and supporting evidence (grounds) and refutation/concession of opposing views related to this point

Paragraph 4:     Third reason and supporting evidence (grounds) and refutation/concession of opposing views related to this point

Paragraph 5:     Conclusion

*Introduction:*  As you develop your introduction, keep in mind that this paragraph (or, in some cases, these paragraphs) should provide context for and build toward a clear statement of your argumentative claim.  Consider, too, ways that you can use the introductory paragraph(s) to draw in your reader; appealing to *pathos* (emotions) and *ethos* (character of the arguer; i. e., your credibility/authority) may be particularly effective here.

*Supporting (body) paragraphs:*  Although the sample outlines above designate a single paragraph for each reason, you may need two or more paragraphs to make a single point.  Similarly, although these outlines indicate three supporting (body) paragraphs, you may certainly need to include four or more reasons to support your claim.  Consider, too, the order in which you will present your reasons and the paragraphs that develop them:  what is the overall logic (*logos*) of your argument?  Should you start with your strongest point and end with your weakest—or should you reverse this order of presentation?  Should you begin with your most traditional reason and build to your most original one—or should you reverse this order of presentation?  Where and how will you address opposing views?  On a more basic level, consider what order creates a smooth flow of ideas:  which order allows you to move easily from one point to the next and to craft strong transitions?  Whatever order you choose, be sure to provide examples to illustrate the generalizations you make and to provide commentary to explain how those examples support the point you are making.

*Conclusion:*  In a short essay such as the one you will write for this assignment, a conclusion that merely sums up the preceding points is a let-down for your reader (and, indeed, insulting:  it says that you believe your reader cannot remember the few points he or she has just read).  Try to conclude your essay not with a rote restatement of your claim and list of your supporting points, but with a powerful reassertion of your claim, your main points, and their significance to your argument.  One way to add pizzazz to your conclusions, for example, is to return to a key element from your introduction; doing so allows you to unify the beginning and ending of your argument and to reinforce how your position fits into the context of the debated issue.

**Evaluation:**

Your paper will be evaluated on how well it:  demonstrates your understanding of the rhetorical purpose of the assignment; presents your argument clearly and logically; shows your thoughtful use of textual evidence; and exhibits your use of appropriate formal and stylistic conventions (see the Criteria for Evaluation of Writing in English 100 and 101 sheet).  I will be evaluating especially how well you:

* Set forth an argumentative claim stating a position on a debated contemporary issue appropriate for the focus and scope of this assignment.
* Develop reasons, evidence, and explanatory commentary to support your position on the issue you have chosen.
* Arrange the components of your argument and explore the relationships among the various points you make.
* Draw logical, substantial conclusions from your reasons and evidence and, where appropriate, contend with potential objections to your findings.
* Where appropriate, integrate and document source material (using MLA style).
* Craft sentences that are grammatically/mechanically correct and stylistically clear, precise, and engaging (and in keeping with the expectations of general academic discourse).