**Social 30-1 Written Assignment II: Position Papers** (Worth 30 marks)

Writing a position paper is one of the many ways you can demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of social studies concepts. You will be asked to write a number of position papers as you work through the course. Also, a position-paper assignment will appear on the Diploma Exam.

This tutorial will give you some guidance on planning and writing position papers.

For Assignment II: Position Paper you are required to analyze a source and write a position paper in which you must

* analyze the source and demonstrate an understanding of liberalism as reflected in the source
* establish and argue a position in response to the question asked
* support your position and arguments using evidence from your knowledge and understanding of social studies

The following step-by-step approach to crafting a position paper will help you write an essay that lays out your position and arguments in a clear and organized fashion.

**Step 1: Brainstorm**

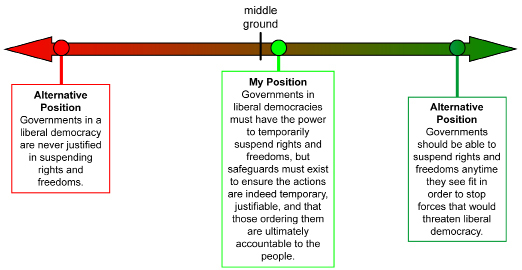
* Take some time to think about the question.
* Think about how the source relates to what you have studied. Think of historical and contemporary case studies that you have covered in lessons that are potentially relevant to the topic. Consider:
  + positions that could be taken on the issue
  + arguments that might be made to support or refute those positions
  + current events

**Step 2: Preliminary Planning**

Make a preliminary decision about the position you will take.

For many issues you may be presented with, taking an extreme position may make it more difficult to convincingly defend your position. It is often easier to defend a clear, but moderate, position.

You should also look at the strength of the arguments you could use to support your position and the amount and quality of evidence that exists to support those arguments. Choose the position that is easiest to defend with what you remember or know from your studies. For the purpose of this assignment, your focus is writing the strongest paper possible, not necessarily taking the position to which you feel most emotionally attached.



Think a bit about the other side(s) of the issue.

You with need to briefly discuss at least one alternative position to your own and one or two arguments that might be used to support that position. On the surface, this might seem counterintuitive. Why, if you are trying to convince the reader of the merit of your position, would you want to discuss the “other side’s” position and arguments?

The answer is that you want to show the reader that you are aware of other positions, have considered their merits and flaws, and ultimately have adopted what you feel is the superior position.

**Choose arguments to support your position.**

It is acceptable to have a single argument that is explored in detail over multiple paragraphs. Most students, however, try to have a minimum of three distinct arguments, each explored in a separate paragraph and supported by evidence.

Arguments may explain why your position is sound. Some arguments may also point out why alternative positions to yours are weak or flawed. When choosing arguments, bear in mind the evidence you might use to illustrate each argument. If you can’t think of any, then you should probably choose another argument.

**Choose evidence or examples to illustrate and support your argument(s).**

There are several types of evidence or examples you can use to support the arguments you make in a position paper.

|  |
| --- |
| * historical or contemporary case studies covered in the course: A position paper is really designed to evaluate what you have learned in the course. Because of this, there will be material that you have studied that will be relevant to the source provided for you to write about. This is one reason it is a good idea to review your notes before tackling written exams. |
| * other relevant factual events or case studies: If your reading or life experience has provided you with a relevant example that is perfect to illustrate an argument, by all means, use it. Try to avoid vague, anecdotal evidence, however, unless the evidence is supported by more substantial evidence. “My brother’s friend’s uncle said the government is tapping everyone’s phone,” for example, would generally not be considered strong evidence. |
| * information from an expert or an authority on a subject: Some students have remarkable memories and can quote exactly, or at least paraphrase closely, the words, facts, and figures provided by various authoritative sources. These can be used as support for arguments. The source of the information and why the source represents an “authority” must be made clear. |
| * current events: If you can select relevant examples from current events to support or illustrate your arguments, you may impress markers more than if you select material you learned about in your textbook. Using appropriate examples from current events demonstrates that you understand how the concepts you covered in the course are relevant to the world around you. |
| * hypothetical examples: Sometimes an argument can be supported by creating a hypothetical situation that illustrates why your argument is sound. Be careful, though. Your example may be hypothetical, but it must remain plausible to the marker. Avoid discussions of the miraculous, the magical, or the improbable. |

**Evaluate what you have assembled.**

Before you move to the outlining stage, review your arguments and evidence.

* Do you have sufficient material to support your position?
* Are any arguments contradictory?
* Do you have enough evidence to support your arguments, and is that evidence strong enough to convincingly make your case?

It is a good idea to engage in this kind of critical thinking at this point, while the information is still fresh and it is still fairly easy to change your mind about the evidence you want to use, the arguments you will make, or even the position you want to take on the issue.

**Step 3: Write a Thesis Statement**

A thesis statement is the foundation on which you build your essay. The rest of the essay is dedicated to proving your thesis. Your thesis statement should be a clear statement of your position on the issue you have been presented with. Depending on how you are organizing your paper, a thesis may also provide a “roadmap” for the reader, giving the reader a brief overview of the arguments you will present in the body of your essay.

Since proving the thesis statement is really the focus of the rest of the essay, it is worthwhile to dedicate a few minutes to ensure your statement is clear and well-written. A flawed thesis statement can undermine your entire essay.

**Step 4: Outline**

Outlining is an important step that, unfortunately, many students skip. If you take the time to plan your paper before you start writing, your paper will ultimately be clearer and more organized.

As well, since outlining helps you develop a clear sense of what you want to say before you start writing, you can concentrate more on how you are going to present the information when you eventually put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard.

There are many different approaches to organizing a position paper. Some students state their main thesis near the beginning and proceed to defend the position. Others evaluate the various positions that can be taken on a topic, and then they work toward a thesis based on the conclusions they draw from their analysis. Modify your outline to reflect the approach that suits you.

The level of detail that you put in your outline will also depend on your own skills and approach to writing. Some students create only a simple, point-form framework to keep them on track and flesh out the ideas as they write. Others incorporate more detail into their outlines, sometimes including entire sentences that they will later lift out of the outline and incorporate into the essay.

**POSITION PAPER OUTLINE**

**Paragraph 1-2: Introduction & Source Analysis**two or three sentences that introduce the issue, provide a bit of history about the issue, and explain why the issue is controversial

* In 4-6 sentences, explain the source (what it is), analyze the meaning and perspective.
  + What type of source is it? Quote, cartoon, photograph?
  + What is the source saying? How does it relate to liberalism?
  + How is it biased or one-sided? What is the perspective of the source?
  + What would supporters or opponents say about the source in response?
* your thesis statement, which provides your position, and a brief overview of the arguments/reasons you will make to support your position
  + one or two sentences that discuss alternatives to the position you will take and some of the arguments taken to support the alternative positions

**Paragraph 3: First Body Paragraph**a sentence that states your first argument

* If one of your arguments is not as strong as the rest, discuss this argument in your first paragraph, so your essay appears to get stronger as the reader moves through your essay.  
  examples or evidence
* analysis that provides an explanation of how your examples or evidence prove your argument to be true and how this contributes to proving your overall thesis.
  + In the last sentence directly link your argument and evidence just explained directly BACK to the source’s point of view.
    - **Example** – “Like the source….” Or Unlike the source, this example [state your example] proves or illustrates that….”

**Paragraph 4: Second Body Paragraph**a sentence that states your second, and next strongest, argument  
examples or evidence

* analysis that provides an explanation of how your examples or evidence prove your argument to be true and how this contributes to proving your overall thesis
  + In the last sentence directly link your argument and evidence just explained directly BACK to the source’s point of view.
    - **Example** – “*Like the source….” Or Unlike the source, this example* [state your example] *proves or illustrates that….”*

**Paragraph 5: Third Body Paragraph**a sentence that states your strongest argument

* examples or evidence
* analysis that provides an explanation of how your examples or evidence prove your argument to be true and how this contributes to proving your overall thesis
  + In the last sentence directly link your argument and evidence just explained directly BACK to the source’s point of view.
    - **Example** – “*Like the source….” Or Unlike the source, this example* [state your example] *proves or illustrates that….”*

**Concluding Paragraph**a few sentences that briefly review the arguments made in the body of the essay

* a restatement of your thesis in light of the information presented

It is important to note that the length of a position paper is by no means limited to six paragraphs. Add as many body paragraphs as you need to adequately explore the issue and defend your position.

**Step 5: Write**

Once you have completed your outline, you may start writing. Try to stick to your outline unless you suddenly discover a major flaw in your organization or thinking. If you find you are finished early, you may wish to add additional material to your essay. Unless you are absolutely certain this will improve the quality of your paper, your time might be better spent reviewing your writing for clarity, spelling, and punctuation.

**Step 6: Proofread**

Take the time to carefully read your finished paper. Make sure your sentences are clear and that they communicate the intended meaning. Check suspect spelling and punctuation. Consider replacing generic language with more appropriate social studies vocabulary where it is possible and appropriate.

**Important Tips**

* Review the comments teachers make on your position papers when they are returned to you. You can’t improve if you don’t know where your weaknesses are. Ask your teacher for clarification or help if you do not see gradual improvement in your position papers as you attempt to address areas of weakness. Take time to compare your paper to exemplars if available.
* Avoid emotional rants or language that attempts to belittle or insult those holding an opposing position. Instead, use logic and quality examples to make your point, and keep the tone of your paper relatively formal.
* Do not rush through the writing of the body paragraphs so that you will have time to write a concluding paragraph. Unless you have organized your essay in a manner that arrives at your thesis at the end of your essay, a concluding paragraph is usually not crucial.
* While it does tie the essay up neatly, a concluding paragraph typically only restates what has already been said above. If you find yourself too short of time at the end of your essay to write a concluding paragraph, a short concluding sentence will suffice.
* Keep your position paper focused and relevant to the issue presented in the source. Some students try to write the “everything-I-ever-learned-in-social-studies” paper. These students do this hoping they will at least touch on information relevant to the source presented in the exam, or that they will impress the markers with how much they have memorized from the course.
* **Do not do this!**  
  Such essays generally do not achieve either goal. Markers prefer a concise, well-organized essay that takes and defends a position on the assigned topic and explores the topic at an appropriate breadth and depth. A well-thought-out, well-written, on-topic five-paragraph paper will always receive better marks than a rambling twenty-page attempt to recount the course content in its entirety.