

Position Paper Assignment

(Structure outline adapted from the Writing Center of the University of Hawai‘i - West O‘ahu)

This paper must:

- accurately describe at least **three different positions on a single issue** in the interpretation of one of the assigned literary works—that is, three different answers to the same interpretive question
- provide *supporting arguments* used by those who hold each position
- provide **your own position** on the issue (one of the three or more positions), which is a claim about the significance or meaning (theme and message) of the literary work
- provide *counterarguments* against the arguments of other positions
- provide *supporting arguments* for your own position
- provide *evidence* for your supporting arguments (including evidence from the literary work—details/quotations, with citations)
- cite a total of at least *three academic/primary sources* in addition to the literary work
 - (for extra credit, cite an academic/primary source which your instructor did not provide; see “Source Types” handout for what counts as an academic source or primary source)
 - in an oral presentation, “citing” means that you mention the source aloud in your oral presentation (typically the author’s name is sufficient, but have the full citation ready in case your audience has a question about the source)
- take **10-12 minutes** to deliver (probably about 5-6 double-spaced pages, but the time is what matters)
- follow the oral presentation guidelines provided below
- include the following sections:

Introduction

Explain the issue.

Write your issue in a complete sentence. Explain it, and include the information that provides background and makes the issue interesting or important for the purposes of interpreting the literary work.

Assert your main claim (your position on the issue).

As always, your claim should be clear, focused (specific enough to be well covered in your presentation), appropriately complex (the result of analysis, not merely easily-found factual material), and arguable (someone might plausibly disagree, whether because of a different perspective or lack of information).

Describe the impact of your approach.

Emphasize what you are adding that none of your sources provides (more evidence/arguments for an existing interpretation, a new compromise between existing interpretations, a new answer to an existing question, etc.).

Countering Arguments for First Position (repeat for Second Position, Third Position, etc.)

Summarize the first position on this issue.

Provide supporting arguments used by those who hold the position.

Use summarized ideas and/or quotes from your sources.

Refute these arguments.

Give support for your refutation.

Your First Subclaim (repeat for Second Subclaim, Third Subclaim, etc.)

State your subclaim (smaller claim supporting your main claim—your position on the issue).

Each subclaim is a reason your audience should agree with your main claim.

Provide support for your subclaim.

[Counterarguments and Subclaims may be in any order, as long as they make sense in that order.]

Conclusion

Restate your argument: why your audience should agree with your position.

Show the significance and impact of your position: why it matters for the purpose of interpreting the literary work.

Oral presentation guidelines

- Length: **stick to the time limit.** Like our class, conferences have limited time, and going over your limit may mean limiting time for audience questions or even cutting into other speakers' time. The lower limit tends to be less strict, but a very short presentation may come across as inadequate.
- It is recommended that you **read your oral presentation.** Different disciplines have different expectations, but for the study of literature, reading a speech verbatim is standard because exact wording is especially important. (If you choose to work from note cards or memory, make sure you have quotations written out, and make sure to practice harder so that you come across as articulate and unhesitating.)
- **Make yourself clear. Write clearly:** use correct grammar and a straightforward sentence structure that is easy to follow in a speech. **Speak clearly:** enunciate, speak slowly and smoothly, using appropriate emphasis.
- **Be prepared.** The more you revise your text and your presentation, and the more you practice delivering your presentation, the more smoothly you will be able to do it.
- **Use your physical presence.** Your voice, your posture, and your gestures are an ethos argument—be aware of these things and present yourself as competent and trustworthy.
- **Make eye contact.** Even though you will probably be reading your presentation, practice until you can look up every few sentences while reading.