

Position Papers

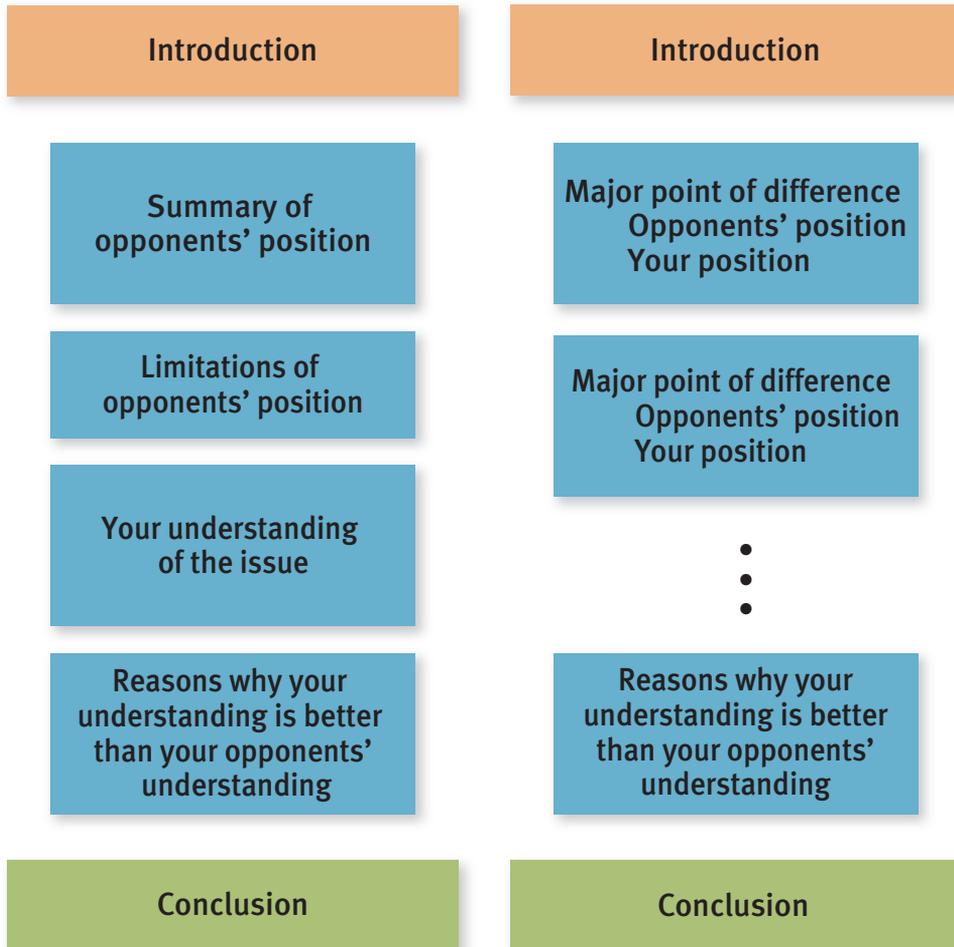
If you like to argue, you will enjoy writing position papers and argument essays. The purpose of a position paper or argument essay is to explain both sides of a controversy and then argue for one side over the other. This two-sided approach is what makes position papers and argument essays different from commentaries (Chapter 10). A commentary usually only expresses the author's personal opinion about a current issue or event. A position paper or argument essay explains both sides and discusses why one is stronger or better than the other.

Your goal is to fairly explain your side and your opponents' side of the issue, while highlighting the differences between these opposing views. You need to use solid reasoning and factual evidence to persuade your readers that your view is more valid or advantageous than your opponents' view.

In college, your professors will ask you to write position papers and argument essays to show that you understand both sides of an issue and can support one side or the other. In the workplace, corporate position papers are used to argue for or against business strategies or alternatives. The ability to argue effectively is a useful skill that will help you throughout your life.

Position Papers

This diagram shows two basic organizations for a position paper, but other arrangements of these sections will work too. In the pattern on the left, the opponents' position is described up front with its limitations; then your own position is explained with its strengths. In the pattern on the right, you make a point-by-point comparison, explaining why your position is better than your opponents'. You should alter this organization to fit your topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context.



Overview

Arguing is fun, but you need to argue fairly and reasonably if you want to win over your readers. The strongest position papers and argument essays present both sides of an issue as objectively as possible and then persuade readers that one side is superior to the other. They tend to have the following features:

- **An introduction** that states the issue being debated, identifies the issue's two or more sides, and usually makes an explicit claim (thesis) that the position paper or argument essay will support.
- **An objective summary** of your opponents' understanding of the issue.
- **A point-by-point discussion** of the limitations of your opponents' understanding.
- **A summary** of your side's understanding of the issue.
- **A point-by-point discussion** of why your side's understanding is superior to your opponents' understanding.
- **A conclusion** that drives home your main point and looks to the future.

This genre tends to be organized two ways, as shown on page 222. With some topics, you may need to show that there are more than two sides to the argument. In these cases, the pattern on the left can be expanded to include summaries and limitations of these other positions. It is best, though, to try to boil the issue down to two major sides. Otherwise, your readers will find it difficult to keep the sides of the argument straight.

ONE STUDENT'S WORK Position Papers

Allowing Guns on Campus Will Prevent Shootings, Rape

Tyler Ohmann

A graduate student leaving an evening class walks along the poorly lit sidewalk to the parking lot—it is a long, cold walk in the pitch-black night, and the student grows wary as shadows begin lurking in the distance. Suddenly, someone jumps out in front of the student, immediately threatening her with force. Before the student can react, she is raped and robbed. This is a very

← The writer sets the scene to grab readers.

continued

scary scenario, and one that happens on the SCSU campus every year. It seems like every week we get an e-mail citing another attack on students somewhere on or near campus. However, all of these attacks could be prevented if we allow students to carry guns as a means of self-defense.

Here is his main point.

Although safety is my biggest concern, there are other arguments that point to this solution as well.

Point-by-point comparison of two positions.

First, it is our Second Amendment right to bear arms. Although debates have gone on about how it should be interpreted, I believe it means that if law abiding, trained and eligible citizens would like to carry a gun with them in self-defense, they should be able to. Right now, that does not include campus. “The law, as it stands now, does not prohibit carry on campus,” said Terence McCloskey, SCSU campus leader for Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC). “It allows universities to establish rules restricting carry on campus by students and staff.” According to the March 2007 Safety and Security bulletin in section 2.1, “Alcoholic beverages, non-regulated drugs, explosives, guns and ammunition are not permitted on SCSU property.” This rule, I believe, is a violation of my Second Amendment rights.

Opponents’ views are presented fairly.

The second reason guns should be allowed is because it will give students, such as the one in the scenario, a sense of security and comfort when they are in a normally uncomfortable situation or area. The opposition would say that although the person with the gun is comfortable, it makes others around that person uncomfortable or afraid to speak up in class. Well, let me ask you this: How often do you feel uncomfortable or scared about someone near you having a gun when you go to a movie theater? Probably not too often. However, McCloskey said that 1 percent of Minnesotans have a permit to carry guns. “That means that every time they go to a movie theater with around 200 people inside, they are sitting with two people that are carrying a gun,” McCloskey said. There are people all around us that have guns, and it seems to be handled just fine. After all, the 1 percent that do carry guns have to meet certain requirements—guns are not handed out to just anyone.

Opponents’ views are presented fairly.

Minnesota law requires everyone to have a permit in order to own a handgun, and to obtain one you must be 21 years of age, be a U.S. citizen, have training in the safe use of a pistol, not be a felon, not have a domestic violence offense in the last 10 years, not be a person convicted of stalking, as well as many other restrictions. You can find these laws on the State of Minnesota Web site.

The final reason that guns should be allowed to be carried by students who obtain a permit is that it could prevent a tragic shooting like the one at Virginia Tech a couple of years ago. “Our best and our brightest are in an

unprotected environment and are essentially being led to the slaughter,” said Keith Moun in an article in the *Missourian*. “It’s not as graphic as that, but it clearly shows that there is an element out there that has targeted college students, and campus policy has left them with no way to defend themselves.” If guns had been allowed on that campus, that tragedy may have been either averted or at least minimized.

So, in order to make the SCSU campus and other campuses nationwide a safe, comfortable environment for everyone, we need to allow the ability to carry a gun on campus. Not only will it make a student carrying a gun feel safe, it can prevent a tragic shooting, a robbery, or a rape. It is our right. Let us exercise it.

The main point is driven home.

Inventing Your Position Paper's Content

When writing a position paper or argument essay, you should try to summarize both sides of the issue as fairly as possible. If readers sense that you are distorting your opponents' view, they might doubt whether your views are trustworthy. So let your facts and reasoning do the talking for you. If your position is truly stronger, you should be able to explain both sides fairly and then demonstrate to readers why your side is the stronger one.

Inquiring: Identifying Points of Contention

To begin generating content for your position paper, first identify the major points on which you and your opponents disagree. A brainstorming list like the one shown in Figure 11.1 on page 226 is often the best way to identify these major points.

Use two columns. In the left column, write “My position” and list all the arguments you can think of to support your case. In the right column, write “My opponents' position” and list your opponents' best arguments for their side of the case. When listing your opponents' ideas, you should do so from their perspective. What are their strongest arguments? What would they likely say to defend their position?

When you have filled out your brainstorming lists, put checkmarks next to the two to five most important points on which you and your opponents seem to disagree. These are called “points of contention” between your side and your opponents' side of the argument.

Researching: Finding Out What Others Know

Now it is time to do some research. You can use your two-column brainstorming list as a guide to doing research on your topic. Collect sources that support both sides of the argument. You should look for a variety of online, print, and empirical sources.

My position: Concealed weapons on campus are a greater risk than no handguns on campus.

Students, faculty, and staff will feel less safe on campus if guns are allowed.

Alcohol could cause a lapse in judgment.

Campus police don't want guns on campus.

universities may be liable if an accident happens.

In a shooting incident, police cannot tell the criminals from the people defending themselves with guns.

Bullets from a defender's gun may strike innocent people in a classroom.

Students are less mature and may use their guns to threaten others or play games.

Some students will carry guns without a concealed-carry permit.

Guns on campus will cause parents to fear sending their students to our university.

Guns locked in cars won't be any use in a shooting.

Less stable students are the ones most interested in carrying guns.

We can strengthen security if campus is thought to be unsafe.

Accidents do happen, and the university will be liable.

My opponents' position: Students, faculty, and staff should be able to carry concealed handguns on campus.

More shootings on college campuses have happened recently.

Gun-free campuses disarm citizens who could end campus shootings.

Violent people would think twice about shooting at a campus.

More mentally ill students are going to college these days.

universities would not be such easy targets for shooters.

A shooting could be ended quickly.

It may take minutes for security to arrive at the scene of a shooting.

Gun accidents are very rare.

Gun ownership is a constitutional right.

People with guns would need to be licensed and weapons concealed.

People will carry guns anyway, so it's best to have it regulated.

Only way to stop someone with a gun is to use a gun.

Guns on campus could be left in car.

People will feel more confident and less scared on campus.

People will be able to be on campus at night.

FIGURE 11.1 Brainstorming to Identify Major Points of Contention

When brainstorming about your topic, just write down anything about your topic that comes to mind.

Again, put yourself in your opponents' place as you research their side of the issue. If you were your opponent, how would you build your argument? What would be your best points? What kinds of sources would you use to support your points? After all, if you only look for sources that support your side of the argument, there is a good chance you will miss your opponents' best reasons for holding their opinion. Then it would be easy for your opponents to undermine your argument by showing that you have not considered one or more important ideas.

Online Sources. The Internet can be helpful for generating content, but you need to be especially careful about your sources when you are preparing to write a position paper or argument essay. Countless people will offer their opinions on blogs and Web sites, but these sources are often heavily biased and may provide little support to back up their opinions. When researching, you should look for factual sources on the Internet and avoid sources that are too biased. Also, keep an eye out for credible television documentaries and radio broadcasts on your subject, because they will often address both sides of the issue in a journalistic way.

Print Sources. Print documents will likely be your most reliable sources of factual information. Look for magazines, academic journals, and books, because these sources tend to be more careful about their facts and have less bias. Through your library's Web site, try using the *Readers' Guide* to find magazine articles and *periodical indexes* to find academic articles. Your library's *online catalog* is a good place to search for books.

Empirical Sources. Facts you generate yourself will be very useful for backing up your claims about your topic. Set up an interview with an expert on your topic, or create a survey that will generate some data. Do some field observations. If you really want to dig up some interesting information, set up an interview with an expert who holds an opposing view to your own. This kind of interview will help you understand both sides of the issue much better.

Remember, you are looking for information that is credible and not too biased. It is fine to use sources that make a strong argument for one side or the other, but you need to make sure these sources are backed up with facts, data, and solid sources.

Organizing and Drafting Your Position Paper

The key to organizing a position paper or argument essay is to remember that you need to tell both sides of the story. As you are drafting your argument, it might help to imagine yourself in a debate with another person (Figure 11.2, page 228). If you were in a public debate, how would you express your best points and win over the audience? Meanwhile, try to anticipate your opponents' best arguments for their position.

The Introduction

Identify your topic and offer some background information to help your readers understand what you are writing about. State your purpose clearly by telling readers that you are going to explain both sides of the issue and then demonstrate why yours is stronger. You might offer your main point (thesis) here in the introduction, or you can save it for the conclusion, especially if you think readers might resist your argument. Look for a good grabber to catch readers' attention at the beginning of your introduction.



FIGURE 11.2 Imagining a Debate with Your Opponents

When drafting a position paper or argument essay, sometimes it helps to imagine yourself debating an opponent. How would you win over the audience? What might your opponent say, and how would you counter?

Summary and Limitations of Your Opponents' Position

Here is the tough part. Try to explain your opponents' side of the issue in a straightforward way. You do not need to argue for their side, but you should explain their side in a way that your readers would consider fair and reasonable. Where possible, use quotes from your opponents' arguments to explain their side of the issue. Paraphrasing or summarizing their argument is fine too, as long as you do it fairly.

As straightforwardly as possible, explain the limitations of your opponents' position. What exactly are they missing? What have they neglected to consider? What are they ignoring in their argument? Again, you want to highlight these limitations as objectively as possible. This is not the place to be sarcastic or dismissive. You want to fairly point out the weaknesses in your opponents' argument.

Your Understanding of the Issue

Then it's your turn. Explain your side of the argument by taking your readers through the two to five points of contention, showing them why your side of the argument is stronger. Here is where you need to use your sources to back up your argument. You need to use good reasoning, examples, facts, and data to show readers why your opinion is more credible.

Reasons Why Your Understanding Is Stronger. Before moving to your conclusion, you might spend a little time comparing and contrasting your opponents' views with your own. Briefly, go head to head with your opponents, showing readers why your view is stronger. At this point, it is all right to concede some points to your opponents. Your goal is to show readers that your view is stronger *on balance*. In other words, both sides probably have their strengths and weaknesses. You want to show that your side has more strengths and fewer weaknesses than your opponents' side.

Conclusion

Bring your argument to a close by stating or restating your thesis and looking to the future. Here is where you want to drive your main point (thesis) home by telling your readers exactly what you believe. Then show how your position leads to a better future than your opponents' position. Overall, your conclusion should be brief (a paragraph in most position papers).

The diagram on page 222 shows two possible patterns for organizing your position paper or argument essay. As you draft your position paper, you might come up with a better pattern that fits your topic. No matter how you organize your position paper, the key is to tell both sides of the issue as fairly as possible.

Choosing an Appropriate Style

The style of your position paper will help you distinguish your side from your opponents' side. Even though your goal is to be *factually* fair to your opponents, there is nothing wrong with using style to make your side sound more appealing and exciting.

Use Plain Style to Describe Your Opponents' Position

You should not be sarcastic or dismissive of your opponents' side of the argument. Instead, describe the other side's argument as plainly as possible. In Chapter 16, "Choosing a Style," you will find helpful strategies for writing plainly, like putting the subjects of your sentences up front and using active verbs. You will also find techniques for writing better paragraphs that use clear topic sentences. If you use these plain style techniques to describe your opponents' side of the argument, it will sound like you are fairly and objectively summarizing their views.

Use Similes, Metaphors, and Analogies When Describing Your Position

When you are describing your side of the argument, you want to present your case as visually as possible. Similes, metaphors, and analogies are a great way to help your readers visualize your argument.

A simile compares something unfamiliar to something familiar:

Simile (X Is Like Y)

A college campus in which students are armed would be like a tense Old West frontier town.

Sharing music is like lending a good book to a friend, not pirating a ship on the high seas.

Metaphor (X Is Y)

If a shooting incident did occur, the classroom would turn into a shooting gallery, with armed students and police firing away at anyone with a gun in his or her hand. No one would be able to tell the difference between the original shooter and students with their weapons drawn.

The purpose of the music industry's lawsuits is to throw a few unfortunate college students to the lions. That way, they can hold up a few bloody carcasses to scare the rest of us.

Analogy (X Is to Y Like A Is to B)

For some people, a gun has the same comforting effect as a safety blanket to a baby. Neither a gun nor a blanket will protect you from those imaginary monsters, but both can give you a make-believe feeling of security.

The music industry's lawsuits are like your old Aunt Martha defending her tin of chocolate chip cookies at the church potluck. The industry offers a plate of delicious songs, but only the "right people" are allowed to enjoy them. College students aren't the right people because we don't have enough money.

Try some of these "persuasive style" techniques to enhance the power of your argument. Similes, metaphors, and analogies will make your writing more visual and colorful, and they will also help you come up with new ways to think and talk about your topic. You can learn more about persuasive style in Chapter 16, "Choosing a Style."

Use Top-Down Paragraphs

Your argument needs to sound confident, and your readers should be able to find your major points easily. So, in your paragraphs, put each major point in the first or second sentence. Don't put your major points in the middle of your paragraphs or at the end because your readers won't find them easily. A top-down style will make you sound more confident, because you are stating your major claims and then proving them.

Define Unfamiliar Terms

Your readers may or may not be familiar with the topic of your argument. So if you use any specialized or technical terms, you should provide quick parenthetical or sentence definitions to explain them.

Sentence Definition

A conceal-carry permit is the legal authorization that allows private citizens to carry a handgun or other weapon on their person or in a secure place nearby.

Peer-to-peer file sharing involves using a network of computers to store and share files without charge.

Parenthetical Definitions

Colleges have traditionally invoked an "opt-out" statute, [a law that allows the ban of weapons where posted](#), to keep concealed handguns off their campuses.

Music sharing should become illegal when a person *burns* the songs (*i.e., puts them on a CD*) and sells them to someone else.

Designing Your Position Paper

Position papers and argument essays tend to be written for college courses, so the design expectations are not high. More and more, though, you will find that your professors appreciate the addition of helpful visuals and the use of good page de-

sign. If your work looks professional, they will likely have a more favorable impression of it.

Use Descriptive Headings. Each of the major sections in your position paper should start with a clear heading that identifies what the section is about. For example, you could use headings like these:

The Case for Allowing Concealed Guns on Campus

The Limitations of Allowing Guns on Campus

Why Concealed Guns on Campus Are Dangerous

Conclusion: Why the Risks of Concealed Weapons Aren't Worth It

You might use bold type to help your headings stand out, and you might use a larger font size where appropriate. Make sure your headings are formatted consistently.

Add Photographs and Illustrations. If you are writing about a local issue or an issue with a local angle, you might grab a digital camera and take a few pictures to use in your paper. The Internet might also be a good place to download a few pictures and illustrations to add a visual element to your text.

In your document, make sure you label your visuals with a number and title, and include a caption to explain them. If you download a photograph or other illustration from the Internet, you will need to cite your source in the caption and in your bibliography. If you want to put your position paper on the Internet, you will need to ask permission from the owners of the photograph to use it on your Web site.

Include Helpful Graphs, Diagrams, and Charts. Position papers often discuss trends in our society, so you might look for ways to use graphs that illustrate those trends. If you collected data or found data on the Internet, you might create a graph or chart to present that data visually. Or, if you found a helpful graph on the Internet, you could use it in your own document, as long as you cite it properly. Graphs and charts should have a title, and you should use numbers in your written text to refer readers to the visual (e.g., “In Figure 2, the graph shows . . .”).

Design the Page to Make It More Readable and Attractive. Let's be honest. A double-spaced, 1-inch margin essay just looks boring. Your professors might appreciate your efforts to design a document that is more readable and more attractive (Figure 11.3, page 232). A header or footer would be nice. Maybe you could use two columns instead of one. Your headings could be bolder and more colorful. Of course, if your professor asks for something specific like “Your essay must use 12-point Times, be double-spaced, and use 1-inch margins,” then you will need to format it that way. But if there are no guidelines, you might ask whether designing the document is acceptable.

Number the Pages. Page numbers might seem like a simple thing, but they are helpful when discussing a position paper with other students or with your professor. Your word processor can add them automatically to the top or bottom of each page.

Campus Violence

In 1999, the American College Health Association (ACHA) Executive Committee adopted a position statement for the Association that addresses acts of violence, bias, and other violations of human rights that have been occurring all too often within or adjacent to college communities:

The American College Health Association is deeply saddened by the many acts of violence, hate crimes and loss of life over this past year. We, the members of the Association, believe that for a campus community to be truly healthy, it must be guided by the values of multicultural inclusion, respect, and equality. Intolerance has no place at an institution of higher learning. The Association supports all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, race, national origin, age, religion, or disability. We encourage all campus health professionals to be actively engaged in the struggle to end oppression, to prevent bias-related violence in our campus communities, and to take action to eradicate injustice. (ACHA, 1999)

Since this timely position statement was developed, acts of violence have continued to force U.S. colleges and universities to address the dangerous and alarming violent events that send shockwaves throughout many campuses and compromise students' and employees' health and safety. Campus shootings, murder-suicides, homicides, hate crimes based on gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, suicides, assaults, hazing, and arson require us to conduct fresh analyses and create new paradigms for preventing and decreasing all campus violence.

This paper will adopt the World Health Organization definition of violence as:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting

in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, p. 4)

ACHA's *Healthy Campus 2010* establishes national health objectives and serves as a basis for developing plans to create college health programs and improve student health (ACHA, 2002). *Healthy Campus* identifies Injury and Violence Prevention as a key leading health indicator. The goal is to "reduce disabilities, injuries and deaths due to injury and violence" (p. 51). Specifically, ACHA seeks to reduce homicides, physical assaults, intimate partner violence, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, rape and attempted rape, physical fighting, and weapon carrying. In addition, a goal is to increase the annual rate of reporting of rape and attempted rape to the police and via surveys.

The purpose of this ACHA White Paper is to conform this serious college health issue through analyzing campus violence patterns, types of violence, methodological problems with collecting campus crime data, underlying issues related to campus violence, and promising practices to prevent and address campus violence.

Scope of the Problem

There are approximately 16 million students enrolled in 4,200 colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The Violence Against Women Act (1994) mandated the study of campus victimization. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) gathers data on crimes reported and not reported to the police from a nationally representative sample of U.S. households. Beginning in 1995, the Bureau of Justice Statistics added new items to the survey regarding student victims of crime.

According to the Violent Victimization of College Students report (Baum & Klaus, 2005), between 1995 and 2002, college students ages 18–24 were victims of approximately 479,000 crimes of violence annually: rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Overall, the violent crime rate declined 54%. These data include both part-time and full-time students attending private or public

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Campus Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights (1992). This law requires that all colleges and universities, both public and private, that participate in federal student aid programs afford sexual assault survivors certain basic rights. The accuser and accused must have the same opportunity to have others present at judicial hearings. Both parties shall be informed of the outcome of any disciplinary proceeding. Survivors shall be informed of their options to notify law enforcement. Survivors shall be notified of counseling services and of options for changing academic and living situations.

Campus Sex Crimes Prevention Act (2000). This act provides for the collection and disclosure of information about convicted, registered sex offenders either enrolled in or employed at institutions of higher education.

University duty to warn

Courts have held that policy and federal law permit notification of family or others (usually by the dean of students) but do not create a duty to notify (Lain v. State of Iowa, 2000). The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits notification as a health or safety issue. Psychologists and psychiatrists have a duty to warn if specific threats are made against specific people by their clients. Privacy obligations of administrators may provide greater flexibility than confidentiality obligations of professional counseling or medical staff. Courts have ruled that colleges have a duty to provide "reasonable supervision of students" (Lain v. State of Iowa).

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the ACHA 2003 Annual Meeting Legal Symposium on High-Risk Students, an invited address by Nancy Tribbeness (2003) (see also Lake & Tribbeness, 2002).

- Make necessary a consultative approach across departments and administrative lines to manage high-risk student behavior.
- Educate faculty and graduate assistants, staff, and other students about the importance of early referral for distressed students.
- Address environmental issues such as drugs and alcohol.
- Develop an early warning system, such as a Student Assistance Coordinating Committee,

where troubled students are discussed and prevention plans are developed.

The following recommendations are taken from Epstein (2002):

- Legal counsel should undertake a legal review of the campus violence prevention plan.
- Institute a policy to identify types of prohibited speech as disruptive to the educational environment.
- Establish a campus ban on firearms.
- Expand campus mental health services.
- Encourage students/staff to report verbal and written threats, weapons, and bizarre behaviors.
- Have protocols in place for conveying information regarding dangerous situations and threats.

Epstein (2002) recommends development of a protocol that addresses bystander reports for each college or university campus. While recognizing conflicting issues of unjust accusations vs. not reporting potential risks that become actual hazards, the policy should ensure due process, confidentiality of the bystander whenever possible, rights of the suspected student, and constitutional validity of the policy itself. College administration must be aware of the risks associated with bystander disclosure and protect that person's rights and safety.

It is extremely important to have protocols in place for conveying information regarding dangerous situations and threats and search and seizures, as well as checking the reliability of third-party tips. A strong emphasis must be placed on increasing staff and student awareness of policies and procedures so that untrained personnel minimize risk. With regard to concerns for violation of privacy issues, Epstein (2002) suggested that one way to involve students is to ask incoming students to sign a release that will allow administrators to take action if their behavior warrants concern and becomes erratic.

Resources: Innovative Programs and Suggested Readings

Promising and innovative sexual violence prevention programs have been developed that are intended for college males only, females only, mixed-gendered audiences, athletes, fraternity members, and

FIGURE 11.3 Designing a Position Paper or Argument Essay

Your position paper doesn't need to look boring and hard to read. The designers of this paper on campus violence use headings, bullets, indentation, and columns to make the text look more accessible.

Revising and Editing Your Position Paper

As you draft your position paper or argument essay, your ideas will evolve. Some shift in your opinion is natural because writing about something gives you the opportunity to think about it in greater depth and consider other viewpoints. Drafting your argument will also force you to back up your claims, which may cause you to rethink your position a little.

Now that you are finished drafting, you need to spend time revising and "re-visioning" your argument to make sure the whole paper holds together. In other

words, you don't want to argue one thing at the beginning of the position paper and then argue something a little different at the end. The whole argument needs to work together to prove your main point or thesis.

Remove Any Digressions. When arguing, you might find yourself temporarily drifting off topic. These moments are called *digressions*, and you should remove them from the final version of your paper. Check each paragraph to make sure you are discussing your topic and not going off in a direction that expands or sidetracks your argument.

Back-Check the Evidence for Your Claims. Make sure your claims are backed up with solid support. If you make a claim about your position or your opponents', that statement should be followed up with facts, data, examples, reasoning, or quotations. Short paragraphs are usually a signal that you are not backing up your claims, because such paragraphs typically include only a claim with minimal support.

Improve the Flow of Your Sentences. Try reading your draft out loud to yourself or someone else. Mark any places where you stumble or hear something that doesn't sound right. Then use the "plain style" methods discussed in Chapter 16, "Choosing a Style," to make your sentences flow better.

Make Your Writing More Visual. Look for places where you can use more detail and color to bring your writing to life. Describe things and people. Look for places where you can use similes and metaphors to add a visual component to your writing.

Ask a friend or roommate to read through your position paper to highlight places where you could revise. Also, your university may have a Writing Lab where you can get help with locating places in your essay that need revision.

Revising and editing are critical to developing solid position papers and argument essays because your readers (i.e., your professors or supervisors) place a high value on clear, thoughtful writing. If they sense that you did not revise and edit your work, they will rate your work lower.

The Rebuttal

A rebuttal counters or refutes an argument. Rebuttals often appear as letters to the editor. They are also used in the workplace to argue against potentially damaging reviews, evaluations, position papers, and reports. Knowing how to write a rebuttal is an important part of defending your beliefs, projects, and research.

The main difference between a rebuttal and a position paper is that a rebuttal responds directly to the points made in the original argument. After responding to your opponent's argument point by point, you then offer a better counterargument. Here are some strategies for writing a successful rebuttal:

Review your opponent's argument briefly. Objectively summarize the original argument's main point and its major claims.

Challenge any hidden assumptions behind your opponent's claims. Look for unstated assumptions in each major claim of your opponent's argument. These are weak points that you can challenge.

Challenge the facts. If the author cites any facts, locate the original source to see if any data or details are outdated, inaccurate, exaggerated, or taken out of context. If the author has no supporting facts, then you can point that out in your rebuttal.

Challenge the authority of the sources. If possible, question whether the author's sources are truly authoritative on the issue. Unless a source is rock solid, you can question the reliability of the information taken from it.

Look for logical fallacies. Logical fallacies are forms of weak reasoning that you can use to challenge your opponents' ideas. You can learn more about logical fallacies in Chapter 22, "Using Argumentative Strategies."

Offer a solid counterargument. Offer a different understanding of the issue supported by authoritative research.

WRITE your own rebuttal. Find a position paper in a newspaper or on a Web site that you disagree with. Write a two-page rebuttal in which you refute the original argument and offer a counterargument. Your goal is to win readers over to your side.

Letter to the Editor on Climate Story

Russ Walker and David Roberts

Politico did a disservice to its readers in publishing the Nov. 25 story, “Scientists urge caution on global warming.” It reports that “climate change skeptics”—the too-charitable name given those who deny the existence of climate change in the face of overwhelming evidence and the testimony of every reputable scientific organization—are watching “a growing accumulation of global cooling science and other findings that could signal that the science behind global warming may still be too shaky to warrant cap-and-trade legislation.”

While reasonable people may debate the value of cap-and-trade legislation, and it is certainly worth reporting on how its congressional opponents are strategizing to block it, it is simply false to point to a “growing accumulation” of evidence rendering basic climate science “shaky.” There is no such accumulation; there is no such science. If there were, perhaps the author would have cited some of it—it is telling that she did not.

Instead, she relies on the work of Joseph D’Aleo, a meteorologist (meteorology is the study of weather, not climate). D’Aleo’s lack of qualifications in climate science would be less relevant if he had published his work on “global cooling” in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Instead, it appears in the *Farmers’ Almanac*.

Incidentally, D’Aleo’s professional association, the American Meteorological Association, is one of dozens of leading national and international scientific groups to endorse the broad consensus on anthropogenic climate change. For some reason, the author did not reference or quote a single one of the hundreds if not thousands of scientists who might have vouchsafed that consensus (inexplicably, the one countervailing quote is given to Al Gore’s spokeswoman). If she had spoken with mainstream climate scientists, she would have discovered that they are not “urging caution” on global warming—they are running around, to paraphrase ex-CIA chief George Tenet, with their hair on fire, increasingly radicalized by the ignorance and delay of the world’s governments in the face of the crisis.

Also glossed over is the fact that the organizations backing D’Aleo’s work—National Consumer Coalition, Americans for Tax Reform, the National Center for Policy Analysis and Citizens for a Sound Economy—are (for better or worse) conservative interest groups, not science

Opponent’s position is reviewed.

Challenges authority of sources.

Points out that the original article missed key sources of information.

continued

Letter to the Editor on Climate Story (continued)

organizations. Similarly, the “Global Warming Petition Project” the author cites is one of the oldest, most discredited hoaxes in the “skeptical” handbook. It first emerged in 1998, when it was promptly disavowed and disowned by the Academy of Sciences. The petition is deceptive: Only a handful of signatories come from relevant scientific disciplines, it is open to signature by anyone willing to fill out an online form and there is no clear way to document the scientific credentials of those who have signed. (One clever blogger signed up his dog.) The petition is rereleased every few years and debunked all over again, inevitably after snookering a few journalists.

Offers a counter-argument.

Meanwhile, respected and nonpolitical scientific bodies are firmly united when it comes to climate change—humanity’s reliance on carbon-based fuels is pumping dangerous amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere, leading to a steady rise in average global temperature and attendant ill effects including droughts, the spread of infectious diseases, and sea level rise. This basic consensus is as well-established in mainstream science as any finding in biology or chemistry, endorsed with a greater than 90 percent degree of confidence by the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Journalists working on climate issues will recognize the bogus evidence and outlier scientists featured in *Politico*’s piece; they are regularly highlighted by the office of Sen. James Inhofe. Though Inhofe’s long campaign of disinformation on climate science is eagerly consumed and propagated by political allies dead set on opposing any government action on global warming, mainstream science and climate journalists have long since learned to disregard it. There’s a reason Inhofe’s campaign is waged via press conferences and online petitions rather than peer-reviewed science.

Here is the main point with an ending that snaps.

Climate change is an incredibly complex topic; the policy prescriptions for addressing it are wide open for debate; the maneuverings of various industries and interest groups are well worth documenting. But the basic science is quite clear, and *Politico* should take the subject seriously enough not to equate the views of a small group of ideological deniers with a consensus reached over decades of intense data collection, study, and peer review.

Here are some quick steps for writing a position paper or argument essay.

IDENTIFY a Debatable Topic

A debatable topic has at least two sides. Choose the side that you agree with. Then narrow your topic to something suitable for a position paper. Think about what is new or has changed about your topic recently.

IDENTIFY the Points Separating Your Views from Opponents' Views

Using brainstorming or another prewriting tool, put down everything you know about your topic. Then write down everything your opponents believe about this issue. When you are finished, put stars or checkmarks next to the issues on which you and your opponents disagree.

RESEARCH Both Sides of the Topic

Do not collect only materials that support your side, because you want to discover your opponents' best reasons for supporting their side. You can authoritatively counter their position as you support your own.

ORGANIZE Your Materials and Draft Your Argument

Position papers are organized to explain both sides of the issue. Be sure you give fair and adequate space to explaining as well as refuting your opponents' argument.

CHOOSE Your Style

When explaining your opponents' position, use a "plain style" with simple sentences and paragraphs. When you explain your own position, add energy to your argument using similes, metaphors, and analogies.

DESIGN the Document

Position papers tend to be rather plain in design. However, you might look for opportunities to add visuals to support your argument. Consider using columns, headings, and other elements to make the document more attractive.

REVISE and Edit

As you draft your argument, your position may evolve, so give yourself time to modify your argument and refine your points. Proofreading is critical as readers will see errors as evidence that your argument has not been fully thought through.

In Defense of Torture

SAM HARRIS

*This position paper, written by Sam Harris, who is best known for his book *The End of Faith*, makes an argument that “torture may be an ethical necessity.” Harris uses a combination of emotional and logical appeals to persuade his readers. Notice how he concedes points to his opponents in strategic ways, which allows him to bring forward his own arguments for torture.*

Imagine that a known terrorist has planted a bomb in the heart of a nearby city. He now sits in your custody. Rather than conceal his guilt, he gloats about the forthcoming explosion and the magnitude of human suffering it will cause. Given this state of affairs—in particular, given that there is still time to prevent an imminent atrocity—it seems that subjecting this unpleasant fellow to torture may be justifiable. For those who make it their business to debate the ethics of torture this is known as the “ticking-bomb” case.

While the most realistic version of the ticking bomb case may not persuade everyone that torture is ethically acceptable, adding further embellishments seems to awaken the Grand Inquisitor in most of us. If a conventional explosion doesn’t move you, consider a nuclear bomb hidden in midtown Manhattan. If bombs seem too impersonal an evil, picture your seven-year-old daughter being slowly asphyxiated in a warehouse just five minutes away, while the man in your custody holds the keys to her release. If your daughter won’t tip the scales, then add the daughters of every couple for a thousand miles—millions of little girls have, by some perverse negligence on the part of our government, come under the control of an evil genius who now sits before you in shackles. Clearly, the consequences of one person’s uncooperativeness can be made so grave, and his malevolence and culpability so trans-

parent, as to stir even a self-hating moral relativist from his dogmatic slumbers.

I am one of the few people I know of who has argued in print that torture may be an ethical necessity in our war on terror. In the aftermath of Abu Ghraib, this is not a comfortable position to have publicly adopted. There is no question that Abu Ghraib was a travesty, and there is no question that it has done our country lasting harm. Indeed, the Abu Ghraib scandal may be one of the costliest foreign policy blunders to occur in the last century, given the degree to which it simultaneously inflamed the Muslim world and eroded the sympathies of our democratic allies. While we hold the moral high ground in our war on terror, we appear to hold it less and less. Our casual abuse of ordinary prisoners is largely responsible for this. Documented abuses at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and elsewhere have now inspired legislation prohibiting “cruel, inhuman or degrading” treatment of military prisoners. And yet, these developments do not shed much light on the ethics of torturing people like Osama bin Laden when we get them in custody.

I will now present an argument for the use of torture in rare circumstances. While many people have objected, on emotional grounds, to my defense of torture, no one has pointed out a flaw in my argument. I hope my case for torture is wrong, as I would be much happier standing side by side with all the good people

who oppose torture categorically. I invite any reader who discovers a problem with my argument to point it out to me in the comment section of this blog. I would be sincerely grateful to have my mind changed on this subject.

Most readers will undoubtedly feel at this point that torture is evil and that we are wise not to practice it. Even if we can't quite muster a retort to the ticking bomb case, most of us take refuge in the fact that the paradigmatic case will almost never arise. It seems, however, that this position is impossible to square with our willingness to wage modern war in the first place.

In modern warfare, "collateral damage"—the maiming and killing of innocent noncombatants—is unavoidable. And it will remain unavoidable for the foreseeable future. Collateral damage would be a problem even if our bombs were far "smarter" than they are now. It would also be a problem even if we resolved to fight only defensive wars. There is no escaping the fact that whenever we drop bombs, we drop them with the knowledge that some number of children will be blinded, disemboweled, paralyzed, orphaned, and killed by them.

The only way to rule out collateral damage would be to refuse to fight wars under any circumstances. As a foreign policy, this would leave us with something like the absolute pacifism of Gandhi. While pacifism in this form can constitute a direct confrontation with injustice (and requires considerable bravery), it is only applicable to a limited range of human conflicts. Where it is not applicable, it seems flagrantly immoral. We would do well to reflect on Gandhi's remedy for the Holocaust: he believed that the Jews should have committed mass suicide, because this "would have aroused the world and the people of Germany to Hitler's violence." We might wonder what a world full of pacifists would have done once it had grown "aroused"—commit suicide as well? There seems no question that if all the good people in the world adopted Gandhi's ethics, the thugs would inherit the earth.

So we can now ask, if we are willing to act in a way that guarantees the misery and death of some considerable number of innocent children, why spare the rod with known terrorists? I find it genuinely bizarre that while the torture of Osama bin Laden himself could be expected to provoke convulsions of conscience among our leaders, the perfectly foreseeable (and therefore accepted) slaughter of children does not. What is the difference between pursuing a course of action where we run the risk of inadvertently subjecting some innocent men to torture, and pursuing one in which we will inadvertently kill far greater numbers of innocent men, women, and children? Rather, it seems obvious that the misapplication of torture should be far *less* troubling to us than collateral damage: there are, after all, no *infants* interned at Guantanamo Bay. Torture need not even impose a significant risk of death or permanent injury on its victims; while the collaterally damaged are, almost by definition, crippled or killed. The ethical divide that seems to be opening up here suggests that those who are willing to drop bombs might want to abduct the nearest and dearest of suspected terrorists—their wives, mothers, and daughters—and torture *them* as well, assuming anything profitable to our side might come of it. Admittedly, this would be a ghastly result to have reached by logical argument, and we will want to find some way of escaping it. But there seems no question that accidentally torturing an innocent man is better than accidentally blowing him and his children to bits.

In this context, we should note that many variables influence our feelings about an act of physical violence. The philosopher Jonathan Glover points out that "in modern war, what is most shocking is a poor guide to what is most harmful." To learn that one's grandfather flew a bombing mission over Dresden in the Second World War is one thing; to hear that he killed five little girls and their mother with a shovel is another. We can be sure that he would have killed many more women and

girls by dropping bombs from pristine heights, and they are likely to have died equally horrible deaths, but his culpability would not appear the same. There is much to be said about the disparity here, but the relevance to the ethics of torture should be obvious. If you think that the equivalence between torture and collateral damage does not hold, because torture is up close and personal while stray bombs aren't, you stand convicted of a failure of imagination on at least two counts: first, a moment's reflection on the horrors that must have been visited upon innocent Afghans and Iraqis by our bombs will reveal that they are on par with those of any dungeon. If our intuition about the wrongness of torture is born of an aversion to how people generally behave while being tortured, we should note that this particular infelicity could be circumvented pharmacologically, because paralytic drugs make it unnecessary for screaming ever to be heard or writhing seen. We could easily devise methods of torture that would render a torturer as blind to the plight of his victims as a bomber pilot is at thirty thousand feet. Consequently, our natural aversion to the sights and sounds of the dungeon provide no foothold for those who would argue against the use of torture.

To demonstrate just how abstract the 10 torments of the tortured can be made to seem, we need only imagine an ideal "torture pill"—a drug that would deliver both the instruments of torture and the instrument of their concealment. The action of the pill would be to produce transitory paralysis and transitory misery of a kind that no human being would willingly submit to a second time. Imagine how we torturers would feel if, after giving this pill to captive terrorists, each lay down for what appeared to be an hour's nap only to arise and immediately confess everything he knows about the workings of his organization. Might we not be tempted to call it a "truth pill" in the end? No, there is no ethical difference to be found in how the suffering of the tortured or the collaterally damaged appears.

Opponents of torture will be quick to argue that confessions elicited by torture are notoriously unreliable. Given the foregoing, however, this objection seems to lack its usual force. Make these confessions as unreliable as you like—the chance that our interests will be advanced in any instance of torture need only equal the chance of such occasioned by the dropping of a single bomb. What was the chance that the dropping of bomb number 117 on Kandahar would effect the demise of Al Qaeda? It had to be pretty slim. Enter Khalid Sheikh Mohammed: our most valuable capture in our war on terror. Here is a character who actually seems to have stepped out of a philosopher's thought experiment. U.S. officials now believe that his was the hand that decapitated the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl. Whether or not this is true, his membership in Al Qaeda more or less rules out his "innocence" in any important sense, and his rank in the organization suggests that his knowledge of planned atrocities must be extensive. The bomb has been ticking ever since September 11th, 2001. Given the damage we were willing to cause to the bodies and minds of innocent children in Afghanistan and Iraq, our disavowal of torture in the case of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed seems perverse. If there is even one chance in a million that he will tell us something under torture that will lead to the further dismantling of Al Qaeda, it seems that we should use every means at our disposal to get him talking. (In fact, the *New York Times* has reported that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was tortured in a procedure known as "water-boarding," despite our official disavowal of this practice.)

Which way should the balance swing? Assuming that we want to maintain a coherent ethical position on these matters, this appears to be a circumstance of forced choice: if we are willing to drop bombs, or even risk that rifle rounds might go astray, we should be willing to torture a certain class of criminal suspects and military prisoners; if we are unwilling to torture, we should be unwilling to wage modern war.

A CLOSER LOOK AT In Defense of Torture

1. Harris uses several hypothetical situations to argue that torture may be needed in some special cases. What are these hypothetical situations, and do you find them persuasive in convincing you to accept torture as an option?
2. Find two places where Harris concedes a point to his opponents about torture. How does he make a concession without undermining his own argument? Do these concessions make his argument stronger or weaker?
3. Harris's final sentence says, "if we are unwilling to torture, we should be unwilling to wage modern war." He comes to this conclusion by comparing the deaths of innocent people (i.e., collateral damage) with the treatment of terrorists. Do you find his comparison between innocent people and terrorists effective or not?

IDEAS FOR Writing

1. This position paper was published in 2005. Now we know much more about the Bush administration's use of torture before and during the Iraq war. Write a briefing in which you objectively describe how torture was used during the Iraq war.
2. Write a rebuttal to Harris's argument. Where are the weak points in his argument? Can you see any ways to use his own arguments against him? What does he seem to be missing and what kinds of questionable claims does he make?

Friends with Benefits: Do Facebook Friends Provide the Same Support as Those in Real Life?

KATE DAILEY

Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace have challenged our ideas about what it means to be a "friend." Today, people can keep in touch with others who might otherwise have faded into the past. Also, we can be "friends" with people we barely know who share common interests or backgrounds. In this position paper, pay attention to how Dailey builds her argument and notice where she summarizes the other side of the debate.

I have a friend named Sue. Actually, “Sue” isn’t her real name, and she isn’t really a friend: she’s something akin to a lost sorority sister—we went to the same college, participated in the same activities and had a lot of mutual respect and admiration for one another. But since graduation, we’ve fallen out of touch, and the only way I know about Sue, her life and her family is through her *Facebook* updates. That’s why I felt almost like a voyeur when Sue announced, via *Facebook*, the death of her young son. I was surprised she had chosen to share something so personal online—and then ashamed, because since when did I become the arbiter of what’s appropriate for that kind of grief?

The more I thought about it, the more I realized *Facebook* might be the perfect venue for tragic news: it’s the fastest way to disseminate important information to the group without having to deal with painful phone calls; it allowed well-meaning friends and acquaintances to instantly pass on condolences, which the family could read at their leisure, and it eliminated the possibility that were I to run into Sue in the supermarket, I’d ask unknowingly about her son and force her to replay the story over again.

Numerous studies have shown that a strong network of friends can be crucial to getting through a crisis, and can help you be healthier in general. But could virtual friends, like the group of online buddies that reached out to Sue, be just as helpful as the flesh-and-blood versions? In other words, do *Facebook* friends—and the support we get from them—count? These questions are all the more intriguing as the number of online social-network users increases. *Facebook* attracted 67.5 million visitors in the U.S. in April (according to ComScore Inc.), and the fastest-growing demographic is people over 35. It’s clear that connecting to friends, both close and distant, via the computer will become more the norm than novelty.

Researchers have yet to significantly study the social implications of *Facebook*, so

what we do know is gleaned from general studies about friendship, and some of the emerging studies about online networking. First, a definition of “friend”: In research circles, experts define a friend as a close, equal, voluntary partnership—though Rebecca G. Adams, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, says that in reality, “friendships don’t have to be equal or close, and we know from research that friendships aren’t as voluntary as they seem,” because they’re often constricted by education, age and background. Friends on *Facebook* seem to mimic, if not replicate, this trend—there are people online that you are more likely to chat with every day, while others only make an appearance once or twice a year, content to spend the rest of the time residing silently in your friend queue. (Though the *Facebook* friends with whom you have frequent social interaction might not be people you interact with often in “real life.”)

In life, having 700 people in your circle of 5 friends could get overwhelming, but that’s less of an issue online. “Research suggests that people are only intermittently in touch with many of their online ‘friends’ but correspond regularly with only a few good friends,” says Shelley E. Taylor, professor of psychology at The University of California, Los Angeles. “That said, creating networks to ease the transition to new places can be hugely helpful to people, offsetting loneliness until new friends are made.”

In other words, *Facebook* may not replace the full benefits of real friendship, but it definitely beats the alternative. I conducted a very informal poll via my *Facebook* status update, asking if *Facebook* makes us better friends. A high-school pal, with whom I haven’t spoken in about 10 years, confessed that since she had her baby, corresponding via *Facebook* has been a lifeline—and even if she wasn’t actively commenting, it was nice to know what people were up to. “Any electronic communication where you don’t have to be in the same physical space is go-

ing to decrease feelings of isolation,” says Dr. Adams.

Several people in my online network admit that *Facebook* doesn’t make them a better friend, but a better acquaintance, more likely to dash off a quick happy birthday e-mail, or to comment on the photo of a new puppy. But that’s not a bad thing. Having a large group of “friends” eager to comment on your daily life could be good for your self-esteem. When you get a new job, a celebratory lunch with your best friends will make you feel good and make for a fantastic memory. But the boost you get from the 15 *Facebook* friends who left encouraging comments can also make you happy.

“The way to think of this is before the Internet, we wouldn’t see our acquaintances very often: every once in a while, we might show up at a wedding and suddenly have 100 of our closest friends around,” says James Fowler, associate professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego. “With *Facebook*, it’s like every day is a wedding.” And just like leaving a wedding may leave you feeling energized and inspired by reconnecting to old pals, so can spending time on *Facebook*, says Fowler.

While Fowler’s research also shows that bad habits like smoking and weight gain can be contagious among close friends, emotions like happiness and sadness are easily transferable through acquaintances. The good news? “Because happiness spreads more easily than unhappiness, getting positive comments from your *Facebook* friends is more likely to make you happy than sad,” he says.

Shy people who may not always be able to engage friends in the real world are finding solace in the structure of *Facebook*. Though people who identify as shy have a smaller circle of *Facebook* friends than those who don’t, they are better able to engage with the online friends they do have. “Because people don’t have to interact face-to-face, that’s why we’re seeing them having relationships: they can think more about what they have to say and

how they want to say it,” says Craig Ross, a graduate student in psychology at the University of Windsor who studies online social networks.

And what of my “friend” “Sue”? Can the support she received from *Facebook* friends upon learning about the death of her son replicate the support that would come from friends stopping by the house? It’s impossible to replace the warm feelings—or brain-boosting endorphins—that come from human-on-human contact, and you can’t send someone a casserole through *Facebook*. But grieving online can have powerful and productive benefits. Diana Nash, professor of psychology at Marymount Manhattan College, who has studied how college students use *MySpace* to deal with grief, notes that, “One of the primary desires that we all have is for someone to really listen to us in a deep kind of way. They want to be listened to,” she says. Her research shows that by sharing their grief on *MySpace*, her subjects felt more listened to and more visible, and doing so helped them heal.

Posting personal experiences, no matter how painful, also allows acquaintances who have lived through similar experiences to reach out, either with information about support groups or just an empathetic ear. “The idea of sharing a commonality helps make it a little more bearable. You’re not alone, and there are others going through what you went through,” says Nash. “It doesn’t take away the pain, but it can lessen the pain and make you feel not so alone.”

The majority of times we reach out on *Facebook*, however, it’s not about a tragedy, but a smaller problem for which we need advice: good movers in the San Francisco area, a copy of yesterday’s newspaper, answers to a question about taxes. This is another place where the large *Facebook* networks come in handy. In real life, people tend to befriend people who think thoughts and live very similar lives to their own, but because on *Facebook* people often “friend” classmates, people met at parties, and friends-of-friends, the networks

include individuals who wouldn't make the "real friend" cut. Having that diversity of opinion and experience available online increases the diversity of responses received when posting a question, which allows you to make a better-informed decision.

Still, there are experts who worry that too much time online keeps us from living satisfying lives in the real world. "It's great to have a lot of *Facebook* friends, but how many of those will friends will show when you're really in trouble?" asks Michael J. Bugeja, a professor of communications at Iowa State University of Science and Technology and author of *Interpersonal Divide: The Search for Community in a Technological Age*. He notes the

world of difference between someone typing a frowny emoticon upon hearing that you've been in a car crash and showing up to help you get home. He also says that *Facebook*, with its focus on existing relationships—and its ability to codify and categorize those relationships—in some ways belies the promise of the Internet. "Rather than opening us up to a global community, it is putting us into groups," he says.

That's why *Facebook* works best as an ¹⁵ amplification of a "real life" social life, not a replacement—even as time and technology progress and the lines between online interactions and real-world experiences continue to blur.

A CLOSER LOOK AT Friends with Benefits

1. In this position paper, the definition of the word "friend" seems open for debate. Dailey offers a couple of different definitions of a friend, a traditional definition and a social-networking site definition. How are these two types of friends similar, and how are they different?
2. This position paper talks about how habits can be contagious among friends, like smoking and weight gain. Bailey, however, sees this kind of con-

tagiousness as a good thing because of *Facebook*. Why?

3. A good position paper fairly describes the other side of the debate, usually early in the argument. However, in this position paper, Dailey waits until the end to clearly state her oppositions' argument. What do these people find wrong with calling people on *Facebook* "friends"?

IDEAS FOR Writing

1. Write a three-page commentary in which you discuss the future of friendships in an electronically networked world. Do you think people will lose touch with each other, because they are mostly interacting through texting, social networking sites, or e-mail? Or do you think electronic networking is actually making relationships stronger? What are some of the benefits of friendships through electronic networking? What are some of the downsides?
2. Find one of your childhood friends on *Facebook*, *MySpace*, or another social networking site. Write a two-page profile of your friend using only evidence drawn from his or her page. On his or her page, your friend has tried to project a particular image. What is that image? How is that image similar to or different from the person you know or knew personally?

1. With a small group, make a list of some challenging issues facing our society today. Pick an issue and explore both sides. What are the two to five major points of contention between the two sides of the issue? What are the strengths of each side? What are the limitations of each side?
2. With your class, list ten effective and ineffective ways to argue. What is the best way to get your point across to someone else? What are your most effective strategies? Then list some of the worst ways to argue. What are some of the annoying ways in which other people have tried to persuade you? How did you react to some of these less effective methods?
3. Think about arguments you have had with friends, family members, and other people you care about. With a small group, discuss why these arguments are sometimes more difficult than arguments with people who are not so close to you. Do you have any strategies for arguing effectively with people you care strongly about? Do you avoid these kinds of arguments? If so, why?

Talk About This



1. Look at the opinions section of your local newspaper. Pick one of the issues that is being discussed in the editorials, commentaries, or letters to the editor. On your screen or a piece of paper, list the positions and the kinds of support offered by one of the writers. Then list the points the opponents might make to counter these positions and support their own opinions. In a memo to your professor, explain both sides of the argument as fairly as possible. Then show why you think one side or the other has the stronger argument.
2. Find a position paper or argument essay on the Internet. You might look for these arguments in the online versions of newspapers or magazines. In a two-page memo to your professor, analyze the argument and explain whether you think the author is arguing effectively or not. Did the author fairly represent both sides of the issue? Is the author too biased, or does he or she neglect any strengths of the opponents' position or the limitations of his or her own position?
3. Pick a topic that you feel strongly about. Create a two-column brainstorming list that explores the issues involved with this topic. Then identify the two to five main points of contention that separate you from someone who disagrees with you about this topic. In a one-page memo to your professor, discuss the strengths and limitations of your side of the issue and your opponents'. Explain what kinds of information you would need to collect to support your best arguments and highlight the limitations of your opponents' views.

Try This Out



Write This



- 1. Take a stand.** Write a five-page position paper in which you explore both sides of a contentious local issue. Pick an issue that affects you directly and try to fairly represent both sides of the issue. Explain your opponents' side of the issue as clearly and fairly as possible. Then point out the limitations of their side. Explain your side of the issue and concede any limitations of your side. Then, persuade your readers that your understanding of the issue is stronger and more reasonable than your opponents' understanding.
- 2. Create a multimedia presentation.** Illegal downloading of music has been an important issue on college campuses recently. Some students are being sued by the music industry, and they are being forced to pay thousands of dollars in damages and fines. Create a ten-slide presentation in which you state your opinion about downloading music "illegally" off the Internet. Explain your opponents' understanding of the issue. Then explain your side and show why you think your understanding is stronger than your opponents'. Your presentation could be made with *PowerPoint*, *Keynote*, or any other presentation software. Try adding photographs, charts, video, and audio, where appropriate.
- 3. Argue that something bad for people is really good for them.** In a five-page position paper, argue that something people traditionally assume is "bad" (e.g., playing video games, being overweight, seeing violence in movies, watching television, cramming for an exam) is actually good. Summarize the conventional assumptions about why something is bad. Then use research to show that it is actually good for people.



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