Faculty Guide: Tips On Writing Assignments  
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**Project 3: Position Paper**

This project will build on skills gained from our last project, where you interviewed and analyzed an unknown discourse community. Similarly, for this next project, you will rely on your analysis, but instead of analyzing a community, you will be analyzing one of your personal beliefs, synthesizing others’ opinions about that same topic/philosophy and creating a cohesive and persuasive essay. This project highlights that positions matter while helping us to think deeper about our reasons and evidence behind our positions and better understanding that our position is part of larger conversations.

In this project, you are tasked to identify the kinds of topics that emerge in our course readings and to develop your position on one of those topics. The key is to reflect on your own position about what an author has presented, thinking about how yours is similar and different; you may also use your interviewing skills from last project and survey one or two peers on the topic. You should then synthesize your findings (from your interviews, the course readings, and your personal experiences), developing an essay based on your stance. Be sure to include reasons with specific examples (from your life, others’ lives, and our readings). Your position paper will be framed by a clear position on that topic, and you will select one of the below sub-genres within the “position genre” to construct your essay:

- a letter to the editor in the *Hattiesburg American*
- an op/ed column in the *Student Printz*, or
- a spin-off of NPR’s “This I Believe” series.

You should consider the audience of your selected sub-genre when writing your essay. In class, we will use NPR’s “This I Believe” series as a general guide to unpack genre features and to find possible topics.

**Getting Started:** We will learn about the position genre and will read and discuss several readings in and beyond our textbook related to positions. While reading these, you should ask yourself: What is the topic (or topics) in this piece? What position is this author taking? What personal experiences led to that position? Next, you might step back, and ask yourself: What personal experiences do I have with that topic? What is my position on that same topic? Doing this will help brainstorm about possible topics for your essay; you want to select a topic that is meaningful to you and that you can develop with reasons and evidence. The success of your position paper depends on your explanation, reasons, evidence, and your connection to your audience. When considering how to connect better with your specific audience, you should examine their values and positions. Once you identify your topic, explore what others think, you will then articulate your stance and find reasons and evidence that effectively support your position.

**Rhetorical Considerations** Like we mentioned, your position matter, but others have opinions on this same topic. Thus, you want to construct an essay that enters a larger conversation on your selected topic. Also, you should decide what will be the most appropriate venue for your position paper: a letter to the editor in the *Hattiesburg American*, an op/ed column in the *Student Printz*, or a spin-off of the “This I Believe” series for NPR. Once you choose your venue, you will then have to decide who your audience might be as well as how you should organize your position based on the features of your selected venue, or rather, your sub-genre. Because this assignment requires you to consider a specific audience and sub-genre within the “position” genre, you should make rhetorical choices based on both.

**Putting It Together:** The format and style of your paper will vary depending on your goals, audience, and selected venue. You are responsible for adhering to appropriate guidelines for that venue. Your essay should have an original title appropriate to your main goal. Should be 4-5 pages, and should include a works cited. Due dates: Interview transcript, 04/20; Draft, 04/22; Final version of essay, 04/26.

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1 Assignment is a version of one used in USM’s Expanded Composition program. Comments have been inserted by Dr. Rachel N. Spear (2014) as helpful tips for faculty across campus to use when crafting their assignments.