Strategies for Writing a Position Paper

A position paper is a kind of academic writing in which the student researches a controversial issue and writes a paper that explains his/her stand or viewpoint on it.

The main goal of a position paper is to take part in the larger debate on the issue by stating and supporting your opinion or recommended course of action. The student is required to research other papers on the issue, analyze them in depth, and formulate his/her own argument on the matter. Real world examples include ethical dilemmas involving existing or soon-to-be-formulated company policy and arguments for/or against legislation that may affect business.

Analyzing Other Position Papers:

The best way to start a successful position paper is research. Here are some strategies to effectively analyze other positions or arguments:

• Did the writer analyze the controversy and discuss what others have said about it?
• What are the various positions on the issue? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? Did the writer cite sources of information and provide a reference list for readers who want to read those?
• Did the writer explain and fairly analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the various sides of the issue? How deeply into the argument was the writer able to go? If there were only two different opinions did the writer carefully explore the strengths and weaknesses of each, or did he/she just disprove one side without going into the details?
• What is the writer’s position on the issue? What is he/she arguing that we the reader should or should not do about it?
• What are the writer’s reasons for his/her opinion? How well does the writer support the recommended course of action?
• Did the writer see the objections to or weaknesses in his/her own argument? Did he/she argue strongly for a particular point of view or direction?
• Was the paper persuasive? Why or why not?

Strategies for Structuring your Position Paper

• Define the issue and provide as thorough a background as possible. State your own position.
• Discuss and analyze the various positions you have researched. Ensure that both strengths and weaknesses are taken into account.
• Discuss your position and analyze its strengths and weaknesses. Discuss its relevance to other positions and why you have chosen it. Provide counters against potential criticisms of and weaknesses in the argument.
• Give reasons why your position and/or suggested course of action is the optimum one for all parties involved.

A successful position paper is one that persuades its audience towards its argument. Reading your paper objectively and asking the same questions of it as you asked of the ones you researched, will help you avoid the same weaknesses in argument that you may have noticed in the papers you have analyzed.

Reference: