**Social Issues Paper “DOs” and “DON’Ts”**

The following is an excerpt from a paper writing guide prepared by Dr. Connie M. Moss of Duquesne University. The full document is available at [http://cpedinitiative.org/files/Duquensne%20U\_Issue%20Paper%20Guide%20for%20Society&Individual\_0.pdf](http://cpedinitiative.org/files/Duquensne%20U_Issue%20Paper%20Guide%20for%20Society%26Individual_0.pdf)

 **The “DOs”:**

• Pick a topic that can be argued.

Position papers are meant to convince readers of something, to change their mind, or to incite change. If your topic is not arguable--or if there is a definite, correct solution-- your paper will automatically be ineffective.

• Formulate a thesis that contains your opinion.

From the beginning, the reader should have no doubt about your stance on the issue. A good formula to follow for a thesis statement is to identify the situation and then make a claim about what should be done (ex: Because pesticides endanger the lives of farm workers, their use should be banned).

• Rely on facts, not opinion, to make your argument.

Though most topics worth arguing about stir up strong emotional reactions, your argument should always rely on facts instead of emotions. Statistics, expert testimony, and personal accounts are all good sources from which to draw an argument. Keep in mind, though, that these sources should be reputable so that the reader can trust your judgment.

• Remember that your writing skills still apply.

The standard academic rules of grammar, formality, and documentation apply. As always, your conclusion must tie your paper together with a summary of the main points. A polished and professional paper helps to convince your reader.

**“The DON’Ts”:**

• Don't fall victim to logical fallacies.

Fallacious arguments are errors in reasoning, and most readers will be able to detect them. Avoid arguments that depend upon generalization or oversimplifications (Example. The recognition of the rights of women will end discrimination against women in the workplace).

Don't attempt to tie together two or more logically unrelated ideas as if they were related. (Example. If we can send a man to the moon, we can find a way to end cyber bullying).

Don't assume that a complex situation can have only one correct outcome (Example. The only way to stop ageism is to stop listing age and date of birth on all forms of identification).

Avoid treating a question as if it has already been answered (Example. The death penalty is obviously useful, or we would not have it in this country).

• Don't rely upon emotional fallacies:

These appeals attempt to overcome a reader's good judgment by using exaggerated emotional pleas.

Avoid flattery and in-crowd appeals to convince your reader (Example. Intelligent people who think critically about the models that we provide know that gays in the military are dangerous).

• Don't employ ethical fallacies.

These tactics are unjustified attacks that are directed to the person and not the issue. Do not assume that a person's character or association with others reflects his or her ability to make a relevant argument (Example. Because Senator Smith is a Republican, her opinion on equal rights for women is naturally tainted and of no value.) Always focus upon the issues at hand.

 **Defining the Thesis Statement**

***What is a thesis statement?***

Every argument you make should have a main point, a main idea, or central message. The points you make in your paper should reflect this main idea. The sentence that captures your position on this main idea is what we call a thesis statement. TOPIC -> ISSUE -> POSITION -> THESIS

***Where can I find a tutorial on writing a thesis statement?***

Consult the Owl at Purdue for a succinct tutorial on writing a thesis statement:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/

***How long does it need to be?***

A thesis statement focuses your ideas into one or two sentences. It should present the main points of your paper and also make a comment about your position in relation to the topic. Your thesis statement should tell your reader what the paper is about. In addition, the thesis statement should help guide your writing and keep your argument focused.

**Questions to Ask When Formulating Your Thesis**

***Where is your thesis statement?***

You should provide a thesis early in your paper in order to establish your position and give your reader a sense of direction.

Tips: In order to write a successful thesis statement:

* Avoid burying a great thesis statement in the middle of a paragraph or late in the paper.
* Be as clear and as specific as possible; avoid vague words.
* Indicate the point of your paper but avoid sentence structures like, “The point of my paper is...”

***Is your thesis statement specific?***

Your thesis statement should be as clear and specific as possible. Normally you will continue to refine your thesis as you revise your argument, so your thesis will evolve and gain definition as you obtain a better sense of where your argument is taking you.

***Is your thesis statement too general?***

Your thesis should be limited to what can be accomplished in the specified number of pages. Shape your position so that you can get straight to the "meat" of it. Being specific in your paper will be much more successful than writing about general things that do not say much. Don't settle for three pages of just skimming the surface.

***Does your thesis include a comment about your position on the issue at hand?***

The thesis statement should do more than merely announce the topic; it must reveal what position you will take in relation to that topic, how you plan to analyze/evaluate the issue.

In short, instead of merely stating a general fact or resorting to a simplistic pro/con statement, you must decide what it is you have to say.

**Examples of Thesis Statements**

Avoid a thesis that is too general. The opposite of a focused, narrow, crisp thesis is a broad, sprawling, superficial thesis. Compare this original thesis (too general) with three possible revisions (more focused, each

presenting a different approach to the same topic):

***Original thesis:***

There are serious objections to today's horror movies.

***Revised theses:***

 Because modern cinematic techniques have allowed filmmakers to get more graphic, horror flicks have desensitized young American viewers to violence.

Today's slasher movies fail to deliver the emotional catharsis that 1930s horror films did.

Avoid making universal or pro/con judgments that oversimplify complex issues.

***Original thesis:***

We must save the whales.

***Revised thesis:***

 Since our planet's health may depend upon biological diversity, we should save the whales.

When you make a (subjective) judgment call, specify and justify your reasoning. “Just because” is not a good reason for an argument.

***Original thesis:***

 Socialism is the best form of government for Kenya.

***Revised thesis:***

 If the government takes over industry in Kenya, the industry will become more efficient.

Avoid generic words/phrases. Search for concrete subjects and active verbs, revising as many "to be" verbs as possible. A few suggestions below show how specific word choice sharpens and clarifies your meaning.

***Original thesis:***

 “Society is...” [who is this "society" and what exactly are they doing?]

***Revised thesis:***

“Men and women will learn how to...," "writers can generate...," "television addicts may chip away at...," "American educators must decide...," "taxpayers and legislators alike can help fix..."

Avoid merely reporting a fact. Say more than what is already proven fact. Go further with your ideas. Otherwise why would your point matter?

***Original thesis:***

Hoover's administration was rocked by scandal.

***Revised thesis:***

The many scandals of Hoover's administration revealed basic problems with the Republican Party's nominating process.