

The Writing Center

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RESEARCHED POSITION PAPER

Most students—even those who write very well—approach this task in an expository way. Expository means that you are informing your audience and at the same time persuading him or her that you've done a good job and should be rewarded (e.g. with a grade). This is the way that you've always written papers, but it won't work this time because researched position papers are professional writing that includes some academic writing.

Reorganizing Your Paper

I am imagining that you will think my suggestions will shorten up your paper—but that isn't true if you allow yourself to think that the paper moves in levels. The first level (the introductory paragraph) has the most general and most important information. You summarize the entire paper here (which means you should write the position statement last). The body of the paper, Level 2, explains what's told in the introduction—so in one way, the information will repeat. That's what professional writing is all about: you give the reader the option NOT to have to read the rest of it if he or she doesn't want to. Here are some steps for converting your paper from expository to professional writing:

- the key findings, ideas, or conclusions of your research should not be more than about 3-7 in number (I mean in general)
- be able to state them in a brief sentence each (or fewer if you can)
- pull them up to the position statement that comes before your intro
- in the first sentence, tell the reader directly what to do or think with this information
- in the rest of the paragraph, key ideas only—no explanations at all (that's Level 2)
- use headings throughout the rest of the paper that are tied to your key findings so that it's easy for the reader to navigate
- underneath each heading, summarize the information and then explain it

I want to emphasize that this kind of writing is totally unnatural—like ballet—no one naturally does this. You have to have a clear sense (like a dancer does) of what is right and wrong and how to execute it. No one can pirouette naturally like a trained dancer—that's why you need to follow the above directions until you learn the form and then follow it on your own (and you will after enough practice).

Example: Public Financing of Sports Facilities

Researched Position Paper

Audience: Mayor of Marietta, Ohio

Sports Facilities Do Not Benefit Local Economies

Turning down the opportunity to have a sports facility built in Marietta, Ohio, would put local funds to better use. Many studies completed by firms in service to the sports industry testify to sports facilities' generation of income for local communities. An economic analysis, however, shows three key points that refute these studies:

- the money spent at the facilities is taken away from other leisure pursuits and therefore not ultimately giving more money to the local community
- jobs are created, but not long term jobs with high pay
- the money used to create the sports facility could have been invested in public works that might generate more income (e.g. schools, airports, roads).

This paper explores these three ideas in terms of their economic impact.

Analyzing This Version

I told the mayor what to do in the first sentence; you could wait until the end of the paragraph too, but it would help you practice if you put the real bottom line up front. I didn't give a fact; I gave a researched opinion. There are no questions. It's very terse because I want the person to grab my paper, get the most important point, and then choose to read the rest of my paper whenever.

I'm imagining that the most difficult part for student writers—initially—will be shifting into command voice and telling the person the bottom line. Using bullets to list your main ideas helps people read more quickly, but check with your professor first. Notice there are no explanations. That will come in the body of the paper—and in economic terminology.

The Body of the Paper

You will feel more comfortable in the body of the paper where you explain ideas like you have in previous papers. It's important in upper-level courses to cite your sources frequently so that your professor (and future bosses) can look up references if he or she likes.

Benefits of Writing a Researched Position Paper

Once you've done one of these, your writing at work will come much more easily. This is an important form for you to know as economics majors.

Setting up an Appointment

If you'd like to have a tutor go over your paper, please call 687-6981 to set up an appointment.