How to Write A Position Paper

Tips, tricks, & tutorials for persuasive writing

Introduction Mentor Texts

What's the relationship between a **hook**, **context**, and **central claim** when introducing an argument?

If learning doesn't help students make sense of themselves and their world, it doesn't do them much good. Standardized and test oriented models of education reform have failed to deliver improvements for students and is one of many factors driving teachers out of the profession. As the crisis of COVID-19 shakes policymakers and administrators out of their status-quo slumber, education has an opportunity to set itself on a new path. Our current model of education needs to evolve because it focuses too much on producing scores instead of fostering the critical, creative, and agile thinking needed in the 21st century. By focusing on test scores and standardization, the education system causes teacher burnout and prevents students from achieving their full potential as learners. Therefore, it should focus more on transferable skills and knowledge.

Social media is fragmenting our ability to understand and relate to one another. Whether it's Google's algorithms customizing our search results, or Facebook selecting and shaping our newsfeeds, our technology is altering our perception of reality. Only in the last few years has this problem come to light. So much so that in October of 2020 congress required the CEOs of Facebook, Google, and Twitter to testify before the Senate. Though little has changed in terms of policy and regulation, the notion that big tech is causing big problems is gaining momentum with conservatives and liberals alike. Regardless of one's politics, the notion that social media is fueling division, misinformation, and in some cases, hate, is gaining mainstream attention. If we are to slow down the damaging effects of social media, there should be clearer and stronger laws and policy in place that protect our data and prevent the spread of misinformation.

Hook
Context
Central Claim

Introduction Anchor Chart

What's the relationship between a **hook**, **context**, and **central claim** when introducing an argument?

Hook

Key Attributes
- Concise and assertive
- Creates emotional response
- Avoids cliches
- Is unique and insightful

Craft Moves
- Rhetorical question
- Bold statement or anecdote
- Tying in a famous quote
- Channel your inner "movie trailer" narrator and write a pitch

Reflective Questions
- What is interesting about my topic?
- Am I just copying an idea I heard?
- Would **I** want to read my paper?
- What emotion do I want my reader to feel? How might I create that?
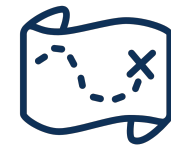
Context

Key Attributes
- Detailed enough to help audience grasp the claim without overwhelming them
- Considers important events, people, or places relevant to the topic
- Considers the recent past of the topic to show its relevance and importance.

Craft Moves
- Detail important current event tied to the topic
- Describe the recent history of a topic
- Gives a Wikipedia style summary of relevant information for a topic

Reflective Questions
- What does my reader need to know to make sense of my topic?
- What current events are related to my topic?
- What is the recent history of my topic?
- How can I make my topic relevant?

Central Claim

Key Attributes
- Succinct and to the point
- Balance of *sophisticated* & *clear* language
- Preview why a topic is relevant and/or how steps can be taken to address it.
- Previews ideas from the rest of the piece
- Also known as *thesis statement*

Craft Moves
- Three prong thesis (if you're feeling stuck)
- Taking a position that supports a specific approach or solution to a problem
- Taking a position that makes a claim about morality, justice, or fairness

Reflective Questions
- Is my central claim a debatable position? Is it something someone would disagree with?
- Is my central claim assertive and concise?
- Is my language clear enough that my reader could easily summarize my position?
- Do I explain why not topic or solution is important?
- Do I explain how my solution will work?

Introduction Infographic

Engage your readers emotions and introduce your topic
What is a compelling way to intro your topic? How can you connect with them or excite them?

Provide some context and background knowledge about your topic.
What does your reader need to know to understand your topic? How can you anchor or connect it to a current event, moment, person, etc.? Consider how to situate your reader in a particular time/place in relation to your topic.

State your central claim
How can you connect your paragraph back to your central claim?

Body Paragraph Mentor Texts

How do **claims**, **evidence**, and **reasoning** impact an argument?

If we want students to be invested in their learning instead of accumulating grades, we need to create relevant, real world learning experiences. Our current model of education isn't capable of motivating students without attaching a grade to their learning. Even students who are engaged and work hard often do so in the hopes of better scores more than a desire to learn. According to a recent Pew Research poll, 47% of students don't see the point of what they learn in school (Smith). This stunning statistic reveals that even successful students don't see the deeper purpose behind the content. To fix this, students need more opportunities to observe how their learning looks and operates in the real world. Researcher Ron Battie (2012) suggests "...student motivation is increased when teachers relate learning to authentic situations." Shifts like this will help students feel more invested in their learning , which will help with achievement and social emotional wellness.

Social Media places people in information bubbles that causes users to only see news sources that reflect what they already believe. These bubbles are the number one cause of polarization and contribute to extremism. The news that people see is shaped by their internet history. Depending on whether you're liberal or conservative, left or right, you'll see an entirely different list of articles if you Google "gun control" or "healthcare" or "voter fraud." Sindur Pochai, Google's CEO, concedes "we acknowledge some of the negative side effects of our algorithms...", hinting that even those within the company realize their damaging effects. Although no one expects political rivals to agree all the time, our inability to even agree on what's real is dangerous. Worse still, YouTube's algorithms even contribute to showing viewers more extreme content. There is a risk that those who fall down those internet rabbit holes could be "exposed to increasingly extreme content due to YouTube's algorithms" (Smithers, 2019). Whether it's Google fragmenting our ability to agree on what's real, or YouTube nudging users towards content that's increasingly extreme, it's clear social media sites contribute to our current moment of extremism and polarization.

Claim   **Evidence**   **Reasoning**

Body Paragraph Anchor Chart

How do **claims**, **evidence**, and **reasoning** impact an argument?

Claims

Key Attributes
- Debatable statement
- Succinct and to the point
- Balance of *sophisticated/clear* language
- Preview why a topic is relevant and/or how steps can be taken to address it.
- Previews ideas from the rest of the paragraph

Craft Moves
- Click here for list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
- Click here for a video tutorial

Reflective Questions
- Is my claim a debatable position?
- Is my claim assertive and concise?
- Is my language clear enough that my reader could easily summarize my position?
- Do I explain how my solution will work or why your perspective is legitimate?

Evidence

Key Attributes
- Usually fact, datapoint, example, quote from expert or study
- Clearly supports the claim at the beginning of the paragraph
- Relevant to the central claim
- Seamlessly integrated into the paragraph
- Has enough context for the reader to see the connections

Craft Moves
- Click here for a list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
- Click here for a video tutorial

Reflective Questions
- Does my evidence clearly support my claim?
- Does my evidence come from someone with credibility and authority on my topic?
- Do I give enough context before I include my evidence?
- What am I trying to prove with this evidence?

Reasoning

Key Attributes
- Further explanation of how the evidence supports the claim
- Provides more commentary and analysis to support the claim
- Makes connections between the evidence and claim clear

Craft Moves
- Click here for a list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
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Reflective Questions
- Is there a clear link between my evidence and reasoning?
- Does my reasoning help prove the claim I made at the beginning of my paragraph?
- Do I provide enough reasoning for my reader to be persuaded?

Counterclaim Mentor Texts

How do **counterclaims** impact an argument?

Proponents of testing are correct to advocate for every student's right to a quality education, but overstate the degree to which yearly standardized assessments provide accountability for teachers and opportunity for students. Previous Secretary of Education Arnold Dunkin claimed "Creating national standards to hold teachers accountable for students learning is a cornerstone of effective education policy." However, there is mounting evidence such policies have failed to live up to their promises. According to education Professor Susan Lee (2018), both Bush's No Child Left Behind and Obama's Race to the Top initiatives "provided no real gain in student achievement and contributed to the stress and burnout of tens of thousands of teachers." This reveals, despite the best intentions of testing advocates, their proposed solution leave much to be desired for both teachers and students. Instead of trying to force top down accountability, policy makers and stakeholders should find ways to help local education systems better support curriculum and instruction initiatives, or even involve educators and students in their creation.

Parker Ruckerburg, founder and CEO of Facebook believes the critiques of his platform are unfair, failing to take into account the positive sides of social media. In a recent interview with 80 minutes Ruckerburg stated his belief that "despite the criticisms of Facebook, the fact remains we do a lot of good in the world. We have fundamentally changed the way that people connect with each other. That's powerful." Ruckerburg might be right. Personbook has changed the way humans interact, but is that a good thing? Should one company, even one person, have that much influence over the way people connect to and relate to each other? Social critic and author of "Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World" Anand Giridharadas doesn't think so. His best selling book offers a compelling takedown of the corrupting influence of those at the helm of these giant tech firms, revealing their conflicting interests and purely profit driven motives. One of the biggest ways we can help curb the damaging effects of technology and social media is to hold tech companies responsible for the effects of their platforms.

Claim   **Evidence**   **Reasoning**

Counterclaim Anchor Chart

How do **counterclaims** impact an argument?

Counterclaim

Key Attributes

- Provides a quote or citation to help accurately present the other side
- Also provides a quote or citation to prove why the opposing perspective is wrong
- Provides reasoning why the opposing perspective is wrong
- Ties back to and strengthens your central claim
- Fairly and accurately represents the opposing perspective

Craft Moves

- Click here for a list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
- Click here for a video tutorial

Reflective Questions

- Does my counterclaim treat my opponent's argument fairly and respectfully?
- Does my counterclaim include evidence and reasoning?
- Do I properly address the counterclaim and prove why my position is still correct?

Conclusions Mentor Texts

A change in curriculum and instruction won't fix everything wrong with the education system, but it will be an important shift in creating more rewarding and effective learning. The data is clear that previous efforts to reform using testing and accountability were a failure. Even previous diehard proponents of these measures have backed off their prior recommendations. Emphasizing transferable skills and knowledge appears to be a more promising way forward. This focus would not only improve scores, but more importantly, recenter what truly matters in education: to make sense of ourselves and our world. Students deserve an education that empowers them and excites them and we must do more to create that.

The new regulations and policies outlined above will do much to alleviate the rising tide of problems created by big tech and social media. Unless more is done, it will become increasingly difficult to address the algorithm reality bubbles, threats of extremism, and gateways to radicalization. Technology is a tool and, like any tool, can be a force for good in the right situation and context. However, it's clear that concentrating that power in the hands of a few individuals is dangerous. Government intervention and increased education about these issues are the only ways to address these problems. The future of our democracy depends on these changes. A nation that can't agree on what's real, can't effectively govern itself.

Conclusion Anchor Chart

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Conclusion

Key Attributes
- Ties all the previous claims together and provides a recap
- Strikes a balance between reviewing facts and creating emotion
- Creates a sense of closure for the reader by tying previous ideas together instead of introducing new ones.
- Smoothly and naturally recaps previous claims
- Has a strong transition from the previous paragraph

Craft Moves
- Click here for a list of sentence stems, frames, and starters
- Click here for a video tutorial

Reflective Questions
- Does my conclusion transition from the previous paragraph?
- Do I restate my claims in an interesting and dynamic way?
- Do I leave my reader with an emotionally inspiring or engaging message?

Conclusion Infographic

**Transition from your
last paragraph**
How can you connect your paragraph
back to your central claim?

Restate your supporting claims
What do you want your reader to remember from your piece?

Think of how you can inspire your reader to act or reflect
How can you leave your reader breathless? Inspired? Filled with emotion? Bring it all home here.