

Preparing to Write the Informative Essay

Speaker: Kameo Cragoe

As you learned in the Course Introduction, this class will focus on planning, researching, and drafting two essays; both essays will be at least ten pages in length. In order to write these two essays, however, you will need to follow a series of steps that will guide you through the research and writing processes. Thus, some shorter assignments will be given prior to your completion of each major essay. These shorter assignments should reflect your movement through these research and writing processes. They should help prepare you to write the two major essays, and they should help you to organize your ideas as well as your research.

Before discussing these shorter assignments, let's look, for a moment, at the final products. The two major essays that you will write are the Informative Essay and the Persuasive Essay. In order to understand how the shorter assignments are intended to lead up to and prepare you to write the major essays, you must have a clear idea of the requirements for these major essays.

In this class, you will choose one controversial topic. This one topic will be your topic for the entire course. After you have chosen a topic, every assignment will, in some way, relate to this topic. The Informative Essay, the Persuasive Essay, and most of the shorter assignments will deal with the topic that you choose. In short, then, choose this topic carefully. Since you will spend the entire course thinking about this topic, you'll want to choose something in which you have interest. We will deal with topic selection in Learning Unit 2.

The Informative Essay will be an essay that explains your topic and explains the controversy surrounding this topic. You will not be presenting your opinion in the Informative Essay. Instead, you will provide a neutral overview of the controversy that includes a clear explanation of the topic, a brief history of the topic, and discussions of both the critics and supporters. Again, remember that you will not take a personal stance or reveal your opinion. You are simply a guide who takes your readers through the controversy and lets them come to their own conclusions without hearing your personal views.

As you will learn in LU02, one of your first steps in the research process will be to formulate a narrowed research question. We will cover this process in more depth later, but let's quickly walk through this process so that you understand how it applies to the Informative Essay.

Let's take a student who wants to write about this topic: sports. It's a fine start for the student to know a general topic. However, she will need to narrow this topic. What about sports would constitute a controversial topic?

This same student has decided to write about whether or not college athletes should be paid. Thus, she would need to take her narrowed topic and turn it into a research question that might look like this: Should college athletes be paid?

As she researches her topic, she would be seeking out answers to her research question. Her Informative Essay would then take readers through this topic, explaining the major positions people may take and arguments people may make in response to her research question. Of course, these answers and arguments will come from documentable, professional, academic sources, and the student must remember to present the information objectively without letting her readers know which side of the debate she agrees with. A very simple layout of this student's paper might look like the following outline.

I. Introduction

II. A brief history and explanation of the topic

In this section, the student will explain why paying college athletes is controversial. The student will also explain when, why, and where this topic emerged. In doing so, she may also include significant legal, historical, or social milestones in the development of this controversy.

III. Explanation of why people support paying college athletes

In this section of the essay, the student will explain the arguments, ideas, reasons, theories, etc. of those people who support paying college athletes. Again, these will not be the arguments of the student writer; these will be the arguments of those who support paying college athletes. The student should not reveal her opinion.

IV. Explanation of why people do not support paying college athletes

This section will discuss the arguments, ideas, reasons, theories, etc. of those people who do not support paying college athletes. The student will not reveal her opinion on the matter; instead, she will simply walk her readers through the reasons that others give for not wanting college athletes to be paid.

V. Conclusion

As you can see, the Informative Essay provides a neutral overview of this controversial topic. The student writer will be expected to bring in a variety of authoritative, reliable, and recent research to help her to explain the topic as well as explain the supporters' views and the critics' views on this topic.

The Informative Essay, in its completion, will consist of at least ten pages of discussion and a works cited page that documents the sources that were integrated into the essay.

In order to help you prepare to write the Informative Essay, you will be asked to complete a number of shorter assignments. These assignments will focus on explaining and applying the research writing process. This class will break down the process so that you complete essential steps that will directly lead to the stage where you are prepared to draft the Informative Essay. **See the Course Schedule for due dates of all assignments.**

After the completion of the Informative Essay, you will move on to the Persuasive Essay. This assignment will require you to take a position on your topic and work to persuade your audience of your position. We will discuss the Persuasive Essay in more detail later in the course.

Use your knowledge of the Informative Essay assignment to begin the research writing process. Remember that you will work towards the Informative Essay through each short assignment and activity found in the upcoming learning units. Complete each of these assignments and activities with seriousness and conviction, as this will help to prepare you to effectively write the Informative Essay and, eventually, the Persuasive Essay.

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