

ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY FOR CONGRESS SIM

How would your senator or representative vote?

What is the task?



PART 1: RESEARCH YOUR REPRESENTATIVE OR SENATOR



1. **Select** a **Representative** (U.S. House of Representatives; period 5 and some members of period 7) **or** **Senator** (U.S. Senate; period 6 and some members of period 7) to research for the essay and to role play in our class simulation of Congress (called CongressSim).
2. **Research** your Representative or Senator and complete the assignment titled **Essay Chunk #1: The Member Profile** (due _____). Be sure to list your sources of information as you do so and try to paraphrase as much information as possible. Your aim is to learn as much as you can, from quality sources, about them.

PART 2: RESEARCH A BILL & FIGURE OUT HOW THEY'D VOTE ON IT



3. **Select** a bill from the available options (coming soon). *You will have to determine whether you think your Representative or Senator would vote yes (yea) or no (nay) on this particular bill*, using the information you gathered about them as **evidence** to support **your argument** about how they would vote.
4. **Research** more information about the bill, or its related topics. Look for speeches your politician may have given about the issue. Look for their voting record on issues similar to this one. You might even call their office to get more information. To do this, complete the assignment titled **Essay Chunk #2: The Bill and Related Issues** (due _____).

PART 3: COMPLETE A LIST OF SOURCES (WORKS CITED PAGE)



5. **Alphabetize** your sources and list as much information about them as you can, following the MLA guidelines for a listing (you will be receiving an example in class). Turn this in as **Essay Chunk #3: The Works Cited Page** (due _____).

PART 4: WRITE THE ESSAY, WHILE CONSULTING THE SCORING GUIDE

	4 EXCEEDS THE EXPECTATIONS	3 MEETS THE EXPECTATIONS	2 NEARLY MEETS THE EXPECTATIONS
ARGUMENTS: Thesis, Claims and Counterclaims	Argument is fully developed and consistently supported by relevant evidence.	Argument is adequately developed and generally supported by relevant evidence.	Argument is somewhat developed and supported by some relevant evidence.
EVIDENCE AND CITATIONS:	The argument is supported by relevant and authoritative evidence that is consistently and effectively used to support the argument.	The argument is supported by relevant and authoritative evidence that is used to support the argument.	The argument is supported by relevant and authoritative evidence that is used to support the argument.

6. **Write** the essay. You'll need a clear introduction, with a thesis (see details on back side), roughly three or four body paragraphs with claim topic sentences and plenty of evidence, and you'll need a clear conclusion. Along the way, be sure to include MLA parenthetical citations that identify where the information used as evidence came from. **See the ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY SCORING GUIDE for details and have it out beside you as you write the paper.**

When is the essay due? To where?

Submit the actual essay to turnitin.com (we'll create an account soon) before class starts on, or before, **Monday, Dec. 14.**

How and why do we cite sources for the paper?

In an argumentative essay, your argument is only as good as your evidence (and the reasoning you use to interpret the evidence). Your evidence is as good as the quality of your sources (**you need at least FOUR quality sources - NOT Wikipedia!**). In order to evaluate an argumentative essay, the audience (and the essay scorer!) need to know *which* information or evidence came from *where*. The way people have come up with to do this most efficiently (even though it still takes a positive, problem solving attitude and hard work to get it done) is to use **citations in the text** that refer to a **list of sources (or Works Cited page)** *at the end of the text*. This way, your readers can see where information came from and can then see the sources (and even check them out for themselves, if they're interested). We will use **MLA parenthetical citations** for this project and a list of sources (or works cited page).

What does an MLA parenthetical citation look like and when should it be used?

It is a method for giving credit to the source from which you gathered the information you are using. You would use a citation *at the end of any sentence in which you used information gathered from a source* (book, web site, article, etc.), *no matter whether you paraphrased it or directly quoted it*.

Example (sentences with citations at the end of each): The United States population is currently at 320 million and is projected to rise to 344 million by 2035 ("United States"). As a result, author Korn Johnson says direct democracy would be impractical at best (Johnson 19).

What does it mean to paraphrase material from a source?

To paraphrase is **to put an idea or piece of information into your own words and your own style or structure**. Just changing a couple words in a sentence is not paraphrasing. You must thoroughly restructure information into a new form or it is considered plagiarism (even if you cite it). And if you paraphrase it, but don't cite it, that too is considered plagiarism (academic theft of another person's ideas). Direct quotations are (and should be) exact quotations from those being quoted (which should be **used rarely and in relatively short form**). You include an MLA parenthetical, in-text citation at the end of a direct quotation sentence too.

What makes it an argumentative essay?

In an argumentative essay, you make an **overall argument** (called a **thesis**), and then you support it with specific sub-arguments (or claims). These **claims** become what we might call argumentative **topic sentences** for each paragraph in your essay. This assignment requires you to research information about your representative or senator so that they can learn more about their voting record, sources of campaign funding, interaction with their party, leadership role, ideology, and the nature of their state or district (of their constituents, who vote the person into office). If the only point of the essay was to explain who your politician is and what they think, it would be an informative essay. But it's not. Instead, you gathered that information *for a purpose: to make an educated judgment about how you think your politician would vote on a specific bill (yes or no) and to make arguments why you think this interpretation is credible and likely to be right*. This requires you to use the information gathered as evidence to support your argument. It also requires you to consider the other possibility (that they might vote differently than you think) and to identify reasons why this might occur. These alternate possibilities are called **counterclaims**. To get to a 4, you must thoroughly address them without dismissing them out of hand. To get to a 3, you must at least attempt to address them. Otherwise, your score will be a 2 or 1

What is a thesis?

It is your answer to the question that was asked. In this case, your thesis will argue that your politician will vote yes or no on a specific bill that you consider. It will also identify some reasons *why* they would vote yes or no.

Example (ONLY an example): Space exploration is a topic that has been important to Senator Milt O'Wagner throughout his long career. Considering the number of bills he has authored or co-sponsored on similar topics, his voting record on the space program, and the importance of aerospace jobs to his state, it is highly likely that he would vote yes to fund a manned Mars space program. However, there is a small chance that party pressure and a tight reelection race would cause him to reconsider.

What is a paragraph thesis (or claim topic sentence)?

It is the first sentence, or topic sentence, of a body paragraph in an argumentative essay. It should make a **claim** that requires further explanation and the use of evidence or examples to support it and make it a reasonable point of view.

Example (ONLY an example): Senator O'Waggoner's own past speeches on the subject of Mars are among the best pieces of evidence that he would vote yes on the Mars Explore bill.

How might the essay be structured?

There are many possibilities, so do not be constrained by this example below. However, it might be helpful to demonstrate some of the elements you might want to include in the essay to boost your scores on Arguments and Organization.

Introduction paragraph: Explain the context (in this case, give a few sentences of background about the senator or representative and then about the proposed bill - or you could flip that order). Write a clear thesis (argues whether they would vote yes or no, and briefly explain why).

Body paragraphs:

It is recommended that you write three or four body paragraphs.

One way to organize your body paragraphs is by arguments in favor of your position (three reasons why they'd vote yes - or no - might equal three paragraphs, with 1 per reason), plus add a substantial paragraph that seriously considers counterclaims (the other side of the argument; why might they vote the other way, however unlikely you might consider it). Then add a conclusion (reinforce your main points and state your thesis in a fresh way).

Another possible structure that would meet the requirements for claims and counterclaims might work like this:

1st body paragraph: Give reasons why they might vote yes (regardless of which side you took in the thesis) - look at all evidence that might suggest they would vote yes on the bill (with citations, of course).

2nd body paragraph: Give reasons for a no vote (again, regardless of your point of view in the thesis) - look at all reasons they might vote against the bill. Of course, use evidence and examples for support (with citations).

3rd body paragraph: Explain whether the evidence for a Yes vote or a No vote by your senator or representative are stronger, going through specific points (this explains the reasoning behind your thesis in the introduction and paves the way for your conclusion).

Conclusion paragraph: Reinforce your main points and restate the thesis.

Works Cited page (MLA format; place at the end of the paper, alphabetized by name of source, then title of source)