

Portfolios #3, 4, 5, 6: An Overview

Eng 291, Dr. Jon Cullick

Writing Instruction Program, Northern Kentucky University

We now begin a major part of the course consisting of four distinct but related units:

Portfolio #3: **Annotated Bibliography:** Locating and evaluating sources for your topic

Portfolio #4: **Persuasive Essay:** Writing a research-based persuasive essay

Portfolio #5: **Public Action Letter:** Sending your argument to a newspaper

Portfolio #6: **Visual Argument:** Converting your argument into a flyer or brochure

Purpose of these Projects

The Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement at NKU points out that "civic skills" are essential to a democratic society. These civic skills include being informed about current events and being open to diverse viewpoints. Other civic skills are "the ability to participate in public deliberation and dialogue" and "a willingness to take informed action to address community needs." For these upcoming writing projects, you will practice all of these skills.

As an active citizen, you can write to influence your world. This is a *Proposal Argument*, proposing a solution to a problem, making a claim about a course of action, answering the question, "What should we do about it?" Proposals are probably the most common form of argumentation. When we give advice to a friend with a personal problem, when we make a suggestion to our employer, when we write to legislators telling them how we want them to vote on an issue, when we write a letter to the editor-in all of these instances we engage in claims about actions.

You are writing for an audience that is made up of reasonable, educated people, but they do not necessarily agree with you. In fact, some of them might be outright hostile to your proposed solution. On the other hand, some of them may not care about the problem you want to solve, or some might not even see it as a problem in the first place. How will you "build a bridge" to all of these people?

Selecting Your Topic **By Dr. Jon Cullick, NKU**

- ✓ Select a topic you care about. If you care about it, you will WANT to write about it, and that's the best motivation.

- ✓ Before choosing a topic, ask yourself these questions:
 - *Am I willing to learn about all sides of this issue?*
 - *Am I willing to assume that those who disagree with me about it are reasonable and sincere?*
 - *Am I willing to treat opposing views on this issue with respect?*
 - *Am I willing to consider compromising my own position on this issue at least a little?*

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, you should choose a different topic.

- ✓ Avoid broad topics that are written about so often in school: Topics such as abortion, gun control, capital punishment, euthanasia, animal testing, etc. will not be approved. A good topic is unique, specific, local, and current.

- ✓ Take whatever position you believe in-liberal, moderate, conservative. All points of view are welcome as long as they are supported with research and presented in a way that builds common ground with an audience.

Writing a Topic Proposal
Dr. J. Cullick, NKU

Please respond to these questions on a separate sheet. This assignment is due next class period, and it must be typed (word processed).

1. What is the subject you are interested in? (State in the form of a question.)
2. Please answer yes or no to the following:
 - a) Do I care about this subject?
 - b) Am I willing to learn about all sides of the issue, am I willing to assume that those who disagree with me are reasonable and sincere, and would I be willing to consider compromising my own position if the opposing position seems convincing?
 - c) Is my topic specific and current?

If you answer “no” to any of these questions, you might need to consider changing the topic.

3. What do you currently know about this subject?
4. Why are you interested in this subject?
5. What questions do you have about this subject that you would like to learn the answers to in the library and on the Internet?

Sample Topic Proposal
Dr. J. Cullick, NKU

1. What is the subject you are interested in? (State in the form of a question.)

Did articles and television shows in 2003, the centennial of the Wright Brothers' first flight, accurately depict the role of the Wright Brothers in aviation?

2. Please answer yes or no to the following:

- a) YES
- b) YES
- c) YES (It's about a historical subject, but it's current because it applies to articles and shows in the year 2003.)

3. What do you currently know about this subject?

The year 2003 was the centennial of the Wright Brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk, and many newspapers, magazines, and television shows celebrated their achievement. But how true are these depictions? The Wright brothers are best known for inventing the first airplane that was capable of sustained, powered, manned, controlled flight. However, they were not the first people to invent the idea of flight. Many others experimented with flight and failed. Orville and Wilbur Wright learned from those failures and improved on those ideas. Although most famous for the airplane, they deserve credit for numerous other inventions. Some of these inventions were improvements on existing airplane technology. One example would be the "airfoil" wing: it existed before the Wrights, but they invented the process called "wing warping," which controls wings in flight. They also invented the wind tunnel, which revolutionized aeronautical research.

4. Why are you interested in this subject?

Flight has always fascinated me because aircraft are the perfect combination of science and art: they are designed according to the laws of physics, and when they are designed well, they not only fly well, they are aesthetically beautiful to look at. I'm equally interested in how history is written and how certain historical figures are made into heroes. So, taking these two interests, I want to learn about the Wright brothers' place in history.

5. What questions do you have about this subject that you would like to learn the answers to in the library and on the Internet?

- *Did the Wright's actually "invent" flight? Who were the first people who invented flight before the Wright brothers?*
- *What other kinds of aircraft were invented before the Wrights' plane?*
- *What did the Wrights learn from those earlier aircraft? What did they learn from the failures of earlier attempts to fly?*
- *Who were Orville and Wilbur? Did they go to school? What business were they in? How did they get interested in flying?*
- *What other inventions did they come up with? What Wright brothers' inventions live on in airplanes today?*

Portfolio #3: Annotated Bibliography

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Writing Instruction Program, Northern Kentucky University

It is now time to begin researching your topic. For this reason, please be aware of these upcoming deadlines:

Deadline to have a topic approved: Wednesday, March 1
Topics cannot be changed after: Friday, March 3
Annotated Bibliography Due: Tuesday, March 15

Your task: Locate ten (10) sources that relate to your topic and use them to create an annotated bibliography.

STEPS

1. Step #1: This week in class, follow the directions on this web page to locate sources: <http://www.nku.edu/~cullickj/Students/Research.html>
2. Step #2: Come to class next Tuesday ready to find a couple of your sources in the library.
3. Step #3: Use the "Working Bibliography" worksheet to take notes on each source.
4. Step #4: Create your annotated bibliography using the sample one as a model.
5. Step #5: Hand in your annotated bibliography in a folder. The annotated bibliography goes in the right pocket. Your worksheets and printouts of sources go into the left pocket.

The purpose of this assignment is to give you practice in locating a wide variety of sources. So, these rules apply:

- No more than one-third of your sources can be web sites.
- The majority of your sources must be books, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and journal articles.
- At least two of your articles must be on paper at the library; the rest of your articles can be on line.
- At least one of your sources should be a book at the library.
- No dictionaries or general encyclopedias count.
- Your sources should be credible and very up to date (within the past five years; books can be a little older).

Portfolio #3: Annotated Bibliography

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An annotated bibliography does what any bibliography does-it lists sources related to a topic-but it also describes and evaluates each source according to the source's relevance, credibility, currency, and usefulness to your project.

1. Write your topic at the top of the page.
2. List every source just as you would do for a regular bibliography.
3. Beneath each source, write a few sentences that describe the source and explain why it is useful to you. Is it relevant, credible, thorough, and up to date?

Jon Cullick
ENG 123
Annotated Bibliography
7 July 2006

Topic: *Because new technology can transport mail efficiently and inexpensively, is the U. S. Postal Service still useful or necessary?*

Bovard, James. "The Last Dinosaur: The U.S. Postal Service." Policy Analysis No. 47. 12 February 1985. The Cato Institute. 2 March 2001.
<http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa047.html>.

This source is so out of date that it might not be of any use. However, this policy analysis is still valued by the Cato Institute, a well known public policy group, so it does provide ideas about why some people want to abolish the postal service.

Gattuso, James L. "Postal Meltdown?" 6 August 2001. Competitive Enterprise Institute. 2 March 2002. <http://www.cei.org/gencon/016,02130.cfm>.

The Competitive Enterprise Institute promotes free enterprise and limited government. Therefore, this web site presents a biased opinion. However, it does present a well informed argument for abolishing the postal service, it is up to date, and it offers many links to other useful web sites. One problem with this source is that I already have too many sources that argue FOR abolishing the Postal Service; I need to find some sources that make an OPPOSING argument.

Stanglin, Douglas. "Don't Return to Sender." *U.S. News and World Report* Oct. 1996: 49-50.

This article is brief, eight years old, and from a popular source, so it will be of little use. Stanglin does offer an easy-to-understand perspective that can help me persuade a wide audience, but I might not use this source.

U.S. Postal Service. *History of the U.S. Postal Service*. 1999-2002. 1 March 2002.
http://www.usps.com/history/history/his1_5.htm

This web page offers a history of the postal service. Because this site has been created by the Postal Service, and because it is up to date, we can assume that this history is complete. However, because the Postal Service wants to be perceived positively, we must not put too much faith in this web page. Other sources in this bibliography will provide some balance.

WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Photocopy this page for each source. Write on the back as necessary.)

Source Information

A. Author of Article (or author or sponsor of web page)

B. Title of Article or Web Page _____

C. Title of Periodical (or sponsor of web page)

D. Volume number and Date _____

E. Page Numbers _____

F. URL & Date of Access (web pages only) _____

Source Evaluation

1. Does the author appear to be credible? Why?
2. Does this source list other sources so you can verify information?
3. Is this source up to date or out of date?
4. Does this source present enough information from all sides, or is it biased?
5. How do you think this source could contribute to your project?
6. If you use this source, what additional information would you need to create some balance?

Portfolio #4: Persuasive Essay

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Purpose

To create an argument that is convincing because it is well informed by research and thorough in scope.

Research

You will need about 9-10 sources for this paper. No dictionaries or general encyclopedias. The majority of the sources should be scholarly or high quality popular sources, credible and up to date. Use as wide a variety of sources as possible: scholarly journals and books; educational, nonprofit, commercial, and governmental websites, high quality newspapers and popular magazines; statistical resources and almanacs; interviews.

Expectations

- Your argument must be attractive to an audience that does not agree with you. It cannot be merely a ten-page statement of your opinion. Rather, it must be respectful and fair to those who disagree. To convince an audience, you must gain their trust. You must show that you understand opposing arguments by researching them, summarizing them fairly, and compromising when necessary.
- Your essay should be long enough and should employ enough sources, to provide all of the development and support necessitated by the thesis.
- Your essay should show effective use of a variety of well-chosen sources.
- Your essay should be logically organized with smooth transitions.
- Sentences should be clear, concise, active, and direct, varied in structure for emphasis and interest, combined and parallel as necessary.
- Your paper should be about 2000-2700 words (6-8 pages in Times Roman).

Important Note

Please review the syllabus on submission of portfolios, late assignments, and safe delivery of assignments to the instructor. Assignments submitted late, assignments not submitted, and incomplete portfolios will negatively affect the final grade.

Portfolio #5: Public Action Letter

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Introduction

It is now time to practice the civic skill of "tak[ing] informed action to address community needs" (NKU Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement). Your task is to convert your essay's argument into a letter. You will send it to a government official, business leader, community organization, or newspaper. The purpose is to persuade your audience to change their minds or take action. What makes this assignment challenging is that you have to take a topic you know a lot about and boil it down to one page. You will be required to mail it (I will provide the postage). If you get a response to your letter or if it appears in the newspaper, let me know so we can tell the class!

Requirements for an Action Letter

1. An action letter must be sent to the appropriate party. Before you begin, ask yourself: who would be the best audience for what you want to say? (a government agency? president? governor? mayor? New York Times? Cincinnati Enquirer? Kentucky Post? Challenger? town newspaper? Northerner?)
2. Find the address on line. Letters to public officials cannot be emailed because they will be ignored. They must be sent the "old fashioned way," through the U.S. Mail. Letters to newspapers can be emailed.
3. An action letter must be direct and concise, getting to the point quickly. Therefore, your letter should be no more than one page, approximately 400 words or less.
4. An action letter must be credible. Therefore, your letter can and should make reference to at least one of your sources.
5. An action letter is public, so it must be respectful. Therefore, even if you are writing to a politician you dislike, you must be polite. If you are writing a letter to a newspaper, your audience will be huge, so you must be respectful so as not to alienate your audience.
6. An action letter must be a business letter to be taken seriously. Therefore, your action letter must be written in business format and it must be proofread perfectly.

A Model Letter

We will look at letters in the *New York Times* as well as letters written by students. Notice how successful letters are concise and get to the point. Notice the respectful tone. Notice that they are in business format and free of errors in grammar.

Outlining and Formatting an Action Letter **Dr. J. Cullick, NKU**

Keep in mind that you are now a kind of expert on your topic because you have been researching and writing about it. You have several pages of a rough essay draft. It's now just a matter of taking your best arguments from that draft. Here's an outline for your letter:

1. First paragraph: Introduce yourself, introduce the issue, explain your connection to it, and state your opinion about it. Like this: "As a taxpayer, voter and student at NKU, I am especially concerned about the federal government's new proposed guidelines for Title IX. I have many friends who are going to college on scholarships they have been awarded through Title IX, and revising the guidelines will have a negative effect on their ability to attend college. The current guidelines are not broken, so the federal government should not be trying to fix them.
2. Second paragraph: Give your best reason for holding this opinion and your best single piece of supporting evidence. You cannot cite a source formally, but you can mention a source informally, like this: "According to the most recent audit of the Internal Revenue Service, the federal government cannot account for \$XXX of the revenue it collected from the taxpayers
3. Third paragraph: Give your next best reason (if you have another reason) with your best single piece of supporting evidence
4. Fourth paragraph: Tell your readers what you would like them to think/do differently. Conclude with an emotional appeal to your reader.

Three or four paragraphs like this (single spaced with heading and signature at the bottom) should take no more than 300 words.

To format a business letter, see *A Writer's Reference* section D3 (pages 66-67). In the opening, write "To the Editor" (not "Dear Editor"). Below are some addresses and emails. Put the full address in the heading of your letter. Remember that email is the quickest way to get a letter published by a newspaper. Don't send your letters yet; I'll edit them and give them back to you for final corrections.

The Cincinnati Enquirer
Letters to the Editor
312 Elm Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202
Letters can be sent online
<http://www.enquirer.com/editor/letters.html>

The Northerner
Letters to the Editor
University Center Room 203
Northern Kentucky University
Highland Heights, KY 41099
northerner@nku.edu

The Kentucky Post
Letters to the Editor
P.O. Box 2678
Covington, KY 41012
kyedits@cincypost.com

The New York Times
Letters to the Editor
229 West 4rd Sreet
New York, NY 10036-3959
letters@nytimes.com

Visual Rhetoric-Creating a Flyer

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Convert your essay into a flyer! You may choose a different format (brochure, newsletter) as long as it involves graphic design. What is the purpose of this assignment? We are living in an increasingly visual world, in which graphics are used to inform and argue. Being an active citizen means knowing how to "read" images with a critical eye and how to create visually appealing texts.

Steps to Follow

1. Read the material on basic visual design
2. Follow the checklist on the handout.
3. On the computer: You may use MS Word. If you would prefer to use a different program, such as MS Publisher or MS PowerPoint, that is fine, but you can do this assignment simply with Word.

On the Computer

If you have never used MS Word to create a flyer, follow the "tutorial" below to learn some techniques.

1. Before you begin, have a flash drive or floppy disk ready and SAVE OFTEN.
2. To locate pictures appropriate for your flyer, go to www.google.com, click *Images*, then enter a search term. For example, to find pictures of pandas, go that the Google images page and type the word *pandas*.
3. Click START- MSOfficeXP- MSWord
4. Type something. Use the mouse to block the text, and then go up to the toolbar to change the font and size of what you just typed. Experiment with different fonts and colors.
5. At the toolbar, click INSERT-PICTURE-CLIPART. Choose a Clipart picture from the popup window to insert into your document. (Clipart might take a moment to load.)
6. Wordart permits you to insert some pre-formatted text in interesting shapes and colors. Click INSERT-PICTURE-WORDART. Choose some Wordart to insert.
7. Autoshape lets you insert figures such as arrows, boxes, circles, and cartoon figures. Click INSERT-PICTURE-AUTOSHAPES. Choose an autoshape to insert.
8. Click once on any of the Clipart, Wordart, or Autoshapes you have inserted. Notice that a box will surround the object. You can put the mouse on parts of that box to change the size of the object.
9. Notice that a formatting box comes up so you can change how they look.
10. Another way to insert a picture is to get one from the Internet. All you have to do is drag the picture from a web page into your document on the screen. (Caution: Taking a picture from a web page requires citing your source, the web page.)

