Unit 1: Definition Argument

Using a critical thinking framework, begin your inquiry into a subject that you both are interested in and can research to find a *debatable or controversial* question about the subject. In other words, an element of your topic must be open to debate and have a rhetorical situation (a context and reason to argue about it).

Below are examples of questions for establishing claims for definition arguments (notice that they all have opposing positions):

* **Is** President Obama a socialist?
* **Are** political campaign materials a form of propaganda?
* **Is** marriagestrictly a spiritual institution?
* **Is** abortion murder?
* **Does** homophobia existon the SCSU campus?
* **Is** there widespread voter fraudin Minnesota?
* **Is** cheerleading a sport?

When choosing a subject, issue, and claim, keep in mind that your primary audience for this argument will be your Upward Bound classmates and your instructor. You will be writing your argument using the essay genre (although not limited to the five-paragraph form). All assignments for this paper will be completed using the MLA 8 formatting.

The typed first draft of your unit 1 essay may be one to two pages in length, but the **final draft** of the essay should be three to five full pages in length, excluding your bibliographic page (which will list your **mandatory** **two** **sources**, print or electronic, that you cited in your essay). Please use 12-point, Times New Roman font, double spacing (with spacing after paragraph 0), and 1” left and right margins for both the first and final drafts (MLA 8).

The process for this paper is as follows:

**Topic and Thesis statement**. This is simply a brief outline of what your topic will be and a proposed rough draft of your thesis statement (not sentence). Bring this to class on Monday, 6-11.

**The Critical Inquiry.** This is a second step in the compilation of your argument. For this assignment, cut and paste the questions below into a new document and in place of my answers, delete them and submit your own. Answer each of the questions regarding your subject. Bring the completed Inquiry to class on 6-13-18.

**What Is Your Topic?**

What do you want to write about? (For example, “President Obama,” “athletic scholarships,” or “marriage” are topics.) Keep this portion simple and separated from the context of the issue, which you will write about in the section below.

**What Is Your Issue?**

Do some basic research to discover a *controversial* aspect, context, or application of the topic you want write about that deals with how the topic is *defined*. **Do not** take a position yet or assumethat you know what the controversy is all about (even if you already have some understanding of the topic and controversy or strong feelings about it). What **specifically** do people disagree about when talking about how this topic is defined? Locate all elements of the controversy (ethical, moral, economic, political, etc.). State the different views or sides of the debate concerning the political aspects of *defining* the topic—this is your *issue*.

***Frame your issue as a research question***. For example, “Is President Obama a socialist?”, “Do athletic scholarships compromise the integrity of universities?”, or “Is marriage as much a legal act as much as it is a spiritual one?” are potentially controversial *definitions* associated with these topics stated as a research questions.

The remainder of your research will be aimed at answering this research question—your answer will provide the foundation of your *definition* argument.

**What’s the Context of Your Issue?**

What *evidence* do you have that a problem exists with how the topic or issue is defined? Where does this debate happen? Who is affected by how the topic or issue is defined? Are some people unaware that this controversy affects them? (Would this include your audience?) Why is a resolution of this specific controversy about defining the topic or issue important? Find a real, concrete example in the news or in your communitythat shows that people are arguing about how the topic or issue is defined and briefly describe it in your critical inquiry. Find evidence for all sides of the issue. (There may well be more than two sides.) State some of the specific people, organizations, or agencies that support the different sides of the definition controversy. **Do not take a position on the issue yet.**

**What Assumptions Surround the Issue?**

To begin critically thinking about the issue, take stock of *your own preconceived notions*, particularly concerning how the topic or issue is defined. What are your biases on, or assumptions about, the topic and why do you have them? If you do have assumptions about how your topic is defined, are these assumptions that your audience will also have? If you’re not biased about the issue, why aren’t you? What are your audience’s preconceived notions about how the topic or issue is defined and why? Remember: *Challenge your values first before challenging your audience’s beliefs*.

Talk to your Upward Bound classmates about what they know about the issue and, if they have an opinion, how they came to it. (For example, do they have direct or indirect personal experience; parental or communal influence; moral or ethical beliefs, etc.?) If they’re not biased toward the topic, why aren’t they? (For example, they are apathetic; never heard of topic or issue; don’t know much about issue; still figuring it out, etc.?) Record all answers and compare them to your own.

**Which Side Will You Take?**

*After* you have conducted research about the issue (from authoritative sources as well as a critical examination of your assumptions and those of your audience) choose a side in the definition controversy and state it as a claim How are you going to keep the claim tied to a definition argument rather than, say, a moral or ethical argument (what is right or wrong)? Shorten your *claim* to its barest essentials—use this shortened version as the title of your essay. (For example: President Obama is a socialist.) Do not forget to outline your thesis as A is B because of 1,2,3.

**Why Take This Side?**

From your previous and ongoing research, state at least **two** reasonsthat persuaded you to believe this particular definition—your *claim* from above—to be true. Link your claim and reasons together using a **because clause**. What do these reasons have to do with your topic? How do your reasons relate to a definition argument?

**What Evidence Do You Have to Support These Reasons and Your Side?**

State at least three specific examples, pieces of data, comparisons, authorities, or other evidence (in any combination that you can, along with the sources they come from) that persuasively support the reasons that support your definition claim. Use reputable, academic sources.

*As a rule of thumb, do not use* Wikipedia *or commonplace or online dictionaries as your source for information or a definition in your essay; they do not qualify as reputable or academic sources*. If you want, you can start with these sources and locate the academic and reputable sources that they draw their information from, usually cited at the end of the entries in the “References” section.

Archive your academic sources *immediately*: make hard copies (print or photocopy) or save the web page (not just the address) as a PDF or web archive. Keep track of the date you accessed the online sources. These sources can be the three required outside sources that you plan to use for your final draft of your paper.

**What Are the Opposing Arguments to Your Claim?**

Summarize the argument that is in opposition to your claim. What examples or evidence or specific people can you locate to demonstrate that this opposition exists? Where or how is the opposition inaccurate, partial, biased, or misguided? How do you know? What biases do you have against the opposition and why do you have them? Where may the opposition be right? How can you counter?

**What Frame Can You Build for Your Essay?**

What is a clever way to get your audience’s attention and introduce the controversy that you are writing about? Consider which of the following methods may be best to start your essay:

*A question to ask; a story (real or imagined) to illustrate; a statement, statistic, or fact to startle; a quotation by a recognizable person to establish importance and credibility.*

Once you have settled on an effective opening, consider your conclusion. How can you return to that question, story, statement, or quotation to provide your audience with a new take on the issue? Appeal to your readers’ emotions by revisiting ideas of context that you considered earlier (i.e., how the issue and its resolution affects the reader). Use your research and experience as guides.

**The First Draft**

This is quite simply a first rough draft of your paper that is at least 2 pages in length. Obviously, the more information you provide, the more beneficial your feedback will be. While this draft does not need to be perfect (it is a draft), it should contain proper MLA 8 citations and conventions. The final draft must still comply to the 3-5 page expectations, even if the draft is shorter. The first draft is due Wednesday 6-20-18.

**The Final Draft**

The typed first draft of your unit 1 essay may be one to two pages in length, but the **final draft** of the essay should be three to five full pages in length, excluding your bibliographic page (which will list your **mandatory** **two** **sources**, print or electronic, that you cited in your essay). Please use 12-point, Times New Roman font, double spacing (with spacing after paragraph 0), and 1” left and right margins for both the first and final drafts (MLA 8). The expectation for this draft is that your work has gone through at least one full revision and multiple stages of development to create a fully-rendered, well-conceived, and articulate argument by definition. The final draft and presentation of the final draft (guidelines to follow) must be submitted for the final week of classes during your scheduled presentation day. TBD.