**Position Paper: Structure and Checklist**

**Structure:** You should aim for 8 paragraphs, with the following characteristics of a good persuasive essay. Not all essays need follow this format rigidly, but if you are struggling with organization, try this:

 **Paragraph One:** briefly highlight both authors’ main arguments. Then end the paragraph with a strong thesis statement, which is your ultimate argument/opinion on the topic. Let the reader know what you will be arguing.

 **Paragraphs Two and Three:** Describe one author’s position on the topic. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of his/her arguments. It is OK to use “I” when stating your impressions of the author’s position.

 **Paragraphs Four and Five:** Do what you did in Paragraphs Two and Three with the opposing author. It is up to you whether to start with the “Yes” or “No” argument.

 **Paragraphs Six and Seven:** Develop your own position on the topic. Whether you completely agree with one author or take a middle ground is up to you. You may incorporate personal experience if relevant. Any outside information you reference must be cited. However, since I am only asking you to respond to the authors from Taking Sides, outside information probably will not help your grade.

 **Paragraph Eight:** Write a conclusion. Ultimately, you should point out how everything you have discussed to this point reinforces your original thesis back in Paragraph One.

**Checklist:** (staple to the back of your Position Paper)

\_\_\_\_\_ I actually read the entire argument for both authors. If I read only the Point-Counterpoint (the first two pages) and try to write my paper, it will be painfully obvious to Mr. Belvin, who is familiar with the authors’ arguments because he has actually read Taking Sides. Laziness = Bad Grade.

\_\_\_\_\_ I used my own words when describing the authors’ opinions and my own position. Mr. Belvin is familiar with my writing style and ability because he has read numerous essays I have written. He can usually instantly recognize work that is not mine because he actually reads and writes lots of comments on my papers. He also has heard of the Internet and can find the same source that I copied very easily.

\_\_\_\_\_ I cited important points the authors make by simply referencing the page number. E.g., (p. 123). I do not need full citations because Mr. Belvin knows what book I am using.

\_\_\_\_\_ I did not lift long quotes from the authors’ essays to pad my paper. Mr. Belvin is more interested in my analysis of the authors’ work and my opinions on the topic.

\_\_\_\_\_ I used the authors’ actual names when I discussed their ideas. I used their full names the first time, and then just their last names every other time.

\_\_\_\_\_ I edited and proofread **VERY** carefully, because I know Mr. Belvin is annoyingly picky. Therefore:

 \_\_\_\_\_ I will not trust Spellcheck to catch everything.

 \_\_\_\_\_ I will check for correct grammar and syntax.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that Mr. Belvin has many obsessive-compulsive Editing Pet Peeves, so:

 \_\_\_\_\_ I didn’t use contractions in a formal essay; oops, I “did not”

 \_\_\_\_\_ I made sure my nouns and pronouns agree. Singular nouns require singular pronouns; plural nouns require plural pronouns.

 \_\_\_\_\_ I wrote in complete sentences. Every sentence has a subject and a verb.

 \_\_\_\_\_ I used actual paragraphs. My paper is not one giant stream-of-consciousness blob, because I also hate reading text with no breaks.

\_\_\_\_\_ I did not waste paper and ink by creating a fancy cover page because it does not help my grade, and Mr. Belvin will probably just throw it in the recycling bin. All I did was put my name and class period in the top right corner. Then I skipped a line. Then I used the actual topic as my title. Then I skipped a line. Then I started my paper. I did not start my paper halfway down the first page and count that as one page, because that fools no one.

\_\_\_\_\_ I used one-inch margins and 12-pt. type-size. I used a “professional” font, something I would use on a college application or a resume.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand Mr. Belvin’s definition of a three-page paper allows for me to write four pages because he does not want me to abruptly cut off my paper after three pages if I have not finished my thoughts. He will not read beyond four pages, though. Besides, it is highly unlikely anything I say after four pages will contribute positively to my paper, and I do not want him to hand my paper back with instructions to “cut.” Or worse, I do not want him to throw pages 5 and beyond in the recycling bin, which he has done before and will do again. I do not want to annoy someone who has to grade 161 Position Papers.

\_\_\_\_\_ I double-spaced my paper. A three-page, single-spaced paper is really a six-page paper, and Mr. Belvin will not read past page 2.

\_\_\_\_\_ Despite my annoyance at Mr. Belvin’s pickiness and demands, I recognize he wants me to make a good grade, and this assignment is potentially a grade-booster. Following this checklist does not guarantee a good grade. The quality of my writing -- my ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the authors’ arguments, and my ability to persuasively defend my thesis -- is more important. I would love for Mr. Belvin to be focusing on the quality of my writing rather than all the crap in this checklist.

\_\_\_\_\_ Finally, I chose not to accept a “zero” on this assignment and turned it on time, because I cannot tolerate 15% of my third-quarter grade being a zero. If I decided to be “sick” on the day it was due, I e-mailed my paper to Mr. Belvin. Then I printed my paper and handed it personally to him on my first day back, because I know he will not print my paper for me. I know Mr. Belvin is not playing the 10-points-off-a-day late-credit games anymore. Extenuating circumstances (major illness, death in the family) must be confirmed via conversation with a parent.