

# *Guide for Writing Position Papers*

**Subject:** Writing an Effective Position Paper

**Background:** A position paper is a short (one-two page) paper that outlines an issue or problem and supports a decisionmaker in choosing an option or in directing additional research or investigation.

**Discussion:** In many types of jobs and often in educational environments, it is necessary to be able to identify issues and problems that require resolution.

- In certain situations, a staff or a student will be required to examine the issue and summarize it for a manager.
- At work, the manager uses position papers to help him or her reach a suitable decision among many options.
- The paper's value increases with the complexity of the organization and the range of issues that can emerge.
- At school, a position paper is used to help students build skill in analyzing problems, summarizing their key points, and identifying options, and proposing solutions.
- There are many possible formats for position papers, but most use some combination of the same major sections:
  - SUBJECT/ISSUE/PROBLEM;
  - BACKGROUND (this can sometimes be eliminated if the issue is clear, simple, or well known);
  - DISCUSSION;
  - CONCLUSIONS;
  - RECOMMENDATIONS (this also is sometimes omitted, if a decision is not required or expected, and then the paper is referred to as an Information Paper)
- This guide is written in position paper format.
- The back of this guide is an annotated template for use in the preparation of a position paper

**Conclusion:** The position paper is an important tool that students should be able to use, both to enable them to summarize key points of issues being studied, and to prepare them for jobs that required the writing of position papers.

**Recommendation:** None. Provided for instructional/informational purposes only.

Prepared by: John Q. Public



# Position Paper

**Subject:** Short title or statement of the main issue

**Background:**

- How did the situation become a problem?
- What are the main developments that led to this point?
- Provide sufficient information to give the decisionmaker the “big picture”
- Can be in bulleted form, like this, or a short paragraph, or both.

**Discussion:**

- Describe the key elements of the problem as they exist today.
- Why is it a problem that needs action? How big a problem is it?
- What are the consequences if no action is taken or if the wrong action is taken?
- What time and cost issues are there?
- Are there multiple alternatives, each with benefits and shortcomings?

**Conclusion:**

- Put everything together in a statement of one or two sentences that prepare the decisionmaker for your recommendation. The conclusion should make a judgment about the issue and be clear about the implications of inaction.

**Recommendation:** State this directly and clearly. Include your rationale or justification for making the recommendation and support it with your best assessment of the risks vs. benefits.

- Occasionally you may have alternative recommendations. If so, separate them clearly and be sure to compare their *relative* risks and benefits.

Your name should go here, in the following format:

Prepared by: I. M. A. Student