**Prompt: Creating a Visual Argument using a Civic Issue**

# **Assignment Description:**

For this Visual Argument Assignment, you will be required to do the following:

* Craft and effectively place a supportable **Main Argument** that reflects a [**Civic Issue**](#_What_is_a) and **your position** on that issue.
* Articulate **no less than 3** [**claims**](#_Types_of_Claims:) to support that Main Argument, **ONE of which is a Claim of Proposal** which provides a solution and/or a call to action (for/of your audience).
* **Support each of your 3 claims with no less than 2 credible sources each (6 different sources in total) that provide** [**evidence**](#_MAIN_TYPES_OF)**.**
* Be selective of **both wording and** [**visual rhetoric**](#_Images:_Be_selective.) so that they work together overall to support main argument being made.
* Effectively **design and place** written and visual content within the [Poster or Pamphlet](#_Formatting:_Poster_or) to maximize ease of access to information for your audience and to create an aesthetically sound piece overall that draws the audience in.

# **Formatting: Poster or Pamphlet?**

Your final product (AT THE END OF THIS MODULE/SEMESTER) will be a formatted/designed/crafted argument on a Civic Issue using **ONE of these TWO choices**:

1. **POSTER**: Create aposter that you would intentionally place somewhere as a means of reaching a your target audience—in other words, the people you want to see/read your argument. Hypothetically, your final product would be an enlarged version (11 by 14 inches, or 16 by 20 inches) of what you create in a **ONE PAGE** Google or Word doc.
	* If you take this approach, you would need to determine **where** you would specifically place this poster (on a school campus, around your neighborhood like at coffee shops, laundromats, etc., at a specific event like a Parent/Teacher Association meeting, around an area where a rally is being held, on the bulletin board in (or throughout the halls of) your major’s department office, in front of a booth at a community event advocating for signatures to support your cause, at a Farmers Market, etc.).
		+ In designing a physical poster meant to catch a physical audience’s attention, you would need to pay particular attention to images and words used to draw readers in to read the smaller content (font, font size, colors, images, horizontal vs. vertical layout, etc.).
	* **Online option**: If you choose to create a visual argument using a poster that you hypothetically wish to post online, you will need to identify specifically where you would post it online (which website) or to whom you would be sending it.
		+ Using this approach requires the effective use of **hyperlinks** to help reinforce your argument being made (through direct links to credible sources).
2. A **pamphlet** that you would physically hand out to people.
	* You would need to identify **where** you would hand these pamphlets out and why (to reach target audience).
	* You would design your visual argument in a way that makes it easy to handle and read for those walking by. Consider using a folded format that has a powerful outside image that reader opens to the real content. I suggest checking out the templates offered through Word.
	* This option can be a MAXIMUM of two pages since it is a physical handout (or flyer) that could be designed to be folded which gives you more space to work with.

## **What is a Civic Issue?**

Here are some ways of thinking about what a Civic Issue is BEFORE selecting a topic. A Civic Issue…

* **affects a large group of people,**
* **is a conflicting topic that people agree and disagree about,**
* **has more than one point of view,**
* **considers the common good for all (goodwill), and**
* **does not necessarily involve the government (but can be crafted in a way so as to gain government attention).**

# **Selecting a Topic:**

Over the past few years, when I ask students to consider a topic to research and make an argument about, I get all kinds of interesting ideas that are reflective of what is going on at a certain time (context). And with so much going on in our world and its many communities right now, there are LOTS of “hot” topics to argue about because there is still so much change that needs to take place so that our world protects all of us, all the creatures that inhabit the world with us, and the actual world itself (our environment/planet).

With that said, for this final Module, in considering and selecting the topic you’d like to work with, I urge you to choose one that really matters to you. It may help to start by brainstorming a list of possible topics, and then NARROW that list down to a single topic that you can make a CLEAR argument about. For example, you might want to argue about the importance of protecting our environment. What I mean by “narrowing” your topic is that you wouldn’t just make an argument about this topic on a grand scale; instead, you would want to approach it by making a narrower, [supportable](#_Making_a_Supportable) argument like this:

* The city of San Diego should make recycling mandatory for all residents.
* Off-shore drilling must end along the entire coast of California.
* The city of San Diego should provide recycling bins and pickup service for *every* neighborhood.
* Only farmers/farms who use sustainable practices should be allowed to sell their products at local Farmers Markets.
* All restaurants operating in San Diego county must implement sustainability into daily operations or face fines.

Get the idea? To further clarify, let’s say you want to argue about the importance of standing against the misuse of authority within Law Enforcement. Rather than addressing this giant issue head-on, wouldn’t it be more effective to examine the misuse of authority within a certain city, precinct or even neighborhood? Or within a certain span of time? Wouldn’t that make it easier to seek out the specific facts and information needed to support your claims and overall argument? And wouldn’t that also make it easier to reach the audience you want to read/see/hear your argument because then you could figure out where to “place” it?

Over man semesters, I have found, and so have my students, that the most effectively argued Civic Issue Arguments are narrower in focus. In other words, instead of choosing the huge topic of “Systemic Racism”, and then making the argument that “Systemic Racism must Stop”, what might be more effective would be to focus on a facet of racism on a systemic level that **impacts you** in some way, and/or your community. With that same HUGE topic in mind, you could narrow your argument to something like this:

***“So that we can begin to counter the racism embedded within San Diego’s public high schools, we must reassess and change the texts/literature used to teach history.”***

See how specific that is? And, subsequently, do you see how this narrower argument’s focus makes it easier to know what to research so that you can support it more effectively through relevant evidence?

## **Researching your Civic Issue:**

Ultimately, your research is meant to…

* educate you so that you can educate your audience about this problem (civic issue) and why it’s important (which will help you convince them to care/do something about it),
* give you a wide range of information that will help you figure out which specific claims to make to support your argument,
* and provide you with a diverse range of information (evidence) from at least 6 credible sources to support your claims.

To guide your research, please read about the [types of evidence](#_MAIN_TYPES_OF) you should be striving to find to support what you want to say about the Civic Issue you have chosen to work with. This will be submitted under the “Researching Your Civic Issue” on Canvas. You will be required to include at least 6 credible sources but please feel free to use more as needed.

To “see” how I might start my research, click [here.](#_My_research_process:)

# **Types of Claims:**

Let’s revisit the most common types of claims writers use to support Main Arguments:

1. Claims about facts/existence

Claims of fact are usually made in regard to whether particular facts are true and/or whether they are relevant. For example, many people claim that an overwhelming consensus of scientists agree about our bleak future due to human-induced climate change. Others deny such a consensus exists, or deny that it is overwhelming. Another example: President Trump has claimed that between three and five million people voted illegally in the 2016 election. His critics claim this is not the case. This debate thus centers on **questions of fact.**

1. Claims about Definitions and Categorization

Many claims are concernedwith how we should define something, or, more broadly, what category we should assign it. For example, some writers claim that waterboarding should be defined as “torture.” The argument is over this: What constitutes torture?

Another example: A debate emerged around a Colorado baker’s refusal to make a cake for a gay couple’s wedding (the debate went all the way to the Supreme Court and seemed likely to return there). Critics of the baker have defined his actions as bigotry and a violation of the couple’s civil rights. Defenders of the baker define his decision as an example of his own religious freedom and free speech. This might be something to consider in regard to the civic issue you have chosen.

Or consider the controversy that occurred over the misconduct of the Minneapolis police officers resulting in George Floyd’s death (even the use of the word “misconduct” is categorizing the officer’s conduct). One facet of this discussion made the claim that Floyd’s death resulted in an abuse of power, while others argued that the officers acted within their power as enforcers of the law in a community with an elevated crime rate. In other words, the debate hinged upon what “category” should be assigned to the conduct of those 4 police officers.

1. Comparison claims (analogy and precedent)

Some claims center onhow, or to what degree, we can compare things. Many such claims draw on analogy. For example, one could make an extended analogy between auto safety and gun safety. As the design of cars and technology changed, so did the safety features of cars (seatbelts, airbags, driver’s test, etc.). With that in mind, shouldn’t gun laws change accordingly to ensure maximum safety for all? So the claim being made is: If regulations of automobiles continue to change to protect, so should regulations of guns which are designed to kill.

If you are making a claim of precedent, consider the legal profession; lawyers often make claims by establishing similarities between a past case and a current case (called “reasoning by precedent”). We also see political leaders do this when negotiating: “This happened last time, so we should do that.” (the “this” is the precedent and the “that” is what we should do now because of the “this”).

1. Claims about Causes and Consequences

Some claims concern causes and effects. In other words, claims of cause and effect often address what has caused a particular trend or outcome, or what might happen if a particular choice is made. For example, some writers claim that pornography, or violent video games, or violent movies, or a lack of prayer in schools, caused an increase in school shootings. “If we don’t limit our children’s screen-time, they will become anti-social and isolated.”

Similarly, some writers advance claims about the **causes** of climate change, the “great recession,” and the recent increase in authoritarian leaders in many countries. Authors have also made causal claims about what is behind the rise of fake news, and the trend toward political polarization. “Because we recklessly damaged our planet without thought of our shared future, we are now facing the possibility of life on Mars.”

1. Claims about values and principles.

Many claims concern values and whether something (or someone) is good or bad. They may also invoke a moral or political principle. For example, “Building SDSU’s extended campus in Mission Valley will be damaging to the ecosystem that lives there.” Or “Smoking is bad for your health.” “Smoking will kill you” (which could also be a claim of cause/effect: “If you smoke, you will die a horrible death”).

1. Counterclaims:

A counterclaim anticipates what the opposition is saying about the topic you’ve chosen that is in opposition to what you are arguing. In other words, you likely came across arguments being made about your topic that conflict with what you believe. You could use a claim your opposition is saying to make a counterclaim.

For example, let’s say you are arguing that fast food companies like McDonalds should contribute to animal research studies. Someone who opposes you makes the claim that animals raised for consumption don’t have rights/feelings. You could make the counterclaim that, based on current studies, animals (like pigs, cows and chickens) DO feel pain and emotions and therefore deserve humane treatment.

1. Proposal Claims/Calls to Action. Of the 3, you are required to include this type of claim.

Proposal claims recommend some type of **action or some solution** to a problem. Such claims ask an audience to do something or solve some problem. Sometimes these claims will begin with the explanation of a particular problem, and then move to the solutions that are available to the audience. For example, “To make a difference, speak up!” “Stop eating meat.” “Vote and be heard.” “Use Social Media to raise awareness about ending systemic racism.” “One way we can protect everyday citizens is to require background checks of ANYONE purchasing a gun—or applying to.”

Most arguments that include a claim of proposal or call to action tend to insert them towards the end of their piece so that the reader is left to resonate on the solution presented. And most tell their readers where to go, or what to do to be heard, contribute, donate, volunteer, etc. (part of your research to find out). Be sure to take this into consideration when placing your claim of proposal in your poster or pamphlet.

# MAIN TYPES OF EVIDENCE:

Through researching your topic, you are required to use at least 2 credible sources to support each of your 3 claims (for a total of 6 different sources). Here are the types of evidence you should be striving to find and accumulate. To make it easier for submission, organize your findings using a bulleted list that includes specific information (not HUGE chunks of it) that might be useful, images, sources, citation information for your works cited sheet and links to the sources (more specific instructions provided under the Research assignment on Canvas).

* **Expert testimony** includes statements and/or direct quotes from experts who agree with one or more of your claims (and thus can be used as support). The most effective way to use this evidence is to integrate specific details of the source into setting up the quote.
* **Historical evidence** presents facts from the past. The goal here is to take a peek forward into our future; if taking an action in the past turned out badly, it may well be that taking a similar action in the present would be a bad idea. Or, of course, if taking an action in the past had a good outcome, repeating that action in the present may have similar benefits. This type of evidence is often used as an appeal to **logos** because it appeals to the reader’s sense of logic, is factual, and thus makes sense.
* **Statistical or numerical evidence** consists of specific numbers. It often tells us how widespread or serious an issue is and is intended to persuade a reader that a matter is worthy of attention. One weakness of numerical evidence is that it can seem rather cold and uninteresting. It tells us how widespread poverty is, for instance, but it may not persuade a reader that we should do anything about poverty – it may fail to convince a reader to actually care about an issue. On the other hand, numbers can easily be used to cause emotion in an audience (like hearing about how many children go hungry in the United States every night). Statistics, facts and numbers should be **current** and come from a **credible source.**
* **Research studies** often involve numerical or statistical evidence but go into more detail about how that information was gathered. These studies are usually performed by academics or experts within fields such as the sciences. Writers may also want to think about using multiple pieces of numerical evidence or research studies that have different qualities. For instance, a writer may want to use a study of a very small group of people because it took place over a long period of time; she or he could then also present another study that looked at a much larger group of people over a much shorter period of time. This would give stronger support to the claim because the two kinds of evidence complement each other.
* **Anecdotal evidence** includes individual real-life examples that can be used to support a claim. This type of anecdotal evidence is most effective when used together with numerical evidence. An individual’s anecdotal details can take the reader “inside” a situation and help the reader feel what it’s like to walk in somebody else’s shoes, so the reader has a more emotional response (pathos) and thus may find such evidence more interesting, while the statistical evidence can help the reader see how widespread the situation is (logos).
* **Personal anecdotes** are exactly like the previous category except that the writer uses their own experience to support a claim. Another potential advantage of this type of evidence is that they can help the reader learn about the writer thus helping the reader learn to like and trust the writer, which makes the reader more likely to accept the writer’s claims. Like anecdotal evidence, the reader would need to believe that the author’s experience is typical, that it represents the experience of most other people in a similar situation. If they think that the author is so unique that this experience isn’t common, the reader will likely reject the evidence. Personal anecdotes are often used to pave common ground with a reader (ethos) and reinforce credibility (since it’s coming from firsthand perspective), in addition to evoking emotion within reader due to unique experiences shared.

# Masquerading as Evidence: Do NOT include this type of “fake” evidence.

Sometimes writers present information that appears to be evidence but that actually cannot function effectively as evidence. These are not verifiable facts but are more general statements. Please avoid the following:

* **Generalized statements** fail to persuade readers because they have no real specifics behind them. Statements like, “Well, everybody knows that Ocean Beach is way cooler than Pacific Beach” are a very weak attempt at evidence. They may work well on an audience who already agrees with you, but they cannot persuade an audience who doesn’t agree. They are not among the “everybody” who already thinks this and the writer hasn’t given them any idea about who that “everybody” is or why the reader should pay attention to those people’s knowledge.
* **Hypothetical events** are also weak in persuading people. This is when a writer asks the reader to imagine something that hasn’t actually happened and to agree that if such a thing had happened, there would have been some specific consequences. A more neutral audience will recognize that there is no real basis for accepting this assumption – that the event never really happened and thus gives no basis in fact for accepting that the imaginary “consequences” were inevitable. None of it happened, so it can’t be evidence.

## **Images: Be selective.**

You will need to use at least **THREE relevant images** that visually reinforce the written text of your poster or pamphlet. You may use more than 3, of course, and you do not have to cite your images since many of them fall under the general pool of knowledge category. However, here are some pointers on your image selection:

* Some images are copyrighted which means you’ll be unable to save or cut and paste them.
* Captions can work very effectively under your images (some, or all) because it gives you an extra little textbox to clarify that image’s role in your overall argument (like if it’s being used to support a certain claim, or the topic which wouldn’t necessarily need a caption).
* Be selective in the images you use. Understand that the first images that come up are usually the ones most used. Consider using some of the images you come across on the credible websites you are using to provide evidence to support your claims (and to education yourself about the civic issue you’ve chosen to work with).
* While I’m not making it mandatory, you may cite where you got your images in your works cited sheet, or through a hyperlink. With that said, if you work with an image that is of someone’s art (like photography, painting, etc.), I DO require you to cite that information and give credit to artist on poster or pamphlet.
* Don’t overly stretch images, oversize images, or rely too heavily on images to make your argument. They are there to work gracefully with the written rhetoric of your argument.
* Your images are NOT considered one of your 6 sources of evidence.

### **My hypothetical research process:**

I thought it might help some of you to consider how I might go about researching for evidence to support this argument: ***“So that we can begin to counter the racism embedded within San Diego’s public high schools, we must reassess and change the texts/literature used to teach history.”***

* First, I would research to find out which texts are currently being used in English/Literature and History classes in our local public high schools. To be honest, I don’t even know if they all use the same canon (list of accepted books). I’d cut and paste my findings in an organized manner, and only include what I can reasonably use (no BIG paragraphs). I’d make sure to include citation info.
* From there, I’d research to find out which texts are causing controversy right now among parents and San Diego high school students (and not in that order necessarily). I would be on the lookout, in particular, for information on texts that are currently being used (see first bullet). Moreover, I’d look for powerful arguments being made by these students and/or parents and why they are making them. I’d consider these arguments being made in relation to the claims I want to make to support my argument. I’d cut and save powerful quotes and facts.
* My next step would be to research what those who have the authority to say something about this topic are saying. This would include TEACHERS, people working in some capacity in the educational field, psychologists, social commentators, local political leaders/advocates, etc. I’d look for quotes and information that could reinforce what students and parents are saying (see previous bullet) about the topic.
* I would also research what more innovative (private/charter) schools are using to teach their students (texts used) and why. This information might work to reinforce a claim I would make about the benefits of making change (in regard to texts used to teach our youth). This evidence would work well to reinforce my claim solution.
* And finally, I would consider my own experience in regard to the texts I read (or that were banned) when I was in high school, particularly those that reflected a lack of diversity, or respect for others, or glossed over parts of history so as not to showcase the more sordid behaviors/events of the past. Or how there was an utter lack of diversity in regard to the authors/voices included as “important” enough (white males for the most part) to be used as representations of what is considered “good” and/or “right.” This anecdotal info would work well to introduce myself in the brief bio that goes with this piece (will discuss in recorded lecture).
* Along the way, throughout each of these queries, I would accumulate powerful images that I feel might reinforce important facets of my argument (Book covers, high school kids reading in class, an image that shows literature as metaphor about embracing diversity, a bulleted list of books that should be added due to the voices represented, people who have broke barriers or reflect powerful parts of history but have been unincluded in reading lists, etc.)

Okay, these 6 bullets above that reflect my research endeavors should give me more than enough to get started in formulating and organizing my visual argument Using the Argument I crafted above and did subsequent research on, the 3 Claims I might make to support it are:

1. Claim of **Fact**: Our local high schools are using an outdated selection of texts to teach our youth.
	1. Evidence: a fact about when texts were chosen and by whom, a powerful text excerpt or two that illustrates what I mean by “outdated”, an image that reinforces that.
2. Claim of **Quality:** The general lack of diversity in texts used to teach gives our students a **distorted/limited understanding** of the collective story of voices that comprise culture.
	1. Evidence: Quotes from students who felt dis-cluded, alienated or simply unacknowledged. Quotes from teachers who have witnessed this. Quote from a renowned psychologist who focuses on the negative long-term impact of this on students.
3. Claim of **Solution**: Using texts that a more accurate and reflective of our diversity enhances education while stimulating a sense of inclusion/community.
	* Evidence: Facts about 2 schools successfully integrating texts the reflect diversity. Quotes from students benefitting from this. Positive image. Stats/facts.