

Using Food Policy Memos to Teach Writing and Critical Thinking in the Food System

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I utilize **frequent low-stakes assignments** to give students practice, engage with the material, reduce anxiety about grades and give students many opportunities to succeed. In NUTR 326 Food Systems (also a writing intensive course), I use four lower stakes policy memos.

- **Policy Memo #1: Should natural capital be monetized in full cost accounting?**
Purpose: To understand how costs to the environment and public health by agriculture and the food system (as well as other industry sectors) are externalized from consumer price in addition to shaping the US and global food systems.
- **Policy Memo #2: Can sustainable agriculture feed the world?**
Purpose: To be able to define and differentiate conventional, sustainable, and organic agriculture and evaluate effectiveness of agriculture practices and policies in providing food access, security, nutrition, and environmental sustainability.
- **Policy Memo #3: Food Stamp Challenge: Can you eat healthy on food assistance?**
Purpose: To experience on a very small scale what those attempting to feed themselves on food assistance do. To evaluate opportunities and challenges to dietary behavior change and food security as well as evaluate the effectiveness of food and nutrition policies in providing access and nutrition.
Additional Requirements:
You are going to participate in the SNAP Challenge and attempt to live on the national average SNAP benefit per person of **\$6.20 per day** for three days.
- **Policy Memo #4: Can the obesity epidemic be solved by addressing individual agency or policy?**
Purpose: To evaluate the limitations and opportunities of the role of the system and the role of the individual in addressing dietary behavior change. To evaluate the effectiveness of agricultural subsidies, food assistance, and other policies on obesity.

Having multiple, lower point assignments allows students to have multiple chances to practice structuring an argument, addressing a specific audience of policy makers, and approaching the writing/revising process. Repetition reinforces learning and if students are more interested in one poised question rather than another, they have opportunities to engage and do better on specific policy memos.

I also do as much as possible **scaffold and sequence** learning to help students build skills and break down assignments into manageable tasks. For example, in NUTR 326 for the first policy memo, students:

1. create an **annotated bibliography** of the readings with a conclusion that details the commonalities, conflicts, or problems the sources make;

Annotated Bibliography (6pts)

An annotated bibliography is an alphabetized list of source citations that includes an annotation underneath each entry.

Read through the Unit One readings. Write 3-5 sentences summarizing the article's main arguments and conclusions. Each of your sources should include:

- A citation using an established citation/ reference list style (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.);
- A brief summary of the source using your own words, the source's reliability, and discusses relation of the source to your other sources, including whether sources agree or disagree with/contradict each other. Note any strengths or weaknesses.

Then write a 150-250- word conclusion. In the conclusion, detail the most important contributions your sources make to your research topic; you may also point out commonalities, conflicts, or problems.

2. **identify their audience** and what they want their readers to come away with in a 2 point in class activity.

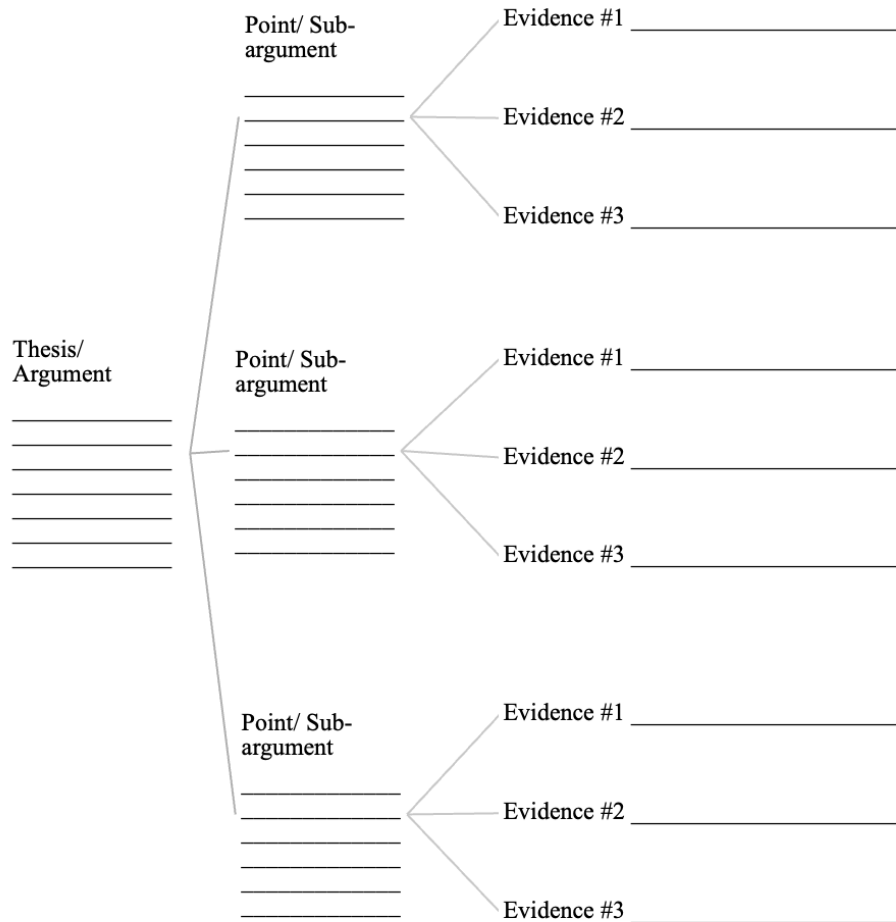
Argument Preparation

Complete the following questions.

1. Before reading what I write, my readers will think this way about my topic:
2. But after reading what I writer, my readers will think this different way about my topic:

3. construct a **tree diagram of their argument**. This helps them to work out how they are going to support their position;

In this exercise we are completing a Tree Diagram of your argument.
Think of this as how you might organize your paragraphs around the points you are trying to make.



4. submit a first draft of the policy memo; and
5. submit their final draft based on my feedback.

For each of the policy memos we discuss the research and their positions in class. I give them step-by-step instructions on **paragraph structure** for the four policy memos.

Policy Memos (4)

Instructions for paper submission:

1. **Read** the unit readings
2. For Policy Memo 3 perform **additional requirements**
3. **Write** an **800-word** policy memo.
 - i. Paragraph 1. Introduction and Problem Definition
 - ii. Paragraph 2. Literature Review
 - iii. Paragraph 3. Issue Analysis
 - iv. Paragraph 4. Proposed Solutions
 - v. Paragraph 5. Strategic Recommendations
 - vi. Paragraph 6. Limitations
 - vii. Optional- Paragraph 7. Cost-Benefit Analysis
- b. Do Not use bullet points or numbered lists in your papers. Write everything out in a narrative form.
- c. Communicate a **clear thesis or position** to address the paper's prompt/question.
- d. **Use evidence** or information from the readings to support points
- e. **Explain conclusions.**
- f. **Use readings.** You will be graded on the depth of reflection and analysis that your papers show and evidence of the integration of readings. Responses should synthesize material from lecture, discussion, and readings, as well as your own ideas.
- g. **Use in-text citations and a bibliography** using a particular citation style- APA, MLA, AMA, Chicago, etc.
4. **Submit.** It is due as an attachment either in a .doc or .docx format. To do so, click on Browse My Computer and upload your paper. Once you are done, click on the Submit button. Late submissions of the first draft of essay #1 will not be accepted for in-class peer review.

Criteria: See rubric and student examples in Canvas

In class we review **A & C grade quality** policy memos. Students receive **targeted instructor feedback** in which to improve upon in the subsequent policy memos. Later in the semester we also discuss and cover strategies for revision and the difference between revising and editing.