
ESSAY WRITING

5-15 days

CREATING A POSITION PAPER

OVERVIEW

The essay continues to be an essential tool for communicating ideas and arguments. An essay can be shared, published on the internet or in print, and sent to individuals and groups in order to influence others' opinions. That being said, mastering the art of writing an outstanding essay is not easy. While students in this course are expected to have multiple years of high school level English education under their belts, they may still need to be taught some basics of essay writing. Position papers, in particular, are research-intensive papers that require sound arguments and an understanding of opposing positions. To influence critical and analytical individuals who may not jump to follow high school students, an essay must marshal powerful arguments supported by evidence and sound reasoning.

Position papers are intended to be short enough that others will take the time to read them. While this may appear to mean less work, it also mandates that students prepare their paper with great care—they have few words to get the message across.

COLORADO CIVICS STANDARDS ADDRESSED: 4.2, 4.4

SAMPLE JOURNAL QUESTIONS

- When you read an editorial in the newspaper, what do you look for? What makes an editorial effective in your view?
- Why is writing a position paper different than writing a critical essay in an English class?
- What are the elements of making a strong argument? Outline an argument you might make in an issue you have had with a friend, family member, or teacher.
- List some of the skills involved in writing a position paper. Which are your strengths? Which do you find challenging? Why?
- Imagine someone with a different view about your issue reading your paper. What arguments could he/she make against your reasoning?

VOCABULARY

Essay: A short written work on a single topic, usually presenting the author's personal view.

Evidence: Facts and reasoning provided in support of a position.

Position paper: An essay that presents the author's or a group's opinion on a policy issue.

Thesis statement: A summary statement of an essay's main point, the author's claim about the topic under discussion.

RESOURCES

American Book Review: 100 Best First Lines in Novels,
<http://americanbookreview.org/100BestLines.asp>

First Lines, <http://people.cornell.edu/pages/jad22/>

Pulitzer Prizes: Commentary, <http://www.pulitzer.org/bycat/Commentary>

Study Guides and Strategies: Writing Position Papers, <http://www.studygs.net/wrtstr9.htm>

University of Hawaii, West O'ahu: Writing a Position Paper,

<http://homepages.uhwo.hawaii.edu/~writing/position.htm>

University of North Carolina Writing Program: Thesis Statements,

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/thesis.html>

Writing at Colorado State University: Argument,

http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/index.cfm?guides_active=argument&category1=31

Xavier University Library: How to Write a Position Paper

http://www.xu.edu/library/help/position_paper.pdf

Many position papers should be available via your local library.

Step 1 – Introduction to the Position Paper

Goals – Students understand the concept of an analytical, written argument.

Means – After brief teacher introduction to the concept of a position paper, students find the thesis, supporting statements, and biggest strengths and weakness of editorials from the local newspaper(s).

Means (Optional) – Local activists share samples of persuasive writing that they have prepared to advance their positions and highlight the features they believe are effective in persuading others to their point of view.

Step 2 – Creating a Thesis

Goals – Students comprehend the notion of a thesis statement and can successfully formulate one for their own work.

Means – Teacher introduces the concept of a thesis statement, especially as it applies to the work students are doing. Teacher, in discussion format, leads students through finding theses in advertisements, art, movies, newspaper articles/pieces, campaigns, student journal entries, official school documentation (letters home to parents etc.), and/or in the description given of this class. Finally, student groups begin formulating the thesis statements for their papers.

Step 3 – Supporting a Thesis

Goals – Students understand the power and necessity of providing supporting evidence for their arguments.

Means – Teacher leads discussion of what qualifies as supporting evidence for an argument. Students, in groups or as a class, find supportive evidence in a song, advertisement, political campaign, newspaper editorial, and/or official school documentation. In addition, teacher can lead a class discussion working through a thesis like, “it doesn’t matter that I’m late to class.” The class can attempt to provide supporting arguments for the thesis, as well as supporting evidence for the counterclaim.

Step 4 - Introducing a Topic

Goals – Students grasp the importance and the skills of introducing a topic in a position paper.

Means – Teacher leads discussion of what makes people want to read more of a book/essay (the first three entries in the Resources section can be used to illustrate effective openings). Student groups discuss how their

Notes:

Names:

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER...

USING WORDS TO FIGHT FOR YOUR CAUSE

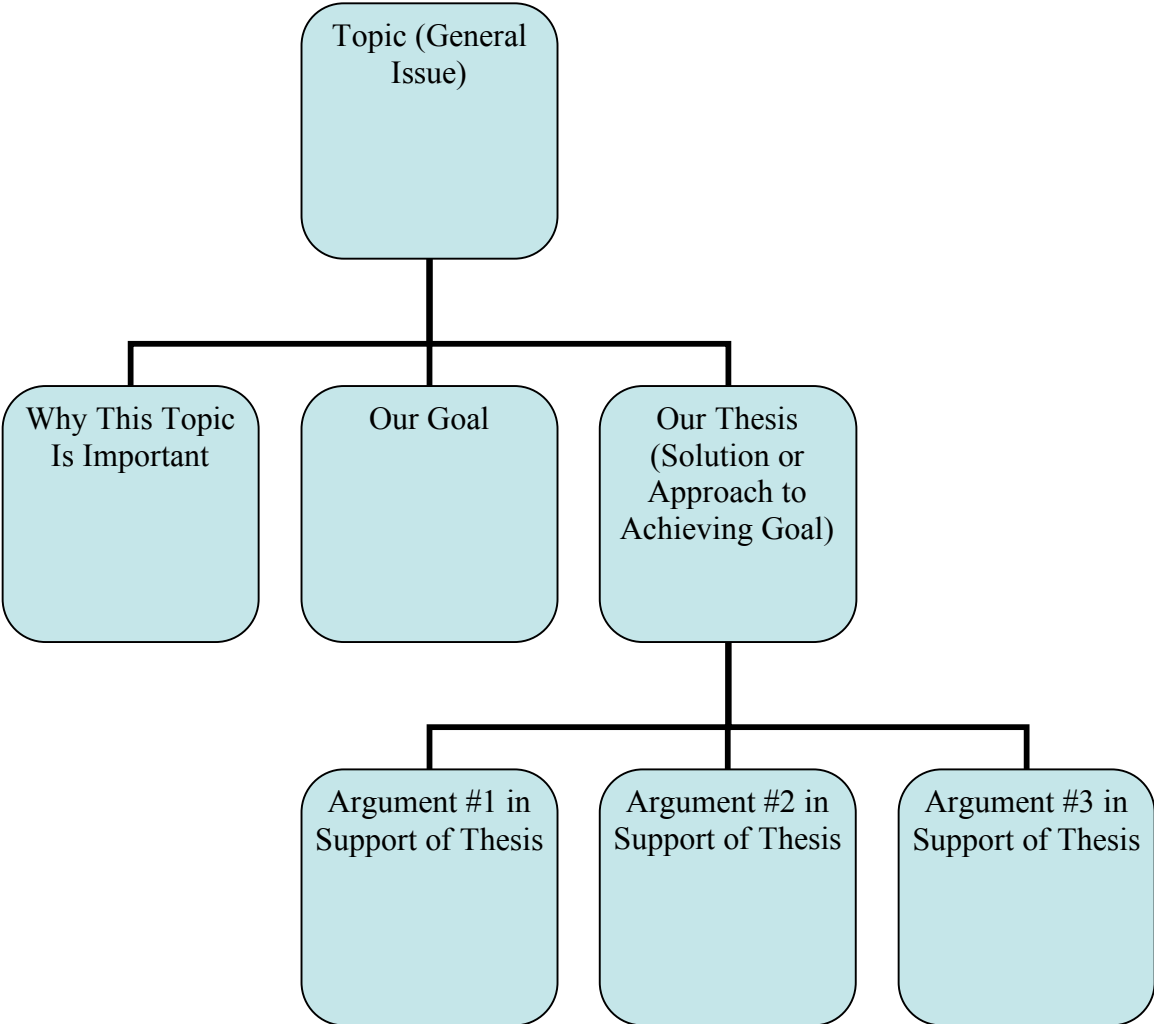
Teacher: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Topic: _____

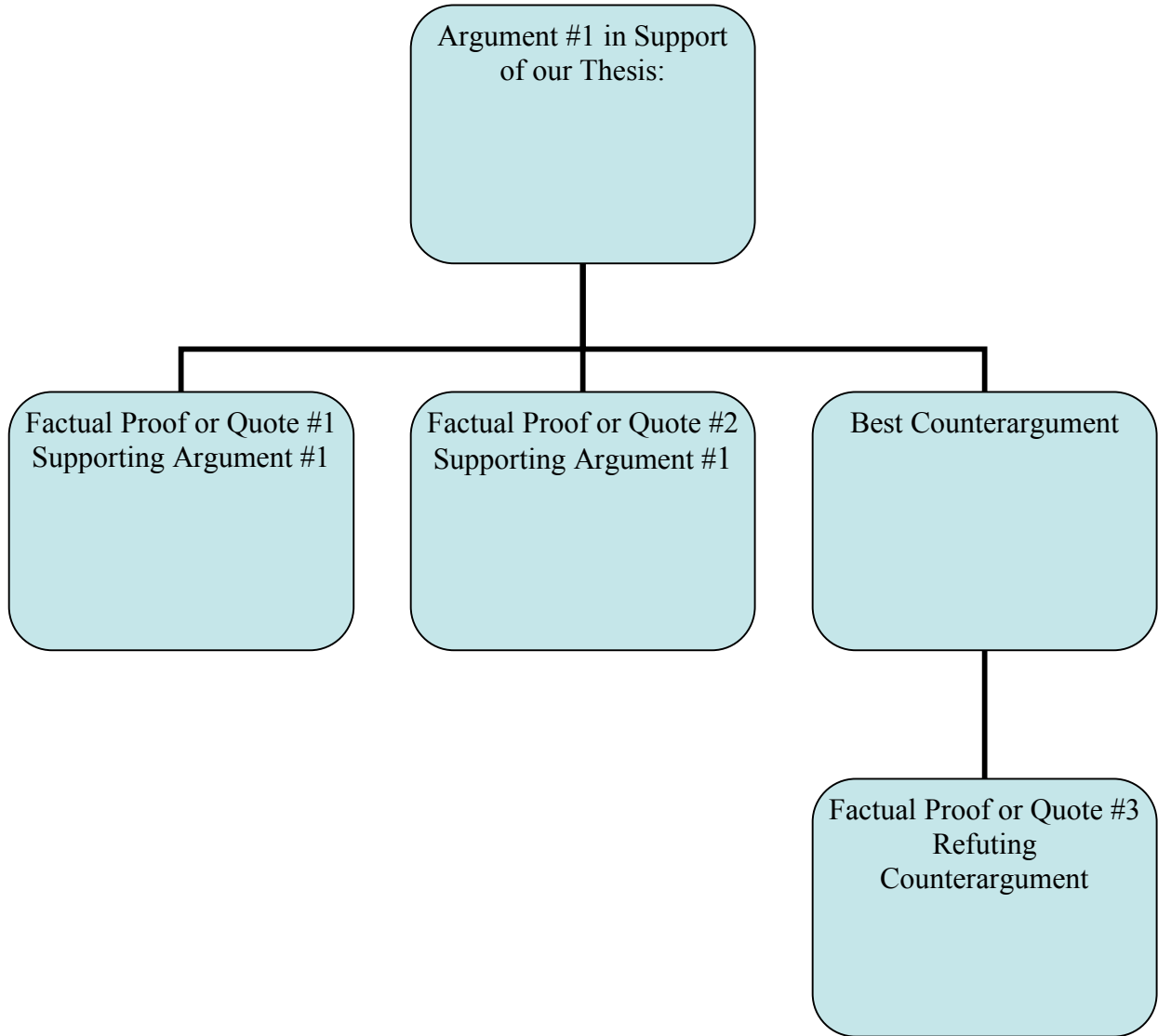
This worksheet will help you to outline your position paper and organize your thoughts. Having a well-organized statement of purpose and support for your ideas will make them more powerful and much more persuasive. After filling in the missing material in this worksheet, writing your paper will be (relatively) easy.



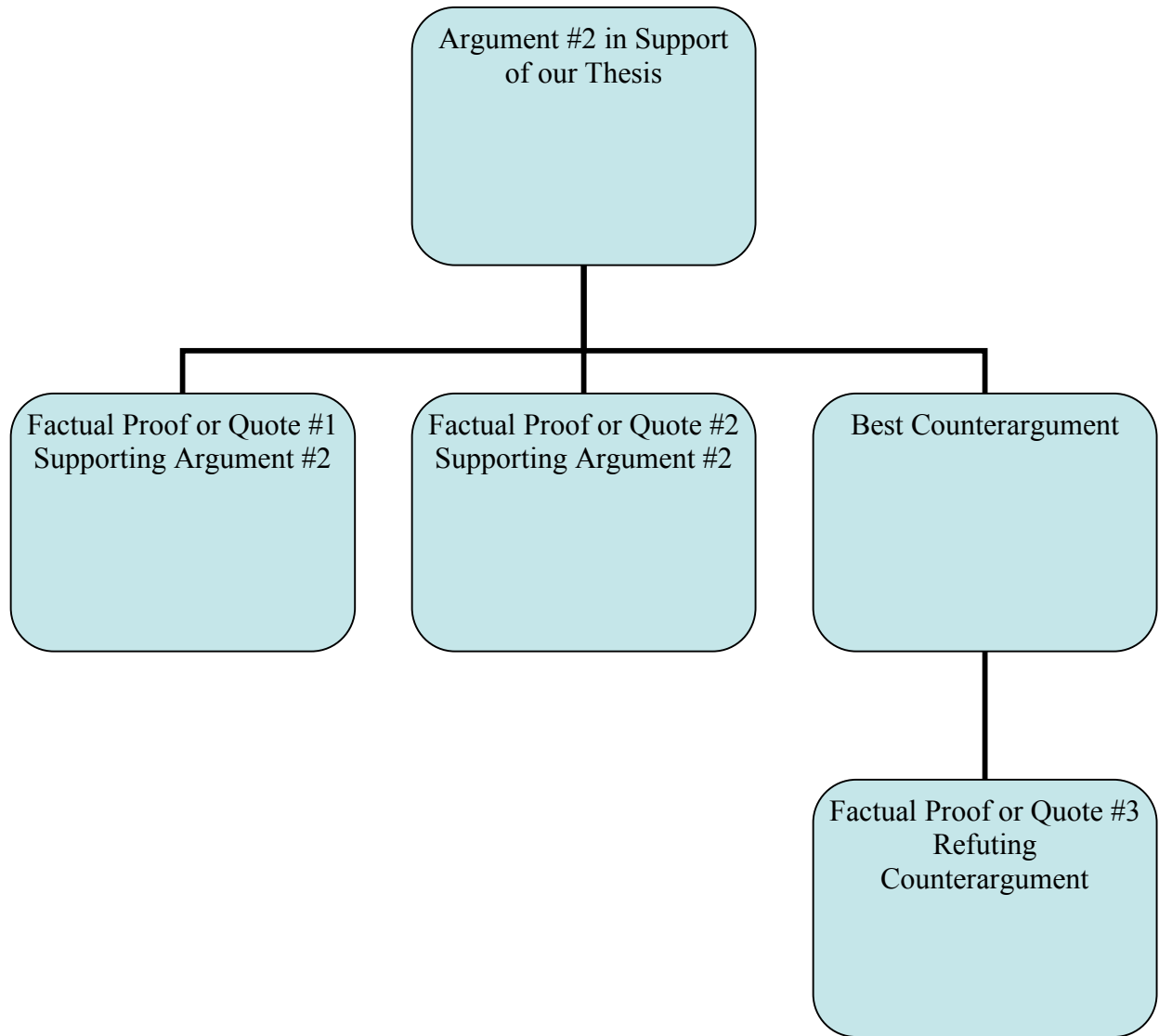
Introductory Paragraph



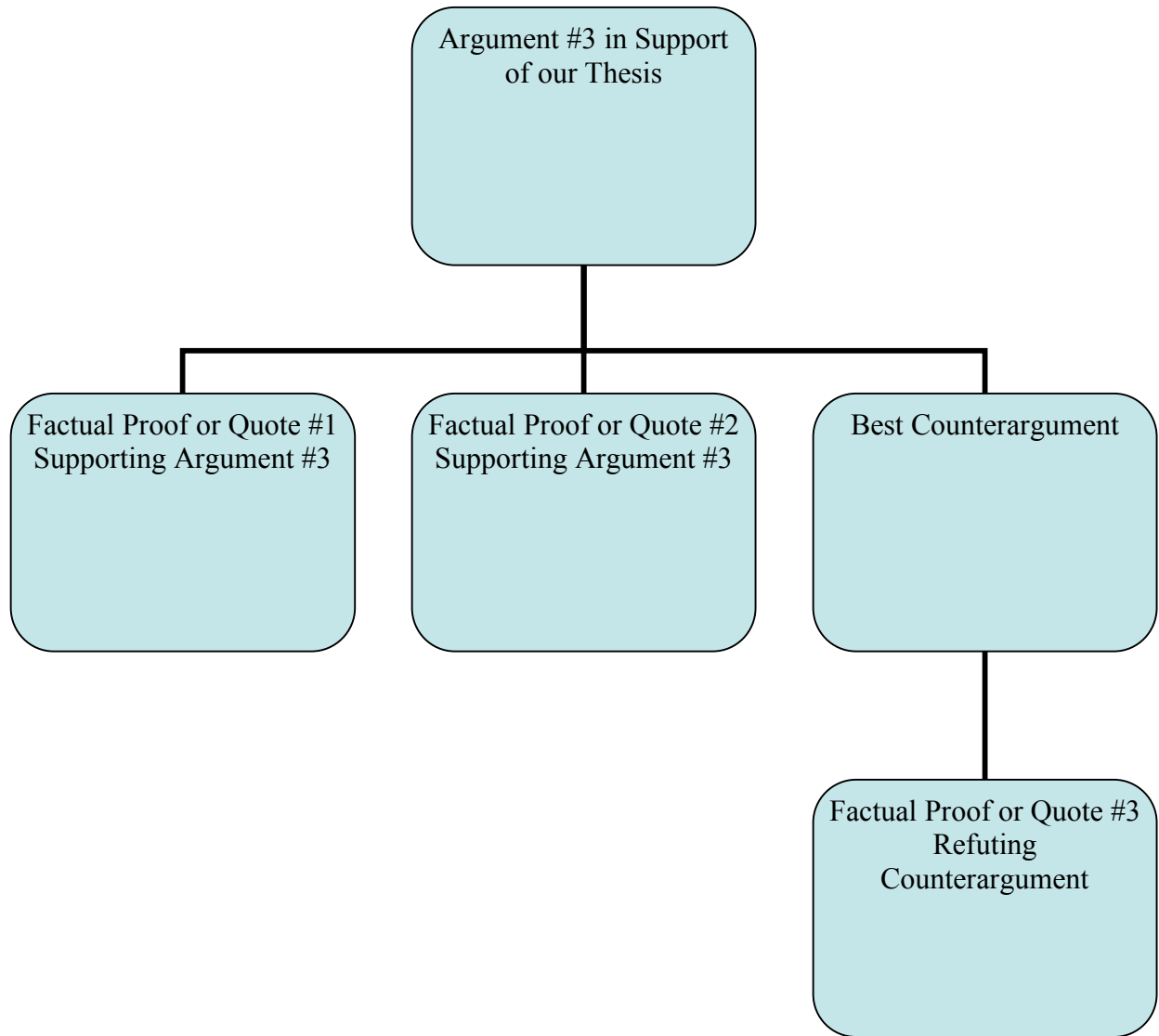
Body Paragraph #1



Body Paragraph #2



Body Paragraph #3



Conclusion

One-sentence summary of body paragraph #1:

One-sentence summary of body paragraph #2:

One-sentence summary of body paragraph #3:

Paraphrase of thesis statement:

Why life will be better if goal is accomplished: