

AP English Language and Composition Three-Topic Memo

It's time to think about articulating the topic you'd like to explore over several major papers. First, let's think of what those papers are and how they affect your search:

1. The Annotated Bibliography: You'll need to be able to find scholarly articles about your topic;
2. The Rhetorical Analysis: You'll need a topic other people make claims and argue about;
3. The Position Paper: You'll need to be able to argue a side, in an argument that treats opposing arguments with intellectual honesty, and that uses mostly *logos*.

Specific topics win the day. When I taught Academic Writing at UMD, I would have students who wanted to argue about legalizing marijuana. "Should we legalize marijuana?" is not interesting—it's trite; it's already been argued out. But, "Would legalizing marijuana in the US decrease drug violence in places where the plant is grown and trafficked?" is an interesting question. It's more specific and focused. (My student who proposed this question used it successfully all semester, but if you end up with a too-specific topic because you take this advice to be specific, we can broaden your question a bit as needed.)

One good way to think through a topic is through Stasis Theory. Stasis Theory is a Classical rhetorical tool that invites you to think about ideas through five (different theorists classify ideas differently, but we'll use five) different categories. We'll use the Stasis Grid later to sort out the articles you find about your topic, but for us right now, you can think about different ideas developing as you go through the stases.

The memo: The three-topic memo is three mini-proposals. For each topic you should include:

1. A research question—in the form of a question—you would like to explore;
2. A brief overview of why the topic is important to you, how you've encountered it in the past, and what questions or points of curiosity you have about it; and,
3. What kinds of sources, answering what questions, you might expect to find. You may do a little research to see what happens when you try to get started, knowing that we'll find many more sources when we go to the university library.

Each mini-proposal can be a good paragraph, something like a third of a page, single spaced.

Please submit your three-topic memo by class time on Monday, either handed in on paper in class or uploaded to the assignment slot in Jupiter. It will be graded in the way that I would grade a study question.