

Pro or Con: Developing Evidence-based Arguments for a Current Marine Conservation Debate

The most important thing that conservation practitioners need to know is PEOPLE. People make problems. People make solutions. And people are compelled by a variety of internal convictions and values as well as external incentives. These internal and external factors influence personal perspectives on environmental issues.



You will explore this idea of multiple perspectives in the context of the various audiences as the environmental policy intern to the Virginia Senator, Mark Warner. He is interested in expanding his environmental position statements in advance of a run for governor. Of particular interest are a variety of marine issues relevant to his constituency, including: a) development of offshore wind energy along the Virginia eastern shore; b) a moratorium on oyster fisheries in Virginia waters of Chesapeake Bay; and c) building a seawall around Norfolk to combat sea-level rise.

The Chief of Staff has tasked you with developing Mr. Warner's position for one of the above marine issues. Specifically, you will construct a portfolio of documents that describe the environment issue, summarize the evidence supporting and opposing action, and justify Mr. Warner's position.

Assignment Objectives

After completing this writing assignment, you will be able to:

- Describe complex conservation issues while considering the perspectives of your audience
- Synthesize evidence from a variety of sources
- Defend a position supporting or opposing an issue with evidence

Portfolio Components

Issue brief

This will be a short paper (maximum 2 page single spaced) that synthesizes the available information about one of the environmental issues, and justifies the position Mr. Warner holds on the issue. Your audience will be the Senator and his staff, but remember that the Senator is concerned with an upcoming gubernatorial election and therefore wants to appeal to the broadest constituency possible. Your issue brief should include each of the following (modified from Penn State University and Duke University assignments):

1. Background on the environmental problem. Be sure to describe the issue and why there is a controversy or problem surrounding it.
2. A description of the proposed solution. You should include a summary of the approach the solution takes in solving or addressing the problem.

3. Summary of the stakeholders. What are the different interest groups and what are their opinions on the issue? How have they tried to influence the policy?
4. A description of public opinion. This is different from the stakeholders' opinions. Public opinion is characterized by polls or surveys of large samples of the population involved (e.g., U.S. population for a federal policy or NC population for a state policy in NC).

Blog post for the public website

This will be an informational post of no more than 500 words that illustrates the position, specifically targeting Mr. Warner's constituency. Your blog post should include:

1. Background on the environmental problem. Be sure to describe the issue and why there is a controversy or problem surrounding it, in terms that will be understood by the general public.
2. A description of the solution Mr. Warner will be advocating. You should justify the solution in terms that will resonate with Mr. Warner's constituency.
3. Supporting images, figures, hyperlinks, etc. and be visually pleasing.

Reflection

The final part of your portfolio will be a 1 page reflection essay that describes what you learned about the field of conservation biology.

Submission Guidelines

All documents will be submitted online through Blackboard under "Assignment". The position paper/issue briefs are due on XX and the blog post on XX. The final portfolio (including revised drafts and a reflection essay) is due on XX. Each document should be submitted with the final name as follows: LASTNAME_Document (e.g., RALPH_positionpaper, RALPH_blog).

Getting Help

There are a variety of resources available to support you during this assignment. The ODU Writing Center (<https://www.odu.edu/al/centers/writing-center>) is an excellent resource, with many options to help you in all your writing stages. Additionally, there are a number of online resources, available here: <http://writingcenter.digitalodu.com/help-docs/> and here: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>. The Duke University Nicholas School of the Environment provides further advice here: <http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/studio/>.

Some general advice on writing a science blog is available here:

<http://www.americanscientist.org/blog/pub/12-tips-for-scientists-writing-for-the-general-public>. I particularly enjoy the blogs [Dynamic Ecology](#), [Conservation Bytes](#), and [IFLscience](#) – check them out for ideas on content, presentation and style.

Evaluation Criteria

For this assignment, we will be following modifications of the ODU "Improving Disciplinary Writing" rubric. You will receive separate grades for the first draft of the position paper/issue brief and blog post (50 pts each) and an additional grade for the final portfolio, which will include the reflection essay (100 pts total).