

## SOCIAL ISSUE PAPERS

### 9.1 ISSUE REACTION PAPERS

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The purpose of being assigned to write an issue reaction paper is to develop and sharpen your critical thinking and writing skills. The model originated from Professor Stephen Jenks, formerly of the University of Central Oklahoma. Your objective in writing this type of paper is to define an issue clearly and to formulate and clarify your position on that issue by reacting to a controversial statement. Completing this assignment requires accomplishing the following six tasks:

1. Select a suitable reaction statement.
2. Explain your selection.
3. Clearly define the issue addressed in the statement.
4. Clearly state your position on the issue.
5. Defend your position.
6. Conclude concisely.

#### 9.1.1 *Select a Suitable Reaction Statement*

Your first task is to find or write a statement to which to react. Reaction statements are provocative declarations. They are controversial assertions that beg for either a negative or a positive response. Your instructor may assign a reaction statement, you may find one in a newspaper or on the Internet or hear one on television, or you may construct one yourself, depending on your instructor's directions. The following statements may elicit a polite reply but will probably not stir up people's emotions. They are, therefore, not good reaction statements:

- It is cold out today.
- Orange is not green.
- Saturday morning is the best time to watch cartoons.

The following statements, however, have the potential to be good reaction statements, because when you hear them you will probably have a distinct opinion about them:

- Abortion is murder.
- Capital punishment is necessary.
- Government is too big.
- Welfare is bad.

Such statements are likely to provoke a reaction, either negative or positive depending on the person who is reacting to them. While they may be incendiary, they are also both ordinary and vague. If your instructor assigns you a statement to which to react, you may proceed to the next step. If you are to select your own, select or formulate one that is provocative, imaginative, and appropriate to the course for which you are writing the paper. Professor Johnson, for example, once assigned this statement in his Social Problems class:

Parents should not use corporal punishment to discipline their children.

Consider the following examples of reaction statements for other sociology classes:

- Juveniles who commit heinous crimes should be certified and tried as adults.
- Social service agencies should be run more like businesses.
- The Supreme Court should take an active role in determining social policy.
- Police officers should not carry weapons of deadly force.
- Workers should be forced to retire by age sixty-five.

Where do you find good reaction statements? A helpful way is to think about subjects that interest you. When you hear something in class that sparks a reaction because you either agree or disagree with it, you know you are on the right track. Be sure to write your statement and ask your instructor for comments on it before beginning your paper. Once you have completed your selection, state it clearly at the beginning of your paper.

### 9.1.2 Explain Your Selection

After you have written the reaction statement, write a paragraph that explains why it is important to you. Be as specific as possible. Writing "I like it" does not tell the reader anything useful, but sentences like the following are informative: "Innocent people are being shot down by violent gangs in the inner city. We must crack down on gang violence in order to make the inner city safe for all who live there."

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### 9.1.3 Clearly Define the Issue Addressed in the Statement

Consider the statement assigned by Professor Johnson: "Parents should not use corporal punishment to discipline their children." What is the most important issue addressed in this statement? Is it the notion that corporal punishment diminishes children's self-esteem and that spanking children will somehow cause them to feel hostile and aggressive? Or is it the possibility that parents might lose control of their children if they don't spank them? Perhaps some aspects of the statement are more important than others. As you define the issue addressed in the statement, you provide yourself with some clarification of the statement that will help you state your position.

### 9.1.4 Clearly State Your Position on the Issue

In response to Professor Johnson's statement, you might begin by saying: "It seems reasonable to assume that no one likes to be hit and that being hit causes feelings of resentment and hostility. Parents who say you can't discipline children without spanking them obviously are confused about the meaning of the word discipline." The reader of this response will have no doubt about where you stand on this issue.

### 9.1.5 Defend Your Position

You should make and support several arguments to support your stand on the issue. When evaluating your paper, your instructor will consider the extent to which you

- Identified the most important arguments needed to support your position
- Provided facts and information, when appropriate
- Introduced new or creative arguments to those traditionally made on this issue
- Presented your case accurately, coherently, logically, consistently, and clearly

### 9.1.6 Conclude Concisely

Your concluding paragraph should sum up your argument clearly, persuasively, and concisely. When writing this assignment, follow the format directions in Chapter 3 of this manual. Ask your instructor for directions concerning the length of the paper, but in the absence of further directions, your paper should not exceed five pages (typed, double-spaced).

The following sample reaction paper was written by a student in a Social Problems class at the University of Central Oklahoma. As you read it, try to identify its strengths and weaknesses.