



Finding Pro and Con Sources

Why use pro/con sources?

An argument is a reasoned proposal to persuade an audience to share your viewpoint about a controversial topic. In order to convince someone to abandon their point of view for yours, you need to understand their point of view. In order to debate intelligently against people who disagree with your point of view, you need to identify and understand the aspects of your argument they disagree with. Good pro/con resources present various points of view in formats that help you better verbalize your perspective and help you understand opposing views.

Finding controversial topics

10,000 Ideas for Term Papers, Projects, and Reports (LB1047.3 .L35 1998 on the Reference shelves) is a great place to see lists of interesting and controversial topics. *CQ Researcher* is another great place to get ideas for topics, plus find current and background information and a variety of points of view. If you're having trouble coming up with a topic, look through your course textbook or talk to your instructor.

Forming arguments

You can form argumentative papers and speeches in several ways:

1. Take a stance: be for or against something. For example, "marijuana use should be legalized because..."
2. Argue the pros or cons of an issue. For example, "the disadvantages of welfare reform legislation are..."
3. Analyze the strengths or weaknesses of an issue. For example, "the strengths behind those arguing for allocating more money to women's collegiate sports are..."
4. Suggest why an issue is discussed or presented as it is. For example, "many people are preoccupied with the death penalty because..."
5. Argue what should be done about an issue. For example, "various organizations are proposing the following solutions to legalizing prostitution... So-and-so has a more convincing case because..."
6. Analyze rhetorical issues behind an issue. Look for logical fallacies such as faulty cause and effect, over-generalizations, emotional appeals, ad hominem, appeals to authority, begging the question, etc.
7. Analyze the state of an issue. For example, "euthanasia has become a controversial issue because over the last 30 years..."

Choosing pro/con sources

What to look for in good pro/con sources:

- **Date:** if you are looking for recent facts, your source should be as up to date as the information you seek. Old sources are not necessarily without value; for research of a historical nature, they may be very useful. You may need to use several sources to find new facts. Ask at the Reference Desk for help with this.
- **Originality:** Certain types of research call for the use of primary sources of information. These are works that provide original information about a topic. Original experiments, historical letters and manuscripts, autobiographies, newspaper accounts, and official records are examples of primary sources. Secondary sources are works that are based on primary sources. For example, the presidential papers of Andrew Jackson are a primary source. A book analyzing his presidency is a secondary source.
- **Biases:** Is this a reliable source of information? What is the agenda of the author? Authors' viewpoints will inevitably color their presentation and interpretation of facts. You should be aware of the biases of the author, and not uncritically accept everything he or she says. On the other hand, resist the temptation to dismiss an author's ideas or statements of facts simply because they represent a viewpoint that you disagree with. See our *Point of View in Periodicals* handout for more information on bias.
- **Level of Scholarship:** Many of the holdings in the library are scholarly by nature, but many are popular sources. The difference between them is important, and the quality of your research can suffer if you do not distinguish between them. Popular magazines are not necessarily of poor quality; they simply are not very useful for most higher-level academic research.

Comparison of Popular Pro/Con Sources

Below are comparisons of some pro/con sources in our libraries. When you see "Call numbers vary" in the location column, you'll need to search our library catalog to find specific books: do a Boolean Keyword search using keywords for your topic, the Boolean operator AND, and the series title in quotations. For example, to search for a book in the *Contemporary World Issues* series about abortion, enter our library catalog, click on the "Boolean Keyword" option in the "Choose Type of Search" box, and type the following in the search box: abortion AND "contemporary world issues".

Source	Description (advantages & disadvantages)	Location
<i>CQ Researcher</i>	Periodical covering argumentative topics since 1991. Each issue provides various viewpoints, detailed background information, chronologies, and bibliographies in about 20 pages. + good for browsing and topic selection + experts write opinions about the issue + has own index (blue issues) and is indexed in EbscoHost	At reference desk, no call number
<i>Congressional Digest</i>	Periodical covering controversies in Congress since 1984. + good mix of opinions + well known people and organizations are quoted + bipartisan + has own index (Dec. issues) and is indexed in EbscoHost, Proquest Direct, Readers Guide - limited topic coverage to only those in debate in Congress	On periodical shelves, no call number
<i>Opposing Viewpoints</i>	Book series presenting balanced, difficult to find, opposing points of view on complex and sensitive issues. Includes diverse materials taken from magazines, journals, books, and newspapers, as well as statements and position papers from a wide range of individuals, organizations, and governments. + excellent selection of topics and opinions + includes bibliographies + includes lists of organizations to contact - viewpoints are reprinted from other sources	Call numbers vary
<i>Contemporary World Issues</i>	Book series including chronologies, statistics, glossaries, organizations, bibliographies, and biographical information about important figures. + longer and more comprehensive than similar series listed here	Call numbers vary
<i>Information Plus</i>	Book series including easy, quick access to statistics and opinions on various viewpoints.	Call numbers vary
<i>Taking sides</i>	Book series written in the style of debates. + useful introductions and postscripts for each issue - viewpoints reprinted from other sources - no separate bibliography	Call numbers vary
<i>Current Controversies</i>	Book series + exhaustive survey of the arguments + diversity of opinions + includes bibliographies + includes lists of organizations to contact - some don't have indexes	Call numbers vary
<i>Ideas in Conflict</i>	Book series including counterpoints, debates, opinions, commentaries, and analyses. + reasoning skill development activities are useful for prompting discussions - some don't have indexes	Call numbers vary