

**CPSC 240: Computer Ethics
Position Paper Assignment
DUE: Dec. 6, Dec. 13, and Dec. 21**

The position paper assignment in this class requires you to write a paper in a very structured format that shows your ability to argue a specific ethical question from multiple points of view. The paper has the following components.

- a. An ethical question (the topic of your paper)
- b. Discussion of your initial position on the question
- c. Background and importance of the question
- d. Arguments for “yes”
- e. Arguments for “no”
- f. Revisit your original position (b) in light of your research. (Conclusion)
- g. An annotated bibliography of references that you used.

This assignment is worth 35% of your course grade. More details on each part are given below.

(a) The topic of your paper must be an ethical question related to computing, and it **must** be stated in the form of a yes-or-no question. Examples include: “Should employers be allowed to read employees’ email?” and “Should Internet access be provided in all schools?” Questions related to any of the topics that we will be studying are allowed, as long as they concern ethical behavior and some form of computing.

(b) Once you have posed your question, you will immediately write a discussion of your current (BEFORE doing any research) position on the question. This discussion should include your answer (yes or no) and an explanation of your reasoning.

PARTS a and b are due by 12:00 noon, Monday, December 6. Revised versions of these parts are due with the final submission on December 20.

(c) In order to discuss your question, you will need to present the necessary background, including definitions and relevant history. This section is where you present the facts that the reader will need to know in order to understand your arguments in the latter parts of the paper. You should also include a discussion of the importance of the topic: to you, and to society as a whole.

(d) and (e) Each of these sections contains a summary of the arguments for one side of the question. You should present each argument in its most favorable light; do not try to tip the scales in favor of (or against) your prior belief. A good position paper will present a balance of arguments for either side.

(f) This part of your paper forms a nice conclusion by revisiting your discussion from part (b) in light of what you learned while researching this paper. Did your research strengthen your position? Did your position change? Be sure to explain the reasons for your beliefs.

PARTS c, d, e and f are due (along with a revised versions of part a) by 12:00 noon, Tuesday, December 21.

(g). Your annotated bibliography lists all of the references that you used, including some that might not make it into the paper. After each citation, give a descriptive and/or evaluative summary of the contents of each item. These notes summarize your reaction to the item that you read. The annotated bibliography will be most useful to you if it is a work in progress throughout your research process; each time you find an article or other source, you should immediately add it to your annotated bibliography, and after you read it, update your impressions of the article. The annotated bibliography will then serve as a good reminder of what you learned as you outline and write your paper. [How to Write an Annotated Bibliography](#) is a good source that provides more on this topic.

A first draft of PART g is due at 12:00 noon on Monday, December 14. The final version is turned in with the rest of the paper on December 21.

In class on December 21, each student will make a brief (5 minute) presentation on their position paper, stating the question and very briefly summarizing the background, initial position and final position, including reasons.

Your term paper will NOT be satisfactory if:

- You fail to follow the format specified above.
- You fail to specify a question in the paper
- You fail to argue both sides of the question
- You fail to state your before and after positions and the basis for your beliefs
- You include material that, while interesting, does not tie to any of the points above
- You fail to use good English, including correct grammar and spelling. Proofread, spell check, and proofread again! You are encouraged to use the services of the writing center to improve your paper, but be sure to provide your writing assistant with this assignment so that he or she is aware of the very specific requirements of this paper.
- You fail to include an annotated bibliography.
- You fail to include appropriate citations to the references where they are used in the paper.