

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Opinion essay assignment

By our last regular class meeting, you must submit an opinion essay where you will apply the knowledge and critical thinking skills you have developed over the first two-thirds of the semester to a topic that meets the criteria noted below.

Your essay must adhere to each of the instructions noted below and be *at least 500 words in length* (aim for 2-3 full pages; please don't submit more than four), *excluding* the required bibliography. As noted in the syllabus, this assignment's grade will make up ten percent of your course grade.

Due date: emailed to me at the start of our last regular class meeting (no hard copy of the paper is required). Unless an extension has been granted at least 72 hours in advance of the due date, late work will receive a 5-percent deduction per day. The penalty will double retroactively for assignments submitted more than three days late and in any case where students do not notify me within 24 hours of the due date to explain why their work is tardy and when it will arrive.

To be considered as having been submitted on time, you must do several things:

1. Before submission, make sure that your paper is double-spaced, and uses normal margins and font size. Its title section must list an accurate word count, excluding the bibliography.
2. Ahead of the deadline, email a copy of the assignment as a PDF, MS Word, or RTF **attached** document (if you send the document as an e-mail message, in Pages format, or as a link to a cloud server document or drive—such as Google Docs/Drive—the paper will not be accepted until it has been submitted in one of the acceptable formats).
3. Email the paper to: msetzler@highpoint.edu
4. **The message's subject line should be: PSC2710OpEd**

Before beginning to write your essay, you must do four things:

- *Carefully review the syllabus sections on academic integrity and any use of AI assistance. AI use is permitted but only for specific activities. You may NOT use AI to research your topic, summarize existing research, or for any of the writing of your paper. You MAY use AI in the ways explained here:*
<https://marksetzler.org/generalissues/AI.htm>
- *Also read the handouts on the course website addressing paper grading criteria and citation expectations. Your essay's citations and the required bibliography should carefully follow one of three formats most used in the social sciences: University of Chicago, the APA, or the APSA. Do not use footnotes. For your convenience, my website provides a handout with many formatting examples using the APSA style. You need to use page-specific citations so that your instructor can quickly verify your interpretation of cited material. Without exception, instances of plagiarism (cases where a student attempts to gain academic credit by submitting an essay in which a significant portion of the writing has been copied, paraphrased without citation, composed by an artificial intelligence program, or patch-written from any other author, the internet, or another student) will receive a zero on this assignment for failing to follow its directions. Violations of the Honor Code will be reported and punished according to university policy. Please note: You may not submit an essay for which you have received or will receive credit in another course.*
- *Make sure you understand the writing style and tone that should be used in this type of assignment. Before writing, you must read three or more examples of opinion essays from different authors at <https://www.realclearworld.com>. RealClearWorld aggregates opinion essays from a wide range of foreign and ideological perspectives, and it is a great resource if you are not sure about what topic you would like to write on. While you will be writing an opinion essay, its*

format and writing style should be professional and analytical in tone. Effective opinion essays use a combination of strong evidence and logic, and their authors have carefully proofed each sentence to make sure that ideas are communicated as clearly, efficiently, and elegantly as possible. These essays should avoid unnecessary jargon and be written for a broad, but well-educated audience. Ideally, your efforts on this assignment will produce an essay that you could submit for publication in a newspaper or magazine. The type and length of this assignment should also make it ideal to use as a writing sample for future internships and job opportunities. Consider these potential audiences as you choose your topic.

- *Do the background research necessary to write a strong argument that is supported with high-quality evidence.* Your essay should include lots of examples and evidence (very short quotes and quantitative data can be especially effective). **Specifically, your arguments must draw upon a modest amount of (i.e., at least 5 articles) of independent research from high-quality sources (i.e., academic journals like *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy*), well-known news magazines and newspapers, or think tank publications).** How do you know your research source is of a high quality? Either use peer-reviewed academic articles you find with Google Scholar or verify the quality of your news/website source here: <https://adfontesmedia.com/interactive-media-bias-chart/>. Avoid sources that are “hyper” or “extreme” partisan outlets or that have a reliability score of under 32 (You will have a limited number of searches on this site before you are asked if you want to join the paid service. For additional searches, consider using your web-browser’s “incognito” setting and “decline” the site’s request to add a cookie.)

The essay topic: Use this assignment to analyze and share your views on an international problem that can be addressed, in whole or at least in part, by the coordinated efforts of the United States and other countries. **Your essay must accomplish three tasks:**

(1) Applying one or more of the theories we have analyzed this semester, identify and contextualize a serious problem that is international in scope.

Specifically, your paper should apply one or more relevant international relations theories to analyze your chosen issue, clearly identifying a significant international problem while providing proper context and background. Examples of theoretical approaches you might consider include changing international norms, breakdown of international institutions, collective action dilemmas, shifting balances of state power, or decision-making styles of specific leaders.

In terms of their substantive focus, past successful topics have included international intervention in civil wars or regional conflicts, human rights violations in specific countries, international crime, terrorism across borders, doping in international sports, and various economic, environmental, and security threats affecting multiple countries.

Important: If you choose an issue we've discussed in detail during class, you must still complete all required background research and base your arguments on sources beyond those assigned for the class. In other words, tackling a topic we have covered in class does not reduce this assignment's research expectations.

(2) Considering the logic of a major theory of international relations and specifics uncovered in your research, make a compelling argument that the United States, working with a larger group of countries, should pursue a specific course of action to address, at least in part, the problem.

(3) Explain in some detail what constraints would need be overcome and what resources will be needed to address or at least improve the problem.

Ideally, you will spend half-a-page or more each of these issues and include examples and evidence from multiple research sources in each of the essay's body paragraphs. For the second and last sections, also consider carefully what you have learned in class and from your textbook chapters on international cooperation and (if applicable) in international law and international organization about when and why countries will cooperate to solve complex problems.

Grading criteria and citation expectations. Your overall paper grade will be the average of two component grades:

The first will assess the quality of the writing, which includes your organization, clarity, grammar, and the logical flow of ideas within paragraphs.

Your paper will also be graded on its analysis and content, which refer to your essay's quality of evidence, logic, and background research.

The letter grades for both components will adhere to the university's criteria for A, B, C, D, and F work, which are described in the course syllabus. Briefly, A work is excellent and distinctive in all respects. B work is good in all respects but could be considerably stronger with additional editing, analysis, or background research. C work least meets the minimum length, writing, and content standards to be considered passing work at the college level. A more detailed paper-grading rubric can be found on our course website (see the "Student Resources" tab on the course website).