Phase 1: Choose a topic

CHOOSE a SIRS Leading Issues topic that

>> You find personally interesting and have questions about
>> You can adequately address in the amount of time you are given to complete your teacher’s assignment.

>> READ your Leading Issue’s brief overview and viewpoints and scan some of the article titles and summaries about the Leading Issue.

ANSWER the following who/what/when/where/why questions:

Who is affected by your Leading Issue?

What are the main problems and/or controversies associated with your issue?

What solutions are authors writing about in articles about your Leading Issue?

If your topic is about an idea or event from the past, how is your topic relevant to people’s lives today?
Phase 2: Choose a focus

>> In your review of your topic, what issues, solutions, problems, controversies or viewpoints interest you the most?

>> What questions do you have about the issues, solutions, problems, controversies, or viewpoints addressed in the articles you read?

Example:
You read an article that opposes the legalization of marijuana.
Your questions could be:
• What are the physical effects of marijuana and how are they harmful?
• What would American society be like if marijuana were legalized?
• Are there any cultures, cities, states, countries where marijuana is legal and how are these societies different from American society?

>> Read carefully at least three articles that discuss the issues, solutions, problems, questions, or viewpoints that interest you the most.

Create or Print a bibliography of these three articles by using the SIRS Tagged List feature.
Phase 3: State thesis

A thesis is supported by evidence and supporting ideas.

A thesis may do one of the following things:
- Assert an opinion or make a judgment
- Offer a solution or recommendation
- Explain something in detail by making a comparison, exploring causes and/or effects, or providing reasons for the existence of something.

Evidence can be
- Facts and statistics
- Ideas and quotes from experts
- Examples of cases relevant to your topic
- Laws, legislation, or foundational primary source documents such as the Constitution of the United States.

Supporting ideas should
- Be clearly explained
- Be supported by evidence
- Provide an analytical connection between evidence and the thesis.

Examples

Thesis example:
- Marijuana should be legalized for medical use.

Possible supporting ideas (remember that you will need to provide at least three supporting ideas):
- Chronically ill patients need access to this drug to ease their pain.
- Trained physicians have the expertise and ability to monitor the quality and patient’s intake of the drug.

Possible supporting evidence (pick evidence that endorses your supporting ideas):
- Quotes from physicians who have prescribed marijuana to chronically ill patients.
- Medical studies that provide support for the efficacy of marijuana to alleviate pain.
- Examples of chronically ill patients who have lived improved or extended lives as a result of being prescribed medical marijuana.
- Examples of states, countries, or cities that have legalized marijuana for medical use.
Phase 3 continued: Brainstorm your thesis, possible evidence, and supporting ideas below.

Thesis:

Three supporting ideas to prove your thesis:

Possible evidence to support your supporting ideas:
Phase 4: Select and Read

SELECT and READ other documents associated with your topic.

CHOOSE documents that will

- Provide evidence such as facts and statistics, cases, legislation, quotes, or personal examples
- Contain expert opinion that supports your thesis or supporting ideas or opposes your thesis or supporting ideas
- Help you explore your questions about your topic’s issues, problems, controversies

Guide to types of documents in SIRS Leading Issues

Newspaper articles are published daily and therefore contain the latest information about a topic or event. The goal of newspaper articles is to report on issues and events; therefore, you will find less analysis of an issue. However, you will find essays supporting various opinions in the Editorial section of a newspaper.

Magazine articles are published less frequently than newspapers and may contain outdated information, particularly if the article was published a while ago. Magazine articles contain more opinion and analysis of issues and events and are usually more in-depth than newspaper articles. Pay close attention to the date of publication of magazine articles, and make sure look at newspaper articles to get the latest factual information about events and issues.

Government documents can be a variety of things published by agencies of the United States government. Government documents contain trustworthy, reliable, and detailed statistical and factual information.

Primary sources consist of statutes, legislation, legal opinion, cases, and other legal materials. Use them to learn about federal and state laws related to your topic.

Viewpoint articles contain opinions about topics.

Reference materials give you a simple overview or definition of a person, place, idea, or event.

Graphics can contain images, as well as graphs with important statistical information.
WebSelect sites are carefully chosen by experts. Always make a note of who created the website and when it was last updated. For “.com” and “.org” sites, ask yourself if the website is presenting a particular point of view.
Phase 4 continued: Critical Reading and Analysis

>> For each document, note the following:

- Thesis statement
- Important phrases or quotes
- Evidence (facts, statistics, examples, etc.)
- Supporting ideas

>> Identify the order in which the author presents the thesis, evidence, supporting ideas, and opposing opinions.

>> Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the document contain facts or only opinion?
- Is the article objective, or is it biased?
- If an opinion is expressed, is it supported by facts and supporting ideas?
- Are these facts from reliable sources?
- Are the facts used appropriately?
- Who is the author of the document? If an opinion is expressed, what authority does the author have to be discussing the topic? Is this person an expert?
- What magazine, newspaper, or other publication did the article appear in? Is the publication reputable?
- If an opinion is expressed, are you adequately convinced, or did the author leave out important ideas, issues, or facts?
Phase 5: Review and Revise

>>Based upon your reading of all the sources associated with your topic, re-examine your thesis.

After reading and analyzing others’ arguments, has your opinion changed?

Have you developed a new focus or discovered something new?

Is your thesis too broad or too specific?

If you answered “yes” to any of these, you may need to revise your thesis statement.

>>Evaluate your sources.

- Do you have an adequate number and variety of sources to convince someone of your opinion?

- Are your sources appropriately used?
  
  *Newspaper articles* provide latest information and some analysis. (The exception is the Editorial section of a daily newspaper, which contains mostly opinion.)
  
  *Magazine articles* provide analysis and opinion with relevant evidence.
  
  *Government documents* and *primary sources* are good sources for statistics, legislation, laws and other material you can use as evidence.

- Are you relying too heavily on one source?

- Are your statistics reliable?
  
  Are your statistics from primary source documents such as government documents? Or are they from secondary source materials, such as magazine articles quoting statistics from government documents? Try to use facts and statistics from the original, primary documents to ensure reliability, validity, and accuracy. If the original document is not available, make sure the statistics you are using were generated by a reliable, trustworthy organization. Note that newspaper polls are *not* statistically valid because they do not reflect a representative sample of a population.

- Do you need to provide more evidence to endorse you supporting ideas and thesis?

Note that you may need to conduct more research to adequately support your thesis.
Phase 5: Writing and Citing

Consolidate all of your evidence, thesis, and supporting ideas into a first draft.

Make sure your draft contains the following:

- An introduction that states your thesis.
- A summary of the opposition’s opinion, along with your refutation of that opinion.
- At least one paragraph for each of your supporting ideas, with relevant evidence and explanation of how the supporting idea supports your thesis.
- A summary or direct quote from an author’s opinion.
- Proper documentation 1) when quoting or paraphrasing someone else’s opinion and 2) evidence. (Use the SIRS Researcher Tagged List feature to assist in creating your works cited/references/bibliography.)
- A conclusion that summarizes the main points of your research paper and states a recommendation, prediction, or solution to the problem(s) raised in the paper.

Create bibliography using SIRS Researcher Tagged List feature.

Evaluation: Phase 6

Before submitting your paper, review and evaluate it. Ask yourself the following questions:

STAYING ON TASK: Have I referred to my thesis statement in each paragraph?

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM:
- When I have restated others’ ideas to support my thesis or argument, have I summarized these ideas in my own words, not theirs?
- Have I given proper credit to my sources?

AVOIDING CARELESS ERROR: Has my paper been proofread? Have I used correct grammar and spelling?