

CS 4001 - Term Paper Topic Proposal

This is the first step in your term paper (which accounts for a large portion of your grade).

Your topic proposal document should have three parts:

1. Term paper topic area: A phrase will do, such as "Patriot Act and privacy," or "Open source reliability" or "Network neutrality"
2. Several questions about the area that are controversial and for which you might take a stand in your paper. This will be an argumentative paper, so you will need to "take a side" in the argument in your final paper. However, for now, just list these as questions, such as, "Is open source software more secure than vendor provided software?", "Should ISPs be prevented from telling subscribers that their records have been requested?", or "How would network neutrality be enforced?"
3. Personal rationale. Why you want to explore this topic and issues (50 to 100 words).

You will receive feedback on this assignment, but the feedback will not figure into your grade unless it appears that you are not approaching the topic seriously.

Take this seriously; you will have to live with your choice for several months, so give your topic careful thought. You will be able to change your topic later if you hit a wall, find the topic less interesting than you originally thought, can't find supporting information, etc. However, you should do this only with GTA/instructor approval and only after resubmitting a revised version of this assignment. Your default assumption should be that the topic you submit now is the topic you will stay with.

Hints on developing a topic: As soon as possible, look through your course textbooks for topics that interest you, narrowing them down to four or five themes. Then do the issue brainstorming process described in WACE where you start from one issue and generate a set of related issues. WACE has a good chapter on composing proposal arguments. It would help to scan it now. You should definitely read it before you start researching and writing the paper itself.

Also read/skim the attached ProposedTopicIdeas.pdf document for a variety of topics. These are not intended to be a blueprint to your paper, but rather topics that might catch your interest.

Generate as many interesting sounding issues as you can for a while, then leave your list alone. Later, come back to your list and choose one of the issues as your major research topic for this paper. During the term, keep a log of your research activities and be ready, in class discussion, to explain what kinds of arguments or evidence turned out to be most persuasive in helping you to take a stand.

Turn in procedure: Turn in a paper with the above information (bullets 1-3). Be prepared to discuss your topic in class (this may mean bringing a 2nd copy to class that you can refer to).