

A TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

An Informative Explanation

My readers are not clear about my topic or the opposing positions I'm exploring.

- State the topic explicitly, perhaps as a question, so the conflicting positions are clear.
- Clarify how your subtopics relate to your topic by forecasting them in your thesis statement.
- Sharpen the contrast between opposing positions by using transitions of contrast (such as *whereas* or *although*).

My readers are not interested or do not appreciate the issue's importance.

- Add information showing the impact of the issue or how it affects people's lives.
- Put the topic in context by providing historical, political, or cultural importance.
- Quote notable authorities to emphasize the issue's importance.
- Cite polls or research studies or use graphics to demonstrate the widespread impact of the issue.

My readers do not understand my analysis.

- Determine whether you are trying to cover too many points.
- Explain in more detail the points that are harder for readers to grasp.
- Consider emphasizing the less obvious points of the disagreement.

My report or analysis seems more like a summary.

- Revisit your sources, brainstorm a list of subtopics some or all of them cover, and create a synthesis chart to help you understand the similarities and differences.
- Consider how the writer's profession or biography could explain why a particular motivating factor (such as a value or priority) has so much persuasive power.
- Think about the social and political situation in which each essay was written and how the writer was trying to appeal to readers.

A Clear, Logical Organization

My readers are confused by my essay or find it difficult to read.

- Outline your report or analysis. If necessary, move, add, or delete sections to strengthen coherence.
- Consider adding a forecasting statement with key terms that are repeated in topic sentences throughout the report or analysis.
- Consider adding headings to highlight subtopics; use key terms from the forecast in your headings.
- Check for appropriate transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and major sections of your report or analysis.
- Consider reorganizing your analysis to alternate between the sources you are comparing.
- Review your opening and closing paragraphs. Be sure you state your thesis explicitly and that your closing paragraph revisits your thesis.

Smooth Integration of Sources

Quotations, summaries, and paraphrases don't flow smoothly with the rest of the essay.

- Reread all passages where you quote outside sources. Ask yourself whether you provide enough context for the quotation or establish clearly enough the credentials of the source's author.
- Use signal phrases to put sources in context. Choose descriptive verbs that clearly indicate what the source author is doing (making a claim, asserting a position, reporting on a study, and so forth).
- Add a sentence explaining what the quotation, summary, or paraphrase means or why it is relevant.

Readers are concerned that my list of sources is too limited or unbalanced.

- Do additional research to balance your list, taking particular care that you have an adequate number of reliable sources from a variety of points of view.
- Ask a librarian or your instructor for help finding sources on your topic.

My readers wonder whether my sources are credible.

- Clearly identify all sources and state the credentials of cited authorities.
- Eliminate sources that are not relevant, credible, or otherwise appropriate.

Appropriate Explanatory Strategies

Readers don't understand my report or analysis.

- Consider whether you have used the most appropriate writing strategies (defining, classifying, comparing and contrasting, narrating, illustrating, describing, or explaining causes and effects) for your topic.
- Recheck your definitions for clarity. Be sure that you have explicitly defined any key terms your readers might not know.

Readers want more information about certain aspects of the topic.

- Expand or clarify definitions by adding examples.
- Add examples or comparisons and contrasts to relate the topic to something readers already know.
- Conduct additional research on your topic, and cite it in your essay.

Appropriate Explanatory Strategies

Readers want visuals to help them understand certain aspects of the topic.

- Check whether your sources use visuals (tables, graphs, drawings, photographs, and the like) that might be appropriate for your report or analysis. (If you are publishing your work online, consider video clips, audio files, and animated graphics as well.)
- Consider drafting your own charts, tables, or graphs, or adding your own photographs or illustrations.

Summaries lack oomph; paraphrases are too complicated; quotations are too long.

- Revise the summaries to emphasize a single key idea.
- Restate the paraphrases more succinctly, omitting irrelevant details. Consider quoting important words.
- Use ellipses to tighten the quotations to emphasize the memorable words.