Writing a POSITION PAPER and Preparing for a DEBATE on Controversial Issues in Psychology

A. You will receive two primary source articles (one pro and one con) on a controversial topic in psychology from your teacher each term. After reading each article, you must summarize each author’s MAJOR points. This can be anywhere from 4 – 7 major arguments.

B. Look at the teacher sample of the INSPIRATION diagram for a position paper/debate on “the use of animals in psychological research”. Review each step in the diagram. Notice the step #1 & #2 is summarizing the pro and con arguments from your reading. Step 3 is stating your position. Step 4 is defending your position and step 5 involves a critique of the opposing side’s arguments. Finally, you are able to discuss special circumstances or exceptions to your position as step 6.

C. INSPIRATION TRAINING – Mac LAB (25 minutes of class time)

D. Now open the student template to get you started in mapping out your position paper for first term. This is meant as a guide. You will be using INSPIRATION to add to this template for your topic. Begin by filling in your summary of major points from each side. Fill in your position. In the Defense category begin diagramming ideas that defend your position that go beyond repeating what is in your summary. Use personal experience or draw upon other resources. Cite these sources. Once you have exhausted all ideas in the defense category begin diagramming criticisms of the opposing side. Respond to all the major points you have diagrammed in your summary for the opposing side. Add any additional criticism that might include issues regarding the credentials or special interest of the authors, bias in the data gathering techniques used, or sampling bias. Finally, if applicable, fill in any special exceptions that you may have to your position. View your Inspiration diagram as an outline. Print the outline and diagram you have created.

E. With your Inspiration Diagram and Outline in hand, begin writing your position paper. The first paragraph should include a brief overview of the question under debate. The second paragraph should be your summary of the Pro side. The third paragraph should be a summary of the Con side. The fourth paragraph should be a statement of your position followed by arguments to defend this position. The fifth paragraph should be a critique of the opposing side’s arguments. Finally, the sixth and last paragraph should include any special exceptions to your position and a brief summative statement repeating your position. You may write the paper in the first person using “I” statements. Be sure to include everything you have diagrammed in your Inspiration outline. You must attach a copy of your Inspiration outline to your position paper.

F. If it is your turn to verbally DEBATE the issue under investigation in class you should use your Inspiration Diagram/Outline as a guide during the verbal exchange. You will be asked to pass in your Inspiration diagram at the end of the debate.