The following is a model outline for the proposition of fact paper. We strongly recommend that you prepare your essay as a detailed outline before actually writing the first draft as a way of making sure that you include all of the minimum requirements and so that you can see the logical flow of the argument in a more-or-less graphic form.

**Proposition of Fact:** The Earth’s global average surface temperature has increased 0.6°C since 1861.¹

I. Introduction [Note: In a 6-8 pp. essay the introduction should take no more than 1 to 1.5 pages]:

A. [DRAMATISTIC INTRODUCTION] Consistent with our “show and tell” model for demonstrating fact claims, you should start with a concrete illustration – a vital example – of the fact that you are trying to establish. The point of the example should be to help you gain some sense of identification with your reader, to let her/him “see” or “feel evidence of the presence of the thing as it might be significant in everyday life.

B. [SIGNIFICANCE/CONTEXT] Establish the significance of the illustration by locating it in the context you want your audience to understand it. So, e.g., if you start with an example of increasingly powerful hurricanes (as an illustration of the presence of global warming) you might talk about how it is important to locate such weather events within a larger discussion of concerns about global climate and this requires that we take careful consideration of a phenomenon called “global warming.”

C. Before we can have a discussion about global warming, we need to be clear about whether or not the Earth is actually warming.

D. [THESIS/PROPOSITION OF FACT] The Earth’s global average surface temperature has increased 0.6°C since 1861. (Summary)

E. [PREVIEW OF MAIN POINTS] Provide an initial summary of how you intend to develop your argument. This functions as a roadmap for the reader – and it will help you to keep on track as well. Be sure that from this point forward in the essay everything you write relates in some direct manner to illustrating, elaborating, explaining, etc. the proposition of fact.

II. Defining the Key Terms: you need to pick out the key terms of your proposition, provide a coherent set of definitions for them, and defend your choice of definitions. By now you should have concluded that definitions are (a) more or less arbitrary, and (b) controlling the meaning of something by controlling its definition entails an incredible amount of power. You also should have learned that even though definitions are more or less arbitrary, that doesn’t mean that we can make words mean anything we want them to be. Words have histories, exist as parts of conflicts, and are understood in more or less conventional ways. As you strive to establish how you want to understand a term you need to demonstrate your understanding of relevant conventions, controversies, and the like, and in general defend the choices you make. You can do this by linking your definitions within a term’s etymology, lining your usage up with the usage of experts and authorities, and explaining why certain usages are better than others.

¹ This proposition of fact is an actual proposition of fact taken from an IPCC report.
III. Elaborating and Explaining the Predicate. Every proposition implies a kind of knowing based on the relationship between subject and predicate. Once you’ve established the definition of a term you need to demonstrate how it is predicated. What is its particular location, state, and/or quantity. So, for example, you might establish that “global warming” is a function of the earth’s global average surface temperature and then discuss how that is determined, thus explaining and justifying the method by which we measure the earth’s temperature. You might discuss what the threshold is for determining that a “warming trend” has been established. Where we see evidence of it most clearly? Why climatologists consider an increase of less than 1 degree C over more than 100 years to be significant. And so on. All of these considerations would lay out a consideration of the implications of the “increase” identified in your proposition at the level of fact and w/o actually evaluating the change per se.

IV. Conclusion: The conclusion is an important formal part of any argument. You need to do two things. First, you need to summarize the significant and salient parts of the essay. Remind your reader of the particular fact claim you defended, and remind them of how you actually demonstrated it. Second, discuss once again why the proposition is significant, perhaps returning to your opening illustration and helping your audience to see how the “fact” might be present (seeable, feelable, relevant) in their own lives.

Works Cited

Don’t forget to include a properly documented works cited page. Be sure to follow the conventions for citation as evidenced in the MLA Handbook 5th ed.


