

11.007 Public Policy Disputes  
**Essay Assignment #3**  
*Due Session 20*

We all would like to believe that our public disputes get resolved at least partly on the basis of the best available information. Said differently, we'd like to believe that the more we know about a problem, the better able we are to solve it. But we have learned that policymaking is a little more complicated than that, and the process doesn't really look as rational as this model would suggest. We know, in fact, that in our adversarial system disputants in public policy debates are divided by fundamentally different values and that they frame information in ways that are consistent with their values and their preferred solutions. This raises an empirical question: What role *does* information play in the policymaking process?

Write a 4- to 5-page (5-page maximum) essay that makes *an analytic argument about the role of information in resolving public policy disputes*. Said a little differently, your argument should make a claim about how information affects public policy decisions. Rely primarily on the reading you've done and class discussions we've had since the last essay to construct and support your argument. Think about both the general points we've covered about how decisions are made by legislators, administrators, and judges, as well as by local government officials. And use evidence from the cases (tax reform, spotted owl, desegregating schools, hazardous waste) to support your argument.

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To repeat what I've said before:

- Essays are due at the beginning of class. You must be in class on time, with your essay, to get full credit.
- Please review the format notes in the syllabus. As a reminder, I ask you to use 12-point type and double spacing and to cite sources using a reference-list format. And please remember to number pages!
- Do your best, while editing, to make your prose clear, concrete, lively and interesting. If you have been struggling with your writing, make an appointment now to see someone at the writing center a couple of days before your essay is due. They should be able to help you edit your draft so that the final version is more polished. (Remember, your audience is an intelligent peer who has not taken this class, so anyone should be able to understand your essay.)