CSD CCSS Handouts for

Argumentative Writing Breakout

Canyons School District
## Argument, Persuasion, or Propaganda?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Persuasion</th>
<th>Propaganda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>Discover the “truth”</td>
<td>Promote an opinion on a particular position that is rooted in truth</td>
<td>Offer “political advertising” for a particular position that may distort the truth or include false information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Technique</strong></td>
<td>Offers good reasoning and evidence to persuade an audience to accept a “truth”</td>
<td>Uses personal, emotional, or moral appeal to convince an audience to adopt a particular point of view</td>
<td>Relies on emotions and values to persuade an audience to accept a particular position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td>Considers other perspectives on the issue</td>
<td>May considers other perspectives on the issue</td>
<td>Focuses on its own message, without considering other positions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offers facts that support the reasons (in other words, provides evidence)</td>
<td>Blends facts and emotion to make its case, relying often on opinion</td>
<td>Relies on biases and assumptions and may distort or alter evidence to make the case</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Predicts and evaluates the consequences of accepting the argument</td>
<td>May predict the results of accepting the position, especially if the information will help convince the reader to adopt the opinion</td>
<td>Ignores the consequence of accepting a particular position</td>
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</table>
### Argumentative Strategies

**Ethos:** the sources credibility and authority

How to Develop Ethos:
- Language appropriate to audience and subject
- Restrained, sincere, fair minded presentation
- Appropriate level of vocabulary
- Correct grammar

**Logos:** logic, numbers, facts, and data

How to Develop Logos:
- Theoretical, abstract language
- Literal and historical analogies
- Definitions
- Factual data and statistics
- Quotations
- Citations from experts and authorities
- Informed opinions

**Pathos:** appeals based on emotions

How to Develop Pathos:
- Vivid, concrete language
- Emotionally loaded language
- Connotative meanings
- Emotional examples
- Vivid descriptions
- Narratives of emotional events
- Emotional Tone
- Figurative language


** Taken from *They Say, I Say* by Graff and Birkenstein
**Argumentation Essays: Structuring Your Argument**

**Argumentation vs. Persuasion: Similar Goal, Different Methods**

The difference? Although the two are often used interchangeably, **persuasive writing** is a broad term that uses many tactics. It focuses more on emotional appeals and the use of style to persuade. The purpose of persuasion is to convince one’s reader or audience to change his or her position. **Argumentation** is a specific kind of persuasion. It uses logical appeals, claims, evidence, warrants, backing, and rebuttals. The purpose of argumentation is to provide organized, well-supported and well-reasoned conclusions in order to persuade the audience to consider your point of view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of a Classical Argument at a Glance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Thesis Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Background Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Reasons and Evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The Opposing View and the Refutation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Conclusions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Purpose**
   - to **convince** the reader to accept the validity of your position
   - to **defend** your position, even in the face of unchanging opposition
   - to **question** or refute a position you think is misguided or untrue

**Topic**

Choose a topic for argumentation that
- you are **knowledgeable** about, interested in, compelled to take a stand on
- you are **open-minded** about—be able to see ALL sides
- is the right **size** for the paper length
- allows a manageable **purpose**

**Audience**

Consider your audience. What are their:
- **beliefs**, opinions, interests
- **attitude** toward your topic (friendly, neutral, hostile)

While writing your first draft, always imagine you are **addressing the opponent** you'd find most difficult to convince.

*Use a Pro/Con chart ("T" chart), a Toulmin outline, or a Think in Threes graphic organizer to help you determine or clarify your position and evidence.*

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** Taken from *They Say, I Say* by Graff and Birkenstein
2. Collect evidence:
   Examples
   - real
   - hypothetical
   - analogy

   Testimony or Expert Opinion → adds authority

   ⇒ Consider the topic and time in which your source is an authority
   ⇒ Use quotations in proper context

   Statistics → especially useful for social issues
   ⇒ Evaluate and use these wisely; they LIE!

   Other types of evidence include:
   - definitions
   - comparison
   - analysis
   - prediction
   - demonstration
   - quotations
   - anecdotes/observations

   Guidelines for choosing and using evidence:
   • relevant
   • representing the full range of opinions on the subject, covering all sides
   • sufficient: depending on length, purpose, audience of the argument

   There are TWO sides to every argument (at least)!

3. Thesis Statement:
   An argument's thesis statement
   • must be debatable; it must have more than one side.

   Thesis: Doctors should be permitted to end a patient's life if the patient makes such a request, because each of us should be free to make the decisions that most concern us.

   Thesis: Today, doctors in America are not allowed to end a patient's suffering through euthanasia, even though many Americans believe in the patient's right to make this personal decision.

   • may contain warrants (a.k.a assumptions) that your argument must support.
4. **Claims:**
A claim is the position statement or key point of an argument, possibly a sub topic of your thesis.
- Three types of claims: claim of fact-state something is true or not true; claim of value-state something has or doesn’t have worth; claim of policy-assert something should or shouldn’t be done
- Claims may contain one or more reasons that support your thesis
  - Your thesis will make a larger claim, which you will back up using claims of fact and opinion.

5. **Dealing With the Opposition**

a. **Identify** all relevant and substantial arguments against your position.
   - Consult friends, people you suspect will disagree with you, research.

b. **Refute** counter-claims when possible by
   - exposing a flaw in the argument's logic (see Avoid Fallacies of Thinking)
   - supplying contradicting testimony, facts, examples
   - recognize or concede another viewpoint when claim has true weaknesses. This adds believability to the overall claim

c. When you can't refute, **concede** the point but
   - try to show its limitations;
   - always move quickly to solid ground (*your* argument).

⇒ Ignoring counter-arguments will only make your argument look WEAK!!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concession Starters/ Transitional Phrases</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I admit that</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is true that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admittedly</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

6. **Craft your argument**
- Use logical appeals-facts, statistics, expert opinions, anecdotes, and examples.
- Avoid appeals of fear or ignorance.
- Use levels of evidence-a minimum of two pieces of evidence to support each reason.

7. **Confirm your claim**
- Conclude with a coherent restatement of main arguments
- Use a call to action


** Taken from *They Say, I Say* by Graff and Birkenstein
## Elements of an Argumentative Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Templates**</th>
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</table>
| **1. Background**  
✓ context, framework, setting  
Basic information about the issue and the position being argued. | ✡ Her argument that ______ is supported by new research showing that _________.  
✡ She argues ________, and I agree because ________. |
| **2. Thesis statement (main claim, proposition)**  
✓ must be debatable  
Clearly states the position to be argued in the essay. | ✡ Although some readers might think that this poem is about ________________, it is in fact about_________________.  
✡ Though I concede that ________________, I still insist that ___________________.  
✡ X is surely right about ________________ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that _________________. |
| **3. Claims are position statement or key point of an argument**  
✓ Claim of Fact  
✓ Claim of Value  
✓ Claim of Policy  
May contain one of more reasons that support your thesis  
May be a sub-topic of your thesis | ✡ X’s claim that ________________ rests upon the questionable assumption that _________________.  
✡ X is surely right about ________________ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that _________________.  
✡ While X is probably wrong when she claims that ________________, she is right that _________________. |
| **4. Evidence that supports this thesis**  
✓ Example  
✓ Testimony  
✓ Statistics, etc. that is relevant, full range, and sufficient  
Supports your thesis and topic sentences. | ✡ According to X, “________”  
✡ In X’s view, “________”  
✡ Consider ________, for example  
✡ Experiments showing ______ and ________ have lead scientists to propose __________. |


** Taken from *They Say, I Say* by Graff and Birkenstein
5. Counter-claims (opposition) and response to counter-arguments (refutation and/or concession)  
✓ Identify  
✓ Refute  
✓ Concede but show limitations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anticipates the reader's objections; makes you sound more objective and reasonable.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Although some readers may object that ____________, I would answer that _____________.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It has become common today to dismiss ____________.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In discussions of X, one controversial issue has been ________. On the one hand, ____ argues _____. On the other hand, ______ contends _____. Others even maintain ______. My own view is ________.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

6. Reaffirmation of your argument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reminds read of your argument and supporting evidence.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In discussions of ________, a controversial issue is whether ________. While some argue that ________, others contend that ________.</td>
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</table>
Avoid Fallacies of Thinking—Use Logic!

An argument is a chain of reasons, supported by evidence, that support a claim. Faulty logic means using evidence that is fuzzy, exaggerated, illogical, or false. Be careful to avoid faulty logic when defending claims.

**Appeals to Ignorance**—Claiming that since no one has ever proved a claim, it must be false. These appeals shift the burden of proof onto someone else. “Show me one study that proves…”

**Appeals to Pity**—Using excuses to ask for leniency. “Imagine what it must have been like…”

**Bandwagon or Appealing to a Popular Position**—Appeals to everyone’s sense of wanting to belong or be accepted. “Everyone believes it or does it so you should too.”

**Broad Generalization**—Takes in everything and everyone at once and allows for no exceptions. Using words like ‘all’ and ‘everyone’ are too general. “Is this claim true for all of the people being discussed, or just some?”

**Circular Thinking**—Restating your claim in different words as evidence for your claim. “I hate this class because I’m never happy in this class.”

**Either-Or Thinking**—Offering evidence that reduces examples to two possible extremes. “Are there other possibilities that should be considered?”

**Half-Truths**—Telling only part or half of the truth. “Is this the full story—or is there another side to this that is not being told?”

**Oversimplification**—Simplifying complex topics into a “simple question.” “___________ is a simple question of __________.”

**Slanted Language or Distracting the Reader**—Selecting words that have strong positive or negative connotation in order to distract the reader from valid arguments. “Is this evidence dealing with the real issue?” “No one in his right mind would even do anything that dumb.”

**Testimonial**—Make sure the expert opinion is an authority on the topic. “What are this person’s credentials?”

**Exaggerating the Facts**—“Is everything that is being said true and accurate?”

**Using a False Cause**—Making a direct link between two separate things without evidence to back it up. “Is it fair to assume that the cause of the problem is exactly what the writer says, or might there be completely different causes?”

**If Only Thinking**—Using evidence that cannot be tested. “How does the writer know this would have happened? Is there other evidence, or is it simply an ‘if only’ argument?”

# Argumentative Writing Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Approaching Expectations</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claim(s) and counterclaims in a discipline-appropriate form and in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from or supports the argument presented.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grade Level Breakouts

Appendix C:
Grade 7 Argument p. 40 “Video Cameras in Classrooms”
Grade 9 Argument p. 57 “The True Meaning of Friendship”
Grade 10 Argument p. 65 “_______________ School Bond Levy”
Grade 12 Argument p. 78 “Freedom from Structure”
Lesson Plan #: AELP-DEB0201

Battle Bars -- The Edible Argument

An Educator's Reference Desk Lesson Plan

Submitted by: Mark A. Schneberger
Email: markusschneberger@hotmail.com
School/University/Affiliation: Oklahoma City Community College

Date: November 20, 2001

Grade Level: 9, 10, 11, 12, Higher Education, Adult/Continuing Education

Subject(s):

- Language Arts/Debate
- Language Arts/Writing

Duration: 50 minutes

Description: This lesson can be used to teach the beginning stages of argument to high school or college level English composition classes. Students use their writing skills to describe how their group's Snickers are a better buy than another group's Kit Kats, while the other group describes how its Kit Kats are a better buy than Snickers. Students use examples of price, advertising appeal, ease of consumption, appearance, dangers, nutrition facts, feel, smell, and taste to support their topic.

Goals: Students will be able to develop a thesis statement and write paragraphs using appropriate forms, conventions, and styles to communicate ideas and information to an audience (for the purposes of persuasion and argumentation).

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to develop a thesis statement and two paragraphs which support that thesis statement.
2. Students will be able to write a paragraph identifying one opposing viewpoint and write another paragraph that attempts to challenge that viewpoint.

Materials:

- a 20-piece bag (approx.) of Snickers Fun Size candy bars
- a 20-piece bag (approx.) of Kit Kat Fun Size candy bars
- chalkboard or dry erase board and chalk/marker
- writing utensils and paper
[If your college disapproves of bringing in outside food items (those not sold at the often overpriced commissary), substitute homemade nut-filled cookies and chocolate chip cookies for the candy bars. If using cookies, modify the thesis statement to fit.]

**Procedure:**

Inform students that they are to begin a unit about argumentation. Find out how many students like to argue and how many do not. Tell them that they are going to argue about something very important today -- candy bars! Inform students that the class is going to be split down the middle, and students on one side will receive Kit Kats while students on the other side will receive Snickers. [Author's Note: You may allow students to choose sides, but you must have (closely) equal representation on each side. Also, tell students not to eat the candy bars.]

Lay a candy bar on each student's desk, or pass the bags around and allow the students to choose their own. Tell the students that they need to imagine that there are only two brands of candy bars in the world -- the ones being discussed. Tell them that their candy bar is the best value, and it is their job to come up with as many "logical" reasons why their candy bars are the best value. Tell them not to consider that the other group is working on doing the same project for another brand. Rather, have them just focus on the question, "Why is my candy bar the best value?" Encourage them to work together to make a list of the top 10 points for why their candy bars are the best.

After they have come up with their lists, have each group elect a representative to write their 10 reasons on the board. The result will be a split board with Kit Kat best-buy points on one side and Snickers best-buy points on the other side. Next, have students vote on which of their side's three reasons best represent why their respective candy bars are the better value. Erase all the others. This will result in a split board with three strong points for each side. Then, tell the groups that they are to individually, or in teams of two or three, write a thesis statement which expresses the idea that their candy bar is the best value. Then they are to craft two short paragraphs of three or more sentences (the paragraphs must be linked with transitional expressions) for each point they've chosen for their side. While students are working, assist each group and view their progress. The result will be a thesis statement and two paragraphs which support it. Allow students to eat their candy bars if they choose at this time. (Sugar may help them write faster!)

After the paragraphing is complete, tell the students how important it is when arguing to be fair and to demonstrate that others may have differing opinions. Then, direct them to individually, or in teams of two or three, assume the position of the other side and identify what they consider to be that side's strongest point about why they have the best value bar. Kit Kat groups will write a paragraph supporting Snickers and vice versa. Encourage students to spend a few minutes in discussion with members of the opposing groups, so they can adequately explain and support their points. Kit Kat members will solicit information from Snickers members and vice versa. While they are working, assist each group and view their progress. The result will be one paragraph, linked to the first two, which demonstrates the opposing position. If students request an opposing side's candy bar, allow them to have one (if there are ones left) to eat.

Finally, explain to students that their job after identifying a strong differing opinion is to directly and convincingly challenge it. Using what they know about candy bars, nutrition, packaging, and logic, they must try to construct one short paragraph (including transitional element) to disprove the other side. Kit Kats will challenge Snickers' strongest point and vice versa. While students are working, assist each group and view their progress. The result will be one challenge paragraph linked to the previous three paragraphs. Encourage students to share their completed paragraphs.
**Assessment:** Collect students’ paragraphs to assess completeness and students' ability to logically demonstrate argumentation in writing.

**Special Comments:** If you have further questions about this lesson plan, which uses food as a base for understanding, please do not hesitate to contact: Mark A. Schneberger, Adjunct Professor of English, Oklahoma City Community College.
Lesson Plan
Building a Better Argument

SUMMARY:
Whether it’s an ad for burger chains, the closing scene of a “Law & Order” spinoff, a discussion with the parents about your social life or a coach disputing a close call, arguments are an inescapable part of our lives. In this lesson, students will learn to create good arguments by getting a handle on the basic structure. The lesson will provide useful tips for picking out premises and conclusions and for analyzing the effectiveness of arguments.

OBJECTIVES:
In this lesson students will:
• Discover the basic terminology of arguments.
• Learn strategies for reliably distinguishing between premises and conclusions.
• Explore the differences between arguments and explanations.

KEY TERMS:
• Argument: A conclusion together with the premises that support it.
• Premise: A reason offered as support for another claim.
• Conclusion: The claim being supported by a premise or premises.
• Explanation: A statement or set of statements designed to show why something is true rather than that it is true.

BACKGROUND:
Logic has been a formal academic discipline for almost 2,500 years now. The Greek philosopher Aristotle first systematized formal logic in the 4th century B.C.E., and university logic courses teach Aristotelian logic to this day. For much of western history, logic was one of the three legs of the trivium (or the classical curriculum, which consisted of grammar, logic and rhetoric). With the growth of more specialized disciplines and wider curricula in the 20th century, formal logic got lost in the shuffle. In its place, philosophers began formulating courses in what we now call critical thinking, or informal logic. Formal rules and the reduction of sentences to things like

∀x∃y[Ax ⊃ [(Qx ∨ Rx) · Sy]]

are reserved for university logic courses. Critical thinking deals with ordinary language arguments, offering us tools for assessing those arguments without the need to learn complicated sets of rules for turning sentences into formal symbols.

INSTRUCTIONS:
Make enough copies of student handouts #1 and #2 so that each student can have one. Have enough blank 3x5 index cards on hand to pass out to everyone at the start of Exercise #3.

MATERIALS:
1. Monty Python, “The Argument Clinic”
   http://youtube.com/watch?v=teMlv3ripSM
2. Student handout #1, Finding Premises and Conclusions
3. Student handout #2, Argument Examples
4. Teacher handout #1, Argument Examples

EXERCISES:
Exercise #1 – Identifying Arguments
To the teacher: Students cannot really begin to analyze arguments until they become good at recognizing them. Many students are not very analytical to begin with, so they will require some help in identifying (a) that something is an argument and (b) what the various parts of the argument actually are.

Most of what appears below also appears in condensed form on student handout #1 (except for the section on implied premises and conclusions), but you should go over it with your students. They can follow along on paper.

Pass out student handouts #1 and #2, Finding Premises and Conclusions, and Argument Examples. We then begin with some basic technical vocabulary.

Premise: a reason offered as support for another claim
Conclusion: the claim being supported by a premise or premises
Argument: a conclusion together with the premises that support it

So, to take the oldest example in logic, one that Aristotle used in teaching at his Academy:

1. All men are mortal.
2. Socrates was a man.
3. Therefore Socrates is mortal.

The three lines taken together constitute an argument. Line 3 is the conclusion. Lines 1 and 2 are premises. Now, there are a few important things to remember about arguments. First, arguments can be either really short (like the one about Socrates) or they can be really long (most op-eds are extended arguments; lots of books are really
long extended arguments). But really long arguments will usually be broken down into series of shorter ones.

Second, it’s important to remind students that “argument,” as it is used in critical thinking, is not the same as what they have with, say, their parents when they stay out too late. A humorous (and pretty effective) way to make that point is to show the old Monty Python skit, “The Argument Clinic.” That skit also makes the point that having an argument doesn’t mean that your argument is any good. An argument might be such that its premises are false or irrelevant to the conclusion, or that they fail entirely to support the conclusion.

But before we can analyze arguments, we have to identify them. That, in turn, means identifying the premises and the conclusions. There are several strategies for doing so. The easiest is to examine the text for clues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premise Indicators</th>
<th>Conclusion Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Since</td>
<td>Therefore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Because</td>
<td>Hence</td>
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<tr>
<td>For</td>
<td>So</td>
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<tr>
<td>As</td>
<td>Accordingly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follows from</td>
<td>In consequence</td>
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<tr>
<td>As shown by</td>
<td>Consequently</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inasmuch as</td>
<td>Proves that</td>
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<td></td>
<td>As a result</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Thus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For this reason</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For these reasons</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It follows that</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I conclude that</td>
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<td>Which shows that</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Which means that</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Which entails that</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Which implies that</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We may infer</td>
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</table>

Unfortunately, not all arguments will contain these helpful indicators, which means that we need some backup strategies. Another useful tool is paraphrasing, or taking a complicated argument and rewriting it to help us see what the claims really are. And finally, a really useful method is what one could call the 3-year-old approach. Read a sentence and ask, as 3-year-olds are inclined to do, “Why should I believe that?” Look at the rest of the passage and see if you can find anything that looks like an answer to the why question. If you find an answer, then the answer is a premise and the original claim (the sentence about which you asked why) is a conclusion. Repeat the process for each claim.

There is, unfortunately, one small complication. Not all arguments have all of the claims stated explicitly. Sometimes there are implied premises or conclusions. Consider the following argument:

You spilled it. Whoever makes the mess cleans up the mess.

What is clearly implied here is the conclusion: You clean up the mess. Now consider the following argument:

You spilled it. Whoever makes the mess cleans up the mess.
You should not eat that greasy hamburger. It is loaded with fat.

Again, there is something implied, but this time, what’s implied is a premise: You should not eat anything that is loaded with fat.

Finally, it is important to remember that sometimes arguments can have more than one conclusion. Look at the following argument:

Since yesterday’s editorial cartoon succeeded in making the mayor look silly, the cartoonist must have finally regained his touch. And the mayor probably won’t be reelected.

This argument can be thought of as having two different arguments in it. We can analyze it in the following way:

Premise: Yesterday’s editorial cartoon succeeded in making the mayor look silly.
Conclusion: The cartoonist has finally regained his touch.

And

Premise: Yesterday’s editorial cartoon succeeded in making the mayor look silly.
Conclusion: The mayor probably won’t be reelected.

Exercise: Look at the arguments on student handout #2, Argument Examples. Have the students identify the premises and the conclusions for each argument. Students can work individually or in small groups of 3 to 5 students. Ask the students to pick out which premises support which conclusions. After students have completed the task, have them report on their answers. Tell students to:

1. Remember to check for premise indicators (since, because, for, given that) and for conclusion indicators (therefore, consequently, so, thus).
2. Keep in mind the 3-year-old method. Read each statement and then ask “why?” Statements that answer why questions are premises. Statements that are supported by other statements are conclusions.
3. Finally, remember that sometimes premises and conclusions can be implied. In other words, sometimes the speaker/writer will assume that the reader can fill in the missing piece(s) of the argument.

Exercise #2 – Arguments and Explanations

To the teacher: Some statements look a bit like arguments but aren’t. In particular, the difference between an argument and an explanation can be tricky. Both answer the question “why?” but do so in different ways. The premise of an argument answers the question, “Why should I accept this conclusion?” An explanation, on the other hand, takes the conclusion as a given – as a fact about the world – and then offers a story about why that particular thing is the case. This exercise will help students learn to distinguish the two.

There are some who will tell you that everything really is an argument for something. In fact, one popular composition textbook is titled “Everything’s an Argument.” There’s just
one problem with that claim: It’s false. The idea behind the “everything’s an argument” movement is that we always are trying to persuade someone of something. So when I explain something to you, I’m really trying to convince you that what I’m saying is true. When I say that a picture is beautiful, I’m trying to convince you of its beauty, for instance. There may be something to this as a method for teaching writing, namely, when we write, we should be aware that we’re always trying to get the reader to do something, even if it’s just to share our point of view for the moment. But from the point of view of the logician, not everything is an argument. Remember our definition of an argument:

**Argument**: a conclusion together with the premises that support it

Not all passages are of that sort. Sometimes we try to convince a person *that* something is true. Other times we want to explain *why* something is true. So we might contrast an argument with an explanation:

**Explanation**: a statement or set of statements designed to show *why* something is the case rather than *that* it is the case

Consider the following exchange:

Ms. Jones: You didn’t turn in your homework, Katie.
Katie: My cat ate my homework.

Here Katie is offering an explanation for why it is that she failed to turn in her homework. Note that she is not trying to convince Ms. Jones *that* she failed to turn in her homework: Both Katie and Ms. Jones agree that Katie failed to turn it in. Instead, Katie is trying to tell Ms. Jones why she failed to turn it in. Katie is offering an explanation, not an argument. But now consider a similar exchange:

Jason: Why did I fail this course, Mr. Smith?
Mr. Smith: You didn’t turn in your homework, Jason.
Jason: My cat ate my homework.

Jason’s sentence is identical to Katie’s, but Jason’s sentence is best understood as offering an argument. Jason is claiming, implicitly at least, that he shouldn’t fail the class because his cat ate his homework. Although Katie’s and Jason’s sentences are the same, they are doing two entirely different things. In other words, it is Jason’s intentions that make his sentence an explanation. To determine what a passage is doing, we will often have to go beyond the words themselves and ask ourselves instead what it is that the author is trying to accomplish.

**Exercise**: Arrange the chairs in the class into a circle. Give each student a 3x5 index card. On one side of the card, students should write either an argument or an explanation. On the other side of the card, they should write “argument” or “explanation” (whichever is appropriate to their particular example). When everyone has finished
writing, have students pass their cards to the person to their right. Students should read the card and decide whether they are reading an argument or an explanation. Have the students continue to pass their cards to the right until they have read all the cards. (Alternatively, this activity can be done in small groups of 5 students each, with the activity ending after all the members of the group have shared their cards.)

After students have read all the cards, collect them and discuss the examples with the class. Students may find it frustrating that critical thinking doesn’t always provide cut answers. But remind them that life is often complicated, and our language reflects that messiness. It may be unclear whether an example is an argument or an explanation. In such cases, one can look at the various possibilities. One can, for instance, say things like: “If this is an argument, then it’s a good (or bad) one because _____,” or, ”If this is an explanation, then it is a bad (or good) one because ____.”

CORRELATION TO NATIONAL STANDARDS

National Social Studies Standards
X. Civic Ideals and Practices
Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Essential Skills for Social Studies
Acquiring Information
A. Reading Skills
1. Comprehension
2. Vocabulary
B. Study Skills
1. Find Information
2. Arrange Information in Usable Forms
C. Reference & Information-Search Skills
2. Special References
D. Technical Skills Unique to Electronic Devices
1. Computer
Organizing and Using Information
A. Thinking Skills
1. Classify Information
2. Interpret Information
3. Analyze Information
4. Summarize Information
5. Synthesize Information
6. Evaluate Information
B. Decision-Making Skills
C. Metacognitive Skills
Interpersonal Relationships & Social Participation
A. Personal Skills
C. Social and Political Participation Skills
Democratic Beliefs and Values
B. Freedoms of the Individual
C. Responsibilities of the Individual

National Mathematics Standards
Process Standards
Reasoning and Proof Standard

National Educational Technology Standards
2. Make informed choices among technology systems, resources, and services.
7. Routinely and efficiently use online information resources to meet needs for collaboration, research, publication, communication, and productivity.
8. Select and apply technology tools for research, information analysis, problem solving, and decision making in content learning.

Information Literacy Standards
Information Literacy
Standard 1 The student who is information literate assesses information efficiently and effectively.
  • Indicators 1 - 5
Standard 2 The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.
  • Indicators 1 - 3
Standard 3 The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.
  • Indicators 2 - 4

Social Responsibility
Standard 7 The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and recognizes the importance of information to a democratic society.
  • Indicator 1
Standard 8 The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology.
  • Indicator 3
Standard 9 The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and participates effectively in groups to pursue and generate information.
  • Indicators 1 - 3

English Language Arts Standards
Standard 1 Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary work.
Standard 3 Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

Standard 5 Students employ a wide range of strategies as the write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 6 Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

Standard 7 Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

Standard 8 Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Standard 12 Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joe Miller received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Virginia. He is a staff writer at FactCheck.org, a project of the University of Pennsylvania’s Annenberg Public Policy Center. Prior to joining FactCheck, he served as an assistant professor of philosophy at West Point and at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, where he taught logic, critical thinking, ethics and political theory. The winner of an Outstanding Teacher award at UNC-Pembroke and an Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant award at the University of Virginia, Joe has over 10 years of experience developing curriculum. He is a member of American Philosophical Association and the Association for Political Theory.
Argument Writing Bibliography

Handouts, Templates & Examples from CSD August Training
http://public.me.com/thejethro

Argument Prezi Presentation
http://prezi.com/nmuphdu4huy/-argument-writing/

Scope & Sequence—Common Core Curriculum Mapping
http://www.commoncore.org/

Writing Guide: The Toulmin Method
http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/reading/toulmin/

Utah State Office of Education Common Core Resources

Argument Writing Montage
http://www.dragontape.com/v/3391042-argumentative_collection
Feedback for Argumentative Writing Session

Rate your confidence regarding your knowledge and skills in the following areas.

A – Uncertain; B – Not Confident; C – Somewhat Confident; D – very confident

After this class, I am able to:

1. Understand and articulate why argumentative writing is an important skill for secondary students to develop.
   A   B   C   D

2. Describe the differences between argumentation and persuasion to a colleague.
   A   B   C   D

3. Describe teaching methods likely to improve my students’ argumentative writing.
   A   B   C   D

4. Identify the strengths and weakness of my students’ argumentative essays compared to the exemplars found in Appendix C of the Common Core.
   A   B   C   D

5. Develop lesson plans likely to increase my students’ ability to write argumentative essays.
   A   B   C   D

True or False:

6. This session increased my overall knowledge about what argumentative writing is.
   T/F

7. This session increased my ability to teach argumentative writing to my students.
   T/F

Open Ended:

8. What did you find most helpful about today’s professional development?

9. Give a suggestion for improving this training.