

Argumentative Writing

Learning Targets

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Writing an Argumentative Essay

Writers and speakers use argumentative techniques to influence the attitudes and actions of an intended audience regarding a wide variety of issues. Effective argumentation involves conveying claims and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

You will work with your teacher and with your classmates to construct two arguments that respond to a specific perspective. You will then use these as models for your own writing.

ACTIVITY 1

Discovering the Elements of an Argumentative Response Essay

Before Reading

1. Honing skills in civil debate and diplomatic argumentation is important in many careers and fields. When trying to convince others of your point of view, it is especially important to understand the logic of the opposition. Think of the last time you engaged in a debate or disagreement with a teacher or classmate about a topic worthy of debate. Were you able to understand the other point of view well enough to respond with a **rebuttal** based on logic and reason? How did you address the opposing point of view effectively?

LEARNING STRATEGIES

RAFT, Discussion Groups, Close Reading, Brainstorming, Think-Pair-Share, Drafting, Peer Editing, Sharing and Responding

ACTIVITY 1

Discovering the Elements of an Argumentative Response Essay

PLAN

This sequence of activities is designed to provide direct writing instruction in argumentative writing, specifically writing to respond. Students will create three separate texts throughout this process: one that is co-constructed as a class with direct guidance from the teacher, one that is peer-constructed, and one that is written individually.

Materials: Pens and highlighters for marking the text

Pacing: 1 class period

TEACH

1 Preview the Learning Targets and focus of this writing workshop.

2 **Before Reading** is intended to **activate prior knowledge** about engaging in debate and response. This workshop requires students to respond to or rebut a particular point of view.

TEACHER TO TEACHER

This sample text was chosen to model the elements of argumentative writing to respond. You may opt to select a different text for classroom use.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Rebuttal: n. Evidence that attacks the criticisms against a thesis or claim, a refutation

After Reading

3. When responding to and analyzing text, it is important to understand the relationship among the author's role, the audience, the format, and the topic. Using the **RAFT** strategy can help analyze the text for these elements. If only one element is changed or adjusted, the text can take on an entirely different complexity. Begin by identifying the following elements from the sample text:

a. Author's Role

Sample response: The writer is the Governor of Illinois whose job it is to veto a legislative bill that he considers unenforceable, unfair, and downright silly. His task is to show why he cannot support the bill without offending its proponents.

b. Audience

Sample response: The audience is the Illinois Senate, including both proponents and opponents of this legislation which saw fit to pass the bill, probably knowing that the Governor would veto the bill. A veto is a public document so the audience also includes the wider public.

c. Format

Sample response: The format is a formal letter of veto.

d. Topic

Sample response: The topic is a veto of legislation enacted to restrict the movements of cats in favor of protecting the lives of birds.

Check Your Understanding

Examine the specific phrases and clauses you highlighted or underlined. How would you categorize the tone of this letter? Why does Stevenson choose to approach this topic with this tone? What is the intended effect of this approach?

Sample response: The tone of this veto is wryly humorous. Stevenson uses wit and humor to amuse the opponents and convince the proponents of this legislation that it would be impossible to enforce and unfair to cats and cat owners. Governor Stevenson uses hyperbole for comic effect and to underscore his reasoning, saying, "I doubt if we want to make their every brief foray an opportunity for a small game hunt by zealous citizens—with traps or otherwise." He crowns his argument with this *reductio ad absurdum*: "The problem of cat versus bird is as old as time. If we attempt to resolve it by legislation who knows but what we may be called upon to take sides as well in the age-old problems of dog versus cat, bird versus bird, or even bird versus worm." He also offers cogent reasoning to assure he is being reasonable and not insensitive to the value of bird life: "I cannot believe there is a widespread public demand for this law or that it could, as a practical matter, be enforced." "That cats destroy some birds, I well know, but I believe this legislation would further but little the worthy cause to which its proponents give such unselfish effort."

Writing Workshop 2 • Argumentative Writing 17

4 After Reading: RAFT is a strategy that helps initiate reader response, facilitate analysis of a text, and promote understanding of the relationship between the author, the audience, the format, and the topic. Begin by creating a class definition of each component of **RAFT** (*Role, Audience, Format, and Topic*). Pair students (or place them in small groups) to discuss and respond to the **graphic organizer**. Ask students to share their responses with the class.

5 Check Your Understanding:

After students answer the question independently or in small groups, lead them in a discussion of the phrases and clauses they highlighted and their understanding of the intended effect of each element. Clarify the terms and concepts if necessary.

ASSESS

Use the **Check Your Understanding** to evaluate students' grasp of diction and tone. Based on your observations of students' understanding of the argumentative elements of a structured response, assess which students may need additional support and resources.

ADAPT

A number of examples of writing to respond are included in well-known literature and rhetoric courses. If you would like to expose students to a longer and more complex example of this type of writing, you may wish to refer to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" as an extension example for potential use in class.

client. According to Mian, Lloyd had to undergo reconstructive surgery and currently suffers from headaches.

- 7 The International Little League tells NBC10 that all local chapters carry accident insurance that covers players, coaches and concessions but not spectators.
- 8 Bob also tells Asbury Park the entire ordeal has made the family step back from the league. He's taken a break from coaching while his wife Sue has stepped down as manager of the league's snack stand. Matthew continues to play however.
- 9 "He accidentally threw a ball," said Bob. "He didn't do anything wrong and I don't want him to carry that around thinking he did something wrong. It's just not right."
- 10 No court date has been set for the lawsuit.

Prewriting

1. Using the left column of the following graphic organizer, list the **explicit** or **implied** points that Lloyd uses to support her position that the Migliaccio family is liable in this case. Then, in the right column, brainstorm possible responses and evidence that could be used to argue against her position. Prepare to share your ideas.

Lloyd's claims (explicit or implicit)	Potential rebuttals and evidence that could be employed to respond to this claim
<p>At little league games, spectators should not be held responsible for paying attention to their environment or watching out for stray/fly balls. It is not reasonable to expect spectators to be vigilant or to protect themselves.</p>	<p>Sample response: All spectators take risks when they attend a sporting event. It is the same as walking in a park when a sporting event takes place. An element of danger is present in all activities.</p>
<p>Sample response: Those who hit baseballs should be liable for any injuries or damage incurred as a result of their hits or misses or mishits.</p>	<p>Sample response: Accidents happen; no athlete intends to hit a spectator. Responsibility implies intent to harm. In this case there was no intent to harm.</p>
<p>Sample response: The Migliaccio family has insurance and the purpose of insurance is to cover any unexpected or unplanned damages that occur, therefore Lloyd can collect damages.</p>	<p>Sample response: Just because a person has insurance does not mean he can be sued for damages for an accident in a public place in a court of law.</p>
<p>Sample Response: Damage or injury incurred can develop over time, rather than at the moment of the incident.</p>	

3 Prewriting: Lead students in an activity that completes the graphic organizer, modeling the process for them using a whiteboard or overhead projector. Synthesize the class ideas to represent the most compelling responses and the most effective evidence for each explicit or implicit claim.

4 If necessary, lead students in conducting light research to augment their bank of evidence, or provide students with preselected sources that might illustrate rebuttal points to the lawsuit. Be sure students understand the importance of **reliability** and **validity** of evidence.

5 Evaluate which responses are the most logical and effective based on the information collected in the graphic organizer. As a group, select an approach to argue and **draft** a thesis, or main idea and reasoning, for the class-constructed response.

6 Lead the group in creating a topic outline, paying special attention to the organization of ideas. As you do this, ask students to articulate why they choose the order they do.

7 **Drafting:** Begin drafting the response to the Lloyd's case against the Migliaccios. To emphasize the importance of outlining, remind students that they should be making conscious references to the outline in both content and organization.

8 Point out the elements of an introduction or opening paragraph and where these elements appear in the sample text. **Think aloud** from the perspective of a writer as you draft this first paragraph.

Writing Workshop 2 (continued)

2. After all class members have shared their ideas, you will have a solid representation of a range of responses and evidence for rebuttal of counterclaims. As a class, synthesize this information, and select the most relevant and persuasive responses and evidence for inclusion in the rebuttal to the case against the Migliaccio family.
3. To augment your evidence, spend time researching online sources as well as conducting informal interviews. Search for both primary and secondary sources. Your goal here is to search out information that represents the entire range of relevant perspectives on this lawsuit—not just your own.
4. Once you have found additional sources, consider their **validity** and **reliability**. If you deem your new information valid and reliable, add the information to your brainstorm list so you can accurately represent these viewpoints in your class-constructed text.

To consider your sources' validity and reliability, think about the following questions:
 - **Validity:** Does the information appear to be legitimate? Is it timely and relevant to the rebuttal? In what ways could this evidence be used to support the ideas generated for response?
 - **Reliability:** Are the author's name and qualifications clearly identified? Is the information from a respected source of publication? If it is an online resource, is the site listed as .gov, .edu, or .org rather than .com?
5. Once you have compiled a list of relevant and valid evidence, choose two to three of the most compelling and precise pieces of evidence and place them on the board.
6. After everyone has submitted their best evidence, you will have a solid representation of a range of views and information on the topic. As a class, use the synthesized information to construct an outline that will frame the response.

Drafting

Your class should now have a clear and thoughtful line of reasoning in response to Lloyd's lawsuit, a list of specific and relevant evidence, and a proposed outline. The next step is to plan an approach that will suit the public audience (not just Lloyd) and the purpose.

7. Remember that part of your task is to present a *persona* that maintains formal style while exposing the absurdity of this case. This is crafted not only into what you write, but how you write it. The tone you strike will have a great deal of impact on the effectiveness and ethos of your response. Before you begin drafting, come to an agreement as a group about how to promote this persona in your response. This selection will influence your choices regarding diction, syntax, and rhetorical appeals/devices.
8. As a class, work together to draft the introduction, or opening paragraph of the response. Remember that while this will take the form of a letter of response, the forum is public and the appeals should be directed at a broader audience than just Lloyd as an individual.

9. Your teacher will assign your group a portion of the outline to draft. Work together as a group to draft your portion of the response and prepare to share your draft with the class for revision before including it in the class-constructed response.

10. After your class has assembled these portions to create a complete body, your teacher will lead your class as you work together to draft a conclusion, or closing.

Check Your Understanding

After you have completed this process, read over the drafted response that your class has created. Use these questions as a checklist.

- Does the introduction clearly establish your group’s position and the topic of contention?
- Are the strongest points of argument in the lawsuit adequately addressed?
- Does the writing maintain decorum while promoting the specified persona desired?
- Does the writing expose the absurdity of holding small children liable for stray pitches?
- Is the tone effective for the purpose and audience?
- Do transitions help the reader clearly make connections among the ideas of the response?
- Is the response organized in the most effective way to convince the audience?

Revising for Language and Writer’s Craft

Using Hyperbole

Sometimes, in order to expose the absurdity of a situation, it is necessary to employ figurative language or *hyperbole* (deliberate exaggeration). In these cases, the figurative expression or exaggeration is not meant to be taken literally. Rather, the intention is to expose the irrational reasoning of the opposing viewpoint by gently (or sometimes not so gently) mocking ideas the other side proposes as logical or reasonable

11. Reread the examples of figurative language and hyperbole employed in the sample text. Then, in the space provided, explain what impression Stevenson hopes to make by employing a hyperbolic diction and imagery in each instance.

Language/hyperbole from the passage	Explanation of the intended effect
It would permit any person to capture, or call upon the police to pick up and imprison , cats at large.	Sample response: Using the language of human capture and incarceration makes the idea of restraining cats ridiculous.
I doubt if we want to make their every brief foray an opportunity for a small game hunt by zealous citizens—with traps or otherwise.	Sample response: “small game hunt” uses the language of hunting and thus contextualizes the restraint of cats as absurd.
To escort a cat abroad on a leash is against the nature of the cat, . . .	Sample response: Inflated diction “escort” coupled with “on a leash” creates a ridiculous image.

(continued)

9 Instruct groups to craft a paragraph that will describe a point of rebuttal to the lawsuit, referencing the class-constructed outline. Assign one talking point to each group.

10 When all groups are finished, ask the presenter from each group to share their work. Read through each group’s contribution and ask for peer feedback from other groups. Allow students to make revisions to their paragraphs.

11 Display the selected paragraphs on an overhead or whiteboard and allow students time to copy them down individually. Make revisions as necessary, keeping persona and tone at the forefront of your revisions.

12 Lead the class in construction of the closing paragraph/conclusion. Model this process using an overhead projector or whiteboard.

13 In discussion groups, ask students to read over the drafted response and use the **Check Your Understanding** questions as a checklist. Emphasize that *logos* should dominate their responses. As groups finish, students should present their revisions to the class in the order those paragraphs will be included in the response.

14 **Revising for Language and Writers Craft** focuses on the rhetoric of hyperbole. This language activity explicitly addresses using figurative diction and hyperbole. Guide students through the activity, checking for understanding by having selected students share their responses.

15 As a class, revise the draft to include more hyperbole where appropriate to create a tactful yet incredulous persona and a tone of wit and irony.

16 Editing: When producing the final draft of the essay, be sure to model editing skills to eliminate mistakes in spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.

ASSESS

Based on your observations in the classroom, assess which students may need additional support and resources as the group moves from creating an argumentative response as a class to creating one in pairs.

ADAPT

You may wish to supply struggling students with a completed graphic organizer of the implicit claims or premises of the lawsuit. Students who struggle to make inferences or draw unspoken conclusions from what they read will have difficulty determining the implied elements of the lawsuit.

ACTIVITY 3

Writing an Argumentative Response Essay with Peers

PLAN

Materials: Materials generated in Activity 1 and Activity 2 to serve as models for partner work

Pacing: 2 class periods

Writing Workshop 2 (continued)

Language/hyperbole from the passage	Explanation of the intended effect
... and to permit it to venture forth for exercise unattended into a night of new dangers is against the nature of the owner.	Sample response: Parallel clauses give this sentence added power and describing a cat's activities as "exercise" while confronting "new dangers" makes the situation ridiculous
Moreover, cats perform useful service... in combating rodents—work they necessarily perform alone and without regard for property lines .	Sample response: Applying legal language of "property lines" makes light of thinking of restraining cats from their valuable service.
... we may be called upon to take sides as well in the age-old problems of dog versus cat, bird versus bird, or even bird versus worm.	Sample response: "Argumentum ad absurdum" or "reduction ad absurdum"
In my opinion, the State of Illinois and its local governing bodies already have enough to do without trying to control feline delinquency.	Sample response: Inflated diction of "feline delinquency" puts the idea of restraining the activities of cats in the context of the functions of governing bodies to make it silly.
For these reasons, and not because I love birds the less or cats the more , I veto and withhold my approval from Senate Bill No. 93.	Sample response: Excellent use of balanced sentence for effect.

- 12.** Look back at the response you drafted as a class. Have you already employed examples of language that intends to exaggerate the claims or ideas behind the lawsuit? In what places could ideas be revised, or words or phrases be added or replaced to exploit this subtle but powerful technique? Consider specific diction as well as **hyperbole** of ideas. Prepare to share your thoughts with the class to be considered for inclusion in the class constructed response.

Editing

After presenting your revisions to the class and hearing the revisions of others, it's time to polish the final draft of the argumentative essay by editing for mistakes. Consider all of the elements listed in the Language category of the Scoring Guide.

ACTIVITY 3

Writing an Argumentative Response Essay with Peers

WRITING PROMPT: With a partner (or partners), locate a published, publicly filed lawsuit or proposed bill that inspires you to respond with rebuttal. Then, work together to respond to the stated or implied ideas expressed in the piece in a well-crafted letter or essay. Refer to the Scoring Guide for this writing task—it will help you understand where to focus your attention and efforts. Your peer-constructed response should include the elements listed in Activity 2 under the writing prompt.