

# ≡ ACTIVITY 7: WRITING TO ANALYZE ≡ ARGUMENTS

Students write short essays analyzing an argument.

## INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Students use their notes, annotations, and tools to write short essays analyzing one of the arguments they have read thus far in the unit. In their essays, students:

- state the author’s position
- identify the elements of the argument (premises, reasoning, evidence, perspective)
- make an evidence-based claim about how the author’s perspective shapes the position and/or argumentation
- use evidence from the text to support their analysis.

# ≡ ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Part 2 presents many opportunities for formative assessment. The two most important proficiencies to assess here are a student’s:

1. understanding of and facility with the concepts for analyzing arguments; and
2. ability to analyze and write about other authors’ arguments

Teachers can use the tools, claims, and conversations from Activities 2 and 4 to assess emerging proficiency with the analytic concepts without the interference of additional reading comprehension loads. These activities have been designed for development and assessment of these core literacy proficiencies in all students (including ELL and students reading below grade level).

The claims and conversation from Activities 3, 5, and 6 add the opportunity to assess the proficiency in analyzing and writing about other arguments.

The short essay from Activity 7 provides a mid-unit formative assessment on both proficiencies and the ability to link and develop analysis across several paragraphs.

As a formative assessment of the text-centered discussions that have led to their claims, students might complete two *TDC Checklists*, one that rates their team’s overall performance and one that represents a self-assessment of their own participation.

## PART 3

# EVALUATING ARGUMENTS AND DEVELOPING A POSITION

“Locking up criminals for longer periods of time has proven one of America’s most effective anticrime strategies ”

### OBJECTIVE:

Students evaluate arguments, determine which arguments they find most compelling, and synthesize what they have learned so far to establish their own position.



## ACTIVITIES

### 1- EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

Students review and evaluate arguments using objective criteria and their own developing perspective of the issue.

### 2- DEVELOPING A POSITION

Students synthesize what they have learned about the issue and related arguments to clarify their own developing perspective and to establish a position for their own argument.

### 3- DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING

*If needed*, students conduct further research to help develop and support their position.

### 4- USING OTHERS’ ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT A POSITION

Students identify an argument that supports their position and write an evidence-based claim about why the argument is compelling or makes sense to them.

### 5- RESPONDING TO OPPOSING ARGUMENTS

Students identify an argument that opposes their position and write an evidence-based claim that either acknowledges the argument’s position, points out its limitations, counters its premises, or refutes it as invalid, illogical, or unsupported.

### MATERIALS:

Text Sets 3-5  
Forming EBC Tool  
Delineating Arguments Tool  
EBA Criteria Checklist  
TCD Checklist  
EBA Terms



## ALIGNMENT TO CCSS

### TARGETED STANDARDS:

**RI.9-10.6:** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose. **RI.9-10.8:** Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning. **RI.9-10.9:** Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance, including how they address related themes and concepts.

**W.9-10.1:** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. **W.9-10.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

### SUPPORTING STANDARDS:

**RI.11-12.1:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. **RI.11-12.2:** Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text. **RI.11-12.3:** Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text. **RI.11-12.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text. **SL.11-12.1:** 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. **W.11-12.9:** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.



## ACTIVITY 1: EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

Students review and evaluate arguments using objective criteria and their own developing perspective of the issue.

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Having analyzed and compared the perspectives, positions, premises, and evidence for various arguments related to the unit's issue, students are ready to evaluate the logic and quality of various positions and arguments in order to determine which ones make sense to them.

#### MODEL EVALUATION

Introduce the *Evidence-Based Arguments Checklist* as a set of criteria for evaluating arguments. Focus on Sections I and II of the checklist for this activity ("Content and Analysis" and "Evidence and Reasoning"). Model how to use the checklist to review and evaluate an argument, using an example from Part 2 of the unit. Think aloud as you explain each of the seven criteria and how it applies to the argument. Model the use of textual evidence in your evaluation.

#### EVALUATE ARGUMENTS IN READING TEAMS

In reading teams, have students use Sections I and II of the checklist to evaluate another argument they have read thus far in the unit. Have each group share and discuss their evaluation with the class. Ask students to support their evaluations with textual evidence. The teacher may need to model how to lead a text-based discussion where students base their opinions off of the readings to either support or challenge a position.

#### DETERMINE COMPELLING ARGUMENTS

Explain to students that evaluating an argument involves both an objective, criteria-based assessment of

its strengths and weaknesses, and the consideration of one's own developing position about the issue. Discuss ways in which readers can determine if an argument is compelling.

In reading teams, students review and evaluate another argument previously read in the unit. Students use the criteria from the *Evidence-Based Arguments Checklist* to objectively rate (as a team) the argument. Students then discuss and compare their opinions about whether the argument is compelling and makes sense to them.

#### INDIVIDUALLY EVALUATE/SELECT COMPELLING ARGUMENTS

Individually, students review the arguments they have read in the unit and determine which they find most compelling. For these arguments, they also use the *Evidence-Based Arguments Checklist* to be certain that the arguments they favor are ones that meet the criteria for "Content and Analysis" and "Evidence and Reasoning."

A graphical representation strategy might be useful for reviewing, evaluating, and determining compelling arguments. Such strategies could be done at the student level, where graphs might arrange and represent the various arguments based on students' perspectives and positions. The class could do this as a whole, posting arguments on the board or around the room, to represent the range of positions.



## ACTIVITY 2: DEVELOPING A PERSPECTIVE AND POSITION

Students synthesize what they have learned about the issue and related arguments to clarify their own developing perspective and to establish a position for their own argument.

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

- Return to the unit's problem-based question and the set of debatable questions that students have previously brainstormed and discussed (This could be part of the class KWL). Have students suggest and discuss various ways of responding to those questions, given what they now know about the unit's issue. Ask students to indicate to which perspective they are currently leaning, and how their thinking is leading them to a position.
- Have students review the evidence-based claims they wrote at the end of Part 1. Have them revise their initial claims based on their current

## ACTIVITY 2: DEVELOPING A PERSPECTIVE AND POSITION (CONT'D)

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES (CONT'D)

- understanding of the issue. They should include new evidence from arguments they encountered in Part 2.
- In reading teams, students review and discuss their EBCs.
  - Once students have discussed their EBCs about the nature of the problem with their reading teams, have each student independently write a short paragraph stating a position they want to take on the issue and for which they want to development a supporting argument.
  - Students return to their reading teams to review each other's positions using the Clarity and Relevance criteria from section 1 (Content and Analysis) from the *Evidence-Based Arguments Criteria Checklist*.

## ACTIVITY 3: DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING

If needed, students conduct further research to help develop and support their position.

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

- At this point, students will hopefully have sufficient background information/knowledge and evidence to develop an argument related to their position. If not – and especially if they have ventured into an area related to but also somewhat divergent from the focus of texts in the unit – they may need to do additional reading or research. Activities, materials, and resources from the *Researching to Deepen Understanding* unit may be helpful here. One approach articulated in that unit that is relevant here is the idea of “framing” inquiry with a set of questions that need to be investigated. Before conducting additional research, students could identify inquiry paths they feel they still need to explore to develop their argument. This will help them effectively “frame” their research for better efficiency and success.
- Unread texts from the text sets and/or additional suggested texts can be used in this research.

## ACTIVITY 4: USING OTHERS' ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT A POSITION

Students identify an argument that supports their position and write an evidence-based claim about why the argument is compelling and makes sense to them.

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

- In developing and supporting their chosen positions, students will need to reference others' arguments related to the unit's issue, and to use those arguments as evidence to support their own. Here students will write a claim that establishes a supporting argument's position and also explains its relevance to their own position.
- Students individually select one or more arguments to use as “building blocks” for their own argument. This is likely to be an argument(s) that they have previously evaluated and found to be sound as well as compelling for them.
  - Students write a multi-part evidence-based claim – or adapt a previously written claim about the argument – that establishes what the argument's position is and why that argument makes sense and is relevant to their own position, citing specific evidence from the argument that they will use to support their own argument. Students should be encouraged to incorporate the perspective and position they drafted in Activity 2.

## ACTIVITY 5: RESPONDING TO OPPOSING ARGUMENTS

Students identify an argument that opposes their position and write an evidence-based claim that either acknowledges the argument’s position, points out its limitations, counters its premises, or refutes it as invalid, illogical, or unsupported.

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

In developing their own positions and arguments, students must also acknowledge opposing viewpoints and arguments. This could be addressed by writing a “counterargument” – expressing why they think the opposed perspective and position is “wrong.” However, students should also learn that there are many ways to respond to a divergent or opposing argument. Discuss with students how including and addressing opposing arguments within their writing bolsters their credibility as authors as they demonstrate a fuller comprehension of the issue and are able to refute other’s positions objectively.

- Explain and model the various ways that one might respond to an argument that emanates from a different perspective and position:
  1. By acknowledging the argument’s position and the quality of its reasoning, but explaining why one has not found it relevant or compelling.
  2. By noting the limitations of the argument, especially as it applies to one’s own position and response.
  3. By countering one or more of the argument’s premises, offering opposing evidence that calls the claims into question.

4. By pointing out the argument’s poor reasoning or lack of valid evidence, analyzing and evaluating it as invalid, illogical, or specious.
  5. Other approaches, based on the nature of the argument itself.
- If desired, the teacher can introduce argumentative fallacies such as a straw man, ad hominem, and red herrings, noting that these techniques should be avoided in academic argumentation.
  - In reading teams, students discuss an opposing argument and determine ways in which they might respond to it.
  - Students individually select an argument that they want/need to respond to, and determine which of the strategies is best suited to the argument they will counter and their own positions/arguments.
  - Students write a multi-part evidence-based claim – or adapt a previously written claim about the argument – that establishes what the argument’s position is and then counters that argument using one of the modeled strategies, citing specific evidence from the argument to support their evaluation and response to it.

## ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

As formative assessments and building blocks for their final argument, students have now revised their evidence-based claim about the nature of the issue based on their developing perspective. In a paragraph, they have also expressed a position they wish to take on the issue, and they have written two multi-part claims that:

1. Present analyses and evaluations of two arguments related to the unit’s issue.
2. Establish the relevance of one argument’s position and evidence to their own argument.
3. Respond to a divergent or opposing argument in an appropriate and strategic way.
4. Cite evidence from both texts to support their analyses and evaluations.
5. Represent their best thinking and clearest writing.

These pieces should be evaluated for students’ understanding of the issue, the clarity and relevance of the perspective and position, and their analysis of textual evidence.

Student evaluations of the various arguments using the *EBA Checklist* should be evaluated for their conceptual understanding and the validity of analysis.