About This Lesson:
Evaluating Arguments

Common Core State Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RI 1</strong> Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. <strong>RI 8</strong> Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.</td>
<td><strong>RI 1</strong> Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. <strong>RI 8</strong> Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.</td>
<td><strong>RI 1</strong> Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. <strong>RI 8</strong> Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.</td>
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Lesson Objectives
Tell students that, in this lesson, they will learn to
- identify elements of an argument
- analyze reasons, evidence, and counterclaims
- recognize logical fallacies, such as circular reasoning, either/or fallacy, and hasty generalization
- evaluate the validity and effectiveness of an argument

Strategies for Teaching
How you use this interactive lesson will reflect your personal teaching style, your instructional goals, and your available technological tools. **Evaluating Arguments** can work well as both a whole-class lesson or as a targeted small-group skill review.

Here are teaching tips for each screen in the lesson.

SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW

Screen 2: Which Argument Is Stronger?
Start by asking students: How would you feel if you were required to play an after-school sport? Then, have students listen to the two arguments. After listening, have the group evaluate, or judge, the arguments, listing reasons for why each one is weak or strong.
Sample Evaluation:
This chart provides a thorough evaluation of both arguments. Students will learn more about the elements of an argument as they advance through the lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Strengths/Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Argument 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Claim:</strong> The new school rule is good.</td>
<td><strong>Strengths:</strong> A strong claim is presented with three logical reasons and two pieces of evidence. Opposing claims are anticipated and addressed.</td>
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<td><strong>Reasons:</strong> We spend a lot of time sitting down. Exercise is good for our minds. Playing sports builds self-confidence.</td>
<td><strong>Weaknesses:</strong> The first counterclaim may not be effective.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support/Evidence:</strong> Results from a research study and an example are provided.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Opposing Claims:</strong> Some students may claim that there’s no time for sports in their schedules. Some students don’t like to compete.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Counterclaim:</strong> Schedules can be rearranged. The new sports are not competitive.</td>
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| Argument 2 | | |
| Claim: The new school rule is good. | **Strengths:** An opposing claim is addressed. |
| **Reasons:** A lot of schools in our region have this requirement. Daily exercise will make us healthier. Playing sports is good experience. | **Weaknesses:** Overall, the argument is weak. The first reason is not valid; the third reason is too vague. The example provided is weak. The counterclaim is dismissive. |
| **Support/Evidence:** An example is provided. | |
| **Opposing Claim:** Some kids say they don’t like to play sports. | |
| **Counterclaim:** They’re close-minded; they should try the new sports first before making up their minds. | |

Screen 3: The Power of Argument
After students read the definition of argument, reveal the numbered items. Revisit the arguments from the last screen and ask:
- Which argument is more convincing? Why?
- Which argument is more credible, or trustworthy? Why?
Make sure students support their answers with details from both arguments.

LEARN THE SKILL

Screen 4: What Makes a Strong Written Argument?
Before revealing the information, ask students what they think the answer might be. After the text is revealed, discuss these questions:

• What are different forms of written arguments? (editorials, advertisements, some blog entries, courtroom opening and closing statements, and speeches)
• What arguments have you read recently? When you read an argument, how do you decide whether you agree with the writer’s points?

Screen 5: Elements of an Argument
Ask students to come up with other possible examples of each element—claim, reasons, evidence, and counterclaims. (Students can describe possible evidence, rather than citing specific evidence that requires research.) Possible claims to work with include:

• All middle-school sports teams should be coed.
• Teen celebrities should act like role models.
• It’s better to “friend” fewer people on a social-networking site than to accumulate hundreds of friends.

Screens 6 and 21: Identify the Claim
Remind students that a claim is a writer’s basic position on a problem or issue. After a student highlights the claim, ask for volunteers to restate the claim. Students can finish this sentence: “The writer believes . . .”

Screen 7: Analyze Reasons and Evidence
Before clicking the labels, have students identify each reason and the evidence that supports it. Then use the questions on the screen to help students analyze the support. Ask:

• What other reasons could the writer include to strengthen the argument?
• What additional evidence would provide stronger support?
• So far, do you accept or reject the writer’s claim? Why?

Screen 8: Analyze Reasons and Evidence
Discuss the meanings of the words logical and fallacy. (Logical refers to something that makes sense and fallacy means “erroneous reasoning.”) Explain that logical fallacies may sound like they make sense if not analyzed more closely. After students read about each type of logical fallacy, ask volunteers to list or generate other examples.

Screen 9: Analyze Reasons and Evidence
Have students explain the either/or fallacy. (The sentence suggests that there are only two possible choices—having electronic devices or having friends.) Help students see that
other choices are available, such as having devices but using them in respectful ways that do not offend others.

**Screen 10: Weigh Counterclaims**
First, help students identify the opposing claim (*devices enable people to stay in closer touch*) and the counterclaim (*using devices makes people less aware of their immediate surroundings*). If students believe the counterclaim is strong, ask them to explain why the burning of the almonds would contradict Gina’s claim that technology allows her to talk face-to-face with friends who live far away.

Students may note another logical fallacy in the text: “This happens to everyone.” (*overgeneralization*)

**Screen 11: Evaluate the Argument**
As students evaluate the argument, have them explain the reasoning behind their thinking. Here’s an outline of all the elements in the argument, as well as some sample strengths and weaknesses.

**Claim:** Actually, our overuse of electronic devices is increasingly taking our focus away from the here and now with harmful results.

**Reasons**
- Paragraph 2: Drivers put lives in jeopardy when they put cell-phone use before safety.
- Paragraph 3: Our inconsiderate use of electronic devices also damages personal relationships.
- Paragraph 4: Those who use gadgets to listen to music wherever they go don’t hear what’s happening around them, so they miss out on a lot.

**Evidence**
- Statistic in paragraph 2: Instead of totally focusing on driving, 49 percent of all adults admit to talking or texting on their cell phones.
- Statistic in paragraph 2: “Forty-four percent of all adults say they have been in a car when the driver used the cell phone in a way that put themselves or others in danger,” according to a Pew Research Center study.
- Example in paragraph 3: Just think about how you felt the last time a friend ignored you to check e-mail, text, or surf the Web on a handheld device.
- Example in paragraph 4: They aren’t soothed by lapping waves at a beach or alerted to danger on a city street.

**Opposing Claim:** Some people claim that electronic devices enable them to stay in closer touch with family and friends.

**Counterclaim:** Whenever people are virtually with someone else somewhere else, they are less aware of their immediate surroundings, and that can have negative consequences.
Persuasive Language
- Paragraph 1: “harmful results”
- Paragraph 2: “lives in jeopardy”
- Paragraph 3: “damages personal relationships,” “harmful and hurtful message”
- Paragraph 4: “soothed by lapping waves,” “alerted to danger on a city street”
- Paragraph 5: “negative consequences”
- Paragraph 6: “excessive use,” “diminishes our connection,” “disastrous results”

Strengths/Weaknesses
- The argument starts with a strong, clear claim.
- Three logical reasons support the claim.
- Mostly relevant evidence supports the reasons. Not being “soothed by lapping waves at a beach” may not be relevant or compelling to all readers.
- A reasonable opposing claim is presented. A counterclaim sufficiently answers the opposing claim. However, the writer includes a logical fallacy (“This happens with everyone”).
- Overall, the argument is fairly strong.

Screen 12: Persuasive Language
Remind students that strong arguments should appeal to logic, not emotions. However, when used appropriately, persuasive techniques can improve an argument. After students read the definitions, click the airplanes to reveal the answers. Then ask:
- Are these examples persuasive? Why or why not?
- What other examples of each technique can you come up with? (Students can supply examples related to a different topic.)

Screen 13: Tips for Evaluating Arguments
Have students complete the frames using an argument from the lesson or one they’ve studied in school. Provide time for students to refer to the argument and complete the frames. Then have students exchange their frames and discuss the descriptions. They can ask each other questions, such as:
- Do you find the argument persuasive? Why or why not?
- What’s the strongest reason? Explain.

PRACTICE & APPLY

Screen 14: Evaluate Reasons and Evidence
Before starting the activity, point out to students that they don’t need to agree with the claims. They just need to choose the version that best supports the claim. Have students evaluate each reason and piece of evidence provided. Ask:
- How strongly does the reason support the claim? Explain.
- Is the evidence relevant? Explain.
Screen 15: Weigh Counterclaims
Remind students that an effective counterclaim must address the opposing claim directly and logically. After choosing the strongest counterclaim, ask students if they can think of any other strong counterclaims for the argument. (Students should be encouraged to express their individuality through their actions.)

Screens 16: Analyze Reasoning
Review the three logical fallacies below. Then have students evaluate the reasoning and explain their thinking.
- **Circular Reasoning**: a restatement of an opinion or conclusion in different words but passed off as a reason or as evidence
- **Overgeneralization**: a conclusion that does not take into account obvious exceptions
- **Either/Or Fallacy**: a statement that provides only two extreme choices

Screen 17: Identify Persuasive Techniques
Ask students to describe some TV, Web, or print ads they’ve seen recently and explain the persuasive techniques they noticed. Then have students look at the ad for bottled water and circle any words or phrases that seem persuasive to them.

Screens 18 and 22: Analyze Persuasive Techniques
To extend the discussion, ask:
- What is the company’s claim? *(Customers should buy Purity bottled water.)*
- What reasons are given to support the claim? *(It’s the purest water on Earth; it’s manufactured by an eco-friendly company; it’s good for people’s health.)*
- What specific evidence is provided? *(None; in fact, this is a flawed argument that uses persuasive techniques and offers no specific support.)*

Screen 19: Tic-Tac-Toe
Divide the class into two teams: X and O. Ask one team to choose a box and state a claim about the given topic. Decide whether the claim states a clear position. If it does, give the team an X or O. Continue play until one team gets three in a row. If no team gets three in a row, the team with the most squares wins when the board is full.

**Note:** Click the *Settings* button in the lower left corner of the screen if you wish to edit the topics on the board.

Screen 20: Show What You Know
Divide the class into two teams to compete against each other. To help students identify reasons and evidence, ask:
- If this is a reason, what claim could it support?
- If this is evidence, what reason could it support?

**Note:** Click the *Settings* button in the lower left corner of the screen if you wish to edit the questions or add categories.
Note: Printable versions of all public-domain selections in this lesson are available on the following pages of this document.
“After-School Sports: Argument 1”

Our school has new rule starting next year. All students will be required to play an after-school sport. We’ll have all the regular sports teams—soccer, basketball, baseball, and softball—and, we’ll also be able to choose from new non-competitive sports, such as gymnastics, volleyball, jogging, and ultimate Frisbee. I think this is a good rule, and here’s why.

First, we spend a lot of time sitting down. We sit in class all day. Then most of us go home and do homework or play video games. Either way, we’re still sitting. Health issues, such as obesity and diabetes, are skyrocketing for students, so playing a sport everyday for a little while can only be good for us.

Exercise is also good for our minds. Researchers at Tufts University found that teens who exercised three or more times a week were likely to report greater happiness than those who didn’t exercise. I know I feel a lot more stressed out on days that I don’t play sports.

Playing sports also builds self-confidence. Whether you play on a team or just for fun, you can’t help but get better over time, and that feels good.

Now, some students might complain that there’s no time for sports in their schedules. Maybe they already have other afternoon activities, such as music lessons. Although it might be inconvenient to rearrange their schedules, it’s a small price to pay for better health and happiness. Other students say they don’t like to compete. Our school took that concern seriously and included four new sports that don’t use formal teams but are still fun and challenging.

Let’s be honest. Most of us have plenty of time in the afternoon and extra energy to burn. Regular after-school sports can change that. By playing an after-school sport, we’ll be better off—now and in years to come.
“After-School Sports: Argument 2”

Our school has a new requirement starting next September. All students will be required to play an after-school sport for 90 minutes every day. Overall, I think it’s a good idea. After all, a lot of schools in our region have this requirement. We’ll be able to choose from about ten different sports. Some of them, such as volleyball and gymnastics, sound cool.

School officials are really worried about students’ health. This new sports requirement will definitely change all that. The daily exercise will only make us healthier.

Playing sports is good experience. My uncle was a star athlete all through school. He played four different sports. He says sports taught him confidence and self-discipline. Those are good skills to have.

Some kids say they don’t like to play sports, but I think they’re being close-minded. They should try the new sports first before making up their minds.

I’m signing up for the Frisbee team. That should be fun. I think this rule will be good for the students in our school.
“Digital Distractions”

He thinks he can read e-mail while he listens to you. She thinks she can text while she drives. But can they? Actually, our overuse of electronic devices is increasingly taking our focus away from the here and now with harmful results.

Instead of totally focusing on driving, 49 percent of all adults admit to talking or texting on their cell phones. What’s the big deal? “Forty-four percent of all adults say they have been in a car when the driver used the cell phone in a way that put themselves or others in danger,” according to a Pew Research Center study. Drivers put lives in jeopardy when they put cell-phone use before safety.

Our inconsiderate use of electronic devices also damages personal relationships. Just think about how you felt the last time a friend ignored you to check e-mail, text, or surf the Web on a handheld device. Treating the people we’re with as if they were invisible could send a harmful and hurtful message. The choice is yours: Will you keep your gadgets or your friends?

Those who use gadgets to listen to music wherever they go don’t hear what’s happening around them, so they miss out on a lot. They aren’t soothed by lapping waves at a beach or alerted to danger on a city street.

Some people claim that electronic devices enable them to stay in closer touch with family and friends. “When I use Skype on my laptop,” my friend Gina said, “I can talk face-to-face with my friend in Mexico!” She had a point, but while she was busy Skyping, she also burnt the almonds she was toasting. That’s my point. This happens with everyone. Whenever people are virtually with someone else somewhere else, they are less aware of their immediate surroundings, and that can have negative consequences.

Our electronic devices may keep us closer to faraway friends, but our excessive use of those devices diminishes our connection to the here and now—often with disastrous results. Isn’t it time we put our gadgets down and started being more present?
“Save Our Art Program”

How will the school survive without an art program? We, in the painting club, were distraught to learn that the die-hard sports fans who make up the school board care more about saving the track team than saving the art program. Fellow students, you are all intelligent, reasonable people. You recognize that creativity, ingenuity, and self-esteem are qualities that should be nurtured in young people. Art programs do just that. Please help save our art classes! Sign the petition now!
The Purest Water on Earth.

Purity.
As a health-conscious consumer, it’s what you expect from water.

Purity.
As an eco-friendly and socially conscious company, we’re determined you’ll have it.

High in the mountains, a spring runs fast and free. Far from the city’s pollution, the water is pure and clear.

In fact, it’s the purest water on Earth. That’s why we call it Purity.

Purity.
Good for You. Good for the Earth.