**Selecting and Using Evidence Effectively in Argument**



[www.xkcd.com/1262](http://www.xkcd.com/1262) “Unquote”

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Rationale (5 min)

One difficulty for students and teachers is the use of specific evidence in argumentative writing. For the students, they see it as a burden—having to research and select evidence—and for the teachers, it is a difficult to grade the giving of evidence because it is often done inexpertly. Too many times, students have been told they must include evidence in their papers. They go on to commit what can be called “‘hit-and-run quotation’” (Graff and Birkenstein 44). In other words, quotations are dropped into paragraphs with little to no introduction or explanation of how they fit.

The even larger struggle is to then teach students how to go about selecting relevant, powerful, and meaningful evidence in their papers. After all, “to launch an argument you need to write the arguments of others into your text” (Graff and Birkenstein 42). At the heart of an argumentative piece of writing is integrating what others have already theorized. This is true for writing in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. In the secondary classroom it is becoming essential, with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, for students to use and integrate evidence effectively. Students are expected not only to generate their own writing but also to use the writing of others, particularly to give their arguments authority, relevance, and credibility (Graff and Birkenstein 42).

Students need to first have an idea of what they are writing about before they can select evidence—a task that is significantly more focused when students are working with a given set of texts, rather than an open-ended research task.

In argumentative writing, students must respond to others’ text and not simply leave quotations sprinkled throughout their paper. An argument is built step by step, layer by layer, and half of each step is using a relevant and targeted piece of evidence.

In building bit by bit students need to explain the reasons that the evidence supports their argument. Ultimately, they should end up with a “quote sandwich,” where they introduce who drafted the original piece of evidence, give the evidence, and then respond with their own ideas about the evidence (Graff and Birkenstein 46). By building their papers in this way, they integrate not only the ideas of others, but also their own—which is Illustrating, one of the key Joseph Harris moves to argument writing (Sproul and Wendler, SAWP 2015). Using a two-column journal helps students rank their evidence, thus teaching them to think through the process of selection, and then working them through the steps of explaining that thinking so it can easily be worked into the paper (Shumake, SAWP 2014).

Sloth Racing on Trial: Locating and Using the Best Quotes

You will use a fake criminal case where you can take sides, evaluate evidence, and then present your team’s chosen pieces of evidence in an argument for either the prosecution or defense. A jury of peers will then decide a verdict of guilty or not guilty based on the arguments presented.

1. Draw a notecard—based on the color you receive, move into the correct groups.

2. Do not open your group’s envelope until told to do so!

3. Using the giant graphic organizer (aka flip chart paper), begin organizing the pieces of evidence as a group as per the following (10 mins):

* Of the given pieces of evidence, each group chooses up to 3 to include in their final argument.
* Rank each chosen piece of evidence based on its quality on a scale of 1-3 (1 being best), and place on the appropriate box.
* Using a marker, explain why this piece of evidence supports your group’s case for the prosecution or the defense.
* Draft a claim for your prosecution or defense team.

4. Present cases to the Jury: Prosecution and Defense. Hand evidence charts to the jury when done (10 min).

5. Jury Deliberation: Come to a consensus of guilty or not guilty by explaining your rationale based on the evidence presented and identify the most persuasive pieces of evidence (10 min).



<http://xkcd.com/1403/> “Thesis Defense”

Building An Argument by Taking the Opposite Side and/or Your Perspective on the Case

1. Chose one of the following two claims below and circle it. It should be the opposite from the side you took initially.

2. Rank your pieces of evidence from your article 1-5 (1 being best), and fill in the chart below.

You are invited to take the opposite side than the one you participated in on your team, and you may rank evidence differently than the prosecution/defense teams. This is your personal reaction to the evidence.

Claim:

1. Lightning was guilty of steroid use.
2. Lightning was not guilty of steroid use.

Rank Quotation Reason Evidence Supports Claim

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |

Drafting: Applying Evidence and Writing a Paragraph

Using the space provided, or a piece of your own paper, draft a full paragraph. Be sure to include a topic sentence and concluding sentence. You may or may not choose to use all of the evidence you have selected as long as you have a concrete paragraph.

Check Your Evidence

Trade paragraphs with a partner. Read your partner’s paragraph. Which evidence was used? Was it used effectively—did it support the claim?

Works Cited

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. "As He Himself Puts It: The Art of Quoting." They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010. 42-51. Print.

Various strategies and methods for teaching academic writing across various subject areas. This book has a focus on all levels of argument writing - the relevant chapter dealt with the need for including quotations and source evidence in academic writing.

Shumake, Jessica. “Dialectical Thinking.” Southern Arizona Writing Project 2014, June 18, 2014. Teaching demo that illustrated various ways for students to engage with text and merge writing with different means of dialogue and thinking.

Sproul, Cathy and Rachael Wendler. “Harris Moves.” Southern Arizona Writing Project: Advanced Institute 2015, June 6, 2015. Presentation outlining the four basic moves in argument writing.

AZ Academic Standards: 11-12

Reading: 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. (11‐12.RL.1)

Writing: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence - Develop claim(s) 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. (11-12.W.1)

**Sloth Racing Trial--Teacher Instructions--1 Day**

1. Put students on teams--you can assign them, or have students draw for them based on your class needs and your preference. 1 team is Prosecution, 1 team is Defense. For the Jury: select an even number of students from each team, 4-8 students suggested depending on class sizes.
2. Have evidence prepared on notecards or paper--place in two envelopes. 1 envelope for Prosecution, 1 for Defense.
3. Have charts for evidence ranking made (using butcher paper, large sticky pads, whiteboard, etc--same chart as page 4). 1 chart per team.
4. Give envelope to teams when students have moved into their respective teams, do not let them open their envelopes until you tell them to do so.

25 minutes for steps 4-9: Adjust time if students need more/less.

1. Students open envelopes and begin going through evidence. Adjust if they need less time or more time.
2. As groups, students place their evidence on the chart .
3. Of the given pieces of evidence, each group chooses up to 3 to include in their final argument.
4. Students rank each chosen piece of evidence based on its quality on a scale of 1-3 (1 being best), and place on the appropriate box.
5. Using a marker, students briefly explain why this piece of evidence supports their group’s case.
6. Students draft a claim for the prosecution or defense team.
7. Have the selected jury members move to a designated jury area. Prosecution and Defense should decide during this time whom will be presenting each case.

15 minutes for steps 11-13:

1. Prosecution presents case.
2. Defense presents case.
3. Jury deliberates and delivers verdict by majority, identifying strongest pieces of evidence for their decision.

Materials: Evidence (below), envelopes, sticky notes or notecards, place for large chart—flipchart paper, butcher paper or white/chalkboard space. The chart students fill out is the same one that they will use to draft their paragraphs (see page 4).

**Paragraph Writing: Day Two**

1. Students review trial evidence (you can keep the charts from the previous day, but they are not required—you can simply provide a list of evidence for both sides).
2. Students fill out their own chart and take the opposite side than the one they had the previous day (you can provide copies of pg 4 directly). Suggested time: 15-20 minutes.
3. Students begin drafting their paragraphs. They can do this on their own paper or paper you provide—your preference. Suggested time: 25-30 min.
4. Extension: Students can trade and read each other’s paragraphs in partners, small groups, etc. Groupings or pairings can be done by your preference/class needs.

Materials: List of evidence, copy of chart on page 4, paper (from student or from teacher).

Prosecution:

Used syringes, which tested positive for steroids, were found in the trash can next to Lightning’s cage.

Three years ago, McGee was disciplined for administering steroids to Lightning. Lightning’s victories were forfeited, and Lightning was banned from racing for the rest of the season.

The previous record, .017 MPH, was shattered in the first race of the year by Lightning, who clocked .025 MPH.

LIghtning has baldness and fur loss—common side effects of steroid use in sloths.

Lightning has needle injection scars on his body.

McGee’s competitor, Florence Simon, testifies that McGee has a “shifty, guilty appearance” before each race.

McGee has a prized jester hat, the trophy from one of Lightning’s victories, that is missing a bell. Lightning jingles when racing.

Defense:

An empty case of caffeine powder was found in McGee’s home.

Lightning’s vet, Dan Davidson, asserts that steroids are very dangerous for diabetic sloths—it usually results in a dangerous and potentially deadly insulin crash.

Lightning is diabetic.

Lightning’s father, Thunder, completed the Molasses Derby in 4 days, 13 hours, and 27 seconds.

Lightning’s mother, Rain, can carry 6 lbs on her back. Lightning can carry 4 lbs. The average sloth can carry 5 lbs.

Lightning helped an injured sloth, belonging to competitor Florence Simon, in the previous race, thus losing and placing second.

Pet psychic Sarah C. Voyant spoke to Lightning, and says that he told her, “I do not use steroids.”