

Grade 8 Playlist: Delineating and Evaluating an Argument

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.8*:

- 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.

Welcome

When making an argument, an author supports the position he or she take on an issue by making claims. In turn, these claims must be supported with evidence from valid, credible sources. An argument should only include evidence that is relevant to the claims the author is making. Poor arguments often include evidence that does not support the author's claims, or evidence that does not do so sufficiently. It is up to the reader to delineate and evaluate an argument to determine whether it is a valid one.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text.
- assess whether the reasoning used in an argument is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient.
- recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

Review

Key Terms

- In an **argument**, an author gives a point of view on a subject and explains why the reader should have the same point of view. To convince the reader to accept his or her point of view, the author makes **claims**, or statements, about the subject that he or she wishes for the reader to accept as fact.
- Authors must prove claims. To prove that the claims they make should be accepted as facts, authors use **evidence** to support their claims. Evidence can take many forms: statistics, the opinions of experts in the field, and text from documents and studies, among many other things. However, it is very important that evidence be:
 - **valid**, or well founded and truthful (not just something the author made up);
 - **relevant**, or connected to the claim that is being made (not a random statement that has little to do with the subject); and
 - **sufficient**, or adequately supporting its purpose in the argument.



- In some arguments, an author clearly states the position he or she is arguing. Other times, it is not so clear. The reader must **delineate** the argument, or determine its claim and evidence, to describe it in detail. Then, after the point of view, claims, and evidence are determined, the reader **evaluates** the argument, determining whether or not it is strong enough to be convincing.

Exploring the Standard

To properly evaluate an argument, readers must delineate the argument's claims and evidence. Then, they must decide whether or not the evidence is valid, relevant, and sufficient. Sometimes these factors are obvious, but in other situations the argument must be carefully examined.

A Closer Look: Recognizing a Good Argument

When delineating an argument, try to determine the author's position after the first read of the it. Then, read it more closely to find what the author's claims are and how they support author's position. The remaining text should support these claims as evidence. Does the argument include any claims or evidence that do not support the position? Is the evidence given enough to convince the reader that the author's claims are valid and factual, or is more needed? And is the evidence even believable in the first place? Can the author cite sources if necessary?

Example 1

Below is an argument. Read it and try to delineate the position and how the author supports it.

¹Do you grow a vegetable garden? If you don't, then you definitely should. Even if you live in an apartment, you can grow a garden on your balcony or even on a windowsill. But if you do have one, then you know how good vegetables are that are grown without pesticides or genetic modification. There is a great difference between vegetables you grow yourself and those that you find in grocery stores. Homegrown vegetables taste better because they do not contain GMOs.

²Genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, do not just taste bad. They are dangerous for people to eat, especially small children. They are made in laboratories using scientific techniques that do not happen in nature. Some people like to defend GMOs by comparing them to the plants that ancient people developed through selective breeding over the course of many centuries, like corn, carrots, and watermelon. But the work that is being done today by scientists is completely different.

³The most frightening thing about GMOs is that most people do not know that they are eating them. They are found in many everyday foods that we all find on the grocery store shelves. Even though GMOs are very dangerous, there are no laws requiring that they be labeled. This is very wrong; people should know what goes into their food. If food companies have to use GMOs in their foods, there should be laws requiring them to label these foods. This way, consumers know what they are getting and whether or not their food is dangerous and bad for them.

This is *not* an effective argument. For one, it is difficult to define what position the author is taking. Are they trying to convince the reader to grow a vegetable garden? In the first part of the argument, that appears to be so. However, the rest of the argument has nothing to do with vegetable gardening. The information in the first paragraph is irrelevant and should not be included in the argument.



Teaching Notes: Delineating and Evaluating an Argument

The goal of RI.8.8 is for students to understand and be able to explain how to **delineate** and **evaluate** an argument. To do so requires determining the author's position, identifying the claims made by the author to support that position, and assessing the evidence used by the author to support those claims for its validity, relevance, and sufficiency. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Have the students locate two editorials or opinion pieces from magazines or newspapers. The arguments made should represent opposing viewpoints. Ask the students to delineate and evaluate both arguments and to determine which is the stronger of the two. Encourage them to put their personal views on the subject aside as they evaluate the arguments made.
2. Choose a well-known speech or letter. Lead a discussion with the class on the speech or letter and ask the students what makes it an especially effective argument (if it is).

Writing Prompts

1. Assign students a topic and ask them to create a position on that topic. Then, have them create an outline showing what the structure of a good argument for that position would resemble. The outline should include claims and specific types of evidence to support the claims.
2. After the students have written their outlines, have them develop their position and claims into a full essay. Remind the students to include relevant and sufficient evidence and to cite all sources used to ensure that their arguments are valid.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RI.8.8:

“Writing and Rhetoric: Teaching Argument”: This resource discusses how to help students think critically and build inferences in argumentative writing as well as developing claims and evidence.

- <https://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/teaching/first-year-writing-pedagogies-methods-design/teaching-argument>

“How to Teach Supporting Your Arguments”: This resource gives ideas for how to help students better support the arguments they make.

- <http://www.usingenglish.com/articles/how-to-teach-supporting-your-arguments.html>

