

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Evaluate an Argument

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY 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.

Welcome

Many authors use informational texts to make an argument or state an opinion about a certain topic. It is up to the reader to identify the argument and decide whether it is based on logical evidence and valid reasoning. Evaluating an argument in this way helps readers make good decisions about a variety of topics, such as how to spend money, vote, and interpret past events.

Objective

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- delineate and evaluate an argument.

Review

Key Terms

- A **claim** refers to a statement that asserts a belief or truth. In arguments, most claims require supporting evidence to be considered valid.
- A **fallacious argument** has a flaw in its structure that makes its conclusion invalid or suspect.
- **Evidence** is information that supports a claim. It can be in the form of statistical data, testimonies from experts, research findings, and examples.

Watch!

The following video explains how claims, reasoning, and evidence make up an argument:

- <https://www.youtube.com/embed/69btpc8Ds0M>

Exploring the Standard

Writers use evidence to try to persuade their audience. Often, writers use both logical evidence and emotional appeals in order to support their claims. Logical evidence, such as facts, data, and expert opinions, is supported by research or experience. In contrast, emotional appeals seek to engage readers' emotions rather than their sense of reason. Emotional appeals may include personal stories, striking images, and words with strong connotative meanings. It is important for readers to recognize how authors may use emotions to sway their readers. In most cases, emotional appeals alone are not sufficient evidence to make a valid argument.



Watch!

The following video evaluates two commercials for their use of evidence to support their claims:

- <https://www.youtube.com/embed/TuBk9yeuVHQ>

Even if a writer uses logical evidence, that evidence may include false statements. For this reason, readers should check that the facts presented in an argument can be confirmed by outside sources. If the facts are true, they still can contribute to fallacious reasoning. For example, the writer might use the facts to draw an inaccurate conclusion. The writer also might provide a fact that is not relevant to the current topic.

Watch!

This video describes and shows examples of fallacious reasoning:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXLTQi7vVsl>

Example 1

The paragraphs below come from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech, delivered as the 1941 State of the Union address. This speech was given before the United States officially entered World War II. What claim does Roosevelt make? How does he support the claim?

Therefore, as your President, performing my constitutional duty to “give to the Congress information of the state of the union,” I find it unhappily necessary to report that the future and the safety of our country and of our democracy are overwhelmingly involved in events far beyond our borders.

Armed defense of democratic existence is now being gallantly waged in four continents. If that defense fails, all the population and all the resources of Europe and Asia, and Africa and Austral-Asia will be dominated by conquerors. And let us remember that the total of those populations in those four continents, the total of those populations and their resources greatly exceed the sum total of the population and the resources of the whole of the Western Hemisphere – yes, many times over.

In the first paragraph, Roosevelt makes a claim that the “the future and the safety of our country and of our democracy are overwhelmingly involved in events far beyond our borders.” In other words, Roosevelt thinks that the United States is at risk because of the conflict overseas. To support this claim, Roosevelt gives two facts that serve as logical evidence:

- Battles over democracy are being fought on four continents.
- The total population of those four continents is much larger than the population in the Western Hemisphere.

However, Roosevelt also relies on emotional appeal to persuade his audience. By predicting that “conquerors” could take over those four continents, Roosevelt evokes a sense of fear. He also uses strong language such as “dominated,” “greatly exceed,” and “many times over” to emphasize how serious the risk is.

