



**OPINION/
ARGUMENT**

A Note About Opinion/Argument

Any time a writer is putting forth a thought, defending a truth, or laying out an opinion, she is creating an argument. The test we used to determine whether a piece belonged in this section is this question: Might a reader or another speaker offer a different thought, truth, or opinion?

Because some of the pieces we have included in this section seem mostly descriptive, they might just as easily have been included in the Informative/Explanatory Writing section. In tests, the lines between the types of writing are rigid and artificially clear. In real life, though, sometimes a piece doesn't fit into a category so neatly.

We advise anyone preparing students for a large-scale writing assessment to study closely the models offered by the assessment source to determine the specific quirks of that assessment instrument. But in a classroom setting, for quality writing instruction, students should learn and practice writing for the many different situations that might require an argument, ranging from opinion pieces to calls to action, debates, literary analyses, and persuasive letters.

The three pieces used in the first three lessons in this section are all written by the same student, Meredith Yoxall. She passionately addresses the problem of homelessness in three different genres: letter, blog, and public service announcement. Nearly any prompt or subject can similarly be addressed in multiple genres.

Writing a Letter to Raise Awareness About a Social Problem

What Writers Do — Writers are sometimes activists, using the power of language to raise awareness about the world's problems.

What This Writer Does —Madison identifies a problem: stray animals. She then examines the causes of the problem and the effect before offering possible solutions.

Activity for your class:

- Using highlighters and a copy of the letter, ask individual students or partners to read it and highlight the following:
 - green—problem
 - yellow—causes
 - pink—effects
 - blue—solutions
- Have students or groups share and discuss their highlighting.
- As a class, discuss the effectiveness of a letter as a means to address a problem. How does this form compare with an essay that does the same thing?

Challenge for students:

Using the text structure below, write an essay or letter discussing the causes and effects of a problem that has come to your attention. Color-code your final piece the same way you did Madison's letter. Share the results.

Problem Awareness

Problem

Causes

Effects

Possible solutions

Madison Morris – Grade 6

To: Citizens of Sanantonio@you.net
From: Madison@xyz.com
Re: Don't Delay Stop Strays

Dear Citizens of San Antonio:

I am taking time to write this letter, because this problem is very important to me: strays. I believe that there are way too many strays in this city. For example, the articles you have been seeing in the newspaper about the feral cat population are very concerning.

But do NOT let your pet go in the parks. Have you ever been to Sunken Gardens? The place is overrun with animals. Stray cats, dogs, bunnies, even hamsters! This is one thing people do when they don't want their pets anymore. And most of the animals have diseases. When people go to the parks of San Antonio and see these strays, then that is the memory they will have of our city. Is this the experience San Antonions want people to have?

Another choice is the pet shelter. I would try to avoid this option, because if your pet is there more than three months then they will consider putting it to sleep.

I do not think our pets should suffer the consequence of dying, because of our careless actions. If only we had spayed and neutered. Or if we had taken care of the animal, it would not have to die. Picture your pet as your child. Would you kill your child because you did not want it any more or couldn't take care of it?

With all the strays, it is very expensive for the shelters. The pet shelters are spending a lot of money on each of our lost animals. This money is coming from the city. And then they charge a fee to reunite the family with their pet. As citizens, we pay for this service with our taxes, so now we are

paying for our animals twice. Is this the type of city we want to be?

We, as citizens of San Antonio, should be responsible for spaying and neutering our animals. This can be an expensive process but several companies have special dates where they will do it for free. Experts say that spaying and neutering will help reduce strays. ☆

Save our city from strays,

Madison Morris

Revising an Argument for Length

What Writers Do — Professional writers may finish a piece and then discover that a publisher needs it to be shorter to fit into their publication. This happens often in printed materials like newspapers, magazines, or books. Even student writers are sometimes given length limitations.

What This Writer Does — Tyler’s piece is a wonderful but lengthy argument urging people to think differently and take better care of our planet. He begins with disturbing information about the great Pacific trash heap and ends with effective “garden of Eden” images. In between, he provides multiple descriptions of the problem, as well as solutions.

Activity for your class:

1. Give this task to groups of students after giving them copies:

“Imagine you are newspaper editors, and you would like to publish this on the editorial page. The problem is that it needs to be about one page long in order to fit into the newspaper column’s space. This means trimming it by half. Your job is to shorten this piece. Keep the beginning and ending, and focus on trimming the middle. You may delete words, phrases, or paragraphs. You may also combine sentences.”

2. Compare the results. Ask students to explain their editing choices.

Challenge for students:

Try this editing exercise on one of your own longer pieces, or write a new one about an environmental problem using the text structure below. See if editing it for length improves it.

Alerting Reader to a Problem

Visual image
of problem

What
will happen
in the future

One plan

Attitude change
required

Imagine
if...

Dear People of the Earth,

Have you ever heard of the Great Pacific trash heap? It's this huge mass of trash that is trapped by the sea's currents. The trash can't decompose. Therefore it has gotten big enough to cover the state of Texas twice! This has become a huge problem because animals that live there constantly get caught in the garbage and either die due to starvation, or have to evacuate the area leaving the ecosystem unbalanced, causing certain species to overpopulate.

More and more of this type of thing will occur in the future if we don't do something soon. Wildlife will wither, the ocean will become nothing more than a giant sludge pool and the forests will become huge landfills. Millions of animals have already become subject to man's incapability to care. Why make it worse?

What I'm suggesting might sound crazy to some people, but the fact is that we just aren't trying hard enough to take care of our Earth. Something us students can do is maybe set a day in the month to gather and pick up trash along the highway. I believe this would make a huge difference.

Little things like aluminum cans or plastic bags add up and we can't keep adding to the equation. Hundreds of species are endangered because of our species. We think we are so much better than every other animal, but do they pollute and destroy our environment?

It takes a special kind of person to see a bottle on the side of the road and pull over to pick it up. Another thing it takes a special person to do is, see a turtle crawling across the road, pick it up and move it over to the other side. Little things like that make all the difference.

From the beginning all we've ever done is care about ourselves and never taken in consideration the effects of our actions. It's about time we did

something about attitude. Try to use greener options like using real plates instead of plastic ones. If it's possible take quick showers instead of baths (it doesn't use as much water). If you want to take it to the next step, another thing that you can do is look around and see what you can do in your community.

So next time you're driving down the road or playing at the beach, think about the cause and effect of, for example, throwing a candy wrapper out the window or onto the sand. Think about the innocent lives you might cause to suffer for it. How would you like it if you swallowed a bottle cap because you thought it was your dinner? How would you like it if you were covered head to toe in crude oil?

If we could help clean and maintain our environment, we could save ourselves and billions of other living organisms from a hell on Earth. Just imagine crystal clear waters teeming with life. Forests overflowing with vegetation and inspiration. Earth would be an Oasis that we could enjoy for generations to come. A garden of Eden we could all share. ☆

Sincerely,

Tyler Moore

Supporting an Argument With Expert Knowledge

What Writers Do — Writers choose topics that they know very well, using specific details to show their expert knowledge.

What This Writer Does — Ben presents five different reasons to convince the reader that hog hunting is important. With each one, he paints a different picture that the reader can visualize. His expert knowledge is clear and strengthens his argument.

Activity for your class:

1. Read and discuss Ben's essay after giving each student a copy.
2. Invite students to draw a stick-figure cartoon panel showing one of Ben's five reasons and examples.
3. Post the cartoons around the classroom or in a hall. Hold a gallery walk to identify each reason. Discuss how the details support Ben's argument.

Challenge for students:

Think of something that you have spent a lot of time doing. List the reasons people should do it, giving clear examples from your personal knowledge and experience. Write an essay or draw a cartoon strip based on your reasons.

Expert Opinion

Topic and
position

Reasons with
clear examples

Restate your
position once
more with
feeling

Top 5 Reasons for Hunting Hogs

The reason hunting hogs is so important is because whether you're a rancher or a deer hunter, hogs just mess things up. They will always break everything you have and scare the deer.

Any deer hunter knows that the worst thing while you're deer hunting is to see your deer run off only to see a pack of hogs walk out snorting and squealing as they snobbily eat all the corn. Therefore this brings me to give you the top 5 reasons why we hunt hogs to get rid of them.

The first reason is by tearing up the deer feeder. The hogs will always get wild while they are eating corn and end up breaking either a side or some part of a feeder that I will have to fix.

The second reason is because the hogs will scare away the deer at a feeder. The deer don't like being around them so right when they see one they run. I had one time where this huge buck just walked out and I was about to take him when a big ole pack of hogs came out to the feeder.

The third reason is because they will break fences. Hogs like to travel, so when they come upon a fence they have to get through it. They all will bust it open and leave a big hole in the fence.

The fourth reason is for when it has just rained a lot. What the hogs love the most is making mud holes out in a field. They will roll around and make a deep hole to mess around in. Once the mud dries there are holes everywhere that mess up all the crops.

And the last reason is that when you have a water tank you don't want hogs getting into it and messing it up to where the water might go out of the tank and drain off to the side. So if you're both a rancher and a hunter, you have plenty of reasons to hunt down those hogs. ☆