English I

Argumentative Writing

Learning Targets
• Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
• Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

• Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
• Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Writing an Argumentative Essay

Argumentative technique is an important skill developed and used by writers to influence the attitudes or actions of their intended audience regarding a wide variety of issues. Effective argumentation involves clearly identifying issues, anticipating and responding to objections, presenting support for a position, and using sound reasoning to help convince the audience.

ACTIVITY 1

Discovering the Elements of an Argumentative Essay

1. In argumentation, acknowledging and addressing counterclaims is one important way for a writer to establish credibility or *ethos*. Showing knowledge of the counterclaims sets the stage for creating a more convincing argument. As you read the writing prompt and the student response below, note how the writer establishes credibility through diction and the evidence used.

2. The first step in responding to an argumentative prompt is to analyze the language of the prompt. Read the prompt below and highlight or underline the important words of Horace's quote. Use resources to be sure you understand the meaning of the words. Then do the same for the writing instructions that follow.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Defend, challenge, or **qualify**—These verbs are part of the language of argument. A position or claim must be defended (argued for), challenged (argued against), or qualified (modified or limited).

The following prompt is from the 2009 AP Language and Composition Exam.

> "Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant." –Horace

Consider this quotation about adversity from the Roman poet Horace. Then write an essay that **defends, challenges,** or **qualifies** Horace's assertion about the role that adversity (e.g., financial or political hardship, danger, misfortune, etc.) plays in developing a person's character. Support your argument with appropriate evidence from your reading, observation, or experience.

Sample Text

3. The following is a sample response written by a student.
   Read the sample response, paying close attention to the **thesis** and its **claims**, the **evidence** used to prove the thesis, and the student's **commentary** about the importance or significance of the evidence. Underline the thesis and claims, and circle the evidence that is offered to support each claim.

There Is VALUE in ADVERSITY

An old proverb states, "Character is what you are in the dark," and it is in the darkest of times that who we are sometimes shines through. Nelson Mandela, Stephen Hawking, Lance Armstrong—our society loves to hear of a person who triumphs through adversity. But would these talents and achievements have arisen anyway—or more easily if there had been no adversity? Possibly, but I agree with Roman poet Horace in that adversity has a way of rousting talent from slumber. Adversity can stimulate, force, and sharpen a person in ways prosperity cannot; there is, then, value in hardship.

Biology teaches us that a stimulus will elicit a response. Newton taught us that one force provokes another, in opposition to it. While various life experiences might "elicit" a response, adversity may analogize better with physics than biology. It does not simply request a response; it demands it. Otherwise, the adversity will never be lifted and hardship will prevail. Hamlet's tragic flaw was indecision, and Shakespeare no doubt understood that those in adversity must learn to be capable of a response if they are to survive.

Survival, of course, is a powerful motivator. Evolution runs on it; in this sense every organism on the planet works due to adversity. This survival imperative is so powerful, it has been used beyond the biological creatures into whom it is hardwired. Computers now make use of genetic algorithms, in which competing solutions to a problem—say, the correct shape of an aircraft wing—are selected, mathematically "bred," and mutated into a new generation. Adversity, it seems, elicits talents in more than humans.

Prosperity, on the other hand, does not always engender growth. The prosperous man has no pressing needs or emergencies that require him to develop talents to counter them. Brave New World provides a literary example. The people in this "utopia" are always fed. They are always happy. There is infinite entertainment, in all imaginable forms. But there is no growth. When the leader of this society asks an outsider if he truly wants pain, death and hardship, the "savage" simply replies, "I claim them all" and took with him all the good things the "prosperous" lacked: love, family, Shakespeare, and much more.

In fiction, a character often ends a story realizing far more than he did when he began. The conflicts and resolutions he has been through have forced it on him. Character development is not merely a literary construct; it exists in life. We cannot live and we cannot grow without the realization that we are not living perfectly and that we have ideals to grow towards, and revealing these aspirations is the true value of adversity.

4. Working with your teacher, construct an outline of the claims and evidence provided in the student sample. How does the organization of ideas strengthen the content of the argument?

Introduction:
 Thesis/Claim:

Body Paragraph 1 Claim:

 Evidence:

Body Paragraph 2 Claim:

 Evidence:

Body Paragraph 3 Claim:

 Evidence:

Conclusion

Check Your Understanding

• How does the writer appeal to *logos* (logic) rather than *pathos* (emotion) in the argument?

• Does the writer select relevant evidence? Is it effective? Why or why not?

• Identify the presence and development of counterclaims.

• How does the writer establish *ethos* (expertise and reliability) in this text? What parts in particular convince you that the writer is trustworthy and knowledgeable about this topic?

Independent Writing

WRITING PROMPT: Your task is to defend, challenge, or qualify the following quote by American essayist and social critic H. L. Mencken (1880–1956).

"The average man does not want to be free. He simply wants to be safe."

Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

1. Issue/Topic	• Is the topic made clear in the introduction? Does the introduction clarify what is implied as well as what is stated by the prompt?

What feedback do you have for the essay you read in peer review?	What feedback do your peer reviewers have for your essay?

2. Thesis	• Does the thesis combine the ideas behind the prompt with an opinion? • Does the writer provide justification for the thesis?

What feedback do you have for the essay you read in peer review?	What feedback do your peer reviewers have for your essay?

3. Support	• What facts, statistics, examples, and personal experiences are used? • Does the writer use sound reasoning and relevant details? • Is the evidence accurate, current, and topical?

What feedback do you have for the essay you read in peer review?	What feedback do your peer reviewers have for your essay?

4. Audience	• To whom are the reasons, evidence, appeals, and examples targeted? • Are the above appropriate for the intended audience?

What feedback do you have for the essay you read in peer review?	What feedback do your peer reviewers have for your essay?

5. Opposing Viewpoints	• Does the writer address opposing viewpoints clearly and fairly? • Does the writer acknowledge and refute opposing viewpoints with logic and relevant evidence?

What feedback do you have for the essay you read in peer review?	What feedback do your peer reviewers have for your essay?

6. Conclusion	• Does the writer conclude the argument effectively?

What feedback do you have for the essay you read in peer review?	What feedback do your peer reviewers have for your essay?

SCORING GUIDE

Scoring Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Emerging	Incomplete
Ideas	The essay • asserts an insightful thesis and claims that effectively anticipate and distinguish alternate positions • provides a variety of precise and convincing evidence and authoritative commentary • demonstrates thoughtful consideration of relevance and sufficiency of evidence and presents information on the range of relevant perspectives	The essay • presents a clear thesis and claims that often anticipate alternate positions • supports reasons with specific and relevant evidence and commentary • demonstrates consideration of the relevance and sufficiency of evidence and presents information on other perspectives	The essay • presents a limited or unfocused thesis and/or claims that do(es) not present alternate positions • contains reasons with insufficient evidence and vague commentary • demonstrates little or no consideration of relevance of evidence and present insufficient information on other relevant perspectives	The essay • presents a limited or unfocused thesis and/or claims without alternate positions • contains insufficient reasons and evidence with vague commentary • includes irrelevant and/or insufficient evidence and information on other relevant perspectives
Structure	The essay • skillfully uses an organizing structure appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context • presents a sustained focus that displays a progression of ideas with clarity • effectively sequences ideas and uses graceful transitions	The essay • includes an organizing structure appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context • includes a sustained focus that displays ideas with coherence • sequences ideas logically and uses transitions appropriately	The essay • may lack an organizing structure or contain one that is inappropriate to the purpose, audience, and context • presents a lack of focus and/or underdeveloped ideas • presents disconnected ideas and employs a limited use of transitions	The essay • contains structure that is inappropriate to the purpose, audience, and context • lacks focus and/or development of ideas • presents disconnected ideas with limited or no use of transitions
Use of Language	The essay • uses syntactical structures effectively to enhance clarity of ideas and persuasive effect • uses diction deliberately crafted for the topic, audience, and purpose • consistently uses semicolons and parallelism correctly when appropriate • uses conventions skillfully to enhance rhetorical effectiveness	The essay • uses varied syntax for effect • uses diction appropriately for the topic, audience, and purpose • usually uses semicolons and parallelism correctly in sentences • uses conventions correctly	The essay • shows little or no variety in sentence structure • uses diction inappropriate for the topic, audience, and purpose • little attention to parallel structures or semicolon use • uses conventions incorrectly; errors in are numerous enough to be distracting and/or interfere with meaning	The essay • shows no deliberate variety in sentence structure • uses diction without consideration for the topic, audience, and purpose • does not use semicolons correctly • contains errors numerous enough to be distracting and/or interfere with meaning