THINKING AND REASONING SKILLS

SKILL 3: PRESENTING AND DEVELOPING ARGUMENTS

This aspect of the course can be really enjoyable and rewarding. Whilst it is fun working with other people's arguments and picking them apart for flaws and appeals, being able to write your own arguments without falling into any of those traps yourself is a different matter!

By teaching and assessing this skill, the aims and objectives are as follows:

PRESENTING ARGUMENTS

Teachers should aim to:
emphasise/highlight the need for students to the importance of structure, clarity and relevance in presenting their own arguments.
Give students strategies for building structured arguments in support of a conclusion.
Guide students in their wording of conclusions to encourage precision.

STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

Come up with reasons to support specific conclusions, using indicator words to make your structure clear.
Use evidence/example to support your reasons.
Word conclusions carefully so that it is clear what exactly is being argued for.

RECOGNISING COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Teachers should aim to:
Explain the nature of a counter-argument and how it should be used to enhance, rather than weaken, reasoning.
Expose students to examples of counter-arguments and give guidance on how to recognise them.

STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

Spot a counter-argument when it appears within an argument and tell it apart from other argument elements, such as reasons.

DEVELOPING COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Teachers should aim to:
Explain the nature of basic, irrelevant Appeals in reasoning (emotion, history, tradition, popularity).
Guide students to recognise and understand these and give them strategies for telling them apart.

STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

Add reasons (and maybe evidence/examples) of your own to build up a counter-argument.

RESPONDING TO | COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Teachers should aim to:
Teach students the importance of directly challenging the specific reasoning given in a counter-argument.
Give students practice and guidance in writing responses to given counter-arguments.

STUDENTS SHOULD NOW BE ABLE TO:

Come up with reasons of your own that would challenge the reasoning given in a counter-argument.

PRESENTING ARGUMENTS

A carefully crafted and skilful argument can be very persuasive. Now that we have learned to avoid relying on false appeals, flaws and loaded language, it should be clear that an argument is only as good as its reasons. They should, at the very least, be relevant, but we want to do more than simply give a bland list of reasons and a conclusion. That would be boring and it wouldn't have much of an impact!

The most basic building blocks of an argument are reasons and conclusion, so we'll start there. Firstly, coming up with a **clear conclusion** is essential. If you want to argue against animal testing, for example, you could just say:

We should not test on animals.

However, this is not very clear at all. It leaves us wondering:

- Who shouldn't test on animals? Me and you? Human beings? Scientists? School children? Teachers?
- What type of animals? Any animals? Just animals with a certain level of intelligence? Just animals with feelings?
- What type of testing? All types? Just for cosmetics or testing medicines?

Be clear about what you mean! A more precise and clear conclusion might look like this:

Scientists should not test cosmetic products on animals that can feel pain.

The following support materials can be found within the **Skill 3 pdf portfolio**.

3.01 Clearing up printable worksheet.docx

Having a clearly worded conclusion makes it easier to think of relevant reasons to support your conclusion. A good way of practising this skill is to start with a conclusion that is random and farfetched. This helps because you are less likely to have a view one way or another and so you have to think more carefully about the relevance of any reasons you give. Consider the following conclusions, and think of at least two relevant reasons that would support each one:

Every child born from now on in this country should be named Bob.

Cheese and onion crisps should be banned in the UK.

Once you have a conclusion and some reasons to support it, your next step is to develop each reason to make it more persuasive. There are a few ways of doing this:

- Give **evidence** to back up the reason
- Give **an example** that backs up your reason
- Go on to **explain your reason further**

To illustrate this, we'll use one of the examples from the last exercise. See if you can work out which is the evidence, example and further explanation:

Conclusion: ***Every child born from now on in this country should be named Bob***

Reason: ***If everyone had the same name, it would encourage people to talk to each other more.***

(a) When asked in a survey, the majority of people said that they would be more likely to approach a stranger to chat if they knew their name.

(b) My friend Bob can't go anywhere without strangers coming up to him and starting up a conversation.

(c) Because people would be less worried about forgetting the other person's name and also they would have something in common already – their names!

Examiner tips

- **Don't use evidence or examples instead of reasons** – they are supposed to back up reasons, not replace them!
- **Try to develop every reason you give using one of these methods** (you don't need to do them all for every reason!)
- **Don't make up evidence or examples just for the sake of it** – if there is no evidence, then your reason might not be such a good one after all!
- **Don't forget to use indicator words to make your reasoning crystal clear!**
- **Make sure you don't appeal to popularity or make generalisations when you refer to certain types of evidence!**

FINISHING TOUCH

The following support materials can be found within the **Skill 3 pdf portfolio**.

3.02 Sorting relevant claims printable worksheet.doc

RECOGNISING COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Counter-arguments are often easy to spot because of the words that people use to introduce them. It should also be easy to tell apart from the real argument from its meaning, because it is saying something that challenges it! Consider the following argument:

Although it could be argued that we should travel by car because it is quicker and more convenient,I think everyone should travel by bicycle. This is because it saves money and because it is better for the environment.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Counter-argument

Conclusion

Reasons

The following phrases are common indicators of a counter-argument, though there are many different ones:

- *Although people might say . . .*
- *Whilst it could be argued . . .*
- *Some might say . . .*
- *On the other hand . . .*

DEVELOPING COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

If you were referring to a counter-argument as part of your argument (which is a good thing to do, by the way!), it is better to develop it in some way. It might seem strange to do this, as it is arguing against yourself, but it shows that you have thought about the reasons for the opposing viewpoint and have rejected them (which makes your own argument stronger).

Consider the following argument:

Violent computer games should be banned, because they expose children to unrealistic violence and give them a false impression about the dangers of physical violence.

Conclusion

Reasons

There are several counter-assertions that we could now add. For example:

- *They don't need to be banned*
- *Banning them would make it worse*
- *Banning them is unfair on adults who like to play them*

These are all undeveloped points that would challenge the conclusion 'violent computer games should be banned. Let's try developing the first one:

Some people say that they don't need to be banned, because violent games have age restrictions on them anyway. For example, Call of Duty has an age rating of 18, therefore making a ban extreme and unnecessary.

Now our counter-assertion has a reason (violent games have age restrictions on them), an example (Call of Duty) and an intermediate conclusion (a ban would be extreme and unnecessary). It also has indicator words (because, for example, therefore). It is now a developed counter-argument.

Task: Try developing the other two counter-assertions above in the same way.

RESPONDING TO COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Unless we respond to the counter-argument, it makes our original argument look bad. Let's take a look at what we have so far:

Violent computer games should be banned, because they expose children to unrealistic violence and give them a false impression about the dangers of physical violence.

Some people say that they don't need to be banned, because violent games have age restrictions on them anyway. For example, Call of Duty has an age rating of 18, therefore making a ban extreme and unnecessary.

We need some way of challenging the counter-argument so that we can return to the opposing argument and make it stronger than the counter-argument. '*However*' or '*But*' can be used to introduce this response. Here are three attempts, but one of them is better than the others:

(a) However, this is incorrect.

(b) However, this ignores the fact that a lot of parents don't pay attention to the age ratings on games, so unless they are banned children are at risk.

(c) However, another reason they should be banned is because they distract children from school work.

Examiner tips

- **Develop counter-arguments –** the clearer they are the easier they are to challenge.
- **Make sure that you challenge the point that the counter-argument is making.**
- **Make sure you return to your own argument**

The following support materials can be found within the **Skill 3 pdf portfolio**.

3.03 Argument chess printable worksheet.doc

3.04 How to win an argument.ppt

In an exam, you are likely to be asked to write at least one longer argument on a particular topic. For this, you will need to put into practice everything we have covered here. In the specimen paper, for example, there is a question related to Douglas Adams' '*The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*'. Here is an exemplar answer to this question, plus a blank worksheet for you to practice longer arguments of your own on:

3.05 The restaurant at the end of the universe exemplar argument.docx

3.06 Developing your own argument printable worksheet.docx

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