

Tools for Instruction

Evaluate Arguments

Proficient readers of informational text are able to identify and evaluate the arguments that an author makes. As part of this process, readers must distinguish fact from opinion and recognize that an author may make claims that are not well-supported or based in fact. These can be challenging skills for students to apply, especially as content-area texts introduce more sophisticated and numerous arguments. To support students in evaluating arguments, focus discussion around content-area and other current texts. Teach students that active readers take a skeptical position, constantly questioning the author's argument and the evidence used to support it.

Step by Step 30–45 minutes

1 Review and clarify arguments.

- Engage students' prior knowledge by discussing their current understanding of the term *argument*.
- Say, *When we hear the word argument, we are used to thinking of it as a bad thing, but let's think about what it really is. When two people are in an argument, they each have a different opinion, and they try to use reasons to persuade one another that their opinion is the right one.*
- Provide a relatable example, such as an argument about which baseball player is the best. Illustrate how people on either side of the argument would give statistics, examples, and opinions to support their ideas.
- Then demonstrate how *argument* can be used in a different way. Say, *When we talk about someone's argument, we mean their opinion and the reasons they use to support it. For example, when we read informational text, we look for the author's main point, or the argument, that he or she is making.*
- Revisit the example, and use specific information to model the use of *argument*.

2 Explain and model evaluating arguments.

- Display the word *evaluate*, and say, *To evaluate means "to judge the quality of" something. Once we identify an author's argument, we must evaluate it in order to determine if it is weak or strong. We do this by looking at the evidence, or the reasons the author gives to support an argument.*
- Continue to draw on your previous example to extend students' understanding.

Kristen argued that Ted Williams was the greatest player of all time. She supported it by using a fact as evidence: he was the last player to hit over .400 in a single season. That fact helps to make a strong argument. If she had said he was the greatest player because he wore long socks, that would make a weak argument. We know that a player's socks would not affect the way he played the game.

- Select an on-level informational text that contains multiple claims. Display the text and distribute copies for students to write on. Then distribute and display **Argument and Supporting Evidence Chart** (page 4).

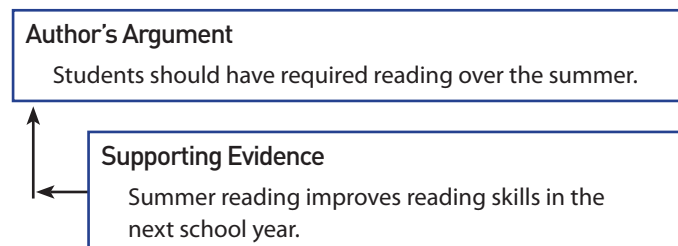
- Read the full text aloud, and identify the author’s argument. Annotate the display copy, and have students do the same on their copies. See the following example.

After reading this article, I can tell that it is mostly about summer reading. That is what the details have in common. So what is the author’s argument? Let’s see ... I think the author argues for required summer reading because he says right here in the second sentence, “All students should be required to read at least three books over the summer.” That is an opinion that he will have to support with good, strong evidence in order to persuade readers to agree. I am going to underline this sentence and write argument in the margin.

- Revisit the text, and model identifying evidence that supports the argument. Annotate the display copy, labeling sentences with *F* or *O* to indicate fact and opinion. Have students do the same on their copies.

Let’s see how well the author supports his argument. He writes, “According to recent research, students who read over the summer show improved reading skills in the next school year.” This makes sense to me, but if I wanted to verify it, I could check the research. So that is one good reason because it is a fact.

- Record information on the chart, and have students fill in their copies.



3 Provide guided practice with evaluating arguments.

- Have students continue to identify evidence and record it on the argument and supporting evidence chart. Direct them to label each statement as a fact or an opinion.
- Then review the evidence with students, and help them to identify whether it is strong or weak. Provide the following questions to prompt their thinking.

- *Is this statement a fact? How can I verify it?*
- *Is this statement an opinion? How could I challenge it?*
- *If the statement is a fact, is it related? Does it support the argument in a logical way?*

- Guide students to phrase their answers in full sentences that include academic vocabulary such as *argument*, *evidence*, and *support*.

4 Provide independent practice with evaluating arguments.

- As students work to evaluate arguments in their independent reading, provide them with the following questions to guide their thinking.

What is the author's argument about _____?

What is the fact in this sentence? How could you verify it?

What is the opinion in this sentence? How well does it support the point?

Does the author support the argument more with facts or opinions?

Which facts and details provide the best evidence? Why?

Connect to Writing Provide students with several relevant topics, such as year-round schooling, school uniforms, and homework. Have them choose a topic, state their argument, and then use both facts and opinions to support it. Students may wish to complete the argument and supporting evidence chart to plan their writing.

Check for Understanding

If you observe...	Then try...
difficulty determining whether an argument is weak or strong	teaching students to annotate the text to help track their thinking. For each statement of evidence, guide them to ask, "Can I challenge this?" Students should mark a <i>Y</i> for <i>yes</i> or an <i>N</i> for <i>no</i> . Count the number of <i>Y</i> s and <i>N</i> s and decide whether the argument is weak or strong.
trouble determining whether evidence is logical	exploring students' background knowledge to determine whether they understand enough about the subject to make this decision.

Name _____

Argument and Supporting Evidence Chart

Author's Argument

Supporting Evidence

Supporting Evidence

Supporting Evidence

Supporting Evidence