

# Elements of Persuasion: Writing and Critical Analysis

## Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to present strategies that will help high school students communicate opinions on issues of the day, by way of Op/Ed or persuasive essays. Successful examples of this essay genre are crafted in a manner that is accurate, clear, concise, logical, convincing, and respectful of opposing arguments.

Using articles in **Points of View Reference Source**, teachers will draw from published materials for students to analyze and model as practice in this genre. This lesson plan may be modified, and articles substituted as needed.

## Curriculum Standards

In addition to aligning with Common Core State Standards (Appendix C), this lesson plan provides opportunities for students to achieve several of the learning competencies described in AASL's [National School Library Standards](#).

## Objectives

Students will ...

- read, analyze and incorporate information from news sources for developing persuasive essays
- improve persuasive communication skills, leading to a more organized presentation of thoughts
- gain skills in research, critical analysis, and weighing of evidence, to fashion informed opinions and judgments
- demonstrate greater self-confidence stating opinions, through command of material
- demonstrate ability to thoughtfully examine, assess and reflect on personal ideas and beliefs

## Skills Practiced

- Critical analysis
- Writing
- Forming opinions
- Researching current events
- Posing an argument of discussion

## Suggested Articles

1. "The Potential of Stem Cell Research," by John Pearson
2. "The Promises and Pitfalls of Stem Cell Research," by Kris Clouthier

Note: The articles listed here are part of the *Points of View* series by Great Neck Publishing. They are available for use with this guide.

## Activities

1. Introduce the genre of the persuasive essay. Point out that, by definition, it is an essay presenting a convincing argument in favor of or in opposition to an issue in debate. Indicate examples of persuasive essays, such as Op/Ed pieces in the newspaper, magazine articles by an editor-at-large, and the text of political and diplomatic speeches (making the case for war in Iraq at the U.N., for example).  
  
What makes an opinion essay different from a report? The answer is bias, presented as a carefully argued point of view. It would be helpful to clarify the definition of *argument* as a supported presentation of a point of view. In this genre, arguments are not heated conflicts. They are opinions.
2. Tell students that they will examine examples of the genre and create their own work. To encourage them in their efforts, remind them that they already possess persuasive strengths in analyzing and arguing everyday issues. They express and try to convince others of their opinions on fashion, sports, current events, entertainment, classes, and food. Present an example: You want to go to a friend's house after school and stay for dinner. Your parents are concerned you might not be able to do that and get your homework done. What do you do to persuade them to see it your way?
  - a. Confront the issue
  - b. Make your plea
  - c. State your case
  - d. Present supporting evidence
  - e. Counter their opposition with rebuttal and/or additional information, anecdote, etc.
  - f. Don't change the subject
  - g. Sum up your case

*That is the essence of a viewpoint essay.*

3. Instruct students that the keys to an effective persuasive essay are organization and support. Some refer to the structure by the acronym POSSE, which stands for:

**P**osition/Introduction

**O**rganization

**S**upport

**S**yle

**E**ffective Conclusion

Others break it down as an **introduction/thesis statement, the body, and conclusion**. Regardless of the presentation, an effective opinion or persuasive essay must accomplish the following:

- Clearly state the issue to be debated
- State a main point of argument
- Communicate the gist of that argument, with supporting evidence, and informed rebuttal of opposing views

## Tackling the Thesis

1. Present the following information: The thesis presents the opinion and purpose statement. It is the foundation of the essay. All arguments, rebuttal and evidence should point to it. In it, one states the issue of debate, the position one takes on it, and its defense. It answers the questions: What are you going to discuss, and how will you argue and support your views? Take the time to clarify the answers to those questions before you write. This clarity is especially important if a writer is asked to argue for a viewpoint that counters his/her opinion. Generally, the thesis statement should be one or two sentences in length.
2. Hand out copies of a Viewpoint Essay Worksheet (found at the end of the unit), and copies of “The Promises and Pitfalls of Stem Cell Research,” By Kris Clouthier. This article is found on the EBSCO database Points of View Reference Source. (Simply type “Clouthier AND stem cell” into the search box and hit enter or click the magnifying glass icon to initiate the search.) Have students read the article title and first paragraph. The information in italicized text below represents the thesis of this essay.

### ***The Promises and Pitfalls of Stem Cell Research***

*Stem-cell research has much to offer in the way of treatments, or even cures, for devastating diseases and injuries. However, research using human embryonic stem cells -- which can be acquired only by destroying a living, human embryo -- must not be condoned, or paid for, by the United States government. Instead, federal funding should go to researching adult stem cells, which have already proved themselves useful in treating patients and can be obtained without destroying lives.*

[By Kris Clouthier. Copyright of **Points of View: Stem Cell Research** is the property of Great Neck Publishing, and its content may not be copied or e-mailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder’s express written permission. However, users may print, download, or e-mail articles for individual use.]

3. Analyzing the Thesis: Ask students to identify the “**what**” and the “**how**” of the statement.

**What:** “*Stem-cell research has much to offer in the way of treatments, or even cures, for devastating diseases and injuries. However, research using human embryonic stem cells -- which can be acquired only by destroying a living, human embryo -- must not be condoned, or paid for, by the United States government.*” Here the author answers the questions: What is the issue? What is the author’s view on it?

**How:** “*Instead, federal funding should go to researching adult stem cells, which have already proved themselves useful in treating patients, and can be obtained without destroying lives.*” Here, the author presents the approach she will take to argue against stem-cell research. Her rebuttal and supporting evidence will follow this schema.

4. Analyzing the Body of the Argument: The body of the essay develops the thesis argument to give weight to the author’s viewpoint and advance the argument with each paragraph. Paragraphs should illustrate the organized flow of and progression of thought; each one set off by a cohesive topic sentence. Topic sentences are like beacons, guiding readers with each point in the argument, and leading them steadily to the conclusion.

Evidence that the body is fit (See Appendix B for printable version):

- The author demonstrates an understanding of the opposing arguments relating to the issue. An understanding of the arguments makes one better equipped to persuade someone to accept a view.
  - The author counters the arguments with a rebuttal of the viewpoints, using relevant evidence, and sound, respectful analysis. There should be no personal attacks against an author, and no extreme or inflammatory language.
  - There is a logical flow of discourse. The essay is organized and does not digress from the point by pursuing insignificant details.
  - A convincing argument is made; the essay is more than a listing of facts.
  - Do all paragraphs work together to support the essay’s thesis?
5. Using the Points of View Reference Source article text shown here, or another of your choice, have students read the entire article then re-examine the thesis statement. Next, present the following excerpts from the essay body as examples that support the thesis.

*“Biologically, every embryo -- with its 46 human chromosomes containing the full genetic code -- represents a human life. Rather than being destroyed for research, IVF embryos could be donated for adoption by infertile couples. Several children conceived in this manner are alive today, thanks to the Snowflakes Embryo Adoption Program.*

*Initially, most scientists said that IVF embryos -- of which there are tens of thousands in the United States -- would provide plenty of stem cells for their research. However, within a few years, some private firms, such as the Jones Institute in New York, began creating embryos for the sole purpose of destroying them to get their stem cells. Others, such as Advanced Cell Technology in Massachusetts, use cloning techniques to create embryos for stem cells. It seems that the demand for more and more of these cells -- and hence the need to destroy human life solely for research -- will never be satisfied.*

*For these reasons, Congress banned federal funding for research involving the destruction of human embryos beginning in 1996. In one of his first televised speeches to the nation, President George W. Bush announced a permanent ban on such funding. Bush's policy does, however, allow funding for 71 existing embryonic stem cell lines, where the life and death decision has already been made.*

*To date, embryonic stem cell research has not produced any new treatments for patients, although it might "at some point in the future," according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Studies in humans are at least three to five years away. In one recent study, 20 percent of animals injected with embryonic stem cells developed untreatable brain tumors. It seems that the ease with which these cells transform may also mean they are harder to control in the body. Indeed, some scientists now admit that the initial fervor over embryonic stem cell research was based on speculation, rather than scientific fact."*

Direct students to highlight article text that satisfies the criteria in the first points of #4 above. Also ask them to look for any flaw in the argument, a crack in the armor, if you will. Is evidence supported? Are the points made relevant to the issue? Does the argument flow from point to point?

6. **Signature Style – Language Analysis:** What words does the author use to argue the point and make the essay a cohesive whole? See text examples below the word lists immediately following. Direct students to highlight such phrases in the selected articles, with a different color.

#### Effective phrases for transition

- Regarding
- Admittedly
- Consequently
- As a result
- Ultimately
- According to
- For this reason

#### Phrases for Emphasis

- Moreover
- Furthermore
- In fact
- Indeed
- Additionally
- For example
- As a matter of fact

#### Word for Counterpoint

- Conversely
- On the other hand

- However
- Nevertheless
- Notwithstanding
- Nonetheless
- Yet
- Despite
- Although
- Instead

**Examples from the text**

- *Initially, most scientists said...*
- *However, within a few years...*
- *Bush's policy does, however, allow funding for...*
- *For these reasons, Congress banned federal funding...*
- *Indeed, some scientists now admit...*

7. **Conclusion, The Big Finish:** In the conclusion, one should find a restatement of the thesis and argument, with supporting detail. An author's goal in writing a conclusion is to have the last word, and have it effectively, leaving the reader with the strongest impression of the point made.
8. **Point, Counterpoint:** Repeat the activities listed above for the second suggested article, "The Potential of Stem Cell Research," by John Pearson, or another chosen essay. After critiquing both essays, students should write a paper in which they identify the essay they believe to have been more persuasive and offer examples to support their thoughts.

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## Appendix A: Viewpoint Essay Analysis Worksheet

### Introduction

Hook: \_\_\_\_\_

(what gets your attention)

Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_

How: \_\_\_\_\_

### Body

Topic Sentence 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic Sentence 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic Sentence 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Evidence 3: \_\_\_\_\_

### Conclusion

Summary of main points:

\_\_\_\_\_

Big picture impact:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Essay Body Fitness Testing

- Does the author demonstrate an understanding of the opposing arguments relating to the issue? Y/N
- Does the author counter the arguments with a rebuttal? Y/N • Are remarks thoughtful and respectful? Y/N
- Is the essay organized? Y/N • Is the essay convincing? Y/N
- Do all paragraphs work together to support the essay's thesis? Y/N
- Is the conclusion sound and strong? Y/N



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## Appendix C: Common Core State Standards

This lesson plan supports the following Common Core State Standards:

### **English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Informational Text » Grade 11-12**

#### ***Craft and Structure:***

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.5: Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

### **English Language Arts Standards » Writing » Grade 11-12**

#### ***Text Types and Purposes:***

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (Also see 11-12.1A through 11-12.1E)

### **English Language Arts Standards » Language » Grade 11-12**

#### ***Conventions of Standard English***

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.