Argument Critique

In this activity, students identify the parts of argument in written texts. You can return to this activity throughout the term.

Materials

You need written arguments for students to analyze. Look for familiar texts that students don’t usually think of as arguments, such as the Declaration of Independence, or texts discussing current issues, such as columns or op-ed pieces—in addition to standards such as the New York Times and Wall Street Journal, check out publications like Rolling Stone, the Economist, and the Manchester Guardian. If your readings include academic arguments shorter than five printed pages, you can use one of those. If possible, add line numbers in the margin. Also make copies of the Argument Boxes and the worksheet below.

Process

1. Assign students to fill out the Argument Boxes as homework. If the text has line numbers, they can put those in the boxes.

2. Put students in groups of three to critique the argument by answering the questions on the worksheet (one worksheet per group). Or you can assign the critique worksheet as homework and have students share their responses in groups before they report to the class as a whole.

3. Reconvene the class to share their critiques. Have them discuss how the writer might have improved the argument.

Worksheet

1. Does the writer present evidence for each reason?
   Do you accept the evidence as evidence?
If you accept the evidence, is it sufficient evidence for you?
Can you imagine other evidence that you would accept? What would that be?

2 Do the reasons support the claim well enough for you to accept it?

Does each reason support the claim to some degree?
Can you imagine other reasons that might lead you to accept the claim? What would they be?

3 Does the writer acknowledge objections or alternatives?
If so, how respectfully does the writer treat those holding those other views?
Do you accept the responses?
If there are no acknowledgements, can you think of any major objections?
Are those objections strong enough to undermine the argument?

4 Do you accept the claim?
If so, did you already believe it or did the writer change your mind?
If you do not accept the claim, do you accept the argument as at least reasonable?

5 List the most important factors from questions 1-3 that led to your answers in 4.