Instructional Module 1: At – A – Glance

Evaluating a Persuasive Essay

Overview
In this module, students will engage in instructional conversations to help them make meaning of the structure and content of authors’ arguments organized in a problem-solution organizational pattern. Students will examine and analyze writing models and commentaries and use graphic organizers to identify and evaluate authors’ evidence.

Standards Addressed
R 2.8 Evaluate the credibility of an author’s argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author’s intent affects the structure and tone of the text (e.g., in professional journals, editorials, political speeches, primary source material).

Teacher Resources

Texts
• A Writer’s Model – “Music to Whose Ears?”
• A Writer’s Model – “Licensed AND Safe!”

Graphic Organizers
• Determining the Credibility of an Author’s Argument
• Problem-Solution Pattern

Additional Resources
• Instructional Conversations – Discussion Group Variations
• Writing a Persuasive Essay
• Evaluating a Persuasive Essay

Suggested Culminating Task
Students will evaluate the credibility of an author’s argument or defense of a claim by writing a persuasive essay that critiques the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of the evidence, and the way in which the author’s intent affects the structure and tone of the text. This task can also be presented in a persuasive oral presentation.
Instructional Module 1: At – A – Glance

Text Summaries

Summary of “Music to Whose Ears”: In this problem-solution essay, the author makes and defends a position on a law that bans car speakers over a certain size and sets limits on speaker volume levels. The author explains three reasons why the law is “misguided and unfair” and concludes with a call to action.

Summary of “Licensed AND Safe!”: In this problem-solution essay, the author states and defends a solution to the problem of poor driving practices among teenagers. The author describes the causes and effects of this problem, then outlines the solutions suggested by public officials, and finally presents an original solution and call to action by proposing that students form their own “safe driving clubs.”
Instructional Module 1
Evaluating a Persuasive Essay - Problem-Solution

Instructional Focus
R 2.8 Evaluate the credibility of an author's argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author's intent affects the structure and tone of the text.

Instructional Focus
"Music to Whose Ears?" and "Licensed AND Safe" are persuasive essays. The first essay proposes that there should be no laws to limit the noise levels coming from car stereos. The second one claims that teens can take action to improve their peers' driving skill. Both are problem-solution essays.

Students will engage in instructional conversations to help them make meaning of the structure and content of argument. These instructional conversations will lay a foundation for the knowledge that students will use throughout the first Instructional Component.

Teachers are encouraged to use the Instructional Conversations Discussion Group Variations as they work with their students.

Teachers may use the various charts and graphic organizers attached to this section throughout the unit.

Instructional Application
Students will evaluate the credibility of an author's argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author's intent affects the structure and tone of the text.
Music to Whose Ears?

Warm spring weather had finally arrived. I got in the passenger seat of my brother’s car. He got in the driver’s seat. We rolled down the windows, and he popped a CD in the stereo, turned up the volume, and headed out for the lake. This is a recipe for a great feeling and harmless fun, right? Some state senators do not think so. They have proposed a law that bans car speakers above a certain size and sets legal volume levels. This law is misguided and unfair. State government should not create a law to limit the noise levels coming from car stereos.

Some people may think that a law should be passed because they believe loud car stereos are a public nuisance—or even dangerous. However, existing state laws already cover the problem of loud noises. According to Richard Tharpe, Hamilton County sheriff, “Right now we can arrest people for disturbing the peace, and state law even sets noise pollution levels. So a new law just doesn’t seem necessary.” In addition, if a stereo causes a traffic accident—which Tharpe notes is uncommon and hard to prove—the driver can be charged. However, in the past five years, only one such accident has been reported. To institute the proposed law, then, is simply unnecessary.

Another reason the legislature should vote down this proposal is that it will add to the burden of already overworked police. A number of towns and cities in the state have admitted to staffing shortages. In fact, Deputy Dennis Marquez, the father of a close friend, has had to work double shifts the last six months in order to ensure that all patrols are covered. According to Deputy Marquez, this shortage results from officers spending too much of their time enforcing misdemeanor laws similar to the proposed ban on loud car stereos. Just because serious crime is no longer on the rise, the police should not have to add another misdemeanor to their workload. Do they really have time to point decibel monitors at passing cars?

The most compelling reason to put a halt to this proposal is that setting legal limits on the volume of car stereos is a form of discrimination. After all, many other public noises are just as loud. Parades and rallies often use high-volume sound trucks. Radio stations broadcast live from stores and parking lots. Loudspeakers, bands, and cheering crowds at football games can be heard for blocks. For example, the cheering during last week’s victorious game against the Tigers could be heard as far away as 135th Street. Also, what about the noise from tools? I have been awakened from a peaceful sleep on many Saturday mornings by neighbors’ lawnmowers, yet I see no proposals for laws to regulate noise made under these circumstances. Why should car stereos be singled out?

We all want our streets to be calm and safe, but the senators’ approach is misguided. An existing law already addresses the problem, and creating a new one would cause more work for police officers. In addition, the new law would not take into account other noises. A law restricting the volume of car stereos is unnecessary and unfair, and each of us should write or call our legislators to say so.
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Licensed AND Safe!

Teenagers, has something like this happened to you? You are driving through the neighborhood in your car, talking to your friends and changing the radio station. As you round a corner, a car that you didn’t see crashes into you with a terrifying crunch! Everyone is okay, but the car is a wreck. While this unfortunate scenario is all too common for teenage drivers, it is a problem that can be solved. Teens can take action to correct their poor driving practices by forming driving safety clubs that increase teens’ awareness of driving safety.

The problem of poor driving practices is not a new one for teens, nor is it limited to one area of the country. Although national studies show that teenage males may be more prone to accidents involving speed, a large percentage of fatal accidents for teen passengers occur with both male and female teenage drivers. Such a problem puts everyone at risk, affecting parents, teenagers, police, insurance companies, and the general public.

Why is this problem occurring? Of all the factors contributing to teens’ poor safety record, a lack of driving experience is probably the leading cause of accidents involving teenagers. Frank Rodriguez, driving instructor for All Right Driving School, says, “A newly licensed driver needs about six months of regular, non-stress driving to develop confidence and skills.” Once licensed, however, teens are often too unfamiliar with the roads and too distracted by conversation, food, music, and cell phones to drive safely. Studies show that half of all teenage drivers have an accident within a year of getting a license, and more than six thousand teenagers die in auto accidents every year.

The solutions offered for this problem vary widely. Many lawmakers are pushing for a graduated licensing program to grant driving privileges over several months. Other lawmakers simply want to raise the driving age to eighteen, an age at which they believe teenagers will be more responsible. However, these solutions don’t satisfy the multitude of mature, safe teenage drivers who desire freedom and depend on their cars for transportation to work or school. For those teens, raising the driving age or complicating the licensing requirements is more of a punishment than a solution to a problem.

Teens can best address the problem of their poor driving practices by forming safe driving clubs. Such clubs would increase teen drivers’ awareness of safe driving practices. When I joined the Safe Driving for Teens Club, I helped print and distribute local street maps and brochures with tips for good driving habits. My club also developed an informative Web page with statistics about teenage driving, suggestions for parental supervision of teen driving, and advice for teens about driving in hazardous conditions. Our Web page received two community service awards. Establishing safe driving clubs for teens is also the right thing to do. Clubs like Safe Driving for Teens encourage teens to be safe drivers. More clubs like these should be started in school districts around the nation.

The problem of poor teenage driving practices is a serious one, but it can be reckoned with by the student community. If you don’t want to see yourself or a friend hurt in an accident, or wait until you’re eighteen to drive, join an organization dedicated to increasing and improving teen responsibility on the road. By coming together to share and spread information on responsible driving, we can all work to make our communities safer places to live and drive.
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Holt Elements of Literature, Fourth Course, online supplemental materials
### Instructional Conversations
#### Discussion Group Variations

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Instructional Application</th>
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<tr>
<td>Promote active learning</td>
<td><strong>Think-pair-share.</strong> This simple technique promotes active learning. Students are encouraged to first write their ideas or thoughts about a topic, illustration, or text and then discuss them with a partner. Finally, the teacher asks students to share their responses with the class.</td>
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<td>Encourage participation</td>
<td><strong>Write-draw-discuss.</strong> This technique encourages participation, allowing students to assimilate new information creatively. Students first write to clarify ideas and then create an illustration or drawing. Students share responses and drawings with a partner after several minutes. Finally, the teacher asks students to share responses and displays a few examples.</td>
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<td>Understand basic discussion techniques</td>
<td><strong>Fishbowl.</strong> This technique helps students understand basic discussion techniques, such as active listening, generating discussion from others’ comments, and asking one another questions for clarification. A small group in an inner circle carries on a discussion while the students in the outer circle observe. During the discussion, ask the outside circle of observers to note how the group participants manage to keep the discussion on one another’s thinking. After the discussion, reverse the roles of students in the inner and outer circles and continue the discussion. Use this procedure frequently until students have mastered basic processes and can conduct independent discussions for at least 15 to 20 minutes.</td>
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<td>Promote learning by giving students the task of teaching</td>
<td><strong>Jigsaw.</strong> This highly structured approach promotes learning by giving students the task of teaching. After students have finished reading a text, divide participants into home groups. Assign each person in each home group an “expert” number (for example, 1 through 5) and explain that these numbers correspond to important sections of material they have just read. Students meet in the “expert” groups (that correspond to the number they were assigned) to reread, discuss, and master a section of the text and determine how best to teach the material to their home groups. Experts return to home groups, and each home group member teaches the content she or he learned in the expert group.</td>
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To determine the credibility, or believability, of an author’s argument, consider the following:

Claim or opinion

- The whole idea of what the writer is saying
- Often stated in the form of a generalization, a broad statement that covers many situations

Support

- Logical appeals — convincing reasons and evidence
  - Reasons: statements that explain why the author holds an opinion
  - Evidence: specific information that backs up a reason; must be relevant (directly and logically related to the reason). Every generalization should be backed up by evidence.
    - Facts
    - Statistics (number facts)
    - Examples
    - Quotations or opinions by experts

- Emotional appeals — appeal to the heart rather than the intellect
  - Stir feelings such as happiness or anger in readers
  - Used because authors know that emotions may override reason
  - Be wary of authors who mainly use emotional appeals
    - Loaded words — words with strong emotional connotations, or associations
    - Anecdotes — brief stories or personal accounts of an event

- Ethical appeals — appeal to one’s sense of right and wrong

Comprehensiveness of support

- Author must provide sufficient evidence to back up generalizations and make argument convincing
- If argument filled with emotional appeals but no relevant evidence, it is possible there is no real evidence to support the author’s claim

Author’s intent or purpose

- Does author present a reasoned, objective-sounding argument?
- Does author have biased interest in topic?

Author’s tone

- Author’s intent affects tone — author’s attitude toward his/her subject
- Angry tone indicates author’s argument probably based more on feeling than on evidence

* Adapted from Holt Literature & Language Arts, Fourth Course
Directions: In groups of 3 or 4, discuss and answer the following questions for “Music to Whose Ears?” and “Licensed AND Safe.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the writer’s position?</td>
<td>1. What does the writer include in Paragraph 1?</td>
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<td>2. What reasons does the writer give?</td>
<td>2. What does the writer include in paragraph 2?</td>
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<td>3. How does the writer support the reasons?</td>
<td>3. What does the writer include in paragraph 3?</td>
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<td>4. Give an example of a reason and explain the evidence that supports it.</td>
<td>4. What does the writer include in paragraph 4?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. What is a counter-argument to the writer’s opinion?</td>
<td>5. Did the writer provide a counter-argument? If so, what is it?</td>
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<td>6. What is the writer’s intent?</td>
<td>6. What does the writer include in the final paragraph?</td>
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<td>7. Explain the writer’s tone. (Evidence)</td>
<td>7. What structure does the writer use (Cause-effect or Problem-solution)?</td>
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Evaluation

1. Is the writer’s position credible? Why/why not?
2. Does the writer provide precise and relevant evidence?
3. Is the writer’s intent clear?
4. Are there gaps in the evidence? What are they and what if anything should be added?
5. How persuasive is this essay?

Extension

Directions: Write a persuasive essay that discredits the writer’s opinions. Defend your position with precise and relevant evidence. Revise your essay using the questions listed above in content, structure and evaluation.
Determining the Credibility of an Author's Argument

Evidence is specific information or proof that supports the reasons/assertions in an argument. Evidence must be precise and relevant, clearly related to the argument. Types of evidence include: analogies, anecdotes, case studies, definitions, expert opinions, expressions of commonly held beliefs, facts, hypotheses, quotations, scenarios. Rhetorical devices (appeals to emotion, ethical beliefs, and logic) are also used to support an author's position.

Directions: Determine the author's position for the passage you read. Complete the chart below. Then answer the questions that follow.

Author's Position: ____________________________

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<th>Types of Evidence</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Effect</th>
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What would be an appropriate counter-argument? ____________________________

What is your evaluation of the author's argument? ____________________________

________________________________________

IC1-65
**Problem-Solution (Problem-Solution Pattern)**

**Thesis Statement (includes problem):**

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<th>Solution 1:</th>
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**Conclusion:**

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Los Angeles Unified School District

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