Overview
The purpose of this guide is to present strategies that will help 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 from the Opinions/Viewpoints topic dropdown heading in TOPICsearch, teachers will draw from published materials for students to analyze and model as practice in this genre.

Standards
McREL Language Arts Standard and Benchmarks (3rd Ed.)
  Writing Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
  Reading Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

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


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 in an attempt to persuade them to see it your way?

Confront the issue
Make your plea
State your case
Present supporting evidence
Counter their opposition with rebuttal and/or additional information, anecdote, etc.
Don’t change the subject
Sum up your case

That is the essence of a viewpoint essay.

3. Identifying the Structure of Persuasion
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: Position/Introduction, Organization, Support, Style, Effective Conclusion

Others set 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

3A. Present the following information about the thesis:

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 in the event that a writer is asked to argue for a viewpoint that counters his/her personal opinion. Generally, the thesis statement should be one or two sentences in length.

3B. 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 EBSCOhost database TOPICsearch. Select Opinions/Viewpoints on the database’s Topic dropdown, and enter the keywords stem cell.

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._
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.

3C. Analyzing the Body of the Argument

The body of the essay develops the thesis argument in order 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:

- 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 particular 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 of the paragraphs work together to support the essay’s thesis?

Using the TOPICsearch article text shown here, or another of your choice, have students read the entire article, then reexamine 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.”

3D. Direct students to highlight article text that satisfies the criteria in the first points of C 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?

3E. 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,
In fact, Indeed
Additionally
For example
In point of fact
As a matter of fact

Words 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...

3F. 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.

3G. 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.

3H. 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.

4. For the Student: Now, It’s Your Turn

The Natick, Massachusetts school system presents a useful and detailed template for writing persuasive essays that can be found at:
http://www.natick.k12.ma.us/schools/wilson/webquest/norton/internet_webquest/esaydesc.html

Resources
Viewpoint Essay Analysis Worksheet

Thesis:
What:____________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________
How:____________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________

Body:
Topic Sentence 1
_________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
Topic Sentence 2
_________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________ 
Topic Sentence 3
_________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________ 
Topic Sentence 4
_________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________ 
Topic Sentence 5
_________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________ 

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 of the paragraphs work together to support the essay’s thesis? Y/N

Is the conclusion sound and strong? Y/N