

Texts and Arguments

Relevance

- Is the material relevant to my work?
- Is the text general or specific?
- Does it provide a broad overview or does it focus on only part of my task?
- When was the text published?

*You are in your **first year at university** and you are asked to write an essay entitled “Is the Antarctic (South polar) ice sheet retreating?” Decide whether each of the sources below is:*

- 1) *Relevant but aimed at too low a level for university use*
 - 2) *Not geographically relevant*
 - 3) *Probably too specialized and technical*
 - 4) *Relevant, recent and probably aimed at an appropriate scholarly level*
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- a) A recent, peer-reviewed article on fluctuations in area of the North polar ice sheet.
 - b) A recent article titled “Disappearing Antarctic Ice”, written by a scientific institute and aimed at school pupils aged 14-16.
 - c) A recent review article in a leading scientific journal, focusing on the decreasing area of Antarctic summer sea ice.
 - d) An up-to-date technical article on improving the equipment used for measuring the thickness of sheet ice.

Text authority

- Are the authors from an organization that is well recognized?
- Do the authors have credibility in their field?
- Does the publication give its source of information?
- Does the text come from a peer-reviewed journal? (Be careful of predatory practices!)

You are asked to write a 1.500-word assignment on the benefits and potential dangers of genetically-modified (GM) crops. Which sources of information below are likely to be appropriate (A), in terms of being authoritative for use as a source for the essay? Which are likely to be inappropriate (I)?

- a) A Wikipedia article on GM crops.
- b) A review article on GM crops by the Royal Society (the UK’s national academy of science).
- c) A recent article on GM crops published in the academic journal *Nature*.
- d) An article on the latest GM crops inventions on the product page of a GM crops supplier.
- e) A blog campaigning against the spread of GM crops.

Text balance and bias

- Does the author or publisher hold a particular view on the subject? Can you identify it?
- Is the publication sponsored by a person or organization that takes a particular stance?
- Is the author a member of a company or organization related to the text topic?
- Why was the publication produced?

Imagine you were asked to write the essay “The Effect of Sunlight on the Skin. How Much is Enough?” This is a question with a potentially complex answer.

Sunlight can have positive effects (e.g. promoting vitamin D synthesis in the skin or raising a person’s psychological mood) and potentially harmful ones (e.g. triggering skin cancer). People from different ethnic backgrounds have skin with different sensitivities to sunlight, and the pattern of solar radiation (intensity, hours of daylight per day, and so on) varies across the world.

Which of the sources below is likely to favor a positive view of the value of sunlight, a negative view, or a balanced view?

- a) The website for a manufacturer of suntanning beds.
- b) The collection of related articles published on the British Broadcasting Corporation’s (BBC’s) news, nature and science webpages
- c) A consumer website for those who have recovered from surgery for skin cancer
- d) The website for a ‘healthy lifestyle’ magazine.
- e) The website for a fashion magazine.
- f) A blog of a dermatologist.

Working with Text – Paragraphs and Structure

- **Structure in a text is important. A well-structured text (or speech) is more understandable and more persuasive than a text with poor structure**
- **Important parts:**
 - **Introduction**
 - **Thesis**
 - **Main body**
 - **Conclusion**
 - **Topic sentence**
 - **Explanation of the topic sentence**
 - **The problem**
 - **Further discussion of the problem**
 - **Concluding sentence**
- **When comparing or contrasting, the following structures are often employed:**
 - A) The block method**
 - B) The point-by-point method**

- **Some common structures of research papers in general academia:**

Structure A	Structure B	Structure C
- <i>Supporting argument 1</i> Evidence and explanation against	- <i>Supporting argument 1</i> Evidence and explanation for	- <i>Supporting argument 1</i> Evidence and explanation against
- <i>Supporting argument 2</i> Evidence and explanation for	- <i>Supporting argument 2</i> Evidence and explanation against	- <i>Supporting arguments 2 and 3</i> Evidence and explanation for
- <i>Evaluation in favor of supporting argument 2</i>	- <i>Supporting argument 3</i> Evidence and explanation against	- <i>Evaluation in favor of supporting arguments 2 and 3</i>
	- <i>Evaluation in favor of supporting argument 1</i>	

2) Look at the following outline of a body paragraph. Work in groups and discuss whether you agree with the way the arguments, evidence, and explanation are synthesized or combined in the outline. Give reasons and examples

- Support argument 1 – giving vouchers to encourage people to buy healthy food
- Evidence and explanation against – financial approach: incentive / what is to stop people selling vouchers for less money? / buy more healthy foods / short-term solution / wasteful initiative
- Supporting argument 2 – encouraging engagement with local people through groups and community action
- Evidence and explanation for – group action to improve conditions / individuals follow / people with different experts / responsibility for own actions / growing own food / long-term behavior change
- Evaluation in favor of 2 – long-term behavior change

3) Read the introduction and body paragraph 1 of an essay. Answer the questions below.

Introduction

The world we live in is suffering from the consequences of our lifestyles, which are becoming essentially more selfish. This phenomenon is not restricted to any one country or region of the world. For the purposes of this essay, lifestyle is defined as the way in which a person or a community, or group of people, lives and works, and includes not just diet and exercise, but also living conditions, general consumption, financial and social behavior; in fact, every action that is involved in an individual's life. A considerable amount of research has been done into persuading people to adapt their lives and lead more responsible lifestyles and there is a wealth of literature as to strategies to engage communities to do so. This essay argues that the most effective way to involve people in making decisions about their lives is not through financial inducement or penalties, but through strategies that engage not just individuals but also communities and families in taking responsibility for their actions.

Body paragraph 1

A recent government initiative in the UK suggests giving individuals £50 vouchers to buy healthy goods at participating outlets. This is perhaps a waste of public money. Harrison (2010, p. 025) claims that this is not an effective use of public funds, as it is open to abuse. For example, supposing people

want cash rather than vouchers. The vouchers can be sold for less than their full value. Further, if the value of eating healthily is not understood, then giving out vouchers is hardly likely to have any lasting effect. Johnson (2001, pp. 126-7) criticizes such schemes for their focus on short-termism and not dealing with the issue. Perhaps, as Gonzalez and Parker (2003, p.074) propose, a better option would be community involvement, not just individual involvement. If the people around an individual or group like a family or community take action to improve their conditions, an individual is then more likely to follow, as Cooper (2007, p.204) points out. Let us imagine people in a community are invited to a local meeting with various experts on changing behavior. They can be shown how to take responsibility for their own behavior, through perhaps growing their own healthy food communally with children and adults being involved. With proper encouragement and support, this strategy is much more likely to lead to long-term behavior change than the distribution of vouchers.

- 1) Identify the thesis statement in the introduction.
- 2) Is the writer arguing for or against financial incentives?
- 3) Does the thesis statement present the writer's stance regarding the overall argument clearly and effectively? Give evidence.
- 4) Identify the approaches the writer uses in their argument in body paragraph 1. Match them to the list in exercise 1.
- 5) Identify and describe in your own words the evidence and explanation for each approach.

4) Evaluate the introduction and body paragraph 1 of the essay above using the questions below.

- 1) Does the writer state their main argument and summarize the different ideas well?
- 2) Is the statement of the overall argument clear? Give evidence.
- 3) How clear are the supporting arguments in body paragraph 1? Give evidence.
- 4) How is the main argument linked with the thesis statement?
- 5) Do you agree with the writer's main argument? Are you persuaded by the argument? Give reasons.