

UNIT 1

Argumentative Essay

STEP

1

ANALYZE THE MODEL

Evaluate an essay on whether students should learn a second language.

STEP

2

PRACTICE THE TASK

Write an essay about the requirement for students to stay in school until the age of 18.

STEP

3

PERFORM THE TASK

Write an essay on the prosecution of individuals for statements they make on social media.

Imagine you and your best friend are arguing about something. You feel that you are right, and she thinks she is correct. Did you give her reasons to prove you were right? Did she give reasons to support her thinking? Did she end up changing her opinion, or did you change yours?

You can write an argument too. You present your claim in writing, then give reasons and evidence for your point of view. What makes an argumentative essay “argumentative” is how you anticipate an opposing view, and refute it. Your goal in writing a formal argumentative essay is to convince your audience (the reader) to agree with your point of view.

IN THIS UNIT, you will learn how to write an argumentative essay that is based on your close reading and analysis of several relevant sources. You will learn a step-by-step approach to stating a claim—and then organizing your essay to support your claim in a clear and logical way.

Source Materials for Step 1

The following texts were used by Mr. Columbo's student, Adeline Jones, as sources for her essay, "Teach It Well, or Don't Teach It at All." As you read, make notes in the side columns and underline information you find useful.

NOTES

Why Learn Another Language?

by Samantha Roberts

Asia has the largest percentage of the world's population, followed by Africa and Europe. Comparatively, North America—meaning Mexico, Canada, and the United States—has a smaller population. Despite this, many countries outside of the United States require their children to learn another language, frequently English.



A Chinese student studying English.

We Need a Global Conversation

In the United States, speaking another language is not a requirement, but it should be. While many countries throughout the world model themselves on America, be it through fashion, music, or movies, America does not respond in kind.

Take China, for example. There are more Chinese students learning English as their second language than there are English speakers in the world. If the United States wants to hold up its end of the cross-cultural conversation, having students learn a second language must become a priority.

The World Is Getting Smaller

NOTES

Some might argue that it is not worthwhile to learn another language because the rest of the world is learning English. This may have been an acceptable solution in the past, but in recent years, with advancements in technology, the world is becoming better connected. More and more, information on the Internet is available in multiple languages, and information isn't confined to being shared only from English publications. And despite the number of people who learn English, there will always be a demand for Americans who speak foreign languages, especially in law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Learning, Culture, and Communication Are Key

Learning a language improves students' vocabulary skills. When they learn the grammar rules for a foreign language, students' English grammar improves. It helps them stimulate their memory, as well. When learning a new language, the learner must pay attention to inflections in speech. Developing qualities such as patience and close attention to detail benefits all learning, not just language acquisition.

Close Read

Cite two pieces of text evidence that respond to the counterargument that Americans do not need to learn a second language because the rest of the world is learning English.

NOTES

In the process of learning a language, students are exposed to another culture. This exposure can result in a sensitivity to people different from oneself, another important quality that we want to cultivate in our youth.

If a second language is taught to children early enough, in kindergarten or first grade, it will not be regarded as the burdensome requirement it often becomes when started later in middle school. Study abroad programs in colleges could become more about experiencing the culture and less about learning the language through immersion.

Students who learn a second language as children grow up to be adults who are clear communicators. Not having to rely on an interpreter to get your message across is an incredible asset in the business world.

If we do not have our children learn a second language, we run the risk of losing our place in the world as a global leader.

NOTES

Why Waste Time on a Foreign Language?

by Jay Matthews

My online discussion group recently exchanged verbal blows over foreign language courses in high school. Most of us defended the conventional wisdom. Learning another language improves cognitive development, we said. It enhances academic skills, encourages a sense of the wider world and looks good to colleges.

But the dissenters scored some points. "It is a waste of time and money in our schools," said a parent who remembered seeing empty language lab stalls. A high school teacher said that "language study is complete nonsense for most people. I'd wager close to 80 percent of kids taking foreign languages in high school do so because they have to."

NOTES

The reason why a majority of high school students take foreign languages — Spanish is the most popular choice — is that selective colleges often require them.

How much do they learn? There is little evidence that many students achieve much fluency in high school.

Because much of the world is striving to learn English, Americans wonder why they should bother to learn other languages. We talk about the importance of foreign language learning to our national security, but we don't mean it. If we need speakers of exotic tongues, we import them.

We tell our children that their Spanish or Russian or Arabic or Chinese studies are important. But we give them high grades for minimal progress. Most colleges don't require that applicants have more than two years' study. And from what I can see, based on what actually happens in high schools, learning a foreign language often is a waste of time.

Discuss and Decide

You have now read two sources about the importance of learning another language in school. Should students be required to learn a language besides English? Cite evidence from the sources in your discussion.

Analyze a Student Model for Step 1

Read Adeline's argumentative essay. The red side notes are the comments that her teacher, Mr. Columbo, wrote.

Adeline Jones
Mr. Columbo
English 8
March 18

Teach It Well, or Don't Teach It at All

Strong opening.

Your claim is clear.

*True, we hope that will
change in the future.*

Excellent reasoning.

There is no doubt that being able to speak a second language is a huge benefit. The problem is that most students do not become fluent taking language classes in high school. Unless you have a gift for languages and continue your studies, you will probably forget what you have learned soon after graduation.

The way world languages are taught in high school, students earn good grades for very little progress. Students are taught to read, write, and conjugate verbs, but real communication and conversation skills are not a priority.

The main reason most kids take a world language in school is to satisfy college requirements. Most colleges require two years of instruction in a foreign language, so that is what most students take. Unless you have the determination and you are going to expend the energy and the time really learning a second language, to do half a job is a waste.

What would be a better way to learn a second language? Most experts feel that second-language learning should start in kindergarten or first grade. An early start to learning

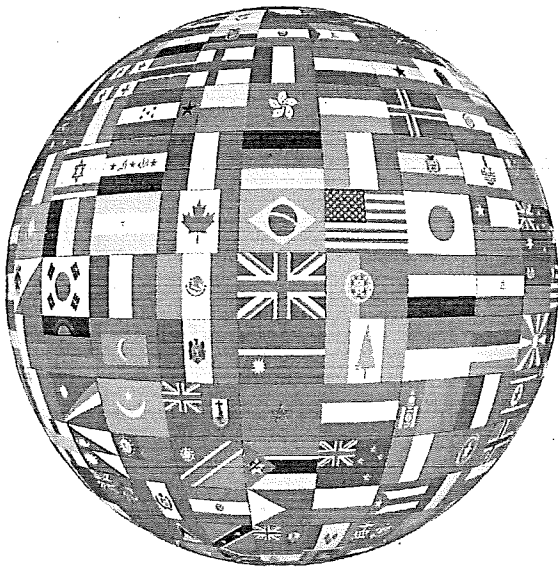
a second language would also help students with their understanding of English grammar and help them become better writers.

Of course, some people like things the way they are and don't want to change the way languages are taught. Because a few people actually do learn a second language in high school, they feel that it is the student's problem. But if being able to speak another language fluently in addition to English became a graduation requirement, I think a lot of students would have to drop out.

*Opposing claim
presented and
answered well.*

In my opinion, unless languages are taught starting in kindergarten with the goal of real fluency, then they should not be taught at all. We should use the time for art, music, and technology classes.

*Good conclusion, well
constructed,
good job!*



Discuss and Decide

Did Adeline convince you that students should not be required to speak a second language? If so, cite the most compelling evidence in her essay.

Terminology of Argumentative Texts

Read each term and explanation. Then look back at Adeline Jones' argumentative essay and find an example to complete the chart.

Term	Explanation	Example from Adeline's Essay
audience	The audience for your argument is a group of people that you want to convince. As you develop your argument, consider your audience's knowledge level and concerns.	
purpose	The purpose for writing an argument is to sway the audience. Your purpose should be clear, whether it is to persuade your audience to agree with your claim, or to motivate your audience to take some action.	
precise claim	A precise claim confidently states your viewpoint. Remember that you must be able to find reasons and evidence to support your claim, and that you must distinguish your claim from opposing claims.	
reason	A reason is a statement that supports your claim. (You should have more than one reason.) Note that you will need to supply evidence for each reason you state.	
opposing claim	An opposing claim , or counterclaim , shares the point of view of people who do not agree with your claim. Opposing claims must be fairly presented with evidence.	