**ENG4C – Developing Critical Thinking skills: Examination of how bias affects evidence validity and author credibility in Opinion Writing / Essays**

Opinion writing is a form of Argumentative or Persuasive writing.

The Author’s purpose in opinion writing is to have the reader (you) understand and accept or agree with the opinion presented by allowing for as few barriers to reader understanding and acceptance as possible in their writing.

One potential barrier to understanding is an unclear opinion. An opinion may be unclear because it is not well explained or supported. This is usually a problem with evidence, structure and editing in the writing process.

A barrier to reader acceptance is credibility (or a lack there of). If the reader does not believe the author’s evidence because of obvious bias in the quality and quantity of evidence the author’s opinion, and arguments supporting that opinion, are undermined and become less credible. This is usually a problem with validity in evidence. \* Remember your Types of Evidence

It is your job to practice the art of critical reading. When you read (especially when you read opinion or argumentative writing) you should be constantly evaluating the validity of the evidence to determine the author’s bias and how it is represented in the writing. Then you need to determine, in light of the authors bias, whether they or their opinion is credible.

***Evidence Credibility Scale***

Most Credible Somewhat Credible Not Credible

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Verifiable Quotes from Expert/ Personal Anecdotes Random / non-verifiable Non Verifiable

Facts and authoritative source relevant to topic quotes Facts and statistics

Statistics

To demonstrate that you have the ability to determine bias and critically evaluate evidence for credibility you have a two part task to accomplish.

Part 1 (20 marks )

* Choose an opinion essay on a topic of interest to you. Look online (search “interesting opinion essays for high school”) or from a magazine such as The Economist or The New Yorker or Maclean’s . ( 1 period)
* Research the author of the essay. Write a 4-5 line bio of relevant facts on them to help you to determine their potential bias.
  + Answer the question: How might the author’s experiences colour their bias? (1 period)
* Read through the essay carefully. Circle the opinions and underline the evidence in the essay.
  + Answer the question: Are there more opinions or more pieces of evidence?
  + Give each piece of evidence a number from the following scale 10 if it is very credible and 1 if it is not credible.
  + Answer the questions: Is this article biased or not?

What makes it biased or not? (1 period)

* Research the evidence and opinions provided and try to verify them by comparing the essay to two other sources / studies or articles on the same topic.
  + Answer the question: In one paragraph discuss the question:

How reliable or credible is the opinion of this author on this subject? Use the evidence from your research to support your opinion. (1 period)

Part 2 (30 marks)

Self Reflection - Write a 1 -2 page metacognitive reflection on your learning evaluating your understanding of bias and critical reading skills. Address the following questions in your metacognitive reflection. Proof read and use paragraph structure properly.

* When you read how frequently do you read opinion based content?
* Discuss a time when you read opinion based content (this could be an article, an essay, or even a text from a friend) and consciously considered or were at least aware of the author’s bias. How did your awareness of the author’s bias affect your agreement with or belief in the validity of their opinion?
* Are you aware of your own common biases? Discuss a time when your bias as a reader/ listener has gotten in the way of your ability to critically understand or process someone else’s opinion.
* How has the process of circling opinions and underlining evidence impacted your ability to determine bias?
* How did your research of the topic, separate from the opinion piece you originally chose, impact your understanding of the credibility of the original author’s opinion?
* Did you originally agree with the opinion of the author or not? Do you now?
* How has the process of critical thinking completed in Part 1 altered or effected how you think or feel about the author’s opinion?