

DEFENDING POLITICAL POSITIONS

Performance Standard 14D.I

Present an argument in support of or against the position taken on an issue by an author of an article accordingly:

- *Knowledge*: Identify and describe the author's thesis on a political issue and support for his/her position.
- *Reasoning*: Critique the author's position on the issue and organize an argument in favor of or against his/her position.
- *Communication*: Write a critique and make a presentation that are well-focused, well-organized and well-detailed; express all ideas in a way that provides evidence of knowledge and reasoning processes.

Procedures

1. *In order to understand the roles and influences of individuals and interest groups in the political systems of Illinois, the United States, and other nations (14D)*, students should experience sufficient learning opportunities to develop the following skills:
 - Critique positions on political issues.
 - Defend a position on a political issue related to current events or national policies.
2. Have students review and discuss the assessment task and how the rubric will be used to evaluate their work. Present the basic elements of critiquing an article to the class: description of the author's thesis (main point); description of the author's support for the thesis; critic's (student's) position in favor of or against the author's position.
3. Provide students a selection of articles related to issues of national importance. Have each student read one article for homework. (Students should become thoroughly familiar with the author's position and support for the position.) Review the student's choice of article to verify it addresses a national issue or policy.
4. Ask each student to write a critique of the article as follows:
 - Describe the main point of the author's thesis (position).
 - Describe the support the author advances (argues) for his/her position.
 - Write an argument in support of or against the author's position on the issue.
5. Ask each student to present his/her critique and pro/con position (3 – 5 minutes).
6. Evaluate each student's work using the Social Science Rubric as follows and add the scores to determine the performance level:
 - *Knowledge*: The description of the author's main thesis (position) and support for the position was complete and accurate.
 - *Reasoning*: The analysis of the author's position and the argument supporting or against the author's position was thorough, objective, and well-reasoned.
 - *Communication*: The critique and presentation were well-focused, well-organized, and well-detailed; the knowledge and reasoning were completely and effectively communicated.

Examples of Student Work follow

Time Requirements

- Two to three class periods

Resources

- Magazines
- Newspaper editorials
- Journals
- Social Science Rubric

"Meets"

Topic: Polygraph Test

Thesis: The author is giving a background of the polygraph, and explaining both sides of the polygraph debate.

Support for Thesis: The author tells how the polygraph test is used. He explains that it checks the heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration rate of the person. The article explains that the polygraph is not only used in court cases, but also in the everyday world. The author gives you a look at both sides of the debates, and stays neutral himself throughout the article.

Student's Position: I don't believe that polygraph tests should be used in the courtroom. I like the fact of using them to maybe get a warrant to search someone's house, but I don't think they should be used to put someone in jail.

The article says that the polygraph may not work because of all the emotion that can result in false readings. And according to the article, the polygraph test needs your physical responses which are triggered by emotion.

I think that with the full range of emotion, the polygraph tests would be hard to find reliable. If someone goes around killing people, but doesn't care about it, his pulse rate, and perspiration wouldn't change, and the polygraph wouldn't notice it. If on the other hand, an innocent person walked in, they would most likely be really stressed, and therefore the readings would be wrong again.

I also don't think it's good to use the polygraph test if it can be manipulated. This shows how inaccurate the polygraph test can be.

Topic: Insanity Defense "Exceeds"

Thesis: There is reason to both support + be against the insanity defense.

Support for Thesis:

Some criminals use the insanity defense as an easy way out of their sentences. The defense is often misused + misunderstood. Many people in prisons are actually insane. Insane criminals are often locked up longer in a hospital than they would be in prison, + they get the care they need.

Student's Position:

I, like the author, am both for and against certain aspects of the insanity defense. I don't like the possibility that a vicious murderer can get out of going to prison just because a jury decides he's off his rocker. However, if a man is insane + really doesn't understand what's going on + why he's being punished, he shouldn't spend life in jail, tortured + confused. I support the 'Guilty but Mentally Ill' verdict.

The verdict 'GBMI' makes it so the criminal must pay for his crime + the family of the victim has retribution. It also discourages future criminals from being involved in criminal activity because if they were just planning to plead insanity, they can no longer escape punishment (it serves as a deterrent). Also, with GBMI, the judge may decide to have the defendant undergo mental health treatment in prison + at mental health facilities, so rehabilitation occurs. The best part, in my opinion, about the GBMI verdict is the incarceration. It insures that the guilty criminal will serve a sentence they deserve + be separated from society for long enough that they're no longer able to be considered a threat.

In conclusion, I support the Guilty but Mentally Ill verdict because it is a deterrent, it protects society, it rehabilitates + is retribution.