Use Sarcasm to Downplay an Opposing Point of View

1. Focus

Explain Using Sarcasm to Downplay Opposing Point of View

Say: When I write a persuasive letter, I want to convince my audience to agree with my opinion about an idea or problem. To do this, I sometimes use a technique called sarcasm to show problems with the opposing point of view. I insert a sarcastic voice into my letter, which is usually humorous or clever. It often also contains irony: I may be saying the opposite of what I mean or highlighting something that is unfortunate and unexpected. Sarcasm is often used to ridicule or mock, but that is not my goal here. I don’t want to be unkind or mean, I just want to persuade my audience that my position is best. So, the goal of my sarcasm is to draw attention to my own argument and take the focus away from the concerns of my opponent. Today I’m going to discuss examples of this technique from two persuasive letters.

Model How Writers Use Sarcasm to Downplay Opposing Point of View

Display the modeling text on chart paper or use the interactive whiteboard resources.

Modeling Text

Read example 1. Say: I can tell that the writer of this passage is arguing that her town needs to sell land and use part of the money from the sale to build a new middle school. Her first sentence offers factual evidence. The second sentence describes the result of the fact that classroom windows won’t open. In the third sentence, she uses sarcasm to ridicule the idea that students can focus on their studies when they are suffering from extreme heat. The writer suggests that her opponents must believe that. She uses the same technique in the next sentence, “But wait, the story gets worse!” Her sentence is a way of criticizing anybody who thinks the school is fine the way it is.

Read example 2. Say: This writer disagrees with the first writer. He would rather pay to repair the school than to build a new one. First, he states a fact: he...
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Sarcasm to Downplay Opposing Point of View

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Many people say the town should not pay to repair the playground. But the swings are broken. Every day, a long line of kids waits for the two swings that work.

Ask students to work with a partner to add a sarcastic voice to these sentences. Remind students to add sarcastic comments or questions that downplay the opposing point of view. If necessary, encourage students to add a humorous, mocking comment about how ridiculous it is that children wait in lines because swings don’t work. Student pairs should write down their sentences. They should be prepared to read them to the class and explain their sarcastic comments.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite pairs to read aloud their sentences and explain how their sarcastic comments add voice and downplay the opposing point of view. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they write their own persuasive letters.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that adding a sarcastic comment is one way to use voice to downplay an opposing point of view in a persuasive letter. As you write your persuasive letter, consider adding a sarcastic comment or question to minimize your readers’ focus on the opposing point of view so that your own strong opinions stand out.

Ask students to look for opportunities in their own persuasive letters to strengthen their position by adding a sarcastic comment or question that downplays the opposing point of view. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite one or more students who have effectively downplayed the opposing point of view with a sarcastic comment or question to read aloud those sections of their persuasive letters.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning and Intermediate

Beginning and intermediate ELs are not ready to work on this skill. While other students collaborate on the partner activity or write independently, meet one on one with students to support developmentally appropriate skills based on their independent writing and language level. For example, you may want to work with students’ recognition of forceful exclamations such as the sarcastic comments in the modeling text.

Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.