

Use a Sarcastic Tone

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn how to use sarcasm to set the tone in a persuasive essay.
- Practice using a sarcastic tone in a persuasive essay.
- Discuss how to apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.



1. Focus

Explain Using Sarcasm to Set the Tone

Say: Writers of persuasive essays sometimes use sarcasm to establish a strong voice and opinion. Sarcasm is language that is strongly negative and often shows anger about something or mocks an opposing point of view. A writer can create a sarcastic tone through strongly negative words and language, through questions that have implied answers, and through jokes that poke fun at other opinions. Sometimes sarcasm is language that says the opposite of what it actually means—in such cases, the writer must make the meaning clear. Although sarcasm is not always the most effective way to be persuasive, it does present a strong opinion and voice, especially when a writer is angry about something. Today we will read examples of sarcasm and learn how to use this technique in your persuasive essays.

Model How Writers Set a Sarcastic Tone

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

1. Keep in mind that while many U.S. students fritter away their summer vacations in unsupervised, unproductive, and unhealthy activities, students in other countries are hard at work—and they will be rewarded in the end.
2. When they finally wake up, what do they do? They surf the Internet or play hours of mind-numbing video games (often violent ones) because no one is there to stop them. Or they plop onto living room couches and view hours of mediocre television programming while texting friends and munching unhealthy snacks.

Modeling Text

Read example 1. Say: I notice that the writer chooses the phrase **fritter away**. This is a way of saying that the students waste time, only the language is even harsher. Then the writer says more about how bad the activities are, using the words **unsupervised**, **unproductive**, and **unhealthy**. These strongly negative phrases are forms of sarcasm. The use of a sarcastic tone gives the writer a strongly critical voice in this persuasive essay.

Read example 2. Say: Here, the writer sets up the sarcasm with a rhetorical question—a question that doesn't actually require an answer because the text is about to answer it. The word choices show the writer's sarcastic tone: video games are **mind-numbing**, kids don't just sit on couches, they **plop**. The television they watch is mediocre and their snacks are **unhealthy**. They **munch** rather than eat the snacks. The writer is criticizing and scoffing at U.S. students.

The sarcastic tone emphasizes how much the writer disapproves of the way U.S. students use their free time in the summer. She is using sarcasm to present a strong voice of criticism in this persuasive essay.



2. Rehearse

Practice Setting a Sarcastic Tone

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

Yesterday, Max and his sister Isabella played card games after school. Then they watched television. Amy and her brother Juan studied for the math test. Then they played a game.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with partners to add words or phrases to these sentences to set a sarcastic tone. Remind students that sarcastic comments are critical and mocking, that they can use questions, and that they can be funny. Student pairs should write down their sentences and be ready to explain what they added to the sentences to set a sarcastic tone.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite pairs to read aloud their sentences and explain how they added a sarcastic tone to the practice text. Record sample student sentences and post these as models for students to use as they write their own persuasive essays.



3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that a writer can use sarcasm to set the tone in a persuasive essay. A writer can use sarcasm to criticize an opposing point of view. As you write your persuasive essay, consider setting a sarcastic tone to point out weaknesses in your opponent's argument and to make your own opinion clear and strong.

Ask students to identify a section of their persuasive essays that they can improve by using sarcasm. 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 volunteers to read aloud a section of their persuasive essays in which they used sarcasm to strengthen their voice or criticize an opposing viewpoint.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning and Intermediate

Developing a sarcastic tone will be challenging for beginning and intermediate ELs. While other students collaborate on the small-group 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' identification of questions in a persuasive essay that the writer immediately answers (such as the rhetorical questions used sarcastically in some persuasive essays). They can identify these by looking for sentences with question marks and checking if these questions are answered.

Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.

All Levels

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: **sarcasm/el sarcasmo; students/los/las estudiantes; tone/el tono.**