

# TYLA CIVILITY *for All*

## Civility For All Classroom Activity – Comments Section

### **Time**

50 minutes (one class period), plus time for optional follow-on activities.

### **Materials**

- Comment sections and tweets, taken from the Internet or written by the instructor. With students working in groups of two to three, the whole class can work with one letter.
- “Dear Editor” worksheet for all students.
- OPTIONAL: One or more copies of the local daily newspaper for students to look at “Letters to the Editor” section in groups.

### **Summary**

Students identify parts of arguments by reading and evaluating the comments, tweets, and/or letters to the editor. They identify weaknesses and strengths of arguments, suggesting improvements to arguments used within the letters.

### **Procedure**

- Begin the exercise by reviewing argument construction with the class.
- Introduce the class to the idea of writing comments or letters to the editor. Most students are not familiar with the layout of print newspapers, so this is an opportunity to teach them the parts of a newspaper — editorials offering the opinions of the newspaper’s own editorial board; guest editorials and opinion pieces by people or organizations in the larger community; and letters to the editor from individuals.
- Discuss the different forums for “Letters to the Editor” opinions in today’s society.
- Discuss with the class the reasons why people might be motivated to write a letter to the editor, comment, or tweet. Discuss what might make a letter’s arguments effective or weak.

- Divide the students into groups of two or three, if they will be working in groups.
- Give each student a copy of the item they will be analyzing, and a copy of the “Dear Editor” worksheet.
- Explain to students that they will be trying, as best they can, to fill out the worksheet and identify all the parts of the author’s argument.
- Monitor student work on the assignment. Depending on the level of student proficiency and the complexity of the letter or comment, this should take 20-30 minutes.
- Lead a discussion regarding the components of the author’s argument(s).
- Discuss possible improvements to the letter, focusing on missing parts of the author’s argument.

### **Optional Follow-on Activities**

- Assign students to write a “better version” of the letter they analyzed.
- This approach takes more time but allows for integration of peer editing into the exercise as well as comparison.
- To practice constructing arguments of their own, students can be assigned (working separately or in groups) to write letters to the editor or public comments. These can be on topics of their choosing, in response to a current event, or in response to an assigned recent reading from the newspaper, magazine, or website.

## WORKSHEET

You have been given a tweet, comment section, post, or letter to the editor of a local newspaper. Read it carefully and answer the following questions. Remember that you are looking for the author's arguments and the reasoning and evidence that back up the author's argument. If you think that reasoning or evidence is missing, please note that in the relevant section.

1. What topic is the author writing about?

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2. What is the author's main idea?

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3. What arguments does the author make in support of their argument? Make sure to reference the author's reasoning and evidence for each argument.

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4. What are two ways the author could improve his or her opinion piece?

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