

Rapid Fire: Evidence-Type

Overview

This exercise helps students understand that there are different types of textual evidence that they can find and that they should be looking for when supporting their own arguments. Like other exercises in Argument-Centered Education, Rapid Fire: Evidence-Type focuses on one of the key components of effective argument education – in this case, of course, evidence – and has students participate in what amounts to a thinking game about it.

There are different ways to categorize textual evidence by type – one common and widely accepted way is “factual information,” “research results,” and “expert opinion.” This exercise takes up this set of categories. To provide examples of each, let’s assume that the argument to be supported is, “Dropping the atomic bomb on Japan in World War II was morally wrong.”

Factual Information

“Japan’s military power had been substantially degraded, so that by the summer of 1945 the Japanese military had fewer than 20% of the fighter planes and ships than it had when WWII started, whereas the U.S. military was expanding in size and strength as the war carried on” (Hirschel Williamson, *The Great Battle for Supremacy in the Pacific*, 2005).

Research Results

According to a Pew Research Study conducted in 2013, nearly 77% of Americans now believe that it was an unwarranted of the U.S. to have dropped atomic weapons on Japan during World War II.

Expert Opinion

In his book *The Imperial Presidency*, famed and widely-respected historian Arthur Schlesinger expresses the view that President Harry Truman made the decision to drop the bomb on Japan without giving sufficient thought to feasible alternatives.

This exercise also draws on and practices an understanding of what a “qualifier” is, in argumentation. A qualifier is a statement or clause that provides a condition or limitation on the basis of which the argument is still true. For example:

Qualifier

“Even though dropping the atomic bombs on Japan probably shortened the war and therefore saved some American lives, the horror that it inflicted on hundreds of thousands of Japanese makes it a morally unjustifiable act.”



Method

1. Gather a set of Rapid Fire: Evidence-Type Exercise clues. ACE has a set of these; you should also consider creating your own, topic- and content-specific to the subject area or even the texts you are teaching. More specificity in these areas can help students see the connection between the exercise and what they will be asked to do in other argument-centered work you will have them do, though the generic clues can still provide clear illustrations of the three types of evidence and qualifications.
2. Pre-teach or review the three types of textual evidence: factual information, research results, and expert opinion – and explain what a qualifier is. Be sure to provide clear examples of each; consider whether it is possible and desirable to offer examples in the context of the current unit content students are studying.
3. Begin the game by calling on two students and asking them to stand. Tell the students that they are to listen to the clue and then try to be the first of the two students to call out the answer – factual information, research results, expert opinion, or qualifier. The first person to call out the correct answer wins that round. If a student calls out an incorrect answer, the other student gets 30 seconds to give one answer. If that answer is correct, the second student wins the round. If it is incorrect, the round is played over.
4. If a student wins the round, he or she advances to play the next round, against a new randomly selected student. The student who does not win the round must sit, and cannot get called on again until everyone else in the room has had a turn in the “rapid fire.”
5. The selection of students should be at a lively pace, and it should be random. Both of these criteria are important to make the exercise work.
6. You should interrupt the activity occasionally to point out a lesson or pattern in the use of evidence that the activity is illustrating.
7. Students will try to answer before the clue is completely given. This is acceptable, because these answers are given on the basis of context signals; however, use mistakes in answering on this basis as illustrations of the need to fully understand context.
8. De-brief at the end of the activity about what it has shown students about the common types of textual evidences.
9. **Adaptation:** Begin by dividing the class into two groups and draw one Rapid Fire student competitor from each group. Keep a tally of how many first and correct answers each group gets and give bonus points or a prize to the winning team.

Adapted from *Teaching Argumentation*, by Katie Rogers and Julia A. Simms (Marzano Research Laboratory, 2014).