Evaluating Arguments and Claims

Name: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____ / 10

Quick Review

A claim is a statement an author wants you to accept. Evidence is what the author offers as support. Strong evidence relates DIRECTLY to the claim, comes from reliable sources, and matches the size of the claim. A claim can be partly proven, fully proven, or barely supported at all.

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Should Middle Schools Require Computer Science?

Across the United States, a debate is unfolding in school boards over whether middle schools should require at least one year of computer science. Supporters argue that the digital world has reached the point where every student — not only future programmers — should understand how the technology that shapes daily life is built. Opponents worry that crowded school schedules cannot easily fit a new requirement without cutting something already in place. The argument I want to make in this article is straightforward: middle schools should require at least one year of computer science, because the benefits are well-supported and the costs are real but manageable.

The case for requiring it rests on three pieces of evidence. First, a 2022 study from a research group at Stanford University followed 1,400 students across three states and found that those who completed a single year of middle-school computer science performed slightly better on standardized math tests at the end of eighth grade than peers who did not, even after the researchers controlled for prior math scores. Second, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that jobs requiring at least some computer science background will grow about 23 percent in the next decade — faster than most other career fields — meaning that students who never see CS may close doors they didn't know they were closing. Third, several surveys of middle-school teachers have reported that students who took CS were more likely to attempt difficult problems in OTHER subjects, suggesting that the course built persistence beyond coding.

Some of the supporting evidence, however, is weaker than it looks. Two recent online polls have claimed that "most parents" want CS required — but the polls did not say how parents were selected, and small online polls often draw responses only from people who already agree with the question. A widely shared blog post argues that one school in California saw a 40 percent rise in math scores after adding CS, but the post does not name the school or the year, and a single school is too small a sample to prove a nationwide point. Strong arguments need to separate the well-supported claims from the eye-catching ones. The Stanford study, the federal jobs data, and the teacher surveys are reasonable evidence. The online polls and the single-school blog post are not.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use the passage to answer each question.

1. What is the author's MAIN CLAIM in this article?

A. Middle-school students should choose their own classes with no requirements at all.

B. Middle schools should require at least one year of computer science.

C. Computer science is the only subject that improves math scores.

D. All parents want their children to learn computer science.

2. Which piece of evidence in paragraph 2 BEST supports the claim that CS may improve student outcomes in other subjects?

A. The 2022 Stanford study of 1,400 students.

B. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projection of 23 percent job growth.

C. Surveys of teachers reporting that CS students were more likely to attempt difficult problems in other subjects.

D. Online polls of parents.

3. Which piece of evidence does the author identify as WEAK in paragraph 3?

A. The 2022 Stanford study.

B. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projection.

C. Two recent online polls about parent preferences.

D. Surveys of middle-school teachers.

4. Why does the author call the "40 percent rise in math scores" blog post weak evidence?

A. The number 40 percent is impossible.

B. Computer science cannot affect math at all.

C. The post does not name the school or the year, and one school is too small a sample to prove a nationwide point.

D. The blog post is too long to read.

5. Which of the following is a CLAIM rather than evidence?

A. "Jobs requiring at least some computer science background will grow about 23 percent in the next decade."

B. "1,400 students across three states" were followed.

C. "Middle schools should require at least one year of computer science."

D. "Students who took CS were more likely to attempt difficult problems in other subjects."

6. Which piece of evidence BEST matches the SIZE of the author's main claim (a nationwide policy)?

A. A 2022 study following 1,400 students across three states.

B. A blog post about one school in California.

C. An online poll of parents who chose to respond.

D. A single teacher's personal opinion.

7. What does the author MEAN by writing, "Strong arguments need to separate the well-supported claims from the eye-catching ones"?

A. A good argument uses every piece of evidence available.

B. A good argument should use only the evidence that holds up under scrutiny, even if other evidence sounds more dramatic.

C. A good argument always uses online polls.

D. Arguments should never use numbers.

8. Which sentence BEST shows that the author has considered an OPPOSING view?

A. "The argument I want to make in this article is straightforward."

B. "Opponents worry that crowded school schedules cannot easily fit a new requirement without cutting something already in place."

C. "Students who completed a single year of middle-school computer science performed slightly better on standardized math tests."

D. "The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that jobs requiring at least some computer science background will grow about 23 percent."

9. Choose ONE piece of evidence from paragraph 2 that you think MOST STRONGLY supports the author's main claim. In 2-3 sentences, explain why that evidence is strong (consider its source, size, and how directly it relates to the claim).

_____

_____

10. Explain in 2-3 sentences how the author's argument would be WEAKER if paragraph 3 (the part naming weak evidence) were removed.

_____

_____

Answer Keys

1	A	**B**	C	D	6	**A**	B	C	D
2	A	B	**C**	D	7	A	**B**	C	D
3	A	B	**C**	D	8	A	**B**	C	D
4	A	B	**C**	D	9	See below			
5	A	B	**C**	D	10	See below			

Explanations

1. B	The author states this claim directly at the end of paragraph 1. A is the opposite. C is too strong — the article never says CS is the ONLY subject. D is a parent-poll claim the author later questions.
2. C	Teacher surveys specifically link CS to behavior in OTHER subjects — the exact claim. A supports math performance. B supports career value. D is the weak evidence the author later rejects.
3. C	The author criticizes the online polls for not naming how parents were chosen — exactly the weak-evidence point. A, B, and D are what the author calls reasonable evidence.
4. C	The author gives two specific reasons: no source detail and sample size of one. A invents a math objection. B contradicts the Stanford study. D is silly.
5. C	C is a recommendation — what the author wants the reader to accept. A, B, and D are facts the author offers AS evidence. Students who pick A, B, or D are confusing supporting data with the claim it supports.
6. A	A study of 1,400 students across three states is the most representative — the right scale for a national-policy claim. B, C, and D are too small or too self-selected to support a national recommendation.
7. B	The sentence draws a line between solid and showy — exactly the careful-author point. A overreaches (more is not always better). C contradicts the paragraph. D ignores the article's use of the Stanford study and BLS data.
8. B	B names the OPPONENTS' concern in their own words — the textbook "acknowledging a counter-argument" move. A states the author's claim. C and D are the author's supporting evidence.
9.	**Answer:** Strong answer (Stanford study): The 2022 Stanford study is the strongest support because it followed 1,400 students across three states, controlled for prior math scores, and produced a measurable academic improvement that directly addresses the question of whether CS is worth requiring. The size (1,400) and the controls make it harder to dismiss than a single school's results. Strong answer (BLS data): The BLS projection is strong because it comes from a federal agency that tracks national labor data, and the 23% growth figure speaks to the long-term cost of not preparing students for CS-using careers. NOT acceptable: choosing the online polls or the blog post (those are the weak evidence); choosing a piece of evidence without explaining its source, size, or relevance; vague answers like "because it's a study." Look for THREE elements in the answer: the chosen evidence, WHY it is strong (source, size, OR direct relevance), AND a link to the main claim.

10.	**Answer:** Strong answer: Without paragraph 3, the article would mix strong and weak evidence as though they were equal, which would let a careful reader dismiss the whole argument when they spotted the unnamed school or the unreliable poll. By naming the weak evidence and setting it aside, the author shows that he is being honest about what his case really rests on, which makes the rest of his evidence (the Stanford study, the BLS data, the teacher surveys) more trustworthy. Acceptable variations: answers that note paragraph 3 builds the author's credibility, OR that it separates strong from weak evidence so the reader can judge fairly. NOT acceptable: answers that say paragraph 3 is unimportant; answers that argue paragraph 3 is the opposite (a counter-argument); answers that name no specific weak evidence at all. A 2-point answer (1) explains what paragraph 3 contributes (separates strong from weak) AND (2) explains the effect on the reader's trust or judgment.

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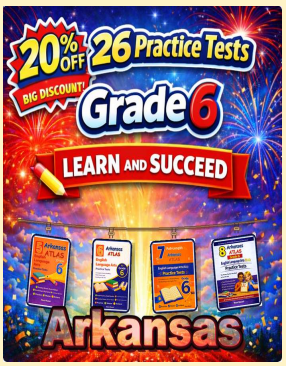

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