

Evaluating an Argument: Reasoning and Evidence

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: ____ / 10



Quick Review

An argument is built from CLAIMS, REASONS, and EVIDENCE. Strong evidence is specific, factual, and sourced. Weak evidence is anecdotal, biased, or vague. A Grade 7 reader can trace a writer's argument step by step AND judge whether each piece of evidence actually supports the claim.

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.



Should Middle Schools Ban Phones During the Day?

American middle schools are increasingly considering policies that require students to lock their phones in pouches or lockers from the first bell to the last. Supporters argue that the change improves focus, mental health, and social behavior; critics worry about safety and parental contact. The evidence, while still developing, leans clearly in one direction: a full-day phone ban is, on balance, a reasonable policy for most middle schools.

First, the focus argument is well supported. A 2023 study by the Education Endowment Foundation, which tracked test scores in 28 British schools that adopted bell-to-bell phone bans, found that average reading and math scores rose by about 6 percent within one academic year. That is a sizable effect, measured with standardized tests, in a large sample. The same study did NOT find that the bans hurt struggling students, a concern critics had raised in advance. Second, my own daughter's middle school adopted a phone-free policy last fall, and she has come home happier than I have seen her in years. I cannot prove that the policy caused the change, but it lines up.

Critics raise three concerns. The strongest is safety: in an emergency, students should be able to reach a parent. Research from the National Association of School Resource Officers, however, recommends that students NOT use phones during active emergencies because the calls can clog cell networks and distract students from instructions. A school's PA system and trained staff are faster, safer channels. A second concern is parental contact for ordinary reasons — a forgotten lunch, a change in pickup. These needs are real, but they are also exactly what main offices have handled for fifty years. The third concern, raised most often in opinion columns, is that phones "are part of how kids communicate now." That may be true, but it is not evidence; it is a description. The question is whether what kids gain from constant access exceeds what they lose in attention, sleep, and social skill — and the studies that have measured those things have, so far, found that they lose more than they gain.

No policy fits every school. A high school senior with a part-time job and a younger sibling to coordinate after class is different from a sixth grader. But for middle schools — the years when most teenagers receive their first phones — the case for a bell-to-bell ban rests on real data, careful reasoning, and a fair acknowledgement of the strongest opposing concerns. That is what an argument should look like.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Read the argument. Then choose the best answer for each question.

1. Which sentence BEST states the author's MAIN CLAIM?
 - A. A full-day phone ban is, on balance, a reasonable policy for most middle schools.
 - B. Phones are part of how kids communicate now.
 - C. Test scores in 28 British schools rose 6 percent.
 - D. My daughter has come home happier.



2. Which detail is the STRONGEST piece of evidence the author offers?
 - A. The author's daughter has come home happier.
 - B. A 2023 Education Endowment Foundation study of 28 schools showing about a 6 percent rise in reading and math scores.
 - C. Critics often raise objections in opinion columns.
 - D. Phones "are part of how kids communicate now."
3. Which piece of the author's support is the WEAKEST kind of evidence?
 - A. The Education Endowment Foundation study of 28 schools.
 - B. The recommendation from the National Association of School Resource Officers.
 - C. The author's own daughter's experience at her middle school.
 - D. The finding that the bans did not hurt struggling students.
4. When the author writes that the daughter "has come home happier than I have seen her in years" and then says "I cannot prove that the policy caused the change, but it lines up," the author is —
 - A. lying to the reader about the study.
 - B. limiting the weight of personal anecdote and signaling honest reasoning to the reader.
 - C. claiming the daughter is the only proof needed.
 - D. ignoring the difference between correlation and causation.
5. Which of these is a CLAIM rather than EVIDENCE?
 - A. "Average reading and math scores rose by about 6 percent within one academic year."
 - B. "A full-day phone ban is, on balance, a reasonable policy for most middle schools."
 - C. "The same study did NOT find that the bans hurt struggling students."
 - D. "Research from the National Association of School Resource Officers recommends that students not use phones during active emergencies."
6. How does the author handle the SAFETY concern raised by critics?
 - A. By ignoring it.
 - B. By citing a recommendation from school resource officers that students should NOT use phones in active emergencies, and explaining why.
 - C. By admitting the safety concern proves the ban wrong.
 - D. By saying the daughter has never had an emergency.
7. Why does the author say of the "phones are how kids communicate now" line, "That may be true, but it is not evidence; it is a description"?
 - A. To insult the critics.
 - B. To distinguish between a true descriptive statement and evidence that bears on the policy question.
 - C. To prove that the line is false.
 - D. To agree with the critics' main point.



8. Which of the author's reasons is BEST supported by SUFFICIENT evidence (sourced, specific, and on point)?
- A. The reason about academic focus, supported by the 28-school Education Endowment Foundation study.
 - B. The reason about the daughter's happiness.
 - C. The reason that phones are how kids communicate.
 - D. The reason that opinion columns sometimes overstate the issue.
9. Identify ONE strong piece of evidence and ONE weak piece of evidence in the argument. For each, explain in one sentence WHY it qualifies as strong or weak.

10. The author writes that critics' "phones are how kids communicate now" point is "not evidence; it is a description." Explain the difference between a description and evidence using your own words and one example from the passage.



Answer Keys

<p>1 <input checked="" type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>2 <input type="radio"/> A <input checked="" type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>3 <input type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input checked="" type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>4 <input type="radio"/> A <input checked="" type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>5 <input type="radio"/> A <input checked="" type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p>	<p>6 <input type="radio"/> A <input checked="" type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>7 <input type="radio"/> A <input checked="" type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>8 <input checked="" type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>9 <input type="text" value="See below"/></p> <p>10 <input type="text" value="See below"/></p>
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Explanations	
1. A	A is the conclusion the rest of the article defends — the main claim. B is the opposing position the author rejects. C and D are evidence used to support the claim, not the claim itself.
2. B	B is specific, sourced, multi-school, and measured — the textbook profile of strong evidence. A is a single anecdote. C describes critics. D is a quoted critic, not the author's own evidence.
3. C	A single family anecdote is exactly what "weak evidence" looks like in a Grade 7 argument — and the author admits as much ("I cannot prove"). A, B, and D are sourced research.
4. B	Acknowledging that the anecdote does not prove cause-and-effect is the author labeling their own weak evidence as weak — a sign of careful reasoning. A invents a lie. C overstates the anecdote. D is the opposite of what the author is doing.
5. B	B is the conclusion the author is arguing for — a claim. A, C, and D are findings from named sources — evidence used to support that claim. A student confusing claim with evidence often picks A or C because they sound 'main-point-like.'
6. B	B is exactly the author's strategy: name the strongest opposing concern, cite a sourced authority, and explain. A is false. C concedes the wrong conclusion. D invents an anecdote-as-rebuttal.
7. B	The author makes a clean Grade 7 distinction: descriptions can be true and still not function as evidence about whether a policy is wise. A invents an insult. C invents a falsehood claim. D inverts the author's position.
8. A	A pairs a real reason with a named, multi-school, measured source — the definition of sufficient evidence. B is one anecdote. C and D describe the opposing side, not the author's evidence.
9.	Answer: Strong answer: Strong evidence — the 2023 Education Endowment Foundation study of 28 schools that found a roughly 6 percent rise in test scores; it is strong because it is sourced, large-sample, and measured with standardized tests. Weak evidence — the author's own daughter coming home happier; it is weak because it is a single anecdote about one family and the author admits it does not prove cause-and-effect. Acceptable variations: strong examples may include the Education Endowment Foundation study OR the National Association of School Resource Officers recommendation; weak examples must include the daughter's anecdote OR the second-hand opinion-column claim. NOT acceptable: labeling the daughter anecdote as strong; failing to explain WHY each example is strong or weak; selecting the main claim as 'evidence.' A 2-point answer requires (1) one strong example with a sourcing/sample-size reason AND (2) one weak example with an anecdote/un-sourced reason.



10.

Answer: Strong answer: A description is a statement of how something is — for example, "phones are how kids communicate." It can be true and still not help us decide whether a policy is good or bad. Evidence is a finding that actually bears on the policy question — for example, the 28-school study showing that test scores rose 6 percent after phone bans. Evidence answers a question; a description merely states a state of affairs. Acceptable variations: any answer that defines description as a 'how-things-are' statement AND evidence as something that supports or undermines a claim, with at least one specific example (the 28-school study, the School Resource Officers recommendation, or 'phones are how kids communicate now'). NOT acceptable: definitions that treat description and evidence as the same; answers without an example; answers that argue the descriptive claim is false (the author concedes it 'may be true').

A 2-point answer (1) clearly defines BOTH terms and (2) cites at least one specific example from the passage.




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