

Instructional Module 5: At – A – Glance

Using Multiple Sources to Evaluate Credibility

Overview

These four texts depict the ethical and moral dilemmas of Good Samaritans, people who perform acts of selflessness and heroism in helping others in great need. In this module, students will read both primary and secondary sources to evaluate the credibility of an author's argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author's intent affects the structure and tone of the text. This module can be used to provide intervention instruction for students needing additional time to demonstrate proficiency in the standards for this component or to provide extended instruction for students who are ready for more advanced instruction.

Standards Addressed

R 2.8 Evaluate the credibility of an author's argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author's intent affects the structure and tone of the text (e.g., in professional journals, editorials, political speeches, primary source material).

Teacher Resources

Texts

- "The Man in the Water" by Roger Rosenblatt
- "Black Box: Air Florida Flight 90"
- "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" from *King James Bible*
- "A State Championship Versus Runner's Conscience" by John Christian Hoyle

Graphic Organizers

- Evaluating a Persuasive Essay
- Using and Evaluating Appeals as Persuasive Rhetorical Devices
- Determining the Credibility of an Author's Argument

Additional Resources

- Reading Check, Thinking Critically, and Extending and Evaluating questions
- In Other Words: Synonyms and Connotations
- Say It Straight: Eliminating Wordiness

Culminating Task

After completing the graphic organizers, students will write a well-organized persuasive essay that *authoritatively* evaluates the credibility of Rosenblatt's assertion that the "man in the water" is a true hero. Students will defend their positions with precise and relevant evidence (e.g., facts, expert opinions, references, and citations from the text(s) provided, expressions of commonly held beliefs, logical reasoning, anecdotes, and analogies). Students will also address counterclaims. A rubric is included for both teacher and student use.

Instructional Module 5: At – A – Glance

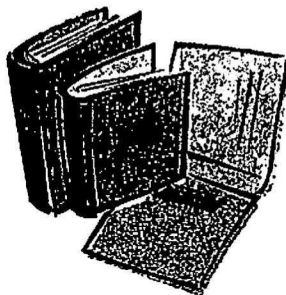
Text Summaries

Summary of “The Man in the Water”: In this personal essay, journalist Roger Rosenblatt reflects on the heroic actions of a few people after a plane hit a bridge and crashed into the icy waters of the Potomac River in the winter of 1982. Rosenblatt calls the disaster “two forms of nature in collision: the elements and human character.” He examines the heroism of two helicopter rescuers who risked their lives to lower a lifeline to the five survivors in the water and of a bystander who jumped in to drag another survivor to shore. His essay, however, focuses on the selfless actions of one of the crash victims, the anonymous “man in the water,” who saved the lives of others by passing the lifeline to them, one by one. He then slipped into the water and drowned. In the actions of this anonymous “man in the water,” Rosenblatt sees the best of Everyman, the triumph of humanity and altruism over the impersonal and indifferent forces of nature.

Summary of “Black Box: Air Florida Flight 90”: This is a transcript of a conversation that took place in the cockpit just before the crash of Air Florida Flight 90. It was recorded on the plane’s black box, later retrieved from the wreckage.

Summary of “The Parable of the Good Samaritan”: A traveler is attacked by thieves who rob him and leave him half dead. Soon a priest and then a Levite see the victim but pass along without helping. Finally, a Samaritan passes by. He gives the injured man first aid and takes him to an inn. The next day, the Samaritan leaves the innkeeper with some money and tells him to care for the man. The parable ends by asking who of the three men was the true neighbor.

Summary of “A State Championship Versus Runner’s Conscience”: In this personal essay, the writer recalls an incident that occurred when he ran for his high school’s cross-country team. After a winning season, his team goes to the state championship. Before the race, the coach tells the team that they have a good chance of winning and that they should not let anyone down. The writer begins the race strongly, and as he runs along a remote portion of the course, he sees an injured runner. He glances at his watch as he runs by, noting that he is making good time, but suddenly he stops in his tracks, torn between helping the hurt runner and winning the race for his team. Then the two runners’ eyes meet, and the writer realizes that he has no choice but to stop and help. Many runners pass by. Finally, a man comes to help the injured boy, and the author finishes the race. His coach and teammates are waiting for him at the finish line, wondering what has happened. His coach belittles him for stopping to help. The writer concludes that he did the right thing by following his conscience.



Instructional Module 5: Evaluating the Credibility of an Argument

Instructional Focus

R 2.8 Evaluate the credibility of an author's argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author's intent affects the structure and tone of the text.

Instructional Focus

In this personal essay, journalist Roger Rosenblatt reflects on the heroic actions of a few people after a plane hit a bridge and crashed into the icy waters of the Potomac River in the winter of 1982. Rosenblatt calls the disaster "two forms of nature in collision: the elements and human character." He examines the heroism of two helicopter rescuers who risked their lives to lower a lifeline to the five survivors in the water and of a bystander who jumped in to drag another survivor to shore. His essay, however, focuses on the selfless actions of one of the crash victims, the anonymous "man in the water," who saved the lives of others by passing the lifeline to them, one by one. He then slipped into the water and drowned. In the actions of this anonymous "man in the water," Rosenblatt sees the best of Everyman, the triumph of humanity and altruism over the impersonal and indifferent forces of nature.

Preparing to Read

Logical, Emotional, and Ethical Appeals: Readers should be aware that they may encounter three different types of appeals designed to win them over to the writer's position, to convince them to believe or do something.

- Logical appeals speak to the reader's ability to reason or think clearly. Logical appeals speak to common sense and logic. Logical appeals use evidence (e.g., facts, statistics, expert opinions, examples).
- Emotional appeals target the reader's feelings. Emotional appeals are aimed at the heart and speak to emotions such as fear, love, sympathy, and pride. Emotional appeals often include anecdotes and loaded words.
- Ethical appeals convey the writer's integrity. Ethical appeals address the reader's sense of right and wrong. They also rely on a belief that the writer is ethical.

These selections can be used for either **intervention** or **extension**, depending on student needs.

Instructional Application

Graphic organizers, Evaluating a Persuasive Essay, Using and Evaluating Emotional Appeals as Rhetorical Devices, and/or Determining the Credibility of an Author's Argument, can help students analyze the credibility of an author's argument. By working in groups, students can have the instructional conversations and accountable talk with will assist with their learning. The graphic organizers can also assist with student learning these selections are assigned as individual work.

Students will write a well-organized persuasive essay that *authoritatively* evaluates the credibility of Rosenblatt's assertion that the "man in the water" is a true hero and defends this position with precise and relevant evidence (e.g., facts, expert opinions, references, and citations from the text(s))

provided, expressions of commonly accepted beliefs, logical reasoning, anecdotes, and analogies). Students will also address counter-claims.

Evaluating the Credibility of an Argument

PERSONAL ESSAY

The Man in the Water

Roger Rosenblatt

As disasters go, this one was terrible but not unique, certainly not among the worst on the roster of U.S. air crashes. There was the unusual element of the bridge, of course, and the fact that the plane clipped it at a moment of high traffic, one routine thus intersecting¹ another and disrupting both. Then, too, there was the location of the event. Washington, the city of form and regulations, turned chaotic, deregulated,² by a blast of real winter and a single slap of metal on metal. The jets from Washington National Airport that normally swoop around the presidential monuments like famished gulls were, for the moment, emblemized³ by the one that fell; so there was that detail. And there was the aesthetic clash⁴ as well—blue-and-green Air Florida, the name a flying garden, sunk down among gray chunks in a black river. All that was worth noticing, to be sure. Still, there was nothing very special in any of it, except death, which, while always special, does not necessarily bring millions to tears or to attention. Why, then, the shock here?

Perhaps because the nation saw in this disaster something more than a mechanical failure. Perhaps because people saw in it no failure at all, but rather something successful about their makeup. Here, after all, were two forms of nature in collision: the elements and human character. Last Wednesday, the elements, indifferent as ever, brought down Flight 90. And on that same afternoon, human nature—groping and **flailing** in mysteries of its own—rose to the occasion.

Synonyms and connotations –
How are the connotations of the word *collision* different from those of its synonym *conflict*?

Evaluating an argument -
What evidence does the author give to support his calling these men “heroes”?

Of the four acknowledged heroes of the event, three are able to account for their behavior. Donald Usher and Eugene Windsor, a park-police helicopter team, risked their lives every time they dipped the skids⁵ into the water

from Holt *Elements of Literature*, Fourth Course, online supplemental materials.

to pick up survivors. On television, side by side in bright blue jumpsuits, they described their courage as all in the line of duty. Lenny Skutnik, a 28-year-old employee of the

Congressional Budget Office, said: "It's something I never thought I would do"—referring to his jumping into the water to drag an injured woman to shore. Skutnik added that "somebody had to go in the water," delivering every hero's line that is no less admirable for its repetitions. In fact, nobody had to go into the water. That somebody actually did so is part of the reason this particular tragedy sticks in the mind.

But the person most responsible for the emotional impact of the disaster is the one known at first simply as "the man in the water." (Balding, probably in his 50s, an extravagant moustache.) He was seen clinging with five other survivors to the tail section of the airplane. This man was described by Usher and Windsor as appearing alert and in control. Every time they lowered a lifeline and flotation ring to him, he passed it on to another of the passengers. "In a mass casualty, you'll find people like him," said Windsor. "But I've never seen one with that commitment." When the helicopter came back for him, the man had gone under. His selflessness was one reason the story held national attention; his anonymity^s another. The fact that he went unidentified invested him with a universal character. For a while he was Everyman, and thus proof (as if one needed it) that no man is ordinary.

Evaluating an argument - What evidence does the author give to support that the "man in the water" is a true hero?

Black Box: Air Florida Flight 90

The following conversation took place just before the crash of Air Florida Flight 90. It was recorded on the plane's black box, later retrieved from the wreckage.

Copilot. It's been a while since we've been de-iced.

Pilot. Think I'll go home and...

Copilot. Boy...this is a losing battle here on trying to de-ice those things...a false sense of security, that's all that does.

Evidence - What elements from this transcript could be used in a persuasive essay? Are these elements logical appeals, emotional appeals or ethical appeals?

Pilot. That, ah, satisfies the Feds. Right there is where the icing truck, they oughta have two...

Copilot. Yeah, and you taxi through kinda like a carwash or something.

Pilot. Hit that thing with about eight billion gallons of glycol...

Copilot. Slushy runway. Do you want me to do anything special for this or just go for it?

Pilot. Unless you got anything special you'd like to do.

Copilot. ...just take off the nose wheel early like a soft-field takeoff...I'll pull it [the throttle] back to about one point five...supposed to be about one six depending on how scared we are...*(laughter)*

[The plane is cleared for takeoff at 3:59 P.M., 45 minutes after its last de-icing.]

Copilot. God, look at that thing.

Copilot. That doesn't seem right, does it?

Copilot. Ah, that's not right.

Pilot. Yes, it is, there's eighty.

Copilot. Naw, I don't think that's right.

Copilot. Ah, maybe it is.

Pilot. Hundred and twenty.

Copilot. I don't know....

Pilot. Come on, forward....

Pilot. Just barely climb.

Speaker Undetermined. Stalling, we're [falling].

Copilot. Larry, we're going down, Larry.

Pilot. I know it.

[Sound of impact]

from Holt Elements of Literature, Fourth Course, online supplemental materials.

A parable is a brief story that teaches a lesson about life. In this well-known parable from the *Bible*, the lesson is about helping others.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead: And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence and gave them to the host and said unto him, "Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?

—Luke 10:30–36, from the King James Bible

Evaluating the Credibility of an Argument

PERSONAL ESSAY

A State Championship Versus Runner's Conscience

John Christian Hoyle

A light drizzle and fog fill the vast margin between gray clouds and muddy ground. The temperature is 42 degrees. The weather envelops and entices me and my six cross-country teammates as we exit the school van.

Our previous performance under similar atmospheric conditions was impressive. It got us here—the final meet of the season, the high school state championship. Physically and mentally, we are over prepared. We're cocky.

Making predictions - Will the author's team win the race? Use details from this passage to support your answer.

Jogging toward the starting line, I feel the eyes of our competition burn into my back. I reciprocate¹ glares while laughing at a joke a teammate shares. I savor knowing that these 180-odd runners know we are the team to beat. I feel powerful.

As we stretch ligaments, I catch a glimpse of our coach smiling—a configuration his mouth and cheeks are not used to. He knows the probability of our placing first is better than excellent.

"This is the best opportunity your school has ever had to win a state title," he says in a gruff voice. "Don't let the school down. Don't let me down. Don't let your teammates down. And, most importantly, don't let yourselves down."

Coach is still speaking. But I've stopped listening. I dream of the big, shiny trophy. We take our places: The gun fires. As I accelerate, I inhale deep breaths. Most of the racers are behind me. I'm hitting stride. A strong finish is mine.

Rounding a corner of a remote leg of the winding course, my eyes zero in on a runner in red shorts. He's sitting down, crying in pain, clutching his foot. I sidestep him and glance at

from *Holt Elements of Literature*, Fourth Course, online supplemental materials.

my watch. I'm making good time. I take comfort in knowing there's one fewer runner ahead of me.

But suddenly I freeze. Cold. I'm breathing heavily. My mind tells my legs to keep moving. But I don't. I swivel around, spotting the downed runner. He's now lying on his back—in the mud. I'm about 20 feet from him. I think for a moment. Do I help? Will someone else in the pack stop to help? Can I come back or send someone when I cross the finish line? I'm losing precious minutes. The agony on his face disturbs me. He's in trouble. Our eyes

Evaluating an argument –
What reason does the author give to explain why the race is over for him?

connect, and at this moment the race has ended for me. Arguments against helping become moot.² I can think of nothing other than helping this fellow.

I help him to his feet. We look for someone else to help, but no one does. About 25 runners have whizzed by. Finally, two or three minutes later, a man comes to take over for me.

"Finish the race," he encourages. "Finish the race!" I do. When I cross the finish line, my coach and teammates are waiting to find out what happened.

"Where were you?" Coach asks in a tone that would have dwarfed Lombardi.³

I explain.

"You what?" he says, tossing his arms in the air in disbelief. "You stopped to help someone."

"Yes," I mumble sheepishly. "It seemed right. I'm sorry."

He laughs at me. His face is fiery red. The six-hour ride back takes days in my mind. It's lonely and silent. Drumbeats from headphones are the only sounds that break the stale air.

Analysis – Did the author do the right thing? Explain.

My team placed fourth. Almost three weeks will go by until Coach speaks to me. Sports make my world revolve. It seems everyone thinks I failed, that I should have breezed by the guy.

from *Holt Elements of Literature*, Fourth Course, online supplemental materials.

I think about it a lot, even now, several years later. Did I do the right thing? Was it worth it?

Yes, because when his eyes connected with mine, my conscience demanded I stop and help. Though I had to think about it for a moment, I couldn't keep running. I would have felt awful if I had—and that would have smoldered in my mind a lot longer than the disapproval of Coach and my team. Basking in personal glory on the altar of ego, I figure, is never worth it.

—from *The Christian Science Monitor*,
February 5, 1999

from *Holt Elements of Literature*, Fourth Course, online supplemental materials.

Reading Check

1. Briefly describe the disaster.
2. According to Rosenblatt, the disaster was a clash between "the elements, indifferent as ever," and what else?
3. Besides the man in the water, who are the three other heroes, and what does each one do?
4. Describe what the man in the water looks like and what he does. What ultimately happens to him?

Thinking Critically

5. Rosenblatt says that the man in the water is proof that "no man is ordinary." What do you think he means by this?
6. Summarize Rosenblatt's most important points, and state his main idea. Which passages support this idea most effectively?
7. How is John Hoyle, the author of "A State Championship Versus Runner's Conscience" like the Samaritan in the Bible parable? How are they both like the heroes in Rosenblatt's essay? Are all these people good Samaritans? Explain your responses.

Extending and Evaluating

8. How would you react in a situation in which you might save a stranger's life but would risk losing your own? Talk about your responses to what the four heroes in Rosenblatt's essay did.
9. The final two paragraphs of the essay make specific points about human nature. Explain in your own words what Rosenblatt is saying, and then give your opinion of his ideas.
10. Evaluate the credibility of Rosenblatt's argument. What is Rosenblatt's intent? Does he give enough evidence to support his claim? What is the tone of this essay?

In Other Words: Synonyms and Connotations

PRACTICE

From a number of **synonyms**, Rosenblatt chose the words that had the **connotations**—the emotional overtones—he wanted. Answer the questions below about his word choices.

1. Rosenblatt says that in the aftermath of the crash, human nature found itself “groping and flailing in mysteries of its own.” Why wouldn’t *waving* have the same effect as *flailing*?
2. The author mentions the man’s “extravagant moustache.” Why is *extravagant* a more effective word to use than *large*?
3. What does *abiding* add to the author’s conclusion about the “wonder of the story” that *lingering* wouldn’t convey?
4. The man in the water “pitted” himself against nature. Why wouldn’t substituting *set* for *pitted* work as well?
5. Why would the author call nature *implacable* rather than *firm*?

Say It Straight: Eliminating Wordiness

Knowing when and how to use clauses and phrases is important because they can add information and variety to your sentences. Don’t overdo them, though, and create a wordy disaster. Compare these two sentences, for example:

1. Every time, hoping to rescue him, they lowered a lifeline and flotation ring and hoped that he would allow himself to be rescued out of the water; but he conveyed the rescue device to yet another one of the passengers who had been in the plane with him, waiting in the water to be rescued after the crash.
2. ROSENBLATT
“Every time they lowered a lifeline and flotation ring to him, he passed it on to another of the passengers.”

Rosenblatt’s sentence is not only much better than the first sentence; it was also harder to write. That’s because it’s easier to be wordy than concise. In your writing, don’t add too many phrases and clauses to a sentence.

PRACTICE 1

Pick another short passage from "The Man in the Water," and inflate it as in the first example. (By rewriting good, spare prose, you'll appreciate what makes it good.) Then, ask a partner to streamline the passage. Compare the shortened version with Rosenblatt's. Did your partner come close to finding the original amid the wordiness?

PRACTICE 2

Take a piece of prose you're working on or a piece from your writer's portfolio. See whether you can improve it by doing some pruning.

Evaluating a Persuasive Essay

Directions: Read the selection. Analyze the text by responding to the information requested in the boxes below.

Issue:

Thesis Statement:

Reason 1 and evidence:

Reason 2 and evidence:

Reason 3 and evidence:

Possible counter-claims:

Response to counter-claims:

Is the author's argument credible? Explain.

Using and Evaluating Appeals as Persuasive Rhetorical Devices

Directions: There are three types of appeals that are commonly used to persuade an audience. Read the selection(s) and complete the graphic organizer below.

- An **emotional appeal** attempts to persuade the reader or audience by engaging the emotions. Emotional appeals speak to feelings, sentiments, and passions. They evoke sympathy, fear, anger, pride, etc.
- An **ethical appeal** concentrates on the reader or audience's shared sense of right and wrong. Ethical appeals rely on beliefs that are generally understood as moral, just, principled or decent.
- A **logical appeal** engages the mind. Logical appeals depend on that which an identified group would consider valid, rational or commonsensical. Logical appeals are convincing because they are sound, realistic, levelheaded, or equitable.

Commonly held beliefs are also a type of persuasive rhetorical device. Commonly held beliefs may be true or inherently fallacious. They are persuasive because an identifiable group of people may believe them strongly.

TYPE OF APPEAL	EXAMPLE	EFFECT

Determining the Credibility of an Author's Argument

Evidence is specific information or proof that supports the reasons/assertions in an argument. Evidence must be precise and relevant, clearly related to the argument. Types of evidence include: analogies, anecdotes, case studies, definitions, expert opinions, expressions of commonly held beliefs, facts, hypotheses, quotations, scenarios. Rhetorical devices (appeals to emotion, ethical beliefs, and logic) are also used to support an author's position.

Directions: Determine the author's position for the passage you read. Complete the chart below. Then answer the questions that follow.

Author's Position: _____

Types of Evidence	Example	Effect

What would be an appropriate counter-argument? _____

What is your evaluation of the author's argument? _____

**ELA Secondary Periodic Assessment Program
Writing a Persuasive Essay**

4 The essay –

- *clearly* extends ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.
- states and maintains a position, *authoritatively* defends that position with precise and relevant evidence (including facts, expert opinions, quotations, and expressions of commonly accepted beliefs, logical reasoning, anecdotes, observations, and analogies) and *convincingly* addresses the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.
- provides a *meaningful* thesis that is responsive to the writing task.
- demonstrates a consistent tone and focus, and illustrates a *purposeful* control of organization.
- demonstrates a *clear* sense of audience.
- provides a *variety* of sentence types and uses *precise* language.
- contains, *few, if any, errors* in the conventions of the English language. (Errors are generally first-draft in nature.)*

3 The essay –

- extends ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.
- states and maintains a position, *generally* defends that position with precise and relevant evidence (including facts, expert opinions, quotations, and expressions of commonly accepted beliefs, logical reasoning, anecdotes, observations, and analogies) and addresses the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.
- provides a thesis that is responsive to the writing task.
- demonstrates a consistent tone and focus, and illustrates a control of organization.
- demonstrates a *general* sense of audience.
- provides a *variety* of sentence types and *some* precise use of language.
- may contain *some errors* in the conventions of the English language. (Errors do not interfere with the reader's understanding of the essay.)*

2 The essay –

- extends *some* ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.
- defends a position with *little* evidence and *may* address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.
- provides a thesis or main idea that is related to the writing task.
- demonstrates an *inconsistent* tone and focus, and illustrates *little, if any, control* of organization.
- demonstrates *little, or no* sense of audience.
- provides *few, if any, types* of sentence types, and uses *basic, predictable* language.
- may contain *several errors* in the conventions of the English language. (Errors may interfere with the reader's understanding of the essay.)*

1 The essay may be too short to evaluate or –

- *fails* to extend ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.
- *fails* to defend a position with any evidence and fails to address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.
- *may* provide a *weak* thesis or main idea that is related to the writing task.
- demonstrates a *lack of* tone and focus, and illustrates *no* control of organization.
- may demonstrate *no* sense of audience.
- may provide *no* sentence variety and uses *limited* vocabulary.
- may contain *serious errors* in the conventions of the English language. (Errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the essay.)*

0

non-scorable

- blank
- illegible/unintelligible

* Conventions of the English language refer to grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and usage.