What Video Games Can Teach Us
The Violent Side of Video Games

Magazine Articles by Emily Sohn

Can a GAME *play YOU?*

CALIFORNIA

R2.7 Make reasonable assertions about a text through accurate, supporting citations.

R2.8 Note instances of unsupported inferences, **fallacious reasoning,** persuasion, and propaganda **in text.**

Also included in this lesson: R2.6 (p. 897), **W1.1** (p. 899), **W2.5abc** (p. 899)

KEY IDEA How often have you heard the reminder "It's only a **game**"? It's meant to warn us that games shouldn't be taken too seriously. But suppose a game could help you learn, or change the way you act. Would it still be "only a game"? Many people think that video games, in particular, can have a powerful effect on their players. The following articles will show you some of the ways in which video games can be helpful or harmful.

DISCUSS Gather in a small group to discuss your video game habits. Take turns answering such questions as "How much time do you spend playing video games each week?" "What kinds of games do you play?" and "Do you think video games have a positive or negative effect on you?" When you are done, compare your results with those of the other groups.



ELEMENTS OF NONFICTION: ARGUMENT

An **argument** consists of a **claim,** or position on an issue or problem, supported by **reasons** and **evidence.** A basic argument might look like this.

Claim: *Dogs are smart.*

Support: *My dog knows his name and does tricks.*

A strong argument also raises possible objections to the claim and offers **counterarguments,** or arguments made to prove that the opposing viewpoint is wrong. As you read the following articles on video games, look for these elements.

READING SKILL: EVALUATE SUPPORT

To avoid being easily swayed by a weak argument, it is a good idea to evaluate the **support** and reasoning a writer includes. Watch for these weaknesses:

- **Vague language**—statements that are unclear
- **Irrelevant examples**—examples that do not directly relate to the claim
- **Fallacious reasoning**—reasoning that includes fallacies, or errors in logic. One type of fallacious reasoning is called **overgeneralization,** in which a statement is too broad to be accurate.

As you read each article, record examples of strong support and weak support in a chart like the one shown.

"What Video Games Can Teach Us"	
Strong Support	*Weak Support*
	Vague language: "a number of young gamers" (line 33)

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Emily Sohn uses the following words to present some of the pros and cons of playing video games. To see how many you know, write definitions for the boldfaced words.

1. Video games **captivate** many people.
2. Some people worry about games that **simulate** violence.
3. Video game players learn to make **precise** movements.
4. The opinions of different experts **complicate** the issue.

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A Mind for Science



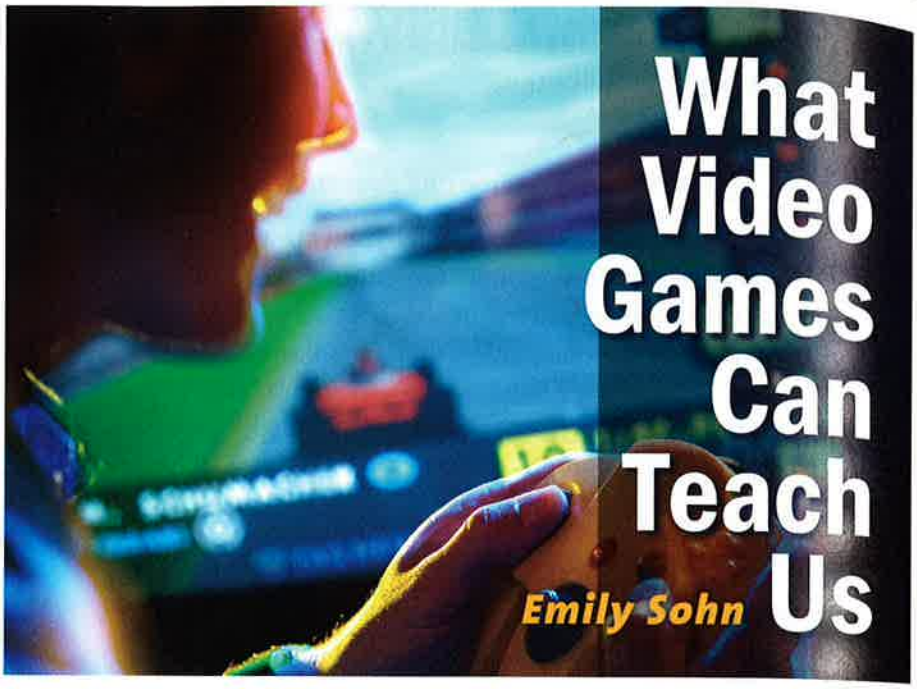
Emily Sohn

A specialist in health and science, Emily Sohn has written for a number of publications, including *Health, U.S. News & World Report, Smithsonian,* and *Outside.* She has also written for the student Web site for *Science News.*

On Assignment Though she is based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Sohn's work as a freelance writer has taken her to faraway and fascinating places. Sohn has traveled to Cuba, Turkey, the Peruvian Amazon, and Sweden in order to research her stories. She is also the science correspondent for Project Exploration, a "living classroom" founded by paleontologist Dr. Paul Sereno and educator Gabrielle Lyon. Sohn went to the Sahara Desert in Niger to report on the project's Dinosaur Expedition 2005.

Free Time When she's not writing or traveling, Sohn enjoys rock climbing, camping, and exploring. She loves being outside.

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR
For more on Emily Sohn, visit the **Literature Center** at **ClassZone.com.**



What Video Games Can Teach Us

Emily Sohn

HERE'S SOME NEWS FOR YOU TO SHARE WITH YOUR PARENTS AND TEACHERS: VIDEO GAMES MIGHT ACTUALLY BE GOOD FOR YOU.

Whenever a wave of teenage violence strikes, movies, TV, or video games often take the heat. Some adults assume that movies, TV, and video games are a bad influence on kids, and they blame these media[1] for causing various problems. A variety of studies appear to support the link between media violence and bad behavior among kids.

But media don't necessarily *cause* violence, says James Gee. Gee is an education professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. "You get a group of teenage boys who shoot up a school—of course they've played video games," Gee says. "Everyone does. It's like blaming food because we have obese people."

Video games are innocent of most of the charges against them, Gee says. The games might actually do a lot of good. Gee has written a book titled *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy.* A

1. **media:** a general term that includes television, films, magazines, newspapers, and video games.

A **ARGUMENT**
Reread lines 1–17 and locate the author's **claim.** What **reasons** does she provide as **support** for it?

A growing number of researchers agree with Gee. If used in the right way, video and computer games have the potential to inspire learning. And they can help players improve coordination[2] and visual skills.

Attention-Getting Games

A good video game is challenging, entertaining, and **complicated**, Gee says. It usually takes 50 to 60 hours of intense concentration to finish one. Even kids who can't sit still in school can spend hours trying to solve a video or computer game. . . .

The **captivating** power of video games might lie in their interactive nature. Players don't just sit and watch. They get to participate in the action and solve problems. Some games even allow players to make changes in the game, allowing new possibilities.

And kids who play computer games often end up knowing more about computers than their parents do. "Kids today are natives in a culture in which their parents are immigrants," Gee says.

In his 2 to 3 years of studying the social influences of video games, Gee has seen a number of young gamers become computer science majors in college. One kid even ended up as a teaching assistant during his freshman year because the school's computer courses were too easy for him. B

Screen Reading

Video games can enhance reading skills too. In the game *Animal Crossing*, for instance, players become characters who live in a town full of animals. Over the course of the game, you can buy a house, travel from town to town, go to museums, and do other ordinary things. All the while, you're writing notes to other players and talking to the animals. Because kids are interested in the game, they often end up reading at a level well above their grade, even if they say they don't like to read.

Games can inspire new interests. After playing a game called *Age of Mythology*, Gee says, kids (like his 8-year-old son) often start checking out mythology books from the library or join Internet chat groups about mythological characters. History can come alive to a player participating in the game. . . .

2. **coordination:** the ability to make multiple muscle groups work smoothly together.

complicate (kŏm'plĭ-kāt') *v.* to make difficult or complex

captivate (kăp'tə-vāt') *v.* to attract and hold interest

B EVALUATE SUPPORT
Reread lines 32–36. Why might the author have chosen to use **vague language** to make this point?

Improved Skills

Video games might also help improve visual skills. That was what researchers from the University of Rochester in New York recently found.

In the study, frequent game players between the ages of 18 and 23 were better at monitoring what was happening around them than those who didn't play as often or didn't play at all. They could keep track of more objects at a time. And they were faster at picking out objects from a cluttered environment.

"Above and beyond the fact that action video games can be beneficial," says Rochester neuroscientist[3] Daphne Bavelier, "our findings are surprising because they show that the learning induced by video game playing occurs quite fast and generalizes outside the gaming experience." C

The research might lead to better ways to train soldiers or treat people with attention problems, the researchers say, though they caution against taking that point too far.

Says Bavelier, "We certainly don't mean to convey the message that kids can play video games instead of doing their homework!"

If Gee gets his way, though, teachers might some day start incorporating computer games into their assignments. Already, scientists and the military use computer games to help **simulate** certain situations for research or training, he says. Why shouldn't schools do the same thing? . . . D

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have started a project they describe as the "Education Arcade." The project brings together researchers, scholars,[4] game designers and others interested in developing and using computer games in the classroom. . . .

Looking at the bright side of video and computer games could also help bring kids and adults closer together. Playing games can be a social activity, during which kids and adults learn from one another. By opening up lines of communication and understanding, maybe one day we'll praise video games for saving society, not blame them for destroying it.

3. **neuroscientist** (nŏŏr'ō-sī'ən-tĭst): a scientist who studies the brain and the nervous system.
4. **scholars:** people who study a particular subject.

C EVALUATE SUPPORT
Does the support the author provides in lines 51–60 seem strong? Explain why or why not.

simulate (sĭm'yə-lāt') *v.* to imitate

D EVALUATE SUPPORT
What **irrelevant example** does the author use in lines 66–70? Record this information in your chart.

The Violent Side of Video Games

Emily Sohn

WHEN I WAS A KID, I WAS OBSESSED WITH VIDEO GAMES.

I saved my allowance to buy new games every month. I read Nintendo magazines for tips about solving the Super Mario Brothers adventures. I played so many hours of *Tetris* that I used to dream about little blocks falling perfectly into place.

There were physical effects too. My thumbs turned into machines, quick and **precise**. During especially difficult levels of play, my palms would sweat. My heart would race. I'd have knots in my stomach from anxiety. It was the same feeling I'd sometimes get from watching scary movies or suspenseful TV shows.

After a while, I started to think that looking at screens and playing games all the time might be affecting me in ways I didn't even suspect. It turns out that I was probably right. E

Scientists are discovering that playing video and computer games and watching TV and movies can change the way we act, think, and feel. Whether these changes are good or bad has become a subject of intense debate.

Concerns About Violence

Violence is one of the biggest concerns, especially as computer graphics and special effects become more realistic. Some parents and teachers blame . . . aggressive behavior on media violence—as seen in TV programs, movies, and video games.

"If you've ever watched young children watching kickboxing," says child psychologist[1] John Murray, "within a few minutes they start popping up and pushing and shoving and imitating the actions." Murray is at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.

There's also evidence that people become less sensitive to violence after a while, Murray says. In other words, you get so used to seeing it that you eventually think it's not such a big deal. F

1. **child psychologist** (sī-kŏl'ə-jĭst): a person trained to study thought and behavior patterns in children.

precise (prĭ-sīs') *adj.* exact or correct

E ARGUMENT
Reread the title of the selection, followed by lines 1–13. What **claim** does the author make?

F EVALUATE SUPPORT
Reread lines 22–28. Does John Murray make any **overgeneralizations** to support his point?

G EVALUATE SUPPORT
Reread lines 29–32. What is the **irrelevant example** in these lines meant to support?

Then there's the "mean world syndrome."[2] If you watch lots of violence, you may start to think the world is a bad place. I still sometimes have trouble falling asleep if I watch the news on TV or read the newspaper right before going to bed. G

Still, it's hard to prove that violence on TV leads to violence in real life. It might be possible, for example, that people who are already aggressive for other reasons are more drawn to violent games and TV shows. . . .

Video Power

Most of the research has focused on TV and movie violence, mainly because TV and movies have been around much longer than video games, says psychologist Craig Anderson of Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Anderson has a Web site dedicated to looking at the link between video games and violence.

In his own research and in analyses[3] of research by others, Anderson says that he has detected a connection between violent video games and violent behavior. He has found that people who repeatedly play violent games have aggressive thoughts and become less helpful and sociable. Physically, their heart rates accelerate.

Video games might have an even more powerful effect on the brain than TV does, Murray says. Players actively participate in the violence. . . .

Next time you play a violent video game, Murray suggests, check your pulse just before and after each round as one way to see how the game affects you.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, I'll bet your heart rate will have increased rather dramatically while playing one," Murray says. "This indicates that . . . you are being affected." H

H EVALUATE SUPPORT
Reread lines 47–55. Does the **evidence** in this section provide strong support for the **claim?** Explain why or why not.

Three teenagers from Puerto Rico have data to back up that observation. With the help of a school nurse, the high school seniors found that people of all ages showed a rise in blood pressure and heart rate after playing a superviolent game. Playing an active, nonviolent game did not have the same effect.

2. **syndrome** (sĭn'drōm'): a group or pattern of symptoms that make up a disease or condition.
3. **analyses** (ə-năl'ĭ-sēz'): examinations of different information or experimental results.

Comprehension



R2.6 Determine the adequacy and appropriateness of the evidence for an author's conclusions.

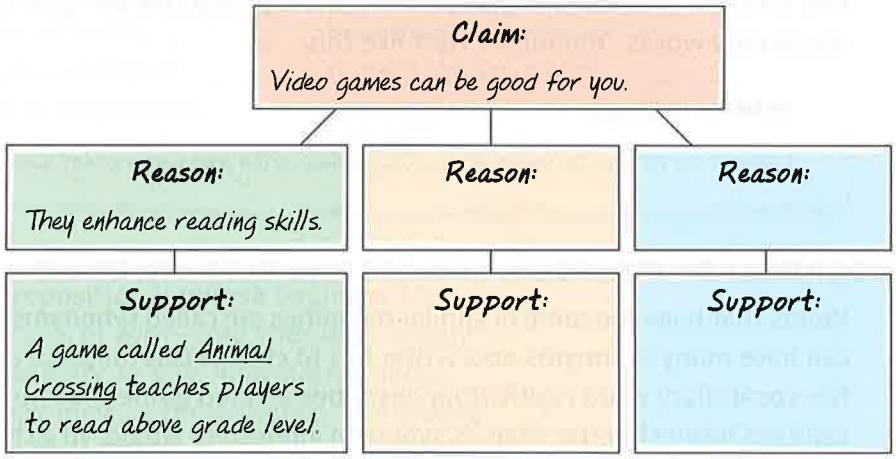
R2.7 Make reasonable assertions about a text through accurate, supporting citations.

R2.8 Note instances of unsupported inferences, **fallacious reasoning,** persuasion, and propaganda **in text.**

1. **Recall** According to "What Video Games Can Teach Us," why is the military using computer games for training?
2. **Clarify** According to "The Violent Side of Video Games," what is the "mean world syndrome"?
3. **Summarize** Reread lines 37–46 in "The Violent Side of Video Games." Then write a summary of Craig Anderson's discoveries.

Critical Analysis

4. **Understand Generalizations** A hasty generalization occurs when a person jumps to a conclusion based on too little **evidence.** Reread lines 44–48 of "What Video Games Can Teach Us." Why might the information in this paragraph be considered a hasty generalization?
5. **Analyze an Argument** Take note of the **claim** Sohn makes about video games in "What Video Games Can Teach Us." In a graphic organizer like the one shown, list the **reasons** Sohn gives for her position, and the **evidence** she uses to support it.



6. **Examine Evidence** One common type of evidence is **expert testimony,** or quotes from people who are knowledgeable about whatever subject is being argued. Look over the articles to find the experts who are quoted in each one. Why might the author have chosen these particular experts?
7. **Evaluate Support** Look back at the chart you filled in as you read, reviewing the support for each article. Which article used more adequate and appropriate **evidence** to support its **claim?** Explain your answer.

Extension and Challenge

8. **Big Question Activity** Review the results of the group activity on page 890. Did you notice any patterns in the **games** your classmates like to play, or in the effect the games have on people? Write a short paragraph that explains whether the results seem to support the first article, the second article, or parts of each.

Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE



Choose the letter of the word or phrase that best completes each sentence.

1. You **complicate** directions by (a) adding steps, (b) explaining them, (c) writing them down.
2. To **simulate** eating, you (a) buy food, (b) pretend to chew, (c) think of dinner.
3. A movie can **captivate** you, making you want to (a) get popcorn, (b) chat, (c) watch closely.
4. A **precise** measurement is (a) estimated, (b) correct, (c) unreliable.

VOCABULARY IN WRITING

Were you surprised by any of the effects of video games described in these two articles? Answer this question in a short paragraph, using at least two vocabulary words. You might start like this.

EXAMPLE SENTENCE

I wasn't surprised to learn that video games often ***simulate*** *violent scenes.*

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: CHOOSE THE BEST SYNONYM

Words that have the same or similar meanings are called **synonyms.** A word can have many synonyms, so a writer has to choose carefully. For example, the vocabulary word *captivating* describes a video game that holds or captures interest better than its synonym *interesting* would. In a thesaurus (a book or electronic tool for finding synonyms), the word *captivating* is also grouped with words such as *fascinating* or *spellbinding*.

PRACTICE For each sentence, choose the synonym in parentheses that best replaces the boldfaced word in the context provided. Consult a dictionary or thesaurus for help.

1. The abandoned factory was dark and **empty.** (deserted, unfilled)
2. After the marathon, he **drank** as much water as he could. (sipped, gulped)
3. The room was **large** and airy. (spacious, massive)
4. The kittens **hit** a ball of yarn back and forth. (batted, smacked)
5. By the end of the five-mile hike, we were all **tired.** (sleepy, exhausted)

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
For more practice, go to the **Vocabulary Center** at **ClassZone.com.**

Reading-Writing Connection



R2.8, W1.1, W2.5abc

Show your understanding of Emily Sohn's two articles by responding to these prompts. Then complete the **Grammar and Writing** exercise.

WRITING PROMPTS	SELF-CHECK
A. Short Response: Revise an Argument Provide a sample of vague language, overgeneralization, or an irrelevant example from either article. Rewrite the **paragraph** in which your example appears, correcting the weak reasoning.	***A successful revision will . . .*** • identify an example of weak or faulty reasoning • use strong reasoning to rewrite the example
B. Extended Response: Express Your Opinion A newspaper editorial is a short piece of writing that expresses an opinion. Write a two- or three-paragraph **editorial** or **letter to the editor** stating whether young people should be allowed to play video **games** as a classroom exercise.	***A convincing response will . . .*** • contain a clear statement presenting your opinion • support the argument with examples from the articles

GRAMMAR AND WRITING

AVOID MISPLACED MODIFIERS A **prepositional phrase** begins with a preposition—such as *from, in, on, under,* or *with*—and ends with a noun or pronoun. Prepositional phrases **modify,** or give information about, another word in the sentence. For example, in the sentence "The mouse is under the table," *under the table* modifies *mouse.* If a prepositional phrase is placed too far from the word it modifies, the sentence's meaning may be unclear.

Original: Anderson connected video games with behavior in his research.

Revised: In his research, Anderson connected video games with behavior.

PRACTICE Move each prepositional phrase to the correct position.

1. Much has been said about violent video games in the news media.
2. Video games can have a more powerful effect than TV on the brain.
3. You can learn a lot from video games with patience and concentration.
4. Emily Sohn talks about playing many video games in her article.

For more help with misplaced modifiers, see page R59 in the ***Grammar Handbook.***