

Argument Analysis – VCAA Sample English Exam 2002
ASHA Lectures

In response to the rising level of absenteeism at Anyton Secondary College, and the principal's proposal to enforce punitive consequences to combat this behaviour, contentious debate has ignited by parents of students on the effectiveness of these measures in addressing the larger issue. The speech by Tom Frost at the School Council meeting is representative of one side of the debate, contending that the stringent repercussions being enforced by the school for truancy are excessive, and not equated to the harmlessness of the actions committed. The letter by Rosemary Collins, while shares a similar point of view in that the disciplinary actions introduced are inordinate, also intends to promote her firm and thus encourage the principal to engage in their consultancy.

Commented [A1]: Identifying issue

Commented [A2]: Identifying text type

Commented [A3]: Identifying contention of first piece

Commented [A4]: Identifying contention of second piece

Through the use of derisive imagery, Frost attempts to paint a scornful image of school, thus presenting the argument that truancy is justified. The painting of school as a place where children are "chained to their desks all day" exaggerates and demonises the schooling experience as one of punishment and torture. In addition, the likening of school to "the remand system" augments this negative image portrayed by Frost, by aligning the school environment and its system to the brutal and rigid procedures and discipline of a prison.

Commented [A5]: Persuasive technique used

Commented [A6]: Identifying the effect of the persuasive technique

Commented [A7]: Identification of orator's first argument

Commented [A8]: Evidencing where this imagery has been presented in the piece

The audience is hence compelled to view children's desire to "wag school" as not coming unprovoked. The mocking of the educational jargon of educational institutions being "independent and flexible environments" further demeans schools and the education they provide. This therefore drives the attendees of the School Council meeting to perceive the principal's punitive measures to tackle absenteeism as establishing a restrictive system; they are thus driven to side against this decision in favour of a more lenient one.

Commented [A9]: Each paragraph for persuasive language should explain:
1) The argument
2) 2-3 persuasive techniques (what they are, how they persuade and what the effect on the reader is)

Frost further aims to depict truancy as being a formative learning experience. The claim that "there are other places to learn things" implies that 'wagging' school is a means to attain knowledge.

Commented [A10]: Argument #2

Furthermore, the portrayal of truancy as being an act to "find out about life first hand" illustrates absenteeism as being a learning experience rather than an act of disengagement and nuisance. This intends to further persuade the audience that this proposal of punitive measures is unjustified, as it

Commented [A11]: Reference to what the technique is (quote)

Commented [A12]: The purpose of this portrayal

implies that students who partake in absenteeism do so for learning and educational purposes. The speaker's questioning of whether "it [is] so bad to wag school" considering "most of us" have done during our adolescence presents truancy as simply being part of childhood development and not behaviour that needs to be heavily sanctioned. This trivialisation is further seen through the labelling of absenteeism as "play[ing] truant" and "wag[ging]". This minimises the severity of the issue, presenting it in a more casual and colloquial manner compared to the more severely connotative terms like truancy. The facetious statement of absenteeism being simply viewed as "off mental health days" in his family imbues this trivial portrayal of the issue, that it is not deserving of harsh punishment. The audience is thus positioned to view the proposal by the principal as excessive and not proportionate to the behaviour of the students.

While the speech presents the severity of the punitive measures proposed by the principal in a condemnatory tone, the letter by Collins does so in a more measured and rational manner. Collins attempts to establish authority on the issue through the presentation of her "research as a consultant" as well as her piece lending itself to research by the inclusion of factual and statistical data that "up to 10 percent of students" require special assistance to achieve regular school attendance. This intends to persuade the principal, Ms Smith, on the specialised knowledge she has on this issue – not simply to demonstrate punitive measures being an ineffective solution, but to furthermore entice Ms Smith in engaging with her firm to combat this mass absenteeism. This notion is reinforced by the accompanying masthead; it acts as a representation of her purpose, to be the key solution to the problem faced by the Secondary College. By her firm also being located in the same suburb as the college, it indicates that they are local and knowledgeable of the socio-cultural context, thus making them well-suited to assist the school. The key having a steel framework fortifies this demonstration by depicting their company as being a strong and effective solution. The principal is thus positioned to perceive both the validity of Collin's contention and the benefits of engaging in the consulting services her company provides.

Despite the speech by Tom Frost and letter by Rosemary Collins both share the same contention, they present punitive models of discipline as not being the most appropriate solution in differing ways. Frost employs informal language and colloquialism, as seen through statements including "keep 'em off the streets" in order to connect with his target audience, other parents in the School Council, to demonstrate that he understands the hardships and the realities of parenthood, and is the voice of their views. This contrasts to Collins, who utilises more formal language such as "Yours Sincerely", which

Commented [A13]: Comparison of tone between the two pieces

Commented [A14]: Comparison of the persuasive language and approaches used by Frost and Collins as concluding paragraph

reflects the professional and formal relationship she shares with the intended reader, the principal. This is further seen in their depiction of student disinterest in school; while Frost employs more colloquial and facetious language in his statement that “school can just be plan boring”, Collins’ language is representative of greater formality, as she portrays the school as needing to “lift [students] engagement with school”. The pieces by Frost and Collins are similar however, in that they are both stakeholders in the recent issue of truancy. This is seen in Collins’ letter, concluding with her being the “Mother of Fiona”, and Frost’s statement that he as “three kids [at Anyton]”. This thus exemplifies both writers as having vested interests in the policies of the school, and therefore would want the best solution to the issue.