

Module 9: Nonfiction  
Topic 4 Content: Persuasive Texts Analysis

Introduction

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February **The Student Dispatch** Vol. 12, No. 3

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### Should Our High School Implement School Uniforms?

By Linda R.

I was sitting in History class with two of my friends when my teacher asked us to get into groups of four to work on a Civil War project. I always studied and did classwork with these two friends, but there's another girl in my History class who's a real brain and always gets good grades. I told my friends that we should ask her to join us, but they only looked at each other and laughed. "I don't want to work with those knee-highs," one of them commented. "I don't care what her pants looks like. I want to get a good grade on this project," I protested. But they didn't want to have anything to do with someone who wore unfashionable clothes, and now they don't want to talk to me, either.



By Sara W.

Last month, one of my best friends Eric told me he was going to check out a huge sale at the mall. His mom offered me a ride, so we ended up buying a few pieces, including some trendy shorts that all the pop stars are wearing now. The next day in school, all my friends commented on how cool my outfit looked. That made me feel confident and happy. In English class, I was so involved in a small group discussion about *Macbeth* that I didn't notice a principal stepping into the room. He tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Your shorts are showing too much, Miss. Come with me. We're calling your mom." As I stood up to gather my things, my face was burning red. I never felt so humiliated before.

Two students named Linda and Sara have written and published op-ed columns in their high school newspaper regarding the issue of school uniforms. You will notice that parts of their columns are highlighted. Hover your cursor over the highlighted excerpts to view an example analysis of their arguments. To scroll through the text, hover your cursor over the top or bottom of the screen and click *Scroll Up* or *Scroll Down*. Click *NEXT* to begin.

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Comment 1


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Linda begins her argument with an anecdote that hooks the reader. This is a compelling story because it brings to life the detrimental effects of focusing on clothes rather than prioritizing learning. Linda was faced with missing out on a great learning opportunity, and evidently her relationship with her former friends was harmed, as you can infer from her words "now they don't want to talk to me." What do you think the main idea of Linda's column is?

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Comment 2


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By Sara W.

Last month, one of my best friends Eric told me he was going to check out a huge sale at the mall. His mom offered me a ride, so we ended up buying a few pieces, including some trendy shorts that all the pop stars are wearing now. The next day in school, all my friends commented on how cool my outfit looked. That made me feel confident and happy. In English class, I was so involved in a small group discussion about *Macbeth* that I didn't notice a principal stepping into the room. He tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Your shorts are showing too much, Miss. Come with me. We're calling your mom." As I stood up to gather my things, my face was burning red. I never felt so humiliated before.

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Sara begins her argument with an anecdote that hooks the reader. This is an effective anecdote because it allows the reader to really experience first-hand the negative consequences resulting from an emphasis on dress code. Sara highlights not only the emotional turmoil that she suffered, but the academic disruption of enforcing the dress code. What do you think the main idea of Sara's column is?

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#### Comment 3

It's time that our high school **embrace** a school-wide uniform. A school uniform policy can improve our education by removing distractions to learning. Instead of worrying about what everyone is wearing, if we're all wearing the same outfit, we can focus on what we're supposed to be learning. Some students are mature enough not to make a fuss over people's looks, but let's be real: **The vast majority of people in our high school are not at that maturity level yet.** Plenty of us have witnessed fellow students being teased or ostracized over something petty like the style or condition of their clothes. And these victims of harassment are usually the students who can least afford nice outfits. Why should **our school's poorest students miss out on a quality education** just because they can't afford the latest fashion? By putting everyone on an equal playing field, uniforms can put an end to the silly "fashion shows" that play out in our hallways and classrooms.

It would be a huge mistake to **force** students to wear school uniforms. If anything, our school dress code needs to be *less* strict. Some people argue that uniforms remove distractions to learning and create an equal playing field for poorer students, but the opposite is true. Uniforms and other dress codes are part of a mentality that scrutinizes the clothing of girls in order to benefit boys. This biased mentality claims that boys get distracted by girls, and so girls who are considered "distracting" must be removed from the classroom so that boys can continue to learn. Of course, this discrimination negatively impacts the education of girls, while **boys are never pulled out of school or punished for dress code violations.** The unfair treatment of girls regarding clothing isn't even necessary in high school. Perhaps young kids get distracted with who wears what, but **we high school students are mature enough to appreciate fashion while still focusing on our school work.**

*It's time that our high school **embrace** a school-wide uniform.*

Notice how Linda chooses the word "embrace" to describe the adoption of school uniforms. This word choice has a positive—even comforting—connotation that makes school uniforms seem like an appealing choice. In this sentence, Linda reveals her main idea: She is in favor of school uniforms. Using words with positive connotations may give her argument a persuasive effect.

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#### Comment 4

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*The vast majority of people in our high school are not at that maturity level yet.*

Linda makes a claim that nearly all students in her school are not mature enough to ignore distractions like clothing. How does she know this is true? Perhaps the number of students who focus too much on clothes is a small majority. Linda fails to provide any evidence for her claim other than subjective observation, which may or may not be accurate.

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#### Comment 5

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*. . . our school's poorest students miss out on a quality education . . .*

Here, Linda claims that underprivileged students in her school do not receive a quality education, implying that their clothing marks their low economic status and makes them a target for unfair treatment. But do poor students actually receive an inferior education, especially due to their clothing? Since Linda does not provide any hard evidence, her claim is vulnerable to counterarguments. For example, perhaps there are students in the school who struggle financially, but does that mean they look different from or are treated differently by their peers? And even if they are treated differently, how does it impact their learning, if at all? Is it possible that underprivileged students can excel academically?

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#### Comment 6

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*It would be a huge mistake to **force** students to wear school uniforms.*

Notice how Sara chooses the word "force" to describe the adoption of school uniforms. This word choice has a negative and threatening connotation that makes school uniforms feel like an unpleasant burden. In this sentence, Sara reveals her main idea: She is opposed to school uniforms. Using words with negative connotations may give her argument a persuasive effect.

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#### Comment 7

It's time that our high school **embrace** a school-wide uniform. A school uniform policy can improve our education by removing distractions to learning. Instead of worrying about what everyone is wearing, if we're all wearing the same outfit, we can focus on what we're supposed to be learning. Some students are mature enough not to make a fuss over people's looks, but let's be real: **The vast majority of people in our high school are not at that maturity level yet.** Plenty of us have witnessed fellow students being teased or ostracized over something petty like the style or condition of their clothes. And these victims of harassment are usually the students who can least afford nice outfits. Why should **our school's poorest students miss out on a quality education** just because they can't afford the latest fashion? By putting everyone on an equal playing field, uniforms can put an end to the silly "fashion shows" that play out in our hallways and classrooms.

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*. . . boys are never pulled out of school or punished for dress code violations.*

Sara makes a claim that female students are unfairly targeted and punished for dress code violations whereas male students are never pulled from class because of their clothes. Is this a fact or an opinion? Sara presents this information as a true fact, but since she does not provide any objective evidence to support her claim, the reader may wonder if Sara is exaggerating, uninformed, or hiding information. Is it possible that boys are also sometimes punished for dress code violations?



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#### Comment 8

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*. . . we high school students are mature enough to appreciate fashion while still focusing on our school work.*

Sara claims that the students in her high school are mature enough not to judge others unfairly based on clothing and that her peers successfully focus on learning, implying that there is no need for a strict dress code. But how does Sara know this to be true? As a student herself, she is certainly familiar with other students, but can she objectively claim to know how mature all the students in her school are? Maybe most students are not as mature as Sara and she simply has never met them.

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#### Comment 9

Students who are opposed to wearing school uniforms claim that they stifle individuality. To all these privileged, elitist students who only care about themselves and their looks, I ask this question: Why do you have to express your individuality through your clothes? Can't you be an individual through the thoughts you express or the work that you do? I think wearing trendy clothes is fun, too. But we can wear our favorite outfits outside of school, like at the mall, movie theater, etc.

Think about it this way: the members of our basketball team all wear the same uniform, right? And yet, the star athletes still manage to stand out through their athletic performance, despite their uniform clothing. Uniforms help bring a feeling of unity and team spirit to the players. Likewise, uniforms can unite the school community just as athletic uniforms do for sports teams. Besides, life is easier without having to worry about your wardrobe in the morning. After all, even Mark Zuckerberg wears the same plain outfit to work every day.

Uniforms stifle expression and individuality. Maybe some people don't mind wearing the same clothes every day, but what about the people who need a creative outlet? It's wrong to suggest that young people must only express their individuality and creativity outside of school. Because we spend most of our time in school Monday through Friday, not having the freedom to choose our own outfits means that our personal wardrobes won't get much use considering that it's not practical to change into a second outfit once the school day is over.

If proponents of school uniforms say that clothes is superficial and doesn't matter, they're disregarding how much influence clothes can have on our mood and self-esteem. If your clothes don't feel right, then *you* don't feel right. Having the freedom to choose how you look means you can feel good about yourself, and this gives you the motivation to excel in academics. If we are forced to wear uniforms, we'll waste energy focusing on how much we hate our outfit.

*To all these privileged, elitist students who only care about themselves and their looks . . .*

Did you identify this *ad hominem* fallacy? In her intent to counter the opposition's claim that uniforms stifle individuality, Linda makes an *ad hominem* attack by calling people who are opposed to uniforms elitist and self-centered. Is it true that opponents are elitist and selfish? Recall that Sara's new outfit was purchased during a huge sale. Perhaps the opposition is not as privileged as Linda assumes. *Ad hominem* attacks are never acceptable, but even if students against uniforms are wealthy and only care about themselves, what does that have to do with the issue?

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#### Comment 10

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*And yet, the star athletes still manage to stand out through their athletic performance, despite their uniform clothing.*

Linda introduces an analogy between athletic uniforms and school uniforms. By pointing out the positive outcomes of athletic uniforms on team sports, she effectively draws a parallel to the same promising results one would reasonably find in school uniforms.

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#### Comment 11

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*Besides, life is easier without having to worry about your wardrobe in the morning. After all, even Mark Zuckerberg wears the same plain outfit to work every day.*

Linda makes a bandwagon persuasive appeal when she brings up the fact that a CEO wears the same uniform to work every day. It is important that you identify this as a bandwagon fallacy; she is suggesting that just because a successful CEO wears the same uniform at work, everyone at her high school should do the same. However, her school does not need to "jump on the bandwagon." There are plenty of successful people who do not wear the same uniform daily. Note how Linda's appeal relies on her knowing her audience well. If the students reading this school newspaper column are not familiar with Mark Zuckerberg or what he wears to work, then they will only be confused by the reference.

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#### Comment 12

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*It's wrong to suggest that young people must only express their individuality and creativity outside of school.*

Did you identify the straw man fallacy presented in Sara's claim? Sara is implying that the opposition wants young people to refrain from self-expression in school. However, this is a straw man fallacy because the opposition is not suggesting that students cannot express their individuality or creativity. Recall Linda's point that there are ways to express individuality other than through clothes. Instead of the actual counterarguments, Sara makes up a false argument, or "straw man," and attacks that instead.

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#### Comment 13

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Sara makes a strong and reasonable point in favor of rejecting school uniforms. Assuming that personal choice in clothes is important and valuable to students, being denied this choice has a significant impact on students since they do spend so much of their time participating in school activities. Sara effectively points out that most students are not going to go through the trouble of wearing two outfits in the same day.

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#### Comment 14

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Uniforms stifle expression and individuality. Maybe some people don't mind wearing the same clothes every day, but what about the people who need a creative outlet? It's wrong to suggest that young people must only express their individuality and creativity outside of school. Because we spend most of our time in school Monday through Friday, not having the freedom to choose our own outfits means that our personal wardrobes won't get much use considering that it's not practical to change into a second outfit once the school day is over.

If proponents of school uniforms say that clothes is superficial and doesn't matter, they're disregarding how much influence clothes can have on our mood and self-esteem. If your clothes don't feel right, then *you* don't feel right. Having the freedom to choose how you look means you can feel good about yourself, and this gives you the motivation to excel in academics. If we are forced to wear uniforms, we'll waste energy focusing on how much we hate our outfit.

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The claim that clothes affect one's mood, which in turn impacts motivation and academic performance, may very well be true. However, more likely it is a hasty generalization fallacy. Recall that Sara experienced a boost in confidence and motivation due to her trendy outfit, but that does not mean that all students experience the same positive effective when wearing nice clothes. In fact, clothes may not have any impact—positive or negative—on certain students. Sara erroneously took her perspective and experience and applied them to everyone else without evidence supporting her claim.

## Module 9: Nonfiction

### Topic 4 Content: Persuasive Texts Analysis

#### Comment 15

Because school uniforms are such an affordable and effective method for improving education, our local school conducted a survey three years ago that showed near universal support on behalf of both parents and students. There is more than enough evidence in favor of implementing a school uniform policy in order to provide the best possible learning environment for all students at our high school.

Remember that group project from my History class? That was the last time I got a C- grade because now I don't collaborate with my old friends anymore. They may still talk about me behind my back, but I've made the choice to focus on what's important: not on how people look but on my education. Until we all have uniforms, students won't make the right choice.

You might remember that three years ago, our local school board surveyed both parents and students and found that the majority of people did not support implementing a school uniform since the added cost of expensive uniforms would place an undue burden on local taxpayers. These findings along with all the other reasons pointing to the detriment of school uniforms suggest that any further restriction on student dress does more harm than good.

After I was pulled from English class because of my harmless clothes, I missed participating in a valuable class discussion, and my peers were harmed not by my clothing but by the disruption of removing their friend and classmate from the group discussion.

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Interestingly, both Linda and Sara cite the same survey as evidence to support their claims. How is this possible when they hold opposing views? This situation actually occurs more often than you might think. Writers may use the same study to draw a wide variety of conclusions. According to the survey conducted by the school board, Linda concludes that most people support school uniform policy whereas Sara concludes that most people oppose it. Who is correct, Linda or Sara? Based on their columns alone, there is no way to know for sure, so you must follow up and examine the survey yourself. Whenever you encounter questionable claims or conflicting information, you must resort to checking the original source.