

COURSE IN EXPOSITORY WRITING
Unit 2. Choose support strategy

Lesson 2a (2 hours)

In Unit 1 you learnt to:

- Place the essay topic in a social situation (What has happened? Why is the reader interested?).
- Set a writer goal (How you, the writer, want the reader to think or act after reading your essay/letter/proposal).
- Decide on your personal position on the essay topic/question (Your writer goal is to persuade the reader to accept your position).

In this unit you will learn how to use your writer goal to plan your essay. The first thing to plan is the strategy for supporting your position. You must, of course, have a position before you can think about choosing a support strategy. We will begin this Unit by checking that you have stated a position in your introductory paragraph (written in Unit 1)

Have I stated a position?

Have you written a position statement in your paragraph? Can you find evaluation and interpretation words in your paragraph? The teacher will show you:

- The difference between evaluation/ interpretation words as opposed to topic words
- The difference between position statement and topic statement

Topic words and evaluation/interpretation words

Topic words: Things, people events, acts.	Evaluation/interpretation words: Our attitudes, feelings, judgements, the way we see things.
Online chatting, computers, internet, taking part, students, teenagers	Waste of time, fun, sometimes rewarding, addicted, must be disciplined

Topic statement and position statement

Essay topic: Online chatting: harmful or beneficial?	
Topic statement	Position statement
As most homes have computers today, many students take part in online chatting.	Online chatting is fun and can be rewarding but students must be disciplined.

A position statement can show a simple, 'black and white' position, like this:

Online chatting is beneficial.

Or it can show a qualified position like the one in the box above. We take a qualified position when we know that our judgement cannot be true in all situations. A qualified

position statement tells the examiner that the student is capable of mature thinking. To arrive at a qualified position, follow these steps:

1. Start with a simple position (*Online chatting is beneficial.*)
2. Question your position. Imagine a sceptical reader challenging you. This reader does not believe your position is reasonable. (*Is it always beneficial? What are the benefits? Why do some parents disapprove of online chatting? Can it be beneficial if a student spends 6 hours a day chatting online?*)
3. Answer your questions. Look at how the simple position is not reasonable. (*...not always beneficial; ...can share ideas and make new friends, but they may be the wrong types; ...no time for homework; we need discipline...*)
4. Use the answers to revise the simple position. (*Online chatting is fun and can be rewarding but students must be disciplined.*)

Activity 2.1 Check your position statement

Pair work.

Read your partner’s opening paragraph.

1. Look for the position statement. Underline the evaluation/interpretation language.
2. Tell your partner whether it is a simple position or a qualified position. Not sure? Discuss it with another student.
3. If your partner is right in saying your paragraph has no position statement, re-write your paragraph. Put in a position statement.
4. If you have taken a simple position and wish to qualify it, try the 4 steps above.

Supporting a position

After we have decided on a position for our essay, we must plan the **support strategy**. A strategy is a planned method of doing something to achieve a goal. A support strategy is a plan that answers the question: What method shall I use to achieve my goal in this essay? Study this example:

Essay Topic:	Online chatting: Beneficial or harmful?
My social, rhetorical goal:	Persuade the examiner to agree that online chatting has benefits and is not harmful if we are disciplined.
My position:	Online chatting is fun and can be rewarding but students must be disciplined.
Support strategy:	Use personal experience to show the fun and benefit from online chatting, and to show how students can be disciplined (in what they say to strangers and the amount of time they spend chatting).

There are a number of support strategies we can use to persuade the reader to see our point of view. Using personal experience is one strategy students can use in O-level essays. In Activity 2.2 we will see a writer using another support strategy – providing evidence to persuade the reader to believe the writer’s evaluation of something.

Activity 2.2 Deconstruction

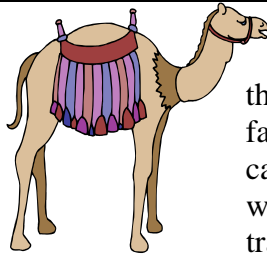
Work in a group on one of the questions following the text. The teacher will tell you which question your group is doing.

Text 2A

FILM REVIEW

The Story of the Weeping Camel

¹A film with this title begs the question: ²Why did the camel weep? ³The idea of family and trauma is not often ascribed to animals. ⁴But this film brings these ideas to the foreground by showing us a family living in the Gobi desert and their experience with their livestock. ⁵It is a refreshing change from most commercial films.



⁶We see how intertwined the lives of the family and the animals are, and how far the family would go to reconcile a camel and her colt. ⁷The birth of the colt was a difficult one. ⁸Hence, the traumatized camel refuses to let the baby suckle. ⁹In the wild, such a situation would mean death for the new-born camel. ¹⁰The family, who lead a largely blissful life on the plain, attempt to rehabilitate mother and child.

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1. The social context. This text is part of a film review. Talk about the social goal of a film review. Why do newspapers have film reviews? Why do people read film reviews?
 2. Writer's position and social context. Sentence 5 says W's (the writer's) position on the film. What evaluation/interpretation words has W used? W's evaluation compares this film to "most commercial films." W is asking her readers to call to mind what most commercial films are like. What are most films showing in the cinema about? Look at the "films" handout the teacher has given you.
 3. Support strategy. W wants to support her evaluation of the film: "a refreshing change from most commercial films". Her support strategy is to tell R details from the film so that R will see the film as "a refreshing change". Look for these details in Sentences 6, 7 and 8.
 4. Support strategy. Read question 3, then look for the details in Sentences 9 and 10.

The teacher will ask some group spokespersons to present their group's answers. As you listen to the answers, note that when writers choose support strategies, they think about their social situation – what the reader knows, the purpose of a type of text (like the film review) in our society and so on.

Activity 2.3 Which is a suitable support strategy?

The writer (W) of Text 2A used another support strategy in the rest of her film review. Listed below are three strategies she considered. Which strategy should she choose? Give reasons for your answer. Writers think about their rhetorical goal when deciding on a support strategy. Refer to W’s goal when you explain your answer to a classmate.

W’s rhetorical goal: Persuade readers to agree that the film is “a refreshing change from most commercial films”.

Support strategies: Tick the strategy you think W should use. Write your reason in the right column.

1. Give statistics (e.g. <i>number of actors, animals, tents</i>) to prove that W’s evaluation (<i>refreshing</i>) is correct.		
2. Interpret (describe) events in a way that shows what W means by her evaluation (e.g. <i>an open flap in the family’s tent allows you to fall asleep watching the stars</i>).		
3. Show R the negative scenario if W’s position is untrue. (e.g. <i>Most people will be bored</i>).		

Here are some support strategies we can use to persuade the reader to be sympathetic to our position in an essay, letter, or proposal.

Support strategy	Example
<p>1. Use ‘facts’ to argue that your position is reasonable.</p> <p>Facts are statements that W and R believe to be true (e.g. <i>Nearly everyone in Singapore carries a mobile phone.</i>)</p> <p>Can you say which are ‘facts’ in this example? →</p>	<p>Position: Some traditional medical treatments are effective.</p> <p>Some western trained doctors in Australia use acupuncture to treat patients suffering from chronic pain, in addition to prescribing conventional pain-killing drugs. These doctors have MBBS degrees. If they bother to learn acupuncture, it must have proven to be effective for at least some diseases.</p>
<p>2. Turn your personal experience and knowledge into anecdotal evidence to support your position.</p> <p>O-level examiners set essay topics with the experience of ordinary teenagers in mind. Be confident about whatever you know and have experienced. Use it to support your argument.</p>	<p>Position: Grandparents enrich the lives of their grandchildren. (Exam topic: Grandparents)</p> <p>As I do not have a grandparent, I envy friends who have loving relationships with their grandparents. One friend, Amy, has a grandmother who will listen to her without nagging her. Amy can talk to her grandma about her problems at school, ...</p>

<p>Caution: Anecdotal evidence may not be acceptable in essays written for subjects like history and social studies.</p>	
<p>3. Show R the benefit or advantage of your position.</p>	<p>Position: Voluntary work should be made compulsory in secondary schools as it contributes to a holistic education.</p> <p>Voluntary work offers the opportunity to strengthen character and learn team work. By helping others, we learn to be civic-minded as well as understand what it is like to be less fortunate.</p>
<p>4. Show R the negative side of the opposite position.</p>	<p>Position: Parents should not cane their children.</p> <p>Parents who use the rod to discipline their children should think of the distress and resentment that caning can cause in children. Children who are caned may grow up in fear of authority and with no confidence in themselves. They cannot have a close relationship with their parents because the emotional pain of being caned will always remain in their memory.</p>
<p>5. Cite a source. Use it to support your evaluation of something. Or use it as the basis of your supporting argument (as in the example →).</p> <p>To cite a source means to refer to something said by a person or found in a text. It is more convincing if the source is regarded as ‘reliable’ by R, although it does not matter much in O-level English essays.</p>	<p>Position: Girls should do national service too.</p> <p>Our Social Studies lessons teach us that one aspect of Singapore’s total defence policy is deterrence. To deter possible enemies we should have a well trained citizen army that is as large as possible. Including girls in NS would increase the size of our armed forces considerably.</p> <p>(What source has the writer used?)</p>
<p>6. Anticipate and answer R’s question or objection to your position.</p> <p>What reader objection did W anticipate in this example? →</p>	<p>Position: Singaporeans can be very generous when their sympathies are aroused. (Topic: Are Singaporeans selfish?)</p> <p>It is true that Singaporeans tend to barge into trains and lifts without waiting for passengers to get out first. But this is not a sign of selfishness. It is anxiety. In our crowded city, people are afraid of being late if they give way to others and the lift or train leaves without them.</p>

The strategies above are ways of thinking. Practise thinking in the way described as you study each example. Do not just understand the words. Ask the teacher to explain the thinking if necessary.

Activity 2.4 Is this a suitable support strategy?

Topic: Online chatting: Harmful or beneficial?

Position holder groups There are two positions on the above topic (Position A and Position B). The teacher has given each of two groups one of these positions. These groups are called the position holders. They have to accept or reject support strategies offered by the other groups in the class. The positions are:

- A. Online chatting can be beneficial if students discipline themselves.
- B. Online chatting is more harmful than beneficial because it can lead to undesirable results.

Support strategy groups If you are not a position holder, your group will get a support strategy. Discuss with group members whether the strategy supports Position A or B. Expect the position holders to challenge you. Plan what to say if challenged: How will this strategy support the position? How will it persuade R that online chatting is....?

When the teacher gives the signal, each group's spokesperson will announce the group's decision to the position holders (with the rest of the class listening). The position holders should challenge the decision: Why do you think your support strategy will help us to convince the reader that our position is reasonable? The group should help their spokesperson to answer the challenge.

Support strategies

1. Use personal observation of the negative results of online chatting (like "spending too much time at the computer")
2. Refer to a newspaper report of a teenage girl who was molested after meeting the person she befriended on an online forum. Interpret this incident as a possible danger in online chatting.
3. Use personal experience to show how students can limit their time in online forums.
4. Anticipate that the teacher-reader will say that online chatting leads to bad English. Argue that this is true only for students whose English is poor in the first place.
5. Use personal experience as evidence of the free expression and exchange of ideas among participants in online chat.
6. Use facts from studies showing that people can become addicted to a behaviour and are unable to give up the addiction even when they try to.
7. Admit that there are a few benefits. Compare them with the dangers to show that the benefits are not worth the risk of potential trouble.
8. Refer to reports of molest cases resulting from online chatting. Give reasons for believing that these cases do not represent the majority of teenagers who chat online.

Carry out the strategy; write the paragraph. After the class discussion, you will know which position (A or B) your group's strategy should support. Working with your group mates, write out the paragraph to carry out the strategy. The paragraph will be 5 to 8 sentences long. Be very choosy about what to include. Keep reminding each other to think about the strategy and the position you are supposed to support.

Lesson 2b Grammar for indicating support (1 hour)

To support our position in an essay, letter or proposal, we use grammar to do the following things:

- Give R (the reader) a hint about the support strategy we are going to use.
- Introduce the supporting main point at the beginning of a paragraph.
- Tell R that we are using ‘facts’ as evidence to support our position.

These are moves we, as writers, make to persuade R to agree with our position. We will study Text 2B to learn what grammar to use to perform these moves.

Activity 2.5 How do writers express support strategy?

Each group will do a different question. First, read the question the teacher tells your group to do. Then go to the indicated paragraph in the text and look for the answer.

1a. In Sentence 3 of Text 2B, W (the writer) states his position. In Sentence 4, W hints to R how he will be supporting his position. He uses words that summarise the main point of each of the next two paragraphs. Read Paragraphs 2 and 3. Then go back to Paragraph 1. Look at Sentence 4 to find the summarising words. Write them in the box below.

Support strategy:	Provide evidence to show that W’s evaluation is right.
Signal the support strategy by using summarising words:	

b. Turn back to Text 2A. Look at the first paragraph. Sentence 4 tells us W’s support strategy: Provide evidence to show that W’s evaluation (*refreshing change from...*) is right. Pick out the summarising words that W used to signal her support strategy.

2. In expository essays, we usually introduce the supporting main point in the first sentence of the paragraph. We use summarising words that perform two functions:

Function	Summarising words:	
	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3
Tell R the main support point.	<i>One reason is ... cannot answer students’ questions.</i> Note <i>is</i> , not <i>are</i> .	
Link the support to W’s position. Note: If the essay topic is a question, show R that you are answering	<i>One reason why computers cannot replace the ... teacher...</i> W is making clear to R: “I am explaining why I	

the question.	disagree with the statement in the essay topic.”	
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Find the summarising words that perform the same functions in Paragraph 3. Write them in the box.

3. Tell R that we are offering facts as evidence to support our position. Two ways of saying "I regard this as true (fact)" are (1) the present form of certain verbs called **modals** and (2) the simple present tense. Study the paragraph 2 examples.

Function	Modal verbs; tense Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3
Tell R you regard as a fact that someone/ something has or does an ability. Use modal can/cannot, will (not) . W uses will to say "I'm sure of this" – another way of signalling 'fact'.	...they (computers) cannot answer...questions. ... Whatever has been programmed ... cannot vary..... the classroom teacher can listen to... The computer will not be able to analyse....	
When we use the simple present tense to describe an action, we send the message: "I regard this as fact."	A computer is programmed to teach... [W uses the passive because he/she wants us to focus on the computer, not on the person who did the programming.]	

Find modals and simple present tense verbs that W has used to signal 'fact' in Paragraph 3 and write them in the box.

Text 2B

From an essay written by a Secondary 3 student.

Topic: Computers can replace the classroom teacher. Do you agree?

1 ¹Computers are used in more and more lessons these days. ²Computers may make lessons more interesting through dazzling displays of graphics, sound and videos. ³But I do not think they can completely replace the teacher. ⁴Computers are not human and can neither think nor feel like real teachers.

2 One reason why computers cannot replace the classroom teacher is that they cannot answer students' questions. A computer is programmed to teach a set of facts in a certain way. Whatever has been programmed into the computer cannot vary according to different situations. If students have doubts or questions in the middle of a lesson they cannot stop the computer to ask it questions. The computer will not be able to analyse the question and answer it. But the classroom teacher can listen to a student's

question, perhaps ask the student a few questions to understand the student's difficulty, and then give an answer to clear the student's doubt.

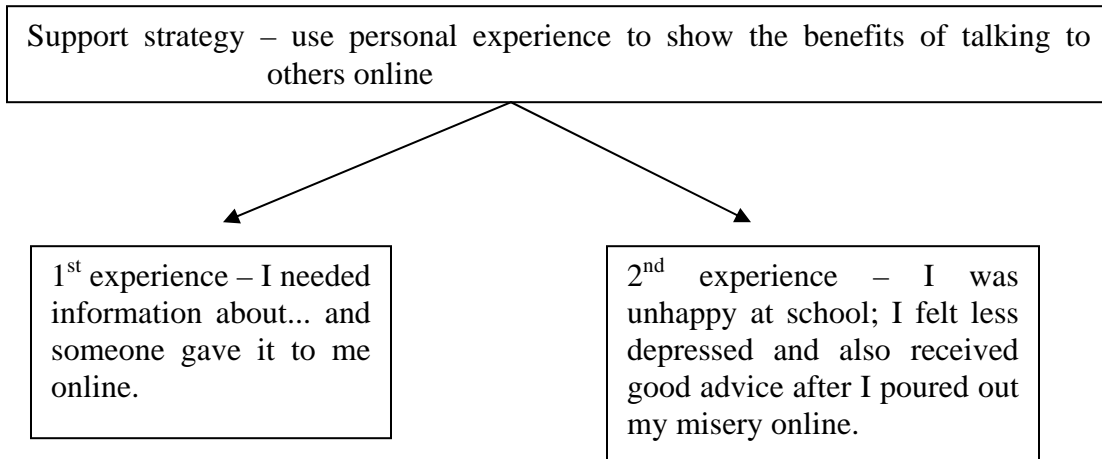
3 Another reason why computers cannot replace the teacher is that they are unable to identify individual problems students may have. Students sometimes need individual attention in a certain part of a topic. The computer cannot understand a student's weak points and give him or her individual attention like a classroom teacher. A student may have emotional problems that affect his or her studies. The computer cannot console and encourage troubled students. A teacher, on the other hand, can show concern and offer counselling sessions.

(The essay continues with two more paragraphs.)

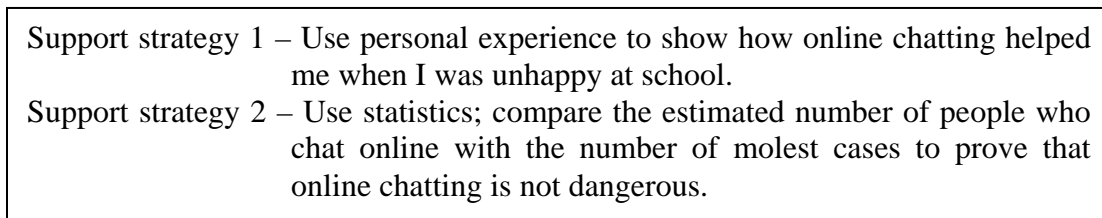
Activity 2.6 Plan support strategy/strategies for your essay

Return to your own position statement, which your partner checked in Activity 2.1. Plan a strategy or strategies to support your position. Write down your strategy/strategies below your position statement. How to describe support strategies? See the example on p.2, the strategies in Activity 2.4 and the ones here below.

One support strategy or more? It depends on how you plan to argue your position. You may decide on one support strategy but carry it out in two parts. Example:



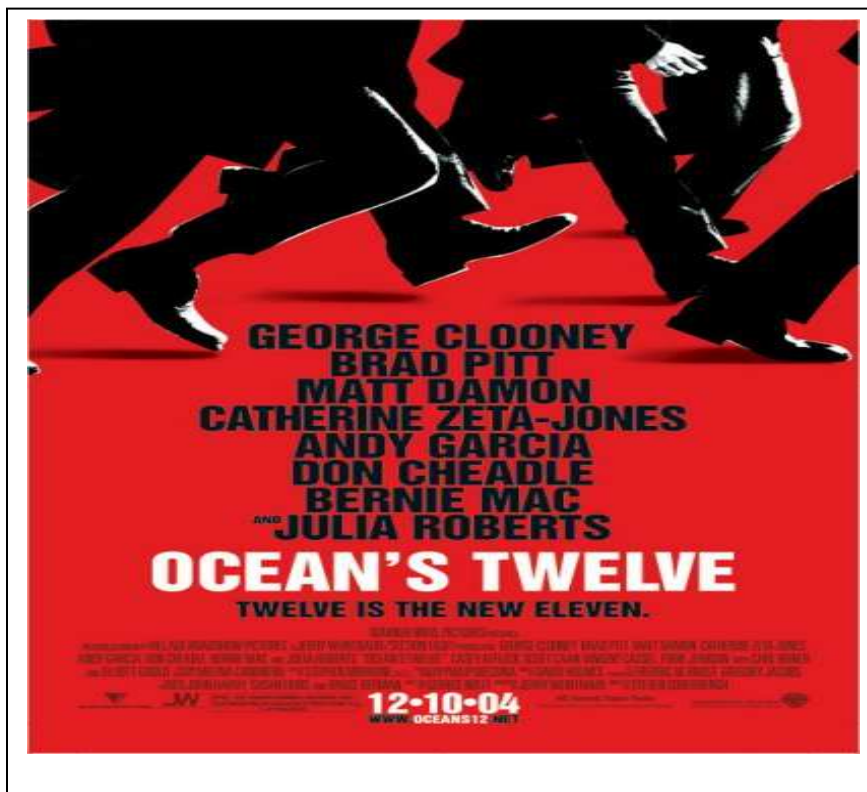
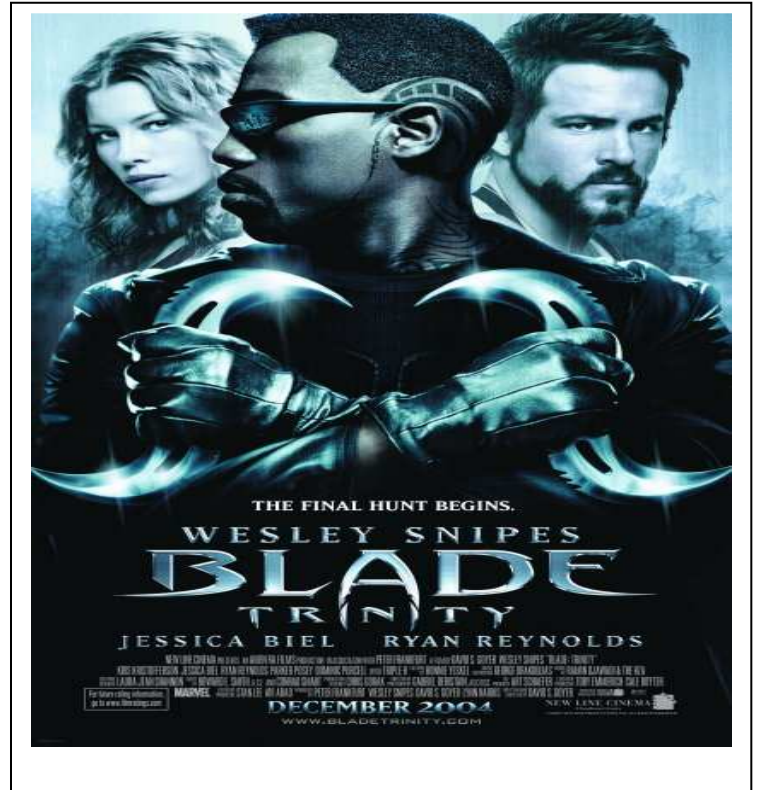
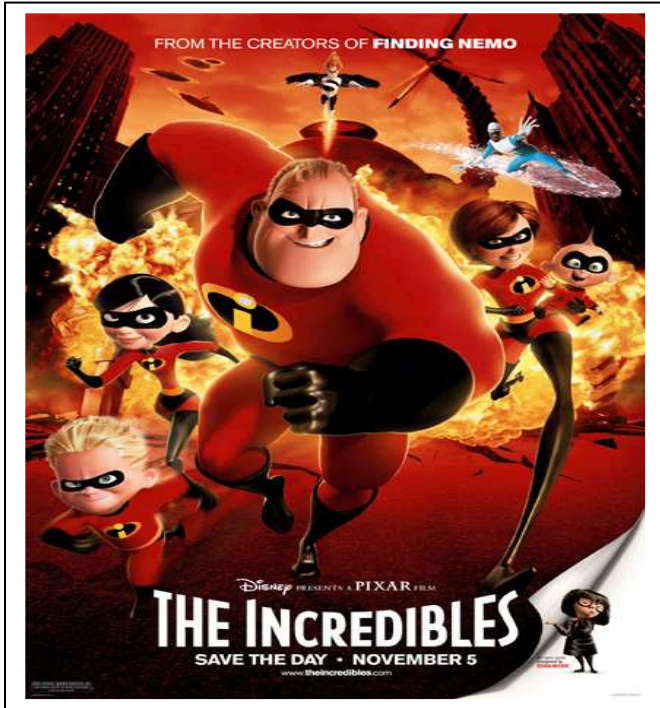
Alternatively, you may use two different strategies to support the same position. Example:

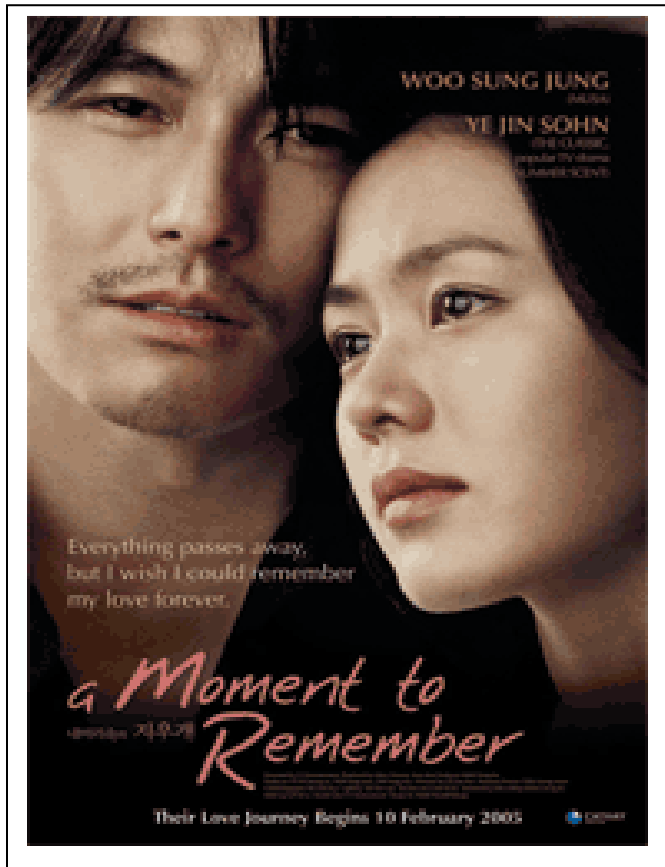


Unit 2. Choose support strategy

“Films” Handout for Activity 2.2 Question 2

Note: It would be more meaningful to students if films current at the time of the lesson are used for this activity.





Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Position Statement

POSITION A:

Online chatting can be beneficial if students discipline themselves.

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Position Statement

POSITION B:

Online chatting is more harmful than beneficial because it can lead to undesirable results.

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Support Strategy

1. Use personal observation of the negative results of online chatting (like “spending too much time at the computer”).

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Support Strategy

2. Refer to a newspaper report of a teenage girl who was molested after meeting the person she befriended on an online forum. Interpret this incident as a possible danger in online chatting.

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Support Strategy

3. Use personal experience to show how students can limit their time in online forums.

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Support Strategy

4. Anticipate that the teacher-reader will say that online chatting leads to bad English. Argue that this is true only for students whose English is poor in the first place.

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Support Strategy

5. Use personal experience as evidence of the free expression and exchange of ideas among participants in online chat.

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Support Strategy

6. Use facts from studies showing that people can become addicted to a behaviour and are unable to give up the addiction even when they try to.

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Support Strategy

7. Admit that there are a few benefits. Compare them with the dangers to show that the benefits are not worth the risk of potential trouble.

Unit 2 Activity 2.4. Support Strategy

8. Refer to reports of molest cases resulting from online chatting. Give reasons for believing that these cases do not represent the majority of teenagers who chat online.

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