

This activity is designed to illustrate to students how the sources provided in any given synthesis prompt may be perceived as “useful” from a variety of perspectives. Students take positions as members of society who must examine the information and weigh what they know and understand about that information, selecting what’s important and understanding why it is important, in order to enter the conversation with an informed and judicious opinion.

The scenario:

A committee, composed of a variety of stakeholders, has been assembled by the school to debate and forward recommendations with regard to the following question: *What are the most important factors that our school should consider before using particular technologies in curriculum and instruction?*

Group students into 6 groups and provide each group with a folder containing only the sources from the 2010 “Tech in schools” synthesis prompt. Each folder also contains ONE of the following stakeholder profiles¹:

You are a parent with young children in Grades 2 and 5. You are the founder/editor of a popular music news website, and work from home and at an office. You rely on technology to run your business, so you’re fairly comfortable with using it. However, you dislike aspects of social media such as cyberbullying and the new generation of technological tools are sometimes confusing to you. You will do anything for your children and part of that involves helping them with homework. You are concerned that you won’t be able to assist your children if the school community implements technology to the point of distraction, or where you cannot navigate it. You live a comfortable life, so the cost of school technology and/or supplies isn’t a problem for you. Technology is already a part of your family’s home life, but you are easily able to control technology use at home and you are unsure if this will be the case in the classroom. Based on your research, you aren’t completely convinced that the implementation of technology in the classroom will positively affect your children’s success.

You are a 42-year-old science teacher. You like to spend your time at the science museum and taking long walks in nature. In your spare time you watch and create nature documentaries and love to spend time with your family. At school, you are a very caring teacher who is the advisor for the AV club. You use mainly paper textbooks and paper-based tasks in your classroom; the school overall does have some projectors and a computer lab with desktop computers that are now a bit old. Although you want the best for your students’ education, and would be very happy to have the latest equipment and software to use in your classes and your club, you are concerned that students are controlled by technology and don’t pay attention to the world around them and how they treat the environment. You have seen technology benefit students’ learning through interactive activities, and you have encouraged your own children to play educational computer games, but you have also seen them become more distracted in class due to social media on their phones.

¹ Credit is due to my 2017-2018 AP English Language students, who developed these personas.

AP English Language and Composition
“Tech in Schools” Synthesis Role-Play Activity

You are a Grade 10 student who loves science and math, and is very passionate about STEM. In your spare time, you like hanging out with your friends and using social media, but sometimes you get too consumed in your technological devices. You grew up in a middle-class family: your father is a medical researcher and your mother is the CEO of a small company. The school provides lots of academic supports and you are actively engaged in various school activities. Even though your parents understand how much benefit technology could bring to classrooms, you are personally concerned that the overuse of social media might distract you from studying if your school uses technology in their curriculum.

You are the founder and CEO of an educational software company. You have a background in both Engineering and Commerce. In your earlier years as a student, you did not have easy access to technology, relying instead on school computer labs and limited software options. Thus, you are keen to offer future generations more opportunities, specifically technology-related ones. As a parent, you learned that one of your children has a learning disability, which was when you founded your company by designing a concept to address your child’s needs and then seeking out a coder who could program your ideas into a user-friendly application. You believe that by implementing your products, schools will elevate the learning experiences of the next generation.

You are a 46-year-old psychologist who works with both children and adults, and is very well respected by your peers. You are married with a child. Since you went to school during the 70s and 80s, technology wasn’t heavily integrated into your learning experience; however, you have seen how quickly technology has developed and become an integral part of your own career. You attended an excellent university, so you have been exposed to some of the best learning in the world and want to be a part of further improving education. You believe in finding a balance between traditional methods of learning and new technology, so that students are prepared both to use the electronics that will be present in their careers and to communicate well with their peers. In your work as a psychologist you rely very heavily on your people skills, and you don’t want to see the next generation lose this skill. As your own child gets older, you want to ensure the best education possible that combines traditional methods and electronics, and preparation for a career involving both people and technology.

You have been a member of the school board in this district for the past several years. Although your own children are now 23-27, you continue to stay motivated for the future students of the school in hopes that they will achieve the success that your own children did. You credit your children’s success to the limited integration of technology in their classroom and community. Although the progression of technology has strongly influenced learning environments today, you continue to strongly believe that heavy reliance on technology is not required to reach success. Additionally, you have noticed that it has sometimes negatively affected your connection with your family. Although over the past decade classrooms have begun to use laptops and SMART Boards, she is nervous about funding copious amounts of technology and whether or not skills like reading, writing, and communicating orally will be affected by electronic integration. However, you strive to have the best school district possible, and although you can sometimes find it difficult to keep up with the fast pace of advancement in education technology, you recognize that this is the way that things are headed.

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Students work in their groups to read through their stakeholder profiles (they can add any details that are in line with those they are provided to further flesh out the interests of the stakeholders). They should have an initial discussion in which they determine the kinds of issues that will be important to their stakeholder.

They should then read through the sources, discussing the following:

- Which sources address the stakeholder’s key concerns? In role as your stakeholder, do you find this information important/useful to you or not? Why?
- Which points will you select from the sources to use to support your position?
- Knowing that others hold other positions, which points will you select to argue against, and how?
- Can you think of any specific examples in your own experience and knowledge (or outlined in the provided material) that illustrate the points you have made – both in favour of your own position and showing the problems with the other possible positions?

Have the students select spokespersons for their groups and have each group prepare a two-minute presentation to be delivered by the spokesperson in role as the stakeholder.

Stage your “community meeting” in which each stakeholder presents to the committee, using the source material and making the reasons for their positions very clear, including how they believe the policy will affect their community.

Provide the students with the initial prompt page from the exam question, and debrief in a discussion about how to approach the question as an argument that must be developed using the sources, whether they support the position or provide opportunities for refutation.