



## **Deconstructing Academic Persuasive Essays by Constructing Argument Maps and Analysing Means of Persuasive Appeal**

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### **ABSTRACT**

As Rider and Thomason (2008) argue, facilitating activities that focus on developing cognitive processes are commonly ignored in academic literacy classes, despite being crucial. In most programmes, reading for general meaning (gist) is the most common reading objective and little regard is given to activities that transfer directly to writing. This presentation of a classroom-based, action research project will demonstrate how students' academic persuasive essay literacy skills were enhanced through conducting argument mapping and analysing the means of persuasive appeal in text. Rhetorically-intensive academic papers commonly move from a major premise to a related specific statement, then to a conclusion, following the principles of Aristotelian syllogism; they also supply evidence to support claims, critique assumptions and rebut objections. Asking students to notice these patterns in a text and to organise them into a visual representation (argument map) facilitates transfer to their own writing. Following this activity, students can be asked to analyse the means of persuasion in the argument map. Aristotle divided these means into three categories: Ethos (credibility or ethical appeal); Logos (logic or the use of reasoning) and Pathos (eliciting the reader's sympathies and imagination). In order to persuade readers that their ideas are more valid than their counterparts', writers appeal to these means. When an analysis has been conducted, students can be asked to critically assess the effectiveness of the persuasive appeals and to compare authors' argumentation. Apart from deconstructing a text through critical reading, students can look to apply similar methodology in their own writing. Skills of this nature are not just common in academic tertiary courses (Kibler, Walqui, & Bunch, 2014), but

also in other disciplines, for example, Law (Berger, 2010). Results from this research will be presented using examples from this researcher's undergraduate Ideas and Exposition writing courses at the National University of Singapore.

### **ARTICLE INFO**

#### *Article history:*

Received: 30 March 2015

Accepted: 30 June 2015

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*Keywords:* Academic literacy, argumentative persuasive essays (APE), argument map construction, Aristotelian means of persuasion

## INTRODUCTION

Teng Poh Hoon (in 'Singteach', <http://singteach.nie.edu.sg/issue07-inspire01/>) from the National Institute of Education, Singapore, stated that more critical thinking programmes were needed in Singapore. He referred to a local student who labelled students in Singapore as the *Gen S*, or the Generation of Sheep. In the same vein, the Singapore Ministry of Education (<http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/news/2013/06/praise-for-schools-that-encourage-creative-and-critical-thinking.php>), refers to Senior Minister of State for Law and Education Indranee Rajah's comments about how schools need to encourage creative and critical thinking. It is argued that this is an essential factor in a good educational programme.

At the Centre of English Language Communication, National University of Singapore, there are a number of courses for first-year undergraduate students that focus on developing critical thinking skills through academic writing. These courses are taught in English by content specialists with PhDs in areas such as Film Studies, Popular Culture, Bioethics and Sociolinguistics. Modules are constructed with a view to enabling students to learn and use critical approaches to analyse texts related to these themes. The module presented in this paper is a sociological analysis of sport as a cultural global

phenomenon, with a particular focus on the emergence and growth of ultra-competitive, elite modern sports, including detrimental side effects such as the deviant subculture of doping.

One of the central rationales for providing these courses is the case for Content-Based Instruction. This field of language instruction holds the premise that through a specific academic field, both a language-acquisition-rich and a cognitively challenging environment can be provided (Baetens-Beardsmore, 2008; Marsh & Fregols, 2013). Using the specialist content, tutors develop students' critical thinking skills by stimulating reflection and discussion on issues while at the same time teaching how to best construct evidence-based arguments through the analysis and construction of academic persuasive essays (APE). One of the assessment tasks of the course is a Comparison Paper. Students are asked to formulate and investigate a research problem within the specific field, analyse data and draw conclusions from primary and secondary sources, and to focus on contestable elements from the topic selected. One contestable theme from the Sport and Competition module I teach is the ethics of doping, ranging from simple use of anabolic steroids to the practice of Fetal Gene Doping, also known as Germ-Line Genetic Modification (GLGM) to create super-athletes. Students read about the subject and assess arguments that experts in the field present on whether it should be condoned in sport.

A selection of 12 journal articles was used as a corpus for the course. Generic academic skills were taught such as how to research for and construct an APE exploiting both primary and secondary sources, in particular, how to construct and maintain a thesis throughout an APE using periodicity (Martin & Rose, 2005) through signposting with effective topic sentences and supporting evidence. In addition, guided peer reviewing and editing were encouraged to facilitate autonomous learning. Three assessment instruments were used: a summary-reflection (800 words); a summary-comparison-reflection (1000 words); and an APE (1500 words). This paper focuses on the second of these instruments, the summary-comparison-reflection. In particular, students were trained to identify the main purpose of two competing papers and to identify the main ideas, arguments and evidence to support those purposes. Similarly to the first task, the summary-reflection, students were asked to effectively take notes, summarise and paraphrase. However, as an extension to the first task, for the summary-comparison-reflection, students were also taught to analyse the persuasive appeals that writers employ when they write a rhetorically-intensive argumentative paper. This was done to ensure that students could compare author styles of writing and make sound evidential arguments about which authors they felt provided the most effective arguments in a debate.

### *Constructing Course Content for Students from Multidisciplinary Contexts*

Students on the course were multinational (Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean) and were studying in a variety of faculties (Science, Engineering, Arts & Social Science, Medicine, Business, Design & Environment, Computing and Law). To cater for the diverse interests of a group of this nature, the course content needed to have a broad content base. Sport as a leisure activity is common here at the NUS campus and doping as a phenomenon has the potential to interest diverse faculties as there is a strong scientific focus as well as a sociological one. Students from the Humanities would find topics about doping as a socialisation process or as a commodity industry interesting; Science, Engineering and Medicine students would find the phenomenon of health and technology in performance-enhancing drugs engaging. Other topics to cater for faculties such as Law could also be covered; for example, whether doping needed to be under Penal Law rather than policed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). As a general observation, many of the papers written about doping appear in medical ethics journals. For the summary-comparison-reflection assessment task, two papers were chosen to compare, one from the British Journal of Sports Medicine, which argued that doping should be legalized, and the other from Sports Med, which argued the contrary. These will be further elaborated on at a later stage in this paper. The

description for the summary-comparison part of the course reads as follows:

*Does the obsession to win in professional sport create the need for performance-enhancing drugs? Should we legalise doping or further tighten control measures? We will explore these questions through close analysis of viewpoints expressed in both scholarly literature and popular media, ultimately developing our own positions in written arguments.*

### Content-Based Instruction

Content-based instruction explicitly teaches subject-specific lexis and implicitly teaches general cross-curricular academic language. A well-known visual image to describe this has been provided by Dutro and Moran (2003). A bricks-and-mortar metaphor is often used to present the interrelation between general cross-curricular academic language and subject-specific language. This can be seen in Fig.1, taken from Zwiers (2008, p. 21).

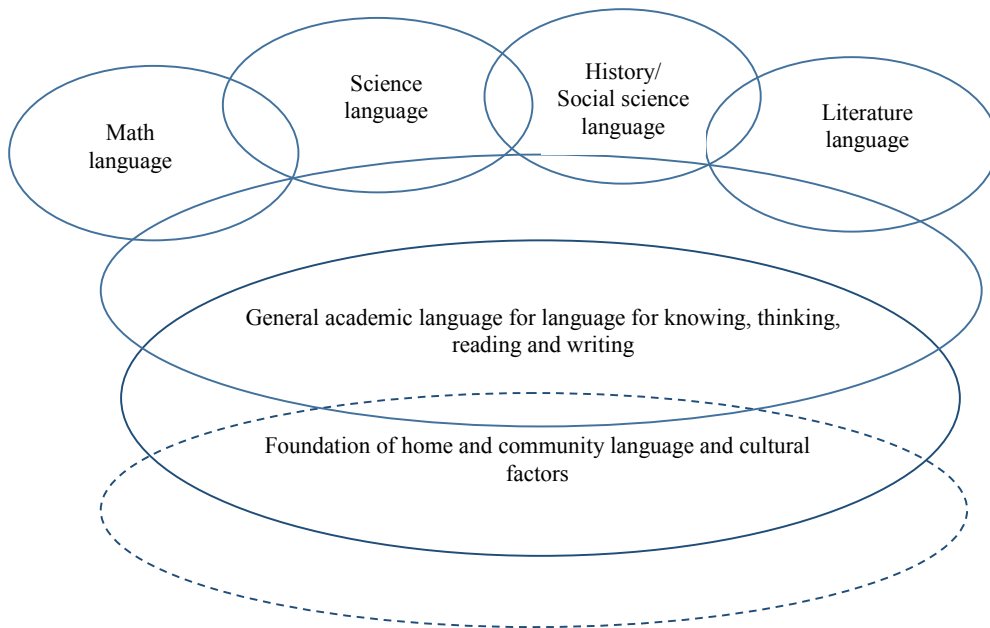


Fig.1: Overlapping variations of language that develop over time.

The dotted line is the foundation of language learned in the first three years. After that, the language an individual learns develops and increasingly becomes specialised in a particular knowledge area. Lexis that belongs to the mortar is general cross-curricular academic language and this

links the content-specific language from subject areas, or the bricks. Examples of general cross-curricular academic language are 'that is to say'; 'leads us to believe'; 'is dependent on'. A well-known source of 570 general cross-curricular academic word families is the 'Academic Word List'

compiled by Coxhead <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/>. There are 10 sub-lists, the first being the most common words; examples for sub-list 1 are: 'analyse', 'major', 'structure', 'source', 'authority', 'significant', 'method', 'sector', 'legislate', 'section', 'assume', 'legal', 'vary', 'theory', and 'assess'. In order to write effective papers on a subject such as doping, learners need to utilise bricks and mortar effectively together.

### *Genre-Based Pedagogical Cycle*

A genre-based framework for academic English instruction is commonly used by various schools. Swales and Feak (1994) posited that it is effective in the teaching and learning of English for Specific Purposes; Martin and Rose (2005) argued that it is a good tool for the instruction of language using a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) position. The cycle links reading and writing, thus developing academic literacy. There is focus on specific and general academic language linked to texts. The basic notion of the approach is that academic literacy can be scaffolded by initially deconstructed text models and reconstructing them with various levels of support; normally this support decreases as learners become more competent with the genre. From a linguistic perspective a text is:

*'An instantiation of language systems in texts; that is, each text is an instance of the entire language system, and each language feature in a text is an instance of one of the options in the language system.'* (Martin & Rose, 2007)

The reference to the 'options of the language system' above refers to the genre or text type being written. As already noted, the genre type presented in this paper is the summary-comparison-reflection paper. The model used for this paper is from Paltridge (2001).

Each stage is designed to achieve different purposes and thus associated with different activities; for example, stage one focuses on tasks to help students explore the context, in particular to analyse the purpose of the text; why it was written; for whom; the relationship between writer and audience; as well as to build field-specific knowledge (vocabulary). Stage two is when the text is deconstructed by exploring the stages of a text (and their functions); analysing the argumentation and the language features chosen by the writer to persuade the reader. Stage 3 focuses on students producing the genre with scaffolded support; this might start as a whole-class writing task or group task. Stage 4 takes students from guided writing to independent production of the particular genre. Stages 3 and 4 normally involve peer evaluation, and a focus on process writing with drafts and revisions.

For this particular study, an explicit examination of the summary-comparison-reflection genre was undertaken. An aspect of stage two is presented. Two texts were chosen for comparison. After mind mapping and concept mapping, the texts were further deconstructed and analysed through argument mapping and analysing persuasive appeal, the two foci of this paper. These analyses occurred at the discourse level as they involve analysing whole clauses or groups of clauses.

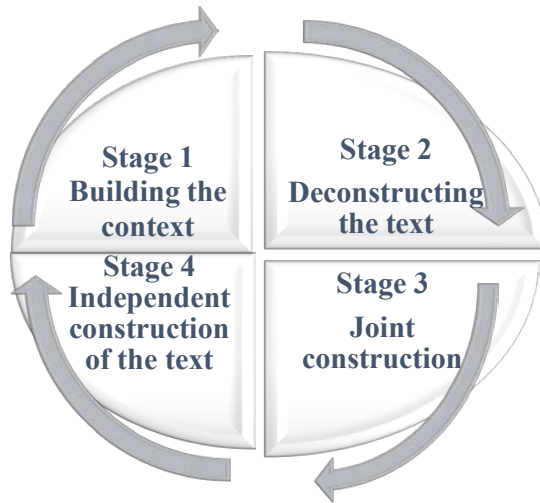


Fig.2: Genre-based pedagogical cycle.

### *Defining the Summary-Comparison Genre*

The summaries of a summary-comparison-reflection genre are quite similar to a descriptive report as the summary initially states the genre type being analysed. To do this, the writer sums up the main ideas, key argumentation and evidence provided. The summaries of the two papers are the basis from which the paper comparisons are written. Thus, it is important that the writer selects the necessary material required for this. In sum, the summary-comparison-reflection should be a stand-alone paper. That is, there should be no need to go back to the parent papers in order to understand the whole of the student's essay.

The comparison-reflection section of a summary-comparison-reflection follows

the basic premises of the exposition that presents a logically sequenced argument in favour of a judgement. The judgement should comprise a justification as to why one paper or summary in this case, is better than another. As the two papers used for this task were rhetorically-intensive, the writer justified why one author was more persuasive than the other. By analysing the two summaries offered, the comparison-reflection section should engage in evidence-based arguments that problematise aspects of one of the summaries in order to present which particular summary was found to be more convincing. Thus, the summary-comparison-reflection might be represented as a genre as shown in Table 1, where it is divided into discourse phases.



TABLE 1  
Summary-Comparison-Reflection Genre

Genre: summary- comparison- reflection paper	Social purpose	Schematic stages	Sub-stages
Introduction	To set the scene and prepare the reader for what is to come.	Opening. Contextualise papers.	Opening: Statement of purpose and organisation. Contextualise papers: Details about authors, journals, articles, readers.
Summaries	In separate paragraphs, condense two bodies of information portraying their key ideas and sources in order to evaluate one over the other and advance an argument.	Present gist. Describe key claims and evidence illustrated.	Present gist: Authors' central ideas. Describe key claims and evidence: Present each paper's main content, the authors' points of view and argumentation as well as the evidence used as support.
Reflection	Present a logically sequenced argument and a position based on analyses of argumentation contained in both summaries.	Thesis. Argument (implications).	Thesis: Orientations (topic priming), position (stand), preview (content overview). Argument: Point (present key claim), elaboration (support with evidence), implication (state importance of claim).
Conclusion	Sum up gist of summaries and state implications of reflection argumentation.	Reiteration.	Reiteration: Summarise arguments and implications. Crystallise main claims and emphasise interpretation.

*Criteria Used to Guide the Assessment of the Summary-Comparison Paper*

The framework used to assess the effectiveness of the students' summary-comparison-reflection paper was extracted from Rose *et al.* (2008). This language assessment model is constructed based on linguistics premises from systemic

functional grammar. It comprises 11 criteria, which are grouped in five categories: genre; register; discourse; grammar; and graphic features. A maximum of 6 points can be given for each item, as presented in the right column of Table 2. These, along with their related questions, are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
Academic Writing Assessment Criteria Adapted from Rose *et al.* (2008)

Genre	Is the genre appropriate for the writing task? Does it go through appropriate stages?	6
Register	Field: Does the writer understand, interpret and/or explain the topic coherently?	6
	Tenor: Are evaluations appropriately objective?	6
	Mode: Is there an appropriate use of technical and/or abstract language?	6
	Phases: Is the text organised in an appropriate sequence of phases?	6
Discourse	Lexis: Is the field well-constructed by technical lexis and sequences of lexical relations?	6
	Conjunction: Are logical relations coherently constructed between sentences and phases?	6
	Reference: Is it clear who or what is being referred to at each step of the text?	6
	Appraisal: Is appraisal used judiciously to evaluate ideas, arguments, people, things and texts?	6
Grammar	Are sentences organised to present information coherently? Are written grammatical conventions used appropriately?	6
Graphic Features	Is the layout clear, including paragraphs and sections? Are illustrations used appropriately and clearly? Is spelling accurate? Is punctuation used appropriately?	6

Analysis for this paper only applies to genre and register levels as well as ‘appraisal’ at the discourse level. At the genre level, assessment of the schema of the text occurs, in particular, whether the appropriate stages have been followed, that is, whether there is a suitable introduction; two well-formulated summaries; a comparison section of these summaries that justifies why one paper or author’s argumentation is more effective than another; and a conclusion, summing up the task and restating the justifications developed in the comparison section. Three criteria at the register level are used to analyse a paper. These are field, tenor and mode. Field is used to analyse whether the student has understood the texts and the nuances of the argumentation. The tenor of the summary-comparison-reflection paper is applied to assess if the summaries are academically-written and also if the reflection is academically persuasive. The mode is used to examine whether the student is using technical and abstract academic language effectively or whether, as is often the case with inexperienced writers, the language sometimes appears closer to speech. Finally, ‘appraisal’ at the discourse level refers to whether the writer has evaluated ideas, arguments, people, things and texts judiciously.

### *Argument Mapping*

Argument mapping has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on undergraduate student critical thinking development (Twardy, 2004; van Gelder

*et al.*, 2004). It is principally a visualising strategy at the discourse level. Students are asked to read a text and analyse the claims and the evidence presented by the author. There is normally a hierarchy to the propositions with a main claim accompanied by supporting claims and evidence related to these. The argument map follows the same hierarchical structure with the main claim numbered 1, and claims supporting or objecting to this claim provided as subsequent numbers related to the importance given to these by the writer in the text. The technique is effective in helping students to process and deconstruct complex argumentation as they can work in groups to create diagrams that capture the logical structuring of the reasoning in a text. Fig.3 presents a simple argument map constructed by students based on a short given text below.

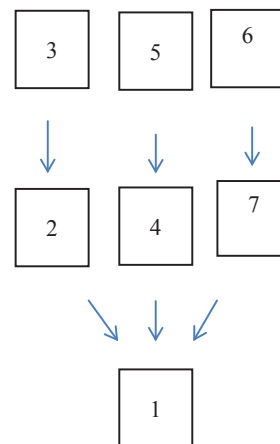


Fig.3: Argument mapping.

[1. Performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) should not be made legal in sport.] For one reason [2. athletes are



significant others for youth and as such symbolise important values in society such as dedication and mental toughness, not negative ones such as cheating and being deceitful. Second, [3. Many effects of PEDs are unknown because of genotypic differences. This is summed up by the President of the Council on Bioethics who argues that [4. any biological agent that has the power to induce significant changes in one's bodily constitution cannot be trusted or is without serious side effects. Third, [5. Tannsjö (2004) argues that poorer nations might benefit from legalising PEDs as they are much cheaper than other athletic development programmes [6. However, this is improbable as athletes from richer nations would still have a much better medical entourage than the poorer nations working on creating the most effective substances for their athletes].

The argument proposes that PEDs should not be made legal in sport (1). At the first level, it is argued that athletes should represent positive, not negative values (2) because they are significant others for youth (3). There is also the contention that many drug effects are unknown (4) and this is supported with a quote from an expert in the field (5). Then, there is the presentation of an opponent's claim (7) and an objection to it, a rebuttal (6). As the argument map is based on the hierarchical categorisation of claims, point 7 goes before 6 as point 6 is the main claim.

### *Analysing Persuasive Appeal*

For the expository genre, in particular in rhetorically-intensive texts, authors seek to appeal to reason through the application of evidence and logic in order to be as persuasive as possible. Using logic to be persuasive can be called appealing to logos; seeking to persuade a reader by using emotionally-driven argumentation, appealing to pathos; and demonstrating that one has a good deal of knowledge about a certain field by using technical language and making one's text multi-voiced through authorial attribution, appealing to ethos. These three methods applied in developing a rhetorically-intensive persuasive text are essential as good writers employ them to control how their readers analyse an argument; in particular, judgements based on these appeals often dictate whether a reader sympathises with or is antagonistic towards a writer's ideas. These engagement strategies were often developed by ancient Greek writers, in particular Aristotle. Activities designed to explore these uses of persuasive appeal have been positively reported in ESL tertiary courses (Kibler, Walqui, & Bunch, 2014) as well as other fields, such as Law (Berger, 2010).

Once the argument maps have been constructed, analysing the kind of appeals employed by an author can be conducted as a follow-up activity to aid in the analysis of the effectiveness of the argumentation in a text. The information presented in Table 3 was constructed by students based on the argument above.

TABLE 3  
Example of Analysing Persuasive Appeal from In-Class Activity

Pathos	Athletes should symbolise important values in society such as dedication and mental toughness.
Logos	Many effects of PEDs are unknown because of genotypic differences.
Ethos & embedded pathos	This is summed up by the President of the Council on Bioethics who argues that [5. any biological agent which has the power to induce significant changes in one's bodily constitution cannot be trusted or is without serious side effects.

Beginning by appealing to pathos, the writer sought to be provocative at the outset to draw in the reader. This was done by evoking the more subjective issue of the social role of athletes, and how youth were effected by them. The tone or tenor of this premise is emotive; it is language seeking an emotional impact on readers. Pathos was also appealed to as an embedded clause from an expert in the field, the President of the Council on Bioethics, using heavily emotive language such as cannot be trusted or is without serious side effects. In contrast, appealing to logos and ethos was not emotionally-driven; the references to genotypical differences relied much more on inductive reasoning using observational analysis and the power of a scientific discourse. This was done by citing the President of the Council on Bioethics, who was deemed a credible source.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### *Approach*

It has already been noted that the Sport and Competition course required learners to compare two academic papers, specifically, two experts' opinions on the issue of legalising performance enhancing substances in sport. The effective ways

outlined to do this were not only to analyse the authors' premises and evidence but also their use of persuasive appeal. To facilitate the learning of this method of analysing rhetorically-intensive texts, a small-scale action research project was conducted. Therefore, the results were developed over time as an ongoing process rooted in trial and error in-class practice, experiential learning and reflection.

### *Participants*

Two groups of 12 undergraduate students, aged 18 to 21, from the National University of Singapore, co-participated in the research. As already noted, the students had differing linguistic and academic backgrounds. The small student population in each class facilitated the project as all 12 participants were given the opportunity to voice their ideas in the whole class environment; thus enabling this researcher to assess informally each participant's uptake of the sessions' foci.

### *Research Questions*

In-class observations of group work were conducted asking the following two questions: are students effectively deconstructing the texts to create argument

maps? Are students effectively analysing the persuasive appeals of the claims pinpointed in the argument maps? After that, the same questions were asked to assess students' independent writing. In addition, at this later stage, as the assignments needed to be formally assessed, the effectiveness of the criteria from Rose *et al.* (2008) was also analysed. Also, a more overarching exploration was conducted to evaluate if the practice of assessing persuasive appeal was an effective way of comparing texts.

#### *Research process*

The initial stage was to determine if students could manipulate the texts effectively to deconstruct them and build their argument maps. Having first presented the concept and conducted a detailed reading of an example argument mapping activity in a whole-class situation, students were asked to deconstruct a single text themselves in groups and then to share and compare their results. Once this initial stage had been conducted, two groups deconstructed separate texts and this was followed by a discussion about which of the authors was more persuasive. This discussion led to an interesting application of the process of analysing persuasive appeal and enforced participants' conceptual and practical understanding of analysing persuasive appeal. It also enabled this researcher to informally evaluate whether students were effectively creating argument maps and analysing persuasive appeals. An example

from a group of students at this stage was offered above in the literature review (see Fig.3 and Table 3).

The next phase was for students to write their summary-comparison-reflection tasks. As already noted, two texts were chosen for this. One of these texts was by Julian Savulescu (2004), Uehiro Chair of Practical Ethics at the University of Oxford, entitled 'Why We Should Allow Performance-enhancing Drugs in Sport'. The other was written by Professor and Chair of Medical Ethics at the University of Tübingen, Urban Wiesing (2011), entitled 'Should Performance-Enhancing Drugs in Sport Be Legalized Under Medical Supervision'? Wiesing, in his paper, refers several times to the content in the Savulescu text; it thus acts partially as a response article to the earlier publication.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Students effectively used argument mapping and they also analysed persuasive appeal well to present their views on the effectiveness of an author's argumentation. An extract from a student's final assignment to demonstrate how appeals were evaluated in the task is offered below:

*Savulescu's central argument for the limited legalisation of PEDs is that it would make sport safer for athletes. This argument appears persuasive for it seems to adequately address the issue of safety. However, it is really an appeal to pathos that plays on one's concern for the welfare of the*

*athlete. Wiesing accepts Savulescu's recommendation of prioritising athlete safety, but takes the argument further to show that defining safety is difficult due to insufficient knowledge about the long-term effects of PEDs; without this, logically, it is impossible to define the boundaries of acceptable risk. Wiesing's argumentation clearly appeals to logos, comes across as grounded in practicality, and is therefore more convincing.*

Similar to this one, appealing to pathos was signalled by all students to be common in the pro-legalisation text and logos more common in the antithesis. All the students recognised that Savulescu's points were persuasive and without exception, concluded that appeals to logos were more convincing than pathos-centric argumentation. This is perhaps where written language differs from spoken as very often speeches that are used for persuasion rely heavily on pathos. It can be seen from the extract that this method of analysing argumentation was very effective for a comparison paper as it enabled students to not only describe why they sided with the content of the argument but also with the style of the argumentation, opening up a further dimension with which to work. Therefore, it is this researcher's belief that using these Aristotelian means of analysis is a highly-sophisticated way to analyse argumentation because students must also understand the inferred meanings in the texts.

Employing the Rose *et al.* (2008) assessment framework, the text from which the extract above was taken received high scores at the register level and for appraisal. This is because the summaries and reflections of both papers were sound, extracting the main content of each to debate (field). The mode score was also high as students were not only required to use the technical language of the PED and ethics fields but also the analytical framework for describing inferred meanings in texts (logos, pathos and ethos). This means that the abstract academic language in the student's writing was complex. In addition, the language was appropriately objective (tenor) because 'argumentation', that is, the supporting claims and evidence viewed in terms of a whole package constructed through the argument mapping, was the theme or point of departure of the analysis. This automatically encouraged objective writing rather than subjective use of 'I think', providing the necessary distance a writer requires to assess objectively. Finally, regarding 'appraisal', the use of 'argumentation', as theme, boosted students' abilities with this linguistic resource. This was because they were required to demonstrate their ability to evaluate arguments judiciously by weighing the associated positive and negative meanings.

## CONCLUSION

In feedback from students, one of the most positive notions highlighted was the strong enquiry-based methodological approach

that text deconstruction through argument mapping and analysing persuasive appeal offers. That is, students were positive about working in groups to explore texts and the language used and to evaluate the arguments as well as inferred meanings conveyed by the authors. One student stated:

*Communicating my views and giving critical analysis were skills that I picked up through this course.*

Another wrote:

*I have learnt how to read critically to identify key elements.*

It is hoped that this paper might encourage other like-minded tutors to conduct similar explorations in developing critical thinking. Tasks, at the discourse level, such as argument mapping and analysing persuasive appeal facilitate the critical reading of field-specific texts of the nature presented in this paper, that is, ones that are particularly rhetorically-intensive. Students are guided to make informed judgements about these texts and their authors' premises and conclusions. These strategies hone important critical thinking skills such as analysing, associating, evaluating, comparing and conceptualising. They also aid in facilitating reconstructions. By raising awareness of the skills authors use to persuade, students can be guided to apply them in their own writing and, hence, develop their own academic persuasive voice.

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