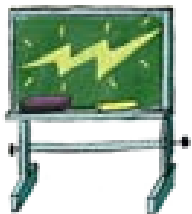


Writing Ideas from the The New York Times



The Learning Network
Teaching & Learning With The New York Times

Compiled by
Sonia Villalón
Teacher Specialist
Hanna High School



JUNE 12, 2012, 11:28 AM

163 Questions to Write or Talk About

By DANIEL E. SLOTNIK and KATHERINE SCHULTEN



A word cloud created from all the questions compiled below.

Update | Sept. 2012: All of these questions are still open to student comment.

We’ve posted a fresh Student Opinion question nearly every weekday for almost three years now. Here are the 163 we asked during the 2011-12 school year.

Each question is based on content from that week’s New York Times, and all of them are still open to comment by anyone from ages 13-25.

Teachers tell us they use our questions to help students practice writing persuasively, as inspiration for lessons, as jumping-off points for class discussions and debates — or just to encourage engagement with current events and with students from classrooms around the world.

Given the emphasis in the Common Core Standards on both reading informational texts and writing arguments, having your students answer our question daily can help address several literacy goals at once. And since we don’t allow last names, and we read every comment before we post it to make

sure it conforms to our standards, The Learning Network is also a secure place for students to post.

And, because this blog and all the Times articles we link to on it are accessible without a digital subscription, each linked article is free to read.

Below, 163 recent questions, with bonus links at the end to nearly 250 more. How will you use them?

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FEBRUARY 4, 2014, 4:25 PM

200 Prompts for Argumentative Writing

By MICHAEL GONCHAR



Jonathan Alcorn for The New York Times

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Update / Feb. 7: We have announced our student editorial-writing contest and published a [related lesson plan](#).

What issues do you care most about? What topics do you find yourself discussing most passionately, whether online, at the dinner table, in the classroom or with your friends?

Later this week we will be announcing a brand-new [contest](#) in which teenagers will be invited to write evidence-based persuasive pieces on the topics of their choice.

To help jump-start your brainstorming, we have gathered a list of 200 writing prompts from our daily [Student Opinion feature](#) that invite you to take a stand.

Though you won't be limited to these topics for the contest, you'll see that our list touches on every aspect of modern life, from politics to sports, culture, education and technology. We hope the range inspires you, and we hope the fact that each question links to at least one related Times article gives you a starting point for finding evidence.

So skim the list below to think about the topic *you'd* most like to take on.

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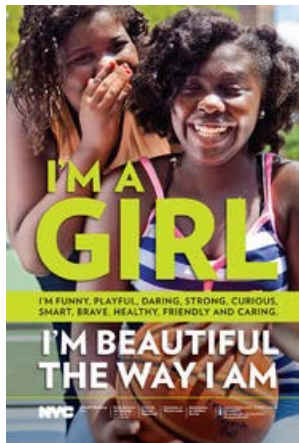
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FEBRUARY 7, 2014, 9:50 AM






For the Sake of Argument: Writing Persuasively to Craft Short, Evidence-Based Editorials

By MICHAEL GONCHAR



Tim Lahan

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Overview | How can writing change people's worldview? How can it influence public opinion? How can it lead to meaningful action?

The persuasive essay is a quintessential high school writing assignment. With the Common Core standards, it seems to have taken on a new urgency in many school districts and classrooms. But students should know that evidence-based persuasive writing is more than just an academic exercise — it is very much alive in the real world. Perhaps one of the best and most widely recognized examples of persuasive writing in action is the classic [newspaper editorial](#), three to four of which The New York Times publishes every day.

In this lesson, we offer suggestions on how to guide students through the writing process when writing editorials — from brainstorming a topic to publishing their work — and all the steps in between. This lesson can be used in conjunction with our [Student Contest](#) on editorial writing, or with any argumentative writing project you do with students.

Materials | Computers with Internet access. Optional copies of one or more of these three handouts: [Debatable Issues](#) (PDF), [Problem-Solution Organizer](#) (PDF), and the [rubric for our Student Editorial Contest](#) (PDF).

Lesson Plan

LANGUAGE ARTS
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Step 1 | Brainstorming: What Do You Care About?

Finding the right topic is essential. Students should pick something that a) they genuinely care about; b) other people would want to read about; c) they can make an argument about; and d) they can find evidence about to support their claim.

You might get students started brainstorming ideas by having them journal about or discuss with partners questions like:

What would you like to change if you could? What problems or policies do you think should be addressed — whether something global, like climate change, or something closer to home, like a later start time for your high school classes? Make as long a list as you can.

What issues, topics and fields are you passionate about? Make a list. Your list might include fields as broad as “music” or as specific as “the early days of hip-hop.” What questions or controversies in these fields do experts or fans often argue? Where do you stand?

What do you do outside of school? What are some things *you’re* an expert on? What aspects of those hobbies or interests do you find yourself having to explain to others? Why?

What issues or ideas do you often find yourself discussing or arguing about with friends, your family or online?

What issues or controversies have you followed recently in current events? What are your opinions about them? What might you need more information about?

Students can then share their ideas and, as a whole class, compile a list on the board or on a class blog or wiki.

To open the class to even more ideas, you might then invite students look through our list of [200 Student Opinion questions that invite argument](#). Not only can this list help students pick a topic, but each question links to a relevant New York Times article, which may be very helpful when students begin to look for evidence.

A Note on Collaboration: The editorial writing process at The New York Times is [done collaboratively](#). That means, a team of writers works together from choosing a topic through researching it and drafting the writing. Teachers may want to give students opportunities to collaborate on their editorials as well, whether for only one step of the project, such as research, or from beginning to end.

Step 2 | Modeling: What Is An Editorial?

To help students envision what they will be writing, it is worth spending time discussing what an editorial is and looking at some examples.

Ask students: What is an editorial? Have you ever read any? Where would you find one? What do you think is the purpose of an editorial?

We selected three recent examples from the

RELATED RESOURCES

FROM THE LEARNING NETWORK

- [Student Contest | Write an Editorial on an Issue That Matters to You](#)
- [Skills Practice | Persuading an Audience Using Logos, Pathos and Ethos](#)
- [10 Ways to Develop Expository Writing Skills With The New York Times](#)

FROM NYTIMES.COM

- [Archive of Editorials](#)

AROUND THE WEB

- [Online Writing Lab | Conducting Research](#)
- [Online Writing Lab | Conducting Research](#)

Times editorial page that students can look over as models, though you or your students may pick others from the thousands in the [Opinion archives](#):

[Firearms' Toll Among the Young](#) (267 words)

[Zero Traffic Fatalities](#) (277 words)

[The Globalization of Pollution](#) (397 words)

Have students choose an editorial to read on their own or as a whole class. As they read, have them note:

What is the opinion or call to action in this editorial?

What evidence does it use to make its argument?

How persuasive do you find the editorial? Is it effective?

What do you notice about the language and tone of the editorial? About other choices the writer(s) have made?

Students may want make annotations or use highlighters as they read, then discuss their findings as a class.

Note: You may want students to look at the rubric you will be using to grade their editorials before they start the research and writing process. Here is our [the rubric](#) (PDF) that we are using for our [Student Contest](#).

Step 3 | Researching: What Do the Experts Say?

Once students have selected a topic, they should begin their research by gathering background information. That might mean reading newspaper articles, consulting an encyclopedia, finding reliable websites or reaching out to an expert to make sure they have enough context about why their topic is important to write a strong persuasive essay.

As they do their research, students can take notes using index cards or in a notebook, or they can use our [Debatable Issues](#) (PDF) handout. Alternatively, if students plan to offer a solution to a problem in their editorial, they may want to use our [Problem-Solution Organizer](#) (PDF).

For more detail about the nitty-gritty of the research process, the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University provides a [guide to conducting research](#) that can be helpful with areas such as evaluating source reliability and doing Internet searches.

Students can find articles in The Times by using the [search feature](#). For our contest, we ask that students have at least one Times and one non-Times source for their evidence, although of course we hope most will read far beyond that requirement as they learn about the topic.

Students might be grouped by common interests to work together during the research portion of this process, then write individual editorials, or they might do the entire assignment in partners or as a group.

Steps 4 and 5 | Outlining and Drafting; Revising and Editing: How Do You Write an Editorial?

Andrew Rosenthal, the editorial page editor at The Times, explains in this [brief video](#) that a good editorial consists of “a clear position that is strongly and persuasively argued.” He then goes on to recommend seven pointers for students.

- 1. Know your bottom line.** “You have to know what you want to say. You have to have a clear opinion — what we call a bottom line.”
- 2. Be concise.** “You need to get to the point of your editorial quickly. You have to state it clearly and you have to be concise.”
- 3. Give an opinion or solution.** “There are basically two kinds of editorials. One expresses an opinion about a situation, like if you want to write about human rights abuses in some part of the world or the country that you’re concerned about. The other kind of editorial proposes a solution to a specific problem. For example, if you want to write about traffic congestion in northern New Jersey, where I live and there’s a lot of traffic, you should have an answer to how to fix the traffic problem.”
- 4. Do your research.** “Everyone is entitled to their opinion, you’re not entitled to your own facts. Go online, make calls if you can, check your information, double-check it. There’s nothing that will undermine your argument faster than a fact you got wrong, that you did not have to get wrong.”
- 5. Write clearly.** “Good writing is important. Make your writing clear and easy to understand. Write as if you’re sending a letter to a well-informed friend who cares about what you think. But don’t use any slang. *OMG* — no. Use examples whenever you can. It’s better to use an example than just to use a word or an adjective that describes something. If you want to say that the mayor’s pre-K policy is wrong, explain how — don’t say it’s just stupid. In fact, never use the word stupid.”
- 6. Every writer needs an editor.** “After you’ve written your editorial, give it to someone you trust to read and listen to what they say. If they don’t understand it, that means it’s probably not clear.”
- 7. Be prepared for a reaction.** “When you write something and you publish it, be prepared for a reaction. If you write a good editorial, people are going to respond to it. And if you criticize people, they definitely are going to respond. So if someone writes you a letter, write them back. Be prepared to defend your position. Don’t get defensive, just explain why you said what you had to say. And if they question your facts, be ready to show that you were right.”

The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University has a [guide to writing argumentative essays](#) that may also be helpful for students as they think about organizing their editorial and developing a logical argument.

Step 6 | Publishing: How Can My Editorial Reach an Audience?

Students will have the chance to publish their editorials as comments on the Learning Network on or before March 17, 2014, as part of our [Student Contest](#). Along with our partner, the [Center for News Literacy](#) at Stony Brook University, we will then choose the best to publish in a separate post. But even if your students aren't writing for our contest, the genre is meant to have an audience. That audience can start with the teacher, but it ideally shouldn't end there.

Students can read their editorials to the class or in groups. Classmates can have a chance to respond to the author, leading to a discussion or debate. Students can try to publish their editorials in the school newspaper or other local newspapers or online forums. It is only when editorials reach a wider audience that they have the power to make change.

Teachers: How do you teach the persuasive essay? Let us know, below. And if you ever use The New York Times to do it, consider writing in to our [Reader Ideas](#) column.

Standards

This resource may be used to address the academic standards listed below.

[Common Core E.L.A. Anchor Standards](#)

READING

- 1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- 2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- 4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- 5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- 6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- 8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- 10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

WRITING

- 1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- 4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- 5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
- 6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
- 7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on

focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

LANGUAGE

1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

6 Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

NAME _____ DATE _____

PROBLEM-SOLUTION ORGANIZER

Directions: As you read about your topic, use the left-hand column below to write notes and quotations about the problems or issues the article raises. In the right-hand column, note any solutions offered. Add your own ideas to both lists when you are finished — what was left out of this article that should also be considered?

Topic: _____

Article headline: _____

Article date: _____

Problems	Solutions
My Ideas	My Ideas



Student Editorial Contest Rubric 2014

	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Beginning (1)
Viewpoint: Editorial states a clear opinion and issues a call to action through argument based on evidence.				
Evidence: Editorial uses compelling evidence to support the opinion, and cites reliable sources.				
Analysis and Persuasion: Editorial convincingly argues point of view by providing relevant background information, using valid examples, acknowledging counter-claims, and developing claims – all in a clear and organized fashion.				
Language: Editorial has a strong voice and engages the reader. It uses language, style and tone appropriate to its purpose and features correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.				
Guidelines: Editorial follows all contest guidelines, including a maximum word count of 450 words and inclusion of at least one Times and one non-Times source.				





FEBRUARY 6, 2014, 10:00 AM

Student Contest | Write an Editorial on an Issue That Matters to You

By MICHAEL GONCHAR and KATHERINE SCHULTEN

The New York Times's editorial page editor Andrew Rosenthal provides seven tips for writing an effective editorial.

 E-MAIL

Updated | Feb. 7

 FACEBOOK

[Is It Ethical to Eat Meat?](#)

 TWITTER

[Should Students Be Able to Grade Their Teachers?](#)

 SAVE

[Do Violent Video Games Make People More Violent in Real Life?](#)

 MORE

Every day during the school year we invite teenagers to share their opinions about questions like these — on [topics from hip-hop to climate change](#) — and hundreds do, posting arguments, reflections and anecdotes to our [Student Opinion](#) feature.

With this, our first-ever Student Editorial Contest, we're asking you to channel that enthusiasm into something a little more formal: short, evidence-based persuasive essays like the [editorials](#) The New York Times publishes every day.

The challenge is pretty straightforward. Choose a topic you care about, gather evidence from both New York Times and non-New York Times sources, and write a concise editorial (450 words or fewer) to convince readers of your point of view.

Because [editorial writing at newspapers is a collaborative process](#), you can write your entry as a team effort, or by yourself. When you're done, post it in the [comments section below](#) by March 17, 2014.

With our contest partner, the [Center for News Literacy](#) at Stony Brook University, we will then use [this rubric](#) to select winners to publish on The

Learning Network.

As teachers know, the persuasive essay has long been a staple of high school education, but the [Common Core standards](#) seem to have put evidence-based argumentative writing on everybody's agenda. You couldn't ask for a more real-world example of the genre than the classic newspaper editorial — and The Times publishes, on average, [four of them a day](#).

To help with this challenge, Andrew Rosenthal, The Times's editorial page editor, made the video above, in which he details seven pointers. We have also culled [200 prompts for argumentative writing](#) from our Student Opinion feature to help inspire you, though, of course, you are not limited to those topics.

Update / Feb. 7: We have just published a lesson plan, "[For the Sake of Argument: Writing Persuasively to Craft Short, Evidence-Based Editorials](#)," that offers additional ideas for teaching the steps in the process.

So what issue do you care about? [Gun violence?](#) [School lunch?](#) [Reality TV?](#) You decide. Then use the facts to convince us that you're right.

Contest Rules

1. Use at least one Times source. You can write your editorial about any topic, as long as you use at least one source from The New York Times. That should pretty much open the whole world to you since you may be surprised how much you can [find in The Times](#).

2. Use at least one non-Times source. Make sure, however, that the source you use is a [reliable](#) one.

3. Always cite your sources. If you found evidence in an article on the Internet, link to it. If you used a print source, state the title and author, linking to additional information about it if possible. If you interviewed an expert, state his or her name and position. Readers (and judges) should always know where you got your evidence.

4. Be concise. The editorial must be no more than 450 words. (Update: Your list of sources is separate and does not count as part of your 450-word limit.)

5. Have an opinion. Editorials are different from news articles because they try to persuade readers to share your point of view. Don't be afraid to take a stand.

6. Write your editorial by yourself or with a group. If you are working as a team, just remember to submit all of your first names and last initials when you post your entry.

7. Be original and use appropriate language. Write for a well-informed audience, but include enough background information to give context. Be careful not to plagiarize: use quotation marks around lines you use verbatim from another source, or rephrase and cite your source.

8. Submissions must be from students who are 13 to 19 years old, though students can come from anywhere in the world. No last names please, but an initial is fine, as is a school or class code of some type. (For example, "Ethan G. CHS112.")

9. All entries must be submitted by March 17, 2014 at 5 p.m. Eastern time, as [comments on this post](#). If you have questions about

the contest, please feel free to post them in the [comments section](#) as well, and we'll answer you there.

10. We will use this [rubric \(PDF\)](#) to judge editorials. The top editorials, as judged by The Times and the [Center for News Literacy](#) at Stony Brook University using this rubric, will be featured on The Learning Network. (As with all our contests, if you win, you can then follow [these steps](#) to make sure we can use your last name.)

Good luck and have fun. As always with a first-time contest, we welcome your questions and comments in case we have somehow omitted details that might be useful. Let us know how we can help, below.



APRIL 19, 2012, 5:11 AM

Is It Ethical to Eat Meat?

By LILY ALTAVERNA

Herbivore, omnivore or carnivore? Some people just can't go a day without chicken, steak or fish, while others refuse to eat food that has even touched meat. The Well blog recently wrote about "The Challenges Of Going Vegan" in a society dominated by meat and dairy. Meanwhile, The Ethicist is running an essay contest for adults asking them to "tell us why it's ethical to eat meat." What do you think?

Student Opinion

Questions about issues in the news for students 13 and older.



[* See all Student Opinion >](#)

In "[Calling All Carnivores. Tell Us Why It's Ethical to Eat Meat: A Contest](#)" Ariel Kaminer writes:

Ethically speaking, vegetables get all the glory. In recent years, vegetarians — and to an even greater degree vegans, their hard-core inner circle — have dominated the discussion about the ethics of eating. From the philosopher Peter Singer, whose 1975 volume "Animal Liberation" galvanized an international movement, to the novelist Jonathan Safran Foer, who wrote the 2009 best seller "Eating Animals," those who forswear meat have made the case that what we eat is a crucial ethical decision. To be just, they say, we must put down our cheeseburgers and join their ranks.

In response, those who love meat have had surprisingly little to say. They say, of course, that, well, they love meat or that meat is deeply ingrained in our habit or culture or cuisine or that it's nutritious or that it's just part of the natural order. Some of the more conscientious carnivores have devoted themselves to enhancing the lives of livestock, by improving what those animals eat, how they live and how they are killed. But few have tried to answer the fundamental ethical issue: Whether it is right to eat animals in the first place, at least when human survival is not at stake.

So today we announce a nationwide contest for the omnivorous readers of The New York Times. We invite you to make the strongest possible case for this most basic of daily practices.

Students: Tell us your opinion: Is it okay to eat meat? Do you? Should there be reforms in the ways that meat is obtained, processed and sold? Do you know people who are vegetarians or vegans? Is meat truly an important part of a well-balanced diet, or might humans be better off without it? What would you say if you entered the contest The Ethicist has posted?



SEPTEMBER 19, 2012, 5:09 AM

Should Students Be Able to Grade Their Teachers?

By MICHAEL GONCHAR



Sittixay Dithavong/Associated Press

Public school teachers and supporters in Chicago marched on streets surrounding John Marshall Metropolitan High School on Sept. 12. [Go to related article >](#)

On Wednesday students in Chicago public schools returned to classes after missing more than a week of school because their teachers were on strike. One of the questions at the heart of the strike: How should teachers be evaluated?

While education leaders in Chicago were not seriously talking about having students evaluate their teachers, some education reformers are. The idea is nothing new in colleges, where students frequently evaluate their professors. So, do you think middle and high school students should be able to grade their teachers?

Student Opinion

Questions about issues in the news for students 13 and older.



[* See all Student Opinion >](#)

Room for Debate recently asked this same question about college students in the piece, "[Professors and the Students Who Grade Them.](#)" And Motoko Rich highlighted the importance of the issue of teacher evaluations in the article "[National Schools Debate Is on Display in Chicago](#)":

One of the main sticking points in the negotiations here between the teachers union and Mayor Rahm Emanuel is a new teacher evaluation system that gives significant and increasing weight to student performance on standardized tests. Personnel decisions would be based on those evaluations.

Over the last few years, a majority of states have adopted similar

systems, spurred by the desire to qualify for the Obama administration's Race to the Top education grants. The Education Commission of the States says that 30 states require that evaluations include evidence of student achievement on tests, and at least 13, and the District of Columbia, use achievement measured by test scores for half or more of a teacher's rating.

Proponents say these measures are needed to improve teaching in a country where 33 percent of fourth graders are not reading at grade level and about one-quarter of public high school students do not graduate on time, if at all. They say the new rating systems will help districts identify the best and worst teachers.

These efforts are stirring skepticism and anger among teachers, some of whom express a sense that those behind the new evaluations know little about what it is like to be in a classroom. Others fear that heavy reliance on scores will turn schools into test-taking factories.

Students

Do you feel students should be able to grade their teachers? Do you think student evaluations should be used by principals and district administrators, along with other data such as principal observations and test scores, to make decisions about teacher salary and job tenure?

Do you think students know what good teaching looks like? Do you think students can tell the difference between a highly effective teacher and a struggling teacher?

Do you think students can be fair in grading their teachers? Or, will they be overly generous to easy teachers and overly critical of hard teachers?



FEBRUARY 13, 2013, 7:07 AM

Do Violent Video Games Make People More Violent in Real Life?

By MICHAEL GONCHAR



Alex Wong/Getty Images

Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. meeting in January with video game industry executives, a response to the Sandy Hook school shooting. [Go to related article »](#)

Young people, especially boys, are playing bloodier and more realistic video games than ever before, and scientists are looking for links between real life violence and violent video games. However, the research so far is inconclusive.

What do you think? Do violent video games make people more violent in real life? Why or why not?

Student Opinion

Questions about issues in the news for students 13 and older.



[• See all Student Opinion »](#)

In [“Shooting in the Dark,”](#) Benedict Carey writes about research looking for connections between violent video games and violent behavior.

The young men who opened fire at Columbine High School, at the movie theater in Aurora, Colo., and in other massacres had this in common: they were video gamers who seemed to be acting out some dark digital fantasy. It was as if all that exposure to computerized violence gave them the idea to go on a rampage — or at least fueled their urges.

But did it really?

Social scientists have been studying and debating the effects of media violence on behavior since the 1950s, and video games in particular since the 1980s. The issue is especially relevant today, because the games are more realistic and bloodier than ever,

and because most American boys play them at some point. Girls play at lower rates and are significantly less likely to play violent games.

A burst of new research has begun to clarify what can and cannot be said about the effects of violent gaming. Playing the games can and does stir hostile urges and mildly aggressive behavior in the short term. Moreover, youngsters who develop a gaming habit can become slightly more aggressive — as measured by clashes with peers, for instance — at least over a period of a year or two.

Yet it is not at all clear whether, over longer periods, such a habit increases the likelihood that a person will commit a violent crime, like murder, rape, or assault, much less a Newtown-like massacre. (Such calculated rampages are too rare to study in any rigorous way, researchers agree.)

Students: Tell us ...

Do you ever play violent video games? Do your friends?

Do you think violent video games make people more violent in real life?

Do you think these games make people less sensitive to real-life violence, blood and gore?

If you play violent video games, how do they make you feel when you play?

Should [legislation regarding violent video games](#) be part of Congress's response to the school shooting in Newtown, Conn., or do you think violent video games are not part of the problem that leads to mass shootings?