DISCUSS Gather in a small group to discuss your video game habits. Take turns answering such questions as “How much time do you spend playing video games each week?” “What kinds of games do you play?” and “Do you think video games have a positive or negative effect on you?” When you are done, compare your answers with those of the other groups.
**ELEMENTS OF NONFICTION: ARGUMENT**

An argument consists of a claim, or position on an issue or problem, supported by reasons and evidence. A basic argument might look like this.

Claim: Dogs are smart.
Support: My dog knows his name and does tricks.

The two articles that follow examine the pros and cons of playing video games. As you read them, look for facts included in each argument that are for or against the issue. Which article is in favor of playing video games and which one is opposed to them?

**READING SKILL: EVALUATE SUPPORT**

To avoid being easily swayed by a weak argument, it is a good idea to evaluate the support and reasoning a writer includes. Watch for these weaknesses:

- **Vague language**—statements that are unclear
- **Irrelevant examples**—examples that do not directly relate to the claim
- **Faulty reasoning**—reasoning that includes fallacies, or errors in logic.

As you read each article, record examples of strong support and weak support in a chart like the one shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“What Video Games Can Teach Us”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague language: “a number of young gamers” (line 33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

You’ll find the following words in the articles on playing video games. To see how many you know, write definitions for the boldfaced words.

1. Video games **captivate** many people.
2. Some people worry about games that **simulate** violence.
3. Video game players learn to make **precise** movements.
4. The opinions of different experts **complicate** the issue.

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
HERE'S SOME NEWS FOR YOU TO SHARE WITH YOUR PARENTS AND TEACHERS: VIDEO GAMES MIGHT ACTUALLY BE GOOD FOR YOU.

Whenever a wave of teenage violence strikes, movies, TV, or video games often take the heat. Some adults assume that movies, TV, and video games are a bad influence on kids, and they blame these media\(^1\) for causing various problems. A variety of studies appear to support the link between media violence and bad behavior among kids.

But media don’t necessarily cause violence, says James Gee. Gee is an education professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. “You get a group of teenage boys who shoot up a school—of course they’ve played video games,” Gee says. “Everyone does. It’s like blaming food because we have obese people.”

Video games are innocent of most of the charges against them, Gee says. The games might actually do a lot of good. Gee has written a book titled *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy.*

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\(^1\) media: a general term that includes television, films, magazines, newspapers, and video games.
A growing number of researchers agree with Gee. If used in the right way, video and computer games have the potential to inspire learning, and they can help players improve coordination\(^2\) and visual skills.

**Attention-Getting Games**

A good video game is challenging, entertaining, and *complicated*, Gee says. It usually takes 50 to 60 hours of intense concentration to finish one. Even kids who can’t sit still in school can spend hours trying to solve a video or computer game.

The *captivating* power of video games might lie in their interactive nature. Players don’t just sit and watch. They get to participate in the action and solve problems. Some games even allow players to make changes in the game, allowing new possibilities.

And kids who play computer games often end up knowing more about computers than their parents do. “Kids today are natives in a culture in which their parents are immigrants,” Gee says.

In his 2 to 3 years of studying the social influences of video games, Gee has seen a number of young gamers become computer science majors in college. One kid even ended up as a teaching assistant during his freshman year because the school’s computer courses were too easy for him.

**Screen Reading**

Video games can enhance reading skills too. In the game *Animal Crossing*, for instance, players become characters who live in a town full of animals. Over the course of the game, you can buy a house, travel from town to town, go to museums, and do other ordinary things. All the while, you’re writing notes to other players and talking to the animals. Because kids are interested in the game, they often end up reading at a level well above their grade, even if they say they don’t like to read.

Games can inspire new interests. After playing a game called *Age of Mythology*, Gee says, kids (like his 8-year-old son) often start checking out mythology books from the library or join Internet chat groups about mythological characters. History can come alive to a player participating in the game.

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\(^2\) *coordination*: the ability to make multiple muscle groups work smoothly together.
Improved Skills

Video games might also help improve visual skills. That was what researchers from the University of Rochester in New York recently found.

In the study, frequent game players between the ages of 18 and 23 were better at monitoring what was happening around them than those who didn’t play as often or didn’t play at all. They could keep track of more objects at a time. And they were faster at picking out objects from a cluttered environment.

“Above and beyond the fact that action video games can be beneficial,” says Rochester neuroscientist Daphne Bavelier, “our findings are surprising because they show that the learning induced by video game playing occurs quite fast and generalizes outside the gaming experience.”

The research might lead to better ways to train soldiers or treat people with attention problems, the researchers say, though they caution against taking that point too far.

Says Bavelier, “We certainly don’t mean to convey the message that kids can play video games instead of doing their homework!” If Gee gets his way, though, teachers might some day start incorporating computer games into their assignments. Already, scientists and the military use computer games to help simulate certain situations for research or training, he says. Why shouldn’t schools do the same thing? . . .

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have started a project they describe as the “Education Arcade.” The project brings together researchers, scholars, game designers and others interested in developing and using computer games in the classroom. . . .

Looking at the bright side of video and computer games could also help bring kids and adults closer together. Playing games can be a social activity, during which kids and adults learn from one another. By opening up lines of communication and understanding, maybe one day we’ll praise video games for saving society, not blame them for destroying it.

3. neuroscientist: a scientist who studies the brain and the nervous system.
4. scholars: people who study a particular subject.

simulate (sīm’ə-lāt’) v. to imitate

EVALUATE SUPPORT
Does the support the author provides in lines 51–60 seem strong? Explain why or why not.

EVALUATE SUPPORT
What irrelevant example does the author use in lines 66–70? Record this information in your chart. Explain whether you think this is an example of faulty reasoning.
WHEN I WAS A KID, I WAS OBSESSED WITH VIDEO GAMES.

I saved my allowance to buy new games every month. I read Nintendo magazines for tips about solving the Super Mario Brothers adventures. I played so many hours of Tetris that I used to dream about little blocks falling perfectly into place.

There were physical effects too. My thumbs turned into machines, quick and precise. During especially difficult levels of play, my palms would sweat. My heart would race. I'd have knots in my stomach from anxiety. It was the same feeling I'd sometimes get from watching scary movies or suspenseful TV shows.

After a while, I started to think that looking at screens and playing games all the time might be affecting me in ways I didn’t even suspect. It turns out that I was probably right.

Scientists are discovering that playing video and computer games and watching TV and movies can change the way we act, think, and feel. Whether these changes are good or bad has become a subject of intense debate.

Concerns About Violence

Violence is one of the biggest concerns, especially as computer graphics and special effects become more realistic. Some parents and teachers blame . . . aggressive behavior on media violence— as seen in TV programs, movies, and video games.

“If you’ve ever watched young children watching kickboxing,” says child psychologist1 John Murray, “within a few minutes they start popping up and pushing and shoving and imitating the actions.” Murray is at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.

There’s also evidence that people become less sensitive to violence after a while, Murray says. In other words, you get so used to seeing it that you eventually think it’s not such a big deal.

1. child psychologist (sī-kōl’ə-jist): a person trained to study thought and behavior patterns in children.
Then there’s the “mean world syndrome.” If you watch lots of violence, you may start to think the world is a bad place. I still sometimes have trouble falling asleep if I watch the news on TV or read the newspaper right before going to bed.

Still, it’s hard to prove that violence on TV leads to violence in real life. It might be possible, for example, that people who are already aggressive for other reasons are more drawn to violent games and TV shows.

**Video Power**

Most of the research has focused on TV and movie violence, mainly because TV and movies have been around much longer than video games, says psychologist Craig Anderson of Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Anderson has a Web site dedicated to looking at the link between video games and violence.

In his own research and in analyses of research by others, Anderson says that he has detected a connection between violent video games and violent behavior. He has found that people who repeatedly play violent games have aggressive thoughts and become less helpful and sociable. Physically, their heart rates accelerate.

Video games might have an even more powerful effect on the brain than TV does, Murray says. Players actively participate in the violence.

Next time you play a violent video game, Murray suggests, check your pulse just before and after each round as one way to see how the game affects you.

“Ninety-nine percent of the time, I’ll bet your heart rate will have increased rather dramatically while playing one,” Murray says. “This indicates that you are being affected.”

Three teenagers from Puerto Rico have data to back up that observation. With the help of a school nurse, the high school seniors found that people of all ages showed a rise in blood pressure and heart rate after playing a superviolent game. Playing an active, nonviolent game did not have the same effect.

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2. syndrome (sīnˈdrōmˈ): a group or pattern of symptoms that make up a disease or condition.

3. analyses (ə-nāˈlīsəz): examinations of different information or experimental results.
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  According to “What Video Games Can Teach Us,” why is the military using computer games for training?

2. **Clarify**  According to “The Violent Side of Video Games,” what is the “mean world syndrome”?

3. **Summarize**  Reread lines 37–46 in “The Violent Side of Video Games.” Then write a summary of Craig Anderson’s discoveries.

Critical Analysis

4. **Examine Evidence**  One common type of evidence is **expert testimony**, or quotes from people who are knowledgeable about whatever subject is being argued. Look over the articles to find the experts who are quoted in each one. Why might the author have chosen these particular experts?

5. **Evaluate Support**  Look back at the chart you filled in as you read, reviewing the support for each article. What examples of faulty reasoning did you find?

6. **Analyze an Argument**  In a graphic organizer like the one shown, list the reasons Sohn gives for her position in “What Video Games Can Teach Us.” Then list the evidence she includes to support her position. Create a similar chart for the second article. Use your charts to compare and contrast the structure and viewpoints of the two articles.

Extension and Challenge

7. **Technology Connection**  Research to find out what professions use computer games or simulations to train staff. What kinds of simulations or games are used? How effective are they in preparing people to do real work?

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**Can a GAME play YOU?**

Review the results of the group activity on page 942. How have your views of the positive or negative effects of video games changed?
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**

Choose the letter of the word or phrase that best completes each sentence.

1. You **complicate** directions by (a) adding steps, (b) explaining them, (c) writing them down.
2. To **simulate** eating, you (a) buy food, (b) pretend to chew, (c) think of dinner.
3. A movie can **captivate** you, making you want to (a) get popcorn, (b) chat, (c) watch closely.
4. A **precise** measurement is (a) estimated, (b) correct, (c) unreliable.

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING**

| adequacy | authority | concept | purpose | structural |

With a small group, discuss the **adequacy** of the supporting details and evidence in the articles on video games. Decide whether one article is more convincing than the other. Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: CHOOSE THE BEST SYNONYM**

Words that have the same or similar meanings are called **synonyms**. A word can have many synonyms, so a writer has to choose carefully. For example, the vocabulary word **captivating** describes a video game that holds or captures interest better than its synonym **interesting** would. In a **thesaurus** (a book or electronic tool for finding synonyms), the word **captivating** is also grouped with words such as **fascinating** or **spellbinding**.

**PRACTICE** For each sentence, choose the synonym in parentheses that best replaces the boldfaced word in the context provided. Consult a dictionary or thesaurus for help.

1. The abandoned factory was dark and **empty**. (deserted, unfilled)
2. After the marathon, he **drank** as much water as he could. (sipped, gulped)
3. The room was **large** and airy. (spacious, massive)
4. The kittens **hit** a ball of yarn back and forth. (batted, smacked)
5. By the end of the five-mile hike, we were all **tired**. (sleepy, exhausted)
Conventions in Writing

◆ GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: Avoid Misplaced Modifiers

A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition—such as from, in, on, under, or with—and ends with a noun or pronoun. Prepositional phrases modify, or give information about, another word in the sentence. For example, in the sentence “The mouse is under the table,” under the table modifies mouse. If a prepositional phrase is placed too far from the word it modifies, the sentence’s meaning may be unclear.

**Original:** Anderson connected video games with behavior in his research.

**Revised:** In his research, Anderson connected video games with behavior.

**PRACTICE** Move each prepositional phrase to the correct position.

1. Much has been said about violent video games in the news media.
2. Video games can have a more powerful effect than TV on the brain.
3. You can learn a lot from video games with patience and concentration.
4. Emily Sohn talks about playing many video games in her article.

*For more help with misplaced modifiers, see page R59 in the Grammar Handbook.*

READING-WRITING CONNECTION

**YOUR TURN** Show your understanding of the two articles on video games by responding to the prompt. Then use the revising tip to improve your writing.

**WRITING PROMPT**

Extended Response: Express Your Opinion

A newspaper editorial is a short piece of writing that expresses an opinion. Write a two- or three-paragraph editorial or letter to the editor stating whether education in your school should or should not include instructional video games. Cite evidence from one or both of the articles in your editorial.

**REVISING TIP** Check to see that you avoided misplaced modifiers in your editorial. Review your work to be sure that you don’t confuse your readers with a prepositional phrase that is in the wrong place.