**Subject area/course**: English/Language Arts; Composition I

**Grade level/band**: 11-12

**Task source**: Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC)

**Tracking Your Taxes**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

1. **Task overview**:

This task introduces students to creating a complex argument about a real-life issue that affects everyone: taxes. Students focus on a specific part of a large task, research information on a topic about which they may not have already formed an opinion, and make an argument for action (or not) based on the results of the research. The format of the final product is an editorial with the audience of students’ peers.

1. **Aligned standards:**
2. **Primary Common Core State Standards**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/1/) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/8/) Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/10/) Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/11-12/3/) 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.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/11-12/1/) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

1. **Critical abilities**

Research: Conduct sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem, narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate, and demonstrate understanding of the subject under investigation. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, use advanced searches effectively, and assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience.

Analysis of Information: Integrate and synthesize multiple sources of information (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to address a question, make informed decisions, understand a process, phenomenon, or concept, and solve problems while evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Communication in Many Forms:Use oral and written communication skills to learn, evaluate, and express ideas for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, and rewriting while considering the audience.

Interpersonal Interaction and Collaboration:Develop a range of interpersonal skills, including the ability to work with others, to participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

1. **Time/schedule requirements:**

* Week 1: Class brainstorming, forming groups, group choose topics, teacher checks topics, students begin researching
* Week 2: Students continue researching, begin outlining and drafting, meet in groups to share information and ideas
* Week 3: Draft due at the beginning of the week in order to give students the opportunity to receive peer feedback
* Week 4: Papers due

1. **Materials/resources:**

Federal sources

* U.S. Office on management and budget: [www.whitehouse.gov/omb](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb) or [www.budget.gov](http://www.budget.gov)
* Congressional Budget Office: [www.cbo.gov](http://www.cbo.gov)
* Offices of state representatives of Congress
* Center on Budget and Policy priorities: CBPP.org
* Newspapers of record: *New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal*, etc.

State sources

* Most states have state web sites on which budgets are fairly prominently displayed
* Offices of representatives to the state legislature
* State newspapers of record

Local sources (County, Municipality, etc.)

* Local web site
* Local newspaper archives
* Local officials

1. **Prior knowledge:**

Students should be able to:

* Conduct research on the Internet.
* Assess information for validity and comprehensiveness.
* Summarize, paraphrase, and cite sources.
* Use the complete writing process.
* Organize an argument: background, statement of the case, presentation of the evidence, refutation of opposing views, conclusion/suggesting courses of action.
* Consult school or public library research librarians for help with sources.

1. **Connection to curriculum:**

This assignment is intended as a final research project in a course, after students have learned to find and assess the validity of information about a topic. In a curriculum where composition is coordinated with a course in American history or political science, it could work as a joint project. This assignment coordinates well with The Declaration of Independence, both as a political document and as a classically structured argument, if that document is part of the curriculum.

1. **Teacher instructions:**

* Adapt the assignment to the government structure of the area in which the school is situated. Research at a state level may be appropriate for a sparsely populated state like Wyoming. State taxes in New York is too big a topic to handle, but bed taxes (on hotels) in the resort town of Lake George is a perennial hot topic.
* Introduce the topic of taxes and ask students to brainstorm all the types of taxes they (or their families) pay. Students may need prompting to include state, county, or local taxes (as appropriate). The list need not be complete, but should be broad enough for students to realize the range of taxes (federal, state, county, local).
* Give students until the next class session to research the topic informally (talk to family members, look at sales receipts and paychecks, etc.) to finish the list of topics.
* Students may work in groups of three or four in order to focus on one type of tax (i.e., county sales tax, school tax, property tax, state income tax). In doing so, students will learn to break a large task into small components.
* Students research information on the type of tax they have chosen – sources, how it is collected, how it is spent, any recent issues.
* Students draft, revise, and edit an argumentative paper that proposes a course of action based on the information they find. Encourage the development of individual ideas beyond “taxes should be lower.” Discuss how the audience of the final product is the school newspaper. Discuss how the tone of an editorial differs from that of a typical essay.
* Optional: Students meet in small groups again to prepare a brief classroom presentation. The presentation must include basic information about the tax, collection, and expenditures, and may include each student’s final argument. The group members do not need to agree on their arguments.

1. **Student support:**

The following suggestions are examples of scaffolding that can be used to meet the diverse student needs within the classroom.

* Provide class time for research on students’ topics.
* Provide definitions of new vocabulary words ahead of time.
* For the final product, all learners will benefit from peer assistance while brainstorming their topics, as well as a peer or teacher review of their papers before final submission.
* Some students will have good research skills, but some will need guidance in the determination of appropriate sources and where to look for them. It is important to spend class time in review of what constitutes an appropriate source in advance of students’ independent work time

1. **Extensions or variations:**

* Students could present the results of their research to the class via an oral or multi-media presentation.
* If there is a particularly interesting and/or controversial topic, a debate could be organized where students choose sides on the topic and defend their views.

1. **Scoring:**

Student work can be scored using the College and Career Ready (CCR) Task Bank Rubric.