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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 36(36)

ISSN

1069-7977

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Publication Date

2014

Peer reviewed

The effects of strategy instruction and role assignment on reducing “My-side bias” during writing

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Abstract: My-side bias is the tendency to ignore or exclude evidence against one’s position. The present study investigated ways of encouraging students to reduce my-side bias and generate more counterarguments in writing argumentative essays. Fifth-grade students (N=90) from elementary school in Japan wrote persuasive essays about school rule topics under three different conditions. 1) Strategy condition: students were given a text outlining strategies to generate more counterarguments. 2) Role condition: students were given the same strategies plus instructions to write like a journalist. 3) Control condition: students were simply told to write persuasive essays. Students in the strategy and role condition generated more counterarguments than the control condition. In addition, students in the role condition referenced evidence against one’s position and included a greater number of rebuttals than the strategy condition. These results suggest that role assignment reinforce usage of writing strategies and reduce my-side bias in writing arguments.