Example: Persuasive writing

Overleaf is a newspaper article by Mick North about arms trading. The writer is using the mode of the persuasion essay. Read the article and then answer the following questions.

1. Does the writer, early on in the article, outline the topics he/she is planning to cover in more detail later on? (A good idea as it helps the reader to get some idea of the essay’s direction.) If so, does the article cover those areas?

2. Do you think the writer makes a persuasive argument? If so, how?

3. Is the argument of the article easy to follow? One way of judging this is seeing whether the writer makes use of ‘signposting’ words and phrases like:
   
   nevertheless on the other hand there are three reasons why
   but in addition to summarise
   because secondly therefore
   moreover however in conclusion

4. Does the article offer enough evidence to support its statements?

5. Is there a clear conclusion to round the article off at the end?

6. Is the essay easy to read or made difficult to read as a result of poor spelling, unclear phrasing and inaccurate punctuation?

7. Would you say this was a good, reasonable or poor writing. Why?

8. Could this article be improved? If so, how?
It is seven years since my five-year-old daughter Sophie was shot dead in the gymnasium at Dunblane Primary School, one of the seventeen victims who were killed. The Dunblane massacre was a horrific reminder of the awful damage that can be inflicted with guns. Thankfully, since that awful day in March 1996 controls over firearms in Britain have been tightened. New legislation was introduced, and handgun ownership is now illegal. The resulting destruction of these dangerous weapons has made Britain a safer place than otherwise it would have been. Thousands more firearms have been removed from the community during two amnesties aimed at illegal guns.

The latest of these amnesties finished last Wednesday. At least 25,000 guns were handed to the police during April. There is now no possibility of them being used in gun crime, and the streets will be safer for that. The Home Secretary David Blunkett hailed the amnesty as a great success, and I agree. While an amnesty is only one of the things needed to deal with gun crime, it sends out the right signals, and any reduction in the number of illegal weapons must be viewed as a positive step. I applaud the Home Office for the measures it is taking to tackle the scourge of gun crime here in the UK.

So why, during a week that saw the end of an initiative I supported, did I decide to criticise the Government so publicly? It has been prepared, quite rightly, to adopt tough measures at home, and in doing so it has set a high standard, an example to the rest of the world. But it is in fact operating double standards, for when it comes to the trade in arms abroad it is falling decidedly short. The Government is not doing enough. It is even going back on its previous promises.
No one who has lost a loved one to gun violence can put out of their mind the resultant trauma. I never will. The experience is shattering. And I know that any parent, child, partner or friend who goes through the experience will feel the same, regardless of where in the world they live. An innocent life lost to a bullet is equally tragic, no matter where the trigger is pulled.

The level of gun violence in most areas of Britain is mercifully low, though still not low enough to stop it being a major concern. Imagine, though, how life would be if gun violence were an ever-present threat. Think how this would affect your ability to work, to bring up a family, just to survive. This is the reality of gun violence for too many people around the world. And we should not turn away and pretend that the carnage doesn't exist simply because it isn't taking place on our streets.

At the heart of the problem are the excesses of the international arms trade and unregulated brokers who put personal profit before any concern for the innocent victims of their trade. Without the tightest controls gun-runners will continue to pour weapons into conflict zones, blighting the lives of people who live there and in neighbouring regions.

I saw examples of the devastation this has caused during a visit with Oxfam to Uganda two years ago. Guns shipped to the civil war in southern Sudan have spilled into Uganda. Disputes between groups of semi-nomadic farmers once resolved without bloodshed, now have lethal consequences because so many men are brandishing AK47 assault rifles. Elsewhere, heavily-armed rebel groups wreak havoc, raiding villages, abducting children and leaving death in their wake.
I visited schools where every child in the class had witnessed gun violence. I talked to victims in hospitals. One little girl, aged two, had lost a foot. Medical staff talked in despair of the drain on their meagre resources which results from the carnage caused by firearms.

Our government started well last year by introducing the first legislation on the control of arms exports for sixty years. But that legislation is fatally flawed. It will allow the international trade in guns to continue unabated, as there is no provision for prosecuting UK arms brokers who continue their business, simply by doing their deals outside the country.

Why can't the Government stop their activities? In their last manifesto Labour had promised to introduce measures to curb the activities of arms brokers and traffickers 'wherever they are located'. Now it appears that, with a few minor exceptions, the controls won't operate outside this country. After a short plane trip or a few minutes on the Eurostar, a UK arms broker will be able to conduct their business from an overseas hotel room and then return home in time for dinner- without any fear of prosecution. This leaves a huge loophole that unscrupulous gun-runners will exploit.

The Government can easily remedy this by introducing what are called 'extra-territorial' controls, which basically mean that a gun broker doing a deal abroad that would be illegal here can be arrested and prosecuted on returning to the UK. We already do this with paedophiles, with terrorists and in cases of bribery and corruption. There is legislation that allows this. It is simple for this sort of legislation to cover brokers too, other countries (even the USA!) already have a fully functional 'extra-territorial'
system for controlling their gunrunners. There is no reason that the loophole can’t be closed.

Every year half a million people around the world are killed by firearms. The majority of these are civilians: the lives of men, women and children destroyed because the sale and transport of arms is badly controlled. Our Government has set an excellent example in its attitude towards domestic gun control. But in patting itself on the back for this, it shows breathtaking hypocrisy when it fails to follow suit in its attitude towards the arms traders. The lives of people in the poorer parts of the world are just as worthy of protection as those in Britain, and our government should demonstrate a consistent approach that reflects this.

To whose advantage is it that UK gunrunners can continue pursuing their trade without fear of prosecution? Except for the traders themselves, the answer is nobody’s. There are no employment or economic implications in closing the loophole. The gainers would be many innocent people in conflict zones. So I ask the Government, and in particular the Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt, to look again at the legislation. Let’s have a single standard, the highest possible, when it comes to controlling guns at home and abroad. Keep your promise that the activities of brokers and transporters will be curbed ‘wherever they are’. Otherwise that broken promise will, without doubt, lead to more broken lives.

*Mick North 2003 (1,123 words)*