

Economics case study and lesson plan

Economics

Studying Economics at A Level requires students to understand different views on how the economy operates and the assumptions that underpin them. Students are therefore encouraged to read articles and recognise what implicit assumptions the writer has made in building their arguments.

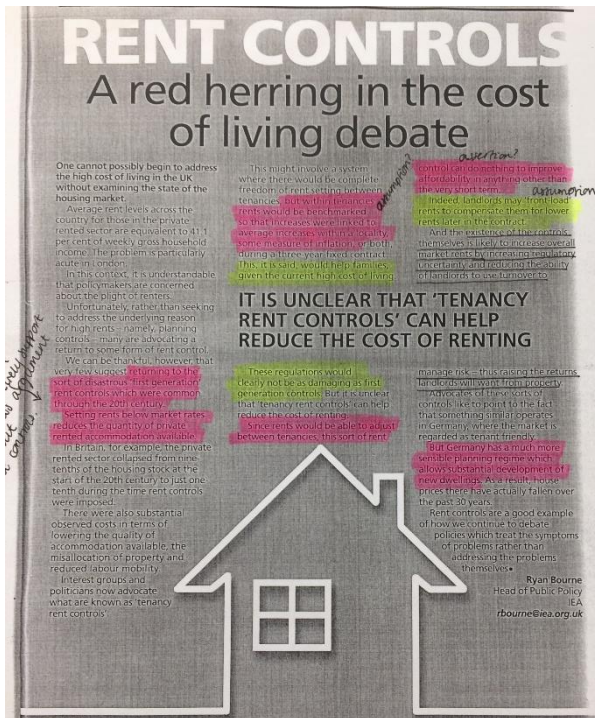
Critical literacy link to A Level assessment objectives

AO4: Evaluate economic arguments and use qualitative and quantitative evidence to support informed judgements relating to economic issues.

Case study – Year 13 microeconomics revision lesson at Chigwell School, Essex

The A Level specification requires students to understand the assumptions that underpin a number of models and the usefulness of models in explaining the real world. This lesson was an opportunity to revise microeconomics content with students and to encourage them to read critically when presented with economics stories in newspapers and magazines.

“I think this approach is very worthwhile in that it enables the students to apply critical thinking to contentious economic issues. They begin to appreciate what is meant by the terms assumptions and assertions, and the way that arguments can be judged as being invalid if the assumptions are questionable and/or the assertion is untested. It is important to select the articles carefully, especially when students are new to the approach, so they can access the activities.” (David Harston, Economics teacher)



Assumption 1:
"Indeed, landlords may 'junk-load' rents to compensate them for lower rents later in the contract."
↳ This can be challenged because landlords may not make initial rents higher because this could lead to their prices being above the market equilibrium, and hence other landlords could undercut this and their property may not be rented.

Assumption 2:
"This, it is said, would help families given the current high cost of living"
↳ A benchmark may not necessarily help families given the current high cost of living because if a benchmark for rents is set higher, then this takes proportionally more of a household's income and therefore may not help families because it could in fact create a higher cost of living.

Assertion 2:
"Germany has a much more sensible planning regime which allows 'substantial development of new dwellings'"
↳ He cannot necessarily say that it is a 'sensible' planning regime because the ability to build more houses, and allowance of this, may not necessarily be sustainable within the economy.

6) The argument shown makes ~~many~~ assertions that have no evidence to back them up as well as assumptions that aren't explicitly said in the argument. As a result the validity of the argument could be questioned as it hasn't been constructed to show evidence for these points.

7) The economic ideology of the writer is neo-liberalist as he shows a tendency to disagree with intervention within the market for rent and suggests a better option could be to let the market decide prices, as he disagrees with many rent control regimes.

During this lesson, students read articles and tried to identify when the writers had made assumptions about the operation of markets. This approach supported the teaching of economics in three ways:

Firstly, it made students more able to complete independent learning tasks as they are more critical of information they find through their research. They are more aware of bias that may be present in articles and can therefore use source material more selectively and ensure greater balance in their research.

"...we understand that we can challenge the writer in some respects. I think that this would help me in economics exams in particular when answering the stimulus material section of the paper. Also, I would now be able to focus on the major points when reading newspapers."
(Student)

Secondly, it has developed students' writing and their ability to build cogent, logical arguments and reach supported judgments. The A Level assessment criteria requires students to write essays that 'use economic arguments and use qualitative and quantitative evidence to support informed judgements relating to economic issues.' By reading critically articles where the writer fails to do those things students are more able to ensure the arguments they construct are free from assertion and unexplained assumptions.

Thirdly, it has improved students' knowledge and understanding of the assumptions that underpin models and schools of thought in economics as they have been required to find them hidden in the arguments of different writers.

"I feel that I can now essentially critique writing and see when an author uses assumptions and assertions to push their agenda."

Equipped with these skills I can be more critical of any pieces that I read and identify the motive and the agenda, not limited to pieces about economics. It will change the way I approach reading especially for articles that I read.” (Student)

More generally, students now take a more critical approach to reading material. They are more aware of the writer and their agenda when reading, particularly news articles which are often presented as factual reporting and not as op-ed pieces. Students have also gained skills they can use when undertaking an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), taking the Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) or when reading news articles away from academic study.

“I think that doing more activities like this would change my approach to reading as it allows me to criticise the text I am reading, therefore not only am I reading into more depth but I am also learning more by doing so.” (Student)

Contributed by James Harley, Head of Economics at Chigwell School.

Economics example lesson plan

NC Year: Year 13 (KS5)	Subject: Economics		Exam course: A Level	
Class name: 13R	Period day/time:	Room: R6	Boys:	Girls:

Lesson context

Students have studied the Microeconomics component for 4 terms and have an understanding of concepts and theories related to the operation of markets. The A Level specification requires students to understand the assumptions that underpin a number of models and the usefulness of models in explaining the real world. This lesson is an opportunity to revise this content with students and to encourage them to read critically when presented with economics stories in newspapers and magazines. Students will read articles and try to identify when the writer has made assumptions about the operation of markets that can be challenged. Links can also be made to the Macroeconomic component of the course where students will have learned the views of different schools of thought within economics and the assumptions they make about how the macroeconomy operates.

Learning objectives:

- To understand the assumptions that underpin some economic models
- To understand arguments against the validity of the assumptions that underpin some economic models
- To recognise when a writer has made assertions and implicit assumptions in their explanation of markets and the economy that could be challenged

Student learning activities:

- Read the article and underline any unsupported assertions made by the writer.
- Read the article again and highlight any sentences where the writer has made an implicit assumption.
- Discuss findings with a partner and write down what assertions and assumptions have been made. Write down the implications these assertions and assumptions have for the argument being put forward.
- Q&A to gather feedback from class and write ideas up on board.
- Discuss with a partner the ways in which the assertions and assumptions can be challenged and therefore make judgements on the validity of the argument the writer presents.
- Q&A to gather feedback from class
- Discuss with a partner and try to decide if it is possible to identify the economic ideology of the writer.

Assessment:

- Through questioning and discussion
- Home learning task: to read a different article and identify the assumptions made by the writer and the way in which they could be challenged. Also identify any unsupported assertions the writer makes.

Extension: to find an article of your own, list any unsupported assertions that the writer makes and explain the economic ideology of the writer.

Resources: Articles and student discussion pairs