

Boost Free Lessons - Year 10 English

Lesson 12: Reading Nonfiction: Authority and Bias

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Read the article below carefully. The line numbers will help you refer to specific parts of the text in your answers.

What the Numbers Do Not Show

- 1 Last month the department released its annual figures on regional school
2 retention, and the headline was encouraging. Retention to Year 12 across
3 regional New South Wales rose from 71 per cent to 74 per cent.
4
5 Three percentage points is not nothing. It represents around 900 students
6 who completed schooling in 2024 and would not have done so on the previous
7 year's rate.
8
9 But the figure is an average, and averages conceal as reliably as they
10 reveal. The same dataset shows that the improvement is concentrated in
11 eleven schools, all within ninety minutes of a regional city. Across the
12 remaining sixty-three schools in the sample, retention was flat or fell.
13
14 The department has not disputed this. Its own report notes the variation
15 in a footnote on page 41, and the accompanying media release does not
16 mention it at all. That is not dishonesty. It is the ordinary practice of
17 reporting the best true thing you have.
18
19 It matters because funding follows headline figures. A three-point rise
20 is evidence a strategy is working. Sixty-three schools where nothing
21 improved is evidence that it is not working there, and those are the
22 schools least able to make a case for themselves.
23
24 The improvement is real. The story is not the improvement.



Worked Example 1

How does the writer establish authority while criticising the department?

1. Authority here comes from **using the department's own evidence** rather than opposing it.
2. The writer accepts the headline figure and calls the improvement real, which removes the appearance of hostility.
3. Specific detail does the work: eleven schools, sixty-three schools, a footnote on page 41.
4. The concession in lines 15 to 17 is the key move. Refusing to allege dishonesty makes the criticism harder to dismiss as an attack.

Model: The writer builds authority by accepting the department's figure as real and citing its own report, including “a footnote on page 41”. By explicitly refusing to call the omission dishonest, the writer removes the easiest counter-attack and keeps the focus on the consequence.

Remember: Judge nonfiction on its **evidence** and its **concessions**. A writer who concedes the opposing case and uses the other side's own data is harder to dismiss than one who simply objects.



Question 1: Answer the following questions. Give the line numbers you used in your answers.

1. What did retention to Year 12 rise from and to?

2. How many students does three percentage points represent?

3. In how many schools is the improvement concentrated?

4. Where in the department's report is the variation noted?

5. What does the writer say funding follows?

6. What is the final sentence of the article?



Question 2: Answer the following questions in full sentences.

1. Explain what the writer means by saying averages conceal as reliably as they reveal.

2. Why does the writer say the omission is not dishonesty?

3. Identify the writer's central argument in one sentence.

4. Is this article objective? Use evidence to support your answer.

5. Explain the effect of the final two sentences.





Every student has gaps. The hard part is knowing exactly where they are.
That is what a Boost assessment is for.

Book a Free Assessment

Normally valued at \$199, free for new families

- A friendly skills check aligned to the NSW syllabus
- Face to face with our qualified tutors
- A clear picture of your child's strengths and gaps
- A weekly plan built around what they actually need

Book a Free Assessment →

boosttutoring.com.au/contact



Answers and Model Responses: Reading Nonfiction: Authority and Bias**Question 1**

1. From 71 per cent to 74 per cent.
2. Around 900 students.
3. Eleven schools.
4. In a footnote on page 41.
5. Headline figures.
6. *The improvement is real. The story is not the improvement.*

Question 2

1. Model: An average produces a single figure from a range of results, so it can be entirely accurate while hiding the fact that outcomes moved in opposite directions. Here a genuine three-point rise conceals sixty-three schools where nothing improved.
2. Model: The department published the variation in its own report, so nothing was hidden. Choosing the most favourable true figure for a media release is normal practice, and the writer names it as such to keep the criticism aimed at the consequence rather than at motive.
3. Model: A genuine average improvement is concealing the fact that most regional schools did not improve, and because funding follows headline figures, the schools most in need will be least able to demonstrate that need.
4. Model: Largely, but not entirely. The evidence is specific, sourced and drawn from the department's own dataset, and the writer concedes both the reality of the improvement and the department's good faith. However, phrases such as *the schools least able to make a case for themselves* carry evaluation, and the decision to lead with what the figures conceal is itself a judgement about what matters.
5. Model: The two short sentences break a pattern of longer, evidence-heavy paragraphs, which gives them weight. The first concedes the department's point completely, so the second lands without seeming to deny the facts. Repeating *the improvement* in both halves makes the reversal turn on a single idea, and the article ends on a redefinition rather than a demand.

