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Stop Arguing With Me!

Crafting Opinion/Argument Texts

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Ohio Striving Readers Literacy Academy • March 19, 2019

- A.** Four Overarching Concepts for Consideration
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 - 2. Writing In Front of Students
 - 3. Developing Concepts in Isolation
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Knowledge of Topic & Genre

Building Knowledge of Topic & Genre Impacts Writing

Olinghouse, Graham, and Gillespie (in press) found that, “for informative, narrative, and persuasive texts, between 30% and 43% of the variance in holistic scores was explained by topic knowledge (6 to 30%) and discourse knowledge (13 to 23%) in fifth-grade students” (69). The catch with any of this research is that skilled writers pull from a variety of skills/tasks, and that only in combination do they achieve success. Therefore, it is very difficult to know, or discuss, the benefits of a particular skill or component of the writing process because they work in interaction with other components (69).

Building Knowledge of Genre Improves Reading Comprehension, Writing, and Revising

An awareness of genre helps writers “mak[e] assumptions and predictions about who will be reading the texts, what their interest and knowledge are likely to be, and how they may be using the information” (18). When you learn to write in a specific domain, you are in fact understanding how that domain functions - both in terms of evaluating and understanding content to be found in it (16). Even as young writers learn about the genres, their characteristics and identifying features, more experienced writers use their prior knowledge of genre to inform both their reading and their writing (15).

Research indicates that when students write in a content area, they are pushed to write for a specific purpose, with language, vocabulary, and genre specific to that content (98). With these genre-specific expectations, students can bring to bear a specific set of evaluative tools used to develop and enhance their writing.

Building Interest in & Knowledge of Topic Improves Writing

Bruning & Kaufman found that “...topic-related interest and knowledge significantly influence writing quality and engagement” (168).

Though Hidi & Boscolo found that both knowledge and interest in a topic affect quality of writing, knowledge is a stronger indicator (2006 as cited in Graham and MacArthur 35).

MacArthur, C. A., S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald. (2016). *Handbook of Writing Research*, 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.

Grades K, 1, 2

Write opinion pieces that...

Kindergarten

- Use drawing, dictating, and writing.
- Include topic/name of book.
- State an opinion.

Grade One

- Include topic/name of book.
- State an opinion.
- **State reason(s).**
- **Close.**

Grade Two

- Include topic/name of book.
- State an opinion.
- State reason(s).
- **Use linking words to connect reasons back to opinion.**
- **Provide concluding statement/section.**



Grades 3, 4, 5

Write opinion pieces that...

Grade 3

- Introduce the topic, support a point of view, and list reasons.
- Provide reasons.
- Use linking words/phrases to connect opinion and reasons.
- Provide concluding statement/section.

Grade 4

- Introduce the topic, support a point of view, and list reasons **with information.**
- Provide reasons **supported by facts/details.**
- Use linking words/phrases to connect opinion and reasons.
- Provide concluding statement/section.

Grade 5

- Introduce the topic, support a point of view, and list reasons with information.
- Provide **logically ordered** reasons supported by facts/details.
- Use linking words/phrases/**clauses** to connect opinion and reasons.
- Provide concluding statement/section.

Grades 6, 7, 8

Write arguments that...

Grade 6

- Introduce claim and organize reasons/evidence.
- Support claim with reasons/evidence.
- Use linking words/phrases/clauses to clarify relationships among claim and reasons/evidence.
- Establish/maintain formal style.
- Provide concluding statement/section that follows from argument.

Grade 7

- Introduce claim, **acknowledge alternate/opposing claims**, and organize reasons/evidence.
- Support claim with **reasoning/evidence.**
- Use linking words/phrases/clauses to **create cohesion and clarify** relationships among claim and reasons/evidence.
- Establish/maintain formal style.
- Provide concluding statement/section that follows from argument.

Grade 8

- Introduce claim, **acknowledge and distinguish claims from alternate/opposing claims**, and organize reasons/evidence.
- Support claim with **reasoning/evidence.**
- Use linking words/phrases/clauses to create cohesion and clarify relationships among claim, **counterclaims**, and reasons/evidence.
- Establish/maintain formal style.
- Provide concluding statement/section that follows from argument.

Grades 9, 10, 11, 12

Write arguments that...

Grades 9 & 10

- Introduce claims, distinguish them from counterclaims, and **create an organization that establishes relationships among claim, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.**
- **Develop claim/counterclaims fairly, supplying strengths/limitations of both in a manner that anticipates audience.**
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify relationships between ideas.
- Establish/maintain formal style and **objective tone while attending to the norms/conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.**
- Provide concluding statement/section that follows from and **supports** argument.

Grades 11 & 12

- Introduce claims, distinguish them from counterclaims, and create an organization that **logically sequences claim, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.**
- Develop claim/counterclaims fairly and **logically**, supplying strengths/limitations of both in a manner that anticipates audience.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify relationships between ideas.
- Establish/maintain formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms/conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- Provide concluding statement/section that follows from and **supports** argument.

Building a Foundation in Existing Opinions/Arguments*

The essential components of an argument are best introduced through analyzing the argument writing of others. Students with foundational skills might benefit from analyzing another young person's writing. Simple pieces on a wide variety of student-friendly topics are available on the web as well. Certainly, stimulating interest with a wise topic choice can help the process considerably. With the advent of technology, YouTube videos on a huge array of topics are readily available at no cost. Careful screening of a selection's content proves necessary, but students can then watch and analyze the components of the argument shared in the video. When students are ready, they will find analyzing speeches by gifted speakers such as Maya Angelou, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. or Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Abraham Lincoln fruitful as they hone their craft.

Use Gradual Release**:

As students study the elements of an argument piece, they will identify those elements more readily in written pieces. This work will build not only their own ability to create arguments (writing) but also their understanding of pieces they read (comprehension).

1. Complete an Argument Template in front of the students. (Avoid providing them with a completed form—better to create it while the students can see you work.)
2. Complete an Argument Template for a different topic with student input/guidance. (Repeat as needed.)
3. Students complete an Argument Template with a partner on a text they understand well. (Repeat as needed.)
4. Students complete an Argument Template independently for an argument piece they have studied in class. (Repeat as needed.)
5. Students complete an Argument Template for an argument they have read/watched independently.

Once students have a thorough understanding of what comprises argument writing, they can then create their own arguments, using the now practiced template. Typically, students should write their first arguments in small groups where ideas can be generated, shared, and incorporated, with an appointed group recorder. Cell phone usage in classrooms, school dress codes, whether students should be required to take a foreign language, and the benefits of recycling are popular topics with which to begin. Hundreds of other topics are accessible on the web as well.

As students become comfortable with argument writing, they can make the transition to more advanced topics, such as effects of students' exposure to violence on television, the negative impact of cigarette smoking, and mandatory military service, all of which are likely to stimulate interest and, likely, even disagreement. Class debates create more fodder in the realm of argument. Recently, my students debated the value of the Electoral College, gun control, and urban versus rural living.

* On this page, the term *argument* is used to represent *opinion/argument*.

**Coined by Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; mainstreamed by Archer, 2011, amongst others

The Language of Opinion & Argument Writing

Basic opinion writing adheres closely to the standard basic paragraph. In fact some of the basic paragraphs students may have already written were really opinion pieces (e.g., Favorite Movie, Favorite Restaurant, Best Pets To Have). Though you may not have been intentional with language such as Opinion or Argument in your instruction as you introduced basic paragraphs, you will want to be more explicit at this juncture.

Terminology in opinion/argument writing varies though most standards use Opinion for younger students and transition to Argument for older students. For example, the C.C.S.S. uses Opinion through 5th grade and Argument for students 6th grade and up. The difference primarily involves the quality of support. If you are celebrating your favorite restaurant, the support is necessarily founded in your personal opinions and reactions. If you are arguing against smoking cigarettes, your support can use a variety of kinds of evidence, from personal experiences and anecdotes to statistics and data. While both opinions and arguments typically involve a personal reaction to a subject, opinion pieces are primarily grounded in that personal reaction whereas a good argument typically cites outside sources for support.

That said, whether you use the term opinion or argument (or some other term altogether), in general your students must take a stand and support it. The first two steps of this style of writing are **take a stand** and **make a list**.

Take a Stand:

1. Read the prompt carefully. Make sure you understand it. Recognize the two (or more) sides of the issue it addresses. Underline any key words.
2. Take a stand. This can often be a single word -- yes or no. Which side you believe doesn't matter; choose the side you can best argue and support convincingly.

Make a List:

1. Make a list of items that support your stand. Support can come from personal experiences, information you've learned in your courses (e.g., historical events), movies you've seen, and books you've read.
2. The list is essential. It allows you to get your ideas on paper and frees up working memory so you can process, organize, and write cohesively about your topic. Also, if you aren't able to generate a thorough list, it's a quick indicator that you aren't prepared to argue that side of the topic.

Opinion Writing - Elementary/Basic

Opinion writing (called argument writing with older students) involves stating an opinion and supporting it. Students need to remember they are providing reasons for something they believe or feel. (Persuasion writing is a version of opinion writing but is designed to convince the reader to share your point of view.)

Though length and sophistication will and should vary by skill and grade level, all opinion writing includes these characteristics:

- opinion on book or other topic
- reasons to support opinion
- conclusion

As the writer develops his craft, his writing will employ these characteristics:

- organizational structure that groups ideas
- transition words, phrases, and clauses that link opinion to reasons

Provide more advanced students with the Signal Words for Reading, Writing, & Note-taking list for transitions. For basic students, here is a simpler list:

Some Opinion Transition Words for Younger Writers

before	second, third,	finally, last	because
first	etc.		but
one, one of the	then, next,		so
first	another,		
	and, also, etc.		

Though the basic elements of an opinion remain the same, as students grow older, they should create opinion pieces that are more elaborate and sophisticated.

The Basic Paragraph - Opinion template should be used as a guide for opinion writing; notice that it is similar to the Basic Paragraph template. It can be simplified for younger writers and those with more basic skills and expanded for older writers and those with more developed skills. One way to expand it is to vertically bisect each of the Opinion boxes to allow for a Details section. Students can then elaborate upon each opinion by including more information about it.

As students become ready to use more detail and transition words, phrases, and clauses, one of the expanded templates may prove useful. These students should generate many reasons in support of their opinion and then determine how best to organize them into categories, each of which will be represented by a supporting paragraph or section of their paper.

Argument Writing - Middle & Upper/Advanced

Argument writing involves stating a claim (often called stand or thesis) and supporting it.

Though length and sophistication will and should vary by skill and grade level, even at the 6th grade level argument writing includes the following (highlights from the standards):

- claim (stand or thesis)
- organized reasons and evidence in support of claim
- use of credible sources
- use of words, phrases, and clauses to clarify relationships among claims and reasons
- formal style
- conclusion (statement or paragraph)

As the writer develops her craft, her writing will examine views different from her own (highlights from the standards):

- recognition of alternate claims (7)
- recognition of and ability to distinguish position from alternate claims (8)
- ability to develop claims and counter claims fairly while pointing out strengths and weaknesses of each (9)

As students grow older, their writing should show increasingly sophisticated transitions between claims and their reasons and between claims and counter claims. Provide older students with the Signal Words for Reading, Writing, & Note-taking list for transitions.

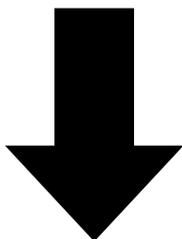
One of the Expanded Paragraph - Argument templates should be used as a guide for argument writing; notice it is similar to the general Expanded Paragraph template. It can be simplified for younger writers and those with more basic skills and expanded for older writers and those with more developed skills. Since starting in 7th grade, students must acknowledge views different from theirs, one template allows for a rebuttal section towards the end of the argument. A more advanced approach, typically used in multi-paragraph essays, is to include counterclaim/rebuttal for each reason section of the paper.

The students should generate many reasons in support of their opinions and then determine how best to organize them into categories, each of which will be represented by a supporting paragraph or section of their paper. Not everything included on the initial list must be used in the paper itself.

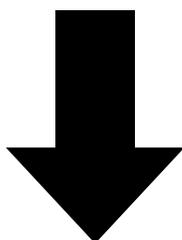
Basic Paragraph Writing - An Overview

Basic Paragraph Writing: A Step-By-Step Process

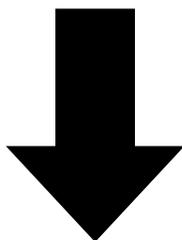
1. Identify and write the topic.



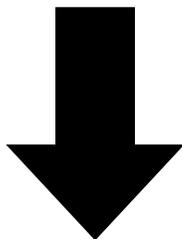
2. Generate a list of items
in support of that topic.
Select a minimum of 3 to use in
your paragraph.



3. Turn the topic into a
topic sentence.



4. Turn selected list items into
supporting sentences.



5. Reword the topic sentence
(perhaps expressing your
opinion of the topic) as the
concluding sentence.

Basic Paragraph Writing: Explanatory Notes

1. At first, topics should be of interest to the students and in areas where they have some knowledge in order to reduce cognitive overload. Once students become comfortable with the basic paragraph structure, topics can be chosen from course material and outside sources. Work with prompts is important even at this stage.

2. Regardless of the length of the assignment, students begin by generating a list. This initial idea generation frees working memory for the more complex writing tasks needed for composing. The students then select from the list at least three items that will form the content of their supporting sentences. Sometimes, lists can be stand-alone assignments. At least at first, students can generate lists together with the instructor serving as scribe.

3. Topic sentences are generally the most difficult to write. These sentences should introduce the paragraph but also engage the reader. Students sometimes find it easier to generate supporting sentences first, returning to write the topic sentence later. As students develop their skills, they need to learn different topic sentence styles; teachers should plan to continue to introduce and help students practice with different kinds of topic sentences.

4. Students develop each selected list item into a sentence. Sentence variety is key in creating an interesting piece of writing. Students should check frequently to see that their supporting sentences connect back to the topic. Transition words are unnecessary for short paragraphs; end punctuation serves as the transition between sentences.

5. The concluding sentence wraps up the paragraph. Learning a variety of styles is useful. Too often, students simply repeat the topic sentence at the end of their paragraphs. Try telling students to *rephrase* or *reword* (rather than restate) the topic sentence. Questions such as “How do I feel about the topic?” or “What’s my opinion?” may help students construct this tricky sentence.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Topic & Stand
Topic: _____
Stand: _____

List of Reasons
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Star your best 3.

Topic Sentence: Claim (or Opinion)

Reason #1

Reason #2

Reason #3

Concluding Sentence (Rewords Claim)

Topic & Stand
Topic: _____ _____
Stand: _____

List of Reasons
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Star your best 3.

Claim (or Opinion)

Reason
#1 _____
Evidence: _____

Reason
#2 _____
Evidence: _____

Reason
#3 _____
Evidence: _____

Counterclaim(s)/Rebuttals

Name: _____ Date: _____

Topic
Claim

List of Reasons
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Star your best 3.

Reason #1 w/evidence
Reason: _____
Evidence: _____

Counterclaim #1 w/rebuttal
Counterclaim: _____
Rebuttal: _____

Reason #2 w/evidence
Reason: _____
Evidence: _____

Counterclaim #2 w/rebuttal
Counterclaim: _____
Rebuttal: _____

Reason #3 w/evidence
Reason: _____
Evidence: _____

Counterclaim #3 w/rebuttal
Counterclaim: _____
Rebuttal: _____

Fleshing Out Your Argument: Developing the Claim

I. For each prompt, write a single sentence that expresses your position, and then list six reasons you chose the side you did.

A. Should schools put tracking devices in students' ID cards?

Reasons:

B. Given the health risks, should parents allow their children to play football?

Reasons:

C. Should classes in the arts be required in K-12 schools?

Reasons:

D. Should people over the age of 65 be retested to keep their licenses?

Reasons:

Fleshing Out Your Argument: Developing the Claim

II. Read each prompt, highlighting important words. Then, develop a single-sentence claim or thesis.

A. Each year, more and more technology finds its way into our schools. Teachers use computers to share information with students, libraries are moving increasingly to on-line research sources, and students complete more and more work on some sort of device. With teachers and students' increasing reliance on technology for their information, schools have found it important to develop filters to keep students from accessing inappropriate websites. Do you think these filters play an important role in the use of technology in schools? Be prepared to provide specific reasoning to support your assertion.

B. A wide array of video games promoting violence, celebrating blood and gore, and celebrating death are available for purchase in stores around the world. Some research has indicated that violent video games promote violence amongst their players, by desensitizing youth to blood, death, and destruction. Do you think violent video games increase violence in their users? Be prepared to provide specific reasoning to support your assertion.

C. Defacing another's property - whether public or private - is illegal. Many towns have created strict and harsh punishments for those who create graffiti on another's property. Meanwhile, other cities and towns have designated certain areas as "graffiti friendly," allowing those who create graffiti a space to publicize their efforts. Do you think graffiti can be art? Is there such a thing as a graffiti "artist"? Be prepared to provide specific reasoning to support your assertion.

Foundations

Basic Paragraph

Topic Sentence
Supporting Sentence 1
Supporting Sentence 2
Supporting Sentence 3
Concluding Sentence

Expanded Paragraph

Topic Sentence
Supporting Sentence 1
Details
Supporting Sentence 2
Details
Supporting Sentence 3
Concluding Sentence

Opinion Paragraphs

Stage 1:

Basic Opinion*

Standards: Grades 1-3

Opinion w/Reasons
Reason 1
Reason 2
Reason 3
Concluding Sentence(s)

Stage 2:

Expanded Opinion*

Standards: Grades 4-5

Opinion w/Reasons/Information
Reason 1
Facts/Details
Reason 2
Facts/Details
Reason 3
Facts/Details
Concluding Sentence/Section

Stage 3:

Expanded Argument*

Standards: Grade 6

Claim w/Reasons/Information
Reason 1
Evidence
Reason 2
Evidence
Reason 3
Evidence
Concluding Sentence/Section

Argument Paragraphs/Essays

Stage 4:

Expanded Argument w/ Counterclaim/Rebuttal

Standards: Grades 7-8

Claim w/Overview & Acknowledge Counterclaims
Reason 1
Evidence 1
Evidence 2
Reason 2
Evidence 1
Evidence 2
Counterclaim
Explanation
Distinguish from Claim
Concluding Sentence/Section

Argument Essays

Stage 5: Expanded Argument w/ Developed Counterclaims/Rebuttals

Standards: Grades 9-12

Introductory Paragraph
Hook
Background
Claim (Thesis or Argument)
Reason Paragraph 1
Reasons with Evidence
Counterclaim with Rebuttal
Reason Paragraph 2
Reasons with Evidence
Counterclaim with Rebuttal
Reason Paragraph 3
Reasons with Evidence
Counterclaim with Rebuttal
Concluding Paragraph
Rewording of Claim
Major Points Recapped
Final Impression

Explanatory Notes

Writing is a developmental process. Some 7th grade students will be ready for Stage 5; some 11th grade students will not.

The most significant difference between Stages 4 and 5 is how the counterclaims are addressed. In 4, the writer establishes a separate paragraph for exploring the counterclaims. In Stage 5, counterclaims and rebuttals are discussed with each reason.

When You're Ready - The Language of Counterclaims

Provide students with Signal Words list at their grade/skill level.*

1. Addition words allow you to flow between reasons but also between reasons and their details/ evidence. (e.g., moreover, additionally, also)
2. Direction Change words allow you to move between the claim and counterclaim and between the counterclaim and rebuttal. Claim/counterclaim/rebuttal isn't just conceptually challenging; the vocabulary is challenging as well. (e.g., although, on the other hand, in contrast)

Provide students with sentence frames that model the movement in #2.

Counterclaim examples: It might seem that; Some people might think; It could be argued

Rebuttal examples: While this may seem to be a valid claim...; One can understand how someone may believe this, but...; The validity of this argument seems to be sound, but...

* Signal List is available from wvced.com.

Signal Words for Reading, Writing & Notetaking

Direction Change & Contrast: A change in ideas to follow.

alternatively
 although
 as opposed to
 at the same time
 but
 conversely
 despite (the fact that)
 different from 
 even so
 even though 
 for all that
 however
 in contrast
 in spite of (the fact that)
 instead
 nevertheless
 nonetheless
 notwithstanding
 on the contrary
 on the other hand
 or
 otherwise
 rather
 still
 though
 unlike
 whereas
 while
 yet

Addition: Similar ideas, additional support, or evidence to follow.

additionally
 again
 also
 and
 another
 as an example
 as well 
 because
 besides (that)
 equally important
 following this further
 for example
 for instance
 for one thing
 further
 furthermore
 in addition
 in light of the...it is easy to see
 in particular
 in the same vein
 in the same way
 just as
 likewise
 more (than that)
 moreover
 namely
 next
 other
 pursuing this further
 similarly
 specifically
 then
 to illustrate

Conclusion, Summary & Emphasis: Conclusion, summary, or emphasis to follow.

accordingly*
 after all
 all in all
 as a result*
 because*
 certainly
 clearly, then* 
 consequently* 
 finally
 for the reason (that)*
 generally
 hence*
 in a word
 in any event
 in brief
 in conclusion
 in fact
 in final analysis
 in final consideration
 in general
 in short
 in sum
 in summary
 in the end
 indeed
 last
 lastly
 naturally
 of course
 on account of*
 on the whole
 since*
 so*
 therefore*
 thus*
 to be sure
 to conclude
 to sum up
 to summarize
 truly

Note: The bent arrow signifies a change in direction while the two straight arrows represent words that continue in the same direction. The arrow on the right crosses a line to indicate an end point.

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(* indicates cause and effect)

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