

Guidelines and Resources for Teaching Argumentative and Opinion Writing

Making a thoughtful, substantiated argument is at the core of critical thinking. The Common Core State Standards' (CCSS) requirements for argumentative and opinion writing recognize the need for this sort of critical thinking and demand that teachers refine how they teach students to compose sound and supported pieces of writing. The objectives of **Opinion Writing (K-5th grades)** range from students being asked to form an opinion, to providing reasons, facts and information to support that opinion, all the while employing sound written communication that includes linking words and phrases and thoughtful organization. **Argumentative writing (6-12th grades)** builds on opinion writing skills, yet differs from other types of writing, namely persuasive, in that the objective of writing an argumentative piece is for the author to make a valid and clearly supported argument for his or her side of an issue rather than simply persuading the reader to agree with the writer's position. Additionally, in this type of response or essay, the author should also address and refute the counterpoints to the stated position in order to thoroughly make a sound argument. The reader should come away being more informed on the side of the issue taken by the author and then left to either agree or disagree.

Main Ideas	Additional Guidelines	Digital Links
<p>Opinion and argumentative writing are required in the CCSS. The approach to this writing differs K-12.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, primary students need to form an opinion in their writing. Some kindergarten students barely write their name in the beginning of the year, but they still have opinions about things. Consider providing scenarios for students and then orally soliciting their opinions, e.g., "What do you think we should do after lunch and recess today?" OR "Which story did you like the best?" Teachers can even provide options from which to choose. Next, ask students to tell you why they made the choices they made. Chart their answers emphasizing that you are recording their opinions. Discuss the value and effect of having an opinion as well as knowing other people's opinions. With students in first through third grade, teachers can provide written prompts that are grade appropriate. For example, teachers may ask, "Which type of pet is the best for someone your age? Teachers then model brainstorming answers and coming up with reasons for those answers. Next, students are asked to do the same for their individual responses. Fourth grade students need to distinguish fact from opinion. Practicing doing so by identifying written facts and opinions about the same topics is an invaluable strategy for helping students to see the difference. 	<p>8 Strategies for Designing Lesson Plans to Meet the CCSS Opinion and Argument Writing Requirements</p> <p>Convince Me--A Lesson Plan for Introducing Argumentative Writing (9-12)</p> <p>Argument/Opinion Writing in Elementary Grades with student samples</p> <p>K-12 Opinion/Persuasive Writing Prompts</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The aim of opinion writing is to encourage students to think critically about their topic and learn how to use evidence to support their opinion and ideas. ● The structure of opinion writing often proceeds as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The students introduce the topic and state why it is important to think about, ○ Then, they state their opinion about the topic, ○ Next, they should include facts, data, evidence that supports their opinion with an explanation for how each fact supports their opinion. ○ Finally, they restate their opinion in the concluding sentence. ● Argumentative writing, grades sixth through twelfth, builds on opinion writing skills and differs from persuasive writing. Unlike the intent of persuasive writing, which is to persuade the reader to agree with the writer’s position, the intent of argumentative writing is for the author to make a valid and clearly supported argument based on credible sources and appealing to reason. In addition the writer also addresses and refutes the counterpoint arguments for the claim stated. The reader of effective argumentative writing becomes more informed on the side of the issue taken by the author. The reader is left to agree or disagree. ● Sixth grade students need to make claims as the focus moves to argument rather than opinion. In order to do so, they need to be presented with debatable topics and have access to resources discussing those topics. They then need to be able to take a position on the topic and actually write a claim statement about it. Consider modeling each step in the process while having students work in small groups on each step and offering several samples of a claim statement to share with the class. ● 8th grade students need to distinguish their claims from alternate claims on the same topic. This requires that they consider various perspectives on the issue and the evidence that supports those perspectives. Again, modeling is key here as well as providing ample and focused practice on identifying and distinguishing their own from other perspectives. ● 11th and 12th graders are asked to acknowledge the significance in their claim--why does it even matter? They also need to address potential biases in their claims and in the claims 	<p>Opinion Writing Ideas and Resources</p>

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	<p>of others. In order to do so, they need to understand what biases and stereotypes are and be able to identify them in writing and in common or cultural thought processes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The requirements stated in the CCSS build upon one another as the students move through the grades. Each grade has a specific focus that extends what was learned during the prior year. Teachers may need to revisit and review those skills and concepts from previous years before moving on to new skills and concepts. 	
<p>Use a variety of skill-focused strategies to help students skillfully think and write opinions and arguments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep in mind that explicit instruction should always be accompanied by practice in the form of a writing activity or inquiry-based application in order for students to understand new information and to integrate their learning. Not all writing assignments need to be long and in depth. In fact, quick writes are an extremely useful tool used to refine students' thinking about an issue. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider asking younger students a question such as, "What is your favorite food? How do good friends treat one another?" Allow students a few minutes to draw or write about their answer and then share. Older primary students may be given a few minutes to complete a t-chart where one side lists opinions they have heard on a topic and on the other side they list questions they need answered to generate facts. For example, if the question is "Do school uniforms improve students' ability to learn?" There are a variety of opinions on the topic, but there are also real research questions as well: How do we measure learning? Why do some schools require uniforms? Why do other schools not require uniforms? Do students who wear uniforms perform better academically than those who do not wear uniforms? Students need to have the opportunity to analyze arguments in written texts regularly so that they are better able to recognize the components of a good argument and recognize a poor one. Teachers need to model how to do this with the class and then allow students to work in small groups and individually. Students need to share what they discovered. Aristotle's rhetorical triangle is great jumping off point for analyzing arguments (See section 	<p>Argumentative vs. Persuasive Writing</p> <p>In Common: Effective Writing for All Students (hundreds of student samples)</p> <p>Analyzing and Evaluating Arguments-- Slideshare</p> <p>Critical Thinking: How to Read and Analyze Arguments</p> <p>Argumentative Writing from the Utah Education Network (K-12)</p>

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	<p>on Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle below).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use a cross-curricular focus to ignite students' thinking about topics they are studying in other classes like social studies or science, for example. Working in tandem with these other classes provides a rich experience for students in building arguments. ● Do not underestimate the power of speaking and listening in preparing an argument. Many students need the opportunity to think out loud and to hear what their peers think about debatable issues. This practice helps students refine their own ideas and distinguish their positions from their peers. It also provides a wider audience for students. Learning is limited when every argument students produce is only shared with the teacher. 	
<p>Structure matters in argumentative essay writing just as much as the ideas and the word choice. The thesis or position of the author called a claim, indicates the structure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are a variety of ways to structure an argumentative essay, but all should begin with an introduction that conveys the relevance of the topic and ends with a clear thesis that states the author's claim, or position. ● The body of the argument may proceed in a variety of ways. Consider the following components found in the body: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The data or evidence from reputable sources that supports that claim, ○ The warrant or explanation of how the data supports the claim, ○ The counterclaim or counterpoint, which should be a logical argument against the author's position, ○ The rebuttal or refutation of the counterclaim, supported by data and analysis that disproves the counterclaim. ● The full structure of the body has many possibilities. Consider the following suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Three paragraphs addressing and refuting one counterpoint each to the claim made in the thesis. This strategy appeases the opposing view before further developing the paper's position. Next would follow three substantiated points in three separate paragraphs that argue for the position stated in the thesis. <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is a more clustered approach where students will make the case for the claim 	<p>How to Write an Argumentative Essay-Three sample structures</p> <p>Purdue OWL: Argumentative Essays</p> <p>Common Core: Teaching Argument and Informational Paragraph Writing</p> <p>The Components of an Argument- The Writing Center</p> <p>Sample Argumentative Essays from ENG 101</p> <p>Sample Argument & Opinion</p>

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	<p>in the first body paragraphs by first including a point supporting the claim and its evidence, then a counterpoint and its evidence. This same pattern proceeds for the next two paragraphs. The last paragraph of the body consists of the author's rebuttal which is the refutation of each of the counterpoints individually.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The body may consist of a point and its evidence, then a counterpoint and its evidence, and the author's rebuttal, repeated for as many paragraphs and points as are appealing to the writer in making a cogent argument for the paper's position. ● The conclusion should at the very least include a restatement of the claim made in the thesis and possibly a summary of the main points of the essay or an extending idea on the topic for further consideration. 	<p>Essays K-12</p> <p>How To Create a Powerful Argumentative Essay Outline</p>
<p>The structure of an argumentative extended response varies slightly from an essay.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This type of extended response might be included on an essay test, for example, or used as a short, written reaction to videos or articles about a current, debatable issue. ● Giving a clear prompt or question provides focus for the students. For example, "In an extended essay response, answer the following question: Is civil-disobedience morally correct?" ● In an extended essay response, students should answer the question in the first sentence and then expound upon their answer by developing points and refuting counterpoints in whatever structure makes sense (see above). ● The final sentence is often a restatement of the first key idea in the response. 	<p>How to Answer an Extended Response or Essay Questions</p> <p>RACES: A Structure for Short Argumentative Writing Responses</p>

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<p>In argument or position writing selections, the topic matters. There has to be more than one side of an issue in order to take a position on it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The topic should be relevant, meaningful, and multi-faceted. For example, an argument about who should have won the last season of <i>The Bachelor</i> is not as meaningful as an argument that explores the impact of a longer school year. ● The topic and direction of an argumentative writing piece is laid out in the thesis statement. Thesis statements should be derived from a research question and state the position of the writer in the form of a claim of policy, fact, value, definition, or cause: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are video games good or bad? (value) ○ How can human trafficking be stopped? (policy) ○ Does homework improve students' test scores? (fact) ○ What is education? (definition) ○ What causes people to spend money rather than save it? (cause) ● Thesis statements should be properly narrowed, clear, and concise while stating the claim and the counter claim to be addressed. Consider the following two thesis statements that respond to the research question <i>Does homework improve students' test scores?</i> (fact) Both address the topic and state a position, but the second includes counter points to be addressed and developed in the paper. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "There is no correlation between the amount of homework students complete each night and their performance on tests and, therefore, if tests measure learning, students should not be given homework." ○ "Homework does not yield higher test scores, and too much homework actually affects students' ability to get enough sleep or participate in extracurricular activities." 	<p>100 Argument or Position Essay Topics with Sample Essays</p>
<p>Ethos, Pathos, and Logos and Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle are important tools in writing and analyzing arguments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In its most basic form, the goal of argumentative writing is to make a valid argument anchored on evidence from credible sources. ● In the study of argument and rhetoric there are particular persuasive techniques that writers use, sometimes, in an effort to make a better case for their position. However, these same techniques can also be the undoing of an argument if the writer relies too heavily on emotional persuasion and not enough on credible evidence. 	<p>Arguing with Aristotle-Argumentative Essay Assignment</p> <p>Three Ways to Appeal to an Audience- Video Lesson</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ethos, pathos and logos are three appeals developed and named by Aristotle that are meant to impact the reader in specific ways. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ethos is an ethical appeal where the writer uses his or her own credibility or character to make the argument more valid. ○ Pathos deals more in emotion where the author’s language or visual imagery create an emotional response in the reader. ○ Logos is the use of logic and reasoning to appeal to a reader by including evidence and data to support the author’s claims. ● Students must be familiar with examples of these persuasive techniques used in advertising and argument. This awareness will inform their analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the arguments others create. For example, the use of too much ethos or pathos, while effective in an advertisement, will conversely unravel the soundness of an argument. ● The Rhetorical Triangle, also Aristotle’s creation, centers on the three components of a rhetorical situation that affects the argument: the speaker (or writer), the audience (or reader), and the context. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For example, the diction or word choice a writer uses changes according to the audience to whom the argument is being addressed. If the context is more formal, the language should be formal. If the speaker’s aim is to be funny yet thoughtful, then the dynamics are very different from the aim to be considered a credible authority on a topic. ● In order for an argument to be well written and thoughtful, the parts of the rhetorical triangle should specifically influence the content as well as the diction and syntax of the essay. 	<p>The Rhetorical Triangle</p> <p>The Rhetorical Triangle In Depth</p>
<p>There are some key best practices that help all writing instruction, regardless of the topic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a safe nurturing classroom environment, as it will always yield better results and more sharing amongst students. Consider the arrangement of desks or tables, how feedback is provided, and how students who are unkind in their remarks or behavior are redirected. All affect the sense of safety to share in a group. ● Provide students with clear directions that are not only orally spoken, but written and 	<p>Evidence-based Practices for Teaching Writing</p> <p>Formative Learning, Kamm Solutions</p>

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	<p>easily accessible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide time for student to generate and examine the criteria by which their work will be assessed. ● Examine models of the types of writing you are asking students to complete. Discuss what to do and not to do using those samples. ● Teach students to summarize what they are reading and allow them time to practice this skill. It will yield precision in identifying main ideas and concision in their writing. ● As students' work is reviewed, keep a running list of what they are struggling with collectively and individually. Review those concepts with the class and allow for clarifying questions and concept practice. ● Allow for multiple drafts. Give students the option to rewrite as many drafts as is reasonable until they master the concept. 	

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