

How do we lead students to own the qualities of strong argument writing?

- **Study forms** that will lead to success for all students (letter, list essay, editorial, blog, podcast, digital commentary, documentary)
- **Students who choose** their passions write better
- **Define the audience** who will read their work
- **“Several laps around the track”** allow students to practice their skills, then repeat what they’ve learned and improve, then begin to move beyond form to larger understandings of the qualities of argument (repetition = retention.) During one unit of study in argument, students might create 3-4 texts that represent different forms, but the similar understandings about the qualities of argument
- **Frequently study texts** and notice qualities, list, & evaluate during the unit, adding to class understandings & the practice of analytical reading
- **Create anchor charts** of understandings for your classroom that remain in place throughout the unit—anyone should be able to walk into your classroom and know what you’re studying and how today connects to yesterday & tomorrow
- **Frame the year of study** for students, showing how qualities of writing and skills and forms are related to each other & how students will gather skills and larger understandings

Quick Writes:

- Use poetry that presents a position or argues a point—short texts, big messages—because poetry reinforces the idea that there are many forms of writing that argue = a bigger picture of the genre and the way all writing is connected
- Use charts, tables, and graphs to practice writing from information that supports ideas with evidence, not just emotion
- Use controversial, local issues to help students connect to the thinking they are already doing & focus on how to support their thinking with reason
- Quickly write in imitation of a mentor text form (like “6 Things You Should Know About” from *ESPN* magazine); day two take one element of the quick write and expand it
- Quick writing is effective for partners; collaborative writing is a powerful teaching tool
- Revise quick writing “make it better” as daily practice in rereading & attention to craft

Revision focus:

- Reread your writing and find: your best phrases, lines; the line that is the heart of what you’re trying to say; a place where you can make it better writing; a place where you can add information to strengthen the idea; a place where you have more to say; then write just from that place...
- Practice introducing support for your idea through another source you quote. Pay attention to the duet of voices: source and writer

Sentence Study (can be chosen from mentor texts in unit):

- This work is ideal for partners—collaborative writing is one of 11 best strategies for teaching adolescents writing skills (*Writing Next*)
- Practice skills like quotations of sources
- Mentor students to samples from texts you study together during this unit: zoom in on one sentence & practice together
 - Example: sentences that group information
 - “**Dash and description**” (zooms in on details that *show* (a narrative skill that is often used in argument); the dash creates emphasis)
 - I stared at my father’s photograph—his thin face stern, lips latched tight, his eyes peering permanently to the right. ~Paul Fleischman, *Seedfolks*.
 - I walked to the run-down market—dirty white walls, roof sinking in, the door constantly swinging against the wall, and wondered why this was the only place to buy milk within a mile of the school.
- Strong opening and closing lines—collect, practice, share
- Study frames for essays (images, ideas, questions)
- Transition phrases and sentences

Mentor Texts:

- It makes a difference when a student (or the entire class) chooses a text as a *mentor*—makes the deliberate decision to mentor their writing to the model
- Choose anchor texts for whole class to *read closely together* that are good models of the argument you want students to write
- Mix published author texts with grade level strong student texts
- Your process in writing an argument including your rough draft (even unfinished) can be an anchor text for the class to study, best if created recently
- Consider the study one author’s work through several texts = Mentor Author
- Teach students how to annotate what they see in a text by showing them how you annotate the craft of a mentor text
- Read, analyze (study), write and share together—your model is critical at every stage of the process

Goals for collaborative writing or independent practice:

- When in the unit will students be ready for independent/collaborative work time?
- How many days per week/minutes per day for this writing time?
- What are your exit tickets or other expectations for productivity?
- Structure and manage individual & small group conferences so you can teach into the intentions of individual students—your most powerful teaching opportunity
- Define your expectations for peer work, lead students in this work

Assessment opportunities:

- Quick writes/notebook grades = good faith effort to write & revise
 - Evidence of revision, sentence imitations, write the entire time to build stamina
- Annotations on a mentor text can highlight particular understandings
- Collaborative work on sentence imitation, revision, or annotation of texts
- Exit slips at the end of class to clarify learning: one sentence to show...

- Writing conferences (teacher or peer) are assessment opportunities, keep records
- For YOU: the unit plan; which mentor texts were successful; which quick write invitations produced greatest engagement; the productivity of workshop time

Final product (last draft) evaluation:

- Will you grade content, process, and mechanics separately?
- Will particular focus skills be graded with more weight than others?
- Will you use a rubric or a list of qualities to define expectations?
- *Optional* but important student self-assessment questions:
 - How did you find your topic? Where did you find evidence to support your position? (Students should name what they've learned about process)
 - What did you learn from a mentor text that helped you write with more purpose and skill? (Students will transfer process of mentoring to writers)
 - How did conferences (teacher, peer) assist in your development as a writer? (Excellent opportunity for teacher feedback & reflection)
 - Discuss your drafting and revision process. (Students highlight revisions)
 - Considering the qualities of strong argument writing that we discussed in class, how would you evaluate this piece of your writing? (Reflection on skill)
 - If you had weeks more to spend working on this piece, how would you improve it? (Writing is not finished, it's just due.)

Readers are rarely persuaded—at least in the intellectual world—by emotion.

Appeal to reason, base your position on documented evidence presented in a logical order.

If you use another writer's words as your own, you have committed a major—perhaps the major—intellectual crime. The responsible writer—student or professional—gives credit for the specific words, information, and ideas that belong to someone else.

~Donald Murray, *Write to Learn*, 1999