

Opinion Writing



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Structure and Cohesion		
<p>The introduction does not forecast the structure of the essay.</p> <p>The writer has made a claim and supported it with reasons, but there is no forecasting statement early on in the essay that foreshadows the reasons to come. Instead, it seems as if the writer thought of and wrote about one reason, then when reaching the end of that first body paragraph, thought “What’s another reason?” and then raised and elaborated on that reason. He is ready to learn to plan for the overarching structure of his argument and forecast that structure in the introduction.</p>	<p>You have definitely learned to make a claim in your essay and to support that claim with reasons. There is one big step you need to take, though, and that is to let your reader know how your essay will go from the very beginning, in the introduction. Today, I want to teach you that opinion writers forecast how their writing will go. They do this by stating their claim in the introduction and then adding on, “I think this because. . .” Then they list the reasons that they will write about in the body of their piece.</p>	<p>Writers use the introduction to forecast how their opinion pieces will go.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State your claim. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think . . .” 2. Tell your reader why your claim is true. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “One reason I think . . . is because . . .” • “Another reason I think . . . is because . . .” • “The final reason I think . . . is because . . .”
<p>Supports are overlapping.</p> <p>In this instance, the writer has developed supporting reasons that are overlapping or overly similar. While this may pose few problems now, the writer will struggle when the time comes to find examples to support each reason (because the examples will be the same!). For example, if a student argues, “Dogs make the best pets,” she may provide the following reasons: they like to play games, they cheer you up, and they are great at playing fetch. Playing fetch and playing games overlap, and you’ll want to help this student find another, different reason why dogs are great pets.</p>	<p>Sometimes, when writers develop supporting reasons for their thesis, they find that one or more of them overlap. What I mean by this is that they basically say the same thing! Today, I want to teach you that writers look at their supporting reasons with a critical eye, checking to see if any overlap. One way they do this is by listing the examples they’ll use for each paragraph. If some of the examples are the same, then the reasons are probably too similar!</p>	<p>Are your supporting reasons too similar? Test them to find out!</p> <p>Support _____</p> <p>Example #1:</p> <p>Example #2:</p> <p>Support _____</p> <p>Example #1:</p> <p>Example #2:</p> <p>Support _____</p> <p>Example #1:</p> <p>Example #2:</p>

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<p>Supports are not parallel or equal in weight.</p> <p>This writer has developed a thesis and supports. While all the supports may support the writer's overall claim, they are not parallel. For instance, when arguing that "dogs make great friends," the writer may have suggested that this is because (A) they always listen to you, (B) they play with you, and (C) one time I was sad and my dog cuddled with me. Supports A and B are both reasons for or ways that dogs can make great friends. Support C is an example of <i>one time</i> a dog made a good friend. This writer needs help identifying places where one or more supports are not parallel and/or are not equal in weight to the others.</p>	<p>As a writer, you want each part of your essay to be about equal in weight. What I mean by this is that all your supports should prove your overall claim <i>and</i> they should be something you can elaborate on with several examples. Today, I want to teach you that writers look back over their supports and ask, "Are these all equal in size?" One way they test out this question is by checking to see if they can give two to three examples for each support. If they can't, they have to revise the supporting reason to make it bigger.</p>	<p>Do you have examples to prove each of your supports? Support _____</p> <p>Example #1: Example #2: Support _____</p> <p>Example #1: Example #2: Support _____</p> <p>Example #1: Example #2:</p>
<p>The writer is new to the writing workshop or this particular genre of writing.</p> <p>This writer struggles not because he has struggled to raise the level of his opinion writing, but because this is a new genre for him. He may display certain skill sets (e.g., the ability to elaborate or write with beautiful descriptions) but lacks the vision of what he is being asked to produce. His piece may be unfocused or disorganized. It also may be sparse, lacking any sort of elaboration.</p>	<p>As a writer, it can be particularly hard to write well if you don't have a vision, a mental picture, of what you hope to produce. Today, I want to teach you that one way writers learn about the kinds of writing they hope to produce is by studying mentor texts. They read a mentor text once, enjoying it as a piece of writing. Then, they read it again, this time asking, "How do opinion pieces seem to go?" They label what they notice and then try it in their own writing.</p>	<p>Writers use mentor texts to help them imagine what they hope to write. They:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the text and enjoy it as a piece of writing. 2. Ask, "How do opinion pieces seem to go?" 3. Label what they notice. 4. Try some of what they noticed in their own writing.
<p>The writer has multiple, well-developed reasons, but they all blur together without paragraphs or transitions.</p> <p>This writer has developed multiple reasons to support his opinion and has supported those reasons with evidence. It is difficult to discern an organizational structure in the piece, however, because many of the reasons blur together without paragraphs or transitions.</p>	<p>A paragraph is like a signal to a reader. It says, "I just made an important point. Now I'm moving onto something else." Paragraphs give readers an opportunity to take in evidence part-by-part, reason-by-reason. Readers expect that opinion writers will separate their reasons in paragraphs, with one section for each reason. Writers reread their writing, take note of when they've moved from one reason to another, and insert a paragraph there.</p>	<p>Opinion writers use paragraphs to separate their reasons. Each paragraph has:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Reasons + Evidence</p>

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<p>The writer is ready to consider counterarguments.</p> <p>This writer has shown evidence that she is ready to consider counterarguments. She may have written something like, “I know that not everyone agrees, but . . .” or may have gone further and laid out the opposing argument that others might make. She is ready to learn to use counterarguments to bolster her own argument.</p>	<p>You are doing one of the hardest things there is to do when you are working to write an argument. You are imagining the people who might disagree with you and trying to see an opposite point of view from your own. Today, I want to show you how to raise the level of that work by teaching you to use counterarguments to <i>make your own argument stronger!</i> One way to do this is by showing that there are flaws or gaps or problems in the counterargument, and then show how <i>your</i> argument addresses those problems. So you might start by saying, “This argument overlooks . . .” or “This argument isn’t showing the full story.”</p>	<p>Strong opinion writers expose the flaws, gaps, and problems in counterarguments and then show how their argument addresses those problems.</p> <p>They might begin:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This argument overlooks . . .” • “This argument isn’t showing the full story.”
Elaboration		
<p>The writer is struggling to elaborate. (1)</p> <p>This writer has an opinion, as well as several reasons to support that opinion, but most reasons are stated without elaboration. He may have created a long list of reasons to support his opinion, but does not say more about any one reason or provide examples or evidence to support his reasons.</p>	<p>You know that when you give an opinion, you need to support it with reasons! But opinion writers don’t just stop with reasons. Today, I want to teach you that when writers come up with a reason to support a claim, they then try to write a whole paragraph about that reason. One way to do this is by shifting into a mini-story. You can start your claim and reason and then write, “For example, one day . . .” or “For example, in the text . . .” and tell a mini-story that shows and proves your reason.</p>	<p>One way writers elaborate on a reason is by providing a mini-story to prove their point. They might write:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “For example, one day . . .” (personal essay) <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “For example, in the text . . .” (literary or argument essay)
<p>The writer is struggling to elaborate. (2)</p> <p>This writer has an opinion, as well as several reasons to support that opinion, but most reasons are stated without elaboration. She may have created an endless list of reasons to support her opinion, but does not say more about any one reason or provide examples and evidence to support it. She has learned to use mini-stories to support her reasons and is ready for a larger repertoire of evidence.</p>	<p>You know that when you give an opinion, you need to support it with reasons! But opinion writers don’t just stop with reasons. They need evidence to convince their readers that their claim is right. Today, I want to teach you that when writers come up with reasons to support a claim, they then try to write a whole paragraph about that reason. One way to do this is by adding facts, statistics, definitions, and quotes that support your reason. Writers have to choose the evidence that makes the most sense for them.</p>	<p>Opinion writers support reasons using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini-stories • Facts • Statistics • Definitions • Quotes
<p>The writer’s evidence feels free-floating or disconnected from the argument at hand.</p> <p>This writer has elaborated on reasons using evidence but has done little to explain that evidence to his reader. He’ll often drop a fact or statistic into a paragraph and may even recognize that it feels awkward. He needs strategies for elaborating on evidence, specifically by learning to tie it back to the overarching claim.</p>	<p>You have elaborated by providing not only reasons to support your claim, but evidence as well. Sometimes, when writers write persuasively, they incorporate facts and statistics and mini-stories, only to find that they feel awkward or disconnected from their own writing. Writers have a trick to fix this problem, and that is what I want to teach you today! One way writers make evidence particularly persuasive is by saying a bit about how that evidence relates to their claim. They might say, “This proves . . .” or “This shows that ____ is true because . . .”</p>	<p>Writers don’t just toss evidence into an opinion piece. Instead, they help their readers understand why it is there! They can help explain the importance of the evidence by writing things like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This proves . . .” • “This shows that ____ is true because . . .”

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<p>The piece is swamped with details.</p> <p>This writer is attempting to be convincing and knows that details matter. Her writing is riddled with facts, details, quotes, and other forms of evidence in support of her thesis. Because the writing is so detail-heavy, the writer has likely struggled to fully integrate the evidence or explain it to her reader.</p>	<p>You are the kind of writer who knows that details matter. Today, I want to teach you that choosing the just-right details and cutting others can make your piece even better. One way to know what details to keep and what details to cut is to read each piece of evidence and ask, “Is that evidence the <i>most</i> convincing evidence I can give to convince my readers of my opinion?” Then you make some hard choices—keeping the best evidence and cutting the rest.</p>	<p>Opinion writers choose evidence carefully and critically!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at each piece of evidence and ask, “Is that evidence the <i>most</i> convincing evidence I can give?” • Then, keep the best evidence and cut the rest.
<p>The writer has provided evidence, but it does not all support the claim.</p> <p>This writer has elaborated on his reasons with a variety of evidence, but not all of this evidence matches the point he is trying to make. It may be that a mini-story is unfocused and not angled to support a particular point. It may be that a quote or statistic does not connect directly to the claim. Either way, this writer needs help rereading his piece with a critical lens, checking to be sure that each sentence he has written helps to further his opinion.</p>	<p>As a writer, you know it is important not just to give a bunch of reasons for a claim, but also to spend time <i>proving</i> those reasons. You have already done this by including all sorts of evidence. Today, I want to teach you that after collecting evidence, writers go back to look at their writing with a critical lens. They ask, “Does this piece of evidence match my reason? Does it really prove what I am trying to say?” If it matches, they keep it. If not, they cut it out.</p>	<p>Opinion writers ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this piece of evidence match my reason? • Does this prove what I am trying to say? • If so, they keep it! If not, they cut it!
Language		
<p>The writer uses a casual, informal tone when writing.</p> <p>As you read this writer’s opinion pieces, you are overwhelmed by a sense of casualness and informality. Likely this comes from a good place on the writer’s part. She may be trying to communicate directly with her audience. (“Hey, wait! Stop and think before you throw that piece of garbage on the ground.”) She may also be attempting to be convincing. (“Littering is <i>sooooo</i> bad for the environment and kills animals every day!!”) There is nothing wrong with this, but you sense that this writer is ready to move toward more sophisticated forms of persuasion, beginning with the adoption of a more formal, academic tone.</p>	<p>As an opinion writer, your first and foremost job is to convince readers that your claim, your opinion, is correct. When you first start out as a persuasive writer, you learn fun little ways to do this, like talking to the reader or making exaggerations. But as you grow as a writer, the challenge becomes, “How do I make my writing equally as persuasive but do it in a way that sounds more sophisticated, more professional, more grown up?” Today, I want to teach you a few tricks for adopting a more formal tone in your writing. When writers want to sound more formal they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use expert vocabulary. • Use sophisticated transition words and phrases. • Incorporate startling facts from credible sources. 	<p>Sound like an expert!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use expert vocabulary related to your topic. Example: When talking about the environment you might use words like <i>biodegradable</i> or <i>ozone</i> • Use sophisticated transition words to introduce insights, ideas, or examples. Examples: <i>alternately</i>, <i>additionally</i>, <i>furthermore</i> • Incorporate startling facts from credible sources. Example: “You may not have known that, according to recycling-revolution.com, recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to power a TV for three hours!

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<p>The writer struggles with spelling.</p> <p>This writer’s piece is riddled with spelling mistakes. This does not necessarily mean the writing is not strong (in fact, the essay he wrote may be very strong), but the spelling mistakes compromise the reader’s ability to understand it. The writer’s struggle with spelling may stem from various causes—difficulty with understanding and applying spelling patterns, a limited stock of high-frequency words, lack of investment, the acquisition of English as a new language—and diagnosing the underlying problem will be an important precursor to teaching into it.</p>	<p>When an opinion piece (or any piece of writing, really) is full of spelling mistakes, it can be hard for readers to understand what you are trying to say. Today, I want to remind you that writers try out multiple ways to spell a word before settling on one. Then, if they are still stuck, they consult a friend, writing partner, word wall, or other classroom resource.</p>	<p>Writers work hard at their spelling. They:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Try multiple versions of a word in the margin. 2. Pick the one that looks right. 3. Consult a peer, word wall, or other resource to help.
<p>The writer struggles with comma usage.</p> <p>This writer is attempting to form more complex sentences but is struggling with the process. It may be that she uses commas incorrectly, interspersing them throughout the piece with little rhyme or reason, or that she simply doesn’t use commas, resulting in long, difficult-to-read sentences. Either way, this writer needs help understanding the ways commas are used in sentences.</p>	<p>I’ve noticed that you’ve been trying to write longer, more complex sentences. Because of this, your writing sounds more like talking. It is quite beautiful. When writers write sentences that are more complex, though, they often need to use commas. Commas help readers know where to pause and help the sentence make sense. Today, I want to teach you a few important ways that writers use commas. Writers use commas in lists, to separate two or more adjectives, before (and sometimes after) names of people, and to separate two strong clauses that are separated by a conjunction.</p>	<p>Use commas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To separate items in a list. Example: I want pears, apples, and oranges. • To separate adjectives. Example: He drove by in his red, shiny car. • Before and after names of people. Example: My brother, Peter, is a good friend. Example: John, don’t be so silly! • To separate two strong clauses that are separated by a conjunction. Example: I am working hard, but she is resting on the couch. Example: She is taking an afternoon nap, and then we will go out for dinner.

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The Process of Generating Ideas		
<p>The writer struggles to generate meaningful topics worth exploring.</p> <p>This writer feels stuck and has difficulty generating ideas for writing. Sometimes this manifests through avoidance behaviors (going to the bathroom, sharpening pencils), and other times the child simply seems to be in a constant state of “thinking,” not writing. This child needs help not only with generating ideas but also with learning to independently use a repertoire of strategies when stuck.</p>	<p>I’ve noticed that coming up with ideas has been hard for you and that you’ve had to spend a lot of time thinking about what to write. When you write opinion pieces, you want them to be persuasive. And for them to be persuasive, you have to <i>care</i> a lot about the topic! It can help to think about what you really care the most about—think about things you love or hate—and then see if you can write opinion pieces about that.</p>	<p>Write what you love, write what you hate, but not about topics that fall in between.</p>
<p>The writer is exploring opinions that are overly simple or without dimension.</p> <p>This writer’s notebook is full of entries about topics that are safe and relatively one-sided. If writing about his own life, he may be writing about how he loves his brother or how candy is the best treat. When writing about texts, the writer is apt to pick simple, obvious points to argue. Based on the work you see this child doing on a regular basis, you are sure that he is capable of developing more complex theses—those that take into account various points of view or that argue claims that are more difficult to prove.</p>	<p>You have been writing about clear, concise opinions like “Dogs make the best pets” and “My mom is my best friend.” Today, I want to show you how to raise the level of the thinking work you are doing by raising the level of your thesis. One way to do this is by picking an issue that people have different opinions on. You can write first to explore one side of the argument, and then write to explore the other side.</p>	<p>Writers make their ideas more complex by exploring issues with multiple sides.</p> <p>“On the one hand, people think . . .”</p> <p>“On the other hand, people think . . .”</p>
The Process of Drafting		
<p>The writer has a clear plan for her writing but loses focus and organization when drafting.</p> <p>This writer seemed to have a clear structural plan for her writing. She went into the process with folders full of evidence or neatly sorted booklets. But, as she began drafting, all this organization seemed to fly out the window. That is to say, this writer put pen to paper and wrote, wrote, wrote—leaving behind any thoughts of groupings and paragraphs.</p>	<p>As opinion writers, it is important to make an argument in a clear, organized way. This allows the reader to follow what you are saying point by point. To create an organized argument, opinion writers make sure they rely on the plans they’ve created. It often helps to draft each part of your essay on a separate piece of paper, dedicating a new sheet to each reason. Then, when you are finished, you paste it all together.</p>	<p>Writers don’t leave their plans behind!</p> <p>One way to make sure your drafts stay organized is to draft each section of your essay on a separate sheet of paper. Use a new sheet for each reason, and then paste the pages together at the end.</p>

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The Process of Revision		
<p>The writer has a limited repertoire of revision strategies.</p> <p>This writer lives off of each day’s minilesson. He is task-oriented and generally applies (or attempts to apply) what you teach each day. This writer may work hard to revise, but when asked what else he might work on, he struggles to answer the question. This student is living on your day-to-day teaching as if it is all he has, rather than drawing on a large repertoire of known writing techniques and strategies.</p>	<p>As a writer, it is important that you take control of your own writing life. Writers use all they know about revision to make their pieces stronger. One way writers push themselves to get even stronger at writing is by studying mentor texts. They look at texts that resemble the kind they hope to create, find places that seem powerful and convincing, and then ask themselves, “What has the writer done to make these parts so powerful and convincing?” Then they try out the same in their own writing.</p>	<p>Writers study mentor authors to help them revise. They:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study a piece that resembles the kind they hope to create. 2. Find places that seem powerful and convincing. 3. Ask, “What has the writer done to make these parts so powerful and convincing?” 4. Try the same in their own writing.
The Process of Editing		
<p>The writer “edits on the run,” investing little time or effort in the process.</p> <p>This writer is not applying what she knows about spelling, grammar, and punctuation while writing. It may be that you have taught a particular spelling pattern, and she mastered it in isolation but is not using that knowledge during writing workshop. She may also spell word wall words wrong or other words that are known (or easily referenced). There is often a sense that the writer does not care about the editing process, viewing it as a cursory last step before publication.</p>	<p>One thing I’m noticing is that editing goes awfully quickly for you and that many times you skip over mistakes. I’ve even seen you misspell a few words that are right up here on our word wall! Today, I want to teach you that editing is a multistep process and something that writers have to take seriously. One way to focus all your attention on editing is to pick one lens first—let’s say ending punctuation—and read through your piece looking <i>only</i> for places where you need to add ending punctuation. Then you pick a second thing to look for, like checking to make sure all your tos, twos, and toos are correct. And again, you read through looking for only those mistakes. Writers do this until they’ve made it through the entire editing checklist.</p>	<p>Writers take each item on the editing checklist <i>one by one</i>.</p> <p>Editing checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read, asking, “Will this make sense to a stranger?” • Check the punctuation. • Do your words look like they are spelled correctly?