

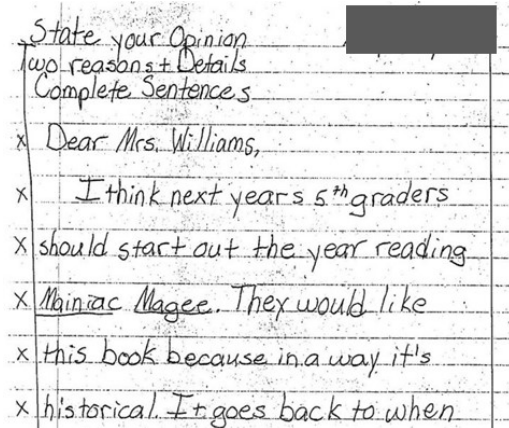
# Collins Writing Exchange

Ideas, Tips, and Resources on Writing from Collins Education Associates

## Tip of the Month

### Using Past Papers to Teach New Skills

By this point in the year, we've all seen more than our fair share of student writing—the good, the bad, and the ugly. We've seen narratives with clever openings, math responses with clearly labeled diagrams, and opinion pieces with well-elaborated reasons. We've also seen research reports with tired facts, short stories with misused quotation marks, and plenty of pieces where every sentence starts with I (bonus points if the I is actually capitalized!) Why not use some of these pieces—including the flawed ones—to improve students' writing skills?



Past student writing samples are a high-impact resource that can be used to model well-executed strategies, help students identify and correct common errors, and build revising and editing skills. [Learn how here.](#)

How to gather samples? Before collecting work, ask for volunteers to share their papers in real time. Flag and save standout papers that come across your desk (both the strong ones and the ones that reflect a common error). Work with colleagues to build a bank of student writing samples to share. And develop a system for saving and labeling past papers for future use. With lots of writing completed so far this year, you'll have plenty of samples to use. And now is the perfect time to start collecting student writing samples for next year!

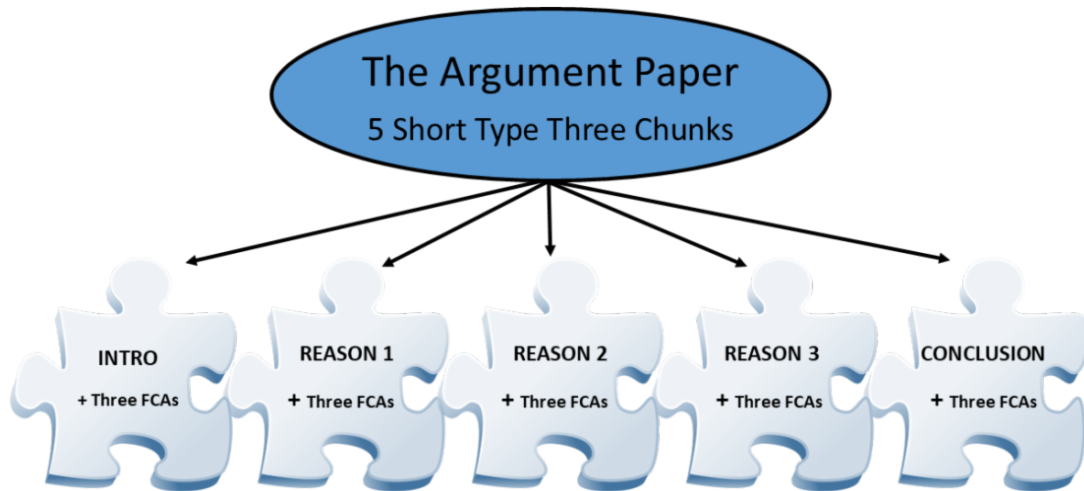
## Featured Writing Assignment

The Argument Essay: Last of a Multi-Part Series

**ARGUMENT WRITING**

## Part 5: Breaking the Draft into Parts

One of the biggest challenges for teachers is managing longer pieces of writing. How to choose only three Focus Correction Areas (FCAs)? How to keep students motivated? How to provide useful feedback to students before it's time to move on to the next project? For longer assignments, such as the argument essay, try chunking; each section of the paper becomes a short Type Three.



Chunking makes longer assignments more manageable, narrows the focus for each section while increasing the total number of FCAs, and allows teachers to provide feedback on earlier body paragraphs so students can apply suggestions to future paragraphs.

For examples of how to use chunking for argument and opinion writing, see the following guides: [Argument](#) and [Opinion](#)

Other great resources for opinion and argument writing:

- Standards-Aligned [FCAs for Opinion and Argument Writing](#) for grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12 on our Focus Correction Areas web page
- "The Guided Research Paper: Interconnected Writing Assignments," which is a chapter in the popular middle school book, [Twelve Assignments Every Middle School Student Should Write](#)

Once you have the process down, you can use chunking to break any longer writing assignment—research papers, lab reports, text-based responses, personal narrative—into multiple Type Threes!

## Need a Rewind?

You can review the argument writing tips for Parts 1 to 4 in previous Exchange articles:

- [Choosing the Right Prompt for Argument Writing \(Part 1\)](#) and [Diagnosing Student Needs \(Part 2\)](#)
- [Gathering Evidence \(Part 3\)](#) and [Developing Claim Statements \(Part 4\)](#)
- [Sample Opinion/Argument Assignments for Grades K-12](#)

# Fixing Mechanics Problems in Student Writing

For anyone who has ever had to read and grade student writing, one of the biggest frustrations is dealing with the plethora of mechanical errors speckling the papers. Students have assured us that they checked their work, and we even had them read their work aloud before submitting it. But still, we find misplaced commas and end marks, forgotten capital letters, run-on sentences . . . the list goes on—and the red pen comes out. How should we approach these errors and, more importantly, how can we prevent them from happening again in the next paper? There's a simple answer to this age-old problem: **Stop fixing errors for your students!**

Instead of acting as a copyeditor for kids, turn the accountability over to them with the [Essential Conventions Check Mate](#).

### During the Initial Writing Process

Start by being proactive. Specify anticipated problem areas by including Check Mate rule code(s) as the third FCA (e.g., "CM rules 4A and 4B") and assigning a related Focused Editing Task. For example, with CM Level B, Rules 4A and 4B, ask students to highlight each pair of quotation marks and circle the commas that set off each quotation.

### Before Submitting Writing

During the revising and editing process, ask students to mark up their papers to highlight certain convention rules that may not have been included as FCAs but could use a review. For example, students might be asked to circle all their capital letters or commas and label each with the corresponding Check Mate rule number.

### During the Feedback Process

Rather than fixing or circling mistakes for your students, flag problems with previously mastered conventions by marking the Check Mate rule number in the margin or by putting a checkmark in the margin and asking students to make the correction and indicate the rule number. Set a maximum number of notations per paper for yourself so you don't get bogged down in the process and lose focus on the content, style, and organization of the writing.



For more tips on how to use the Essential Conventions Check Mate as a learning tool, see Gary Chadwell's [Check Mate FAQs](#).

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## Administrators' Corner

# Helping School Leaders Foster a Culture of Writing

Educators are constantly being inundated with professional development opportunities and new initiatives. Sadly, many programs fall by the wayside if teachers feel unsupported or succumb to the belief that "this too shall pass." In *Swimming in the Deep End: Four Foundational Skills for Leading Successful School Initiatives*, Jennifer Abrams emphasizes the importance of repetition and clarity when building accountability for any new initiative.



Thus, school leaders can and should make it a habit to weave Collins language into their informal conversations with teachers. Abrams goes on to encourage school leaders to look for ways to highlight what teachers are doing well and then offer some options for reaching writing goals.

In other words, if you want to see Collins Writing stick in your school (we sure do!), it's important to keep Collins a part of the conversation to help demonstrate your commitment to the program and provide teachers with the ongoing support they need for success.

During informal conversations with teachers, ask questions like the following:

- Are students able to produce more text in the same amount of time when you give a Type One assignment, as compared to earlier in the school year?
- Have students come to expect frequent Type Two quizzes? Why is that?
- Do you ever change FCAs for different students in your classes? How?
- Have you put into practice any of the Collins Writing Program [essential assignments](#): Short Persuasive Essay, Ten Percent Summary, Comparing and Contrasting Essay, and Vocabulary Cards? How were they received by the students? If any of these assignments are still on your to do list, be sure to check out the complementary student materials for each of the assignments on our [Free Resources](#) web page.

[Click here for Tip 3](#) with a full list of questions and ideas for how to incorporate your findings during faculty meetings. Or, revisit [Tip 1](#) and [Tip 2](#) and learn answers to some of the most [frequently asked questions](#) posed by school leaders that use the Collins Writing Program.

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## Quick Links

# Looking for More Collins Writing?

Planning professional development for this spring? Starting to think about how you can up your Collins game as we begin to transition back to some sort of “normal” for the next school year? Our menu of [virtual and in-person training options](#) is always growing. We offer an array of options designed to support (or jump start!) your Collins Writing implementation and improve writing practice. [Contact us](#) to learn more about customizing workshops or coaching sessions just for your staff.

Looking to attend training on your own? View our [Public PD Schedule](#) for upcoming live and online events, which include several after-school webinar opportunities for both new and experienced Collins users.

More links of interest:

**FREE  
RESOURCES**

**Ready-to-Use Type Threes, FCA Lists, Graphic Organizers, and More!**

**PUBLIC PD  
SCHEDULE**

**Upcoming Live and Online Events in Your Area**

**ESSENTIAL  
CONVENTIONS**

**Check Mate and Other Resources to Tackle Teachers’ Biggest Writing Pet Peeves!**

**WORKSHOPS &  
INSTITUTES**

**From Collins Basics to Expert-Level Training—  
Find It Here!**

**EXCHANGE  
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**All Previous Newsletters with FREE Writing Assignments in Every Edition!**

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