

January 21, 2021, Issue No. 51

Collins Writing Exchange

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

A Note to Our Readers

Why Focus on Opinion/Argument Writing?

Today's national and state standards focus on argument writing as a critical skill for middle and high school students. Successful argument writing in the upper grades begins with the development of reason-based opinion writing in the elementary grades. This issue of the Exchange is the first of a multipart series devoted to opinion/argument writing. Look for future articles in the series in upcoming Exchange issues.

Featured Writing Assignment

The Argument Essay: Parts 1 and 2 of a Multipart Series

Argument Writing Part 1: Choosing the Right Prompt

Choosing the right prompt to elicit well-developed arguments and reasoning poses a challenge for many teachers. For fresh ideas and a variety of contemporary, high-level prompts that inspire students to take a stand, check out the New York Times ["401 Prompts for Argumentative Writing."](#) The prompts can be adapted for your grade level, content area, or student makeup and are sure to capture students' interests and complement your school curriculum.

Argument Writing Part 2: Diagnosing Student Needs

It's always a good idea to diagnose student learning needs before undertaking larger writing projects. We also want to be sure students are invested in the topic before committing multiple days or even weeks to an assignment. For a quick preassessment of student skills and interests in the area of argument writing, carve out a short segment of a class period for the following sequence of activities:

1. Preselect 5-10 argument (or opinion) writing prompts from the [New York Times list](#), or create your own menu of prompts for each class or grade level.
2. Give students a few minutes to preview the set of prompts and choose their individual favorite.
3. Assign Type One Writing: Compose a paragraph of at least 8-10 lines that identifies the prompt you chose and why we should spend time writing an entire essay on this topic.
4. Collect these Type One responses and use them to
 - determine student interest in the topics chosen before making a final decision on essay topic; and
 - identify key elements of argument (or opinion) writing that are either demonstrated in or missing from student writing

This will help you to plan instruction once you begin the larger essay. Some of these Type One samples might even be used to model key skills or practice revision of weaker skills.

Be sure to check out our next issue of the Exchange for more on argument writing. In the meantime, for a proven and reliable assignment to get kids started with writing short opinion/argument pieces that are rich in reasons and evidence, try one of these Collins favorites:

- **My Book Review** ([Grades K-3](#))
- **Book of the Year** ([Grades 3-6](#))
- **The Short Persuasive Essay: Taking a Stand on an Issue** ([Grades 7-12](#))
- **Evaluate an Answer** ([Math](#))
- **SAT Writing in Shop** ([Career & Technical](#))

Free Resource

Opinion/Argument Writing Outline Template

Graphic organizers are key to helping students formulate ideas and provide the necessary reasons and details to support an argument or opinion. Students can easily construct outlines on their own, but sometimes it helps to have a template to follow.

Use the [Outline Focus Sheet](#) as a prewriting exercise before composing Type Three argument or opinion essays. Spend time guiding students in identifying reasons and evidence as they complete the outline to ensure quality content in their compositions.

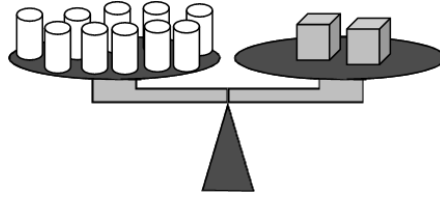
Free Resources

Find more valuable resources on our website under [Free Resources](#).

Tip of the Month

Using Graphics to Prompt Thinking and Writing

For a high-interest, content-rich alternative to your standard Type One and Two Writing prompts, consider using graphics to target critical skills and engage higher order thinking. Start with an image that conveys key subject-area content, set a short time limit (one to three minutes), and ask students to respond in one of the ways below:



- Identify as many vocabulary words as you can (at least six) that are related to this graphic.
- List at least three things you know are true about the shown graphic.
- Write at least two questions that you might see on a test that includes this graphic.
- Describe one common error students might make when working with this graphic.

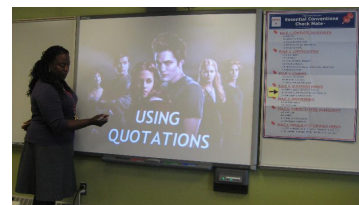
For additional resources, check out one or more of the following:

- Instructions for [Using Graphics-Based Prompts](#)
- Starter Set of [Sample Graphics](#)

Administrators' Corner

Helping School Leaders Foster a Culture of Writing

One of the most frequent questions we hear from school leaders is “How can I support Collins Writing in my building between associate training visits?” Over the next several Exchange issues, we will tackle this issue and propose a series of simple steps administrators and instructional coaches can take to learn more about how Collins Writing is being implemented in classrooms and how they can help teachers to improve their classroom writing culture.



Helpful Hint

During class visits, walk-throughs, instructional rounds, online observations, or any other time you find yourself in a classroom, look for the following:

- Collins terminology used by both the teachers and students
- Writing folders or notebooks with assignments in Collins format
- Assignments on display with Collins format

- Any physical evidence (posters, Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) on board, reference to the Collins Writing Program in class objectives, etc.)

Making these simple observations will give you a sense of where Collins Writing is being used and which elements of the program are most prominent in your building. Consider pairing your own observations with a brief Type One-inspired activity at your next monthly faculty meeting, posing the following question to teachers for a quickwrite and discussion: If I walked into your classroom right now, what evidence of Collins Writing would I see?

By showing teachers you are invested in Collins Writing, you encourage higher levels of implementation and open the door for thoughtful discussions on best practices.

[Click here](#) for answers to some of the most frequently asked questions posed by school leaders using the Collins Writing Program.

Quick Links

Looking for More Collins Writing?

Check out our continually updated list of [virtual and in-person training options](#), specially designed to support (or jump-start!) your Collins Writing implementation and improve writing practice during this time of hybrid/virtual instruction and beyond. We offer live virtual sessions, prerecorded webinars, and in-person workshops, as well as customized workshops or coaching sessions just for your staff.

PLUS! View our [Public PD Schedule](#) for upcoming live and virtual training events, including our upcoming certificate- and graduate-credit courses.

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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