



***PASSION* Project:**

Researching and Writing About the Things We CARE About

A powerful way to motivate the most reluctant students is to let them choose their own reading and writing topics, especially when you let them explore the activities they are most passionate about beyond the school day. Here is a step-by-step process for how to guide students successfully from choosing a personal passion, to researching both sides of their issue, organizing their piece, and writing an effective essay using opinion/argument techniques. I've illustrated this guide with actual samples from a recent set of lessons in a 5th and 6th grade classroom in Duarte, California.

This lesson is written in steps. You may take a class period for each step, combine steps over one long class period, or take several periods for any given step. This will depend of the level of guidance your students need with online research, notetaking, organizing, or the writing process itself. The illustrated lesson happened initially over one long afternoon with several follow up sessions to guide the writing process.

Step One: Brainstorm Personal Passions

Start this off by explaining that when people write opinion/argument essays they are sharing their personal beliefs and passions. The purpose of this writing type is to share these thoughts, but also back them up with well-researched evidence to support their claims. Simply model a personal list of topics you are passionate about as a person. Talk out loud about how you are generating the list so that the students can “hear” your thinking. Here’s my list:

What I really Care About:

- Growing food in my garden
- Making sure all kids have access to books they like to read
- Global warming and what to do about it
- My dog—off leash places for us to explore
- My daughter—what's the best college for her
- Cheap restaurants—where's the best place to eat in my town for little money
- Live music—how can we help local musicians survive

Have students make their own lists on white boards, then share out their ideas. Record these on a chart for the whole class to see. Help students narrow and refine their ideas as they do so. This will really help the research and writing process. For example, if a student says “video games!” you can say, “What about them? Which are the most entertaining? Educational? Are they addicting? Too expensive?” Try to help them narrow their focus. Here's the list from the class I worked with:

What Our Class Really Cares About:

- Basketball teams --every elementary school
- Common Core math is too hard
- Kids should be allowed to play football
- School should have sewing classes
- More recess
- Braces—too expensive
- Video games—are educational
- Make-up: girls should be allowed to wear

Step Two: Guided Research

Model for students how to research their topic. Choose one from your personal list and show them how to select search terms and research their topic. I chose the issue of off-leash dog parks for my model. I simply typed into a google search : off leash dog parks pro con. Here were my top hits:

<https://apdt.com/pet-owners/dog-park/pros-and-cons/>

This is from the association of professional dog trainers. I was able to discuss with the students why this is most likely a credible source.

Here's the next hit, which is from Pedigree dog food, we were able to look at it and decide whether it was useful information since it is also trying to sell dog food.

<http://www.pedigree.com/all-things-dog/article-library/pros-cons-of-dog-parks.aspx>

Here was a source that clearly took an opposing view to mine, so we were able to really see the other side of the argument, also great photos

<http://fidoseofreality.com/six-reasons-stopped-going-dog-parks/>

As we looked at each site, I started a simple T-chart list on the whiteboard next to the screen to take notes on what I was finding. You'll also want to show the students how to keep track of their sources by either cutting and pasting the URL into their notes documents, (if they are on their own laptops), or writing the URLs into their notes as they go. You may also have them browse sources then choose to take notes from a limited amount, such as 2-3 sources.

Here were my notes:

PROS	CONS
<p>Socialization -dogs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dogs meet dogs-get along with different dogs• Learn order in pack• Play <p>Socialization-people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• meet other dog owners• can talk more easily without having to manage a leash <p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dogs need 30 mins. Hard aerobic exercise daily-off-leash they can run• Off-leash dogs run further—bush to bush, dog to dog <p>People-</p> <p>Dog owners 70% get 150 mins exercise/week, non-dog owners 40% Univ. of Western Australia www.bark.com</p> <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn about other breeds• Meet dog lovers to talk, dog trainers• See notices about dog events and issues• Watch how other dog owners train their dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health—can pick up kennel cough and other diseases• Aggressive dogs can hurt your dog• Small dogs and large dogs-same place, problems• Clean-up-some pet owners don't pick up poop• Space and fencing—needs to be maintained, expensive

In my experience, it has been helpful for students to research both sides on an issue before they write. It helps them learn about the topic more thoroughly, as well as anticipate the opposing point of view. Although in the Common Core Standards the counterargument is not required in writing until grade 7, noting the other side as part of the elaboration process of writing makes it more convincing and interesting. Students are not required to mention this, but it strengthens their writing and students can do this in simple ways with a language frame such as, “Although many people think _____, I believe _____”.

After you model this research and note taking process. Give the students time to research their own. They can try typing in their topic plus the words “pro con”, or can search with terms from their topic such as “braces too expensive families”. You will need to guide this process and help students find helpful sources. If this is too hard to manage, you can have students form groups around the same topic and help each group on a rotating basis.

Step Three: Creating an Outline

Once students have gathered adequate information, show them from your model of notes how to decide on the organization of their essay. I generally have them notice how the information falls into categories, then have them select 3 or more categories for their paragraphs. Next, I have them decide the order of their categories in the essay. One technique is to save their strongest group of ideas for the last paragraph before the conclusion. Here was my organization based on my notes:

- 1) Introduction:
 - a) Hook
 - b) What’s an off-leash dog park
 - c) My claim and 3 reasons of support
- 2) Socialization
 - a) Dogs—get along different kinds of dogs, order of pack
 - b) People-meet other dog lovers, easier to talk without leash
- 3) Education
 - a) Learn about other breeds
 - b) Learn about dog events and issue
 - c) Watch dog trainers at work
- 4) Exercise
 - a) Dogs—much more off leash—bush to bush
 - b) Mental stimulation –dogs-can freely explore environment and smells
 - c) People—may hike further without leash, play fetch
- 5) Conclusion
 - a) Repeat claim—essential every town has off leash dog parks
 - b) Join me at city council meeting to vote for dog parks

Step 4: Writing the Introductory Paragraph: the hook and the background information

Use the “Hooks” worksheet <http://www.knoxeducation.com/sites/main/files/file-attachments/hooks- leads for argument essays - lesson-example and worksheet for students 2016.pdf> to teach alternatives for starting off an essay. One way to do this is to take each type at a time, model the process for your essay, then ask students to tell you their topics and as a class use shared writing to try that technique with on of their topics.



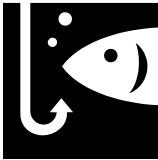
The image shows a worksheet titled "Hooks! Effective Leads for Argument Essays". It includes the instruction "Go fishing for a hook and hook them into following your argument with one of these strategies." Below this is a table with several rows for different hook types: "My Topic...", "The Hook (Lead)", "Startling Fact", "Question to ask the reader", "Question", "Startling question about an audience", and "Present a problem".

After you create a few samples, give students time to write their own hook for their essay for that technique.

Encourage lots of sharing so they can get ideas from each other. Once you have repeated this process with each of the techniques, students may choose their best hook from the worksheet and type or write it into their essay

Here’s the example from the class I worked with. We got through two of the types of hooks in about a 30 minute period:

HOOKS



Startling Fact:

- A new study has shown that one in five dog owners are too lazy to give their pet a daily walk.
- 240 million girls play soccer in the U.S. every year.
- In Finland students have 75 minutes of recess daily—here in the U.S. 22% of schools don’t even have recess!
- Over 26 million kids play basketball on a team.
- Playing most video games improves the problem-solving part of the brain.
- Research has shown that in California 66% of students are having trouble with common core math as shown on the SBAC test.

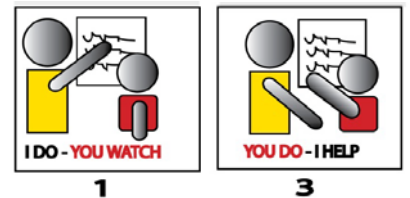
Narrative:

- You are nervous enough at the orthodontist, but when they reveal the cost for braces to you, you get startled at the amount. You may not know if you can even afford them because \$3000 is a lot of money.
- You're down on the field in your helmet and jersey. You look up and see a crowd cheering for you. You feel nervous and excited at the same time!
- The test was so difficult. I had trouble figuring out the answers. When I finished my test I was nervous to hear about my score. I knew I had a bad grade, but I didn't feel bad because common core math is really hard. In California 66% of students didn't meet the standard on the new test last year.

Once students have selected and written their hook, you can guide them with how to write the next couple of sentences of the introduction which will define their topic and provide context. Finally suggest that the last sentence of their introduction paragraph states their claim and lists the reasons they will elaborate on in the next several paragraphs. Initially they can just use commas in a series to separate these ideas and provide an advance organizer for the rest of the essay.

Step 5: Write Body Paragraphs and Use Language Frames:

Continue to use the “I do, you watch,” followed by the “you do, I help,” mode as you walk the students through the body paragraphs of their essay. Give students a copy of the language frames handout, and suggest that they use those linking words and phrases to glue their sentences together as needed. They are not required to use a frame for each sentence by any means, but this may help students learn how to write in a more formal style as required in the Grade 6 and up standards for the Common Core. You'll need to walk around and support individuals and groups with this process. You may even want to form writing groups with common topics to help guide with greater ease.



Language Frames poster: http://www.knoxeducation.com/sites/main/files/file-attachments/g6-8_argument_writing_language_frames_final.pdf

Argumentative



Language Frames for Writing Arguments

= What I think

Reasons = Why I think it

Evidence = What I know from my research

Stating a claim:

- In my opinion....
- I believe that....
- It seems obvious to me that....
- Although not everybody would agree, my position is....
- *(In my opinion) (I think that)* _____ *(need to/have to/should)* _____ *because* _____.

Reasons:

- I have several reasons for arguing this point of view.
- My first reason is.... Another reason is....
- There are several points I want to make to support my point of view.

Citing Evidence:

- According to _____
- Author, _____, indicates _____
- In the article _____ by _____ we learn that _____
- _____ shares the _____ statistic that _____
- An example that illustrates this point comes from _____
- _____ explains/states/argues that _____

Consider the counterargument*:

- Some argue that....
- They say (claim, hold, maintain) that....
- On the other hand, there are many who disagree with the idea that....
- A further point they make is....

Restate your position:

- However, there are several reasons to oppose this point of view.
- After looking closely at both sides of the issue and the evidence, I believe it is best to.... because...
- Despite the fact that....it is also vital to consider....
- The advantages of ... outweigh the disadvantages of....
- The issue is not so much a question of..., but a question of....
- What it seems to come down to is... versus....
- Even though the issue has two sides, I think I have shown that....
- Even though both sides have merits, the greater good will come from....
- If we look closely at..., we will see that it is better to....
- Based on the evidence so far, we should...because

**Not required until 7th grade, but makes for a stronger argument*

Step 6: Write the Conclusion: *A Call to Action*

Explain to students that one way to conclude an opinion/argument essay is to tell the reader what you want them to do with the information you've shared in your essay. Once again, you can model in your own essay then help others write using that technique for their topic. Showing the students a weak version and then working together to write a stronger version will help them see what you mean.

Call to Action Poster: http://www.knoxeducation.com/sites/main/files/file-attachments/call_to_action-writing_an_effective_conclusion_paragraph_draft_2.pdf

Call to Action!

Writing an Effective Conclusion Paragraph

Tell the reader what you want them to do with the information they just read in your essay.

For an issue:

Ask the reader to take your side, and follow up with an action

EXAMPLE:

I urge you to vote yes on the upcoming bond issue to build more off-leash dog parks in our town.

For a review:

Tell the reader who you recommend this product for:

EXAMPLE:

Every young person will enjoy this hilarious movie. I encourage you to go out and see it this weekend.

For a math procedure:

Remind the reader of the effectiveness of the process you shared.

EXAMPLE:

Next time you are tackling a long division problem, try these three easy steps for an accurate answer.

Create anchor charts showing your students' weak and strong conclusions and label and discuss what techniques the writer uses to make a conclusion stronger.

Help students understand the power of a strong conclusion by writing a weak conclusion in front of the students and then use shared writing to transform it into a strong conclusion that calls the reader to some action. Here are some examples of what we mean.

Weak Conclusions/Endings	Strong Conclusions/Endings
<p>Thank you for reading this letter. I hope that you make the right decision about school uniforms.</p>	<p>Please don't forget your duties in education. Allow us this one area to let our imaginations shine! Ways to express our individuality are few, so please, let us keep the ability to show our personality. We encourage you to pick up your pens and vote against the uniform policy at Wednesday's board meeting.</p>
<p>In conclusion, I think that our school needs a recycling bin.</p>	<p>Don't forget that we need to be saving the planet. We won't be saving the planet without a recycling bin. The world would be a big dump without any recycling bins! Pick up your pen right now and write a letter to the principal. Protect our earth!</p>

Step 7: Publish and Share!

If possible, have students type these essays and share them with all the students as a blog, webpage, magazine, newsletter, etc. There are many templates to choose from in Google Classroom or other platforms. It will be very exciting for students to see their own beliefs shared powerfully with the school. Invite guest audience members to hear the essays read aloud for even more impact. The school principal, parents, other students, or community members who share common interests are all good choices. I would also love to read your students' work and will gladly write back with feedback and kudos. Simply send me the link or email the essays: charlotte@knoxeducation.com.



Off-Leash Dog Parks Now!

By Ms. Knox

Imagine this: you come home tired from work and need to head out immediately to drag your dog around the block by leash. The dog wants to run after being inside all day, but you want nothing more than to relax on the couch. What if you could drive to a big open dog park and let your dog play freely while you lounged on the bench with your friends? Off leash dog parks provide open space that is securely fenced for dogs and their owners to enjoy. Although everyone may not agree, I believe that our community could really use an off-leash dog park.

Off-leash parks are excellent places for dogs and people alike to socialize. Canine friends love to run and sniff each other. They learn to get along when they have the freedom to greet each other at their own pace. When people don't have to hold onto leashes, they are free to walk around and talk to friends. Many people meet each other at the same time each day and can catch up on news of the neighborhood. Some people even form dog walking groups, such as Wag-n-trails, and make plans to meet and hike together which is great fun.

Dog parks are a wonderful source of education for all dog owners. Many dog trainers can be found at dog parks working their clients. They are often friendly about giving advice or even signing you up for a class. These parks are also a fantastic place to learn about other dog breeds. You can approach owners and ask them about how their pooch behaves and what they enjoy eating, for example, small breeds need to eat much fewer calories than larger breeds. Most dog parks also have a bulletin board where you can learn about upcoming dog events and help find missing dogs.

Last but not least, dogs and people alike get much more exercise in an off-leash environment. Dogs will eagerly run from bush to bush sniffing and exploring. I estimate that my dog gets about 10 times more exercise when she is off leash than on. People, too, can cover much more ground when they are not towing their dog with them. They often choose to go on much longer hikes than they normally would when holding a leash.

Please join me at the next city council meeting on February 20 to make a stand for more off leash dog walking areas in our town. There are countless reasons why this is healthy for our community.