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Grade: 11th
GPS Standard: Expository Writing

Task analysis: What are you expecting people at this level to write?

There is a debate about the distinction between expository and argumentative writing; certainly good argumentative writing draws on the aspects of good expository writing—namely, facts and explanation. **We have the following expectations:**

- The text produced by the student must be organized around a single point, or series of points.
- Each point must have supporting details. Those supporting details would be composed of a *claim*, *evidence*, and a *warrant*. The claim is an assertion. Evidence would consist of a primary or secondary source that substantiates the claim. The warrant would be an explanation on the part of the writing explaining why the evidence supports the claim.
- The text should use sound reasoning and logic.
- The text should take into account opposing viewpoints by restating those viewpoints accurately and rejecting them using, again, claims, evidence, and warrants.
- The text will answer questions readers are likely to pose.
- The text should function on its own—it should not require additional verbal explanation from its author for the points to be clear.
- The text must be coherent and understandable.

The students will likely already know...

The teaching of expository and argumentative writing should make use of students' preexisting faculties for explanation and persuasion—by the time they reach 11th grade, students are able to convince their parents why their curfew should be extended, explain coherently why they don't like going to school, etc. They have cause to make arguments and often, the ability to make them verbally.

But the students will likely not know...

However, even college students have trouble putting even those arguments down on paper. Generally, there are difficulties in giving the writing a coherent structure, and beyond a litany of assertions, students do not “stop” to give evidence or explain why the evidence they've obtained supports their argument. Even adult writers in popular newspapers omit the discussion of opposing viewpoints, a very basic property of adequate persuasive and expository writing. These properties of writing will be directly addressed by this unit.

Some students may not know...

Some students may not be able to write coherently. With TESOL learners in your classroom, it is impossible to expect any particular level of basic writing coherency. This must be addressed using various additions and changes, of course, but this unit, by virtue of discussing out loud everything that is going to be put on paper, should allow students who are able to participate in class discussions the opportunity for learning.

Our unit will use a questioning model that will keep the students involved at every level, allow them to construct their own knowledge at their own speed, and ensure that the teacher does not outpace them during instruction (or, perhaps worse, move too slow). Hopefully, the teacher will already know a few topics of interest to the students, either via observation of student conversations or via an interest inventory. However, this is not absolutely necessary, and can be assessed on the fly.

Lesson overview:

The teacher will begin by introducing several controversial topics for discussion. The topics can be drawn from knowledge about the students' interests, or can make use of connections to the literature. Given that 11th grade typically involves an American literature curriculum, you could use a variety of American issues that are discussed in literature but still have relevance and incite discussion today. For example, war literature from the fifties and the seventies can be compared to discussion of the Iraq and Kuwait wars of recent history.

By introducing each topic one by one, the teacher should eventually hit on a topic that prompts participation from most of the class. The teacher will then load a word processor on the projector and begin asking questions about the students' views, waiting for one of the students to make a specific *claim*.

Next to the word "claim," the teacher will type a student's claim. Example claim: "It is reasonable for young men and women to be sent to war." The teacher will then begin functioning as the questioner, and ask the student to produce some kind of evidence to support this claim. The teacher will then type it on the project, next to the word "evidence." Example evidence: "We have an all volunteer force." The teacher, as questioner, will then ask the students, "why does this evidence support your assertion?" or in some cases, simply, "why?" The teacher will then write the response next to the word "warrant." Example warrant: "Because people volunteer to be part of the army, it is reasonable to assume that they have acknowledged and understand the risk that they might be sent to war, even one with a purpose they may or may not agree with."

This process can go as quickly or as slowly as necessary. During the questioning, the teacher may have to explain what a warrant is, or what evidence is. Still, the students should be able to produce answers to these questions. By seeing these three elements put together, they will learn that in expository and argumentative writing, these elements belong together. Further, they will see that the three elements, when combined, make for a more compelling argument than a mere assertion—which is the extent of many students' initial capabilities.

Now that the three concepts of a supporting detail have been explained (claim, evidence, warrant) the teacher can move on to the next requirement of the task analysis: dealing with opposing viewpoints. Also, this will be another opportunity for the students to work with the three elements of a supporting detail. The teacher will begin to shoot holes in the argument of the student, making her own claim. Example counter-claim: "It is NOT reasonable for young men and women to be sent to war." The teacher will then prompt the class for evidence for this

claim.¹ Example evidence: “The men and women who join the armed forces may do it out of financial obligation.” The teacher then asks how this evidence supports the claim. Example warrant: “If soldiers did not really volunteer to join the armed forces, it’s not reasonable to assume that they understood and agreed with the risks of joining, since they did not have a choice to begin with.”² The teacher will, again, put all of this on the projector using the same model as before.

The teacher can then return to the students making the original claim. Are they persuaded? Can they answer this claim? At this point, assuming the teacher has stoked the fires of argument, students can (and will want to) write their own claim, evidence, and warrant. After five minutes, the students can share these in a classroom discussion. The teacher should then type on the board another one or two claims that directly address the counter-claim and original claim.

This activity can be repeated with as many different topics or as many different claims as is necessary, until the students demonstrate understanding of the concepts behind claims, evidence, warrants, and counter-arguments.

Up until this point, the teacher has functioned as the questioner—demanding claims, evidence, warrants, and an answer to counter-arguments. This job can now be turned over to the students. With each student pair given a laptop, one student can function as the questioner, while the other student functions as the arguer. Students can work in groups of three, with a student functioning as questioner, a student functioning as arguer, and a student countering the claims of the arguer with his or her own claims, evidence, and warrants. The questioner will also be responsible for typing this information using the same format as the teacher.

The students will rotate tasks, each given an opportunity to function as the questioner and the arguer. By having a questioner, students will make explicit for themselves the gap in understanding between the speaker and her audience. Since the questioner is charged with actually writing down the information stated by the arguer, the arguer will learn to anticipate and deal with the questions posed by an audience.³

Eventually, by using the model of the teacher as questioner, the students will be able to imagine their own imaginary questioner, constantly demanding a singular claim, evidence for that claim, and warrants for the evidence.

¹ If no one in the class agrees with or makes the counter-claim, the teacher may have to make it and substantiate it. This is a good reason to pick out a controversial topic that, at least within the class, incites controversy, since students will be available to provide opposing claims, evidence, and warrants.

² Naturally, argumentation is a very recursive process—the idea that some people are compelled to join the armed forces may be perceived as another claim that needs its own evidence and substantiation. This should be explained as well.

³ For this reason, it is imperative that the students function as adequate questioners, demanding answers to questions, as well as posing reasonable counter-arguments. If there is any doubt about the ability for the students to do this on their own, the teacher should consider a “fishbowl” style activity, wherein a group of students attempts the process in front of the entire class. This way, the teacher can handle any problems the students are likely to have with the process before releasing the entire class to the project.

The students will then be charged with writing short pieces that restate their claims, evidence, and warrants. The teacher will require that the student address a counter claim in his or her piece. By splitting up the cognitive labor of making an argument and actually writing it down, the process should be easier. Anyone, when charged with making an argument *and* writing coherently, face the process as though they were charged with both juggling and walking simultaneously. But just as each of these is learned one at a time, the process of expository writing can be, in parallel fashion, split up for greater ease of understanding.

Future directions:

This is not the end of the expository writing instruction. Later, students will move on to more expansive written projects, with less help from their peers, more claims, better evidence, and a greater variety of increasingly credible sources. This unit will prepare them for the basic chunks of that process, and the next step is stringing together these basic chunks into a larger argument.

Rubric:

Rubric for Writing Assignment

Exceeds Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The text produced by the student must be organized around a single point, or series of points. • Each point must have supporting details. Those supporting details would be composed of a <i>claim</i>, <i>evidence</i>, and a <i>warrant</i>. The claim is an assertion. Evidence would consist of a primary or secondary source that substantiates the claim. The warrant would be an explanation on the part of the writing explaining why the evidence supports the claim. • The text should use sound reasoning and logic. • The text will answer questions readers are likely to pose. • The text should function on its own—it should not require additional verbal explanation from its author for the points to be clear. • The text must be coherent and understandable.
Meets Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The text should take into account opposing viewpoints by restating those viewpoints accurately and rejecting them using, again, claims, evidence, and warrants. • The text produced by the student must be organized around a single point, or series of points. • Each point must have supporting details. Those supporting details would be composed of a <i>claim</i>, <i>evidence</i>, and a <i>warrant</i>. The claim is an assertion. Evidence would consist of a primary or secondary source that substantiates the claim. The warrant would be an explanation on the part of the writing explaining why the evidence supports the claim.
Fails to Meet Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No opposing viewpoint is presented • Points are not stated • Claims are not supported with evidence or warrants

Context:

We foresee teaching this unit to a classroom of tech to standard track students, with one or two advanced TESOL learners. The classroom will be half male, half female. The socioeconomic status of the students will range from poverty level to upper-middle class. Some students may be categorized as EBD or LD.

Rationale:

Expository writing meets the GPS standards for 11th grade. The persuasive nature of this particular assignment is applicable to the students' life beyond the school walls and will be useful as they embark on their mature, adult lives. Regardless of if the student continues their formal education, they will need the ability to argue and express themselves in an effective and coherent manner. Allowing the students choice in the subject matter for their writing assignments makes the writing more meaningful. Moving from interviews to a writing assignment is scaffolding tasks to avoid overwhelming the students and making the students aware of the necessary steps for making an effective argument. Being aware of the process will produce more coherent arguments.