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SHELL
EDUCATION

Think It,
Show It

Social Studies

Strategies for
Communicating
Understanding

Gregory A. Denman
Foreword by Dylan Barth

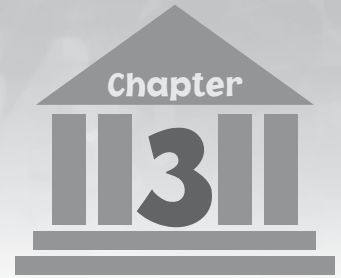




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Writing for Different Purposes



To help students understand the different purposes and types of writing that are important in social studies, I start by having them close their eyes and imagine their “dream cars.”

If you had all the money you would ever need, what car would you have in your driveway? Think about what it would look like, how it would drive, how fast it could go, what technology it would have ... Everything!

When they have fully visualized all of its details and are totally enthralled by their imagined dream cars, I say:

Now, drop the engine out. What do you have now?

After the chorus of moans, I go on to explain that they have, from all appearances, what look like fabulous cars. Each car has wheels, doors, and every high-tech, computerized, luxury option possible, but it has no engine and no power. It won't go anywhere. It won't take them anywhere. It will just sit in the driveway and rust. The same is true with writing. I go on to say:

You can have words on paper—even correctly spelled words. You can have indented your paragraphs properly and adhered to your margins and included a title. So now it looks like great writing, but writing has to have a motor. It has to be powered and have an objective. If it does not, it's simply words on paper without purpose. The words in any writing have to accomplish something such as describing an idea, explaining a procedure, or presenting a comparison of two or more subjects. Perhaps what the words need to do is to persuade readers to agree with your views about an issue. If they don't, it is like the car that just “looks” like a car: a piece of writing with no engine.

In the same way that the engine powers a car, it is the purpose that drives a piece of writing. This discussion, of course, is a lead-in to an examination of the different purposes of writing. In the previous chapter, compare and contrast was the purpose of writing used for the example lesson. Compare and contrast is one of six categories of writing that will be examined in this book. This chapter will examine the other five in greater detail.

Categories of Writing Purposes

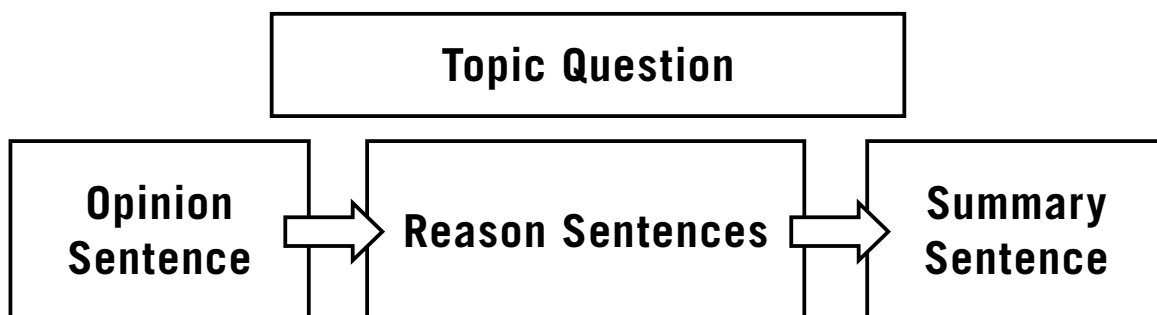
- opinion, persuasive, and argumentative
- informative/explanatory
- narrative
- descriptive
- cause and effect
- compare and contrast

Opinion, Persuasive, and Argumentative

Opinion pieces are where a writer aims to share his or her opinion, relying on feelings and stating what he or she thinks and why. In a persuasive piece, the writer aims to convince or persuade the reader to agree with his or her perspective by blending facts with opinion. Only the writer's point of view is presented. Unlike persuasive writing, a formal argument addresses multiple sides of an issue. Writers aim to get readers to accept their sides by presenting claims and counterclaims. The piece relies on reasons and credible data that support the argument. Arguments are more formal and maintain objective third-person points of view.

Opinion Pieces

Opinion pieces will be an easy purpose for students to grasp, as the writing provides the reasons that support students' opinions. The organization of the opinion is key to success of this writing purpose. The student must be given the structure with which they build their opinion pieces. First, students must introduce the topics they are writing about. Then, they provide the reasons that support their opinions in the bodies of the texts. Finally, they should include closing statements to their opinion pieces. You can follow the steps of this pattern with beginning students: opinion sentence, reason sentences, and summary sentence.



Opinion Sentence

Write an opening sentence clearly stating your opinion (what you think). Include key words from the topic question in your sentence. Use one of the sentence stems to start:

- I think ...
- I don't think ...
- I believe ...
- I don't believe ...
- In my opinion ...

Note: With advanced students, add these sentence stems:

- From my point of view ...
- I question whether ...
- I maintain that ...
- I (dis)agree with ...

Reason Sentences

Continue by writing two or more sentences with the reasons that support your opinion (why you think what you think). Use one transition (linking) word with each sentence:

- first
- second
- also
- next
- finally
- in addition

Note: With advanced students, have them write more than two sentences and give them these transition phrases to help them elaborate on their reasons:

- as an example
- for a case in point
- for instance
- in fact
- therefore
- despite
- on the other hand
- moreover
- besides
- furthermore

Summary Sentence

Finish by writing a sentence where you summarize the reasons for your opinion.

Note: More advanced students need to make sure that their summary sentences summarize and support the reasons given in the paper.

After reading a short article on Thomas Edison, a topic question could be: *In your opinion, what were the characteristics of Thomas Edison that helped make him a success?* The text on the following page is an example of a response:

In my opinion, there were two characteristics that helped make Thomas Edison a success. First, his curiosity led him to start experimenting at a young age. As a boy, he set up a laboratory in a baggage car of a train he worked on, so he could experiment in his spare time. Second, he had many failures with his experiments, but he never gave up. His first patent in 1870 was not a success. Thomas's curiosity and the fact that he never gave up helped make him a success.

In the student sample above, notice that the student:

- included key words (*characteristics, made him a success*) from the topic question in the opinion sentence;
- used transition words (*first, second*) to sequence the reasons;
- supported the opinion with reasons; and
- summarized the reasons (*curiosity; never giving up*) in the concluding sentence.

As a culminating activity, have students color-code their paragraphs. With highlighters or colored pens, they should color their opinion sentences green; their reason/evidence sentences yellow; and their summary sentences red. In addition, they can circle all transition words and phrases. The *Student Opinion Paper Guide* (Figure 3.1; reproducible on page 156) serves as a guiding activity for students writing opinion pieces. Figure 3.1 includes a blank reproducibles as well as a student example.

Figure 3.1 Student Opinion Paper Guide

Appendix B: Student Resources

Name: _____ Date: _____

Student Opinion Paper Guide

Directions: After reading the topic question, follow the directions at the bottom of the page to write your opinion paper.

Topic Question _____

- Opinion Sentence:** Write an opening sentence clearly stating your opinion (what you think). Include key words from the Topic Question with your sentence. Use one of these sentence stems to start: *I think, I don't think, I believe, I don't believe, or In my opinion.*
- Reason/Evidence Sentences:** Continue by writing two or more sentences with reasons that support your opinion (why you think what you think). Use one of these transition (linking) words with each sentence: *first, second, also, next, finally, or in addition.*
- Summary Sentence:** Finish by writing a sentence where you summarize the reasons for your opinion.

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Blank Reproducible

Appendix B: Student Resources

Name: _____ Date: _____

Student Opinion Paper Guide

Directions: After reading the topic question, follow the directions at the bottom of the page to write your opinion paper.

Topic Question In your opinion, what were the characteristics of Thomas Edison that helped make him a success?

In my opinion, there were two characteristics that helped make Thomas Edison a success. First, his curiosity led him to start experimenting at a young age. As a boy, he set up a laboratory in a baggage car on a train he worked on so he could experiment in his spare time. Second, he had many failures with his experiments, but never gave up. His first patent in 1870 was not a success. Thomas' curiosity and the fact that he never gave up helped make him a success.

- Opinion Sentence:** Write an opening sentence clearly stating your opinion (what you think). Include key words from the Topic Question with your sentence. Use one of these sentence stems to start: *I think, I don't think, I believe, I don't believe, or In my opinion.*
- Reason/Evidence Sentences:** Continue by writing two or more sentences with reasons that support your opinion (why you think what you think). Use one of these transition (linking) words with each sentence: *first, second, also, next, finally, or in addition.*
- Summary Sentence:** Finish by writing a sentence where you summarize the reasons for your opinion.

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Student Example

Persuasive Pieces

As students mature with the writing they complete in social studies, they move beyond simple opinion paragraphs to longer persuasive pieces. Where opinion papers rely solely on the writer's opinions and feelings, persuasion texts blend their opinions with facts to convince readers to agree. Opinions evolve into the writer's positions. The *Topic, Issue, and Position Statement Planning Grid* activity sheet (Figure 3.2; reproducible on page 157) directs students to do four things:

1. State the topic.
2. Identify the issue and his or her position on the given issue.
3. Select relevant background information.
4. Develop reasons to support the position.

Figure 3.2 Topic, Issue, and Position Statement Planning Grid

The figure displays two side-by-side versions of a worksheet titled "Topic, Issue, and Position Statement Planning Grid". Both worksheets are labeled "Appendix B: Student Resources" at the top right and "157" at the bottom right. They include fields for "Name:" and "Date:". The left worksheet is a blank reproducible, while the right one is a student example with handwritten text.

Blank Reproducible:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Topic, Issue, and Position Statement Planning Grid

Directions: Complete this activity sheet to outline your opinion.

Topic: _____

Issue: _____

Position Statement: _____

Background Information: _____

Reasons I Support My Position:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Student Example:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Topic, Issue, and Position Statement Planning Grid

Directions: Complete this activity sheet to outline your opinion.

Topic: Turning off lights in my house

Issue: One dollar is taken from my allowance each week when my parents find a light left on.

Position Statement: I don't think I should be charged the dollar.

Background Information: I sometimes forget to turn off the light when I leave a room; my parents complain about the light bill; and now they charge me one dollar for every light I leave on.

Reasons I Support My Position:

1. I might stumble in a dark room.
2. I'll never learn to budget my money if I never have any.
3. A dark house is not very inviting.

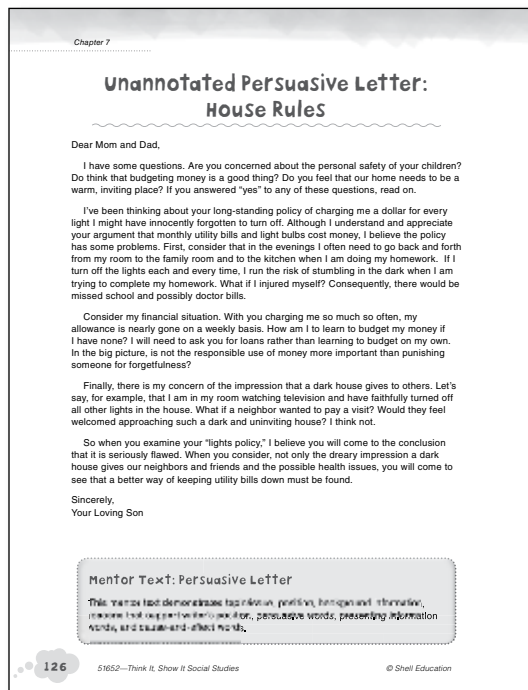
Blank Reproducible

Student Example

Model It!

While studying rules and laws along with Kathleen Krull's *A Kids' Guide to America's Bill of Rights: Curfews, Censorship, and the 100-Pound Giant*, students were prompted to think about all the rules of community life: home, school, neighborhood, and so much more. Then, they selected one of the rules they have at home and took a position against it. Figure 3.3 is an example of an *Unannotated Persuasive Letter Mentor Text* (page 126).

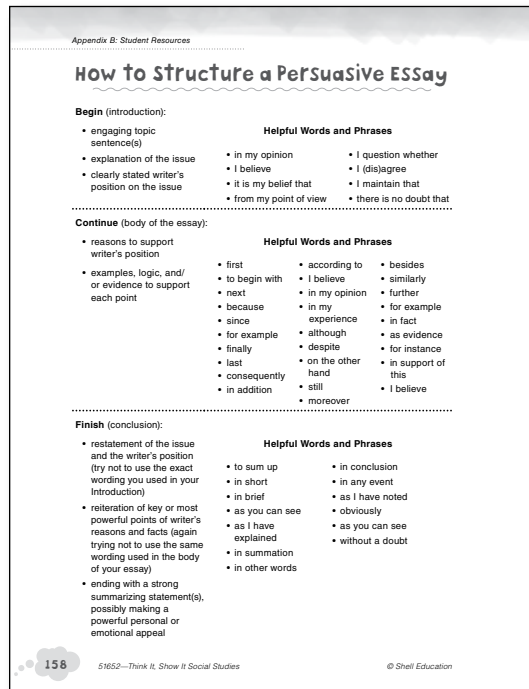
Figure 3.3 Unannotated Persuasive Letter: House Rules



After the students filled out their sheets, they then wrote letters to their parents in attempts to persuade them regarding the rules. (Parents were also invited to write responses.)

To help support the composition of the letters, students use the *How to Structure a Persuasive Essay* sheet (Figure 3.4; reproducible on page 158), from which they can pick key persuasive words and phrases.

Figure 3.4 How to Structure a Persuasive Essay



Using “persuasive sentence stems,” students pick words and phrases to help them write persuasive sentences.

Persuasive Sentence Stems

- I realize you _____ (*believe, feel, maintain, want, favor, support, argue, make the case/point*) ...
- I understand you _____ (*believe, feel, maintain, want, favor, support, argue, make the case/point*) ...
- Even though you _____ (*believe, feel, maintain, want, favor, support, argue, make the case/point*) ...
- Although you _____ (*believe, feel, maintain, want, favor, support, argue, make the case/point*) ...
- _____ (*but, yet, however*) I question _____ (*on the other hand, nevertheless*) ...

Topic Sentences

With both opinion papers and persuasive pieces, students can practice effective ways to begin their paragraphs. Maureen E. Auman, in a program called *Step Up to Writing*, has formulated a series of methods or patterns for writing topic sentences. Four of them are adapted here. These are particularly helpful when students write opinion papers and shorter persuasive pieces. The patterns are:

- number statements
- topic/opinion statements or issue/position statements
- “however” statements
- *and*, *but*, and *or* statements

Number Statements

A number statement is an opening sentence that contains a number word or phrase. These words might be used in number statements:

- a couple of
- a few
- a number of
- many
- numerous
- several
- ten
- three
- two
- various

Example Number Sentences

- There are *numerous* ways in which humans interact with the environment.
- Greece was home to *various* city-states.
- *Two* Founding Fathers had great influence over the beginnings of America.
- Trade is *one* of the *many* reasons countries cooperate.
- *Two* important characteristics that Thomas Edison had that made him a success were persistence and love of knowledge.
- There are *several* things that I would like you to consider regarding our long-standing rule and consequences for not turning lights off.

Topic/Opinion Statements

A topic/opinion statement is a sentence that begins with a preposition or prepositional phrase. Here are examples of different prepositions and prepositional phrases students can use in their writing:

- although
- as
- as long as
- as soon as
- because
- before
- even though
- even while
- if after
- since
- unless
- until
- when
- whenever
- whether
- while

After introducing the preposition and prepositional phrase, a student can draw the connection to his or her topic. The topic of the paper is given first and followed by a comma. Then, the writer's opinion is given.

Example Topic/Opinion Statements

- *Before* Thomas Edison became a success as an inventor, he had many personal characteristics that helped him.
- *Even though* Congress can pass laws, the president can still veto them.
- *Since* the Industrial Revolution, lifestyles have changed completely.
- *After* being purchased from the French, the Louisiana Territory needed to be explored.
- *As* the Nineteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution, voting rights were finally granted to women.

Issue/Position Statements

Like the topic/opinion statement, the issue/position statement begins with a preposition or prepositional phrase. Issue/position statements are generally introduced to advanced students. These are some commonly used issue/position statements:

- after
- although
- as
- as long as
- as soon as
- because
- before
- even though
- even while
- if
- since
- unless
- until
- when
- whenever
- whether
- while

Unannotated Persuasive Letter: House Rules

Dear Mom and Dad,

I have some questions. Are you concerned about the personal safety of your children? Do think that budgeting money is a good thing? Do you feel that our home needs to be a warm, inviting place? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, read on.

I’ve been thinking about your long-standing policy of charging me a dollar for every light I might have innocently forgotten to turn off. Although I understand and appreciate your argument that monthly utility bills and light bulbs cost money, I believe the policy has some problems. First, consider that in the evenings I often need to go back and forth from my room to the family room and to the kitchen when I am doing my homework. If I turn off the lights each and every time, I run the risk of stumbling in the dark when I am trying to complete my homework. What if I injured myself? Consequently, there would be missed school and possibly doctor bills.

Consider my financial situation. With you charging me so much so often, my allowance is nearly gone on a weekly basis. How am I to learn to budget my money if I have none? I will need to ask you for loans rather than learning to budget on my own. In the big picture, is not the responsible use of money more important than punishing someone for forgetfulness?

Finally, there is my concern of the impression that a dark house gives to others. Let’s say, for example, that I am in my room watching television and have faithfully turned off all other lights in the house. What if a neighbor wanted to pay a visit? Would they feel welcomed approaching such a dark and uninviting house? I think not.

So when you examine your “lights policy,” I believe you will come to the conclusion that it is seriously flawed. When you consider, not only the dreary impression a dark house gives our neighbors and friends and the possible health issues, you will come to see that a better way of keeping utility bills down must be found.

Sincerely,
Your Loving Son

Mentor Text: Persuasive Letter

This mentor text demonstrates topic/issue, position, background information, reasons that support writer’s position, persuasive words, presenting information words, and cause-and-effect words.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Student Opinion Paper Guide

Directions: After reading the topic question, follow the directions at the bottom of the page to write your opinion paper.

Topic Question _____

- 1. Opinion Sentence:** Write an opening sentence clearly stating your opinion (what you think). Include key words from the Topic Question with your sentence. Use one of these sentence stems to start: *I think*, *I don't think*, *I believe*, *I don't believe*, or *In my opinion*.
- 2. Reason/Evidence Sentences:** Continue by writing two or more sentences with reasons that support your opinion (why you think what you think). Use one of these transition (linking) words with each sentence: *first*, *second*, *also*, *next*, *finally*, or *in addition*.
- 3. Summary Sentence:** Finish by writing a sentence where you summarize the reasons for your opinion.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Topic, Issue, and Position Statement Planning Grid

Directions: Complete this activity sheet to outline your opinion.

Topic: _____

Issue: _____

Position Statement: _____

Background Information: _____

Reasons I Support My Position:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How to Structure a Persuasive ESSay

Begin (introduction):

- engaging topic sentence(s)
- explanation of the issue
- clearly stated writer's position on the issue

Helpful Words and Phrases

- in my opinion
- I believe
- it is my belief that
- from my point of view
- I question whether
- I (dis)agree
- I maintain that
- there is no doubt that

Continue (body of the essay):

- reasons to support writer's position
- examples, logic, and/or evidence to support each point

Helpful Words and Phrases

- first
- to begin with
- next
- because
- since
- for example
- finally
- last
- consequently
- in addition
- according to
- I believe
- in my opinion
- in my experience
- although
- despite
- on the other hand
- still
- moreover
- besides
- similarly
- further
- for example
- in fact
- as evidence
- for instance
- in support of this
- I believe

Finish (conclusion):

- restatement of the issue and the writer's position (try not to use the exact wording you used in your Introduction)
- reiteration of key or most powerful points of writer's reasons and facts (again trying not to use the same wording used in the body of your essay)
- ending with a strong summarizing statement(s), possibly making a powerful personal or emotional appeal

Helpful Words and Phrases

- to sum up
- in short
- in brief
- as you can see
- as I have explained
- in summation
- in other words
- in conclusion
- in any event
- as I have noted
- obviously
- as you can see
- without a doubt