

Writing Instruction That Works:

Argumentation as a framework for composition

Kriston Crombie Stotik
Columbus City Schools

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How many of us felt like this when first considering how to teach writing?



When I first began to teach writing, instruction seemed to revolve around the following terms:

Cause and Effect

Close Reading

Comparison Contrast

Personal Narrative

Research

Expository

Process

Classification

Persuasion/Argumentation

Illustration

In other words, writing instruction involved a seemingly endless list of essay types that I would never have time to get to and the students would never have time to master.

How would I have time to fit in all of those essay types?

Which one should I start with?

How do I know which is the most important?

Which grade level is a preferred match with each type of writing?

How do I incorporate this in with literature?

Panic Ensued!

Misgivings aside, I put my head down and soldiered on...

gamely teaching the **Cause and Effect** essay with Macbeth,

the **persuasive essay** with Julius Caesar,

the **comparison-contrast** with Fahrenheit 451, etc.

They Go Together Right?

Still, it was an enormous undertaking that seemed disjointed and disconnected

I always felt like I was teaching my students how to complete a specific task rather than how to compose...

Something was missing

One day a student raised her hand and asked, Ms. Crombie what if I'm assigned a paper in college that I haven't learned how to write?

The silence was deafening because she was correct...what if?

I began searching for a way to ensure that my students knew how to approach any kind of writing regardless of whether they'd received formal instruction or not.

Finally, I found what I was looking for.

Argumentation!!!

Argumentation is everywhere...
Because everything contains a claim

The sky is blue.

Ohio State Football is the best.

Calculus is a difficult subject.

All Claims are supported by some kind of evidence

Absorbed blue light is radiated in different directions and gets scattered all around, some of which reaches you and looks blue.

The Buckeyes are now 10-0.

Few high school students actually take calculus and fewer still, do really well.

A claim is a specific, **clear and direct** statement that announces the direction, mission, goal, or focus of your writing. It is a declaration that **requires further clarification, explanation, and evidence**. Your essay then works to support this claim in numerous ways.

The conventions of academic writing demand a clear and direct statement of purpose that announces in no uncertain terms what will be **unpacked, considered, demonstrated, defined, suggested, revealed, critiqued, –or just plain argued**.

Since our culture is so visual I began with non-print argumentation

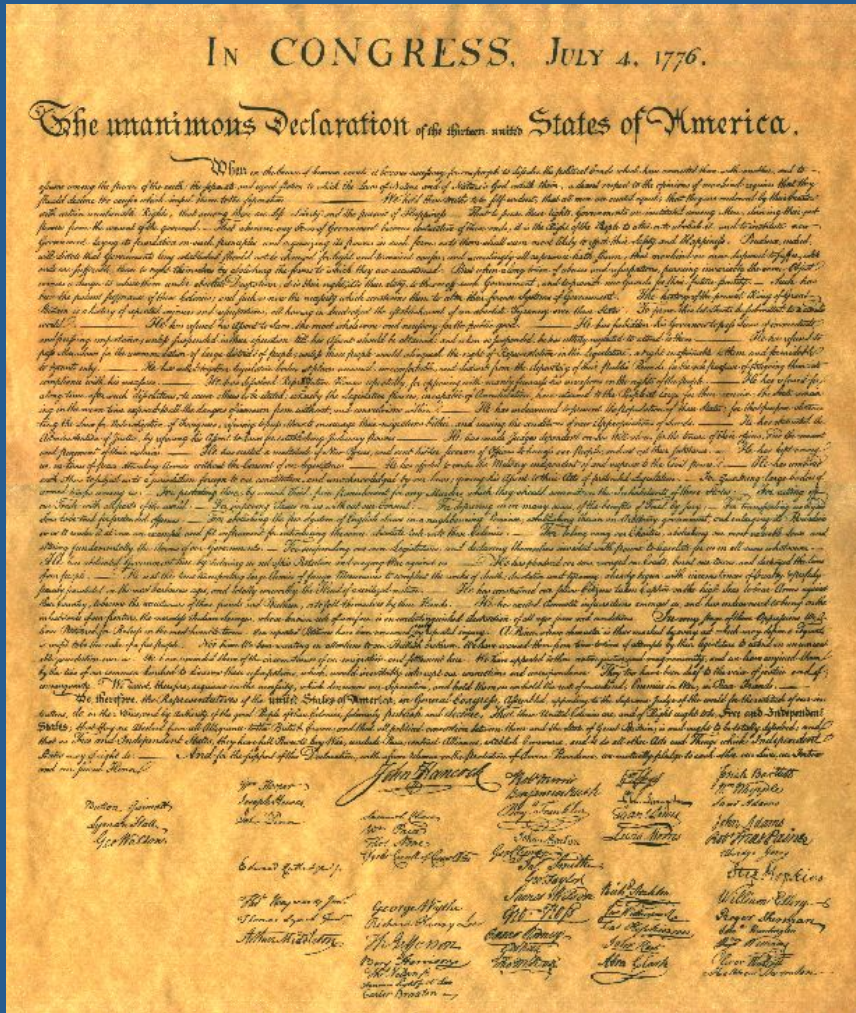


Photographed by Lewis Hines, North Carolina, 1909

Directions: Analyze the photograph by answering each question in paragraph form. Fully unpack each question...no listing or one word answers.

1. Describe what you see in the image? What seems to be the occasion for the photograph/image?
2. Describe something beautiful, haunting, disturbing, attention-grabbing, or frightening and then explain why the image made you feel this way?
3. What does the photographer seem to be claiming in this work? How can you tell? Provide a detail that supports your interpretation.

Next, we worked on identifying written argument before transitioning to creating our own.



We began by taking a look at a document everyone was familiar with and we analyzed Thomas Jefferson's essential claim in **The Declaration of Independence.**

HE has excited domestic Inturrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our Frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction, of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.

IN every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms : Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated Injury. **A Prince, whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Ruler of a free People.**

NOR have we been wanting in Attentions to our British Brethren. We have warned them from Time to Time of Attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarrantable Jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the Circumstances of our Emigration and Settlement here. We have appealed to their native Justice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of common Kindred to disavow these Ufurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correspondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and of Consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the Necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends.

WE, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT STATES may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

After reading and analyzing the whole document, typically, the students are able to find a single statement that encompasses exactly what Thomas Jefferson claims...**King George III is an unfit ruler of the American Colonists.**

One could not help watching [the Moth]. One was, indeed, conscious of a queer feeling of pity for him... the legs agitated themselves once more. I looked as if for the enemy against which he struggled. I looked out of doors. What had happened there? Presumably it was midday, and work in the fields had stopped. Stillness and quiet had replaced the previous animation. The birds had taken themselves off to feed in the brooks. The horses stood still. Yet the power was there all the same, massed outside indifferent, impersonal, not attending to anything in particular. Somehow it was opposed to the little hay-colored moth. It was useless to try to do anything. One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom which could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings; nothing, I knew, had any chance against death. Nevertheless after a pause of exhaustion the legs fluttered again. It was superb this last protest, and so frantic that he succeeded at last in righting himself. One's sympathies, of course, were all on the side of life. Also, when there was nobody to care or to know, this gigantic effort on the part of an insignificant little moth, against a power of such magnitude, to retain what no one else valued or desired to keep, moved one strangely.

Virginia Woolf

from *The Death of The Moth*

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from The Death of The Moth

Virginia Woolf claims in her Essay *The Death of the Moth* that (state the claim here) _____

_____. She writes (textual

evidence here), “_____.” In this statement, Woolf

suggests that (your analysis of passage goes here) _____. Finally, she

suggests that (further clarification of Woolf’s argument) _____.

Virginia Woolf is wrong/right, because **(your claim here)**_____.

For example, **(your support)**_____. Although Woolf might object

that **(acknowledgement)**_____, I maintain that **(rebut acknowledgement)**

_____. Therefore, I conclude that **(restate your argument)**_____.

_____.

Then, I took it even deeper and we moved from printed text to a blend of printed text and non-printed text with a portion of *The Communist Manifesto* and Diego Rivera's *Detroit Man and Machine* and Ford Maddox Brown's *Work*.



Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.

from the Communist Manifesto



The task is to create **an argument**—that is, to express a point of view on a subject and support it with evidence.

In this essay you must construct an argument stating your interpretative claim regarding the overall argument made by either Ford Maddox Brown's *Work* or Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry or Man and Machine*.



Diego Rivera's *Detroit Man and Machine*



Ford Madox Brown's Work