

"Writing a warrant is like sticking 9
inch nails through each one of my
eyelids" - high school student



Argumentative Writing

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My Students

- First generation college students
- Little to no experience with Argumentative Writing



What Keeps Me Up At Night

- Approximately **38%** of 1st and 2nd year undergrads are in a remedial college course (*College Board*)
- Nearly **4 out of 5** students in remedial college classes graduated with a 3.0 GPA or higher (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*)
- **6 in 10** students say high school classes were easy, and nearly half said they would have liked them to be harder (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*)

Why Argumentative Writing Is My Passion

- Critical Thinking and Metacognition
- Skills learned transcend subject areas

– goes beyond the English classroom



Why Argumentative Writing Is My Passion

“Argument is at the heart of critical thinking and academic discourse; it is the kind of writing students need to know for success in college and in life – the kind of writing that the Common Core State Standards puts first” (George Hillocks Jr. *Teaching Argument Writing*).

My Evolution of Argumentative Writing

From when I started, to where I am...
and to where I'm going

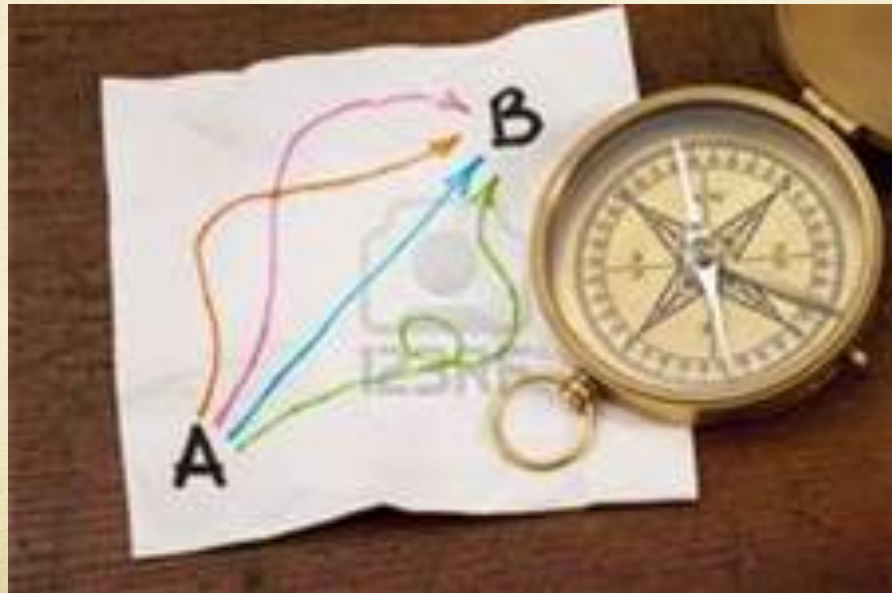


How I Start

- Go over the definitions of “claim, evidence, warrants”
- Give examples
- Do activities
- Have them write
- Lecture, show them, practice, help... (exhausted sigh)
- **BUT...**

The Hardest Part

- For the most part, CLAIM and EVIDENCE can be taught
- Warrants are the biggest challenge for me and my students



What My Students Say (speaking through similes)

**“Writing a warrant is like explaining water has a taste.” -
high school student**

**“Writing a warrant is like looking for a needle in a
haystack (Needle: the words you want. Haystack: the
other words going through your mind). -high school student**

What My Students Say (speaking through similes)

**“Writing a warrant is like a cow on astroturf – all
confused and not sure what to do.”** - high school student

**“Writing a warrant is like trying to put my brain in
someone else’s head.”** - high school student

Why They Think It Is Hard

- “Writing warrants are hard to write because the **evidence seems self-explanatory**. After you show your evidence you expect people to understand it on their own without explanation.” -high school student
- “Warrants are hard to write **because you have to think so hard** to make sure your evidence proves your claim. It’s too much thinking for 7 in the morning, my analyzing is not the best at that time.” - high school student

Why They Think It Is Hard

“They are hard to write **because I don’t understand them.**” - high school student

“Warrants are hard to write sometimes because they **seem redundant to ourselves. We easily see how our evidence supports our claim without explaining it to ourselves,** so when we explain it to others, it’s like we are repeating it.” - high school student

“Warrants are hard **because it is so new to us** and with more challenging literature, it is hard to wrap our minds around it...” - high school student

After...

- 2 ½ months of instruction and a formal argumentative paper:

48% were able to successfully define “warrant”

30% were somewhat able to define “warrant”

22% were not able to define “warrant”

What I See...

- Because students confuse warranting with being redundant they **do not** force themselves to actually **think through** what their evidence means.



What I See...

- Students love to “leave the text” they’ve selected as evidence once they start warranting.



What I See...

- They don't put quotes/evidence in context which **takes away from the logical process** they need in order to warrant effectively.



Cannot Be A Box On A Shelf

- It has to be a building process

**It must be tried, examined, tried,
examined, tried, examined and so on.**



Embed it into your everyday practice!

Understand the Struggle but Never lessen the Rigor

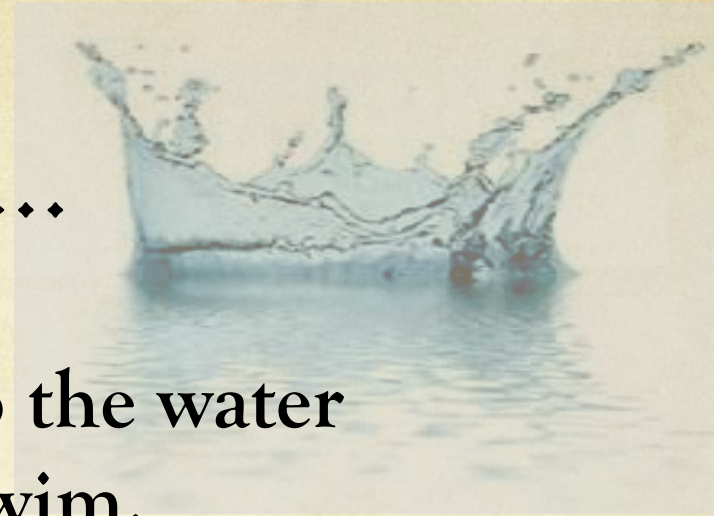
- Expectations must be high from the start or they will naturally remain complacent because it is hard (wouldn't you?)

COMPLACENCY = NO GROWTH

LOW EXPECTATIONS SEND A BIG MESSAGE



Sometimes...



**You have to throw them into the water
before they can learn to swim.**

- The first paper - HUGE - in their learning process. Don't help too much!
- Grading, Comments, and Conferencing -ALSO HUGE - in their learning process. Be hard on them, and do not give them the answers - they will never learn to warrant that way.

Reflection is Important!!



For BOTH teacher and student!

Keep it Going!

Not them... YOU! We can always get better, we are not perfect, if it is hard for you that's ok - it is hard for them too.



They are willing to stick with
it...

- **“My writing abilities are not impressive and I’m probably one of the more weaker writers in this class, but I feel like I can pick up on this technique of writing well. If I practice it enough, I will eventually get it”** -high school student (on being asked how confident he feels about his ability to be able to write this way by the end of the school year).