“Writing well is hard. Teaching students to write well is even harder. The task is particularly confounding because so much of what has been said and written about how to teach writing is at odds with how real writers work. For example, “Show. Don’t tell.” Plenty of remarkable writers do a lot of telling. “Never use said.” Glance down at the dialogue in a novel on your bedside table. I’ll bet you find repeated he said and she said. “Eliminate all ‘to be’ verbs.” Have you ever tried writing without them? Definitive rules about writing simply don’t hold fast.”

—CAROL JAGO

Teaching students to write well is hard. Team teaching with a master writing teacher can make it easier—and more productive. *Come to Class* offers you that opportunity. In *Come to Class*, Carol Jago shares the writing lessons and classroom survival skills she honed over 32 years of teaching. Each lesson describes Carol’s teaching moves and language and includes suggestions on pacing the lesson, setting students up for success, organizing flexible groups, and troubleshooting common classroom management problems. Organized around five fundamental types of writing—expository writing, persuasive writing, writing about literature, narrative writing, and reflective writing—*Come to Class* will help you personalize your writing curriculum while at the same time it will support you as you prepare your students for district assessments.
“As flexible and creative as I want my students to be as writers, I believe teaching students to write cohesively requires a cohesive instructional plan. My experience with teenagers, particularly with unskilled writers, has been that students respond well to clear directions. Too often simply inviting them to write about whatever they liked in whatever form they liked resulted in unfocused and shabby products.”

Through its five writing units *Come to Class* offers a systematic method for teaching the various types of writing.

**Writing to Explain**

*Writing to Explain* highlights the relationship between writers and readers and helps students explain themselves clearly, convincingly, and cohesively.

**Writing to Persuade**

*Writing to Persuade* focuses on persuasive writing and, using a wide variety of literary and rhetorical examples, demonstrates how teachers can help students craft effective essays.

**Writing About Literature**

*Writing About Literature* offers novel methods for helping students write both analytically and insightfully about poetry, plays, short stories, novels, and literary nonfiction.

**Narrative Writing**

*Narrative Writing* teaches students how to use the features of fiction—anecdote, dialogue, setting, tone—to tell stories and to enliven analytical essays.

**Reflective Writing**

*Reflective Writing* invites students to explore important issues in personal essays that go beyond simple autobiography and use personal experience as a springboard for analysis.

Each unit contains an opening essay, seven lessons, and the texts, templates, and rubrics that students need to successfully compose a specific type of writing. By the end of each unit, students will have planned, drafted, revised, edited, and assessed a finished essay or story.
COME TO CLASS

Writing to Persuade

Different types of writing place different demands on students. These lessons focus on persuasive writing and demonstrate how I teach my students to craft effective essays. Presented as seven sequential days of instruction, the lessons could also be spread over two weeks or longer according to your school calendar or the length of your teaching period.

You may also wish to intersperse your writing curriculum with literature lessons. I have presented the lessons as an intensive writing workshop to help you see how the entire unit fits together and how the teaching builds on what has gone before. As always, you will want to take your cue from your students and not ask for more than they can deliver.

That said, I believe that we often spread out due dates over such a long period of time that we build in too much time for procrastination. For me, focused work on improving students’ writing skills has always seemed best.

“...the lessons in each unit are designed as models, not prescriptions. Everything you need to teach them is here—from what to prepare ahead of time to homework assignments, from model texts to graphic organizers—but don’t worry about following like a script what I offer here. Think more like a gifted cook who reads recipes for ideas and inspiration but always changes what is on the page to suit her palate or guests.”
Every unit book opens with a short essay discussing the particular writing type. The essay creates a context for the lessons that follow and provides background information about writing for this purpose.
Getting Organized

The Thinking Behind the Lesson

In today's lesson you may find yourself rowing against the tide. Many students have been so thoroughly trained to use organizational structures that they approach a writing task as an almost mechanical process. They believe a thesis paragraph plus three supporting paragraphs plus a conclusion equals an essay. While such an organizational pattern is clearly superior to stream-of-consciousness writing, it can also seem artificial, not only to readers but also to students themselves. Formulaic writing is rarely joyful. Nor do such structures and strictures invite the kind of writing in which students deepen their understanding of the subject as they write.

Not every persuasive essay needs the customary three points of proof. Certain topics invite a host of supporting points. Others might involve long explanations of research or data. Sometimes the thesis is most effectively revealed at the very end of an essay. Occasionally an essay might begin with an extended anecdote illustrating the situation the writer plans to persuade readers to avoid. The challenge for writing teachers is to find a balance between offering students too little guidance in terms of organizing their ideas and giving them too many rules to follow. Instead of listing a number of organizational patterns during this lesson, I watch for opportunities to point out examples of different organizations and how they can help a writer make a strong argument.

Some years ago I read a news item about Louisiana Governor Mike Foster sponsoring a "Respect" bill that required students to say "Yes, Sir" and "No, Ma'am" to their teachers. The governor and the legislators who passed the bill apparently believed that forcing students to speak with courtesy would improve discipline in classrooms. I didn't know exactly what I thought about the idea of passing a law enforcing respect, but I knew that this was something I cared deeply about. In the process of writing an essay, I found myself exploring the ways in which teachers...
show—and sometimes fail to show—respect for their students. I concluded the essay with, “Legislating for respect will likely achieve nothing. One can only wonder how the Louisiana governor plans to punish 10-year-old offenders who refuse to parrot ‘Yes, Sir; no, Sir.’ Instead of passing another law, let’s earn—by our teaching, by our character, by our dress—our students’ respect.” Only in the very last sentence had I figured out what I wanted to persuade my readers to think and do.

Even as we help students craft a plan for their persuasive essays, we need to allow them the freedom to let their writing be a vehicle for their thinking. As E.M. Forster said, “How can I know what I think till I see what I say?”

**Come to Class**

Connect today’s lesson on getting organized with what students learned yesterday about gathering ideas.

“Students, please come to class. Today we are going to discuss the ideas you found last night that you feel are most compelling. This is the first step toward organizing your thoughts into an essay that can persuade others to see things the way you do.”

Rather than collect the homework, have students use the writing ideas they brought to class.

“I see that you have all arranged yourself in groups with your friends. Before you get too comfortable, everyone who was absent yesterday or who forgot to collect ideas for persuasive essays last night, please come and sit at this table where I’ve put newspapers. While the rest of us are rearranging ourselves, could those of you who were here yesterday please explain to those who weren’t what they should be looking for in the newspapers?”

**Organize students into groups.**

Quickly count heads of students who did the homework and divide by three. This will give you the number of triads needed for the following activity.

“Please count off from one to eight. Now would the ones raise your hands? The twos and so on? Find the group of desks marked with your group number.”
“Now would you please greet the writers you will be working with today? Then share with one another the one idea from yesterday’s news about which you’d most like to persuade others to think the way you do. As you describe the news item, be sure to explain why you care about this issue. If your triad has trouble deciding which of you should go first, start with the person with the longest hair. You have 15 minutes.”

Check that students are on task.

As students begin sharing their ideas for persuasive essays in their small groups, stop first at the table where the students who haven’t done the homework or who were absent are working, making sure they understand their task. To help them catch up with the rest of the class and get ready for today’s lesson, instruct students to choose quickly and to begin sharing what they found and why they care about this issue as soon as possible. They can always change their minds about topics to write on later.

Move around among the groups, listening for an example that you can use to help the whole class begin to think about organizing a persuasive argument. Alert students when 5 and 10 minutes have passed to ensure that everyone has a chance to talk.

It is usually better not to choose a student whom others already believe is an outstanding writer. By selecting a student who does not ordinarily stand out, you can both build her confidence as a writer and help others see that they can all be successful on this assignment. When you find a seed idea you think will work well, ask the student if she would mind if you used her idea with the whole class. You can promise the student that the class will be doing some of her work for her.

Identify what you want students to learn in today’s lesson on getting organized. Revisit “Your Brain on Baseball” to see how a sophisticated writer organizes his ideas.

“Could I please have your eyes and ears front and center? Thank you, students. As I eavesdropped on your conversations, I heard a lot of terrific ideas. You know, it won’t be cheating to use an issue that someone else shared in your group for your own essay. Just because you are writing about the same news item doesn’t mean you will be writing the same essay.

Side column notes present a variety of teaching ideas and recommendations, including When Things Go Awry, strategies for successfully heading off common problems. Each of these side notes is specific to the situation, offering timely and relevant counsel.
The next step we need to take is to create a framework for our essays. You all know that every essay has a beginning, middle, and end, but there are many different ways you can structure these essential pieces. The most important question writers ask themselves when planning is, 'What kind of organizational structure would best support my persuasive purpose?' Let’s look again at the David Brooks essay we read yesterday. In your groups please discuss what you notice about the organization of ‘Your Brain on Baseball.’ Feel free to mark up the text as you identify supporting evidence. You have 10 minutes.

Reconvene when the time is up and discuss the essay’s structure.

"Shall we come together once more?" (Wait until all eyes are on you.) "So what did you notice? How did Brooks structure his essay?"

Jenny’s hand shoots up. "Well, it sure wasn’t a five-paragraph essay."

"No, it isn’t. Did it seem organized to you, though, Jenny?"

"Yeah, kinda. I mean, he talks about baseball and then about how the brain works and then about baseball again and then about intelligence and then about baseball again and then puts it all together at the end. It wasn’t confusing to read, just hard to explain."

"So an essay can be organized without following an outline or other traditional structure. What held Brooks’ ideas together then?"

Jorge has an answer. "It seemed like he was talking on paper about something he was thinking about. The essay takes you step by step through his argument, so maybe that’s how he organized his ideas. It’s like he goes, ‘Here’s what I saw. Here’s what I read. Here’s what I think. Here’s what baseball players do. Here’s what else I know.’ See? Kind of like he’s walking us through the steps."

Use a selected student’s idea for a persuasive essay to model how a writer considers a working organizational plan.

"Let’s hold onto Jorge’s idea about how an essay can unfold for a reader while we look at the issue Max plans to develop into a persuasive essay. Max, could you come up and explain the news item you found and explain why you care about this issue?"

Max shares with the class an article on teenage obesity and explains how he thinks young people should stop eating so much junk food because the bad habit could do permanent damage to their health.

"You really seem to care about this issue, Max. Do you have any idea how you might organize the paper to persuade readers to think as you do?"

Max hesitates, but Jenny, who was part of Max’s triad, is bursting to offer a suggestion. "What if you opened with scary statistics about diabetes and gastric bypass surgery gone wrong and other gross things that can happen when people are obese?"
“I like that,” Max responds, “but I was thinking about retelling this story from the article first.”

“Well, I thought that would put a face on the problem. You’d have to think about a real person getting fatter and fatter and still eating. Then I could add statistics and stuff later. I’d need more information for that, though.”

“How else might Max organize his essay?”

Andre offers, “You could lay out the problem in your introduction and then have most of your essay be about ways kids could eat healthier—like a section on the problem and then a couple of sections on solutions.”

I interject: “That would be a really effective plan, Andre. Another kind of essay might do it the other way around and have several paragraphs about different aspects of the problem of teenage obesity, saving the solution for the conclusion. There is no one ‘right’ way to do this. What makes an organizational structure ‘right’ is if it will carry your argument forward and persuade readers to think the way you do.”

Assign homework.

Have students begin in class the work you want them to complete as homework. In small groups have them discuss how they might begin to organize their ideas for their persuasive essays.

“Before we begin drafting our essays tomorrow, you need to sketch out a plan. It is likely that you will change the plan as you write, but having a framework to work from will help you proceed. Please copy this simple graphic organizer from the board onto a sheet of paper.

“In the last 10 minutes of class, please turn to the friends who have given you so much help already today and offer one another ideas about how your persuasive essays might best take shape. Any questions?”

Help is an e-mail message away

Though you have tried your best to help students get organized, a few may still be floundering, feeling that their ideas don’t quite fit within the frameworks suggested. Some of these students may be reluctant to ask for help in front of peers.

What to do?

I give students my e-mail address and invite them to send me a message if they are having difficulty getting organized. Almost inevitably, what happens is that as students describe the problem, they begin to solve it for themselves. A short reply message in which I applaud the new tack they want to take and encourage them to keep working is usually all that is required of me.

Graphic organizers can be powerful tools for helping students see the shape of their thinking and organize their ideas. Through overuse, many students have begun to see them as more “fill in the blanks” worksheets.

To avoid this, rather than handing out forms for students to complete, I ask students to draw their own organizers on a blank sheet of paper. The goal is not to create a perfectly filled-in graphic organizer but to achieve organized thinking.

### Graphic Organizer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The Come to Class section of the lesson ends with a homework assignment—a follow-up to class work and preparation for the next class.

The text includes lists and graphics to copy onto the board to use during instruction.
Getting Organized

Create the Context
Connect today’s lesson on getting organized with what students learned yesterday about gathering ideas.

Share and Consider
Ask students refer to their homework notes and share their best ideas for a topic in triads.

Discuss
Revisit the persuasive essay and discuss how an accomplished writer organizes his or her ideas.

Model
Discuss a selected student’s idea for a persuasive essay and model how a writer crafts a working organizational plan. Consider a number of possible organizations.

Assign Homework/Answer Questions
Set up the homework assignment and have students begin the work you want them to complete for homework. Ask students to discuss in small groups how they might begin to organize their ideas for their persuasive essays.
The appendix at the end of each unit book contains copy masters of all lesson resources and alternative texts. Texts include essays by professional writers as well as examples of student essays. Other resources include graphic organizers, word lists, brainstorming aids, teacher letters, self-assessments, rubrics, writing assessment prompts, and more.

The lessons in Come to Class move back and forth between reading and writing, asking students to reflect upon what published authors have done and how we might use these techniques in our own writing.
Essential Elements of a Persuasive Essay

Directions

The student essay below is composed for a test on writing persuasively. Please read the prompt and essay. Then identify the following essential elements of a persuasive essay: thesis statement, controlling idea, supporting evidence, and call to action.

Prompt

In many American schools students are being required to complete a certain number of hours of volunteer community service to graduate. What do you think about this proposal? Is community service an essential part of a student’s education, or should volunteer work be just that—voluntary? Write an essay in which you try to convince readers of your opinion regarding requiring community service for graduation. Be sure to use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.

Sample Student Essay

Across the nation many schools have instituted community service as a requirement for high school graduation. While this may seem to be a good way to help young people learn about how important it is to be a contributing member of their community, I believe the new requirement is a bad idea.

First, the new requirement places unnecessary stress on students whose families depend upon them to work after school and on weekends. Sending this work brings in additional income to the family. It isn’t fair that it is easier for students from affluent families to complete their community service requirement than for others, too often what is supposed to be meaningful community service instead is a bunch of hours spent cleaning cages in an animal shelter or working in a nonprofit organization’s office. This work does little to teach high school students how to give back to their communities.

Finally, the biggest thing that is wrong with requiring community service for graduation is that volunteer work should be voluntary. As soon as we say “Do this,” most teenagers want to do the opposite. Young people should be encouraged to volunteer in their communities and to experience the value that can come from helping others. This kind of experience is something that can’t be required. Rather than instituting new graduation requirements, let’s bring true voluntary work into the schools. Our communities need young people to become more involved and more active.

When using appropriately rubrics and scoring guides can take the mystery out of assessment and promote greater transparency in grading. In providing greater transparency to the assessment process, rubrics encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Persuasive Writing Rubric

5 IDEAS AND EXPLANATIONS (at least two) are insightful, thorough, convincing, and supported by a variety of compelling evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion. The main opposing arguments and evidence are stated clearly. The main opposing arguments are supported by relevant evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion. The main opposing arguments are supported by a variety of compelling evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion.

STYLE is clear, shows sentence variety and interest, and presents vocabulary appropriately for content. The style is a pleasure to read—graceful, uncluttered, and vivid.

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS errors are rare or absent.

4 IDEAS AND EXPLANATIONS (at least two) are reasonable, substantial, and supported by relevant evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion. The main opposing arguments and evidence are stated clearly. The main opposing arguments are supported by relevant evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion. The main opposing arguments are supported by a variety of compelling evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion.

STYLE is logical and appropriate for content, but not as smooth as a 5. The style is a pleasure to read—graceful, uncluttered, and vivid. The style is functional but sentence variety and interest, and presents vocabulary appropriately for content. The style is a pleasure to read—graceful, uncluttered, and vivid.

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS errors are occasional.

3 IDEAS AND EXPLANATIONS are mostly understandable and on topic, but evidence is limited and explanations are often too simple, obvious, long-winded, or illogical. May mention opposing arguments in outline, but not rebutted in essay. The main opposing arguments are supported by relevant evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion. The main opposing arguments are supported by a variety of compelling evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion.

STYLE is functional but sentence variety and vocabulary are limited in style is lively but wordy. The style is functional but sentence variety and vocabulary are limited in style is lively but wordy. The style is functional but sentence variety and vocabulary are limited in style is lively but wordy.

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS errors are frequent.

2 IDEAS AND EXPLANATIONS are too simple, brief, vague, repetitious, and repetitive. Deduct points for weak supporting evidence that is not true to topic. The main opposing arguments are supported by relevant evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion. The main opposing arguments are supported by a variety of compelling evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion.

STYLE is overly simple, unclear, or repetitive. Example sentences are repetitive, make no sense, and are written in a formulaic fashion. The style is functional but sentence variety and vocabulary are limited in style is lively but wordy. The style is overly simple, unclear, or repetitive. The style is overly simple, unclear, or repetitive.

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS errors are pervasive and obscure meaning or heavy-handed attempts to disguise grammatical errors.

1 IDEAS AND EXPLANATIONS are absent, irrelevant, unsupported by evidence, or nonexistent. Poor essay structure; the main opposing arguments are supported by relevant evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion. The main opposing arguments are supported by a variety of compelling evidence that appeals to both logic and emotion.

STYLE is so vague that sentences are hard to understand, or essay is too short to judge grammar/structure.

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS errors are pervasive and obscure meaning or heavy-handed attempts to disguise grammatical errors.

“Every unit, students are invited into the assessment process. I want my students to develop the ability to tell for themselves whether what they have written has value. I can’t and don’t want to be the only arbiter of excellence in the room.”
In the *Come to Class Teaching Guide*, Carol explains the motivations and ideals that inspired *Come to Class*. In addition to providing an overview of the *Come to Class* components and instructional design, Carol also presents tips on how to be successful writing students and teachers.
Through a narrated slide show, Carol explains her philosophy and teaching approach and guides you through a typical class session. Using six authentic student essays, Carol demonstrates approaches to providing feedback that is helpful and full of information about good writing—without overwhelming student writers.

▲ Lists of teaching tips and a Come to Class calendar provide professional insight and inspiration.

▲ All of the lesson-specific teaching tools and handouts are provided in an electronic format that is easy to search and print out.

The Resources CD-ROM provides a range of print and video resources to support your teaching throughout the year. A bank of reproducible teaching tools, a narrated slide show, and an innovative critique of student essays are designed to help you differentiate instruction and craft your own writing curriculum.
teaching writing well is hard—and important

In 2007, the National Writing Project conducted a survey on how Americans valued writing skills in school, in the workplace, and in higher education.

In school

◆ 74% of Americans say that today there is a "greater need to write well to succeed than 20 years ago."
◆ 84% say students should learn to write well as a requirement for high school graduation (top 3 subjects: reading; math, writing).
◆ More than 7 in 10 say giving all students daily writing assignments (71%) and teaching writing in all subjects (74%) are ideas that should be put into practice now.

In the workplace and higher education

◆ Blue-collar workers (80%) and white-collar workers (93%) say writing is important to success in their careers.
◆ Americans say students need writing skills to succeed in college (67% say it is "essential").
◆ A large majority of the public (79%) understands that reading and writing go hand in hand.

There is widespread agreement, writing instruction should be a centerpiece in the high school curriculum. With its systematic, but flexible, approach to writing instruction, Come to Class will support you in establishing your own rigorous and responsive writing curriculum.

about the author

Carol Jago is a teacher with 32 years of experience in middle and high school in Santa Monica, California. The author of nine books on education, she continues to share her experiences as a writer and as a speaker at conferences and seminars across the country. Her experience in standards assessment, literature study, and writing instruction has made her a sought-after speaker. Carol served on the planning committee for the 2009 NAEP Reading Framework and the 2011 NAEP Writing Framework and directs the California Reading and Literature Project at UCLA.

Carol Jago's longtime work with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has led to her election to a four-year term on the Council's board. During that term she will serve as president of the Council. Carol is also active with the California Association of Teachers of English and edits CATE's award-winning journal California English.

Carol's Heinemann titles include:
◆ Papers, Papers, Papers: An English Teacher’s Survival Guide
◆ Classics in the Classroom Video: Teaching The Odyssey
◆ Classics in the Classroom: Designing Accessible Literature Lessons
◆ Cohesive Writing: Why Concept Is Not Enough
◆ Beyond Standards: Excellence in the High School English Classroom
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