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Appendix: Unit 4

“Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?”
Criteria for a Persuasive Essay

Appendix: Unit 5

“Tante Tina’s Sacrifice”
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Criteria for an Analytical Essay
Writing a Persuasive Essay

Middle school students enjoy writing persuasive essays, especially when they choose topics that relate to school, home, friends, and personal issues. Children are experts at “working” adults in order to obtain a forbidden privilege such as going to the movies during the week; middle school students tell me that their persuasive techniques include buttering up adults by being extra polite and completing chores without adults nagging them.

“Once I sense my mom is on my side because I’ve been, like, totally helpful, I ask the big question,” Jason explains. “Persuading her is easier,” he adds.

However, I find that I can’t assume that writing a persuasive essay will be easy for all middle school students because developing a thesis statement and writing solid arguments to support the thesis is more demanding than the verbal buttering-up technique many employ.

I stand in front of a seventh-grade inclusion class. We have studied a persuasive essay mentor text and how to negotiate criteria. “Turn to your partner,” I say, “and discuss what you think should be included in the content of a persuasive essay. Try to think of three suggestions and jot these on notebook paper.” Silence. I try again, and this time I model. “I think the essay needs a title that lets readers know what the topic is.” I jot “Title that announces topic” under content and invite students to chat with their partners.

Thoughts race through my mind: I did give lots of support during the mentor text lesson. It’s on the chart. They’re not connecting. Quickly, I decide to think aloud and model how I use ideas on the chart to develop content criteria. Tension...
dissolves. And from these students I have learned that when the genre is unfamiliar or they have experienced it only once, I, the teacher, have to model the process for them, even if it's a process they've been through before. If students feel they can't or are reluctant to risk suggestions, then the teacher steps in and responds to their needs by providing the support that can prevent them from feeling insecure or frustrated and avoiding the content of the lesson.

Use the lessons for a persuasive essay to teach all levels of students how to develop an opinion about a topic and convince others to side with them. You'll find a lesson on exploring and finding topics, studying a mentor text, brainstorming a list of arguments for and against an opinion, and planning the essay. Revision and editing lessons include transitions between paragraphs and paragraphing a persuasive essay. Note that I've put the lesson on leads and endings for persuasive essays (Lesson 4) before having students plan because I wanted to introduce them to techniques they'll need and use during planning.

As you explore the lessons where students create plans, compose a first draft, peer-edit, and revise the first draft, I've offered suggestions for integrating the revision and editing into Lessons 7 and 8 and for circling back to lessons on specific nouns and repairing run-on sentences. Play with my suggestions and adapt them to your schedule and your students' needs.
Lesson 1: Finding Topics

How This Helps

“But I still can’t think of a topic.” This statement, typical of some middle school students, is one that can frustrate teachers. To offer these students support, it’s helpful for the students not only to talk to a partner and study notebooks to explore topics, but also to invite other students to share their ideas for persuasive essay topics.

Jotting these shared ideas on a chart makes a range of topics available to the entire class and supports students who feel tentative about choosing a topic. In addition, revisiting the chart over several days to add ideas can help students find their “just-right” topic or spark a related idea. Use this lesson to help students find a topic they care about and want to explore. You can also send students to websites that list persuasive topics for speeches and essays to gather more ideas. (See “Additional Ideas for Finding Topics for a Persuasive Essay” at the end of this lesson.)

What You Need

- Give out writing folders and notebook paper.
- Prepare a new chart titled, “Possible Persuasive Essay Topics.”
- Have on hand a stack of sticky notes for students to use when peer-editing.
- Set up a clipboard with dated sticky notes.

Invite Students To

Skim and reread parts of their writers’ notebooks for topics.
Pair-share and discuss possible topics for their essays.
Brainstorm topic ideas on notebook paper.
Share ideas with classmates.
While Ciara and Kira pass out writers’ notebooks and writing folders, I flip to the chart headed: “Possible Persuasive Essay Topics.”

**Students ➤** Pair-share and discuss possible topics for their essays.

“Today, we’re going to generate possible topics for a persuasive essay,” I say. I always open this lesson with a question for students to discuss with a partner: “What do you want to persuade your parents, siblings, friends, and teachers about?”

As pairs take five to seven minutes to talk, I make the rounds, clipboard in hand, and listen to seventh graders.

Jeremy tells his partner, “I want to watch R movies and stay up very late on school nights.”

“Do you think that topic is realistic?” I gently ask.

“Nah. But I would like to stay up to see a special show or the end of a football game.”

“That’s a terrific idea,” I say. “Try to come up with a few more.” And I move on to listen to other students, jotting, on sticky notes, the names of those who aren’t sharing. Writing down students’ names is my memory cue to read their brainstormed lists and observe them skimming their notebooks.

Jeremy’s comment is typical of middle school students. A question, kindly posed, can set students on track.

**Students ➤** Brainstorm and skim writers’ notebooks for topic ideas.

“Take a piece of paper from your writing folder, head it, and jot all the topic ideas you recall from your discussion and any others that popped into your mind,” I say. I circulate to discover the moment when most students stop writing. Then I say, “Now take another five to ten minutes to skim your writer’s notebook and reread an entry you feel might contain topics. Add these topics to your brainstormed list.”

I encourage students to find topics for a persuasive essay by considering issues at school with friends, siblings, and parents. Having personal experience with a topic makes finding convincing points easier. Moreover, students can learn, apply, and understand persuasive techniques using personal persuasion, and even
include statistics they find on the Internet. In middle school, taking positions for and against societal issues—capital punishment, lowering the age for obtaining a driving license, or permitting women to participate in active combat—requires students to complete a great deal of research and can extend a unit on persuasion far beyond the time limits most middle school teachers have.

During this time, I make the rounds and pause at students’ desks if they are not skimming their notebooks or adding topics to their brainstormed list. I bend down and start turning pages in the notebook, pointing out entries that might contain rich ideas.

When everyone has finished searching notebooks, I say, “Reread your topic lists and choose a topic for me to write on the chart so everyone has access to diverse ideas. Listen carefully and try not to repeat topics. If your ideas are all on the chart when your turn comes, just say, ’Pass.’”

If your list is sparse, return to the chart a few minutes each day for the next couple of days and ask students to suggest more topics. Following is a list of topics seventh graders generated.

### Possible Persuasive Essay Topics

- chew gum at school
- text during class
- have a recess each day
- no dress code
- more choices for lunch
- bring back the soda machine
- have a morning snack
- have a snack machine with healthy choices
- no homework on weekends
- early dismissal every Monday
- have classes start at 9:00 AM
- have a football team and practice
- more free reading time
- clubs that meet at school
- no sharing a bedroom with a sibling
- need more memorials for soldiers
- crash diets don’t work

**Chart:** Seventh graders’ brainstormed list of topics

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**Management Tip**

I jot on a sticky note who shares ideas and who continually passes. To make the process fair, I start student shares at different points each day. I might begin with a group in front of the room one day, and then start with a group at the back of the room the next day. Varying the starting points offers all students opportunities to contribute ideas before they have to pass.
Handling Reluctant Participants

If I notice a few students who pass all the time (and the sticky notes enable me to remember this accurately), I will meet one-on-one with those students and ask: “Can you tell me why you continually pass?” Some students respond immediately, but most simply shrug their shoulders or say, “Dunno.”

By middle school, most students do know why they don’t answer, and I become a broken record, posing the question privately each day until I receive a response. Reasons include: “I’m always wrong”; “They [classmates] laugh”; “I don’t like to share ‘cause I could make a mistake.”

First, I assure students that there’s no right or wrong when finding topics or discussing what you think you know about a topic. To break this negative cycle, I will meet with a student prior to class and talk over his response to a question I’ll pose. Preparing an answer with me builds students’ self-confidence, and over time, they risk responding without preparation. Most likely, you’ll do this several times before the student risks answering independent of your preparation.

I use the rest of this class period and as much of another class period to help students choose their topic and support them as they create a brainstormed list of ideas about their persuasive essay topic. Organizing students into partners stimulates brainstorming. Partners read each other’s lists, raise questions on sticky notes, and return the note and list to their partners. Writers then use the questions to add details about their topics. I make the rounds as students do this so I can assist with the questioning process.
Closing Routine

Class ends with the same students collecting notebooks and writing folders and my complimenting the class on the variety of topics they generated as well as the good start they have made brainstorming ideas about their topics. "Next class," I say, "we'll study a mentor text using your writers' eyes."

Assessing Students’ Needs

Who Got It?

Make the rounds and listen to students discuss possible topics. Use their paired discussions, brainstorming on paper, the list you write on chart paper, and the questions that follow to decide whether some students need other sources of inspiration in order to find a topic.

Did the student find topics in her notebook?
Did the student generate topics during paired discussions?
Was the student able to brainstorm four or more possible topics on paper?
Was the student able to choose a topic?
Did the student begin writing details about her chosen topic?

If students have difficulty finding topics for a persuasive essay . . .

• Break down students’ thinking about topics into considering what audience they might persuade:
  ◦ Parents
  ◦ Friends
  ◦ Brothers and/or sisters
  ◦ Teachers
  ◦ Other adults
• Partner students with peers who can generate topics and see if a paired conversation helps.

If students can find topics for a persuasive essay . . .

• Invite them to select two topics they feel strongly about and discuss with a partner to discover which topic they’ll pursue.
• Have students work with a partner to identify the parts of a persuasive essay.
Additional Ideas for Finding Topics for a Persuasive Essay

• Have students visit these websites to read and find other possible topics:
  - www.speech-topics-help.com/persuasive-speech-topics-for-teens.html
  - http://homeworktips.about.com/od/essaywriting/a/100-Persuasive-Essay-Topics.htm

• Invite students to browse through newspapers and magazines for ideas. Have students share topics they have found with the class. Add these to the “Possible Persuasive Essay Topics” chart to inspire students who are undecided about their topics.

• Invite students to interview peers in other classes, teachers, and family members to collect more suggestions for possible topics.
Studying a Mentor Text with a Writer’s Eye

How This Helps

Middle school students are ingenious in the art of persuasion, and their comments reflect years of experience persuading parents, friends, and siblings. “Bribe ’em,” “Make ’em feel guilty,” and “Have a compromise ready in case you have to try it” attest to the range of experience middle school students have with the art of persuasion. This lesson taps into what students know and do.

However, knowing how to persuade does not mean that students can write an effective persuasive essay. Studying a mentor text can help students shape their natural persuasiveness into a worthy essay. By studying a mentor text, students can raise their awareness of the strategies and techniques writers use to persuade. Through this mentor text lesson, students will develop a deeper understanding of the importance of positioning arguments for and against an opinion as well as including facts such as statistics, survey results, and quotes from experts. In addition, analyzing the mentor text can raise students’ awareness of the job of transition sentences.

Invite Students To

Discuss real-life ways to persuade.
Read the mentor text.
Discuss the mentor text with a partner.
Analyze the mentor text and list what they learn about the elements of persuasive writing.
Share ideas.

What You Need

- Give out writing folders.
- Give students a copy of the mentor text, “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?” from the Resources CD-ROM, or another text you select. (For students reading two or more years below grade level, adapt this lesson to the alternative mentor text on the Resources CD-ROM, “Adopting a Pet from the Pound.”)
- Prepare to display “Questions for Analyzing a Persuasive Essay: ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” from the Resources CD-ROM.
- Title two new charts: “Ways to Persuade” and “Analysis of ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’”
- Set up a clipboard with dated sticky notes.
As Jack, Maria, and Kendra give out writing folders, I tell students to take out a piece of notebook paper from their folders and head it.

**Discuss examples of persuasion.**

I start the lesson by asking seventh graders to tell me how they persuade their parents to let them do something that’s against the rules, like hanging out in the local mall on a school night. Immediately, a dozen hands shoot up.

“How do you mean by ‘Bribe ’em?’” I ask.

“Make ‘em feel guilty,” David says. “That’s a great way to get your way.”

“You surely have effective strategies,” I say. “Now turn to your partner and take a few minutes to discuss other persuasive strategies you can use.”

I circulate among students and listen. When their talk about persuasion diminishes, I say, “Finish your thought. Then take a few minutes to jot three to four ideas on your paper for how to persuade.”

When they are done, I invite students to share and write the points they make on chart paper. It is helpful to discover what students know about the art of persuasion before plunging into the mentor text. This lets you know how much scaffolding you’ll have to do.

### Ways to Persuade

- soften them up
- make them feel guilty
- use the best arguments for convincing others
- figure out the against arguments and show how they don’t work
- use statistics or scientific evidence
- quote an authority or someone you respect

**Chart:** Seventh graders’ ideas on ways to persuade
“You know a great deal about how to persuade,” I say. “Now let’s take a look at how one middle school writer uses her knowledge of persuasion to write a persuasive essay.”

I ask three students to give out a copy of the mentor text and read the essay aloud.

**Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?**

The final bell rings. It’s the last day of school, and summer has finally come! Students don’t have to think about school for at least another 2½ months. That is the way it should always be. Schools should continue using the traditional calendar and not a year-round schedule. There are numerous downsides to year-round schooling. It has no positive effects on education, it adds to costs, and it disrupts the long-awaited summer vacation.

Contrary to the well-accepted belief, year-round schooling has no constructive impact on education. Most year-round schedules use the 45-15 method: 45 days of school followed by 15 days off. Because of this, there are many first and last days of school. All those transitions disrupt the learning process. Also, there is no evidence of higher test scores. Due to that, many schools that change to year-round schedules end up switching back. For example, since 1980, 95 percent of schools that tried the year-round schedule changed back to a traditional calendar. It is obvious that changing to year-round schooling does not help students; therefore, why is the change necessary?

Like any other facility, keeping a school open requires a great deal of money. When a school changes to a year-round schedule, the costs skyrocket. Keeping school open in the middle of summer requires air conditioning, and that adds significantly to the school’s expenses. The usual utility bills grow because of the additional open-school time. Finally, teachers must be paid for all the weeks they are working. With all these factors, the cost of keeping schools open becomes immensely high. For example, a high school in Arizona had a cost increase of $157,000 when they switched to year-round schooling. Some schools may not be able to handle such increases, and other schools that can handle these expenses could be doing better things with the money. Is year-round school really where the money should go?

An important part of a child’s life is summertime. With year-round schedules, students would hardly have any time to relax. During the 15-day breaks, they would be thinking about their quick return to school. It would also be difficult to coordinate family vacations with parents’ work.

Mentor Text: “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?”
Scaffolding Learners

Studying a persuasive essay mentor text poses challenges for English language learners and learning disabled and special education students as well as students writing a persuasive essay for the first time. The challenge includes pinpointing the arguments for and against the writer’s opinion and figuring out the opinion. The scaffolds on the “Analysis of ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” chart as well as the “Questions for Analyzing a Persuasive Essay: ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” guide students’ discussions. Moreover, having scaffolds in the form of headings on the chart can support students’ note taking and their ability to suggest criteria.

Analyze the mentor text and share ideas about persuasive writing.

After reading the read-aloud, I display “Questions for Analyzing a Persuasive Essay: ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” to guide partners’ discussion.

The questions for analyzing a persuasive essay are available on the Resources CD-ROM.

Questions for Analyzing a Persuasive Essay: “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?”

- What is the opinion or position of this piece? What is the writer for? What is the writer against?
- What are the points against year-round school? How does the information in paragraphs two and three convince readers?
- What are the points for a traditional school year? Why are these convincing?
- What is the point of view?
- What points does the ending leave you with? Are there any new ideas?
- Did the author use statistics or researched information? How were these effective?
- Did the author quote an authority? Why?

Display: Scaffolding questions for discussing “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?”

I then think aloud to start the process of analyzing with a writer’s eye.

“I love the introduction because the writer places me in the last day of school and celebrates the joy of a long summer vacation. Then she quickly changes the tone by presenting her negative opinion of year-round school and the points she’ll make against attending school all year. Ending the lead with a summary of what the next
two paragraphs will contain is her transition into her second and third paragraphs. Any comments or questions?"

“What’s a transition?” asks Cecily.

“It’s a sentence the bridges ideas between paragraphs and lets readers know what’s coming as they continue to read,” I reply.

“Can the transition be a question?” asks Renee. “The writer ends paragraphs two and three with questions.”

“Absolutely,” I answer. “Do you think the question is effective?”

“It is in this essay,” says Renee.

“It’s a technique you can consider using if it works with the content of your essay,” I reply.

“Do we have to imitate the writer’s lead in our essay?”

“This is just one way to lead a persuasive essay. Before you plan, I will give you a handout with other suggestions for leads. However, the important thing is to develop a lead that effectively presents your topic.

“Take about fifteen minutes to reread the essay silently, and then turn to your partner and discuss the questions. Jot your ideas on the back of your paper and then you’ll share. I’ve written headings on the chart to guide your thinking and note taking.”

**Analysis of “Summer: 15 Days or 2 ½ Months?”**

State the opinion of this persuasive essay.

Arguments Against Year-Round School:

Arguments For a Long Summer Break:

Ending

Point of View

**Chart:** Headings to guide students’ analysis

Once paired discussions begin, I make the rounds, clipboard in hand, and listen to discussions. Because I’m using an essay composed by a middle school student, seventh graders find the organization and ideas accessible.
"I think the writer could have told us what to do if our district wanted year-round school—like write to the school board and superintendent," Jared says to Mark.

"Yeah. This [the ending] kinda just wraps up the points she made," Mark adds. I highlight this conversation, sharing it with the rest of the class so everyone benefits from this excellent point.

"The position has two points—I think," says Jared.

Partner conversations dwell on how well the writer addressed the arguments against year-round school. As students jot their points onto paper, I turn to the chart titled “Analysis of ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” and collect these points, placing them under specific headings:

### Analysis of “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?”

**State the opinion of this persuasive essay.**

The writer believes that the traditional school year with 2½ months summer vacation is better than year-round model.

**Arguments Against Year-Round School:**
- Uses statistics—1980—95% of schools dropped year-round—powerful.
- Research—costs a high school $157,000 more for year-round—schools can’t afford this now.
- Address cons in second and third paragraphs. Very specific—year-round means higher pay for teachers; disrupts learning; gives exact schedule; utility bills up; no difference in students’ learning.

**Arguments For a Long Summer Break:**
- Quotes an expert—Dr. Scales—to show why camp and a long summer are good for children.
- Starts addressing arguments for long summer break in third paragraph. We liked it ending with the points for traditional school calendar: scheduling vacations; benefits of camp and other activities; maintains health and children’s development.

**Ending**
Repeats the lead or introduction. Does not add anything new.

**Point of View**
3rd person

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**Chart:** Students’ completed analysis of “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?”
Closing Routine

Toward the end of class, I invite students to turn to their partners, discuss the topics they’ve selected, and add to their brainstormed list of details, encouraging them to think about using some of the techniques they just learned about in their own persuasive essays. While they return notes and the mentor text to their writing folders and hand them in, I summarize what I have seen them do well while studying the mentor text.

Assessing Students’ Needs

Who Got It?

Listen to partners as they discuss the mentor text and to students as they share what they have learned about a persuasive essay; jot what you notice on the sticky notes. The questions that follow can help you determine who “gets it” and who needs additional support.

- Did the student identify arguments for? Arguments against?
- Did the student understand why the ending was satisfying?
- Did both students (or all group members) contribute to the discussion?
- Did the student provide text details to support his ideas?
- Did the student add details to his brainstormed list about his topic?

If students have difficulty analyzing the mentor text . . .

- Review terminology, especially for English language learners and learning disabled and special education students, to make sure that terms are clear: persuade, arguments, pro or for, con or against, introduction, opinion statement.
- For additional practice, use “Adopting a Pet from the Pound,” an easier mentor text on the Resources CD-ROM.
- Have students work with a peer expert and analyze a different persuasive essay.
• Work with a small group who require your expertise. Take four to five minutes from a few classes to see if you can boost their understanding of terms and the mentor text. Think aloud and show students how you use a few questions from the “Questions for Analyzing a Persuasive Essay: ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” Or adapt these questions to address another persuasive essay.

If students can analyze the mentor text . . .
• Invite students to reread their lists of possible topics in their notebooks and the list on chart paper.

• Ask students to choose one idea (could be a new one that came to mind) and brainstorm a list of points for their position and some points against it.

• Organize this group into partners. Have partners read each other’s brainstormed lists and pose questions on a sticky note—questions that can drive the writer to add more details about their topics.

• Have pairs create possible content, craft, technique, and organization criteria for a persuasive essay based on personal experience.

Additional Ideas for Analyzing Mentor Texts
• Have students bring in editorials, persuasive letters to the editor, and op-ed pieces (opinion editorials) from their local newspaper and share these with their group or the class to deepen their knowledge of persuasive techniques.

• Reserve a section of a bulletin board and have students post editorials, op-ed pieces, and letters from their local newspaper. Invite students to read and analyze them for specific purposes: lead, ending, and the organization of arguments.
Lesson 3: Negotiating Criteria for a Persuasive Essay

How This Helps
I’m coaching Ms. Golding, a novice teacher. We’ve met once and today I’m observing her class. Ms. Golding tells her sixth-grade students that today they will draft their persuasive essay. Hands shoot up. “How do I know how many arguments to include?” Jill asks.
“Topic sentence or a big introduction?” asks Phillip.
“How long?” “How many arguments against our side do we include?” “Does spelling count?” As the questions pour out, I notice that tears well up in Ms. Golding’s eyes.
“You can draft tomorrow,” I suggest. “For today, pairs can read and discuss the persuasive pieces on the bulletin board.”

Later that day, Ms. Golding and I meet and discuss negotiating criteria. As a novice teacher, Ms. Golding was unfamiliar with teaching criteria and had planned to develop a rubric for grading students’ final drafts. She had not expected to be bombarded with unanticipated questions.

An overarching purpose of this lesson is to work with students and develop specific guidelines for writing a persuasive essay before the planning stage. Knowing the criteria they will be expected to meet enables students to do a better job of planning and drafting. In addition, students will return to the criteria to peer-evaluate first drafts and then improve them before writing a second draft.

What You Need
- Give out writing folders.
- Post the chart with the students’ “Analysis of ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” that you created in Lesson 2.
- Be prepared to create a new chart with students, “Criteria for a Persuasive Essay.”
- Set up a clipboard with dated sticky notes.

Invite Students To
- Reread the “Analysis of ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” chart.
- Discuss possible criteria with a partner.
- Negotiate criteria using the headings and details on the analysis chart;
  OR
- Read and discuss the criteria handout.
- Weigh in on the grading percentages.

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Teaching the Lesson

Students’ analysis of the analytical essay suggests content criteria for their own essays.

Reread “Analysis of ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” and discuss possible criteria with partners.

As three students hand out writing folders, I display the chart titled “Analysis of ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’” and reread the sections out loud.

Analysis of “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?”

State the opinion of this persuasive essay.

The writer believes that the traditional school year with 2½ months summer vacation is better than year-round model.

Arguments Against Year-Round School:
• Uses statistics—1980–95% of schools dropped year-round—powerful.
• Research—costs a high school $157,000 more for year-round—schools can’t afford this now.
• Address cons in second and third paragraphs. Very specific—year-round means higher pay for teachers; disrupts learning; gives exact schedule; utility bills up; no difference in students’ learning.

Arguments For a Long Summer Break:
• Quotes an expert—Dr. Scales—to show why camp and a long summer are good for children.
• Starts addressing arguments for long summer break in third paragraph. We liked it ending with the points for traditional school calendar: scheduling vacations; benefits of camp and other activities; maintains health and children’s development.

Ending
Repeats the lead or introduction. Does not add anything new.

Point of View
3rd. person

Chart: Students’ completed analysis of “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?” from Lesson 2
“Take a piece of paper and head it with your name and date. Then turn to your partner,” I say, “and take about five to ten minutes to discuss the elements of a persuasive essay that are on the chart. Then decide on content criteria for the essay you will plan and compose. Which elements of a persuasive essay do you think we should include in our own?” Clipboard in hand, I make the rounds and listen to pairs’ discussion.

**Tommy & Jack**

“I know we need a lead,” Tommy says to Jack, “but I’m not sure what kinds are for persuading.”

“Don’t know either,” says Jack. And I make a note to explain that we will have a lesson on leads that work for persuasive pieces.

**Kendra & Kyla**

“We definitely need points for, and we have to make those against not work,” Kendra says to Kyla.

As I circulate, I hear students discuss the headings on the chart. The scaffolds are working, I think.

“Take a few minutes to jot suggestions for content criteria; work with your partner.”

**Cecily & Jay**

“There’s not much choice,” Cecily says.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Well, we need all of these things [chart headings]. No choice.”

“You’ll have choices with your topic, the kind of lead and ending you develop, the arguments you select and the way you position your arguments for and against the topic, the facts you include, and the experts you quote.”

“Can an expert be a student?” Jay asks.

“Sure, as long as they have experience and expertise. Now let’s develop the criteria.”

**Students >> Negotiate criteria and grading percentages.**

I begin by suggesting that the title should introduce the topic of the essay, and write this on the chart. I then ask them to volunteer other criteria, writing them under the appropriate categories after the group discusses, accepts, or rejects recommendations. We decide not to include using statistics and quoting an expert, even though these were in the mentor text, because we have little time for research. I finish by adding two conventions, paragraphing and varying sentence openings. Here’s what students negotiate:
After establishing the criteria, I either ask students to work in groups to suggest percentages for each section of criteria or assign percentages and have students offer adjustments. In addition to posting criteria for students while they plan and draft, I suggest giving them a copy of the criteria to place in their folders.

**Closing Routine**

I compliment the students for their participation in transforming elements of a persuasive essay into criteria for writing and evaluating. I encourage them to turn to the brainstormed details for their topics to see if they reflect these criteria before handing in their writing folders.
Assessing Students’ Needs

Who Got It?

The questions that follow, along with your observations and notes of partner discussions and students’ brainstorming and sharing, will enable you to decide who requires more experience with this kind of mentor text.

Could the student identify elements of a persuasive essay?

Did the student make the transition from the mentor text to setting criteria?

Did the partners suggest relevant criteria?

Did the student participate in negotiating criteria? Percentages?

If students have difficulty negotiating criteria for a persuasive essay . . .

• Adjust your expectations so students experience success. Adjustments can include:
  ○ requiring a specific type of lead and ending or giving them two choices;
  ○ including two to three points for and two against long summer vacations; and
  ○ suggesting how to position their arguments.

Once students see that they can write a persuasive piece, you can return to this genre and increase the expectations.

• Have a peer expert work with them and think aloud to showcase the process.

• Reteach for a small group and model the process, showing them step-by-step how to turn elements of a persuasive essay from an analysis into criteria.

If students can negotiate criteria for a persuasive essay . . .

• Search the Internet and/or interview an expert at school or by telephone for data to use in their essay.

• Have them continue to discuss their topic with a partner, brainstorm, and collect questions from their partner that enable them to add more details to their brainstorming.

• Discuss, with a partner, how they plan to position their arguments, lead, and end their essay.
Additional Ideas for Negotiating Criteria for a Persuasive Essay

- Invite students to study the structure of a newspaper editorial and develop criteria for this type of persuasive piece.
- Give students two to three persuasive essays by former students (remove names). Have them read these essays and discuss why the writers’ way of positioning the arguments was effective or ineffective. Finally, ask students to talk about how they would state their findings in criteria.
Lesson 4: Writing Leads and Endings for Persuasive Essays

How This Helps

“Can’t I just start with my opinion?” Joey asks. This question is typical of middle school students, especially if they wrote opinion paragraphs in earlier grades that opened with their position. Yes, I want students to weave their opinion into the lead, but a persuasive essay needs a well-developed lead or introduction, similar to the lead in the mentor text students studied.

I’ve positioned the lesson on leads and endings before inviting students to plan and draft because what students study and learn in this lesson will enable them to craft a lead and an ending that strengthen the effectiveness of their essay. I recommend that you present the lesson on leads on one day and the lesson on endings the next day. Separating these lessons helps students understand and absorb the specific ways to start and close a persuasive essay.

Before teaching this lesson, students should have their topics and brainstormed lists (Lesson 1). These lists, along with their knowledge of leads for persuasive pieces, will enable them to create plans that include possible leads and endings.

Invite Students To

Read different types of leads and endings.
Study examples of each type.
Discuss these with a partner.

What You Need

- Give out writing folders.
- Give each student a sticky note.
- Give students two handouts from the Resources CD-ROM: “Leads That Work for Persuasive Essays” and “Endings That Work for Persuasive Essays.”
- Prepare to display “Sample Endings for a Persuasive Essay” from the Resources CD-ROM (Day 2).
- Post the “Possible Persuasive Essay Topics” chart that the students brainstormed in Lesson 1 (Day 2).
- Prepare a clipboard with dated sticky notes.
Teaching the Lesson

DAY 1

Beginning with a lesson on leads gives students a manageable way to focus their essays.

Students >> Study examples of different types of leads.

As three students hand out writing folders, I give each student the handout with leads, endings, and examples and say, “Today, you’re going to study and discuss, with your partner, leads that are effective for persuasive essays. The examples are by former students. First, look at the leads. Today, we’ll focus on those, and you’ll practice writing at least two leads with your partner.”

Leads That Work for Persuasive Essays

1. Include important facts and statistics, such as percentages and survey results.
   
   Example: “Don’t diet. Eat less. Eat healthy. A survey by Gallup shows that 95% of people who go on crash diets gain back their weight.”

2. Start with an anecdote—a story snippet that introduces your topic and opinion.
   
   Example: “Imagine that Sally, a student, is the only one in the locker room. Everyone else is in the gym. She trips and falls. She can’t move because her leg hurts too much. But fortunately, her cell phone is handy, so she texts her mom, who calls the school. Within an hour Sally is in the emergency room having her leg x-rayed.”

3. Quote an authority on your topic.
   
   Example: “After-school clubs keep students engaged in their interests and off the streets,” said Mr. Farrell, principal of the school.

4. Include some background information about your opinion and choose a few details that grab the reader’s attention.
   
   Example: “Ten years ago there was no dress code at school. Like today, most students dressed appropriately. The guidance counselors spoke to students who were inappropriately dressed.”

Handout: Types of leads for persuasive essays

The handout is available on the Resources CD-ROM.
I read the leads out loud and then model how I think aloud, using the lead that incorporates statistics. First, I read the first sample lead again: “Don't diet. Eat less. Eat healthy. A survey by Gallup shows that 95% of people who go on crash diets gain back their weight.” Then I say, “Including a statistic, like the Gallup poll percentage that everyone recognizes, adds validity to your thesis statement. Whenever you can include facts—from a national poll, by calling a local doctor for a quote, by quoting a well-known expert—you strengthen your position.”

**Students Discuss effective leads with a partner.**

I ask students to pair-share for about ten to fifteen minutes and explain why each one of the leads is effective. While making the rounds, I listen to partners’ discussions and questions.

“Do we have to use one of these?” I repeatedly hear as I circulate.

I stop the discussion for a moment and tell students, “These are suggestions—worthy ones that might be unfamiliar to you, but definitely leads to consider. My standard for the lead is that it does a great job of introducing your opinion and grabbing readers’ attention. Try to focus your discussions on why these leads are effective for persuasive essays.” Here are points seventh graders made:

“Facts, stats, these you can’t argue with.”

“The anecdote works for narrative and this [a persuasive essay].”

“Anecdotes get you interested—stories are great.”

“An authority makes you think about the opinion. It should be a respected person.”

“To help you become even more familiar with these leads, I would like you and your partner to write two, using the topic you have chosen for your persuasive essay. Half the class will focus on numbers 1 and 2 in the students’ handout and the other half on numbers 3 and 4.” I point to the list of possible topics from Lesson 1 and say, “You can write a lead for any of the topics on the list or one you and your partner agree upon.”
Clipboard in hand, I make the rounds to listen to discussions, read partners’ leads, and stop to offer support. The handout examples written by middle school students made these leads accessible to seventh graders.

**Possible Persuasive Essay Topics**

- chew gum at school
- text during class
- have a recess each day
- no dress code
- more choices for lunch
- bring back the soda machine
- have a morning snack
- have a snack machine with healthy choices
- no homework on weekends
- early dismissal every Monday
- have classes start at 9:00 AM
- have a football team and practice
- more free reading time
- clubs that meet at school
- no sharing a bedroom with a sibling
- need more memorials for soldiers
- crash diets don’t work

**Chart:** Students’ brainstormed list of topics from Lesson 1

I close by finding something during the class to compliment and remind students to store the handout on leads and endings in their writing folders before stacking them on one student’s desk.
The leads students composed during the last class set them up to think about endings.

Study examples of different types of endings.

While Isaac and Isabelle hand out writing folders, I say, “Take out the handout headed ‘Endings That Work for Persuasive Essays’ from your writing folders. Today we’re going to study three effective ways to end a persuasive essay. The topic of your essay will help you decide which ending will be most effective.”

Endings That Work for Persuasive Essays

1. **Call the reader to action.**
   
   For example, in the mentor text essay “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?” the writer could have ended this way: “Speak up! Everyone in the community who values long summer vacations over year-round school should say so—by writing letters to the school principal, the school board, and the district’s state senator.”

2. **Make a logical prediction.**
   
   In an essay calling for students having cell phones at school, the writer could close with: “Having a cell phone handy could allow sick or injured students to contact a family member in an emergency and get the help they need.”

3. **Pose a thought-provoking question.**
   
   In an essay calling for a morning snack for middle school students, the writer can end with: “Should students be concentrating on their classes—or be distracted by their growling stomachs?”

Handout: Types of endings for persuasive essays

“Often, a student will end a persuasive essay by summarizing the main points. This works, but repeating the argument is not as effective as the three possible conclusions on your handout. All of these urge readers to make the change that you advocate. Now turn to your partner and take a few minutes to discuss the three endings.”

Next, I read the examples out loud, explaining each technique.

Since these endings are new to students, several ask me to show them how each one would work with their thesis statements. “I think hearing your thinking and
watching you write will help us understand each one better. “Here’s how I model the process for a thesis statement that calls for forming a middle school soccer team. I think aloud and reveal each sample ending as I go.

“If I’m asking students (my audience) to act, I need a call-to-action ending. I want them to write letters and emails, so I tell them who should receive letters and emails from them. Definitely write to the principal, the school board, parents, and coaches.” I show them the call-to-action sample and read it aloud.

“If I choose to make a prediction, I need to figure out the good things a soccer team will bring if the school gets one.” I read aloud the logical prediction sample.

“Finally, if I want to get students to take a side right away, I might use a thought-provoking question. I need to frame a question that makes students want to take action. With this topic, I think I’ll have to end with a few questions.” I read the last sample aloud.

**Sample Endings for a Persuasive Essay**

**Thesis statement:** Our middle school should have a soccer team.

**Audience:** Fellow middle school students

**Call to action ending**

A soccer team will raise school spirit and give more students a chance to learn a sport and play other schools. Help make this happen! Get the important players on board. Write or email parents, the principal, athletic coaches, and school board members. Sign up to speak at a school board meeting.

**Ending that makes a logical prediction**

Rallying the principal, school board members, coaches, and parents around forming a soccer team at school has many benefits—it will increase school spirit among students, add a popular sport to students’ choices, provide another after-school activity, and help more students stay in shape.

**Ending with a thought-provoking question**

Shouldn’t students who enjoy soccer have a chance to play that sport at school? Wouldn’t school spirit be improved if there were more sports games for students to attend and enjoy?

**Display:** Sample endings for a persuasive essay
Discuss effective endings with partners.

I have students turn to their partners and take two to three minutes to discuss these endings, and then ask them to share their thoughts.

“You struggled with the question,” Jenna says. I nod my head in agreement.

“I think the call to action is the best,” says Mark. Lots of “yeahs” echo around the room.

“Even though it’s possible to use any of these endings,” I say, “you will find that one of them works best with your topic. If you’re unsure which technique to try, compose two or all of them, read these to a partner, and ask your partner to offer an opinion.”

Use any remaining time for students to reread the brainstormed lists of persuasive topics that they created in Lesson 1 along with questions a partner generated. Now that they’ve let their brainstorming cool, they might have ideas to add.

Closing Routine

Close class by asking students to file their lists and ending handout at the back of their folders and stack folders on one student’s desk. Compliment students’ listening and contributions.
Assessing Students’ Needs

Who Got It?

Use your observations of students’ discussions, the sample leads partners wrote, and the questions that follow to determine who requires extra support.

Did partners’ discussion of the examples of leads and endings demonstrate that they understand why these are effective?

Were pairs able to compose two sample leads?

Did students understand the effectiveness of endings that do more than restate the original opinion?

If students have difficulty understanding leads and/or endings for a persuasive essay . . .

• Ask a peer expert to help them study other persuasive pieces, focusing on the leads and endings.

• Partner students and give them essays from former students to study. Ask students to classify the leads and endings.

If students understand leads and/or endings for a persuasive essay . . .

• Give them a writing plan form (see Lesson 5) to complete as long as you have approved their topic and brainstormed lists.

Additional Ideas for Leads and Endings for Persuasive Writing

• Download, from Leonard Pitts’ website, op-ed pieces that students can study, focusing on leads and endings. Go to: www.miamiherald.com/leonard_pitts/

• Collect editorials and op-ed pieces from newspapers that are appropriate for your students and have them study the leads and endings.

• Make persuasive essays by former students (remove their names) available and have partners study the leads and endings.
Planning a Persuasive Essay

**How This Helps**

Ann Robb, an eighth-grade teacher at Powhatan School in Boyce, Virginia, with whom I have worked with for years, observed, “I find that some middle school students can plan a short narrative and memoir in their heads. But they all need to plan their essays. Middle school students are more comfortable and familiar with narrative than the structure of different types of essays. In my classes, everyone completes a plan for an essay because it helps them collect and organize their ideas.”

I couldn’t agree more. Reviewing a plan for a persuasive essay permits me to see whether students have specific details, have shown that points against can be rebutted, and have thought about an effective lead and ending.

This lesson asks students to use their detailed brainstormed lists on their topics that they began in Lesson 1. Having two or three days to plan allows you to make the rounds, confer with each student, and offer students support and encouragement as well as ensure that they are on the right track.

**Invite Students To**

*Reread* their brainstormed lists.
*Complete* their writing plans.
*Peer-edit* their writing plans.

**What You Need**

- Give out writing folders.
- Make sure students’ writing folders contain a copy of the “Criteria for a Persuasive Essay” from Lesson 3.
- Give students the “Writing Plan for a Persuasive Essay” handout (see Resources CD-ROM) or use your own form.
- Make sure students have two Lesson 4 handouts: “Leads That Work for Persuasive Essays” and “Endings That Work for Persuasive Essays” (from the Resources CD-ROM).
- Prepare a clipboard with dated sticky notes.
To support students while they plan their persuasive essays, I give students one to two class periods to discuss their topics and add to their brainstormed lists, following the lesson format in Unit 1, Lesson 6.

**Discuss topics and reread brainstormed lists.**

I post the negotiated criteria for a persuasive essay chart (from Lesson 3) on the board, have a few students give out writing folders, and ask students to retrieve a copy of their brainstormed lists and the “Criteria for a Persuasive Essay” handout from their folders.

“Today, you’re going to plan a persuasive essay. Before you do, reread your brainstorming and see if you need to add anything. Do you have enough details to support your argument? Do you have ways to answer the point against it?”

Some students might prefer to organize their brainstorming under two headings: arguments for and arguments against. Others might prefer a free fall of ideas that can be organized at the planning stage. It’s also helpful for partners to exchange brainstormed lists, read each other’s, and then raise questions that send students back to generating more ideas.

**Complete planning forms.**

As students complete their brainstorming, I ask them to take a “Writing Plan for a Persuasive Essay” handout that’s on my desk and tell them, “You’ll have all or part of two to three classes to complete your plan. Refer to your handouts on leads and endings that work for persuasive essays as you consider a possible lead and ending for your essay. You can seek advice from a classmate or ask me questions as I make the rounds. Once I approve your plan, reread your brainstorming and plan a few times, put these aside, and then draft your essay. Remember, the more detailed you make your plan, the easier it will be to write your essay.”
Lesson 5: Planning a Persuasive Essay

As I circulate among students, I pause to okay plans and provide support. During two to three classes, I can confer with everyone and offer extra time to students who need prompting and/or modeling to complete their plans. I pause at Kendra’s desk because she is reading a book instead of working on her plan.

I notice Kendra has a title, “Healthy Snacks Make Healthy Students,” and arguments for her position, so she has a good start. I don’t chastise Kendra for reading but pull up a chair and sit next to her. Commenting on the reading will only escalate the frustration Kendra feels, so I concentrate on the writing.

“How’s your plan coming?” I ask.

Handout: Writing plan for a persuasive essay

As I circulate among students, I pause to okay plans and provide support. During two to three classes, I can confer with everyone and offer extra time to students who need prompting and/or modeling to complete their plans. I pause at Kendra’s desk because she is reading a book instead of working on her plan.

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“How’s your plan coming?” I ask.
"I can’t come up with arguments against a snack machine," she says.

“What do you think teachers might say?” I ask.

“It will take class time away from work,” says Kendra.

“Great point,” I say. “There’s your first argument against it. What about the custodians?”

“Yeah. They won’t like the wrappers and bits of food on the floor. That will be the biggest point against it, I think.”

“You’re on a roll,” I say. “Jot these down and figure out how you will show each is not a problem.” I move to Jared’s desk because he’s raised his hand.

“Jared

“How can I help?” I ask.

“Having trouble with the possible lead.”

“You’ve done a great job with your pros and cons,” I say. “And I love that in your ending you want students to write letters to the school board about cell phones at school. Do you want to quote someone? Or use an anecdote?”

“I’d like to use a question, but that’s not on the list.”

“A question can work. Do you have one in mind?”

“Yeah. Why might a cell phone at school be more helpful than annoying?”

“I like it,” I say. “It makes me think about the issues. Go for it. When you write the entire lead, run it by me.” I jot a reminder to check back with Jared on a sticky note to make sure I remember to check with him if he forgets to show me his introduction.

Circling Back

Take fifteen minutes from each class when students plan their essays and use this time to circle back and review specific nouns and pinpointing and repairing run-on sentences. Ask students to include specific details on their plans. For example, a seventh grader, Tamara, is writing against cosmetic companies using animals to test their products. Tamara uses the words abuse and harmful and shows surprise when I ask her to be more specific. Questions that I jot on a sticky note help Tamara: What is the abuse? How does testing products harm animals? This is the ideal time to circle back and nudge students to be specific, which in turn will affect the quality of their essays.
Each day, clipboard in hand, I make the rounds and listen to students’ questions, help them get “unstuck” by asking questions that provoke thinking. I also bring students back to the talk-about-your-topic stage so we can hear topic details and make sure all writers want to invest in their ideas. The planning stage is the ideal time for students to switch topics, and I encourage them to change, especially if I sense that their interest has waned.

**Closing Routine**

By the end of the planning process, all students have something on their planning forms. I compliment them on this and remind them to check the chart or their handout, “Criteria for a Persuasive Essay,” to make sure their plan reflects the content criteria.

**Assessing Students’ Needs**

**Who Got It?**

Use your observations of students completing their plans and the questions that follow to decide who can begin a first draft and who needs extra support with planning.

- Did the student create a working title that introduced the topic?
- Was the student able to craft a working lead?
- Did the ending go beyond the information in the essay?
- Did the student include specific details in her arguments for?
- Did the student have details that would refute the arguments against?
- Did the student require lots of support from a peer? From you?

**If students have difficulty planning a persuasive essay . . .**

- Discover the areas that pose difficulty, such as writing a working lead or listing the arguments for and against. Have the student return to his brainstormed lists and use that to complete one section a time. Check up on the student to make sure he’s on the right track.
- Support students who can’t get started. Take five to six minutes to work with individuals. Invite them to talk about their topics and write
their ideas on the planning form. Then ask them to complete a section. Continue to break the process down, turning the writing over to the student.

**If students are successful with planning a persuasive essay . . .**

- Have students read their plans and brainstormed lists several times before drafting their essay. If students want and need to re-skim their plans and brainstormed lists while drafting, that's fine.

- Pair up students. Have them discuss their plans and then start drafting. Often, talk helps students recall and expand on details from the plan. Let students reread sections of their plans when they need to refresh their memories.

**Additional Ideas for Planning a Persuasive Essay**

- Invite students to create their own planning forms, use them, and share these with the class.

- Have students create a planning form for an editorial and write one for the school or local newspaper.

- Encourage students who have finished their persuasive essay writing plans to exchange and comment on each other's ideas.
Lesson 6: Drafting a Persuasive Essay

How This Helps

“I can write a draft of a memoir or story and enjoy it. Essays are hard to do,” Kyle tells me as I make the rounds in his class. Kyle’s observation represents the feelings of many middle school students. Stories—telling them to one another and reading novels—have been an integral part of their at-school and at-home reading lives. Essays haven’t.

This lesson provides students with guidelines for drafting their persuasive essays, gathering peer feedback, and completing a second draft. The guidelines encourage students to reread sections of their essay plans to refresh their memories prior to writing. In addition to completing a quick self-check of their essay using the “Criteria for a Persuasive Essay,” student partners will peer-edit essays using the form on the Resources CD-ROM. Using peer feedback, students can improve their persuasive essays and write second drafts for their teachers to read.

On the days students compose, revise, and edit their first drafts, in addition to circling back lessons, take fifteen minutes from each class and teach Lesson 7, “Making Transitions Between Paragraphs,” and Lesson 8, “Paragraphing a Persuasive Essay.” Avoid feeling frustrated if students don’t get transitions because they will have this lesson many times before they graduate high school.

What You Need

› Give out writing folders.
› Make sure students’ writing plans from Lesson 5 are included in their folders.
› Print out for students and prepare to display “Guidelines for Completing a First Draft of Your Persuasive Essay” (from the Resources CD-ROM).
› Make sure students have the Lesson 4 handouts, “Leads That Work for Persuasive Essays” and “Endings That Work for Persuasive Essays,” in their writing folders.
› Have copies of “Peer-Editing a Persuasive Essay” (on the Resources CD-ROM) available for students who are ready for peer-editing (Day 2).
› Set up a clipboard with dated sticky notes.

Invite Students To

Reread their plans and brainstormed lists several times. Complete first drafts of their persuasive essays. Self-check their drafts against established criteria. Peer-edit a classmate’s draft.
As David, Cecily, and Kendra give out writing folders, I display “Guidelines for Completing a First Draft of Your Persuasive Essay” and hand out a copy of it to each student.

Students ➤ Reread plans and brainstormed lists and begin a first draft.

“Some of you have already begun drafting your persuasive essays; others are or will soon be ready to start. You will have most of three to five class periods to complete a first draft and peer-edit a classmate’s draft. Then you’ll have two to three extra classes to revise and edit your first draft and write your second draft. If you need more time, we can negotiate. You will all finish at different points during the week, and that is

Guidelines for Completing a First Draft of Your Persuasive Essay

Seek help from a classmate or teacher when you feel you’re stuck. If you want to discuss a passage or paragraph with a partner to clarify your thinking, do it.

1. Plan to write at least four paragraphs: the lead; a paragraph that addresses arguments for; a paragraph that addresses arguments against; and the ending.

2. Decide how you want to position your arguments:
   - Pros first, then cons
   - Cons first, then pros
   - All but one pro first; at the end of cons add your best pro point

3. Reread your plan and brainstormed list several times.

4. Get started by writing your working title and lead on your paper.

5. Write the for paragraph(s) that support your position. Return to the notes on your plan before or while you draft the paragraphs that contain arguments for and against. This can refresh your memory as you draft.

6. Write the against paragraph(s) and address these points.

7. Add the ending, your last paragraph.

8. Reread your lead and your ending. Now that you have a first draft, decide whether you want to try a different lead or ending. Number the lead and ending on your draft, and rewrite these on separate paper.

Display and Handout: Guidelines for completing the first draft of a persuasive essay
fine. Find a peer editor whose draft is ready for review at about the same time as yours. After you both complete your review, you’ll be able to revise and edit using your peer editor’s suggestions.”

“Today, you’ll be drafting your persuasive essay. If you’ve already begun, retrieve your writing plan and draft from your writing folder. If you haven’t yet, take a piece of paper, head it, and add the title of your persuasive essay. Also retrieve your writing plan and your handouts on leads and endings for persuasive essays.”

I read the points about drafting a persuasive essay out loud and ask everyone, even students who have begun the drafting process, to listen. I answer questions and set the class to work on their drafts. As I do every day during drafting, I make the rounds, clipboard in hand, for this is the ideal time to confer, validate writing, and suggest partnerships. Conferring, then, becomes an organic part of the writing process because as students work, I listen and support. Here are snippets of short conferences designed to move each student forward in the drafting process:

**Mark**

Mark raises his hand, and I navigate around desks to his. “How’s it going?” I ask.

“I can’t decide whether to put pros or cons first,” he says.

“Have you discussed this with a peer?” I ask. Mark shakes his head.

“Talk to David,” I suggest. “If that doesn’t help, see me.”

I’ve learned that often a student solves a problem like this one by hearing himself talk through his points with a peer.

**Olwen**

I stop at Olwen’s desk and see that she’s doodling around the margins of her paper. She is writing to advocate for scheduling morning snacks into the middle school day.

“You’ve written your title and lead,” I say. “Your lead is a grabber—very effective use of fragments: ‘No breakfast. No morning snack. Middle school students who are hungry focus on a growling stomach, not their schoolwork.’”

“I like it,” says Olwen. “But I’m not happy with how I’ve addressed the points against this. It’s lame,” she says.

“Show me what you have.”

“One of the points against is that snack time will create litter. I say that students will promise to throw crumbs and wrappers in the trash can. But I know they won’t all do this.” Olwen explains.
“I agree. How can you make that stronger?”

Grace, who sits in Olwen’s group, says, “I’ve got an idea. Have contracts requiring kids not to litter. One warning and if you break it [the contract], no more snacks for a month.”

“That’s good,” says Olwen, and she begins to incorporate Grace’s idea into her draft.

Brief, informal conferences help students solve problems that can become obstacles that slow down or stop the drafting process. Your continual availability can support students and move them forward. There will be times when you sit beside a student and write a few sentences or a paragraph that the student dictates in order to stoke the drafting fires. Do this as often as needed to build students’ self-confidence and self-efficacy.

**Closing Routine**

I’ve always been able to find excellent examples to compliment at the end of class. Today, I commend writing partners for helping to solve each other’s problems. I make sure students return their handouts and drafts to their writing folders by the end of class.

This portion of the lesson focuses on peer-editing followed by revision and editing. You’ll need to set aside at least two classes.

**Students ➢ Self-check drafts and peer-edit a classmate’s draft.**

Students are ready to peer-edit at different points in the drafting process. Some will finish their drafts in two to three days while others need the entire reserved time. At some point (it needn’t be Day 2!), review the peer-editing process with the whole class. Remind student editors to read their partner’s draft and check it against the negotiated criteria to suggest ways to improve the essay. Stress the importance of offering feedback that helps a partner revise and edit. I suggest peer editors start with positive comments and then use questions to point out needs (see Unit 1, Lesson 7, and Unit 3, Lesson 4 for more detailed suggestions). Make sure peer editors return their review sheets and the drafts to their partners and that writers read the suggestions carefully, using comments and questions to revise and edit.
On the board, share an example you’ve written or one from a student. Here’s one I have used:

**Peer-Editing a Persuasive Essay**

Writer’s name: ______________________________ Date: ____________________

☐ Self-evaluation or ☐ Peer-evaluation by ________________________________

1. For each section you read, find something positive to say.

2. Put suggestions in the form of a question. For example:
   - Can you add details to your lead paragraph?
   - Can you make your opinion clearer? More interesting?
   - Can your conclusion use a persuasive technique?
   - Can you add specific details to the examples for your argument?

Provide feedback on:

The title:

The lead paragraph:

Points for the position (at least two):

How the writer rebutted the points against the position:

The ending paragraph:

Sample: Peer-editing form

Now, in addition to supporting students who continue to draft, you’ll help peer editors find elements to praise, phrase their comments as questions, and make other constructive suggestions.

One class and part of a second class is all students usually need to write a second draft. Students arrange their work with the second draft on top; peer-editing, first draft, plan, and brainstormed list underneath it.
I read second drafts, offer feedback, and give two second-draft grades: one for content and style, and one for writing conventions. Students appreciate a second-draft grade, especially if I ask them to bring their work to a publishable draft and change the grade. Since students don’t revise and edit every second draft, it’s your choice whether you count or how much you weigh the second-draft grade.

Who Got It?

Use your observations of students’ drafting and discussions, your notes, and the questions that follow to determine who needs help and who can work independently.

Did the student use the guidelines for drafting a persuasive essay?
Did the student refer to her plan?
Did the student use her handout on leads and endings?
Did the student check her draft against the criteria?
Did the student use class time well?
Was the student able to peer-edit and offer helpful suggestions?
Did the student use peer-edits to complete revisions?
Did the student have difficulty getting started with drafting?

If students have difficulty drafting and peer-evaluating their persuasive essays . . .

• Invite a pair to work side-by-side so they can answer each other’s questions as they edit.

• Guide students who struggle to take their working title or lead from their plan and write it on their drafts. Often, just having writing on their paper gives them the confidence to continue. These students will probably refer to their plan more often than proficient writers.

Management Tip

As you make the rounds, you will be able to determine when it’s time to set a deadline date for students to complete revisions and edits on first drafts. You might have to nudge some students to use class time more productively, and setting a due date can accomplish this.
If students can draft and peer-evaluate their persuasive essays . . .

- Invite them to complete revisions and edits and run these by their peer editor.
- Have students start their second draft—the draft that the teacher reads and then offers additional feedback.

Additional Ideas for a First Draft of a Persuasive Essay

- Start a class blog and have students use it to persuade others. Go to www.blogspot.com and follow the directions to start your blog.
- Invite students who prefer drafting on the computer to use a computer in your room or in a colleague’s room.
- Have students who prefer working on their own self-edit their draft using the same form.
Making Transitions Between Paragraphs

How This Helps

“Transition. Ugh!” a new teacher vents as we discuss strategies for helping students transition between paragraphs. Even seasoned teachers feel tentative about showing students the importance of transition sentences and how to add them to an essay.

This lesson will offer you some strategies that can help all students, from struggling to proficient writers. However, I find that I always have students who can’t write transition sentences independently even after a great deal of scaffolding. From my perspective, that will always be the case in middle school. Making students aware of the need, repeating the lesson from genre to genre, and providing support can eventually enable students to absorb and apply techniques to their own writing.

What You Need

- Give out writing folders.
- Make sure all students have copies of the mentor text, “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?” from Lesson 2 or from the Resources CD-ROM.
- Prepare to display “Questions and Tips for Making Transitions Between Paragraphs” from the Resources CD-ROM.
- Set up a clipboard with dated sticky notes.

Invite Students To

Study transitions between paragraphs in a persuasive essay.

Apply what they learn about transitions to first drafts.
As three students hand out writing folders, I invite the rest of the students to look toward the back of their folders and retrieve the mentor text, “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?”

Study transitions between paragraphs in a persuasive essay.

I display “Questions and Tips for Making Transitions Between Paragraphs.”

Questions and Tips for Making Transitions Between Paragraphs

Look at your draft.

1. Is there a transition sentence at the end of most paragraphs?
2. Does the transition sentence smooth the way to the topic of the next paragraph?

If you need a transition . . .

• Know the topic of the paragraph that you are transitioning to.
• Use a statement to transition.
• Use a question to transition.
• Use words and phrases that introduce transition sentences: in addition, moreover, however, therefore, often.

"Today, you’re going to study the transition sentences that act as a bridge from one paragraph to another. In an essay, the last sentence of one paragraph should set the reader up for what’s to come in the next paragraph. Take a few minutes to skim the mentor text, ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’ Slow down when you read the last sentence of each paragraph and ask yourself, ‘How does this sentence pave the way for the information in the next paragraph?’"

“Let me show you how I analyze the transition from the lead to the second paragraph. Actually, the last two sentences of the first paragraph make the transition by stating that there are several downsides to a year-round school calendar and then summarizing three of the downsides that the author then addresses in the second


Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?

The final bell rings. It’s the last day of school, and summer has finally come! Students don’t have to think about school for at least another 2½ months. That is the way it should always be. Schools should continue using the traditional calendar and not a year-round schedule. There are numerous downsides to year-round schooling. It has no positive effects on education, it adds to costs, and it disrupts the long-awaited summer vacation.

Contrary to the well-accepted belief, year-round schooling has no constructive impact on education. Most year-round schedules use the 45-15 method: 45 days of school followed by 15 days off. Because of this, there are many first and last days of school. All those transitions disrupt the learning process. Also, there is no evidence of higher test scores. Due to that, many schools that change to year-round schedules end up switching back. For example, since 1980, 95 percent of schools that tried the year-round schedule changed back to a traditional calendar. It is obvious that changing to year-round schooling does not help students; therefore, why is the change necessary?

Like any other facility, keeping a school open requires a great deal of money. When a school changes to a year-round schedule, the costs skyrocket. Keeping school open in the middle of summer requires air conditioning, and that adds significantly to the school’s expenses. The usual utility bills grow because of the additional open-school time. Finally, teachers must be paid for all the weeks they are working. With all these factors, the cost of keeping schools open becomes immensely high. For example, a high school in Arizona had a cost increase of $157,000 when they switched to year-round schooling. Some schools may not be able to handle such increases, and other schools that can handle these expenses could be doing better things with the money. Is year-round school really where the money should go?

An important part of a child’s life is summertime. With year-round schedules, students would hardly have any time to relax. During the 15-day breaks, they would be thinking about their quick return to school. It would also be difficult to coordinate family vacations with parents’ work schedules. Turn to your partner and discuss how the author makes transitions. To do this, read the last one to two sentences of the prior paragraph together, figure out the topic of the second paragraph, and explain how or whether the final sentences of the first paragraph made the transition.”

While partners take about ten to fifteen minutes to read and discuss, I make the rounds and listen to conversations.
Kira notices, “The writer uses a question at the end of the second and third paragraphs. Cool. I like that a lot.”

Cecily wonders, “Is a question better than a statement?”

“No,” I respond. “Use the sentence type that makes the best transition. Try a question or a statement, read it out loud to yourself and a partner, and choose the one you feel makes the best transition.”

When discussions wane, I call students’ attention to “Questions and Tips for Making Transitions Between Paragraphs” and ask them to jot tips they find useful on scrap paper for their writers’ notebooks.

Students ➢ Use transition sentences in persuasive essays.

I use the remaining fifteen to twenty minutes of class for students to check to see that they have transition sentences between the paragraphs of the first draft of their persuasive essay and encourage them to check their work with a partner.

Circling Back

Circulate and answer questions. In every grade, there will be students who find this extremely difficult. You might have to write transition sentences for some students and think aloud to make your process visible. Help them and circle back to this lesson when students learn how to write analytical and informative essays. If students need additional time to revise for transition sentences, point out that they will have the time while peer-editing and revising first drafts.

Jake, a seventh grader, had difficulty making transitions. Over two consecutive days, I supported him by asking questions that enabled him to attend to transitions. His thesis, “I believe students should be able to chew gum at school,” was his transition to his second paragraph that discussed arguments for this position. Using one of the ideas at the end of this lesson (in the “If students have difficulty making transitions between paragraphs . . .” section), I asked Jake to tell me the content of his third paragraph. “Umm, it says that chewing gum relieves stress and can help us concentrate in class and do better on tests ‘cause gum stops the stress and helps us think.”
I ask, “How can you set the reader up for that paragraph? Your second discusses how chewing gum tastes good and whitens your teeth.” No response.

I decide to scaffold more and ask, “Can you compose a sentence that starts with ‘in addition’ and give readers an idea for the content of the third paragraph?” Long pause, but I wait. “Say your sentence and I’ll jot it for you,” I tell Jake.

“In addition, chewing gum can improve your schoolwork.”

“That will work so well,” I tell Jake. “Tomorrow, add the transition sentence to the paragraph that addresses an opposing argument and have Mark help you through the process. Then show me what you’ve written.”

Repetition and scaffolding can help students develop a process for adding transition sentences until they start to do this when drafting. The amount of time and support middle school students require varies. Know that at times you will feel as frustrated as students. When this happens, end the lesson, let a day or two pass, and try again.

**Closing Routine**

I close class by acknowledging how challenging transition sentences are and complimenting the students on their efforts. As usual, their drafts and notes on transitions go back into their writing folders, which get handed in.

**Assessing Students’ Needs**

**Who Got It?**

Observe students while they peer-edit each other’s persuasive essays to see if they can add effective transition sentences to first drafts. The questions that follow can also help you support students:

- Did the student contribute ideas during the discussion of the transition sentences in the mentor text?
- Could the student pinpoint a need for transition sentences while peer-editing?
- Did the student successfully add needed transition sentences to her draft?
**If students have difficulty making transitions between paragraphs . . .**

- Have students do the following on their own or with a peer expert's support:
  - Reread their lead paragraph and the first sentence of the second paragraph.
  - Use the topic of the second paragraph to jot some ideas for writing a transition sentence at the end of the lead paragraph. (Thinking out loud can help because the student's partner can use what the student says to offer support.)
  - Use the notes to craft a transition statement or question.
  - Continue this process for adding transition sentences to the rest of the essay.

- Organize students into pairs. Ask students to underline their transition sentences and with their partner test whether each is effective. Have students revise transition sentences that need improving.

**If students can make transitions between paragraphs . . .**

- Ask students to write a second draft after revising and editing their first drafts.

**Additional Ideas for Studying Transitions Between Paragraphs**

- Have students study the transitions between paragraphs using another mentor text or an essay by a former student. (Remove names.)

- Ask students to study writers' transitions in newspaper editorials and op-ed pieces (opinion editorials).

- Have a small group of proficient writers learn about using transition words in a persuasive essay and share their knowledge with the entire class. Go to this link: www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/lessons/606/.
Paragraphing a Persuasive Essay

How This Helps
"Not one paragraph marked" or “The first paragraph is marked—that’s all.” We’ve all seen student writing without paragraphs, and it does raise our frustration levels. However, that’s typical of first-draft writing when middle school students invest their energy in getting the content down. For me, paragraphing becomes a problem when students can’t mark paragraphs when editing first drafts.

This lesson will raise students’ awareness of paragraphing a persuasive essay by studying the mentor text, “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?” Students will also discuss how the organization of their arguments can impact the way they paragraph their essay.

Invite Students To

Study the relationship of positioning arguments and paragraphing.
Discuss with a partner other ways of positioning arguments.
Create a chart of suggestions of ways to position arguments.

What You Need

- Give out writing folders.
- Prepare two new charts titled “Guidelines for Paragraphing a Persuasive Essay,” and “Ways to Position Your Argument.”
- Make sure students all have copies of the mentor text, “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?” from Lesson 2 or from the Resources CD-ROM.
- Set up a clipboard with dated sticky notes.
While three students hand out writing folders, I begin a chart, writing the title “Guidelines for Paragraphing a Persuasive Essay.”

**Students Study and discuss paragraphing in a persuasive essay.**

I ask the class to take the mentor text “Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?” out of their folders and to head a piece of paper with their names and the date.

“Reread ‘Summer: 15 Days or 2½ Months?’ and think about paragraphing. Why did the author start new paragraphs where she did? Next, turn to your partner and take five to ten minutes to discuss how the writer paragraphed this essay.”

Clipboard in hand, I make the rounds and listen to partner discussions.

“It’s easy to see it [paragraphing] when it’s done,” says Katie. “I have trouble figuring it out in my stuff [writing].”

“You have a great point,” I say. “But if we look at how this writer does it and some guidelines, you can be more successful.” Others agree with Katie’s observation. I know that for students to improve with paragraphing, I have to raise their awareness of when to paragraph and have them apply what they learn to editing their own work.

Once students have had a chance to talk about the mentor text, I guide the class discussion to conclude that the paragraphs reflect the organization of the persuasive essay. A new paragraph starts each new section.

I jot “the lead”; “the ending”; “arguments for your opinion”; and “arguments against your opinion” on the chart on the board.

Joey asks, “Can you have two paragraphs for arguments if you have a lot?”

“I think so,” says Kendra. “If it [the paragraph] goes on and on, it can be confusing.”

“We only have to write about three arguments so I guess one paragraph will work,” observes Cecily.

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“Excellent points,” I say. And I add Joey’s idea to the chart. “Now that you have your arguments arranged in paragraphs, how are you going to organize those paragraphs?” I remind them that in their drafting directions (Lesson 6), I suggested three ways to organize their arguments: pros first, then cons; cons first, then pros; all but one pro first with the best pro at the end of the cons.

Chart: Guidelines for Paragraphing a Persuasive Essay

Make separate paragraphs for:

- the lead;
- the ending;
- arguments for your opinion;
- arguments against your opinion; and
- if you have four or more arguments for your opinion, you might need two paragraphs.

Chart ways to position arguments.

While students talk, I title a chart “Ways to Position Your Arguments.” Then, clipboard in hand, I listen to students’ discussions. Without my telling them, students use the mentor text for ideas. After some discussion, they not only recall what they had learned earlier but also suggest adding to the guidelines. I summarize the possibilities on a chart.

Ways to Position Your Arguments

1. Begin with arguments against and end with arguments for.
2. Begin with arguments for, but save your best argument for to put at the end of the paragraph with arguments against.
3. Pick arguments against that you believe lots of people will say, and make them work for your opinion.
4. Always use the top arguments for your topic, and start and end with the very best ones.

Chart: Students’ ideas for positioning arguments
Lesson 8: Paragraphing a Persuasive Essay

I then suggest a strategy for students to use when paragraphing and organizing their drafts:

1. Use the paragraph symbol (¶) to mark the paragraphs on your first drafts.
2. Read your first draft out loud and listen carefully to the position of the arguments. If you want to reposition arguments, number the sentence(s) or paragraphs in the order you want them in your next draft. Then when you rewrite it, write them in your new order.

It's helpful if students paragraph their drafts immediately after the lesson on paragraphing and positioning arguments because the discussion is at the forefront of their minds. Moreover, the second draft you read will be greatly improved.

**Closing Routine**

Compliment students on their paragraphing work before making sure they file their drafts in their writing folders.

**Assessing Students’ Needs**

**Who Got It?**

Use your observations of students’ discussions and the ideas they contributed plus the questions that follow to decide who needs help and who can work independently.

Did the student understand that arguments in a persuasive essay can be organized differently?

Did the student understand the basic paragraphing points: separate the lead and ending paragraphs; divide the body into paragraphs according to the arguments?

Could the student explain the paragraphing in the mentor text?

Could the student return to his first draft and mark the paragraphs?

**If students have difficulty paragraphing their persuasive essays . . .**

- Show students the list of guidelines for paragraphing a persuasive essay. Read their drafts aloud, identifying the end of the lead paragraph. Have
them use the paragraph symbol (¶) to separate the lead paragraph from the second paragraph. Do the same for the ending paragraph. Next, have students separate the body into two to three paragraphs using the position of their arguments to help them accomplish this.

• Partner these students with peers who can paragraph. Have the students read their work aloud, listen for changes in the position, and with the support of a partner, mark the paragraphs using the paragraph symbol (¶).

If students can paragraph their persuasive essays . . .

• Have students complete their second drafts and self-check their work against the peer-evaluation suggestions and the criteria.

• Invite students to complete an extra persuasive project: a speech, editorial, letter to the editor, or op-ed piece.

Additional Ideas for Paragraphing a Persuasive Essay

• Have students investigate a blog to study the paragraphing these writers use. Send them to the blogs posted by East Middle School Library; all blogs on this website have been researched and approved by the school’s librarian. This website is at: http://east.mesa.k12.co.us/library/persuasivewritingblogs.htm
Quick and Easy Professional Study Suggestions

Take fifteen to twenty minutes twice a month to meet with colleagues and choose one item to discuss each time you meet.

1. **Discuss leads and endings.** Figure out the positives of your minilessons on leads and endings for persuasive essays by sharing what worked. Then troubleshoot and bring up areas that you feel need additional thought. Gather suggestions from colleagues.

2. **Bring sample first and second drafts.** Bring a first and second draft that illustrates excellent improvement and one where the student made a few token revisions. First, celebrate successes and then turn your discussions to figuring out ways you can help students who complete minimum revisions.

3. **Discuss transition-sentence lessons.** Share with colleagues your lesson on transition sentences and discuss what worked well and what didn’t help students. By exchanging experiences and ideas, you can explore alternate ways to teach students how to make effective transitions between paragraphs.

4. **Share accommodations for English language learners and writers who struggle.** Discuss ways you adjusted the criteria and your lessons for students who require accommodations to experience success. Which lessons did you emphasize? De-emphasize? How did you help this group succeed?
Thank you for sampling this resource.

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