

# Study Guide for *Get It Done! Writing and Analyzing Informational Texts to Make Things Happen*

Teaching the Reading and Composing of Informative/Explanatory Texts

~ Chapters 1–5 ~

**Purpose:** This reading guide can be used as a vehicle for discussion or an exchange of ideas with colleagues as part of a study or reading group as well as a resource for generating ideas, plans, and lessons you can undertake with your students.

The focus of this book is teaching reading and composing of informative/explanatory texts. The foci of your course include *teaching through inquiry* and *applying informative/explanatory texts* in our teaching, as the Common Core State Standards call for. This reading guide will address both purposes.

## Chapter 1 Laying the Foundation

In the first chapter you get an introduction to informative/explanatory texts that includes a definition of what the authors mean when they say informative/explanatory as well as a hierarchy of the different types of texts they will explore throughout the book. There is also an emphasis on teaching informative/explanatory texts in real-world contexts and in service of citizenship.

<p><b>REACT</b> <i>(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)</i></p>	<p>“As cited in the introductory CCSS documents: ‘Evidence concerning the demands of college and career readiness gathered during development of the CCSS concurs with NAEP’s shifting emphases: standards for grades 9–12 describe writing in all three forms (narrative, argument, informative/explanatory), but, consistent with NAEP, the overwhelming focus of writing throughout high school should be on arguments and informative/explanatory texts’” (1).</p>	
--	--	--

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

Early on in the chapter, the authors argue that an “emphasis on informative/explanatory texts will require teachers in all subjects to deeply understand how they work, how to teach them, and how to help the students use them to get real work done” (2). Go to the Reading or Writing Informational Standards for your grade level and content area and identify one standard that will achieve one or more of the requirements above. Paste the standard and write a brief explanation of how it will encourage deep understanding and/or getting “real work done.”

**REFLECT**

What is your understanding of what the authors refer to as “thought patterns” (5)?  
What are some thought patterns that are unique and natural for experts in your discipline/content area?

## Chapter 2 Thinking About the Structures Behind Informational and Explanatory Texts

In this chapter the authors define the characteristics of informative/explanatory texts and provide a more detailed definition of each text structure in their hierarchy of informational texts. They also discuss the importance of understanding through categorizing and teaching through thought patterns.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Cause–effect structures explain the relationship between an impetus or set of causes and consequences (at least for events that have already occurred—anything predictive clearly seems to be an argument)” (15).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

Find a reading or writing standard for Informational Texts at your grade level that you feel you could meet through teaching one of the text structures defined in Chapter 2. Copy that standard onto the third column, bolding the words or phrases that are most significant to you. Then, write a brief description (1–4 sentences) of your thinking about *how* the standard could be met through that specific text structure.

**REFLECT**

What is a text you teach that your students struggle with? What are some things you do (or could do) to help students “learn *how* to read” the “thought patterns” of the text and to meet “the demands” of that specific text structure (17)?

**REACT**

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“When you teach students information, or the *what*, they will quickly forget it even if they do well on information-driven, fill-in-the-blanks kind of tests. And they won’t have learned any *processes*, the kind of learning foregrounded by the CCSS that transfers to future knowledge production and problem solving” (21).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

Return to the CCSS  
Informational/Explanatory reading or writing standards at your grade level and identify a different standard that you could use as an example of Procedural Knowledge. Paste it in the third column and explain (1) why you believe it is procedural and not conceptual, and (2) whether it is Procedural Knowledge of Substance or Form and how you know.



**REFLECT**

Consider a text structure you currently teach and, using Jeff's example of the Inquiry Square for the Fable Unit, articulate the following:

- Knowledge of Purpose
- Procedural Knowledge of Substance
- Procedural Knowledge of Form
- Declarative Knowledge of Substance
- Declarative Knowledge of Form

**Chapter 4 Five Kinds of Composing:  
Making Informational Texts and Making Them Matter**

Chapter 4 provides a definition of *composing* and a rationale for using that term rather than the term *writing*. It then moves to a detailed description and definition of each of the Five Kinds of Composing that go along with the Five Kinds of Knowledge.

**REACT**

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“[George] Hillocks’ work has convinced us that students can and do learn to write by doing many things that are not writing (hands-on activities, visualizing, debates, group problem-solving activities, small-group discussions), all of which involve talking about content *and* process and all of which represent content *and* process through composing of one sort or another” (37).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

In Chapter 4, the authors point out that the new Smarter Balanced and PARCC Performance Tasks require a form of Composing to Transfer. Browse through some of the assessment samples (posted under Resources on the wikispace) and identify and discuss where you see Composing to Transfer. How is this different from assessments we have seen in the past?

**REFLECT**

Identify one type of composing you already have students do regularly in your classroom and explain a specific context that illustrates how you use it.

Identify one type of composing you don't have students do regularly and come up with a specific lesson or unit where you could add it.

## Chapter 5 The Process and Practical Context of Inquiry

Chapter 5 provides an overview of inquiry and is organized as a series of FAQs about teaching through inquiry. This chapter serves as a follow-up to *Engaging Readers and Writers Through Inquiry* (Wilhelm) and may address some of the questions you had after reading and discussing that text. Your responses in this section will be slightly different as we would like you to use the information to start thinking about planning on inquiry unit.

**TAKE ACTION**  
*(Begin the first steps of planning a unit)*

Consider the discussion of essential questions in the beginning of the chapter. List two to three units you know you will teach next year and brainstorm possible essential questions for those units.

**RESEARCH**

*(Begin gathering resources)*

Choose one of the units and essential questions above and find informative/explanatory texts outside your textbook that you could teach as part of the unit. Remember that you want to focus on “putting things together that go together” (52) and that there are many types of text structures that the authors classify as “informative” (see Chapters 1 and 2).

**TRY SOMETHING**

Under the second FAQ “Once you have an essential question, what do you do?” the authors list and explain strategies for each of the Five Kinds of Composing. Choose *one* strategy under ONE category that you can fit into your instruction in the next couple of weeks. Explain what it is and how you can use it. If possible, try the strategy and write a reflection on how it went.

~ Chapters 6–Conclusion ~

**Purpose:** This reading guide can be used as a vehicle for discussion or an exchange of ideas with colleagues as part of a study or reading group as well as a resource for generating ideas, plans, and lessons you can undertake with your students.

The focus of this book is teaching reading and composing of informational/explanatory texts. The foci of your course include *teaching through inquiry* and *applying informative/explanatory texts* in our teaching, as the Common Core State Standards call for. This reading guide will address both purposes.

<b>Chapter 6 Naming and Listing: Prerequisites for Problem Solving and Performing the Possible</b>		
<p>Chapter 6 begins the series of chapters further explaining each of the text-structures included in the hierarchy of informational/explanatory texts. The chapter starts off explaining why naming and listing is important, including how we name and list things. In an inquiry unit exploring the question <i>What does it take to survive and thrive in middle school?</i> the authors move to the concrete examples of naming and listing for the Five Kinds of Composing.</p>		
<b>REACT</b> <i>(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)</i>	<p><i>“Our major point is this: listing and naming . . . are basic prerequisites to all the other text-structures considered to be informational/explanatory” (80).</i></p>	



**REFLECT**

Chapter 6 includes many specific examples of how listing can be used in the context of a unit. Choose one example the authors include and explain how you could adapt it for a unit you teach or for a potential inquiry unit you might plan in the future.

## Chapter 7 Getting to the Point: The Process and Promise of Summary

In this chapter the authors move to the next text structure in the hierarchy, summarizing. It begins with an explanation of why summary matters and what's involved in the process of summarizing. It then moves to series of summarizing strategies presented in the context of an inquiry unit on the question *What does it take to be informed voters?* The chapter concludes with a focus on proofreading and composing to transfer through summarizing.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Summary is a basic cognitive skill and a general process of reading and composing, meaning that all successful readers and composers necessarily bring forward the gist of a text every time they successfully read or compose” (82).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

As the authors point out in the first marginal note (on page 81), summarizing is explicitly mentioned in CCSS reading anchor standard 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. What do you think about the placement of summarizing in this standard? What does this suggest about the teaching of summary?

**REFLECT**

Consider the many summarizing strategies the authors include in this chapter. Choose one that you can add to an existing unit or to an inquiry unit you are planning for the future. List the strategy and explain how you would adapt it to fit your unit.

## Chapter 8 Getting Oriented and Directed: Description and Process Description/Explanation

Chapter 8 begins with an explanation of why descriptions and process descriptions matter, particularly in the disciplines. The chapter moves through a series of lesson ideas for teaching the Five Kinds of Composing for descriptions, followed by the same for process descriptions. This chapter includes a number of lesson ideas as well as explicit connections to the CCSS.

### **REACT**

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Process descriptions are the basis of history; of methodology in math and science; and of many other subjects” (110).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

Chapter 8 includes lesson ideas with notes about specific CCSS standards that are met in the lesson. Choose one lesson and explain *how* the lesson meets one of the CCSS standards listed. (This process will be very important as you start to work with administrators, curriculum directors, and other teachers to implement the CCSS in your schools and districts.)

**REFLECT**

Chapter 8 includes many lesson ideas for how descriptions and process descriptions can be used in the context of a unit. Choose one lesson idea explain how you could adapt it for a unit you teach or for a potential inquiry unit you might plan in the future.

## Chapter 9 Divining and Defining What's the Big Definition?

In this chapter the authors move to the next text structure in the hierarchy, definition. They argue that definitions are a prerequisite to comparing and contrasting and further explain the two different types of definitions: definitions and extended definitions. They present examples of essential questions for different disciplines that lend themselves to extended definitions as culminating projects. The chapter then offers several examples of frontloading extended definitions and lesson ideas for composing to practice, draft, final drafts, and for transfer.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Definition is central to much of what we do both in and out of school” that it’s hard for us to imagine anyone not thinking that definition is an important structure to teach. “If our students are to be good citizens, if they are to be successful in any discipline, they have to learn to define” (122).



**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

The word *definition* appears in CCSS writing standard 2b at all grade levels and in all disciplines. Locate that portion of the standard for your grade level and discipline and (1) write the standard out, and (2) explain how you can incorporate the standard in a specific unit or lesson plan.

**REFLECT**

Consider the many ideas for incorporating definitions and extended definitions that are presented in this chapter. Choose one that you can add to an existing unit or to an inquiry unit you are planning for the future. List the strategy and explain how you would adapt it to fit your unit.

## Chapter 10 Comparing and Contrasting: But What's the Difference?

Chapter 10 follows the same format as the other chapters, beginning with an explanation of why comparing and contrasting matter, particularly given how frequently we engage in comparing and contrasting in our lives. The chapter then introduces a several essential questions that lend themselves to comparing and contrasting, including a unit around the question *What influences us?*, which is the basis for the explanation of Five Kinds of Composing and instructional activities that are focused on comparing and contrasting.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

You may notice that we are citing many of the same CCSS standards for different activities. This is the beauty of having fewer standards—it offers the opportunity to transfer those skills to new and different situations for multiple exposures in different contexts.

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

In this chapter the authors point out that research and multiple modalities are emphasized in the CCSS. How would you explain this to one of your colleagues or an administrator who was interested in knowing more about the CCSS and, specifically, what is emphasized in the standards? How might you help them understand that research and multiple modalities are “Key Design Considerations” of the CCSS?

**REFLECT**

Consider the Comparison and Contrast Think-Aloud the authors present on pages 148–52. What is an example that is specific to the course you teach that you could use to model this process? Explain how this would fit in a unit you already teach or in an inquiry unit you might design.

**Chapter 11 Classification:  
The Most Powerful Thought Pattern in the World?**

This chapter begins with a thorough description of how classification matters, including its critical role in modern science, research, and data and in being human. The unit idea for this chapter involves a group of teachers exploring the question *What are the types of, causes of, effects of, and solutions to poverty?* in the context of a course on teaching for social justice. The chapter moves through the Five Kinds of Composing within the context of this unit, including numerous lesson ideas as well as templates for writing essential questions that lend themselves to classification.

**REACT**

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Classification is so crucial to human activity that the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss famously remarked that ‘man is the classifying animal’ (cited in Gardner 1982). Forget the thumb or language, he maintained—what makes us human and allows all uniquely human endeavors is our capacity to sort and categorize” (171).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

Chapter 11 includes lesson ideas with notes about specific CCSS standards that are met in the lesson. Choose one lesson and explain *how* the lesson meets the CCSS standards listed and include at least one more CCSS standard you think is met in the lesson. (This process will be very important as you start to work with administrators, curriculum directors, and other teachers to implement the CCSS in your schools and districts.)

**REFLECT**

Consider the list–group–label strategy described on page 178. What is a set of data you could use for a list–group–label in a unit you teach or an inquiry unit you might design? Explain how classifying the particular data you have chosen will help them understand something important in the unit.



**Chapter 12 Problem–Solution and Cause–Effect:  
So What’s the Problem?  
and  
Conclusion Bringing It All Together:  
Working Toward Opportunity and Possibility**

The final chapter begins with an explanation of why problem–solution and cause–effect text structures are at the top of their informative/explanatory hierarchy, including a qualifier explaining why they were not included in the book on argument. It then follows the familiar pattern of explaining the Five Kinds of Composing for problem–solution in the context of the unit *What are our civil rights and how can we best protect them?*, followed by the same for cause–effect and the question *How can we really establish the truth?*

The book concludes with a final note about the importance of teaching through inquiry in order to assist students in reading and composing informational/explanatory texts and for making learning relevant.

**REACT**

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“We want to cultivate—both in ourselves and in our students—a problem-seeking and problem-solving mentality. We want to encourage proactivity versus reactivity: a tomorrow mind instead of a yesterday mind. Denial or just plain avoidance is an all too-human problem—and it needs solving! As a culture we avoid and deny problems” (196).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

On page 197, the authors explain why they have included these two text types in the book and how they define problem–solution and cause–effect texts that are informational. What is your response to this decision (on the part of the authors and the CCSS designers)? What is an example of a problem–solution or cause–effect topic from a course you teach that fits the informational definition the authors include? Explain. What is an example of a problem–solution or cause–effect topic for a course you teach that fits the argument definition the authors include? Explain.

**NEXT STEPS**

The conclusion wraps up with the hope that this book gives you ideas about how to devise effective instruction to meet the CCSS and to teach informative/explanatory reading and composing. Whether you are taking the third credit of this course or not, we hope your next step will be to design an inquiry unit that involves informative/explanatory reading and composing. What is the first unit you will plan? What are possible essential questions? What types of informative/explanatory text types will be involved in the unit?