

CCSS Writing Types

The CCSS writing types are modes of discourse that writers and speakers use to organize and communicate their thinking. Each type acts like a lens through which a writer presents content in specific ways to a reader. For example, an argument about climate change presents the topic differently than an informational report. Writers construct compositions employing a mode's elements (e.g. structure, language, logic) to achieve an effect based on purpose and audience. Conversely, readers use knowledge of text types to help them follow a writer's line of thought and purpose. The LDC Framework has developed task templates for each of the three types of writing cited in the Common Core State Standards: argumentation, informational/explanatory, and narrative. These tasks require writing in response to reading and non-fiction writing in each mode.

Although information is provided in both arguments and explanations, the two types of writing have different aims. Arguments seek to make people believe that something is true or to persuade people to change their beliefs or behavior. Explanations, on the other hand, start with the assumption of truthfulness and answer questions about why or how. Their aim is to make the reader understand rather than to persuade him or her to accept a certain point of view. In short, arguments are used for persuasion and explanations for clarification. (CCSS Appendix A, p. 23)

Argumentation

Argumentation tasks ask student writers to take a position and provide a convincing set of reasons for that position. In such compositions, a position is called a “claim”, and the writer backs it up with textual evidence gathered from texts, experts, or research. The writer engages in supporting or proving his or her claim throughout the composition. The more credible the reasons and supports cited are, the more convincing the argument.

Argumentation requires student writers to learn and apply skills that result in a convincing composition. To be convincing, a writer must develop a logic supported by relevant, accurately cited evidence and relate that evidence closely to their claim, using language that makes these connections. In academic settings, readers expect the language of the discipline and any protocols assigned to a document type. For example, science readers would expect an abstract at the beginning of the paper. An editorial reader would not necessarily expect academic citations but rely on the quality of the writer's reasoning and references. A skill writers of argumentation should develop is their awareness of bias, their own and the bias of sources. Doing so better ensures that compositions are not purely opinion.

Argumentation tasks often start with a question that forces the writer to argue “yes” or “no” and sometimes “maybe.” Questions that begin with “to be” verbs (is, was) and “to do” verbs (does, did) or “which” lend themselves to argumentation. Below are some examples. (Note: to answer these questions students would engage in texts.)

- Is Iago a sympathetic character?
- Was Valley Forge the turning point in the American Revolution?

Informational/Explanatory

This mode involves expository writing used to explain, describe, and inform. Tasks that ask student writers to inform or describe the reader about a topic are clearly informational; tasks that ask writers to explain or explore a topic are explanatory. The purpose of informational writing is to give information to the reader or describe something accurately. It's found in manuals, memos, reports, and technical documents. Explanatory writing explores an idea or topic, sometimes as a skeptic, to help the reader think about the topic. Its purpose is to not to conclude but to consider. Explanatory writing is often speculative and the form favored by essayists, editorialists, and journalists.

Following are some sample questions for explanatory tasks taken from Appendix B in the CCSS document:

- How does the theme of “nature vs nurture” emerge and how it is shaped and refined over the course of the novel?
- What do these two works have in common?

Informational Tasks describe or relate information or procedures:

- How do cells divide?
- What methods should an ethnographer use when gathering data about a social issue?

Narrative

In the LDC Framework narrative writing is non-fiction writing that describes an account of an event or experience. Information and content for these products can be gathered through polling, interviewing, and researching. Narrative template tasks were included to offer students an opportunity to write for a general audience and employ stylistic devices not used in more formal writing. As in the other two modes, LDC narrative writing requires textual or other kinds of evidence to support a controlling idea. This mode is a good opportunity for students to write up interviews, conduct polls, research background for a news report or documentary, and write manuals. Following are sample questions for narrative accounts?

- What events led up to the 1964 Selma Sit-Ins?
- How do you build a bridge?

Resources:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/> (See 7-12 grades section)

<http://www.moonstar.com/~acpjr/Blackboard/Common/Glossary/ModesDiscourse.html>

www.oneworldeducation.org