

Lesson Skill: Writing counterarguments

Strand Writing

SOL 11.6

12.6

Materials

- A rough draft of an essay or research paper that the students have already composed
- Sample argumentative essay in Classical Argument format (do an Internet search)
- *Peer Editing* sheet
- Highlighters

Lesson

1. Students print a copy of a rough draft of an argumentative paper that can be written on by themselves and their peers.
2. Review the process of peer editing with students. Students work in groups of four, so each student's paper will be read by three other students. Students make positive comments as well as constructively critical comments.
3. Discuss the reasons that counterarguments are important to making a complete and reasonable argument. Touch on the ideas that counterarguments are necessary to render the other side's argument impotent and that agreeing with some parts of a counterargument help appease the other side and may spur some agreement with the writer's side of the argument. Many Web sites have informative sections on counterarguments that can be used to formulate a mini-lesson or create a presentation. Consider using a multi-media presentation with this lesson so students can see examples of counterarguments and their effectiveness. Review the sections of the Classical Argument format and their purposes (see teacher-made handout). Distribute copies of a sample Classical Argument essay.
4. Students read the essay and see if they can draw lines between the different sections of the essay format and label the sections. Students pay particular attention to the counterargument section. Students highlight each of the counterarguments addressed and prepare to discuss whether or not the author used them effectively. How could they have been used more effectively? Were any obvious counterarguments missing?
5. After student discussion is finished, peer editing of the papers will take place. Distribute the peer editing sheets (attachment), divide students into groups of four, and review the peer editing sheet. Make sure students understand that along with the regular peer editing for grammar, punctuation, and style; they will also read to formulate and suggest counterarguments for the writer.
6. Allow time for the peer editing process. When students get their own papers and the counterargument suggestions back, they discuss their ideas with each other,

perhaps even argue them. Student writers then decide if they want to include suggested counterarguments.

7. The peer editing assignment could be turned into an online discussion. Students can post their papers in an on-line discussion and assign specific students to read and comment on specific papers. This assignment could lend itself well to an electronic conversation about possible counterarguments and their validity.

Strategies for Differentiation

- Simplify process: have students write an argumentative essay, identify counter arguments, and write another essay related to the counter arguments. Finally, have students compare both arguments identifying elements of skill and style.

Peer Editing Pass-along Sheet

Reader #1: _____ (name)

Reader #1 should read the attached paper and answer the following questions.

1. Does the writer have an appropriate introduction? Does it work? Why or why not? Can you suggest anything that would make it better?
2. Is there a thesis statement? Does the writer stick to it in the body of the paper? Highlight the thesis statement. From reading the thesis statement, what do you think this paper is going to be about?
3. Does the writer use appropriate and convincing evidence? Are the arguments backed up by facts, statistics, anecdotes or expert opinion? Point out places where the writer needs more documentation or explanation to support the argument. Point out places where the writer did exceptionally well in supporting the argument.
4. Are appropriate transitions used from one paragraph to another and from one topic to another? Highlight some of the transitions. Are there places where the transition seems awkward? Can you suggest a better way to form a transition?
5. If you were arguing against the writer's point of view, what point would you argue and why? How could the writer fend off your argument?
6. Name one thing the writer did very well and one area of improvement.

Peer Editor #2: _____ (name)
Peer Editor #2 should read the attached paper and answer the following questions.

1. Does the conclusion provide a satisfactory closing to the argument? Why or why not?
2. Does the conclusion refer back to the thesis statement and does it state how the thesis has been proven by the arguments in the paper? If so, is it done well? How can it be improved?
3. Is there a Call to Action in the conclusion? Does it work? Is it realistic or contrived? Why?
4. What is the writer's strongest argument in the paper? Why? Would any of the writer's arguments make you either soften or change your opinion? Which ones?
5. If you were arguing against the writer's point of view, what point would you argue and why? How could the writer better fend off your argument?
6. Name one thing the writer did very well and one thing that needs to be improved.

Peer Editor #3: _____ (name)
Peer Editor #3 should read the attached paper and answer the following questions.

1. Your job is to read for errors in usage and mechanics. First, highlight any grammar, punctuation, capitalization, or spelling problems.
2. Analyzing the writer's style. Does the author use varying sentences? Is there any place in the essay where the writing became boring or predictable? Was there any place in the writing where the writer used run-on sentences? Was the text hard to follow? If so, point it out.
3. Can sentences be combined to make the writing flow better and make it more understandable and enjoyable to read? If so, point out these places. Do you have any suggestions to make the writing better?
4. Is there any inappropriate vocabulary? Did the paper have a voice? Explain the voice.
5. If you were arguing against the writer's point of view, what point would you argue and why? How could the writer fend off your argument?
6. Name one thing the writer did very well and one thing that needs to be improved.