



Formative Single-Point Rubric

Argument Writing
6th- 7th Grades

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Introduction

To better support middle-level teachers with assessing writing at the classroom level, the Office of Assessment and Standards, along with ELA content experts, teachers, and literacy leaders from across the state, has created grade-level writing rubrics for each mode of writing in the *2024 SC CCR ELA Standards*. These rubrics will provide teachers with common writing goals for their students and a common tool to evaluate student writing.

Overarching Expectation 6 (ELA.OE.6) in the 2024 ELA Standards notes that students should “create quality work by adhering to an accepted format.” Using rubrics to assess writing provides students with expectations and an accepted format for various types of writing assignments. While rubrics communicate learning goals to students, they also support teachers by providing a tool for quick, targeted feedback and promoting collaboration and conversations between teachers.

The formative rubrics created for South Carolina middle-level teachers are single-point rubrics. These rubrics list the criteria for proficiency in the different modes of writing at each grade level and allow teachers to identify where students approach proficiency and exceed proficiency.

Single-point rubrics are formative and instructional because they allow teachers to provide students with feedback for improvement. This differs from the holistic Text-Dependent Writing (TDW) scoring rubrics, which are summative and do not allow explicit feedback for improvement. Another advantage of the single-point rubric for classroom use is that teachers can use only the parts of the rubric they want to focus on at that time. This allows for more targeted feedback and remediation. This also allows for more variety in the format of student writing.

We would like to thank all the ELA content experts, teachers, and literacy leaders who assisted us in the creation of the ELA formative rubrics.

How to Use a Single-Point Rubric

Single-point rubrics allow teachers to focus on one or two areas of weakness instead of focusing on all elements in a student’s written work. Using single-point rubrics also provides teachers with the ability to provide targeted feedback and instruction to each student based on his or her individual needs.

Example: Transitional Words and Phrases

Suggestions	Criteria	Strengths
	Transitional Words and Phrases: The writer effectively and consistently uses a variety of transitional strategies to smoothly connect all parts of the argument. The transitions support the organization of the response.	

In the table above, the criterion to be targeted through feedback and revision is “*transitional words and phrases*.” The criterion is outlined in the middle section of the table. The left-hand side of the table provides space for a teacher to provide suggestions for improvement on the targeted criterion—transitional words and phrases. The box on the right-hand side of the table provides space for a teacher to note any strengths in the student’s use of transitional words and phrases. Teachers may choose to leave feedback in both categories or in one category.

Student Sample: Figure 1

...Likewise, the approach required for e-sports is similar to the strategy used in conventional sports. In e-sports, players generally play with a team and are aware of their responsibilities to their aforementioned team. Therefore, video gamers learn to assess their surroundings and responds to other players and actions strategically. Additionally, they have to perform these actions even quicker because the situations during e-sports change rapidly...

Figure 1 contains an excerpt of student writing with the transitional words and phrases highlighted in yellow. Words such as “likewise,” “aforementioned,” “therefore,” and “additionally” link together the writer’s argument and improve the readability of the text. The writer also uses phrases such as “in e-sports” and “even quicker because” to link additional ideas and provide sentence variety.

Example: Providing Suggestions and Noting Strengths

Suggestions	Criteria	Strengths
The word “aforementioned” is a strong term, but is it needed to communicate this idea? Can this be more concise?	Transitional Words and Phrases: The writer effectively and consistently uses a variety of transitional strategies to smoothly connect all parts of the argument. The transitions support the organization of the response.	The ideas are clearly linked and support the claim.

Although the student’s sample shows an effective use of a variety of transitional strategies, there is some room for improvement, as noted in the “suggestions” column. The suggestions are for the student to consider and apply to his or her written work during the revision process.

Steps for Using a Single-Point Rubric

This is a suggested list of steps, not a prescribed list.

1. The argumentative writing criteria for “meeting expectations” are provided within the rubric. These criteria are aligned to the grade-level indicators for ELA.C.1.1, ELA.C.4.1, and ELA.C.5.1. The criteria presented in the single-point rubric are clear, specific, and measurable.
2. Familiarize yourself with the rubric and then introduce it to your students. Ensure that students understand the criteria and that you may choose to focus on one criterion or multiple when assessing their writing.
3. As you assess student writing, check the criteria outlined in the rubric. You may also wish to refer to the additional support provided for each criterion.
4. Provide suggestions for improvement and revision in the left-handed column of the rubric. Use the right-hand column to highlight any areas where the student exceeds expectations.
5. Once you have identified an area(s) of weakness for the student, determine appropriate instructional support to help the student improve his or her writing and meet the expectations of that criterion. The document provides suggestions for each criterion in the rubric.
6. After additional instructional support or remediation, allow the student to revise the written work. Some students may have to revise the work several times, focusing on different criteria with each revision.

Argumentative Elements for Grades 6 and 7

The following definitions are based on the definitions provided in the *2024 SC CCR ELA Standards* Glossary of Terms. The Glossary applies to K-12 instruction. The language of the following definitions has been adapted to suit 6th- and 7th-grade ELA instruction.

Research

Before a student can write an argumentative response, he or she must investigate a topic or issue, take a stance on it, collect evidence to support their stance, and consider alternative or opposing perspectives on the topic or issue. Refer to the Research grade-level indicators for guidance.

Topic or Issue

A student writer in grades 6-7 should thoroughly investigate a topic or issue before taking a stance and writing an argument. In argumentative writing, the student writer should remain on topic or issue from the beginning of the written work to the end of the written work. It is the writer's responsibility to show a thorough understanding of the topic.

Claim

A claim is a statement of what the writer wants to persuade the reader to believe. It is a debatable statement that reasons and evidence can support. The writer's goal in argumentative writing is to prove that his or her claim is the most logical conclusion.

Reasons

Using reasons allows the student writer to explain why he or she believes his or her claim to be valid. Reasoning also allows the writer an opportunity to explain why the evidence he or she provides is relevant to the claim.

Relevant Evidence

A writer uses evidence to support his or her reasons and claim(s). Evidence is fact-based and can be proven or disproven. Specific types of evidence named in the ELA Standards are facts, data, statistics, details, and other information. A student writer may go beyond these types of evidence.

Alternative Perspective/ Counterclaim

In sixth grade, students are expected to acknowledge an alternative perspective on the topic or issue. In seventh grade, *alternative perspective* shifts to *counterclaim*. A counterclaim presents an opposing viewpoint to the writer's claim.

Organization

When organizing an argument, the writer should present the topic or issue, followed by the claim. In the body of the written response, the writer should include reasons supported by evidence. The evidence should be supported by reasoning that progresses the argument. The writer should present and refute the counterclaim. The structure of the argument and how the writer presents and refutes a counterclaim are dependent upon the writer's style and may be impacted by the writer's purpose and the intended audience. The concluding section or statement should include a reiteration of the writer's claim.

Concluding Statement or Section

The concluding statement or section should include an emphasis on the writer's claim and why that claim is the most logical conclusion.

Transitional Word and Phrases

The purpose of transitional strategies in argumentative writing is to link the topic or issue, claim, reasons, evidence, reasoning, and alternative perspective or counterclaim. The transitional strategies selected by the writer support the organization of the argument and the progression of the argument.

Language and Voice

In argumentative writing, the words a writer chooses (diction) and how the writer arranges those words (syntax) impact the argument's effectiveness, emphasize points, and hold the reader's interest. The writer should consider the audience when making decisions about word choice. The writer should also consider the length of the sentences, the use of phrases within sentences, the use of punctuation, and the word order. Diction and syntax impact the writer's style and voice.

Purpose

The writer should convey a sense of purpose. The purpose of an argument is to persuade the reader to believe or feel a certain way. Some arguments may include a call to action.

Grammar and Conventions

For specific information about the grade-level expectations, teachers should refer to ELA.C.4.1.

Citation of Sources

Any time a student writer uses information from source material, he or she should cite the sources. This includes information directly quoted from the source material, facts, data, and ideas. If a writer paraphrases an idea(s) conveyed in the source material, it should be cited.

6th Grade Argumentative Single-Point Rubric

Each targeted criterion of 6th-grade argumentative writing can be addressed singularly or in groups, depending on the instructional focus and the individual student's strengths and weaknesses.

Suggestions	Criteria	Strengths
	Topic or Issue: The writer displays an understanding of the topic or issue as he or she presents the topic or issue and carries it throughout the written response.	
	Claim: The writer takes a clear position on the topic or issue and makes a defensible claim.	
	Reasoning and Evidence: The writer integrates skillful reasoning and a variety of evidence to enhance the claim and progress the argument.	
	Alternative Perspective: The writer acknowledges an alternative perspective.	
	Transitional Strategies: The writer effectively and consistently uses a variety of transitional strategies to smoothly connect all parts of the argument. The transitions support the organization of the response.	
	Language and Voice: The writer's use of language enhances the argument, and the word choice is skillful and precise. The writer incorporates a variety of sentence types and phrases to enhance the argument and engage the reader.	
	Grammar and Conventions: The writer uses correct grammar and conventions.	
	Citation of Sources: The writer thoroughly cites source material using an academic style guide as pre-determined by the teacher.	

All excerpts of student writing used in this document are from the SC READY TDW Sampler for 6th Grade.

7th Grade Argumentative Single-Point Rubric

Each targeted criterion of 7th-grade argumentative writing can be addressed singularly or in groups, depending on the instructional focus and the individual student's strengths and weaknesses.

Suggestions	Criteria	Strengths
	Topic or Issue: The writer displays an understanding of the topic or issue as he or she presents the topic or issue and carries it throughout the written response.	
	Claim: The writer takes a clear position on the topic or issue and makes a defensible claim.	
	Reasoning and Evidence: The writer integrates skillful reasoning and a variety of evidence to enhance the claim and progress the argument.	
	Counterclaim: The writer acknowledges a counterclaim.	
	Transitional Strategies: The writer effectively and consistently uses a variety of transitional strategies to smoothly connect all parts of the argument. The transitions support the organization of the response.	
	Language and Voice: The writer's use of language enhances the argument, and the word choice is skillful and precise. The writer incorporates a variety of sentence types and phrases to enhance the argument and engage the reader.	
	Grammar and Conventions: The writer uses correct grammar and conventions.	
	Citation of Sources: The writer thoroughly cites source material using an academic style guide as pre-determined by the teacher.	

All excerpts of student writing used in this document are from the SC READY TDW Sampler for 6th Grade.

Element: Topic or Issue

Criterion: The writer displays an understanding of the topic or issue as he or she presents the topic or issue and carries it throughout the written response.

Below are some examples of what you may see in student writing as you evaluate for topic or issue.

A student who is on target will

- thoroughly and succinctly introduce a topic or issue.
- provide the reader with a clear overview of the topic or issue.
- remain on topic throughout the written response.
- show an in-depth understanding of the topic, issue, and source material.

A student who needs support may

- mention a topic or issue in vague terms.
- leave the reader with questions about the topic or issue.
- introduce extraneous information that distracts the reader.
- show evidence that he or she does not fully understand the topic, issue, or source.

Student Sample 1

Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.

In the story, “The Netherlands: Leave Nature Alone”, I think that the Dutch people should not reclaim any land from the ocean and turn it into podler land.

First, the Dutch should not reclaim any land from the ocean and turn it into podler land because “The ocean might look one big body of water, but it is not. It is made of many different kinds of ecosystems.” This could mean that many animals or sea creatures could die because the Dutch is bringing water out into the ocean and reclaiming more and more land because of what they build. Also, what if there is only one type of plant or food that a certain type of animal eats that is close to the Netherlands and the Dutch just scoop it out with their windmills and then the animal’s plant or food is gone. Then that animal could die out and go extinct. Then that will be all of the Dutchs fault.

Next, the Dutch should not reclaim any land from the ocean and turn it into podler land because “The Dutch have built impressive engineering projects to gain land. These projects, however, are not failproof. The walls and dams can break if too much pressure is put on them.” If any bad weather comes and the ocean creates huge waves, then the Dutch might think that they are safe because of the wall or dam, but to me, I don’t think so. Those walls might be strong but over time nature is going to damage it. That wall or dam could break and fall on the Dutch people and many houses will be very damaged and some of the people could also be severely hurt. Also if the wall or dam breaks and falls over then the water will be crashing in and most or even all of the land is going to be flooded and under water.

Student Sample 1**Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.**

Lastly, the Dutch should not reclaim any land from the ocean and turn it into polder land because it will be safer for their people if they stop.

Student Sample 2**Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.**

In these passages the authors ask if they should move or not move onto the polder land. After analyzing we should not build on polder land.

The first reason is it used to be sea floor. Moving animals out of their habitat can cause disruption in their life. "emptying the water from portions of the sea may disrupt lives of the organisms that live there, resulting in the loss of plant and animal species." This shows why we should not claim the land.

The second reason is after a while the walls can decay. If the walls decay it would be a risk to the Dutch for losing lots of homes and businesses. "The Dutch would lose all the land they tried to gain." This proves they should not reclaim polder land. The third reason is the walls are very expensive to maintain. Sea water can rise and walls can decay cause Dutch people to have to repair the walls. "Money used to maintain the walls can be used for more worthwhile purposes." This proves we should not reclaim polder land.

In conclusion we should not reclaim polder land because. The displacing of sea life, the risk and the price to maintain.

Commentary**Element: Topic or Issue****Student 1**

The student introduces the topic in the introductory statement through his or her claim and carries the focus throughout the response.

Student 2

The student introduces the topic of polder land, but it is not clearly presented. In the remainder of the response, the student does not make clear connections to the topic. For example, the introduction states the topic as "should move or not move onto polder land". In the first body paragraph, the focus is on the sea floor and animal habitats. The student does not clearly connect this to "if they should move or not move onto the polder land".

Considerations for Student 2

Below is a sampling of instructional suggestions for teachers to consider as they support students in argumentative writing. Argumentative writing is a process and should be approached as a sequence of skills. Sequencing writing assignments helps students build a frame of reference as they move from one step to the next. Teachers should also consider scaffolding writing assignments from shorter pieces (quick writes, journals, paragraphs) to longer pieces. Students should receive timely feedback as they progress through a sequence of writing assignments. This will better prepare them for a longer written piece. The following considerations are specific to Student 2 and the element of *topic* or *issue*.

Consideration 1: Does the student fully comprehend the text or source material?

Suggestion: Whether the source material is located through student research or provided by the teacher, there is a chance some students may not fully comprehend the text(s). If a student does not fully comprehend the text(s), he or she will struggle to choose a side and write an argument about the issue. If you suspect a student may not understand the text(s), ask the student to summarize the text. If you notice in the summary that the student has missed important points, consider providing guiding questions for him or her to answer while re-reading the text(s). These questions should allow the teacher to identify and address any gaps in understanding before the student writes an argument. The guiding questions and answers will also serve as a resource to the student as he or she begins writing.

Consideration 2: Does the student fully understand the task?

Suggestion: Once a student can demonstrate that he or she comprehends the text(s), the teacher should ensure that the student understands the task. Not all argumentative responses will be tied to a single task or topic. Some topics will be selected by the students as they research an issue of their choice. Regardless of how the topic or issue is presented, if the student cannot verbalize exactly what he or she is being asked to write, the teacher may need to clarify the task for the student. This could be as simple as asking the student to highlight keywords in the task or rephrase the task.

Consideration 3: Can the student recognize that he or she does not clearly introduce the topic?

Suggestion: Once the student can demonstrate that he or she comprehends the text(s) and the task, provide the student with several one-paragraph examples that demonstrate a vague understanding of a topic. Some students may have to read aloud the examples and confer with the teacher to be able to determine if a topic is clearly introduced. Ask the student to rewrite the examples to better clarify the topic. Short excerpts of source material may need to be provided to the student. This can also be done in a small group setting.

Consideration 4: What is one way to use mentor texts to support this student?

Suggestion: Provide the student with a multi-paragraph exemplar. Walk the student through the exemplar, highlighting or marking how the topic or issue is carried throughout the entire written work. Ask the student to write a short response that models the mentor text. Then, ask the student to highlight or mark how he or she carries the topic throughout the response. This can also be done in small groups or as a whole class.

Consideration 5: Is the student able to fully revise the written response?

Suggestion: Once the student can demonstrate an understanding of the task and text, and is able to recognize how a topic is introduced and carried throughout a multi-paragraph response, ask the student to rewrite his or her initial response, incorporating these skills. Provide the student with additional feedback and repeat the process if necessary.

Element: Claim

Criterion: The writer takes a clear position on the topic or issue and makes a defensible claim.

Below are some examples of what you may see in student writing as you evaluate for *claim*.

A student who is on target will

- take a clear position on the topic or issue.
- state a defensible claim.
- carry the claim throughout the entire written work.

A student who needs support may

- only discuss the pros and cons of a topic or issue
- make an unclear claim that requires the reader to infer what the writer might be trying to express.
- state a fact instead of a debatable claim.
- provide only a summary of the topic, issue, or text.
- only provide his or her opinion.

Student Sample 1

Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.

I believe that you should leave nature alone. The Netherlands are a beautiful country, no doubt about that, and they are famous for their tulips. But, their system of reclaiming land isn't a good idea. It is expensive, interrupts ecosystems, is risky, and it is not a full-proof plan.

Student Sample 2

Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.

The Nether Lands should be Polder Land so more people can like live there, Becuase one day we are going to lose room on the earth, And there would be a lot of fish in the water meaning more food, They can build better walls to keep the seawater out of the city/town, And it has the most heathiest plants that you cant find almost any whereon the map, Its good farm land to make the "Heathiest plants", So I say we shoud turn the Nether Lands in to Polder Land/State.

Commentary
Criterion: Claim

Student 1

The student takes a clear position on the topic, “...their system of reclaiming land isn’t a good idea. It’s expensive, interrupts ecosystems, is risky, and it is not a full-proof plan.” While this student’s claim is clear and debatable, an area of focus for this writer could be on word choice, “full-proof” instead of “foolproof”.

Student 2

The task asks students to read the source material about polder land and state a claim as to whether the Netherlands should or should not reclaim the land from the sea to turn into polder land. While it seems this student may be claiming that the Netherlands should reclaim land for polder land, he or she does not state a clear, defensible claim. The reader is required to make inferences about what the writer may be claiming.

Considerations for Student 2

Below is a sampling of instructional suggestions for teachers to consider as they support students in argumentative writing. Argumentative writing is a process and should be approached as a sequence of skills. Sequencing writing assignments helps students build a frame of reference as they move from one step to the next. Teachers should also consider scaffolding writing assignments from shorter pieces (quick writes, journals, paragraphs) to longer pieces. Students should receive timely feedback as they progress through a sequence of writing assignments. This will better prepare them for a longer written piece. The following considerations are specific to Student 2 and the element of *claim*.

Consideration 1: Does the student understand the purpose of a claim in argumentative writing?

Suggestion: Addressing this concern may require explicit instruction delivered in a small group or individual setting. Only providing a student with the definition of a claim is not sufficient. While the student will need access to a definition to use as a resource, the instruction should focus on the function of a claim, how it is different from an opinion, and what makes a claim effective. This can be done by using mentor texts. Once a student understands the purpose of a claim, he or she should be presented with several different claims to evaluate. Some of the claims should be clearly written, and others should have deficiencies. Students can work in small groups sorting the claims before explaining why some of the claims are clear and defensible, and some are not.

Consideration 2: If the student can separate a clear, defensible claim from one that is not, what's next?

Suggestion: Provide the student with several claims that are vague, do not take a clear position, or express only an opinion. Have the student identify the problem(s) with each claim, and explain what the claim needs to be clear and defensible. Then, ask the student to rewrite the claims, making the necessary adjustments. This can be done in a small group setting or individually.

Consideration 3: How can we use mentor texts?

Suggestion: Once the student can write a clear, defensible claim, he or she will then focus on how to carry a claim throughout a written response. Provide the student with a multi-paragraph argument. Ask the student to first highlight or mark the claim and then highlight or mark how the writer of the text carries the claim throughout the text. An example is below.

Student Sample 1: Full Response
Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.

I believe that you should leave nature alone. The Netherlands are a beautiful country, no doubt about that, and they are famous for their tulips. But, their system of reclaiming land isn't a good idea. It is expensive, interrupts ecosystems, is risky, and it is not a full-proof plan.

First, the system of reclaiming land is extremely expensive. They section off a region of ocean and then they drain it, sending the water off with windmills and canals. As the second passage, 'Leave Nature Alone' states, "They build engineering projects like walls and canals to block off areas of the North Sea. Then, they use windmills to pump the water off this land." This seems like a good idea until you think about what they do next, they build walls to keep the remaining water out. But, these walls can break if the water pressure is too strong, storms can damage them harshly, and basic erosion can disrupt the wall's structure just as badly. As the second passage also states, "...walls and dams can break if too much pressure is put on them. If a storm comes through the area and pushes huge amounts of ocean water against one of the walls, the dam or wall could become damaged or break." The cost of maintaining the walls, rebuilding them, and even building them in the first place must be extremely high. Also, the cost of draining the water from the reclaimed land must also be very expensive. From the cost of machinery, to the cost of workers, it really doesn't seem like a good idea financially.

Second, the movement of reclaiming land is not only expensive, but it also displaces wildlife. Removing water from the polder land also removes all the plants and animals that once called that region their home. As the passage states, "The ocean may look like one big body of water, but it is not. It is made of many different kinds of ecosystems. What

Student Sample 1: Full Response

Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.

grows in one small part of the sea might not grow anywhere else.” The ecosystems speckled around the ocean are invaluable to the ocean’s health, so displacing ecosystems just to get a new region of land that is too expensive to maintain anyway is just not a good idea. By removing the ocean water, they are putting the sea life at risk and removing valuable wildlife from the planet. That also doesn’t seem like a good idea.

But, what about the pros? What about the good things that come with reclaiming? Well, when the Netherlands reclaims land they usually turn it into one of two things: farmland or housing. The Netherlands are becoming more and more crowded. Housing is cramped. If they can expand into the ocean, those problems become less and less urgent. Also, the soil that they get from the reclaimed land is fertile and soft because of all the nutrients and minerals that have settled on the seabed. This land is perfect for growing flowers, especially tulips, and all kinds of crops. As the first passage states, “Polder land is some of the healthiest farmland in the country. It has fertile soil due to the nutrients that have settled on the seabed. One of the things grown in polder land is flowers...Relative to other countries, there is only a little land per person, so all the people who live there have to squeeze into any available space. If more land were available, people could move out of crowded areas and live in places with more open space.” It sounds great, but sadly, the cons outweigh the pros. With the gain of farmland and housing there also comes a great deal of costs and risks. It isn’t safe to have the walls when they could collapse during any storm. And the danger of killing off an entire ecosystem is too risky.

In conclusion, I believe that the Netherlands should leave nature alone. Not only do the costs of maintaining the polder land (reclaimed land) outweigh the housing opportunities, but it also poses a real risk to the population. So, I do not believe that the Netherlands should continue reclaiming land.

**This response is highlighted for print.*

Consideration 4: How do we put this together?

Suggestion: In this student’s paper, the yellow-highlighted sections are evidence of how the student writer presents a claim and carries it throughout the written work. The writer uses evidence such as:

- *I believe that you should leave nature alone.*
- *But, their system of reclaiming land isn’t a good idea. It is expensive, interrupts ecosystems, is risky, and it is not a full-proof plan.*
- *system of reclaiming land is extremely expensive.*

- *they build walls to keep the remaining water out. But, these walls can break if the water pressure is too strong, storms can damage them harshly, and basic erosion can disrupt the wall's structure just as badly.*
- *The cost of maintaining the walls, rebuilding them, and even building them in the first place must be extremely high.*
- *must also be very expensive. From the cost of machinery, to the cost of workers, it really doesn't seem like a good idea financially.*
- *not only expensive, but it also displaces wildlife.*
- *that once called that region their home.*
- *different kinds of ecosystems.*
- *displacing ecosystems just to get a new region of land that is too expensive to maintain anyway is just not a good idea.*
- *are putting the sea life at risk and removing valuable wildlife from the planet.*
- *With the gain of farmland and housing there also comes a great deal of costs and risks. It isn't safe to have the walls when they could collapse during any storm. And the danger of killing off an entire ecosystem is too risky.*
- *the Netherlands should leave nature alone.*
- *the costs of maintaining the polder land (reclaimed land)*
- *poses a real risk to the population.*
- *So, I do not believe that the Netherlands should continue reclaiming land.*

Once a student can write a clear, defensible claim and outline and explain how another writer supports a claim in a multi-paragraph written response, the student is ready to revise his or her original draft. It may further benefit the student to create an outline before writing the response. Some students, such as those in sample 2, may need support in other areas of argument writing, such as using evidence and reasoning to support the claim. Requiring a student to write an outline before composing the written argument may also help these students better connect their reasons and evidence to their claims.

Element: Reasoning and Evidence

Criterion: The writer integrates skillful reasoning and a variety of evidence to enhance the claim and progress the argument.

**ELA.6.C.1.1 states that evidence consists of facts and data from a credible source(s). This list is not restrictive.*

**ELA.7.C.1.1 states that evidence consists of facts, data, and/or statistics from a credible source(s). This list is not restrictive*

Below are examples of what you may see in student writing as you evaluate for reasoning and evidence.

A student who is on target will

- provide reasons to support the claim.
- make clear connections between the claim and the reasons.
- provide evidence to support the reasons.
- smoothly integrate the evidence into the written response by providing a mixture of direct quotes, paraphrasing, summarizing, and elaborating as appropriate.

A student who needs support may

- include evidence that seems “thrown in” as a required element without consideration of whether it supports the reasons and claim.
- not make clear connections between the claim and the reasons.
- provide evidence that is not clearly connected to the reasons or the claim.
- include mostly summary that doesn’t explain how the evidence supports the reasons or the claim.
- repeat the same reasons multiple times.
- use the same pieces of evidence.

Student Sample 1

Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.

In the story, “The Netherlands: Leave Nature Alone”, I think that the Dutch people should not reclaim any land from the ocean and turn it into podler land.

First, the Dutch should not reclaim any land from the ocean and turn it into podler land because “The ocean might look one big body of water, but it is not. It is made of many different kinds of ecosystems.” This could mean that many animals or sea creatures could die because the Dutch is bringing water out into the ocean and reclaiming more and more land because of what they build. Also, what if there is only one type of plant or food that a certain type of animal eats that is close to the Netherlands and the Dutch just scoop it out with their windmills and then the animal’s plant or food is gone. Then that animal could die out and go extinct. Then that will be all of the Dutchs fault.

Student Sample 1**Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.**

Next, the Dutch should not reclaim any land from the ocean and turn it into polder land because “The Dutch have built impressive engineering projects to gain land. These projects, however, are not failproof. The walls and dams can break if too much pressure is put on them.” If any bad weather comes and the ocean creates huge waves, then the Dutch might think that they are safe because of the wall or dam, but to me, I don’t think so. Those walls might be strong but over time nature is going to damage it. That wall or dam could break and fall on the Dutch people and many houses will be very damaged and some of the people could also be severely hurt. Also if the wall or dam breaks and falls over then the water will be crashing in and most or even all of the land is going to be flooded and under water.

Lastly, the Dutch should not reclaim any land from the ocean and turn it into polder land because It will be safer for their people if they stop.

Student Sample 2**Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.**

In these passages the authors ask if they should move or not move onto the polder land. After analyzing we should not build on polder land.

The first reason is it use to be sea floor. Moving animals out of there habitat can cause disruption in there life. “emptying the water from portions of the sea may disrupt lives of the organisms that live there, resulting in the loss of plant and animal species.” This shows why we should not claim the land.

The second reason is after a while the walls can decay. if the walls decay it would be a risk to the dutch for losing lots of homes and businesses. “The dutch would lose all the land they tried to gain.” This proves they should not reclaim polder land.

The third reason is the walls are very expensive to maintain. sea water can rise and walls can decay cause dutch people to have to repair the walls. “Money used to maintain the walls can be used for more worth while purposes.” This proves we should not reclaim polder land.

In conclusion we should not reclaim polder land because. The displacing of sea life, the risk and the price to maintain.

Commentary

Element: Reasoning and Evidence

Student 1

Student 1 meets expectations by using reasons and evidence to support his or her claim. The student also elaborates using summary, paraphrasing, and original thinking.

Student 2

Student 2 provides reasons that consist of paraphrased text and direct quotes from the text followed by a statement such as “this shows why...” or “this proves...”. The statement at the end of each paragraph is a restatement of the student’s claim. In other words, the student is using a restatement of his or her claim to support his or her claim. This response is also very formulaic, which may inhibit the writer from his or her purpose to be persuasive.

Considerations for Student 2

Below is a sampling of instructional suggestions for teachers to consider as they support students in argumentative writing. Argumentative writing is a process and should be approached as a sequence of skills. Sequencing writing assignments helps students build a frame of reference as they move from one step to the next. Teachers should also consider scaffolding writing assignments from shorter pieces (quick writes, journals, paragraphs) to longer pieces. Students should receive timely feedback as they progress through a sequence of writing assignments. This will better prepare them for a longer written piece. The following considerations are specific to Student 2 and the element of *reasons and evidence*.

Student 2 struggles with providing reasons and evidence that enhance his or her argument. The student’s claim is also weak and reads more like an opinion. When working with this student on argumentative writing, the teacher may wish to begin by ensuring the student understands the task and topic. Next, the teacher may want to focus on instruction that supports the student in writing a clear, defensible claim before writing the rest of the argument.

Consideration 1: Does the student understand the basic elements of argumentative writing and how they work together?

Suggestion: Create a “claims, reasons, evidence” chart for students to use. *Claim* could be described as “what do I think?” *Reasons* could be described as “why do I think this?” *Evidence* could be described as “How do I know this?” *Alternative Perspective/Counterclaim* could be described as, “What does the other side think?” Provide students with slips of paper with each containing text that illustrates claim, reason(s), evidence, and alternative perspective/ counterclaim. Ask students to identify each argumentative element, sort the elements, and place each slip of paper on the chart with

the correct element. Allow time for discussion and a re-sort, if necessary. Some students may need to engage in this activity multiple times with increasingly complex arguments.

Consideration 2: Does the student understand how to use evidence to support a claim?

Suggestion: Divide students into two groups. Provide each group with several short texts that explore different sides of the same topic or issue. Pose a question to the groups, such as “Should schools move to a four-day school week?” Assign one group in favor of the issue and one group in opposition. Allow the groups to read the texts and find evidence to support their stance on the issue. Set up a way for students to appropriately debate the topic. This may include choosing one student from each team to debate the topic. Structuring the debate is of paramount importance. As a requirement of the debate, the speaker representing each group must provide one reason at a time with supporting evidence from the text. The speaker must then explain how the evidence supports the reason and claim.

Consideration 3: How can all students be involved?

Suggestion: Once the two groups have debated the issue, ask each student to use the information from the debate to write an argumentative introduction, including a clear, debatable claim. Students can then share and evaluate each other’s claims. Allow time for revision.

Consideration 4: How can I help students determine which evidence is relevant and which evidence is not?

Suggestion: Provide students with a claim and slips of paper that include different pieces of evidence. Ask students to sort the evidence into categories such as “strong,” “weak,” and “not relevant.” Once sorted, students should be able to explain their categories. If a student is struggling with supporting claims with evidence and reasons, the teacher could provide students with a claim and slips of paper with evidence and reasons and ask the students to connect which evidence supports which reasons and to explain how.

Consideration 5: How can I use mentor texts?

Suggestion: Provide students with a copy of an argument. Ask students to highlight the parts of the argument. This can be color-coded to show the difference between claims, reasons, and evidence.

Element: Alternative Perspective / Counterclaim

Criterion: The writer acknowledges an alternative perspective (6th) or counterclaim (7th).

Below are some examples of what you may see in student writing as you evaluate for *alternative perspective* (6th) or *counterclaim* (7th).

A student who is on target will

- acknowledge an alternative perspective (6th) or counterclaim (7th) clearly to the reader.
- show a distinct difference between the claim and the alternative perspective (6th) or counterclaim (7th) to the reader.

A student who needs support may

- imply an alternative perspective (6th) or counterclaim(7th), leaving the reader to infer what it may be.
- present the claim and alternative perspective (6th) or counterclaim (7th) in a compare-and-contrast structure instead of an argumentative structure.
- fail to include an alternative perspective (6th) or a counterclaim (7th).

Student Sample 1

Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.

I believe that you should leave nature alone. The Netherlands are a beautiful country, no doubt about that, and they are famous for their tulips. But, their system of reclaiming land isn't a good idea. It is expensive, interrupts ecosystems, is risky, and it is not a full-proof plan...

What about the good things that come with reclaiming? Well, when the Netherlands reclaims land they usually turn it into one of two things: farmland or housing. The Netherlands are becoming more and more crowded. Housing is cramped. If they can expand into the ocean, those problems become less and less urgent. Also, the soil that they get from the reclaimed land is fertile and soft because of all the nutrients and minerals that have settled on the seabed. This land is perfect for growing flowers, especially tulips, and all kinds of crops...

Student Sample 2

In these passages the authors ask if they should move or not move onto the polder land. After analyzing we should not build on polder land.

Commentary

Element: Acknowledging an Alternative Perspective/ Counterclaim

Student 1

Student 1 makes the claim, “I believe you should leave nature alone... their system of reclaiming land isn’t a good idea. It is expensive, interrupts ecosystems, is risky, and it is not a [foolproof] plan...” The student acknowledges an opposing viewpoint by mentioning that there are “good things that come with reclaiming”.

Student 2

Student 2 makes a statement about the authors “ask[ing] if they should move or not move onto the polder land.” This is a weak claim that may impact the quality of the student’s argument. The student does, however, acknowledge an opposing viewpoint by stating “we should not [build] on polder land”. The acknowledgment of an alternative perspective/counterclaim is also vague and doesn’t fully align with the claim. The claim mentions moving onto the polder land, and the opposing viewpoint mentions building on polder land. It is unclear if moving and building are the same thing.

Considerations for Student 2

Below is a sampling of instructional suggestions for teachers to consider as they support students in argumentative writing. Argumentative writing is a process and should be approached as a sequence of skills. Sequencing writing assignments helps students build a frame of reference as they move from one step to the next. Teachers should also consider scaffolding writing assignments from shorter pieces (quick writes, journals, paragraphs) to longer pieces. Students should receive timely feedback as they progress through a sequence of writing assignments. This will better prepare them for a longer written piece. The following considerations are specific to Student 2 and the element of *alternative perspective or counterclaim*.

Student 2 makes a weak attempt to acknowledge an alternative perspective (6th) or counterclaim (7th) to his or her claim, “we should not build on polder land.” Because the student’s claim is more of an opinion than a defensible statement and lacks clarity, the teacher may wish to first focus on the expectation of writing a clear, defensible claim.

Consideration 1: How can mentor texts be used to support this student?

Suggestion: This student does not make a clear claim, which may be why this student struggles with acknowledging an alternative perspective (6th) or claim (7th). This student may need instructional support with writing a clear, defensible claim before revisiting how to acknowledge an alternative perspective or counterclaim. Providing this student with a mentor text and asking him or her to map the argument through underlining or highlighting may help the student better understand the function of a claim and alternative perspective/counterclaim and the relationship between the two. Provide students with the opportunity to discuss this in small groups and conferences with the teacher.

Consideration 2: What is the next strategy?

Suggestion: Once the student has a better understanding of the functions of and relationships between claims and alternative perspectives/counterclaims, an additional mentor text could aid a student in determining how an author presents an alternative perspective/ counterclaim to his or her claim. Once a student can identify both in a mentor text, he or she should then be asked to explain how the alternative perspective/counterclaim is opposite the claim.

Consideration 3: How can I use groups to support this student, and maybe others?

Suggestion: Divide the class or a small group into two groups. Provide each student in group one a slip of paper that has a claim written on it. Each student should have a different claim. Provide each student in group two a slip of paper that has an alternative perspective/ counterclaim written on it. Each claim provided should have an alternative perspective/counterclaim. Allow the students time to match their claims and alternative perspectives/counterclaims. Then ask students to explain how they know their elements match. For students who need additional support, provide them with an additional list of claims and alternative perspectives/ counterclaims. Students can then match the claim to its alternative perspective/counterclaim and explain how they know.

Consideration 4: Why is revision important?

Suggestion: Once the student has a deeper understanding of the functions and relationships between claims and alternative perspectives/counterclaims, the student should be tasked with applying those revisions to his or her original written work. This will allow the teacher to determine if the student understands the elements and is able to apply them in a written argument.

Element: Organization

Criterion: The writer organizes an argument that is unified by the claim. The writer presents a logical progression of ideas that increases the effectiveness of the argument.

Below are some examples of what you may see in student writing as you evaluate for organization.

A student who is on target will

- introduce the topic or issue so that it is clear to the reader
- present the argument in a way that makes it easy for the reader to determine the claim, reasons, supporting evidence, and alternative perspective/counterclaim.
- link all sections of the response in a way that makes it smooth to read.
- include a concluding statement or section that reiterates the writer's claim on the topic or issue.

A student who needs support may

- neglect to provide an introduction or introductory statement is clear to the reader
- not communicate the relationships between the elements of the argument so that they are clear to the reader.
- not link sections of the response and create confusion for the reader.
- neglect to include a concluding statement or section.
- include a concluding statement or section that does not reiterate the writer's claim.

Organization is not based on a required number of paragraphs or sentences within a paragraph. Transitional words and phrases play an important part in the structure and organization of a written work. Because of this, one student's response will be used to illustrate organization and transitional strategies.

Element: Transitional Strategies

Criterion: The writer effectively and consistently uses a variety of transitional strategies to smoothly connect all parts of the argument. The transitions support the organization of the response.

Below are some examples of what you may see in student writing as you evaluate for *transitional strategies*.

A student who is on target will

- select and use transitional words and phrases that enhance his or her purpose for writing.
- use transitional strategies to connect elements of the argument and show relationships between elements.
- select and use transitional strategies to support an organizational structure.
- select and use transitional strategies to progress the argument.

A student who needs support will

- use basic transitional words and phrases that seem to be randomly selected without consideration of how they function within the text.
- use transitional words and phrases that do not enhance his or her purpose for writing.
- use transitional words and phrases that do not enhance the structure or organization of the response.
- repeat one or two transitional words or phrases throughout the response.
- use transitions only to order his or her thoughts (first, next, last...)

To support teachers with organization and transitional words and phrases, this sample includes an annotated response to explain how the elements work. In the sample below, the elements are highlighted and color-coded within the student response. The color-coding is for print purposes.

Student Sample 1

I believe that you should leave nature alone. The Netherlands are a beautiful country, no doubt about that, and they are famous for their tulips. But, their system of reclaiming land isn't a good idea. It is expensive, interrupts ecosystems, is risky, and it is not a full-proof plan.

First, the system of reclaiming land is extremely expensive. They section off a region of ocean and then they drain it, sending the water off with windmills and canals. As the second passage, 'Leave Nature Alone' states, "They build engineering projects like walls and canals to block off areas of the North Sea. Then, they use windmills to pump the water off this land." This seems like a good idea until you think about what they do next, they build walls to keep the remaining water out. But, these walls can break if the water pressure is too strong, storms can damage them harshly, and basic erosion can disrupt the wall's structure just as badly. As the second passage also states, "...walls and dams can break if too much pressure is put on them. If a storm comes through the area and pushes huge amounts of ocean water against one of the walls, the dam or wall could become damaged or break." The cost of maintaining the walls, rebuilding them, and even building them in the first place must be extremely high. Also, the cost of draining the water from the reclaimed land must also be very expensive. From the cost of machinery, to the cost of workers, it really doesn't seem like a good idea financially.

Second, the movement of reclaiming land is not only expensive, but it also displaces wildlife. Removing water from the polder land also removes all the plants and animals that once called that region their home. As the passage states, "The ocean may look like one big body of water, but it is not. It is made of many different kinds of ecosystems. What grows in one small part of

the sea might not grow anywhere else." The ecosystems speckled around the ocean are invaluable to the ocean's health, so displacing ecosystems just to get a new region of land that is too expensive to maintain anyway is just not a good idea. By removing the ocean water, they are putting the sea life at risk and removing valuable wildlife from the planet. That also doesn't seem like a good idea.

But, what about the pros? What about the good things that come with reclaiming? Well, when the Netherlands reclaims land they usually turn it into one of two things: farmland or housing. The Netherlands are becoming more and more crowded. Housing is cramped. If they can expand into the ocean, those problems become less and less urgent. Also, the soil that they get from the reclaimed land is fertile and soft because of all the nutrients and minerals that have settled on the seabed. This land is perfect for growing flowers, especially tulips, and all kinds of crops. As the first passage states, "Polder land is some of the healthiest farmland in the country. It has fertile soil due to the nutrients that have settled on the seabed. One of the things grown in polder land is flowers...Relative to other countries, there is only a little land per person, so all the people who live there love to

Student Sample 1

squeeze into any available space. If more land were available, people could move out of crowded areas and live in places with more open space." *It sounds great, but sadly, the cons outweigh the pros. With the gain of farmland and housing there also comes a great deal of costs and risks. It isn't safe to have the walls when they could collapse during any storm. And the danger of killing off an entire ecosystem is too risky.*

In conclusion, I believe that the Netherlands should leave nature alone. Not only do the costs of maintaining the polder land (reclaimed land) outweigh the housing opportunities, but it also poses a real risk to the population. So, I do not believe that the Netherlands should continue reclaiming land.

**This response has been color-coded for print.*

Commentary

Elements: Organization and Transitional Strategies

- The student organizes his or her argument by focusing on the topic and supporting the claim throughout the full response (in yellow).
 - *I believe that you should leave nature alone.*
 - *But, their system of reclaiming land isn't a good idea. It is expensive, interrupts ecosystems, is risky, and it is not a full-proof plan.*
 - *the system of reclaiming land is extremely expensive*
 - *they build walls to keep the remaining water out*
 - *harshly, and basic*
 - *the wall's structure just as badly*
 - *rebuilding them, and even building them in the first place must be extremely high*
 - *must also be very expensive*
 - *From the cost of machinery, to the cost of workers, it really doesn't seem like a good idea financially.*
 - *not only expensive, but it also displaces wildlife.*
 - *removes all the plants and animals that once called that region their home*
 - *different kinds of ecosystems*
 - *displacing ecosystems just to get a new region of land that is too expensive to maintain anyway is just not a good idea*
 - *and removing valuable wildlife from the planet*
 - *With the gain of farmland and housing there also comes a great deal of costs and risks. It isn't safe to have the walls when they could collapse during any storm. And the danger of killing off an entire ecosystem is too risky.*
 - *the Netherlands should leave nature alone*
 - *the costs of maintaining the polder land (reclaimed land)*
 - *but it also poses a real risk to the population. So, I do not believe that the Netherlands should continue reclaiming land*

- The student also uses a variety of transitional words and phrases to link the sections of the argument and to connect the ideas within the response. The skillful use of transitional strategies makes it easier for the reader to follow the argument (turquoise).
 - *But, their system*
 - *First,*
 - *As the second passage, 'Leave Nature Alone' states,*
 - *Then,*
 - *This seems like a good idea until*
 - *As the second passage also states*
 - *The cost of maintaining the walls*
 - *Second,*
 - *As the passage states*
 - *By removing the ocean water,*
 - *As the first passage states,*
 - *It sounds great, but sadly*
 - *In conclusion, I believe*
- The student provides three reasons why it is not a good idea to reclaim the land. These three ideas are explored throughout the paper and are organized in a natural way that integrates text, reasoning, and an elaboration of thoughts. Notice that the student does not address each issue in its own paragraph. The student seamlessly intertwines the reasons in a logical order.
- Information related to the reason that it is expensive is in bold.
 - *extremely expensive. They section off a region of ocean and then they drain it, sending the water off with windmills and canals.*
 - *The cost of maintaining the walls, rebuilding them, and even building them in the first place must be extremely high. Also, the cost of draining the water from the reclaimed land must also be very expensive. From the cost of machinery, to the cost of workers, it really doesn't seem like a good idea financially.*
- Information related to the reason it disrupts ecosystems is underlined.
 - *but... interrupts ecosystems*
 - *it also displaces wildlife*
 - *removes all the plants and animals that once called that region their home*
 - *many different kinds of ecosystems*
- Information related to the reason for risk is highlighted in pink.
 - *risky*
 - *walls can break if the water pressure is too strong*
 - *storms can damage them*
 - *erosion can disrupt the wall's structure*
 - *walls and dams can break if too much pressure*
 - *the dam or wall could become damaged or break*
 - *putting the sea life at risk*

- The student presents the alternative perspective/counterclaim (green).
 - *But, what about the pros? What about the good things that come with reclaiming?*
 - *If they can expand into the ocean, those problems become less and less urgent.*
 - *This land is perfect for growing flowers, especially tulips, and all kinds of crops.*
 - *If more land were available, people could move out of crowded areas and live in places with more open space.*
- The student goes beyond the grade-level expectations by refuting the counterclaim (italicized yellow).
 - *It sounds great, but sadly, the cons outweigh the pros.*
 - *With the gain of farmland and housing there also comes a great deal of costs and risks. It isn't safe to have the walls when they could collapse during any storm. And the danger of killing off an entire ecosystem is too risky.*
- The concluding section of the response reiterates the student's claim and the student's position on the topic/issue.

Considerations

Consideration 1: Is there a specific number of paragraphs in an argumentative work?

Suggestion: The instruction on how to organize an argumentative work should focus on organizing the elements of the argument (claim, reasons, evidence) before adding transitional words and phrases, elaboration of ideas, and additional stylistic elements. Some students may benefit from writing an outline of their argument to first ensure they have all the elements and that the elements work together.

Consideration 2: How do I teach students to use the “right” transitional words and phrases?

Suggestion: Some students may need explicit instruction to understand what transitions are and how they work. The teacher may want to provide 1-3 sentences on the same topic and ask the student to determine which transitions could be used to link together the sentences. The student may then be asked to explain how his or her choice of transitions functions within that small piece of text.

The student should receive explicit instruction on how each type of transition functions within argumentative writing. For example, transitions such as “this statement supports” and “if...then” are two possible phrases to use when supporting a claim. To support a counterclaim, the student may use “while it may be true that” or “even though”. The focus should be on helping the student understand how the transitions function and should not be on memorizing lists of transitions.

Consideration 3: Can a list of transitions support the student?

Suggestion: Not all transitions are “one size fits all.” How they are used within a written work and the purpose and structure of that written work must be taken into account. Otherwise, the student may just randomly insert transitions that do not enhance or progress the argument. The student must understand how to use transitions to “show a contrast” or “continue a line of thinking” and how that is different from just using basic transitions such as “first,” “second,” and “next”.

Consideration 4: How can mentor texts be used as a support?

Suggestion: Once a student can write a few sentences using appropriate transitional strategies (consideration 2), the student should then have the opportunity to study how other writers successfully use transitions in their writing. This can be done by asking students to read and annotate a mentor text. As the student identifies transitions, he or she should also be able to explain how each transition works.

Consideration 5: How can I better support students in organizing their arguments?

Suggestion: Model writing an argument with your students. Write an argument with them and explain your decisions as you write. Students can write along with you and annotate their work with your explanation. This can serve as a resource when needed.

Transitional words and phrases impact the organization of a response and the writer’s style and voice.

Element: Language and Voice

Criterion: The writer’s use of language enhances the argument, and the word choice is skillful and precise. The writer incorporates a variety of sentence types and phrases to enhance the argument and engage the reader.

Below are some examples of what you may see in student writing as you evaluate for *language and voice*.

A student who is on target will

- select and use words and phrases that support his or her purpose and enhance the argument.
- select and use words and phrases that strengthen the argument.
- select and use words and phrases that enhance his or her style and voice.
- select and use words and phrases specific to the topic.
- use various sentence types to create variety and engage the reader.
- effectively order words and phrases to create variety and engage the reader.

A student who needs support may

- use the same words or phrases at the beginning of most sentences.
- write sentences of one type or structure.
- use words that are vague or unrelated to the topic or issue.
- use overly complicated language about the topic or issue that distracts the reader.

Student Sample 1

Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.

By blocking the sea water out of the polder land, some species of plants and animals that thrived in that ecosystem are losing their home and life. In the second text, “The Netherlands: Leave Nature Alone” it states “What grows in one small part of the sea might not grow anywhere else. Emptying the water from portions of the sea may disrupt the lives of the organisms that live there, resulting in the loss of plant and animal species.” This shows that animals and plants are going extinct because of the loss of their habitat. Though polder land has healthy soil, there are other ways to get healthy fertile soil by taking care of the dry land properly. By stopping polder land, the Netherlands would be a safer, full of life place.

Student Sample 2**Refer to the 6th-Grade TDW Sampler for the task.**

The Netherlands shouldn't reclaim land and make it Polder land because in The Netherlands: Leave Nature Alone in sentence 3 it says "They built engineering projects like walls and canals to block off areas of the North Sea". All of the engineering stuff is bad for the land and the water. Doing all of that can make all the food you plant go bad really fast and make your water undrinkable. They must have a reason for having such little land and then all of a sudden they want more land. That's why they shouldn't get it.

Commentary**Element: Language and Voice****Student 1**

Student 1 uses a variety of sentence structures and types. The first sentence begins with a phrase, which is in contrast to the next sentence beginning with "In the second text." Words such as "portions," "disrupt," "extinct," and "habitat" relate to the topic and enhance the student's argument.

Student 2

In contrast, student 2 uses language that is not as precise and clear to the topic as student 1. For example, "Doing all of that" is a vague statement that may cause the reader to do extra work to determine what "that" is referring to in the response. In this case, "that" appears to refer to "all of the engineering stuff," which does not aid the reader or enhance the writer's argument. Another example is "That's why they shouldn't get it." This statement lacks clarity and again requires the reader to go back into the response to try and determine who "they" is and what "it" is.

Considerations for Student 2:

When evaluating this sample of writing, the teacher may need to begin with a focus on mechanics and usage. This student struggles with writing complete sentences and with using appropriate punctuation. The teacher may wish to first address those issues before language and voice. Or the teacher may wish to address both issues simultaneously. The following questions are for teachers to consider.

Consideration 1: Does the student have a thorough understanding of the topic?

Suggestion: Students must have a thorough understanding of the topic to understand the vocabulary that aligns with that topic. For example, if a student has researched the issue of gas cars and electric cars, the student should understand terms such as "EVs (Electric Vehicles)," "hybrid," "petroleum," and "efficient". A student who does not thoroughly understand the topic will have a difficult time choosing precise language.

Consideration 2: Does the student understand the difference between vague language and precise language?

Suggestion: Choose a topic that is familiar to the students. The teacher should then provide a short text about that topic that uses vague language. Ask students to highlight or underline the vague words. Students should have the opportunity to discuss their choices with one another and adjust before they start replacing the words. Part of the discussion should include students explaining why they identified some words as vague. Next, ask students to replace the vague words with words that are more precise to the topic. Students should be able to define any replacement word they use.

Consideration 3: How can I use visual images?

Suggestion: Place students into small groups. Provide each group with a picture or image. Ask the group to write a description of the picture. Once finished, each group will read its description to the class, allowing the other students to gain a mental image of the picture. Then, the group will reveal their picture. Does the picture match the mental image created by the description? How can the description be adjusted to better describe the image?

Consideration 4: Would conferencing benefit this student?

Suggestion: With stronger writers who only need some fine-tuning, a writing conference may be the best choice. The teacher may choose to begin by reading the work aloud to the student and asking clarifying questions such as, “What is stuff?” Through conversation, the teacher may help the student realize that some of his or her word choices are vague and confusing to the reader.

Consideration 5: How can I use mentor texts?

Suggestion: The teacher may wish to provide the student with two versions of the same (short) text. One version could include specific word choices and vocabulary related to the topic. The second version could have some of the specific words replaced with vague language (that, stuff, etc). The student could then evaluate the two texts and explain why one is easier to read than the other. The teacher could then remove the more specific example and ask the student to improve the vaguer sample.

Element: Grammar and Conventions

Criterion: The writer uses correct grammar and conventions.

A 6th-grade student who is on target will

- apply knowledge of capitalization rules.
- apply knowledge of comma rules learned in K-5.
- apply knowledge of punctuation rules learned in K-5.
- apply knowledge of grammatical rules learned in K-5.
- apply knowledge of additional conventions learned in K-5.
- use commas, parentheses, and dashes to set off nonrestrictive clauses as appropriate.
- use a colon to introduce a quotation as appropriate.
- use a hyphen in a compound adjective with numbers as appropriate.
- use correct pronoun-antecedent agreement.
- use definite and indefinite articles.
- write complete sentences.
- use correct pronoun-antecedent agreement.
- avoid inappropriate shifts in verb tense.

A 7th-grade student who is on target will

- apply knowledge of capitalization rules.
- apply knowledge of comma rules learned in K-6.
- apply knowledge of punctuation rules learned in K-6.
- apply knowledge of grammatical rules learned in K-6.
- apply knowledge of additional conventions learned in K-6.
- use a comma to separate coordinate adjectives as appropriate.
- correctly hyphenate compound words as appropriate.
- correctly use phrases and clauses within sentences.
- write complete sentences.
- use correct pronoun-antecedent agreement.
- avoid inappropriate shifts in verb tense.

What to Consider While Evaluating Student Writing: Grammar and Conventions

Grammar, usage, and conventions are essential elements of writing. While evaluating writing, the teacher should determine which writing deficit needs attention first. For example, if a student writer displays problems with punctuation and comprehension of a text, which is more important to address first? Is it more beneficial for the student writer to have all punctuation in its proper place in a written work that is so vague it's unclear if the student understands the topic? Which of these two scenarios is easier to correct, and which one is of a more immediate concern?

Let's look at two examples of student writing.

Excerpt of Student Writing	Considerations
"While in the first passage the narrator describes it as 'wonderful, beautiful, & calm', the other one describes it as 'dangerous, unpredictable, & scary', this is showing how people have different opinions from just seeing it & living it"	There are several concerns about this sample of writing. Yes, there are spelling, capitalization, and punctuation errors, but are those errors the biggest issues with this student's writing? Will correcting those errors improve the overall response? This student was asked to write an argument to persuade readers. The student wrote a summary of the two provided texts. Is it possible the student did not understand the task or purpose? What is more important to address first?
"The argument weather the dutch should take the polder land has been going out for a while. Some claim that it is unhealthy for the enviornment while others claim it's helpful for human life and the growing population. I know that taking the polder land will benefit more than it will hurt. This is due to it allowing conviences to the dutch population and reducing nautural problems."	This sample of writing includes a clear claim, but has errors with spelling, capitalization, and some concerns with word choice, such as using the phrase "has been going out for a while." Because the student appears to have a clear understanding of argumentative writing, it may be beneficial to begin by helping this student clean up spelling and capitalization errors first.

Element: Citation of Sources

Criterion: The writer thoroughly cites source material using an academic style guide as pre-determined by the teacher.

Before assigning writing, the teacher should select an appropriate academic style guide for instruction on how to cite sources and avoid plagiarism. Depending on the style guide, students may be required to include an author's last name, page number, the title of the work, and/ or the URL associated with the source. This is a classroom-level decision.

A student who is on target will

- include the source of a direct quotation.
- include the source of any information directly taken from another person or the entity's work.

A student who needs support may

- not include the source of a direct quotation.
- not include the source of any information directly taken from another person or the entity's work.

Element: Citing Sources

- Determine which type of citation style guide to use in the classroom. Use only that format during the school year.
- Do not teach all parts of the style guide. Only teach the parts that are relevant for 6th and 7th-grade students. Provide students with a document that outlines the requirements of the selected style guide and provides examples.
- Model creating in-text citations and a resource page with students. Have students work alongside you so they can implement the format with you. This can also be used as a resource.
- Frequently revisit the style guide and model pieces of it. The less frequently you use the style guide in your classroom, the less students will remember.
- If most students in the class are making the same errors in their citations, reteach it to the entire class.
- Allow students to use their resources as they add citations to their work. The more they see and use the resources, the better they will be at citing sources.