

COMPOSING FEATURES

(from *Understanding the North Carolina Writing Assessment Scoring Model at Grades 4, 7, & 10*, NCDPI Testing Section)

FOCUS

Focus is the topic/subject established by the writer in response to the writing task. The writer must clearly establish a focus as he/she fulfills the assignment of the prompt. If the writer retreats from the subject matter presented in the prompt or addresses it too broadly, the focus is weakened. The writer may effectively use an inductive organizational plan which does not actually identify the subject matter at the beginning and may not literally identify the subject matter at all. The presence, therefore, of a focus must be determined in light of the method of development chosen by the writer. If the reader is confused about the subject matter, the writer has not effectively established a focus. If the reader is engaged and not confused, the writer probably has been effective in establishing a focus.

ORGANIZATION

Organization is the progression, relatedness, and completeness of ideas. The writer establishes for the reader a well-organized composition, which exhibits a constancy of purpose through the development of elements forming an effective beginning, middle, and end. The response demonstrates a clear progression of related ideas and/or events and is unified and complete.

SUPPORT AND ELABORATION

Support and Elaboration is the extension and development of the topic/subject. The writer provides sufficient elaboration to present the ideas and/or events clearly. Two important concepts in determining whether details are supportive are the concepts of relatedness and sufficiency. To be supportive of the subject matter, details must be related to the focus of the response. Relatedness has to do with the directness of the relationship that the writer establishes between the information and the subject matter. Supporting details should be relevant and clear. The writer must present his/her ideas with enough power and clarity to cause the support to be sufficient. Effective use of concrete, specific details strengthens the power of the response. Insufficiency is often characterized by undeveloped details, redundancy, and the repetitious paraphrasing of the same point. Sufficiency has less to do with amount than with the weight or power of the information that is provided.

STYLE

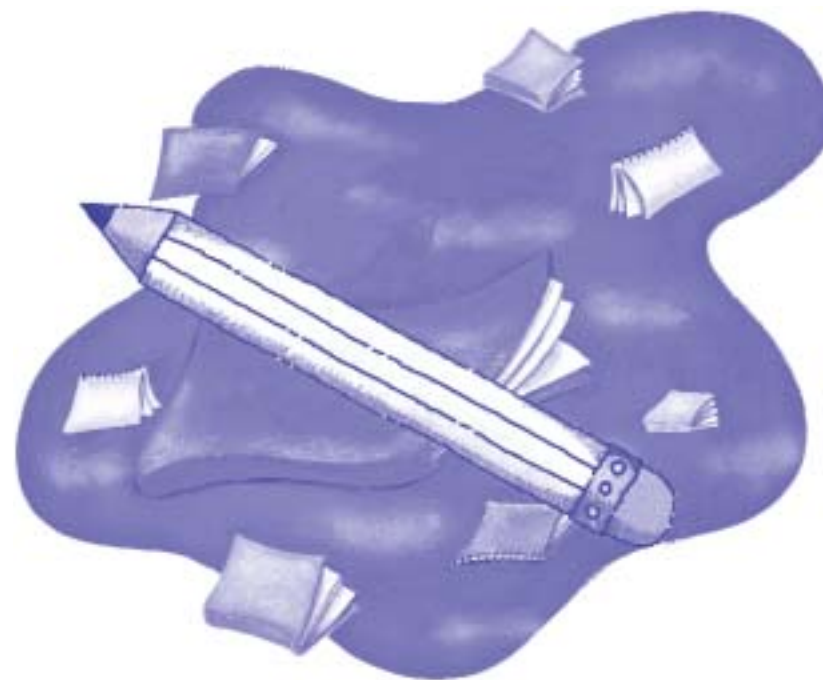
Style is the control of language that is appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context of the writing task. The writer's style is evident through word choice and sentence fluency. Skillful use of precise, purposeful vocabulary enhances the effectiveness of the composition through the use of appropriate words, phrases and descriptions that engage the audience. Sentence fluency involves using a variety of sentence styles to establish effective relationships between and among ideas, causes, and/or statements appropriate to the task.

CONVENTIONS

Conventions involves correctness in sentence formation, usage, and mechanics. The writer has control of grammatical conventions that are appropriate to the writing task. Errors, if present, do not impede the reader's understanding of the ideas conveyed.

Argumentative writing is assessed by the North Carolina Writing Assessment for Grade 7. Prompts for this assessment may focus on problem solution or evaluative writing. Students are assessed according to the features of writing as delineated by the North Carolina Writing Assessment Scoring Model. For the purposes of classroom instruction and assessment, students should focus on these composing features.

Argumentative WRITING IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL



ARGUMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION involves defining issues and proposing reasonable solutions. Middle school students are usually great at knowing the issues—it’s the reasonable part that brings a smile to middle school teachers! In middle school, students must learn the differences between an informal hallway confrontation and a logical, detailed coherently organized argumentative work. Therefore, building the foundation of understanding argument and producing argumentative products begins in Grade 6, is more developed and emphasized in Grade 7 and is expanded and refined in Grade 8. By the end of middle school, students should be able to effectively analyze and respond to public documents, construct engaging thoughtful solutions to problems, and present well-argued, coherent, and convincing responses.

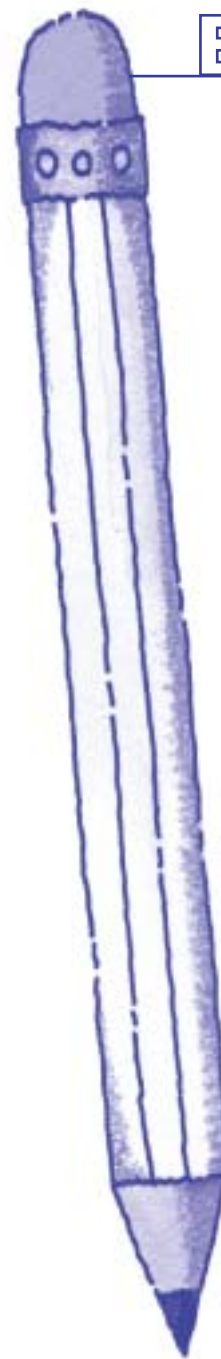


SAMPLE ARGUMENTATIVE

PRODUCTS

- Debates
- Problem/Solution Essays
- Speeches
- Letters to the Editor
- Evaluations
- Letters to Officials
- Articles
- Response to a School Policy

BENCHMARKS



GRADE 6

In Grade 6, students learn the foundations of argument. Students learn through the exploration of a variety of materials how to recognize effective arguments by summarizing the author’s purpose and stance; by distinguishing between fact and opinion; and, through developing an awareness of audience. Students in Grade 6 should be able to respond to public documents such as editorial and school or community policies.

GRADE 7

Argument communication is the focus of Grade 7 English language arts and is assessed in this grade by the North Carolina Writing Assessment. Continuing to build on the foundation of argument, students in Grade 7 focus on the importance of the effective use of language and examine how an argument is affected by style and tone. On the North Carolina Writing Assessment, students demonstrate that they can focus on an argumentative writing task by organizing their thoughts so that their writing progresses logically; by providing sufficient support and elaboration to present their ideas

clearly; and, by skillfully controlling their writing so that it is appropriate to the purpose, the audience, and the context of the writing task. Students are prepared for this assessment through studying a variety of argumentative works; by learning to analyze problems and solutions in various contexts and situations; and by creating arguments that evaluate by justifying judgments with logical relevant reasons, clear examples, and supporting details.

GRADE 8

Teaching in the argumentative environment does not end after the State Writing Assessment. Students in Grade 8 continue to evaluate argumentative works with more sophistication. Instruction focuses on identifying the social context of argumentative works; understanding counter argument; and, by judging the effectiveness of tone, style and the use of language. In other words, students learn to use language to convince or persuade an audience. Students will use these skills as they prepare research presentations that are a major focus in Grade 8.