Module Script

Launch: Introduction

**Formative Assessment of Written Language in Grades 6-8**

The classroom instruction you will see in this module is aligned with the Common Core State Standards in English language arts, specifically the seventh grade standards. Take a moment to review the focal practices and content standards for this module.

This module focuses on the language and content that students use to write essays analyzing the development of theme in a grade-level text. The videos and scenarios you will work with throughout the module demonstrate how to use the formative assessment process to focus on language and content in order to help students develop their writing skills.

Throughout the module, you’ll see real-life video clips of a seventh grade English language arts class where students are working on essays that analyze a piece of literature, supporting their ideas and claims with evidence from the text.

Both the linguistic diversity and language needs of this class are significant. Many of the students are bilingual and some are officially classified as English language learners, with a wide variety of English language proficiency levels among them. There are also students in the class who speak different varieties of English at home, such as African-American Vernacular English or Chicano English. The students also have differing familiarity with the language of literary analysis.

In this module, we’ll see the teacher, Nikysha Gilliam, and her seventh grade students focusing on both the language and content involved in writing an essay to analyze the development of theme in Lois Lowry’s novel, *The Giver*. To assist them through the writing process, Ms. Gilliam takes her students through all four components of the formative assessment process and uses a writing analysis tool, which will be introduced later in the module.

At the beginning of the module, you will hear about how Ms. Gilliam clarifies the intended learning for her students by explaining the purpose of the lesson - and then review the learning goals and success criteria. Ms. Gilliam then elaborates on that clarification by showing a model of a strong introductory paragraph to her students.

Then you’ll hear about the different ways that the teacher elicits evidence of learning and language use from students by asking them to discuss their textual evidence in pairs, as well as by collecting drafts of their essays.

Next you’ll view how Ms. Gilliam uses the Writing Analysis Tool as well as the learning goals and success criteria to analyze and interpret students’ essay drafts. You’ll also have a chance to use the Writing Analysis Tool *yourself* to analyze a student writing sample and see how the teacher interpreted the same transcript.

And finally, you’ll see how Ms. Gilliam *plans* to acts on her interpretation of the student evidence as well as how she actually does act – by offering feedback and making instructional adjustments– during the next lesson. You’ll also be asked to look at the changes in a student’s writing from one draft to the next and reflect on how Ms. Gilliam’s instructional changes helped the student to make progress toward the success criteria.

Launch: Educator Learning Goals and Success Criteria

There are two educator goals for users of this module.

First, educators – meaning those of you working through the module right now –

*understand that students use language in specific ways to write a literary analysis and support their claims.*

Second, *educators understand how the formative assessment process can help them analyze and facilitate student use of language.*

And educators will know they have met these two learning goals when they can accomplish the following success criteria:

* Begin to analyze the quality of students’ writing with respect to focus, support and organization
* Begin to analyze the coherence of the language students use to make a claim about the theme and support it with evidence
* Use this information to reflect on their own teaching practice

Launch: Student Learning Goals & Success Criteria:

As mentioned, the instruction in this module is aligned with the Common Core State Standards, specifically the seventh grade English language arts standards. Click on the button to review the focal standards for this module.

There are two student learning goals for this module. The first goal is that *students understand how an author develops and makes clear a theme through different literary choices and devices.*

The second, *students understand that writing an essay that analyzes a piece of literature involves supporting ideas and claims with evidence from the text.*

Students will know they have met the learning goals when they can:

* Identify the theme of the text, *The Giver*
* Determine how *this* author developed the theme through the use of literary devices
* Use the language of literary analysis to write a clearly organized essay, making a claim about the theme and supporting it with evidence

Launch: Module Orientation

This module demonstrates the formative assessment process with an instructional task aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts.

The featured module tasks and video clips were created and selected because they focus on the language that students use to conduct a literary analysis of a grade-level text.

This module is one of a comprehensive package of five modules focused on the entire formative assessment process, with an emphasis on the use of language. The modules feature instruction in both English language arts and mathematics across various grade levels, and highlight different practices that require the use of language in the Common Core State Standards.

This module is divided into four sections: Launch, Explore, Summarize, and Toolkit.

In the launch section, you will:

* View the focal Common Core State Standards and watch a trailer highlighting the featured classroom.
* See the educator and student learning goals and success criteria for the module
* Explore the four components of the formative assessment process and how this process can help educators focus on language in content areas
* And become familiar with the Writing Analysis Tool

In the Explore section you will:

* View vignettes of the instructional task showing how it involves each component of the formative assessment process.
* Engage in interactive learning events about each formative assessment component.

In the Summarize section you will have opportunities to:

* Reflect on your learning
* Apply what you have learned
* And share your learning with others

The Toolkit provides supplementary materials to reinforce ideas presented in the module and to delve deeper into the topic.

Launch: The Role of Language in Content

In this section of the module we’ll examine the critical role that language plays in the new college- and career-ready content standards and discuss the challenges, implications, and opportunities of a dual focus on language and content.

In the past, there's been a great deal of division between content and language teachers. This was exacerbated by a policy paradigm that mostly kept language – with the exception of vocabulary – out of the realm of content standards.

The new standards, however, are very explicit that all teachers are teachers of language and literacy and that in order to be successful in disciplines, students need to be able to engage in rich language practices.

For example, students need to understand the discourse of particular disciplines and be able to read and comprehend complex text across various disciplines.

Students also need to be able to explain their thinking, and to argue that their point of view or their method for solving problems is valid. They also need to modify their language choices, depending on the purpose and the audience.

Students must also understand the typical text structure in different disciplines as well as be able to use complex sentence structures and to understand not just content area vocabulary, but general academic vocabulary that cuts across disciplines (Script adapted from K. Thompson, 2014).

It’s important to note, however, that this “new policy paradigm” is not changing the essence of mathematics or science or even English Language Arts with respect to language. These content areas have *always* been linguistically demanding. Now the standards just make these language demands more visible and rigorous. In other words, while language has always integral to core content, now it is transparently so.

The increased visibility and rigor of language demands in content areas has implications for *all students –* and as a result all teachers. Meaning that in order to be successful in disciplines, ALL students need to be and able to engage in rich, rigorous language practices.

Yet there are certain groups of students who face additional challenges under the new policy paradigm. These student groups include:

* Current English language learners
* Former English language learners
* Speakers of non-dominant varieties of English
* Students with limited exposure to disciplinary literacy practices
* Students with disabilities

As teachers of these student groups, the increasingly important role of language in content areas can certainly seem daunting, particularly when students are faced with the dual challenge of learning language and content at the same time.

But this new paradigm suggests that students’ language proficiency can – and should - be developed simultaneously in the context of content instruction.

And formative assessment of content learning - with a focus on language- can support these processes by helping teachers and students attend to individual learners' needs, both in terms of learning content and developing the language necessary to express that content.

This Venn diagram, created by Tina Cheuk from the Understanding Language Initiative at Stanford University helps illuminate the linguistic demands of the new standards.

To create the graphic, Tina looked at the key practices in the Common Core math and English language arts standards, as well as the key practices in the Next Generation Science Standards, and mapped where they overlapped.

And while there’s a lot of information to be gleaned from this graphic, the main ideas are that it can help distinguish the specific language demands of the practices and serve as a guide to point out the high leverage areas to really focus in on.

Let’s take a look, for example, at the English language arts practices that we focus on in this module, practices one and two.

English language arts practice one, at the center of the diagram, is a high leverage practice, meaning it’s one of the practices with the greatest overlap across disciplines. Practice one focuses on students analyzing a range of grade-level complex texts with evidence, which means students being able to read a complex text and interact with that text in ways that allow them to answer questions or support their writing with evidence. And while the language demands of this practice will vary depending on the type of analysis and texts students engage with, students will unfailingly need to think critically to support their positions with reasoning and evidence and to *linguistically* support the analyses.

Please note that one could also argue that the student tasks featured in this module are also aligned with English language arts practice 3. But since a major objective of the featured lessons is for students to analyze a text, make claims and support those claims with evidence, Practice 1 seems to be a better fit.

English language arts practice 2, however, is also implicated in this module. This practice, which focuses on producing clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to the task, purpose and audience, is all about using context-appropriate language to clearly communicate content understandings. It can also be considered a high-leverage practice as it has a lot in common with science practice eight.

So, as this Venn Diagram tries to make very clear, the language demands of the new standards are *significant* as is the expectation that language *instruction* should NOT be isolated from meaningful content area learning.

In other words, as George Bunch, Amanda Kibler and Susan Pimental say in their 2012 paper for Understanding Language:

*In the context of the expectations for all students articulated by the Standards, “language instruction” for ELs can no longer be envisioned as isolated from the context of meaningful and engaging academic work. Although the decontextualized teaching of discrete elements of a second language (e.g. verb tenses, grammatical structures, vocabulary) may be effective for inducing the use of those elements on restricted tasks and tests that highlight them, it is unclear whether such instruction is effective for fostering the use of those elements in wider communication. This is not to say that an explicit focus on language [structures] is not called for, but rather that such a focus must occur in conjunction with, and in the service of, meaningful academic work across the curriculum.*

Please take a few minutes to reflect on the ideas presented in this section of the module, pausing to read, think about, and answer these reflection questions before moving on to the next section.

Launch: Formative Assessment Process

This section focuses on the elements of formative assessment. But what is formative assessment? And how might it be helpful in assisting educators to focus on the language students use to communicate content understandings?

Formative assessment is a key component of the Smarter Balanced Assessment system.

It is defined as a deliberate **process** used by **teachers and students during instruction** that provides **actionable feedback** that is used to **adjust ongoing teaching and learning strategies** to improve students’ attainment of curricular learning goals.

Contrasting what the formative assessment process **is** with what formative assessment process **is not** may help us paint a clearer conceptual picture.

Most importantly, the formative assessment process is a learning and teaching practice, meaning it is something that teachers and students do, not something they give or take. And even though the formative assessment process has the word “assessment” in it, it is not a kind of test. Instead, it is reflective learning and teaching practice.

And as a reflective practice, the formative assessment process becomes a tool to guide instruction and improve student learning because it allows teachers and students to gain insight into learning as it is happening or in some cases, shortly after it happened. This contrasts with what formative assessment is not - a summative or evaluative tool that is used to determine student grades.

What formative assessment is and what it offers, is a process by which to inform feedback so that it becomes productive and effective. What formative assessment is not, is simply providing feedback. Feedback is essential to the process, yes. But simply providing feedback does not formative assessment make.

Finally, formative assessment is an iterative process, meaning that it occurs or should occur over and over again until students have reached the desired learning goals, with the endpoint of one iteration becoming the starting point for the next iteration. The formative assessment process is *not* a one-time event.

The four components – or attributes - of the formative assessment process, clarify intended learning, elicit evidence, interpret evidence, and act on evidence are represented pictorially, using a clover.

To clarify intended learning, educators and students identify what the broader learning goals are as well as define the success criteria so that students may demonstrate to what degree they have met the learning goals.

Appropriate and effective learning goals

1. Define what students should know – not what they should do - by end of a lesson or unit
2. Focus on broader conceptual understandings or big ideas
3. Reflect the intent of the Common Core practices and content standards
4. Build on prior learning, considering previous observations and learning progressions

Additionally, effective learning goals – in this era of linguistically demanding college and career ready standards – must consider how students should use language to communicate their learning.

Let’s review the two student learning goals for this module:

* *Students understand how an author develops and makes clear a theme through different literary choices and devices.*
* *Students understand that writing an essay that analyzes a piece of literature involves supporting ideas and claims with evidence from the text.*

In this case both of the learning goals require students to think about how language is used to communicate learning.

Appropriate and effective success criteria

* Define the evidence that teachers and students will use to determine how students are progressing towards learning goals
* Align closely to the learning goals, considering both content and language
* Are specific, concrete and measurable, specifically in contrast to the learning goals
* And use disciplinary, precise, but ‘student-friendly’ language

Additionally, success criteria are much more effective when they are modeled or created in collaboration with students.

Finally, effective success criteria should draw from and/or be refined by relevant rubrics or matrices, such as the **Writing Analysis Tool**, which is introduced in this module as a scaffold for educators as they are learning to formatively assess the language and content of student writing.

The Writing Analysis Tool is designed to help teachers capture, analyze and interpret the quality of students’ writing with respect to focus, support and organization, and language use.

As mentioned, the Writing Analysis Tool should be thought of as a tool to scaffold *your* learning, as you grow in your understanding of how to recognize, analyze, and teach the content and language skills needed for strong student writing. But it is also a formative tool to help you gauge your students’ development.

The analysis tool will be examined much more thoroughly later on in the module. The primary reason for introducing it now is to demonstrate how it can be useful not only in defining learning goals and success criteria, but also throughout the entire formative assessment process.

There are three dimensions of the Writing Analysis Tool: 1) Focus, which addresses the articulation and clarity of a topic, thesis or argument; 2) Support, which focuses on how the writer uses the language of the discipline to support ideas with relevant evidence; and 3) Organization, which address how the writer uses language and textual structures to organize the writing.

Please note how there is not a separate dimension that addresses language in Writing Analysis Tool. Instead language, and specifically *how language is used to clearly communicate disciplinary understandings,* is embedded into each of the three dimensions.

So now, let’s take a look at the student success criteria for this module and examine how the Writing Analysis Tool influenced them.

The student success criteria for this module state that students will know they have met the learning goals when they can:

* Identify the theme of the text, *The Giver*
* Determine how *this* author developed the theme through the use of literary devices
* Use the language of literary analysis to write a clearly organized essay, making a claim about the theme and supporting it with evidence

As may be obvious, the third success criteria draws heavily from the Writing Analysis Tool, addressing all three of its dimensions and focusing on the language used in the essay.

The next component of the formative assessment process is elicit evidence. Educators and students can elicit evidence using a variety of strategies.

But what does evidence consist of? The type of evidence referred to in this module is evidence of student *learning* and *language* *use.* Or more specifically, observable evidence of student learning and language use, meaning in order for something to be considered evidence you have to be able to see, hear, or read it.

In addition, evidence has to provide insight into students' learning.

It is also extremely important to tie or match the evidence to the learning goals and success criteria. Additionally, anything referred to as “evidence” in this module is evidence that comes in the form of *language output*. Finally, evidence of student learning and language use can come in a variety of forms, as long as they meet the above criteria.

For example, all of the following - partner- or group-conversations, class presentations, conferences, exit slips, and student essays - can all be examples of evidence, as long as they are observable, provide insight into students’ learning, match the learning goals and success criteria, and are language products of learning.

That said, there is not “one correct way” to go about eliciting evidence.

While teachers are often the ones doing the eliciting, both teachers and students can elicit evidence from other students. In fact some of the most fruitful elicitation occurs between peers.

Additionally, eliciting evidence can be done spontaneously or planned for ahead of time. For example, you may spontaneously decide to probe that student about her work and then use that information to formatively assess where she is in terms of the learning goals and success criteria.

Or you may decide ahead of time, before the lesson occurs, what kind of evidence you will elicit from students and what evidence would demonstrate mastery of the success criteria and learning goals. This is planning for interaction.

The third component of the formative assessment process is interpret evidence.

To interpret evidence, educators examine the evidence elicited and identify where students are in relation to the learning goals and success criteria.

For example, as we can see in this visual, Student A starts with a particular understanding, which we'll call his starting point. And at the other side of the graphic are the defined learning goals and success criteria.

And through interpreting the evidence the teacher and students can begin to understand where Student A is currently is in his learning, relative to where he started and the desired learning goals.

There are two basic ways to interpret evidence of student learning, in the moment, or after the fact.

Interpretation can also be done by either the teacher or the student – or ideally – by both.

And remember, in this module we are not just concerned with evidence of students' content learning, but also with evidence of students' language use as we aim to develop both students' content understanding and their English language proficiency.

More specifically, the module addresses gathering and interpreting evidence regarding how students are accomplishing academic tasks through language and communicating their learning.

Interpreting evidence, of students' language use, however, is often easier said than done, even if you've considered language in your learning goals and success criteria. This is the case, because it's difficult to wrap our heads around the learning progression for language use, especially because many existing language rubrics focus only on language form.

This is another area where the Writing Analysis Tool can be extremely useful as the tool was designed to help you interpret the evidence you've gathered of student learning and language use.

The final attribute of the formative assessment process is act on evidence*.*

When educators and students act on evidence, they use the information gleaned from interpreting the evidence to adjust teaching and learning and take appropriate and actionable steps to meet the needs of students in the classroom.

There are basically two ways to act on the information you got from interpreting evidence of student learning and language use.

First, teachers and students can act on evidence by providing direct oral or written feedback to students.

Second, educators may act on evidence by engaging in instructional responses or making instructional adjustments based on their interpretation of the student evidence.

There are also two different times to act on evidence.

You can either act upon the evidence in the moment, right after you have interpreted the evidence.

Or you may act on evidence after the fact - after you have reviewed and analyzed a particular piece or pieces of student evidence - perhaps later in a lesson, during the next lesson, or across the span of the unit.

There are also important criteria to consider when attempting effective action.

Effective action needs to be evidence based, meaning there needs to be a clear logical, and relatively direct link between the interpreted evidence and the action taken.

Second, feedback and instructional adjustments need to consider where students are on relevant learning and language trajectories. Have they reached the learning goals for both content learning and language use? If not, where are they in their development in relation to both where they started and the desired goals? And what is a logical next step on both the learning and language use trajectories?

This is another area in which analysis tools such as the Writing Analysis Tool are helpful - in figuring out what a logical next step, and thus appropriate action, may be.

And finally, effective formative action moves student learning forward or is *actionable.* Meaning that the action is descriptive, specific, and provides students with concrete information upon which they can act themselves.

This section focused on the process of formative assessment and how this process can be useful in assisting educators to focus on *both* the language and content related to student writing. The Writing Analysis Tool was designed to inform your work at every stage of the formative assessment process. Take a minute to brainstorm how it might help you at each stage.

Launch: Focus on Language

In a previous section of this module, you learned why it is important to focus on the language in content, particularly given the significant shifts in education policy. But what does it really mean to “focus on language,” specifically within a content area such as English language arts?

“Focusing on language” in this context does **not** mean “focusing on language form.” In other words, a focus on language within the context of language arts– particularly in this era of college- and career- ready standards - does not equate simply focusing on vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation.

While there are moments when it is appropriate to focus on these features of language, this module advocates a more integrated instructional approach that highlights the complex functions of language and moves beyond simplified views of it as specialized vocabulary.

Why? Well, a purely grammatical approach will NOT engage students or allow them to maintain the high cognitive demand that the Common Core Standards facilitate.

And often when we focus too heavily on language form, particularly when students are attempting to orally communicate their understandings, it backfires and students shut down and stop trying to push themselves linguistically.

Let’s take a look at a conversation between a teacher and student that illustrates this phenomenon.

**Teacher:** Jaime, what do you think the theme of the story was?

**Jaime:** Try hard.

**Teacher:** Can you use a complete sentence please?

**Jaime:** Um. I think theme try hard.

**Teacher:** You forgot the verb. You think the theme *is* try hard.

**Jaime:** Uh, yeah.

**Teacher:** So you think that the theme is try hard. Why do you think that?

**Jaime:** Cuz they kept trying.

**Teacher:** Remember, we don’t start sentences with “because.” So why did you think

that?

**Jaime:** Um, I dunno.

As you can see in this case, the teacher was so focused on Jaime’s linguistic forms that how he got this answer or why he believes it is correct was never fully explored. And there was very limited opportunity in this exchange for the student to communicate his understandings or develop his disciplinary language beyond using complete sentences.

Now let’s take a look at how the conversation between Jaime and his teacher *might have gone*, had the teacher been focusing less on language form and more on how and what content understandings he was attempting to communicate.

**Teacher**: Jaime, what do you think the theme of the story was?

**Jaime:** Try hard.

**Teacher:** Okay, so you thought the theme of the story was, “It’s important to try

hard.” Can you tell us more about why you think this is the theme? What

are your reasons?

**Jaime**: Well, the main guy, Fred? He keep trying to be.. uh a pilot. Even when his

mom die and they have no money.

**Teacher:** Ah, so the main character, Fred, kept trying even though he faced a lot

of challenges. He kept trying; he *persevered*.

**Jaime:** Yeah. So I think the theme, the lesson, is you need to keep trying,

per, persevering, even when hard stuff happen.

So, as Leo van Lier and Aida Walqui articulate in their 2012 paper for Understanding Language,

The [Common Core State Standards] provide us with an opportunity to engage students in valuable actions, such as in English Language Arts, engaging with complex text and using evidence when interacting with others; and in Mathematics, maintaining high cognitive demand, developing beliefs that mathematics is sensible, worthwhile, and doable. **A purely grammatical or functional progression will not get students to engage in these acts, or to become engaged, motivated, develop their autonomy, and succeed. It is essential that we do not miss this opportunity to integrate language, cognition, and action deeply and coherently.**

Now, take a minute to reflect on these ideas, pausing to read, think about, and answer these two reflection questions before moving on to the next section.

Launch: Writing Analysis Tool

The **Writing Analysis Tool,** or WAT for short, is designed to help teachers capture, analyze and interpret the quality of students’ writing with respect to focus, support, organization, and language use. And while it was designed specifically for use with grades sixth through eighth, it is flexible enough to be adapted and applied in lower or higher grades as well.

There are three dimensions that Writing Analysis Tool addresses: 1) Focus, 2) Support, and 3) Organization. Language, and particularly *how language is used to clearly communicate disciplinary understandings,* is embedded into each of the three dimensions.

Now, let’s take a closer look at each of these three dimensions.

**Dimension 1** of the Writing Analysis Tool examines the *focus* of a piece of expository student writing. Which is to say it addresses the articulation and clarity of a topic, thesis, or argument.

The progression of possible evidence that a piece of student writing may demonstrate with regards to focus starts with *strong evidence,* meaning that a topic, thesis, or argument is clearly articulated near the beginning of the writing and remains prominent and consistent throughout the text.

Inconsistent evidence is demonstrated in pieces of writing where the topic, thesis or argument is either partially articulated - for example too vague or too detailed - or introduced sometime after the beginning of the text and/or not prominent throughout the text.

A piece of writing my demonstrate *evidence of attempt* when an attempt is made to articulate a topic, thesis or argument somewhere in the text, but that topic, thesis or argument is muddled, confusing, or multiple foci are presented.

And finally, if no attempt is made to articulate or introduce a topic, thesis, or argument, then a piece of writing is said to demonstrate no attempt for Dimension 1.

**Dimension 2** of the Writing Analysis Tool addresses *support,* meaning it focuses on how the writer uses the language of the discipline to support ideas with relevant evidence.

Strong evidence is demonstrated in pieces of writing in which the writer uses the **language of the discipline**[[1]](#footnote-1) to support the focal idea with relevant evidence, such as facts, definitions, textual references, examples, or details.

Please note that this phrase – *language of the discipline –* is broad by design and could refer to any of the following: language from texts consulted during research for an essay, content-specific vocabulary, or word types specific to the discipline. For example, an essay about a scientific topic might use nominalization. In this module, the students are using the language of literary analysis, discussing and pointing out literacy devices that bolster the theme. Yet, the language of the discipline could also include what is sometimes referred to as “mortar words” or academic vocabulary that goes across disciplines.

Inconsistent evidence for Dimension 2 is given when the writer, at times, uses clear language and ideally the language of the discipline, to support the focal idea with some relevant evidence.

Evidence of attempt is given when the writer attempts to use language to support the focal idea with evidence, but the writing may be confusing or unclear.

And finally, no attempt is given when there is no indication that the writer attempted to use language and/or evidence to support the focal idea.

And finally, **Dimension 3** of the Writing Analysis Tool focuses on *organization,* meaning how the writer uses both language and textual structures to organize and make the writing clear.

Strong evidenceis given in instances when the writer uses the language of the discipline and **linguistic markers -** which mightinclude *because, on the other hand, however, in order to -* to create appropriate **textual frameworks** that set up structured relationships, such as compare and contrast, cause and effect, sequence of steps or events, or problem-solution. And a piece of writing demonstrates strong evidence when these textual frameworks make the information clear, organize the presentation of the topic and details, tie paragraphs together, and highlight relationships among key ideas.

Inconsistent evidence is given when the writer*, at times,* uses coherent language to create frameworks that organize the presentation of the topic and details, but linguistic markers may be used inconsistently or only occasionally.

A piece of writing demonstrates an evidence of attempt when the writer attempts to use language to create organizing frameworks, but these frameworks or the language used in them do not make information clear *or* linguistic markers are present some of the time, but may be used erroneously.

No attempt is given to a piece of writing when there is no attempt by the writer to use language to make information clear, organize the presentation of topic and details, or tie sentences or paragraphs together.

In this module, you will have a chance to see a practicing teacher, Ms. Gilliam, use the Writing Analysis Tool to formatively assess both the content and language of students’ literary essays. You will also have a chance to practice using the Writing Analysis Tool, using student essays from the focal seventh grade class.

In the toolkit section of this module, you will find a downloadable version of the Writing Analysis Tool. This version of the tool has been specially formatted so that you can use it with your own classroom as well as make changes to it to meet your specific needs. This version of the tool also includes context and instructions for using the tool.

Now please take a few minutes to read, think about and reflect on the following questions related to the Writing Analysis Tool and it’s application.

Explore: Clarify Intended Learning Vignette

This section of the module addresses clarifying intended learning.

The two lessons highlighted in this module are part of a larger writing unit focused on Lois Lowry’s novel *The Giver.* Within this unit, students have been working on identifying the theme of *The Giver* and writing an essay analyzing how the author develops the theme through different literary choices and devices.

The writing prompt for the essay task is: *Write an essay communicating what the theme of the text is and how the author, Lois Lowry, develops the theme as the novel progresses.*

In the first lesson featured in this module, students are finishing drafts of their essays. Specifically, they are using scaffolds that they had worked on during previous lessons – such as a graphic organizer outlining their evidence and an introductory paragraph frame – to finish drafting their essays.

Let’s first hear the teacher describe, in her own words, the objective for the first lesson, and then we will take a look at the *broader* learning goals and success criteria for these *two* lessons.

*Em, there definitely was specific criteria that I had in mind in terms of the objectives that I set for the lesson. I wanted the students, again, to be able to give a name to the tool or the type of evidence that the author used to develop the theme. And then also, I wanted them to be able to, at least, begin to communicate that idea in a piece of writing, so in their introductory paragraph.*

At the beginning of the first lesson, the teacher explains the purpose of -and goals for- the lesson to her students and articulates for them the criteria for success.

The student learning goals for the lesson are:

* Students understand how an author develops and makes clear a theme through different literary choices and devices.

AND

* Students understand that writing an essay analyzing a piece of literature involves supporting ideas and claims with evidence from the text.

Students will know they have met the learning goals when they can:

* Identify the theme of the text, *The Giver*
* Determine how *this* author developed the theme through the use of literary devices
* Use the language of literary analysis to write a clearly organized essay, making a claim about the theme and supporting it with evidence

In addition to introducing these success criteria to her students, the teacher also models the lesson’s desired outcomes for the students by sharing her own introductory paragraph for an essay that she composed herself for the assignment, pointing out the elements of a strong introductory paragraph in the process.

Explore: Elicit Evidence Vignette

After clarifying the desired outcomes for her students, the teacher next elicits evidence of learning from the students. She does this in two ways:

First, the teacher asks her students to discuss with a partner the evidence they selected to support the theme they have identified for the novel. To do this, students refer to the graphic organizers they have used to gather their evidence. Students are then instructed to talk to each other about how the evidence they have chosen supports the theme of the novel, as well as to identify the types of literary devices or “tools” that are represented in their evidence.

By listening to students’ conversations, the teacher is able to assess their understanding of the novel’s theme as well as ascertain their progress in selecting appropriate evidence to support their claims pertaining to the development of the theme.

Next, the teacher elicits evidence of learning from her students by asking them to continue drafting their essays.

The teacher reminds her students that they should use the scaffolds they had completed in the earlier part of the writing process – namely, the supporting evidence graphic organizer and the introductory paragraph frame – as resources for organizing and composing their essays.

The teacher then collects students’ essay drafts and uses the information she gathers from them to inform her instructional next steps. In the next section of the module, we will see how the teacher interprets evidence of her students’ learning and language use by using the Writing Analysis Tool.

Explore: Interpret Evidence Vignette

This section of the module focuses on interpreting the elicited student evidence of learning and language use, which in this case is in the form of writing.

Before we hear how the teacher interpreted specific evidence of her students’ work, let’s review the three dimensions of the Writing Analysis Tool.

Remember, the three dimensions are: focus, support, and organization.

Also note that there is not a separate dimension that addresses language in the Writing Analysis Tool. Instead language, and specifically *how language is used to clearly communicate disciplinary understandings,* is embedded into each of the three dimensions.

And for each dimension, the teacher decides which criterion level most accurately reflects the evidence shown in the student’s writing sample, and also writes a rationale to explain her determination.

Now, let’s listen to the teacher discuss how the Writing Analysis Tool helped her to focus her interpretation of the students’ writing in order to hone in on where her students are in terms of the learning goals and success criteria.

*So I know that there again, like I said, there were specific things that I had in mind that I wanted them to be able to do. I wanted them to be able to write this essay, to be able to, you know, to state, in this incidence, what the theme of the text is, and then provide evidence from the text that shows that support. What the Writing Analysis Tool did for me was: helped me to focus my lens. So that when I went back to look at those student work, you know, using the Writing Analysis Tool, it wasn't a time to focus on: oh my gosh, there are so many mis-spelled words, oh my gosh, they didn't indent the paragraph. But really look at the content of what they are saying, so that it's really what revision is all about, you know. There are other times in the writing process when you worry about the mechanics but here the Writing Analysis Tool helps me focus on the content, so that we can revise and make things more clear, make our ideas more clear. So the Writing Analysis Tool was really, um, I don't want to say taskmaster, but it was like really made me focus.*

*Um, and so I had the student work in front of me, and I had the Writing Analysis Tool. And I laid them side by side. And I read through each student's essay, read it through once. And then kind of went through the Writing Analysis Tool, and then went back to the essay, but looked at, looked for specific things the second time through. So the second time through, after I read it. I've looked initially, like mainly at the introductory paragraph because that's where the topic or the thesis was supposed to be stated, right? So that's where I am look for students to identify what theme of the text is. And do I see that? You know, if I see it, okay, that's great. Now, how is that idea thread through the text. You know, is that focus there where they maintain that, you know, this is the theme of the text, and this is the evidence that points to that.*

*Um, then I moved down to the next section where it talks about support. Well, they talked about this theme or this idea throughout the text. But how are they using the evidence to support that idea? Are they using evidence from the text? Are they explaining it? Are they making it clear to the reader? Are they spelling it out for us? Or are they leaving it for us to infer? Do we have to make a leap of an assumption? Um, you know, to say, oh yeah, I think I understand where the writer is going with this. Um, if it was clear, if there was, you know, they provided the context with the evidence, and then gave their interpretation what they thought it meant, and then also provided some additional commentary to show how that specific piece of evidence supported the theme, then it was strong, right?*

*But what I was finding as I was going through was that, there was definitely some attempt. Um, that it wasn't necessary spelled out. Or that in places the evidence that they chose to support was there, and there they explained some but didn't make a clear enough connection. So it was inconsistent.*

*Um, the last thing I looked at was the way the essay was organized. So, the introductory paragraph, the three supporting, and then the conclusion. You know what did the language look like? Were there transitions to move from one idea to the next? Um, you know, so kind of things like that, where I wanted to make sure that you know, yes, I understand that this is what I am talking about in my introduction. I am spelling it out, you know, kind of introducing it to the reader. And then here is why I am making that assertion. So my next three are kind of backing my claim in my introduction. And then my last paragraph is wrapping it up and tying it all together. Um, and what I found when I went through was that, again, there were varying degrees of proficiency. There were some students who, while I didn't have strong evidence that it was very tightly organized, um, it was definitely organized enough where is was inconsistent. So the next step down. And then there were some, where it was less organized than that, so it was an attempt. You know, I saw a lot of attempts, but again, the, there were varying degrees of proficiency in the attempts that the student made.*

As you can see, the teacher noticed varying levels of proficiency with regard to the different dimensions of the Writing Analysis Tool in her analysis of her students’ work. Let’s take a closer look at how the teacher analyzed one particular student’s essay draft to better understand her application of the tool.

Within his introductory paragraph, this student has identified the theme of *The Giver,* as the following:“memories are an important part of everyday life.” Then, in the first body paragraph of his essay draft, the student writes:

“In The Giver, there was plenty of examples to support the theme. One of them is an actual quote. The Chief Elder told Jonas at the ceremony of Twelve, “Jonas, you will be trained to be our next Receiver of Memory.” The context of the quote is during the ceremony of 12, Chief Elder and Jonas. What the quote means that only one person holds the memories because no one else wants them. I don’t think that’s right because everyone deserves memories.”

For Dimension 1, the teacher determined that this student demonstrated “Strong Evidence” of Focus, and in her feedback to the student, she wrote:

You articulate a clear and concise theme in your introductory paragraph, and each supporting paragraph relates back to the same theme.

For Dimension 2, the teacher determined that the student demonstrated “Evidence of Attempt” regarding providing supporting evidence. She elaborates in her written feedback, stating:

You insert your opinion in many places, instead of explaining how your evidence supports the theme. For example, “I don’t think that’s right because everyone deserves memories” is your opinion, not an explanation of why the evidence SHOWS that memories are important. How does the selection of a Receiver of Memory show that memories are important in everyday life?

Finally, for Dimension 3, the teacher determined that the student again demonstrated “Evidence of Attempt” in using the language of the discipline to make information clear. Hhere is her feedback:

Your language is VERY informal. This is not a conversation that you are having with friends. For example, “I don’t think that’s right” is an informal statement (not to mention an opinion!) and does not clearly explain what you’re trying to say about how your evidence supports your thesis.

Explore: Interpret Evidence – Learning Event

In this learning event, you will analyze an essay written by another student in the class. Take a moment to read this student’s work and use the Writing Analysis Tool *yourself* to analyze it. Then, you can download the Expert Analysis to compare your interpretation with that of an expert in the field.

Explore: Interpret Evidence – Reflection Questions

In the featured lesson, the teacher used the Writing Analysis Tool as a formative assessment tool to help guide her instruction, and she also gave it to her students as a peer evaluation tool. Here you can read a selected piece of student work and an associated peer evaluation. Please read these pieces and reflect on the role that peer evaluation can play in the formative assessment process. Also, can you think of ways in which the Writing Analysis Tool might be adapted for student use?

Explore: Act On Evidence Vignette

In this final section of the module you will see the teacher act on her interpretations of student evidence, using the Writing Analysis Tool as a guide.

First, you will hear how the teacher’s use of the Writing Analysis Tool helped her to determine focus areas for what her students need to work on next. In the subsequent clip, you will see the teacher providing this verbal feedback to her students at the start of the second lesson, before students begin working on their revisions.

*And so after looking at the writing and using the Writing Analysis Tool. So looking specifically for focus and the supporting evidence that they provided and the way their work was organized, um, there were varying degrees of proficiency at this point. So there were some students who kind of got the idea of the structure, that there is gonna be an introduction that, you know the next three paragraphs are gonna provide the support and there's gonna be a conclusion in the end. Um, the introduction, in some of their writing, was, you could tell that they had some ideas, but they weren't clearly defined. Um, there's a hint of a spark in there somewhere. Um, and because it wasn't clearly defined, then the rest of their essay kind of ran everywhere. And so using that Writing Analysis Tool really helped me to focus just on those specific nuggets. You know, what does the focus look? Did they state a thesis or topic at the beginning? And did they continue with that throughout the essay? You know, did they provide support? What kind of language did they use? Did they tie their ideas together to organize it?*

*Okay, like I said, I had an opportunity to take a look at your work last night, and I made comments. Before you dig into the comments that I made, I want to give you some verbal feedback. I want you to hear from me. In the conversations yesterday, in the last lesson I heard many of you sitting with a partner and being able to articulate what your theme was, or explain what your theme was and tried to provide the evidence to support what the theme was. Okay. I also heard and saw some people who were still gathering evidence, so trying to make sense of the evidence they found. Then I saw some people able to name the tools that the author used, be a character action, or dialogue, or specific literary devices that the author used to help develop the theme. Okay. And all those conversations are absolutely wonderful and help us along the way to writing this essay.*

After analyzing her students’ essay drafts, the teacher also realized that the original template she used to help students compose their introductory paragraphs was not successful in helping students articulate a focused thesis and lay the groundwork for their supporting evidence in the subsequent body paragraphs.

In the next clip, the teacher reflects on how her interpretation of student writing samples illuminated the shortcomings of her original introductory paragraph frame. Then, we will see the teacher provide a revised introductory frame to her students during her second lesson in order to help them revise and strengthen their introductory paragraphs.

*As I looked at student writing, um, I realized that we need to take a step back. And that students needed a little bit more scaffolding. So that they could meet the expectation and be successful, not only with the introductory paragraph, but with the rest of the essay. 'Cause the introduction kind of really serves as the foundation for the rest of the essay.*

*And what I found, as teachers often borrow, was a template online, and I had used it before as it was already written, and you know, we kind of struggled through it in the past, and I didn't really think anything of it. Until this particular assignment, this particular task, where I am absolutely, positively more clear about the objective that and what I want the students to be able to do, and the outcome that I am looking for. And so I think because I was more clear on the outcome on the product that I wanted them to have at the end and the objective that I wanted the students to be able to meet. It caused me to go back and take a look at that writing frame, that writing template. It was already set up, I felt, in a way that all students have to do is to plug in their, you know, their evidence from their graphic organizer, and it would just be laid out for them. But there was something about the way it was worded. Again, it was the language that you know, kind of caused a little bit of confusion. And so when they got the original template, um the students were already to dive with the specifics even though this was the introduction. Well, you know, she develops this theme because first, she describes Jonas like this, and then Jonas has this conversation and finally, you know he decides he's gonna make this move. You know, where do you go from there? If that's your introduction, there's no more essay, right? You have nothing else to share. You share it all. But not only that they kind of missed the whole idea of that there are these specific tools that the author uses to develop the theme.*

*And that's kind of, that was kind of the point, right, so having to kind of tweak and reword that framework was really beneficial for them because then they can see yes, I am putting the title here of the book, and the author, and a little bit information about the author, and here's where I put what I think the theme is and here is how she develops it. Tool #1, tool #2, and then finally, at the end of the text or towards the end, tool #3, done.*

*Not only that I revised this graphic organizer, I also took a moment because when I read your introductions a lot of them were very specific even though I said in the last lesson and I showed you the introduction that I wrote that you were just naming the tool that the author uses to develop the theme, right? So I went back and I took a look at the frame that we could use. I took a look at the frame that we did use, and I revised it. And this kind of gives you some clues about what specifically is expected in this part of your essay.*

*So in (the title of the book),um, this is something about the book, so information about the book, author, information about the author. And then here you are going use a verb like "claims" or "suggests", "asserts", "suggests,” "reasons", "argues" that, and then whatever you said the theme was is going to go there, okay? So you've made your assertion, you already decided what the theme is of the book that goes here. The next part, you write how the author develops it. She develops this idea by first ..., and then a verb here, either she "presents", she "creates", she "illustrates", she "uses", okay? And the your first tool. Where's your first tool coming from? Our graphic organizer. From your graphic organizer, okay? And it says, "Then, uses, presents, illustrates, employs tool #2". Where does tool #2 come from? Your graphic organizer. Last transition, "Finally", or you can use "towards the end of the text", or "lastly", he or she, another verb, and then the last tool from the graphic organizer. Does that make it more clear for you? Yes. Is that seem like it's easier to understand? Yes.*

During the remainder of the second lesson, students begin reviewing the feedback they receive from the teacher in the form of the Writing Analysis Tool. They also begin to draft new introductory paragraphs using the revised introductory paragraph frame.

You can see samples of student work, including their drafts and final essays, in the toolkit section of this module.

Explore: Act On Evidence – Learning Event

As you can see from the following sample of student work, there is marked improvement in this student’s introductory paragraph using the old template versus the new one. Reflect on the differences between the first introductory paragraph and the second. How did the revised frame help this student to formulate a clearer and focused introductory paragraph?

Summarize

Now that you have finished this module, take a few minutes to read and think about the questions, which ask you to apply what you have learned. Enter your responses in the text boxes. For a copy, click Print or Email. Your answers will not be saved when you close the module.

1. “Language of the discipline” could refer to any of the following: language from text consulted during research for the essay, content-specific vocabulary or word types specific to the discipline (nominalization for science, descriptors for narratives, etc.), “academic” vocabulary, or “mortar words.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)