TEACHING ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING
TEXAS HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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WHY DOES WRITING MATTER?

• Writing is the primary basis upon which student intellect will be judged—in college, in the workplace, and in the community.

• Writing is an essential job skill.
WRITING MATTERS IN THE REAL WORLD!

• A Wall Street Journal article entitled “Must Have Job Skills” identified clear communication, which includes clear writing, as the #1 skill necessary for success in the current job market.

• A Washington Post article (“Career Coach: Are Writing Skills Necessary Anymore?”) queried executives, consultants, and business leaders from various disciplines, and all of them stressed the value of good writing skills in today’s workforce, noting that “writing is even more important than in previous years.” At the same time, these business leaders stated that writing skills among graduates have declined.

• Learning to write well is IMPORTANT and will have an impact on future goals!
WHY DO STUDENTS RESIST WRITING SO MUCH?

They don’t feel like a participant!

How do we get them to see that they use these skills regularly?

• Purpose + Audience + Tone = Decisions students make every day!
FIRST STEP TO CREATING A SOUND ARGUMENT—WRITING A THESIS STATEMENT!

• A thesis is not a statement of fact: Martin Luther King wrote “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

• A thesis is not a half-hearted attempt to pick a fight that makes the writer seem unreasonable: “Letter from Birmingham Jail” is the Martin Luther King's best work, and anyone who doesn’t agree can shove it.

• A thesis is not an abstract assertion: Humans have debated issues of race since the beginning of time.

• A thesis is not a list of various subtopics: In “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King expresses sadness at the ways that the other ministers handled his arrest, irritation that America is still dealing with issues of race, and anger over the treatment he receives in jail.
THE THESIS SHOULD CONTAIN THREE IMPORTANT POINTS:

- An opinion
- The reason for having this opinion
- A consideration of why the idea is important or an attempt to address the “so-what” question
## INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start</th>
<th>Start with a statement to introduce or set up the idea.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set up</td>
<td>Set up the context.</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>State thesis or main idea as the last sentence of the introduction.</td>
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BODY PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

**Front-Load the point!**

**“** Be sure that the other sentences in the paragraph elaborate on and offer support for the topic sentence and, therefore, the thesis.

Use concrete evidence!

**“** Avoid ending a body paragraph on a transition to the next body paragraph. Instead, wrap up the main idea in the paragraph.
THE TOPIC SENTENCE SHOULD PERFORM THREE MAIN TASKS

- It must be argumentative.
- It must highlight the main point in the paragraph.
- It must tie back to the thesis statement.
EVIDENCE-BASED ARGUMENT! USING QUOTES EFFECTIVELY

• STEP 1: Select an excerpt from the text that is informative, surprising, or particularly relevant to the argument.

• STEP 2: Decide how much of a quote that is actually NEEDED to prove the point.

• STEP 3: Embed the quote!
  • Use a signal phrase: Wes Moore states, “I was reminded of all of the sacrifices my mother was making to keep me there” (25).
  • Weave analysis and embedded quotes: Desmond also reveals a pattern of unequal opportunities by stating that the government “legitimizes and defends landlords’ rights” to accumulate as much income as possible (308).
  • Use a colon: Perhaps Desmond’s most convincing evidence that the government actively discourages poor people from saving money is Larraine’s irrefutable response: “I can’t leave money in my bank” (217).

• Step 4: ANALYZE the quote!!
COMMON STUDENT MISTAKES WITH QUOTING

• A dropped or unincorporated quotation: “I was reminded of all the sacrifices my mother was making to keep me there” (Moore 25).

• A sentence with a quote that becomes a comma splice: Wes Moore struggled as a child, but he knew his mom was trying to help him, “I was reminded of all the sacrifices my mother was making to keep me there” (25).

• A sentence with a quote that becomes a run-on: Her determination and passion caused him to understand that she had great expectations for him and his life “Every time I looked around at the buildings and the trees and the view of the river, I was reminded of all the sacrifices my mother was making to keep me there” (Moore 25).

• A quote that relies too heavily on square brackets: Wes Moore claims that his “nonexistent relationship with his father [is what causes Wes’s] seeming indifference about being a father himself” (101).
IN CONCLUSION...

(PLEASE NEVER WRITE THIS!)

• A conclusion should DRAW CONCLUSIONS and offer closure.

• A conclusion can (and should) contain new insights; however, it shouldn’t be bringing up new points in the argument.

• A conclusion should avoid summary.
STEPS TO CREATE A BETTER ARGUMENT

- Understand assignment
- Consider audience, purpose, and tone
- Brainstorm
- Create the thesis
- Organize ideas and make an outline
- Start drafting
- Revise! Revise! Revise!
Let's eat grandma!
Let's eat, grandma!
PUNCTUATION SAVES LIVES!
QUESTIONS?

Contact me!

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