



ACS Athens
American Community Schools

Promoting Inclusion Through Differentiated Instruction in Writing:

A case study of 5th grade persuasive writing

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Presentation Overview

- **Understand** the importance of inclusive practices in the classroom.
- **Explore** the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to support diverse learners through a 5th grade case study.
- **Learn** practical strategies for creating inclusive learning environments.



Case Study

Context:

- 5th-grade students at ACS Athens Elementary
- Persuasive essay writing & reading unit (interdisciplinary approach)

Cohort:

Seven students with diagnosed learning disorders supported through the Optimal Learning Program (OLP).

Challenges include difficulties in structuring written pieces, writing mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization and grammar) and elaborating in written pieces.



Unit Goals

Overarching Goal: To craft a persuasive essay in relation to the United Nation Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs)

Learning objective #1: Students will be able to craft a five paragraph essay (introduction, three body paragraphs and conclusion).

Learning objective #2: Given a burger paragraph graphic organizer, students will be able to include a clear topic and closing sentence in each body paragraph.

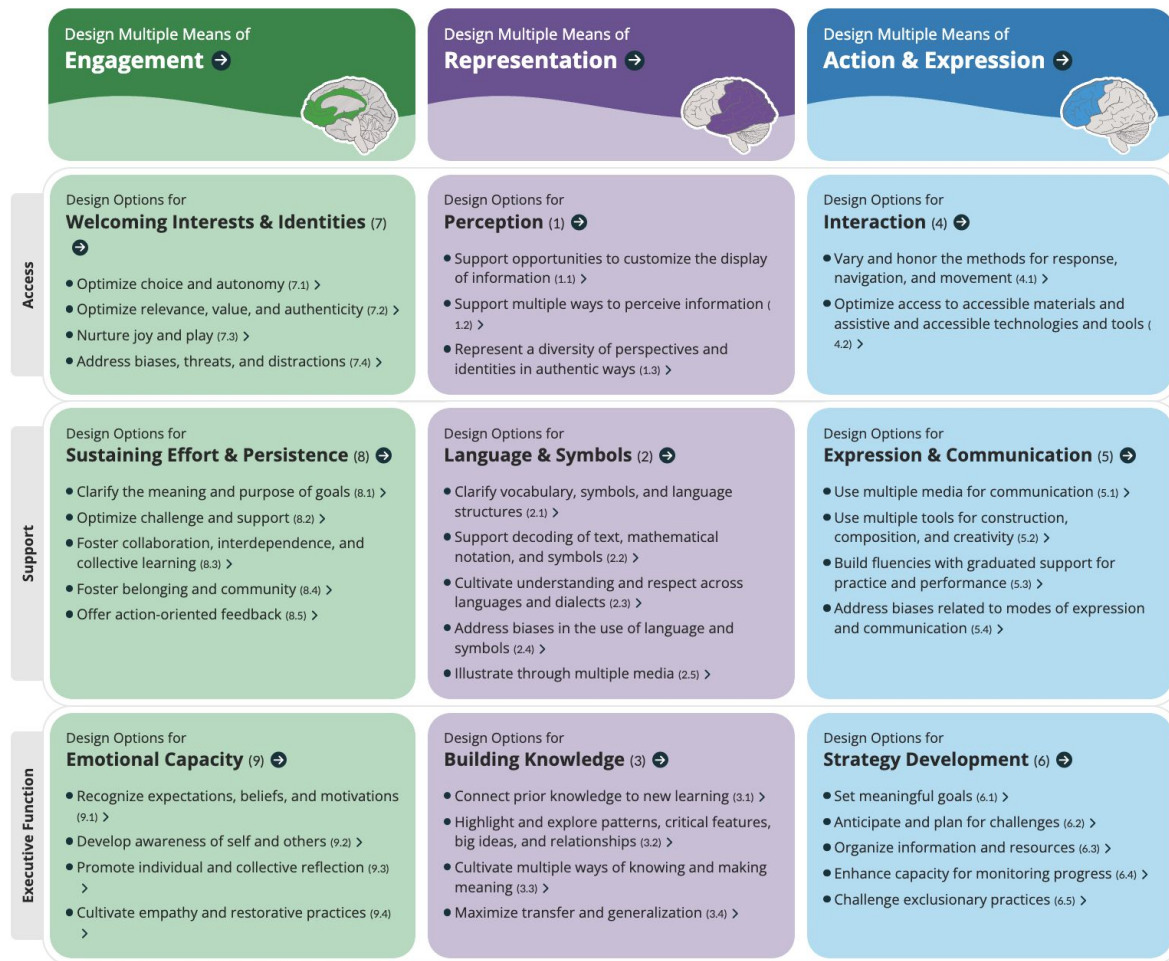
Learning objective #3: Students will be able to craft a thesis statement which they will include in their introduction. The thesis statement will include their claim and at least two reasons to support the claim.

How can we get our students there?

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

The goal of UDL is **learner agency** that is purposeful & reflective, resourceful & authentic, strategic & action-oriented.

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UDL Principle: Engagement

Design options for welcoming interests & identities

- Student choice in essay topics and stances.
- Students could relate to the SDGs, both through their personal perspectives and interests, and were inspired by the community and global action.

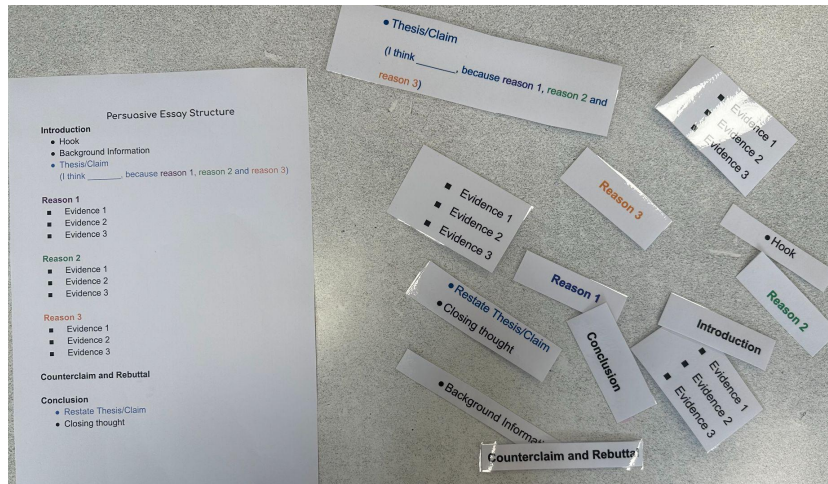




UDL Principle: Representation

Design options for perception

- Use of manipulatives and visuals.



Example 1: hands on experience through a tactile visual of essay structure

Imagine walking along a beautiful beach, only to find the shore littered with plastic bags, tangled in seaweed and floating in the waves. This sight has sadly become all too common as plastic pollution continues to grow, endangering wildlife and damaging the environment. While plastic bags may seem convenient, their devastating impact far outweighs their short-term usefulness. They pollute our oceans, harm wildlife, and contribute to global waste problems. Given the growing awareness of environmental protection, it is clear that plastic bags should be banned. This is because they harm marine life, contribute to non-biodegradable waste, and waste valuable resources.

First and foremost, plastic bags are dangerous to marine life. Millions of tons of plastic waste end up in the ocean each year, and plastic bags are a large part of this pollution. Marine animals like turtles, whales, and seabirds often mistake these bags for food, leading to choking, blockages, or even death. In fact, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), plastic debris causes the deaths of more than 100,000 marine animals annually. If we ban plastic bags, we can help reduce this serious threat to marine ecosystems and protect countless species from harm.

Another important reason plastic bags should be banned is that they contribute heavily to non-biodegradable waste. Plastic bags take hundreds of years to break down, and during this time, they occupy valuable space in landfills or, worse, end up littering our streets and natural environments. Unlike biodegradable materials, plastic does not decompose but instead breaks down into smaller toxic particles that further pollute the earth. By banning plastic bags, we would significantly cut down on the waste filling our landfills and reduce long-term pollution.

Finally, the production of plastic bags wastes valuable resources. Plastic bags are made from petroleum, a non-renewable resource that is already under significant strain due to global demand. Producing millions of plastic bags each year requires vast amounts of energy, water, and fossil fuels, all of which could be better used for other purposes. Moreover, the pollution from producing and transporting plastic bags contributes to global warming and air pollution. A ban on plastic bags would save these resources and help move us toward a more sustainable future.

In conclusion, plastic bags pose a serious threat to marine life, contribute to non-biodegradable waste, and waste valuable resources. For the sake of the environment and future generations, it is crucial that we ban plastic bags. By doing so, we can significantly reduce pollution, protect wildlife, and move toward a more sustainable, resource-efficient world.

Example 2: color use for emphasis of essay structure in a modelled final product



UDL Principle: Action & Expression

Design options for expression & communication -

- Class Debates
- Digital Posters
- Student recording



Design options for strategy development -

- Graphic organizers
- Burger Paragraph visual
- Self-monitoring checklist



An example of a student's digital poster



Graphic organizers (option 1)

MY GRAPHIC ORGANISER FOR PERSUASIVE WRITING 

introduction

Hook: _____

Personal Experience - Examples: _____

Thesis: _____

reason 1	reason 2	reason 3
Main idea: _____	Main idea: _____	Main idea: _____
detail 1 _____	detail 1 _____	detail 1 _____
detail 2 _____	detail 2 _____	detail 2 _____
detail 3 _____	detail 3 _____	detail 3 _____

conclusion

Write your "Thesis" again: _____

Reasons why you believe that: _____

Call reader to take action OR Final wise words: _____



Graphic organizers (option 2)

Persuasive Essay Graphic Organizer 2

Introduction

- Hook

- Background Information

- Thesis/Claim
(I think _____, because reason 1, reason 2 and reason 3)

Reason 1:

- Evidence 1
- Evidence 2
- Evidence 3

Reason 2:

- Evidence 1
- Evidence 2
- Evidence 3

Reason 3:

- Evidence 1
- Evidence 2
- Evidence 3

Counterclaim and Rebuttal

Conclusion

- Restate Thesis/Claim

- Closing thought



Graphic organizers (option 3)

Persuasive Essay Graphic Organizer

Introduction

- Hook:

- Background Information:

- Thesis: I believe ____ [claim] ____, because reason 1, reason 2 and reason 3.

One reason that [claim] is that

- For example,

- Also,

- In addition,

Another reason that [claim] is that

- For example,

- Also,

- In addition,

The third reason that [claim] is that

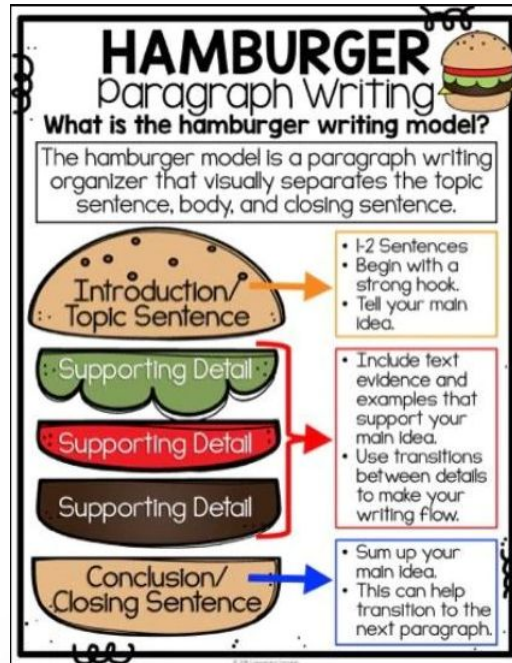
- For example,

- Also,

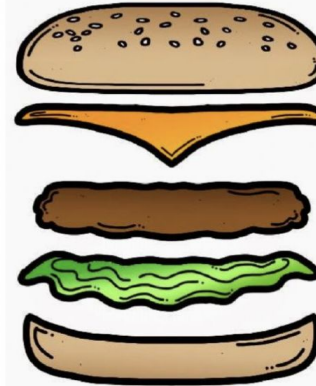
- In addition,



Graphic organizers: paragraph support



Remember the parts of a paragraph



First sentence: Main idea
(introduction)

Supporting idea

Supporting idea

Supporting idea

Last sentence: Your thoughts
about the topic.
(Conclusion)


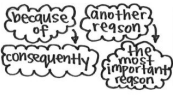


Self-monitoring checklists

Persuasive Essay Checklist

- ☐ **Introduction**
 - ☐ Hook
 - ☐ Background Information
 - ☐ **Thesis/Claim**
(I think _____, because reason 1, reason 2 and reason 3)
- ☐ **Reason 1:**
 - ☐ Evidence 1
 - ☐ Evidence 2
 - ☐ Evidence 3
- ☐ **Reason 2:**
 - ☐ Evidence 1
 - ☐ Evidence 2
 - ☐ Evidence 3
- ☐ **Reason 3:**
 - ☐ Evidence 1
 - ☐ Evidence 2
 - ☐ Evidence 3
- ☐ **Counterclaim and Rebuttal**
- ☐ **Conclusion**
 - ☐ **Restate Thesis/Claim**
 - ☐ Closing thought

Opinion Writing Checklist

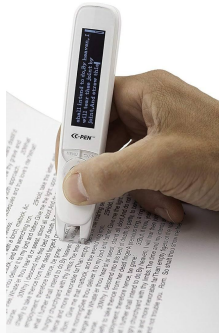
Grade 5				
STRUCTURE				
Overall	I made a claim or thesis on a topic or text, supported it with reasons, and provided a variety of evidence for each reason.			
	Did I do it like a fifth grader?	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES
Lead		I wrote an introduction that led to a claim or thesis and got my readers to care about my opinion. I got my readers to care by not only including a cool fact or jazzy question, but also figuring out what was significant in or around the topic and giving readers information about what was significant about the topic.		
	Chocolate milk ^{is unhealthy} is bad so schools should stop ^{ban} it.	I worked to find the precise words to state my claim; I let readers know the reasons I would develop later.		
Transitions	This shows that...	I used transition words and phrases to connect evidence back to my reasons.		
		I helped readers follow my thinking with phrases such as another reason and the most important reason. I used phrases such as consequently and because of to show what happened.		



Additional Tools

The following tools were available to all students:

- **Reading pen** - Access to this tool during the research phase
- **Speech-to-text/ word processor** - Access to a computer throughout the writing process. Students could type or use speech-to-text during note taking and paraphrasing.
- **Article Format** - Students had the choice of reading articles either in digital format or in hard copy. Articles were screened for readability to ensure comprehension. Students were also permitted to watch educational videos on their topic as an alternative way of gathering information.



AI platforms



Student Performance & Assessment

Pre Assessment

Pre On Demand administered to assess student level and abilities prior to unit

Formative Assessment

Ongoing feedback through student-teacher conferencing and live documents

Post Assessment

Post On Demand administered to assess student level following intervention

Pre on Demand **Opinion Writing** Assessment

Think of a topic or issue that you **know and care about**, an issue around which you have **strong feelings**.

You have **50 minutes** to write an **opinion** or **argument** text in

which you will **write your opinion or claim and tell reasons** why you feel that way.

When you do this, draw on everything you know about essays, persuasive letters, and reviews.

Please keep in mind that you'll have 50 minutes to complete this, so you will need to **plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting**.

If you want to use information from a book or another source you are more than welcome to do so, as long as you cite your sources. However, you don't have to use other sources, it's up to you.

Student prompt used for Pre Assessment



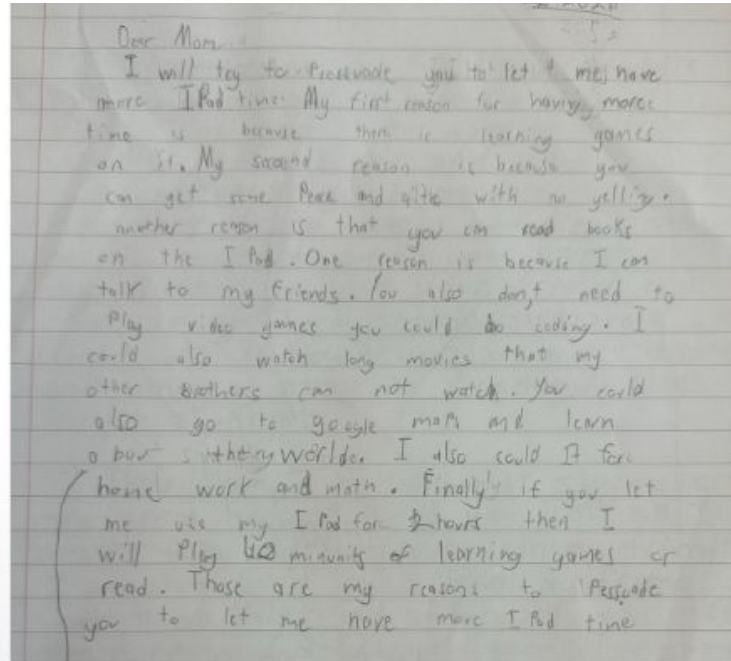
Pre On Demand (student A)

Learning objective

#1: craft a five paragraph essay

Learning objective #2:

include a clear topic and closing sentence in each body paragraph.



Learning objective #3: craft a thesis statement which will include their claim and at least two reasons



Post On Demand (student A)

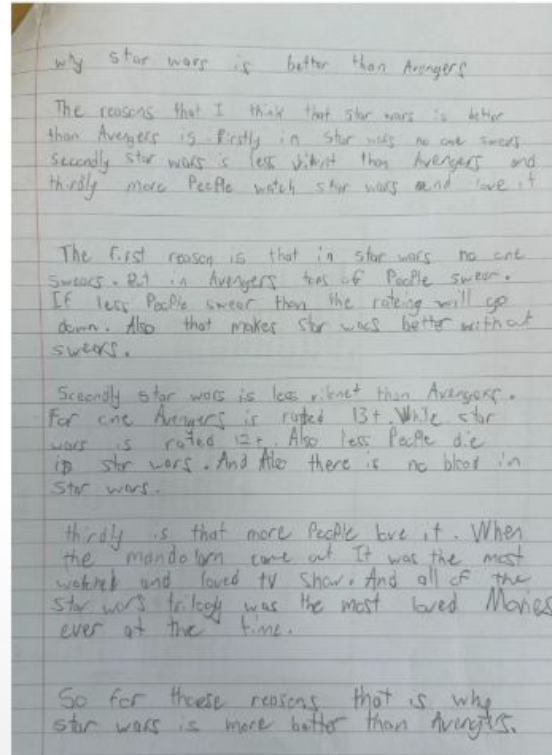
Learning objective

#1: craft a five paragraph essay

Learning

objective #2:

include a clear topic and closing sentence in each body paragraph.



Learning

objective #3:

craft a thesis statement which will include their claim and at least two reasons



Pre On Demand (student B)

Learning objective

#1: craft a five paragraph essay

The best planet in the solar system in my implanon is Mars because it is one of the planets named after a Greek goddess. Mars is also one of the best looking planets in the solar system. Even the Greeks love the planet because they name it after the goddess of war. They did it from the color red that you see on the planet and they thought that it was the birthplace of many powerful people. For a long time war was connected to mars. They thought that mars was a symbol of power and war.

Mars will probably be terraformed so we can live there. It also has many robots that have explored the planet for water and to see if there is life on mars. People are studying if there was life there. Mars has ice on the planet so there may have been life on Mars in the past. Mars will be one of the only planets that will be terraformed.

Mars is one of the planets that has the things to terraform it. It also is the only planet that has clean water. It has a good amount of heat as well. Its atmosphere is also very good for us. It is so good that there may be life on it right now. People are making ideas to go to mars and terraform it.

People think if there was life on mars. I picked it because it is so fascinating. There are so many that Mars could have been like. it may have been like earth in the past. Many other people are also so fascinated by its past and wonder if we could live there. I think that we could live there. What do you think about it? Could we live there or not?

Learning objective #2:

include a clear topic and closing sentence in each body paragraph.

Learning objective #3: craft a thesis statement which will include their claim and at least two reasons



Post On Demand (student B)

Learning objective

#1: craft a five paragraph essay

Learning objective #2:

include a clear topic and closing sentence in each body paragraph.

equal rights for all

By date june 11 2024

Think of a world where everyone has equal rights. A world that can not be real because of us. We need to be equal. The man was made to have equal rights. No one can take away these rights. That is true but people break the rights of humans. That makes others rich and the rest poor. I have a dream that one day all men can be equal because skin color doesn't matter and sex doesn't matter and because we all came from the same place with the same rights

Skin color doesn't matter. People think that if you are white then you are better than other people but that is not true. 26.4% of people do not believe that we are all the same. Because people are racist then people can not get as much pay as others. Places in poverty have less than half their people not working because people will not let them. That makes it harder for everyone to live and work. It makes countries weak and poor. We need to stop it! But we will lose over \$42,000,000,000\$ on convening everyone in every country that we need to take action.

Also people think that if you are a man then you are better than a woman. Because in the very beginning the men would hunt and the women would pick berries and other fruits. That made many think women are weak and are not needed. But because of this only 33% of women work instead they do not thing. That also makes countries that do not support women weak and poor. The women we have working get paid less than men. That makes everything bad.

Learning

objective #3: craft a thesis statement which will include their claim and at least two reasons



Key Takeaways & Future Considerations

- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** Integrating writing and reading workshops with real-world global issues (SDGs) made the unit engaging and meaningful for students.
- **Use of UDL Principles:** Differentiation and choice through the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) ensured that students of varying abilities could meet learning objectives.
- **Success of Targeted Interventions:** Graphic organizers, manipulatives, and self-monitoring checklists helped students organize ideas and improve their persuasive writing.
- **Student Growth:** Pre- and post-assessments showed clear improvements in thesis crafting, paragraph structure, and overall persuasive writing skills, with most students achieving learning goals.
- **Future Considerations:** Extending assessment time, introducing exit tickets for formative assessment, and increasing the use of assistive tools (reading pen, text-to-speech) will further support student success.

