The Comprehensive Expository Writing Guide for Grades 6-8

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based on the original work of Barbara Mariconda and Dea Paoletta Auray
Students can make dramatic progress with their writing during the middle school years. Many will have the vocabulary, academic skills and body of general knowledge to make writing a meaningful way of communicating their interests and viewpoints. However, some will require significant support in all phases of the writing process and all will require ongoing review of the skills they need to organize their thoughts for writing, conduct effective research, and glean information from a variety of texts. Overall, the goal for the middle school years is to make writing a means through which students can effectively “show what they know.” Being able to do so is crucial for success in high school, college, and beyond.

In the activities that follow, your students will learn to:

- Recognize and distinguish between genres, including the sub-genres of expository writing. They will be able to spot the subtle differences between expository and opinion writing as well as opinion writing and the more complex argumentative writing.
- Organize information in a logical manner so that their writing is easily understood, cohesive, and effective.
- Develop broad yet distinct main ideas.
- Generate a variety of rich supporting details and fact-based evidence.
- Conduct effective research and enhance their writing with quotes, statistics, amazing facts, descriptive segments, and anecdotes.
- Write compelling introductions with powerful leads and clear topic sentences.
- Creatively restate their main ideas in conclusions that sum up the whole piece and end with decisive, memorable statements.
- Respond to a variety of writing assessments with confidence.

The activities provided here were developed for grades 6-8, as students hone the writing skills they need to produce essays with multiple body paragraphs as well as effective introductions and conclusions.

Also included are a variety of more challenging activities that will guide more advanced students through the process of further developing and refining their writing skills. In each section you will find a variety of activities to meet the needs of the range of students in your class. Some lessons are largely teacher directed, others require greater independence on the part of the students. This allows you to differentiate to best meet the needs of all students.

In addition to the multitude of writing activities included throughout this text, you will also find many foundational exercises necessary to inform writing tasks. These critical thinking exercises (such as sorting details into main idea categories, recognizing fact from opinion, analysis of text, etc.) precede the actual writing lessons. Without this prior knowledge and experience students cannot be expected to effectively complete writing tasks.

Lastly, given the demands of the latest standards and testing trends it is critical for students to generate their writing in both the traditional pen to paper mode and directly at the keyboard. It is important to note that the latest research suggests that each modality stimulates the brain differently. Pen to paper is a slower, more multi-sensory process, which reinforces the assimilation of knowledge and skills in a wider variety of ways.
At the same time, in order to be an effective communicator in the 21st century students must also possess agile keyboard skills. Therefore, we suggest that students are given the opportunity to respond to the written tasks in this text in either modality, at the teacher’s discretion. The following icon will appear on lesson plan pages in which keyboarding may be an option. Considering your students’ access to and experience with computer technology vs. paper and pen, you can designate which assignments seem better suited to a traditional or technological approach.

What You’ll Find in this Guide

This book was designed to provide everything you’ll need to teach expository and opinion writing in grades 6-8. It includes not only opportunities for writing informational and opinion texts, but more importantly, we’ve deconstructed effective writing into all of the foundational concepts and discrete skills students need in order to be successful.

Writing is a complex task. Simply discussing the attributes of powerful texts as a prerequisite to writing is not enough. Students must learn, through explicit, objective-driven instruction, the salient features of the genre, author’s purpose, and have a strong grasp of basic concepts that inform these understandings. For example, before asking students to organize their writing by arranging like details into paragraphs, they must know how to sort and categorize, to use inductive and deductive reasoning. Before we suggest the use of more powerful vocabulary in their writing we need to have students use it comfortably in spoken language. They need scaffolding to grasp and apply these concepts to the writing task. Skipping any of the foundational skills only results in frustration. Many writing resources make a lot of assumptions around these foundational concepts and students suffer the consequences.

This guide includes clear, objective-driven lessons that cover the all-important foundational concepts, and then build writing lessons on this firm base of understanding. Then, we begin teaching all of the specific skills that are the hallmarks of effective expository and opinion writing.

This approach is extremely powerful for teachers and youngsters alike. Teachers begin to look at writing in more objective terms, in relation to specific skills taught. Students gain by having what can be an overwhelming process broken into manageable parts.

For ease of use, the book is divided into skill sections. Within each section you’ll find a wide range of lessons - some very directed, others requiring more independence on the part of the student. These can be used at your discretion based on the needs of your students.

The Skill Sections are as follows:

Section 1: Recognizing Genre/Organization
Section 2: Broad Yet Distinct Main Ideas
Section 3: Elaboration
Section 4: Research
Section 5: Introductions and Conclusions
Section 6: Authentic Writing Tasks
Objective
Students learn strategies for close reading that provide valuable information about organization that will later inform their writing.

Strategies include:
• Skimming and scanning for an overview of the entire text
• Recognizing the importance of headings, keywords, diagrams, illustrations
• Writing a summary based on information provided (text conventions)

IMPORTANT VOCABULARY
title, topic, headings, bold-face print, italicized print, key words, diagram, photograph, illustration, caption

Procedure
1. Explain to the class that they will be reading a selection titled The Mayan Empire and that they’ll be learning some strategies for how to read more effectively in order to glean the most information from the piece.

2. Photocopy pp. 45-46 and distribute copies to the class and project it on the white board. To build context and background, begin by sharing your own pre-existing knowledge of the topic and discussing any background knowledge your students might have. Then, ask them to listen carefully as you read the piece aloud to them. (This is particularly important for students who may have difficulty reading the piece independently.) This will give them a sense of what the text is all about.

3. Explain that, before they read an expository piece, it’s important to look for certain cues that can provide valuable information to aid the reader’s understanding. Direct their attention to the piece and ask them to annotate it together, labeling the important parts. Use the guided questions below to inform your discussion.

4. First, circle the title. Ask them what the title reveals. (the topic) Remind them that the topic tells the reader what the entire piece will be about. Model this for students and have them do the same.

5. Next, for reference purposes, number each paragraph.

6. Point out and underline the headings. Explain that the headings allow you to quickly skim and scan the piece and get a sense of the main ideas of the piece.

7. Ask them to help you fill in the Summarizing Framework, based solely on the title and headings.

   TOPIC: The Mayan Empire
   Main Idea #1: Early Mayan Settlements
   Main Idea #2: The Mysterious Fall of the Mayan Empire
   Main Idea #3: The Legacy of the Maya

(continued)
Discuss how identifying the topic and headings can set a purpose for learning. As readers they already have a good idea what they’ll be reading about, which aids in comprehension. Discuss how a summary such as this might be an excellent way for an author to begin. (Helps with organization and focus.)

8. Next, in each paragraph, have them locate all bold-faced or italicized words. Explain that these are key vocabulary words that might be new to the reader. These keywords are usually either preceded or followed by a definition to aid in understanding. Point out that these specially marked words indicate some of the important details in the piece.

(Option: For homework, have students create a key word vocabulary chart, listing each key word followed by a definition they craft from the information provided in the text.)

9. Point out the map and its caption. Ask students why both are important.

10. Next, on the white board or chart paper, translate the information on the summarizing framework into an extended summary using the following sentence starters:

   This expository text provides information about the Mayan Empire. We’ll trace its development from small early settlements, to its mysterious fall, and learn about the lasting legacy of the Maya.

   Or...

   This expository text discusses The Great Depression. The author chronicles the emergence of Hoovervilles, details the devastation of the dust bowl, and reveals how a newly elected U.S. president rebuilt the economy with his “New Deal.”

   Or...

   This informative piece is all about the continent of South America. The author explores the physical and human characteristics of the Amazon River, the Andes Mountain Range, and the Atacama Desert.

   NOTE: Frequently the middle school social studies curriculum includes the study of the five themes of geography and this informative piece about South America explores one of them: the physical and human characteristics of a place. The expository pieces about the Mayan Empire and the Great Depression address topics often explored in middle school social studies too. If appropriate at your school, you might want to work with your social studies department to create cross-curricular connections when you use any of these three pieces for writing instruction.

11. Finally, have them read the text independently. Discuss how examining the following text conventions: title, headings, bold or italicized key words, photographs and captions guide their reading - think about how much they’ve learned before they’ve even started reading! Also point out the way that the author organized the information made it more accessible to the reader.

   NOTE: Approach the articles on pp. 49-58 in the same fashion. You may also use any high quality magazine article or textbook chapter in the same way.
The Mayan Empire

Imagine a city of stone in a tropical jungle, ruled by kings and bustling with builders, star-gazing astronomers and fierce warriors. That could be what a Mayan settlement looked like the earliest days of Mesoamerica, the southern regions of North America from the year 2000 BC until the early 1500s. As the native people of this region, the Maya created one of the best known civilizations of ancient times in what is now Mexico and Central America. Let’s take a look at how the Mayan empire rose and fell, and the legacy left behind by this fascinating civilization.

Early Mayan Settlements

The Maya civilization probably began as small settlements of hunter-gatherers began trading with one another. These settlements got together and formed regional chiefdoms, an organized system of rule usually based on kinship. They became skillful farmers, clearing acres of rain forest to grow crops such as corn, squash, beans and cassava, a starchy vegetable that tastes like a sweet potato and grows in the tropical regions of the Americas. As their farms thrived and their population grew, they set down roots. They began constructing vast cities of stone with tall pyramids that had steep stairs leading up the sides to the top where powerful rulers were laid to rest. Some of these pyramids still stand today. They also built palaces for their “kuhul ajaw” or holy lords that were often situated on elevated stone platforms to keep them safe from seasonal flood waters. While the Maya were once considered a peaceful people, it is now believed that they were anything but. The inscriptions on the stonework they left behind show that the Maya went to war with their neighbors often, fighting to not only protect their cities, but for the prestige of victory and to take prisoners, who became their slaves. Despite those bloody battles, the Mayan empire thrived for nearly 2,000 years.

At its peak, the Mayan Empire covered about 37,000 square miles in southern Mexico and Central America.
The Mysterious Fall of the Mayan Empire

In the 800 A.D., the Mayan empire had great leaders and mighty armies. Trade seemed to flourish, but the population began a slow decline. One hundred years later, many of the great Mayan cities had been abandoned and swallowed up by the jungle. What happened? There are many theories surrounding the mysterious decline of the Mayan civilization. One of the most recent and widely accepted is that drought and the process of clearing, but not replanting trees in a rainforest known as deforestation, brought it to an end. In a recent study, researchers at Arizona State University concluded that the great Mayan city of Chitzen Itza was abandoned at a time when “severe reductions in rainfall were coupled with a rapid rate of deforestation.” This makes sense when we consider that the Mayans used massive amounts of wood to fuel their fires. The rapid deforestation, combined with drought, depleted the soil of nutrients so that crops could no longer grow in the region. The people left the Mayan cities and dispersed into small villages. Centuries later, many were taken as slaves by Spanish conquistadors. In spite of the struggles of the past, an estimated 7 million Maya keep their colorful culture alive today in southern Mexico and Central America.

The Legacy of the Maya

The Maya people were among the most advanced and innovative of their time. Amazing mathematicians, they developed the concept of zero. This feat of brilliance allowed them to work with once unimaginable sums and learn how to measure time. Simply by observing the stars and the cycles of the moon, they created an accurate calendar that is still used in some Mayan communities today. The Maya had their own complex language and kept their own historical records. They harvested rubber from the rainforest tree and used it to make glue, water-resistant cloth and book bindings. If you’re a chocolate lover, you’ll surely appreciate the Maya’s discovery and cultivation of the cocoa bean, with which they made a thick bitter version of the hot chocolate we enjoy today. It is interesting to note that the Maya people created one of the most complex looms for weaving cloth of its day, but they built their cities of stone without even using as basic a tool as the wheel.

From its primitive beginnings to its unpredictable decline, the Mayan Empire made an indelible mark on world history and left us with a legacy of innovation. Without a doubt, it is fascinating to study the rich history and culture of the extraordinary Maya people.
Teacher Background: Elaboration

So often, when students begin expository/informational writing, they will simply string together a list of facts, without elaborating or expounding on them. When we, as teachers, respond by asking, “Could you add some more details?” students generally locate nouns and insert adjectives. These adjectives are often color words, size words, or other overly general adjectives. They have, in fact, followed our directions, however, this simplistic approach to elaboration does little for the overall strength of the piece. The problem is not in students’ responses - the problem is that our directive to them is ineffective.

Here’s a sample of this:

Original Student Version in which the author simply states facts:

Sleepover camp can be fun. Usually you sleep in a cabin with at least four other people. Sometimes you have campfires at night. During the day, you go swimming, ride bikes, play sports and have lots of fun. Camp is also a great place to make new friends.

Typical Student Revision based on an ineffective cue: “Could you add some more details?”

Sleepover camp can be a fun and exciting way to spend your summer. Usually you sleep in a rustic cabin with between 4 and 8 other people. There are usually bunk beds in the cabin. At least once a week, you have campfires and you can roast hot dogs or toast marshmallows. During the day, you go swimming in a lake or pool, ride bikes along mountain trails, play soccer or baseball and do other fun activities. Camp is also a great place to make new friends who you will look forward to seeing you all winter long.

Clearly you can see how the student added more details but notice how these “details” add little to the content or style of the writing. In the next example, the author “shows” rather than “tells,” using details in a powerful, effective way. Notice not only the greater level of description, but, the enhanced level of information in this version:
If you love the outdoors and meeting new people, you would probably enjoy spending a few weeks this summer at a sleepover camp. Offering dozens of exciting activities, this exciting and memorable experience is not only fun, but it helps you learn to do things on your own. Campers report that they enjoy the feeling of self-sufficiency when they leave the comforts of home behind and sleep in a rugged cabin with four to eight other people. Listening to the hoots of owls, they drift off peacefully in rustic bunk-beds and comfy sleeping bags. At most camps, there is a crackling bonfire beneath the starry summer skies at least once a week. Lucky campers have the chance to roast hot dogs and toast marshmallows as they listen to ghost stories and sing songs late into the night. But don’t stay up too late. You’ll need lots of energy to fully enjoy the action-packed days at camp. After breakfast with your friends, the day might begin with an invigorating swim in the pool or lake. If you’re interested in competitive sports, join a baseball or soccer team and see your skills improve with daily play and lots of friendly coaching. You might also decide to take a challenging bike ride along a shady, pine-scented mountain trail. If you enjoy arts and crafts or drama, you’ll have a chance to flex your creative muscles by sculpting with clay or taking on a role in a camp production. As your days pass in a flurry of activity, you will be meeting new people every single day. Don’t be surprised if some become devoted friends whom you look forward to seeing summer after summer.

The first educational objective in regard to creating effective “supporting details” is for students to develop an awareness of the power of “showing” rather than “telling” - to learn to recognize simply stated versus vividly elaborated details. Instruction begins with opportunities for students to compare simply stated facts to vivid, fully elaborated details.

Another important aspect of “elaboration” in expository/informative writing is an awareness of the value of research. The student writing a report on the African elephant will learn to recognize the ways simple research can dramatically inform and enhance their writing.

One extremely effective technique is the application of a variety of detail-generating questions. Students take a basic fact and apply detail-generating questions to it in order to expand their thinking. This technique accomplishes three things: it helps students recognize not only the power of vivid, specific details, but also guides them to see how relevant details lend themselves to delivering even more critical information. The questions also drive research. By asking specific productive questions we can elicit much more powerful responses from students. The quality of the questions we ask will determine the quality of the responses students give. Eventually, students internalize the questions, and begin to apply them independently.

So what are these “detail-generating questions?” They are listed on the Student Reference Sheet on the following page.
DETAIL - GENERATING QUESTIONS

WHAT DOES IT “LOOK” LIKE?

Sound like? Feel like?
Taste like? Smell like? Seem like?
You may need to research this!

WHY IS THAT IMPORTANT?

Why is that important to your main idea?
You may need to research this!

IS EACH DETAIL IN A SEPARATE SENTENCE?

Separate the Grocery List!

DID YOU GIVE A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE?

Avoid general language such as “stuff,” “things, “nice,” etc.
Objective

Students write sentences using two basic detail-generating questions: What does it look like? Why is it important?

Procedure

1. Review the way that detail generating questions can help writers go beyond “Just the Facts” sentences, and allow them to “show” rather than “tell.”

2. Display several online photos of volcanoes. Chart the following “Just the Facts” sentence as a starting point:

   **The eruption of a volcano can be destructive.**

   Find and project a photo or have students view a video of an erupting volcano and point out the underlined detail in the sentence (eruption of a volcano). Ask students to look at the photo and contribute details about the way a volcanic eruption might look like. (What does it “look” like?)

   Revise the sentence using some of the details students’ contributed:

   **The eruption of a volcano can release rivers of red hot lava and thick clouds of gray ash.**

   Now, ask “Why is it important?” See if students can contribute ideas about those details are important. Write:

   **The eruption of a volcano can release rivers of red hot lava as well as thick clouds of gray ash that are capable of destroying nearby communities and wilderness areas.**

3. Point out how this revision corresponds to the detail generating questions by underlining the “What does it look like?” words (red, hot, thick, gray) in one color and underlining the “Why is it important?” part (that can destroy nearby communities, wilderness areas,) in another color.

4. Copy and distribute one of the student activity sheets **Writing Sentences with “What Does It Look Like? Why is it Important?** pp. 284-294. Read through the example on the first activity sheet, underlining the “What does it look like?” words (torrential rains and howling winds) and circling the “Why is it important?” phrase (extreme tides can cause widespread flooding as well as the erosion of beaches and wetlands).

5. Allow students to work independently, applying the detail-generating questions to revise the sentence. Circulate, answering questions and making suggestions as students proceed. Please note that activity sheets 1-4 include examples for students to refer to while activity sheets 5-6 challenge students to apply the detail-generating questions without such guidance. Read strong examples aloud.

   **Optional Extension:** If students are having difficulty coming up with the “Why is it important” part of their revision, use this as a jumping off point for research. A good research question can be framed using the “Why is it important?” language.

   **Ex.** Why is cereal and milk a good breakfast? (See section 4 for more tips on research.)

6. Repeat this activity with the other student activity sheets as needed, or assign as homework.
WRITING SENTENCES WITH “WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?” (5)

Read the detail sentence below. Revise the sentence using the detail-generating questions: What does it look like? Why is it important?

Detail Sentence:

It takes confidence to perform on stage.

Your revision:

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Detail Sentence:

Moose are a large mammal of the northern woods.

Your revision:

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Detail Sentence:

Gym class gives students a chance to develop their athletic abilities.

Your revision:

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
Read the paragraph below. The author has simply listed a few facts about mountain ranges of the world. Instead, the author should have SHOWN us what each mountain range looks like. On another piece of paper, revise this paragraph using the detail-generating questions. Research these mountain ranges on the internet or in the library to get the information you need. You can use the sentence starters at the bottom of the page to vary your sentences. Look for and correct redundant word choice and always remember to break up the grocery list! Finally, look over your completed paragraph and highlight the “What does it look like?” parts of your sentences in red and the “Why is it important?” parts in blue.

There are many great mountain ranges around the world. The Andes is the world’s longest mountain range. The Himalaya is the world’s highest mountain range. The Rockies, the Appalachians and the Cascades are North American mountain ranges. The Alps are the tallest and most famous mountain range in Europe and the Snowies are the highest peaks in Australia. The Atlas Mountains are in northern Africa and its highest peak is Mount Toubka in Morocco.

**SENTENCE STARTERS:**
- Imagine the view from _________________.
- The highest peaks are _________________.
- Only experts should try _________________.
- In the nearby valleys, _________________.
USING DETAIL-GENERATING QUESTIONS (5)

Soaring into the sky with snow-covered peaks and sheer rock faces, mountains are a beautiful and dramatic geographic feature of every continent on Earth. Stretching 4,500 miles along the west coast of South America, the Andes are the longest mountain range in the world. For centuries, these extraordinary peaks have been mined for gold and silver. North America boosts several notable mountain ranges and many consider the jagged Rockies the most scenic of all. Filled with natural wonders such as hot springs and bubbling mud pots, the Rockies begin in the southwestern United States and run north to the Yukon Territories of Canada. Another notable North American range is the Cascades that extend through the states of California, Oregon and Washington and into southern reaches of British Columbia. Lassen Peak and Mount St. Helens, the only active volcanoes on the continental U.S., are part of the Cascades range. To the east, you’ll find the gentle swells of the Appalachians, the oldest mountain range in North America. Only an expert should take on the world’s highest mountain range, the Himalayas. This Asian range attracts adventurers who dream of summing Mount Everest, the world’s highest peak at almost 30,000 feet above sea level. In Europe, the Alps are considered the birthplace of many exhilarating mountaineering sports, including downhill skiing and tobogganing. Covered with ice and snow even in the summer, the Alps experience more destructive avalanches than any other mountain range on earth. Regardless, 120 million people from around the globe visit the Alps each year to enjoy the breathtaking views and world-class winter sports. The Snowies are the ski destination in the land down under. As the highest mountain range in Australia, the Snowies are home to some of the most unique wildlife on earth, including the critically endangered Corroboree Frog, a tiny amphibian with bright yellow and black stripes. Nomadic tribes of native people still tend their flocks of sheep and goats in the Atlas Mountains of northern Africa. With sculptural rock formations and deep river valleys, this range extends for 1,600 miles through Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. From the elegant ski resorts of the Alps to the remotest reaches of the Rockies, mountains are among the great natural wonders of the world. Wouldn’t it be a wonderful adventure to see each and every one of these mighty mountain ranges?
Objective

Students learn to use search engines to research topics of interest to help them add descriptive details to their writing.

Procedure:

1. Review with students what they’ve learned thus far about conducting research online. Be sure to use the vocabulary of online research - key words, search terms, search engines, etc. Refer back Research! Using Search Engines, p. 326, and remind them of some of the ways they can narrow their search.

2. Distribute Researching a Topic of Interest (1) - Endangered Species, p. 335, and talk it through together. Select one endangered species and MODEL the process of generating research questions through classroom discussion.

3. Working independently or with partners, have students select an endangered plant or animal species and generate research questions about the habitat, appearance and behavior of this plant or animal. Circulate as they work on this, offering guidance as necessary.

4. For additional practice, have students complete Researching a Topic of Interest (2) - The Frilled Shark, pp. 336-337, and proceed similarly.

NOTE: You can easily replicate this lesson using thematic material relevant to your curriculum. The most powerful instruction will take place when the research is heavily integrated across the curriculum. We strongly encourage you to apply the format provided to whatever theme, topic, or subject you’re working on in class.

5. Have students use a search engine to locate the answers to their questions. Be sure to have them notice which search term or keyword/phrase yielded the best results and have them cite (list) that source. (A helpful website to check out is sponsored by The National Wildlife Federation.)


6. Finally, in the form of a short paragraph, have them answer their research questions. Remind them to use the detail generating questions (“What does it look like?” “Why is it important?”) as they compose their sentences.
RESEARCHING A TOPIC OF INTEREST (1)
ENDANGERED SPECIES

There are more than 40,000 endangered plant and animal species here on earth. Choose one of these plants or animals and use your research skills to learn more about its appearance and habitat as well as the factors that caused it to become endangered.

1. Write the name of the endangered species of your choice:

2. Conduct online research to find answers to your questions about this plant or animal
   List several research questions:
   1. ________________________________________________________________
   2. ________________________________________________________________
   3. ________________________________________________________________
   4. ________________________________________________________________

5. What search terms yielded the best results? _______________________________________

6. Cite your best source here: ___________________________________________________

7. What did you learn? Do you think this endangered species will make a comeback? Why or why not?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
GLEANING INFORMATION FROM DIAGRAMS, CHARTS, GRAPHS, MAPS (1)

While researching, authors often come across valuable information communicated through diagrams, charts, graphs, timelines, and maps. Information presented graphically can be incorporated into an essay, report, or research paper. Examine and discuss each example, below. Then, on another sheet of paper, write three or more detail sentences using good sentence variety and word choice about information provided in the diagram, the pie chart, the bar graph, and the map.

ANNUAL POGO HARBOR TRIATHLON

- Biking 62.5%
- Running 31.5%
- Swimming 6.0%

TRIATHLON

10 miles biking  5 miles running  1 mile swimming
GLEANING INFORMATION FROM DIAGRAMS, CHARTS, GRAPHS, MAPS (2)

While researching, authors often come across valuable information communicated through diagrams, charts, graphs, timelines, and maps. Information presented graphically can be incorporated into an essay, report, or research paper. Examine and discuss each example, below. Then, on another sheet of paper, write three or more detail sentences using good sentence variety and word choice about information provided in the diagram, the pie chart, the bar graph, and the map.
PARADE ROUTE

Downtown Charmwell
TAKE SOME NOTES

Read the complete sentences below and translate them into brief notes. Write just enough to trigger your memory of what the sentence taught you so that you can recall it at a later time. Focus on keywords. Keep it short by using dashes (-) and slashes (/) whenever you can.

1. Cells are made of protein and organelles, which are tiny structures within a living cell.
   Your notes: ____________________________________________________________________

2. Created in the bone marrow, red blood cells transport oxygen around the body.
   Your notes: ____________________________________________________________________

3. Mitochondria are organelles that provide a cell with energy.
   Your notes: ____________________________________________________________________

4. Another organelle, known as the cytoplasm, consumes that energy.
   Your notes: ____________________________________________________________________

5. A third organelle is the nucleus of the cell where the genetic code is stored.
   Your notes: ____________________________________________________________________

6. Mitosis is the process of cell division that creates two identical cells.
   Your notes: ____________________________________________________________________

7. Animal cells are irregular in size and shape while plant cells are more uniform.
   Your notes: ____________________________________________________________________

8. Plant cells contain chloroplasts which absorb the sunlight necessary for the process of photosynthesis to begin.
   Your notes: ____________________________________________________________________

VOCABULARY LIST

Protein: Large biological molecules consisting of the amino acids necessary to build healthy living tissues such as muscle, hair, enzymes and antibodies.

Organelle: Specialized structures with specific functions found within a living animal cell.

Cell: the smallest unit of a living organism.

Chloroplast: a part of a plant cell that includes the chlorophyll necessary for photosynthesis.

Photosynthesis: the process through which green plants and some other organisms use sunlight to transform carbon dioxide and water into nutrients.
CITING SOURCES

It is a serious breech of academic integrity to take words and ideas that are not your own and incorporate them into your writing as if they were. This is called plagiarism and it is easily avoided. All you need to do is give the person or agency that generated the information credit for doing so with a properly formatted footnote, endnote, or in-text citation.

HERE ARE THE FORMATS YOU NEED TO FOLLOW WHEN CITING SOURCES

From Books
Author’s Last Name, First Name, Title of the Book, City, Publishing Company, date.

From Magazine Articles
Author’s Last Name, First Name, “Title of Article,” Magazine Name, Publication Date, Volume, Page Number.

From Websites
Author’s Last Name, First Name, Title of Article, Publication Date, Page. Site Owner, Date of visit, web address.

All of this information is not available for some websites. In that case, include whatever you can.

If you are using footnotes, the information cited is numbered in superscript (like this:1) and the numbered footnote appears at the bottom of the page in the format shown above. Endnotes use the same format but appear not on each page, but collectively at the end of the paper.

In-text citations give credit right within the text, such as “According to the Center for Disease Control....” Or “Research completed at Stamford University suggests that ...”

Remember: unless the information is widely known or available from a multitude of sources, it must be cited.
**WRITING A PARAGRAPH USING SUPPORTING DETAILS (1)**

Look at this author’s prewriting plan for a paragraph within an expository piece.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN IDEA</th>
<th>Have you ever tasted sushi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DETAILS</td>
<td>Popularity in North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different types</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On a separate sheet of paper, or at the keyboard, write a paragraph that includes all of these details. Remember to use good sentence variety and include vivid, interesting words. Use at least one “Golden Brick” in your paragraph. Begin with research and take notes on what you learn below.

Notes: ________________________________________________________________
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Using Information from Multiple Sources

Creating Fully Elaborated Paragraphs

Objectives

Students write fully elaborated paragraphs by applying all the organizational and elaboration skills they’ve been taught, including:

- Gleaning information from charts, graphs, fact sheets, and videos.
- Creating first-hand evidence and generating other “golden bricks,” such as:
  - Quotes
  - Anecdotes
  - Statistics
  - Descriptive Segments
  - Amazing facts
- Elaborating on facts using the basic detail-generating questions:
  - What does it look like?
  - Why is it important?
  - Can you give a specific example?
  - Is each detail in a separate sentence?
- The use of word referents

Procedure

1. Select a particular activity of interest to your class. Discuss the main idea and summarize it into a “blurb.”
2. Review the fact sheet, graph, timeline, or video associated with that particular activity sheet.

Note: So that students are able to bring facts from several different sources to their paragraph, each activity sheet includes some accompanying resource, such as a timeline, video, graph, or fact sheet - and activity (2) asks them to create first-hand evidence too. Students will need to incorporate information from the given resource and from their own research in their paragraph.

Accompanying videos were easily accessible at publication time. However, web content changes frequently and unpredictably. Thus, we can’t guarantee that the recommended video will be available when you need it. If it’s not, a thorough search of the given topic will most likely yield an appropriate alternative.

3. MODEL, composing the paragraph by combining all relevant information. Remind them that they can certainly conduct additional research if needed.
4. Give students the chance to compose their own paragraph during GUIDED PRACTICE. You might want to project a selection of sentence starters for students to refer to as they work independently and remind them that they can conduct additional research on their own if needed.
WHAT YOUR INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH NEEDS

1. **A LEAD**
   Catch your reader’s attention with:
   - a question
   - an amazing or unusual fact
   - a descriptive segment
   - a quote
   - a statistic
   - an anecdote

2. **A TOPIC SENTENCE**
   Briefly, clearly, tell the reader what the piece will be about.

Read each introduction paragraph that follows. Pay attention to the different kinds of leads. The lead appears in italics. The topic sentence is underlined. Notice that the topic sentence in each example is the same.

*Each year an astounding 35,000 travelers from around the world set sail for a cold and windy place where there are no resorts, no restaurants and no stores. These hearty adventurers are eager to explore and photograph Antarctica’s dramatic Elephant Island. Let’s take a closer look at the history, geographic features, and wildlife of this remote, rugged island.*

Type of Lead: **A STATISTIC**

*Imagine cruising through a crystal clear sea where glassy sheets of ice and majestic glaciers float with the currents. Straight ahead, a mountainous island soars into the sky and your heart races with excitement as you approach. Without a doubt, it would be the adventure of a lifetime to explore Elephant Island. Let’s take a close look at the history, geographic features, and wildlife of this remote, rugged island.*

Type of Lead: **A DESCRIPTIVE SEGMENT**

*It might be hard to believe, but there is a species of seal that can weigh up to 8,000 pounds! This immense, blubbery mammal is called an Elephant Seal and it has a whole island named after it! Let’s take a close look at the history, geographic features, and wildlife of this remote, rugged island.*

Type of Lead: **AMAZING FACT**
The first time I saw a photograph of Antarctica’s Elephant Island, I thought that it had been taken on another planet. That was when I vowed to someday visit this otherworldly empire of ice. Let’s take a close look at the history, geographic features, and wildlife of this remote, rugged island.

Type of Lead: **AN ANECDOTE**

Would you dare visit Elephant Island? Found just off the coast of Antarctica, this frigid, windswept place has a bleak, one-of-a-kind beauty, but it’s hardly welcoming to humans. Let’s take a close look at the history, geographic features, and wildlife of this remote, rugged island.

Type of Lead: **A QUESTION**

“Standing on the stirring ice, one can imagine it is disturbed by the breathing and tossing of a mighty giant below.” That’s how polar explorer Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton describes his first impression of Elephant Island in Antarctica, where he and his crew were stranded for 21 months between 1914-16. Let’s take a close look at the history, geographic features, and wildlife of this remote, rugged island.

Type of Lead: **A QUOTE**
LEADS AND TOPIC SENTENCES (2)

Read each introduction paragraph. Fill in the author’s prewriting plan in order to highlight each main idea. Underline the lead in red and the topic sentence in blue. Then, on the line below each paragraph, tell which kind of lead the author used:

- Descriptive Segment
- Amazing Fact
- Question
- Quote
- Statistic
- Anecdote

1. It might be hard to imagine, but Thomas Edison was only 19 years old when his first invention was patented. By the end of his career, more than 1,000 of his ideas had been issued patents. The genius of Edison brought us some of the most important inventions of all time, including the light bulb, the motion picture camera, and phonograph, the first machine to record and playback sound.

   **TOPIC:** ________________________________

   **Main Idea #1:** ________________________________

   **Main Idea #2:** ________________________________

   **Main Idea #3:** ________________________________

   **Type of Lead:** ________________________________

2. Do you suffer from arachnophobia? If so, you are not alone. Many of us are afraid of spiders. While most of these creepy insects are harmless, there are several species of venomous spiders that can do us serious damage. We’d all best beware of the highly toxic Brazilian Wandering Spider as well as the Black Widow and Brown Recluse Spider.

   **TOPIC:** ________________________________

   **Main Idea #1:** ________________________________

   **Main Idea #2:** ________________________________

   **Main Idea #3:** ________________________________

   **Type of Lead:** ________________________________

**BONUS:** On another piece of paper or at the keyboard, rewrite the lead for either (or both) of these paragraphs using a different type of lead.
Teacher Background: Conclusions

The conclusion paragraph should “sum up” the main ideas of an expository piece. However, this should not be a totally redundant restating of the main ideas. Here’s an example:

So now you’ve learned about the culture of indigenous Arctic people, including their foods, shelters, clothing and belief systems.

It is clear that this informative piece focused on the topic of indigenous people of the Arctic and that the main ideas were their foods, shelters, clothing and belief systems. However, this kind of redundant restating is boring. In this section, we will explore a number of different techniques that can be used to creatively restate the main ideas, including:

- Restate each main idea as a question
- Word referents
- Definitive words and phrases
- Informative verbs
- Hypothetical anecdotes
- Restatement of general topic sentence

You’ll find that some of these techniques (questions, word referents, definitive words/ phrases, restatement of general topic sentence) are quite easy for middle school students while others (hypothetical anecdote, informative verbs) pose more of a challenge. We’ll start with the more easily assessable techniques and move onto the challenging ones as students gain confidence.

RESTATE EACH MAIN IDEA AS A QUESTION

How would you like to try a taste of caribou jerky? Could you make yourself comfortable in a cozy igloo during a blizzard? Can you imagine how warm a jacket lined with polar bear fur would be? Doesn’t it make sense that the Inuit had loving, spiritual bonds with animals?

Let’s analyze the way in which each main idea was referenced in the above example.

- Foods: caribou jerky
- Shelter: a cozy igloo
- Clothing: jacket lined with polar bear fur
- Belief systems: spiritual bonds with animals
Conclusions

WORD REFERENTS

rephrase key words and phrases for sentence and word variety

The inventive people of the far north showed their ingenuity as they found food, fashioned warm clothing, built snug shelters and developed unique belief systems. Using the few natural resources available to them, these hearty survivors were able to thrive for centuries in a harsh, unforgiving environment.

Notice how the use of the word referents such as “inventive people of the north” and “hearty survivors” has replaced indigenous people of the arctic or Inuit. “Harsh unforgiving environment” is a word referent for the arctic.

DEFINITIVE WORDS/PHRASES

(list below) lend an air of authority and finality to the piece.

Certainly  Surely  Without a doubt  Clearly
Absolutely  Decidedly  Truly  For sure
Positively  Definitely  Of course  Indeed
Undoubtedly

Without a doubt, the indigenous people of the Arctic were able to carve out a comfortable and enduring way of life in the iciest reaches of the planet. Their foods, clothing, shelters and belief systems certainly reflect their ingenuity.

RESTATEMENT OF GENERAL TOPIC SENTENCE

Beginning writers might end their pieces with phrases such as “I hope you liked reading my report.” This ineffective, immature, awkward final sentence is fairly typical of young children and even older students who lack specific instruction in expository writing. They rightfully sense the need for some closure but are uncertain about how to achieve it. The use of the general topic sentence as the final sentence in the piece is an excellent alternative. Restate the TOPIC along with a general adjective.

Are you in awe of how the indigenous people of the Arctic adapted to their harsh, icy environment? If so, you are not alone. Many of us admire these robust natives of the north. Their ingenuity and respect for nature is reflected in their foods, clothing, shelters and belief systems. The Inuit people were certainly successful at adapting to their challenging environment.
Conclusions

HYPOTHETICAL ANECDOTE

a situation presented that would, hypothetically, put the reader in contact with your topic.

If you ever have the opportunity to visit the Arctic, remember the ingenuity of the native people of this icy realm. Without a doubt, the animals and indigenous people of the north country deserve our utmost respect.

INFORMATIVE VERBS

replace passive or helping verbs with informative verbs in order to easily restate each main idea. Here is a list of informative verbs for reference purposes:

- recognize
- uncover
- observe
- focus on
- consider
- be familiar with

- understand
- reveal
- analyze
- research
- determine
- be on the lookout

- learn about
- study
- investigate
- know
- remember
- become aware of

- discover
- examine
- find out
- delve
- explore

Learning about how the indigenous people of the Arctic adapted to life in the harshest environment on earth is not only fascinating, but inspiring. Without a doubt, it is valuable to remember the ingenuity of the robust natives of the north who created their own unique foods, clothing, shelters and belief systems.

All of these techniques will be presented to students, from the most basic skills to the most sophisticated, in the activities that follow. The first lessons introduce the simpler techniques.
Literary Analysis Task:
Narrator’s Point of View

When students read narrative stories, they’re sometimes asked to consider the point of view of the main character (also referred to as the narrator) and the way the narrator’s worldview and personal experiences affect the way story events are portrayed. This critical thinking skill requires students to “get inside the head” of the main character/narrator and try to understand how his/her ideas, beliefs, impressions, opinions have been formed based on their family, school, community situations and life experiences. It requires students to think empathetically, to ask themselves questions such as, “If I experienced what the main character experienced, how would I respond? How would I see the world?”

Here is an example of this type of literary analysis task:

The stories Jake Junior and A Time to Shine both include events in which the narrators found themselves in settings where they felt unsure of themselves. Citing specific passages from the story, write an essay describing how each main character’s point of view influenced how these settings are described. Be sure to use details from both stories.

Keep in mind, that while the genre of the texts being analyzed for this purpose (comparing narrator’s points of view) are narrative stories, the related writing task is expository in structure. The author needs to present his/her analysis in a logical sequential way, presenting their topic, an introduction that identifies the task, a number of body paragraphs, each with a main idea and supporting details, and a concluding paragraph that creatively restates the main ideas. The supporting details need to include specific examples from the text as evidence.
Objective

Students compare two narrators’ (or main characters') points of view regarding their perceptions and description of setting, and discuss the reasons that inform these characters' viewpoints in an analytical essay.

Procedure

1. Ask the class if they’ve ever heard the term “point of view” and discuss their understanding. “Point of view” in a story can be defined as the lens through which the main character or narrator sees the world. The narrator’s life experiences, feelings and opinions affect and influence their point of view. Ask them the following: If they were reading a story about a boy who had gotten lost in the woods as a young child, and years later was asked to go on a camping trip with his scout troop in a state forest, how might he feel? What might his point of view be and why? How would he describe the woods?

2. Tell the class that they’ll be reading two stories, Jake Junior and A Time to Shine. Explain that the narrator (main character) in each story finds him or herself in a setting where he/she feels uncertain and anxious. Ask them to consider the point of view of each narrator and how their point of view is communicated through the way they perceive the setting. Have them think about how their attitudes, opinions and feelings influence their impressions of place. (If necessary, review the meaning of “setting” in a story.)

3. Copy and distribute clean copies of both stories and share the boxed writing task below. You may choose to have students read each story silently first, then read both selections aloud to them. Discuss point of view and setting in each. (Refer to the Annotated Pages of both stories, pp. 534-535 and 538-539, to guide your discussion.) Use the Chart, p. 540, to help students organize their ideas and their supporting details. MODEL an example or two of locating and noting details in the text. Point out that the chart is designed like the pillar framework, with main ideas followed by supporting details.

The stories Jake Junior and A Time to Shine both include events in which the narrators found themselves in settings where they felt unsure of themselves. Citing specific passages from the stories, write an essay describing how each main character’s point of view influenced how these settings are described. Be sure to use details from both stories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>JAKE'S SITUATION:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where is he and why?</td>
<td>How did he feel about his situation?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EVIDENCE OF HIS FEELINGS:</strong></th>
<th><strong>DESCRIPTION OF SETTING THAT ILLUSTRATES POV:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>JENNA'S SITUATION:</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where is she and why?</td>
<td>How did she feel about her situation?</td>
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*POV = point of view*
Additional Literary Analysis Task Assignments

Below you will find a variety of additional Literary Analysis Tasks. Each requires the student to access at least two sources of information on a given topic. These sources might be magazine or online articles, videos, or images. Each requires students to take notes on each source and refer to these notes in composing an essay. Some suggested online resources are provided, but you may choose to substitute other sources of your own, including textbooks, nonfiction texts, etc. (Keep in mind that video content can change, so always check these before referring students to them.) You can also easily substitute curriculum related topics for any of the suggested assignments.

1. You have viewed one video about the Blue Whale, world’s largest marine mammal and another focusing on the African Elephant, the world’s largest land mammal. Incorporating information from the videos, as well as two other resources of your choice, write an expository essay comparing and contrasting these two massive mammals. Your essay must include at least three body paragraphs, one focusing on the calls and signals these animals use to communicate.
   
   Suggested video:  www.nationalgeographic.com/video/elephant-gestures-play
   www.nationalgeographic.com/video/whale_bluecalls

2. In a few years, it may be commonplace for cars to drive themselves. You have read two articles and watched a video about self-driving cars. Use the information provided by those resources to write an expository piece about the pluses and minuses of these technological marvels. Feel free to incorporate additional sources of information if needed.
   
   Suggested video:  www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbyhdv1rH4k

3. You have read the story Giving Up Too Soon?, pp. 545-546, and watched a video about how some middle school students are already at-risk for dropping out of high school. Write an expository essay explaining these risk factors and describing how you might help Teddy, the character in the story, if he was a friend of yours.
   
   Suggested video: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/education/dropout-nation/middle-school-moment

4. Find two nonfiction books about a topic you’ve studied in class (your textbook can be one). Then, find an online article or video on the same topic. Take notes from each source. Then, write an expository piece on this topic. Be sure to cite your sources.

5. You have watched a video about the PH scale and researched the properties of acids, bases, and neutrals. Now write an expository piece describing the characteristics of each. Make sure your essay includes specific examples from the video and explains how the PH scale works.
   
   Suggested video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3ASylAlysO
6. Think of a book you’ve read that was set in a time and place you’d like to visit. Research this place via books and online resources. Then, write an expository essay about this destination. Two of your paragraphs should focus on the history and geographical features of this place.*

**Note:** Just a few examples of middle school novels with a strong sense of time/place are:

- *A Star in the Storm* by Joan Hiatt Harlow
- *Bud Not Buddy* and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry

*If your social studies curriculum includes study of the five themes of geography, this prompt provides a great opportunity for a valuable cross-curricular connection adapted as such:

**Think of a book you’ve read that was set in a time and place you’d like to visit. Research this place via books and online resources. Then, write an expository essay that explores this place in terms of the five themes of geography. Your essay should focus on at least three of the five themes.**

7. Research the characteristics of folklore as a literary genre. Then, listen to the selected podcasts from Barefoot Books, *Oona and the Giant* and *The Black Bull of Norroway*. Write an expository essay explaining the characteristics of classic folklore using specific examples from the tales you listened to.


**Note:** Many, many podcasts of folktales are available free of charge at i-Tunes. The two suggested above are recommended because they are age appropriate for middle-schoolers (many of the selections are more appropriate for elementary students) and because they clearly illustrate the classic elements of folklore. Students may need to listen to the podcasts more than once in order to isolate specific examples.

Some of the classic elements of folklore that your students may come up with through their research are:

- Folklore originated in the oral tradition (it is a story meant to be told rather than read).
- Folklore often contains magic or magical creatures.
- Folklore reflects the cultural values of the place where they originated.
- The purpose of folklore is to entertain or teach a lesson.