

# Argumentative Writing in a 10th Grade Co-taught English Classroom

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## Abstract

Writing is a key skill that is found in multiple academic and workplace disciplines. More specifically, the ability to write a convincing argument is invaluable as students will be applying to colleges, filling out job applications, composing resumes, and ultimately securing employment positions through interviews in the near future. These examples of argument involve the same subset of composition skills. The argumentative writing components investigated in this study are composing a logical introduction with a clear thesis statement, incorporating the intended audience, using rhetorical strategies, incorporating support from outside sources, appealing to opposing arguments, effectively summarizing the main points, and a call to action. I taught lessons targeting argumentative writing skills in which student work was evaluated using the Middle Years Program (MYP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) rubrics. The test group studied was tenth grade co-taught English classes. They were evaluated using Middle Years Program (MYP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) rubrics that implemented Common Core standards. Through a series of small-scale writing exercises that culminated in a large argumentative paper, students demonstrated improved argumentative writing abilities by fulfilling higher criteria on the rubrics.

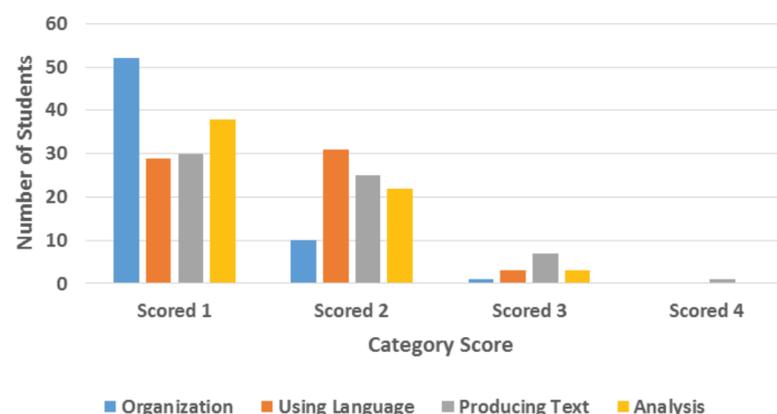
## Introduction

The standard used to analyze the growth of the student population is the Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1. The standard addresses the writing components of an effective argument. The argumentative components include having an introduction that states a clear claim, body paragraphs that develop and support that claim with research and rhetorical techniques, an appeal to the opposition, logical transitions, and a conclusion. The rubric categories used to evaluate the arguments include overall depth of analysis (analysis), creative engagement with the topic (producing text), organization, and effective use of rhetorical language (using language). In order to improve student learning, instructional methods that align with the MYP learning approaches are utilized throughout the study period. Examples of these instructional methods include purposeful grouping; scaffolded classwork; AVID text-marking strategies; rhetorical precis; kinesthetic, visual, and auditory classroom activities; tiered activities and authentic assessments. After analyzing the pre-assessment data, 70% (48 out of 68) of the tenth grade standard co-taught students should improve in at least 2 of the 4 categories on the 2nd Quarter Benchmark essay portion.

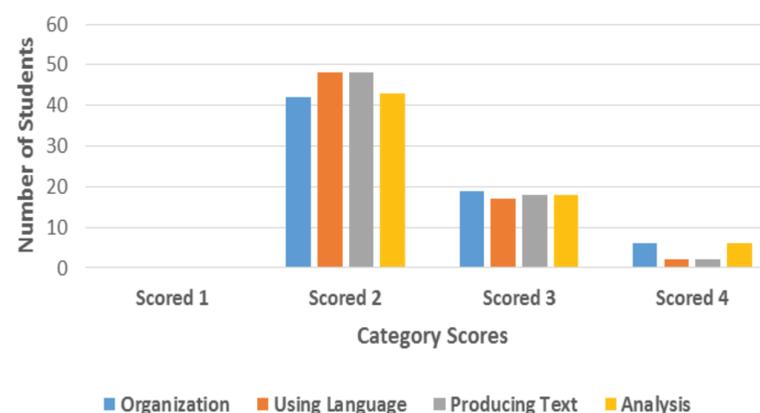
## Methods

With the interest of concentrating on the categories that aligned with the challenging standard assessed on the benchmark essay, student proficiency was measured by evaluating the pre-assessment essay using the MYP rubric that utilized the standard-aligned categories. For the duration of the study period, selected students' written work was evaluated only using the MYP standard-aligned rubrics. Category scores from the pre-assessment are illustrated in the graph below. In order to increase student proficiency, rhetorical precis and other scaffolded argumentative writing activities were incorporated throughout the *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* unit. Frequently, students were asked to write small argumentative pieces that gradually increased in length and decreased in teacher scaffolding as argumentative elements were instructed in detail. Additionally, communicators, Plickers, video clips, song bites, white boards, and differentiation cubes were used to increase students' understanding about rhetorical strategies and argumentative writing techniques to enhance their assignments.

Pre-Assessment Category Scores



Post-Assessment Scores Based on the Quarterly Benchmark



## Results

The student growth objective was achieved based on the data collected by the quarterly benchmark essay rubric that aligned with Common Core standards for writing.

## Conclusion

Standard co-taught tenth-grade English students often struggle with argumentative writing. This study examines the students' ability to compose an effective argument that includes an introduction with a claim, body sections that substantiate that claim with rhetorical techniques and textual evidence, logical transitions, an appeal to the opposition, and a summative conclusion. All of these elements were taken from the Common Core standards for writing. The chosen research population was 68 tenth-grade standard co-taught English students in a suburban high school. Overall, the student learning objective was met and exceeded.

## Acknowledgements

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