Technology's Adverse Effects on Students' Writing: An Emphasis on Formal Writing is needed in an Academic Curriculum

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Technology's Adverse Effects on Students' Writing: An Emphasis on Formal Writing is needed in an Academic Curriculum

by

Kathleen A. Bronowicki

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# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

- Problem Statement ..................................................... 2
- Significance of the Problem ........................................... 6
- Purpose ........................................................................... 10
- Rationale ......................................................................... 12
- Definition of Terms ....................................................... 13

Chapter Two: Literature Review

- The Purpose and Importance of Writing .......................... 15
- Writing Skills on the Decline ............................................ 18
- Technology Undermining Writing Skills ........................... 22
- Common Core Learning Standards .................................... 28

Chapter Three: Application

- Solution to the Writing Decline ....................................... 32
- Implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards .... 35
- Mini-units for Grades Sixth through Twelfth ...................... 41
  - Sixth through Eighth Grade Mini-unit ............................. 45
  - Ninth through Tenth Grade Mini-unit ............................. 86
  - Eleventh through Twelfth Grade Mini-unit ....................... 115

Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations ............. 141

Works Cited ........................................................................ 150
Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement- The evolving world of technology is negatively influencing students’ writing skills and, therefore, strategies aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards need to be implemented in the classroom.

What is the importance of being able to write well? What do proficient writing skills enable individuals to do? How has the growth of technology affected the way students write? These are difficult questions that consist of multiple answers. Ultimately, we cannot stifle the ever-changing advancements in technology, but we can work to teach students the differences between informal and formal writing, and where and when each is appropriate.

Throughout generations, writing has remained one of the primary modes of communication. Over the course of history, the method through which writing is conveyed has changed; however, the goal has remained the same: to actively and effectively communicate information in a clear and coherent manner. The overall purpose of writing is to convey information to others in a way that can be fully understood. In today’s society, students need to be able to write in a sophisticated manner in order to succeed in college and in the workplace; writing skills serve as the starting point from which individuals can be contributing and active members of society. This is easier said than done when you consider the many different contexts in which writing is displayed, and the various technological tools that assist with the process.

Prior to the development of computers and other technological advancements, the writing process was much different. In the National Council of Teachers of English, Kathleen Yancey reports that writing was first represented by:

the physical difficulty of inscribing alphabetic characters on a surface; pencils weren’t widely available until the early part of the twentieth century, which was forty years
before the invention of the ballpoint pen; how messy and sloppy it was to try to compose in ink that dripped all over the page- and then smudged (2).

As evidenced, before computers existed, writing was a laborious process that required attention to detail and precision, as errors would not only destroy the presentation of a writing piece, but encompass a significant amount of time to correct. Handwriting was the sole method of writing, as writing was presented in the form of print. As the twentieth century progressed, writing with a pencil became the primary method of writing; “letters, diaries, reports, reviews, summaries, and news stories” were often read and produced through written communication in classrooms (Yancey 3). There was a heavy emphasis on conveying information in ways that allowed the reader to thoroughly comprehend the information presented, and develop an interest in the information as a result of the writer’s clarity, precision, and organization. As these writing techniques became popular and noteworthy, it was the writing process that prevailed in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, learning was textbook driven and writing instruction was instructed through a technique known as process writing. Process writing, or the writing process, involves invention, drafting, peer review, reflection, revising, re-writing, and publishing; the popularity and growth of this process was implemented across various curriculums during this time period (2011 Education Commission). Overall, this process allowed individuals to structure their writing in such a way that promoted organization, grammatical accuracy, and exposure to others’ ideas and outlooks on particular elements of the writing process.

At about the same time that the writing process was evolving, the personal computer was created and introduced. The desktop publishing option provided individuals with the opportunity to generate products using the “visual and verbal elements of a page” (Yancey 4). Today, the
majority owns a computer or laptop, and utilizes the several different programs that each offers. For instance, Microsoft Word 2010 and Microsoft PowerPoint 2010 are two programs that assist students with spelling, grammar, and sentence structure. What’s more, these programs are equipped to identify errors and correct those errors with ease. As technology continues to advance, I-pads, I-pods, and I-phones have become increasingly popular within the last few years, making the internet and other programs typically found on a computer, easily accessible. With the I-pod created in 2001, the I-phone in 2007, and the I-pad in 2010, individuals nation-wide were consumed with technological advancements regardless of where they lived and what they did on a daily basis (2014 Everyi.com). In addition to these technological tools, text messaging became a “must have” for individuals in 1993, with texting as a key tool for quick and easy communication. In current day society, there are not many teenagers who do not have a phone, let alone text messaging applications. While technology has certainly advanced itself and become a fundamental aspect of life today, there are several harmful effects that negatively influence students’ writing in the classroom.

Students nearly depend on these forms of technology on a daily basis; their constant attachment to these devices reveals that they are academically and socially dependent on them, and require them to excel in both areas. It is difficult for students to leave the house without these items, often stating that when they do, they feel like a “part” of them is missing. Technology quickens and simplifies tasks for students, yet it has ingrained in them an attitude that they do not have to put effort into anything they write. With the constant exposure to shortened forms of words and programs that essentially do the work for them, students are now having difficulty distinguishing between informal and formal writing. As a result, teachers are
currently observing a dramatic increase in the informal language that is “creeping” itself into formal writing pieces and, consequently, causing a drastic decline in students’ writing overall.

Since these technological tools have come into play, teachers nation-wide are dealing with problematic writing issues. Between texting and relying on Microsoft Word programs to do the work for them, students are “changing the nature of the English language” and relying on technology to “fix” all of their writing errors (Bromley 103). While texting, students often use abbreviated words, combine numbers, letters, and symbols to stand for specific words, and neglect correct English capitalization and punctuation forms. Additionally, the nature of text messaging creates a sense of laziness in students, inhibiting their ability to work through a challenge and stay focused on a task.

In addition to texting, all of the programs on Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint allow students to type up assignments, papers, and presentations. Thus, students take advantage of the spell-check and grammar-check options to ensure that their work is free of spelling, grammatical, and/or sentence structure errors. Although these options save students’ time and energy, they lower students’ mental energy and decrease their persistence; furthermore, students have become so accustomed to taking shortcuts and writing in small bites that they fail to see the purpose of writing, editing, revising, and re-writing, let alone using grammatical precision and appropriate sentence structure. Students do not truly comprehend the writing process because they are depending on these programs to do the job for them without putting any effort into understanding why certain corrections are made (Salter 2274). Technology has become a key component in students’ lives, and because of it, they cannot effectually detach informal writing from formal writing (Post). As a result, students are bringing multiple errors and various
misconceptions into formal writing assignments and assessments that solely require a pencil and paper.

This troubling lack of motivation on the students’ part is what prevents some teachers from explicitly teaching the elements of writing. This generation of students is not sustaining the mental energy that is necessary to write well and do not see the value in writing well; therefore, numerous teachers are currently facing a real and valid problem, particularly English teachers whose curriculum thrives on written expression. Since technology has implanted this belief in students that they can always take shortcuts without thoroughly comprehending the writing process, students fail to see the importance of learning the correct way of writing. This is shown further when Madden and Laurence indicate that over the past twenty years, there has been a significant gap and decrease in students’ writing skills (3-4). Due to the cultural shift from the twentieth century to the twenty-first century, students today are consumed with and rely on technology for too many tasks. As of now, technology is continuing to grow and students’ writing skills are remaining on the decline. That said, how do teachers motivate students to want to learn how to write well, independent of technological tools? How will they teach students the differences between informal and formal writing instead of dismissing the issue and allowing them to combine the two as one? These questions need to be answered sooner than later if we are to mold students into active, effective, and contributing members of society.

**Significance of the Problem**

As aforementioned, students are not exhibiting the exceptional writing skills of students in the twentieth century with technology of the twenty-first century as the culprit. As evidenced, “since the technology boom of the 1990s, the rise of digital communications and twenty-first century literacies leave many fearful for the future of the English language” (Dietz, Roback, and
With the writing skills of today’s students not mirroring those of students in the twentieth century, students are at a greater risk for being ineffective and inadequate members of society. As the global economy continues to become more competitive, it is detrimental for students to be able to convey information through writing in professional ways without the presence of errors. In short, education and society cannot push this issue under the carpet anymore. The adverse effects of technology are putting our students behind, as a greater number of students are entering colleges and careers without the critical skills that are necessary for success.

Professors of colleges and authority figures within the career world are seeing a sharp decline in individuals’ writing skills (Rothman 10-11). The overall use of the English language is either being forgotten, or simply not being taken into consideration. The years of maintaining precision and accuracy are long gone. According to Mara Corey, an Advanced Placement writing teacher at Irondale High School in Minneapolis, reports that there has been a “decline in students’ writing skills over the past thirteen years, as students are not in deep conversation and prose as they once were” (Post). What’s more, students are currently using abbreviations of words, misspellings, run-on sentences, and combinations of symbols, numbers, and letters in professional papers and assignments (Salter 2274). Clearly, attention to detail is at a halt in today’s society. This is simply because individuals rely too heavily on technology to provide them with shortcuts or worse, do the job for them in its entirety.

If students are to succeed in college and in career settings, and be valuable contributors in the academic and professional world, it is crucial that they are well-equipped with sophisticated writing skills. In college, students are required to produce professional reports with correct grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. In addition, written communication is the primary
mode of communication in the work world, and reflects an individual’s intellect and ability to deliver information. For individuals to be taken seriously and respected in academic and professional settings, they need to exhibit the writing skills that mirror correct English grammar. This entails communicating ideas clearly and concisely with sufficient organization, valid arguments, and credible evidence (Carnegie Mellon). Although it is acknowledged that these writing skills are essential for success, there are a significant and troubling amount of students who are not adequately prepared for life beyond the high school doors.

Due to an increasingly high number of ill-prepared students in college and employees in the workforce, the Common Core Learning Standards have been put into effect. As of 2013, “forty five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Common Core State Standards” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative). With almost every state on board, it is evident that both written analysis and in-depth expression of ideas are vital to academic and professional success. Moreover, individuals must be able to “write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence”, in conjunction with correct grammar and sentence structure (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative). This means that all students everywhere, save five states, are now expected to achieve these writing goals as proposed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative. If students across America are being exposed to these challenging writing standards on a daily basis, there will be a significant and national increase in individuals who are deemed as college and career ready. Despite the drastic change in writing skills to be taught, the arduous work in designing new lessons aligned to these standards, the elevated expectation of writing, and the innovative measures of assessments, our country (except for five
states) is striving to meet these national writing benchmarks in order to prepare students for the rigorous expectations of college and the workforce.

*In* the classroom, the majority of students *are* attempting to achieve these Common Core Writing Standards, but the problem that exists inherently lies *outside* of the classroom. The minute students exit those classroom doors, they are engaging in technological activities such as texting, blogging, and etc., as well as using Microsoft Programs to hastily complete writing assignments that often only require a pen or pencil. This constant exposure to shortened snippets of information and quick correction of errors by technological means is significantly hindering our students and keeping them from truly understanding and applying the writing process. Overall, students are so consumed with technology outside of school, and so heavily rely on it for socialization and academic purposes that this perspective and frame of mind is quickly advancing itself in the classroom.

The social acceptance of grammatically incorrect language among school-aged students and the low energy mindset that accompanies it is putting our students at a serious disadvantage. Students are used to communicating in the various short phrases endorsed by the common and popular texting “lingo”. As short snippets of information and abbreviated words are part of the “texting language”, students do not see the importance of truly understanding the correct way to write and, therefore, rely on technology to do the job for them. Due to this, there is a blatant lack of motivation in the classroom and a mindset that correct written expression is not necessary. In today’s society, students lack the persistence that is needed to be driven and diligent writers. Therefore, although the Common Core Learning Standards are being implemented in classrooms nation-wide, students continue to carry informal language into formal writing tasks.
In the process of developing a sense of motivation in students and creating writing lessons directly aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards, it is imperative that the difference between informal and formal writing tasks is explicitly taught and modeled with writing activities that correspond to the standards. With a greater conceptual understanding of informal and formal writing, students will not be as apt to combine the two styles as one and, as a result, teachers will see an overall growth in students’ writing skills. This is because the formal writing tasks aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards require focused claims, valid evidence, organization, and grammatical precision that will ultimately help mold students into college and career ready individuals. Within the context of the classroom, writing tasks with these challenging, yet valuable requirements need to happen now and more frequently than ever before. However, prior to completing formal written tasks and grasping the importance of formal writing, it is crucial that students thoroughly understand the difference between informal and formal writing, and are able to identify the contexts in which each is appropriate. Once this crucial step is taken, students can practice the formal, advanced, and sophisticated writing skills that are expected in college and the workplace, while simultaneously attaining a sense of inspiration and motivation to write well and, in turn, expressing confidence about the work that they possess.

Purpose

Now more than ever, it is important for students to develop higher level writing skills so that they are college and career ready. Amid the ever-changing evolution of technology, educators are discovering that adequate and effective writing is often left to the wayside. Unfortunately, this generation of students does not see the value in being able to write well due to the multiple technological tools that often fail to support the formal writing process. With the
progression and execution of the Common Core Learning Standards, teachers are provided with a method in which to teach purposeful and sophisticated writing. Additionally, these standards aid teachers in their instruction of formal and informal writing, and help to demonstrate the value of formal writing. Through a complex, yet instrumental plan, the Common Core Learning Standards help guide teachers as they instruct their students on these elements of writing, and support teachers as they successfully produce individuals who are college ready, career ready, and, thus, active and influential members of society.

As the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards is clear, it is also deemed an extensive solution to the problem that requires detailed lesson plans. Therefore, in order to effectively employ the writing standards that help guide this process, we need to outline key words and activities specific for sixth grade through twelfth grade. Lesson plans incorporating these key words and activities need to be straight-forward, motivating and engaging, and clearly defined at each level. It is imperative that teachers instruct their students with the addition of in-depth formal writing lessons and writing activities centered on evidence-based claims, valid evidence to support claims, organization of ideas, grammatically correct sentence structure, and correct use of mechanics. In addition, at each level, lesson plans need to be designed to efficiently outline the differences between formal and informal writing; furthermore, it is essential that hands-on activities are created to engage students and allow them to identify formal and informal pieces of writing, as well as thoroughly understand the contexts in which each is appropriate. In short, implementing these writing standards involves dedication and hard work, particularly when constructing creative, yet invaluable lesson plans that meet the Common Core Learning Standards.
Rationale

As new and advanced forms of technology continue to evolve in society today, the job market is escalating into a highly competitive establishment. Therefore, in this current generation, it is the wrong time for middle school students’ writing to be worse than any other generation. We cannot stop technological advancements from continuing to rise, but we can ensure that our students attain the formal writing skills that are necessary for successful achievement in the academic and professional realms of society.

Time is of the essence, and the Common Core Learning Standards are a step in the right direction. Yet, the Common Core Learning Standards alone will not accomplish the goal; teachers must utilize the writing standards as a guide in generating productive lessons that outline the differences between informal and formal writing, and further support formal writing with strategies that reflect the importance and implication of the process.
Definition of Terms

**Common Core (Learning) State Standards**- Common learning targets that are currently adopted by all but five states in the United States of America

**Evidence-Based Claim**- a factual statement that can be supported with specific textual evidence

**Textual Evidence**- details, quotes, and evidence derived from a text that helps support an argument and/or claim.

**Formal Writing**- a complex form of writing that demands formal language and vocabulary, correct English grammar, substantial effort to construct meaningful sentences, paragraphs, sufficient elaboration on a topics, and arguments relevant to a well-defined claim.

**Informal Writing**- a style of writing that is more personal and objective, and does not require correct English grammar or English writing guidelines; this style is often accompanied by slang, broken syntax, figures of speech, and simple sentences.

**Text Messaging (texting)** - short messages that are sent electronically from one cell phone to another

**Microsoft Word**- a full-featured processing program for Windows and Mac from Microsoft. It allows individuals to type, make attractive documents, insert pictures in documents, save documents, and make web pages, graphs, tables etc. This program also contains tools that assist with spelling, grammar, and sentence structure by identifying errors and fixing them.

**Microsoft PowerPoint**- presentation software program that uses a graphical approach to presentations; this program allows for slide-shows and is widely used in businesses and classrooms. It is also a tool assists with spelling, grammar, and sentence structure by identifying errors and fixing them.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

As the research proves, students are lacking the essential writing skills that are vital for college and career success. Some of it may be due to laziness, some of it is due to technology, and some may be due to both. This rapid decline in students’ writing is one of the primary reasons for the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. It is evident that students’ writing skills are significant in the current day and age, but how important is it for students to be able to write well? To what degree do students need to write well and how much should they know concerning the written English language? With the media and various sources of technology evolving, it makes one question what specific writing skills are needed for students in a world that is reliant on technology to do the job. Unfortunately, educators have seen a drastic decline in students’ writing capabilities as a result of new technological advancements.

If more and more technological advancements develop, how do teachers distinguish what written skills students need to possess, and how do they show students that certain writing skills are necessary for success regardless of existing technology that essentially does the work for them? With a decline in students’ writing skills, it seems a bit daunting to manage a curriculum and decipher what writing skills need to be taught in the face of technology that, unfortunately, provides students with a “shortcut” or a way out of truly understanding the English language and grammatical rules that coincide with it. In general, to what extent are students suffering in the areas of writing and how can educators accurately and efficiently fill the void, while abiding by the Common Core Learning Standards? Should writing skills be taught explicitly regardless of the various technological tools available, and if so, how do teachers go about performing this overwhelming task? These questions should be fairly easy to answer, but because of the constant reliance on technology, our students are entering English classes with the
mentality that they do not have to work to become better writers since there are other methods that they depend on. However, with the new Common Core Learning Standards “setting the stage” for educators, along with increased competition within the global economy, it is more imperative than ever that students obtain the essential writing skills. It will most definitely be a struggle and a challenge for both educators and students; however, the task must be accomplished, with the Common Core Learning Standards serving as a guide for all individuals involved.

**The Purpose and Importance of Writing**

“Writing is a complex task involving many component skills, some of which students may lack completely, some of which they may have only partially mastered” (Carnegie Mellon). Being able to write independent of all assistance and technological methods is significantly important, even amidst this ever-changing world filled with technological tools that promote quicker and easier tasks. Moreover, writing skills that have become utmost important in the face of the Common Core Learning Standards are writing mechanics, writing strategies, writing in a way that communicates ideas clearly and concisely, constructing a reasoned argument, and organizing evidence and ideas, while using appropriate and valid sources to prove a point (Carnegie Mellon). These skills are becoming increasingly important to attain, as writing is a key factor in obtaining success in college and careers. If students do not know how to effectively write with sophistication and precision, they may not be considered or accepted into colleges or universities. In addition, these individuals may not even stand a chance against other, more qualified individuals when competing for positions in the job market. To prepare students for college and beyond, the Common Core Learning Standards have put assessments in place that allow students to demonstrate their writing skills.
Being able to write independent of technological advancements is crucial and now mandated on numerous assessments to attain a clear “picture” of a student’s writing capabilities. For instance, Common Core exams, Regents exams, SAT tests, ACT tests, and college entrance exams are all hand-written and do not involve computers or technology for the generalized, average student population (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 6). Numerous standardized tests require students to write with paper and a pencil in actively assessing student strengths and weaknesses in writing. Furthermore, these examinations require students to write essays and constructed responses to demonstrate their writing skills. “Writing appears to be crucial for students’ success on high-stakes achievement tests that have become a linchpin in school reform efforts in the United States” (Troia and Olinghouse 344). There appears to be an increased emphasis on writing without the use of technology mainly because writing is one of the most important methods of communication and can be an effective communication tool regardless of an individual’s location, occupation, and/or language.

To promote college and career readiness, involving effective communication through writing, academic writing has become a critical element in the K-12 educational experience. In alignment with the new Common Core Learning Standards, “students are now expected to compose texts to demonstrate, support, and deepen their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their relationships, and their world” (Troia and Olinghouse 344). Thus, writing has become an essential in the lives of students because writing truly enables students to delve deeper into texts regarding critical or controversial issues, better understand and analyze the various relationships within the world, and make meaningful connections to themselves, to others, and to the world through the use of written communication. In general, writing makes an individual more aware of the world around them because not only can they convey certain
messages with others through writing, but they can also thoroughly understand the simple, yet sometimes complex writing of others. If individuals cannot successfully communicate information to others through written communication and/or cannot thoroughly comprehend others’ advanced written expressions, they are missing out on important knowledge to be gained, possible relationships or connections to be made, and job opportunities to be achieved.

In order to graduate from high school and college, and compete in a highly competitive global economy, students need to achieve writing proficiency. “Writing proficiency is the number one determiner of graduation eligibility and in making decisions regarding grade retention and promotion” (Troia and Olinghouse 344). Because writing is such a crucial and common form of communication in college and in the workforce, students must be able to demonstrate their critical thinking skills by writing. Authoritative figures in a college setting or in the workforce are able to assess one’s ability to think through situations and solve problems by evaluating their writing skills and professional approaches to situations that often involve written communication (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 22). Therefore, it is vital that students are introduced to formal writing and are provided a chance to produce professional, formal reports. In fact, the workforce demands that individuals write with grammatical precision and “delve deeply into a topic and provide an argument by writing logically and coherently with clear, cut evidence” (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 22). It is necessary that students know how to write in a formal and professional manner, as professional reports for college professors, colleagues, and business partners are expected both in college and in the workforce. Evidently, this is easier said than done and raises the question: How are students going to succeed in the world and obtain a professional occupation if they are unskilled in all aspects of writing? How will they move up on the ladders involving college, promotion, and employment?
The answers to these questions are not promising as “the demands for professional writing in college and in the workforce will continue to escalate” with time (Troia and Olinghouse 344). If individuals cannot meet this demand, there will be a higher percentage of students who have no choice other than to leave college acceptance letters and job opportunities for those who have proficient writing skills, see the importance of writing, and fully understand the complex nature in all that writing entails. According to Gardner and Powell, numerous students “lack the ability to write, re-write, and grapple with complex text” (51). Consequently, this transfers to the workforce, as new entrants to the U.S. workforce are not demonstrating levels of excellence that are essential to compete successfully in a competitive global market (Rothman 10-11). The current problem lies in technology and students’ mentalities due to technology. Students do not always see the importance of truly understanding the English language and grammatically correct written expression. As a result of new technological advances, students want to “click to find” without actually understanding the complexity involved in writing (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 17). This type of mentality is truly doing our students a disservice and many of them do not even realize it. Will they realize it before it is too late? Educators hope so.

Writing Skills on the Decline

As the global economy becomes more and more competitive, with jobs that are few and far in between, students’ writing skills are decreasing at a rapid rate. Some of this stems directly from the lack of writing instruction in middle school and high school. Unfortunately, the precise writing skills that are necessary for success in college and in careers are not always being explicitly taught; moreover, in many circumstances, students have a simple approach toward writing, with a resolute mindset that technology can “fix” the spelling and grammatical errors for
them. This student mindset makes it highly difficult for teachers to demonstrate the importance of writing and motivate students to write in more sophisticated, professional, and challenging ways. While most educators hope that students see the benefits of learning how to critically write without depending on any technological tools to assist them, some teachers take the “easy way out” when student motivation is lacking and student “buy-in” is inexistent. For example, in a study conducted at George Washington University, “first year undergraduates reported that the most frequently assigned high school writing tasks required them to offer and support opinions, with a secondary emphasis on summarizing and synthesizing information” (Carnegie Mellon). Skills such as criticizing an argument, defining a problem, and developing a solution are not practiced enough in current day education, yet these are the very skills that are essential for success in college and in the workplace. If these advanced thinking skills are not being taught explicitly, with writing always being viewed as “easy” or “fun” through the use of technology and little to no critical analysis, students will continue to have a distorted perception of writing.

This unfortunate distortion only prevents students from learning to write using their critical thinking skills, and leaves them lacking the skills to prove multiple claims with valid evidence. Hence, students continue to view writing as creative and opinion-based, which is not what college professors and authorities in the workplace look for in academic and professional writing. Opinion-based writing, creative writing, and writing using a form of technology do not allow students to actively struggle with information or challenge their thinking (Carnegie Mellon). In addition, students are not writing with grammatical precision and correct sentence structure, and are certainly not challenging themselves to write in a more sophisticated manner. This lack of effort is clearly due to an increased reliance on technology to do the work for them and, as a result, a lack of effective and explicit writing practices in the classroom (Purcell,
Buchanan, and Friedrich 37). While educators may recognize this instructional weakness in their classrooms and see the importance of writing, they often grapple with the idea of teaching in-depth writing skills simply because of student resistance. With that said, how can we, as educators, motivate students to write independently and in more formal, challenging ways? How do we get students to “buy-in” and recognize the importance as well? In an evolving world of technology, these questions are not easy to answer. We know that research statistics reveal that students are not college or career ready, but how bad is it?

While many students are not writing enough in middle school and high school, both teachers and students are not placing an emphasis on specific writing techniques that are most important. Commonly observed, students place a greater emphasis on penmanship and spelling, rather than focusing on their overall structure, content validity, ample evidence, and the writing process (Straub and Alias 17). With bad habits that transfer on throughout high school, students are not able to distinguish what essential writing skills will help them succeed in the future. For instance, “some students were taught in high school to avoid the first-person, and thus may use awkward grammatical constructions to avoid it rather than learn the contexts when its use is appropriate” (Carnegie Mellon). Knowing when and how to use first-person point of view is key, and students need to know what contexts are appropriate for this style of writing and what contexts are not appropriate. Without this knowledge and appropriate instruction, however, educators find students focusing on an element such as this and spending an ample amount of time on this one minor issue, instead of concentrating on the “meat” of a piece of writing, which consists of structure, content, evidence, and the writing process.

According to Troia and Olinghouse, self-report data from a national sample of secondary teachers reveals that teachers “frequently give writing assignments that require little analysis,
interpretation, or actual composing, and devote less than three hours per marking period to instruction related to writing strategies” (345). Once again, we see that the chief components of writing are not being emphasized. Furthermore, in both of the aforementioned situations, teachers are resistant to instruct students on these significant elements due to students’ overall lack of motivation and perception of writing. Many teachers question why they should devote a significant amount of time to writing if students do not see a clear purpose in doing it, simply want to take a “shortcut”, and strive to do just that. However, as we know, when writing is not being taught explicitly, and on a consistent basis with students held to specific standards which reflect the “meat” of writing, many students lack the ability to critically think, express ideas in a coherent and organized manner, synthesize information, and propose valid arguments with sound evidence.

Findings have shown that because of this decrease and inconsistency in writing instruction, students are lacking the crucial skills necessary for success in college and in the workplace. According to Rothman, “in 2011, just one in four students who took the ACT test met the benchmark scores in all four subjects: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Reading, and Science” (10). Additionally, three-quarters of college professors and employers identify students’ and employees’ writing as only fair or poor (Troia and Olinghouse 345). This is an incredibly high number of individuals who are not meeting the writing demands of college professors and employers in the workplace. What’s more, there are high remediation rates in higher level education and “40 % of entering college students are required to take at least one remedial course before enrolling in credit-bearing coursework” (Rothman 11). Evidently, students entering college and/or the workforce are ill-prepared, with written communication being the greatest deficiency and largest gap. These statistics are alarming and prove that there
needs to be a change. Before changes can be made and executed, it is imperative that educators take a step back and focus on the underlying issue at hand: the influence of technology on our students and the change wrought in teachers as a result.

**Technology Undermining Writing Skills**

It is clear that with the technological advancements on the upswing, our students are consumed with varying forms of technology that often inhibits their ability to write in a sophisticated and formal manner. In addition, the increased dependence on technology is drawing students away from the means with which to become critical thinkers and skillful, proficient writers. According to a survey conducted in 2012 from Common Sense Media, fifty-eight percent of teachers say that some forms of technology and the media negatively affect students’ writing. Additionally, only forty-four percent of the teachers surveyed described their students’ writing as excellent or good. This same report indicated that this generation of students are used to thinking in “short bites”, leaving them unwilling to work toward a goal (Electronic Education Report 5). Because technology “speeds” up life by reducing the amount of time individuals spend on tasks, students do not always see the purpose in completing tasks without the use of these technological tools.

In conjunction with computer applications and technological access tools, there is a preconceived notion that learning should be fun. Students are exposed to so many different technological advancements that make them believe that learning should always be fun. “One of the most pervasive outcomes of technology is that students acquire the belief that learning to write should not be a struggle and that good teaching will make learning easier and more enjoyable” (Olson and Clough 9). Teachers obviously want their students to enjoy learning and be actively engaged in the process, yet not all learning should be fun and entertaining. For
invaluable learning to occur, students should have to work hard and even struggle a bit. What is the point of learning if it is always easy and fun? Students need to be challenged, “struggle to make sense of new experiences, think about thinking, and make new connections” (Olson and Clough 9). However, these challenges require diligence and perseverance on the students’ part. This would not characterize learning as necessarily fun, easy, or entertaining, but it is certainly meaningful learning. In addition, for students to become motivated and persistent learners, they cannot continue to have the mindset that anything worth learning can and should take the form of a technological tool. Writing should be a struggle that comes with reward and confidence after utilizing critical thinking skills and cognitive effort. Maintaining effort and determination in achieving a goal is much more crucial, particularly when students enter college and the workforce where they can no longer depend on technology to complete all of their assigned tasks.

With the spell check access on Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint, students often take shortcuts, making it clear that spelling, grammar, and sentence structure are of no importance to learn since technology does the job for them (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 36). There are other forms of educational software programs that also contain tools which provide spelling and grammar checks. For instance, the spell-check option on Microsoft Word corrects incorrect homonym usage. If a student writes, “Their were several different options available,” the program will underline the word in blue to indicate what the error is. If a student right clicks on the word “their”, the correct form of the homonym, “there”, will be available for substitution. In addition, if a student writes a run-on sentence, the program will underline the sentence in green, allowing the student to right-click, then click on a phrase that reads “about this sentence”, and correct the sentence using the option the program provided. Obviously, these are
tools that do assist individuals in completing tasks more efficiently; however, if students do not understand certain, crucial aspects of the writing process, these technological tools are doing them a disservice and promoting misunderstandings. Thus, they cannot explain why a specific change was made or why a particular word was correct over a different one. Yet even worse, some students just do not care and fail to take correct English into account with the knowledge that the computer can do it for them (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 17). At times, technology is so advanced and “so far beyond students’ conceptual understanding that it does not motivate them” to strive to find out the correct way of writing (Olson and Clough 10). This is why it is so important for teachers to understand students’ thinking behind language uses and writing processes by implementing numerous formal and summative assessments throughout each unit. Despite the innovative writing assessments and data developed by teachers, many are still finding that students’ reliance on technology is holding them back from delving deeply into the art of writing.

The more students rely on technology for writing assignments, the greater the decline in their ability to grapple with complex writing strategies and tasks. Take the example below stated by teachers in focus group discussions in the article “The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing is Taught in Schools”:

The use of word processing programs and spell-check is wonderful, but students rely on it so much that even when it changes their thoughts and words and it does not even make sense anymore because they’ve put in words that they’ve substituted words for misspelled words that don’t even make sense, it hinders their ability (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 36).

Clearly, many middle school and high school teachers are concerned that the current technology in place is negatively impacting students’ understanding of the writing process. Furthermore, they are losing the ability to express complete thoughts and cannot think on their own; in
general, technology is hiding students’ misunderstandings and interfering with their learning (Olson and Clough 11). As a result, students are not able to critically think and analyze evidence, synthesize information, write evidence-based claims and prove the claims with valid evidence, and recognize appropriate grammatical and structural errors (Rothman 10). In addition to computer programs, text messaging is another major technological advancement that is deterring our students from successfully completing formal written tasks.

Texting has become significantly popular among today’s teenagers. More specifically, it is one of the primary modes of communication among twelve to seventeen years olds in the United States and is continuing to grow in people of all ages (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 12). For instance, by the end of 2007, seventy-four percent of all cell phone users worldwide were “active users of text messaging” (Dansieh 224). Lenhart et al. explains that fifty-seven percent of sixteen year olds and seventy-seven percent of seventeen year olds text on a daily basis (2). In addition, “one in three teens sends more than one hundred text messages a day, or 3,000 texts a month (Lenhart et al. 2). With the significant increase in the amount of texting, it has been proven that texting could “heighten the tendency among students to adopt non-standard uses and contracted forms of English words in their classwork” (Dansieh 222). Texting is a “must have” for students in today’s society; they are “attached” to their cell phones and depend on text messaging for daily communication with others. However, the abbreviations, run-on sentences, alphanumeric combinations, and misspellings utilized in text lingo are often transferred to formal written tasks in the classroom. In further explanation, Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich include a teacher’s survey response to express the link between texting and formal writing:
I have a hard time with some students using the lowercase ‘i’ and abbreviations in their essays. I think my students would say that any ‘writing’ they do is for specific assignments in classes, essays, research papers, etc. Outside of the classroom, they are texting a lot. While texting is a form of communication, it is not ‘writing’ in my opinion, and because of texting, I think there are some serious issues that are surfacing more and more these days. A lot of students don’t know how to write a complete thought. They can’t use correct punctuation, and they don’t start sentences with capital letters. They are supposedly learning all of this in class, but it is their outside communication that seems to predominate in their ability to communicate (37).

When students are reading text messages sent to them with these grammatical errors, they do not have difficulty comprehending the information since they are subjected to “texting language” numerous times on a daily basis (Hogan et al. 2). The problem that then exists is that students become used to this form of writing; as a result, they begin to exhibit this writing style in school when sophisticated writing is required and expected.

According to Hogan et al., an online survey consisting of 2,840 individuals was conducted at Lane Community College through the website edutopia.org. The survey found that both students and instructors have negative attitudes toward texting (1). For instance, the survey results revealed that “seventy percent of those surveyed believed that texting had harmful effects on students’ writing skills” (Hogan et al. 1). At the completion of the student survey, it was discovered that forty-five percent of students admitted that they use “text language” as opposed to complete sentences and proper punctuation when texting; as a result, sixty-eight percent of the students believed that texting did have a negative impact on their writing skills (Hogan et al. 5). This makes sense when considering that technological tools, such as texting, often cause students to write carelessly and too fast. As the research reveals, texting discourages the importance of editing, revising, and being diligent when writing (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 32). Hogan et al. prove this downfall to be true as eighty-one percent of the instructors stated that they observed an increase in “text language” in assignments that have been turned in within the last
couple of years (6). We know that the research demonstrates the negative influence of texting on students’ writing, but what specific issues are being displayed in student papers?

Texting produces an abbreviated mindset in students, often enabling them to write with little detail and represent words by replacing them with shorter, less sophisticated words. Dansieh elaborates on this issue by providing readers with examples of words that are shortened through the use of symbols that sound like the syllable of specific words; this action only produces misspelled words and new words that do not currently exist in the English language (224). Examples of these words and phrases that are used when texting are “4 U” for “for you”, “B4” for “before”, “LOL” for “laugh out loud”, “shud” for “should”, and “Gr8” for “great” (Dansieh 224). These word and phrase substitutions only promote laziness in students, as a teacher stated in a report conducted by Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich (37). In addition, there is little thought or effort put forth when writing a text message since shorter forms of expression have become widely accepted and quite popular among the generation of teens. In short, the more students get used to this form of communication, the greater the chances are that their academic writing will suffer.

The problem at hand lies in students’ present-day perception of writing, as texting would not be so much of an academic issue if students could differentiate between informal and formal contexts of writing. Thus, many students are combining texting and formal writing as one without identifying the differences between them, as well as where each is appropriate and applicable. Unfortunately, texting has created lazy writers who expect teachers to decipher the “texting language” and “know what they are trying to say when they word responses in poor and incorrect ways” (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 38). After all, isn’t this the language that they are constantly using to communicate with their peers, who evidently comprehend it and respond
in an equivalent manner? Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich state it with such precision when they explain that many students have attained this misconstrued view that all writing can be short and direct as a result of texting (38). Furthermore, there is clearly confusion and a belief in some students that writing with speed is more productive than writing with depth and development. As a result, this belief and consistent, concise communication is preventing students from delving deeply into writing pieces, expressing complex thoughts, and spending time revising their writing to create a more refined piece. Once students exit the classroom, teachers have no control over what students spend their time doing or if and when they text their friends, so how can educators work together to solve this external problem that is quickly advancing itself into the classroom?

**Common Core Learning Standards**

The implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards aims at teaching students the essential writing skills without the need to be dependent on technology. In addition, the writing standards prevent students from writing in short snippets, and promote depth and critical analysis that is embedded in the process of writing. Rather than enable students to take shortcuts when writing, the new standards require that students truly comprehend the many complexities of the English language. In short, the Common Core Learning Standards present a probable solution to the negative impacts of technology on student writing and support the teaching of informal versus formal, informational writing.

The writing standards prior to the development of the Common Core Learning Standards presented a significant issue as students were ill-prepared for college and careers. According to Rothman, these state standards were too low and did not sufficiently challenge students; consequently, in 2006, state leaders began developing standards that would be common among
states and in 2009, this project was divided into two parts to create standards for college and career readiness (11-12). Aforementioned, students are entering college and careers without the essential writing skills needed for academic and professional success. As a result of this current occurrence, it was clear to state leaders that they needed to make a substantial modification, as writing has proven to be a key component in college and career success. To provide further evidence, Troia and Olinghouse state that “writing serves as the gateway for employment and promotion” (344-345). Writing reveals one’s intelligence and ability to communicate through a clear, coherent, and distinguished manner of expression. Fortunately, these new standards are significantly critical, valuable, and useful in enhancing students’ writing and critical thinking skills.

The writing standards within the Common Core Learning Standards have been generated under an entirely different focus in order to support college and career readiness. For instance, one of the main writing goals is to “reduce traditional emphasis on narrative writing” and focus primarily on informational writing (Rothman 14). Instead of having students make connections and utilize first-person point of view, the Common Core State Standards want students to inform others about a topic, which is a considerable and essential skill in college and career settings (Gardner and Powell 50). Under these standards, students are directed to avoid writing about personal experiences; the absence of connections and personal experiences lessens the chance that students will use “text language”, and rather influences them to become accustomed to formal, informative writing with grammatically correct language.

Adding to this change, it is necessary that students write clear and concise claims and counterclaims while simultaneously planning, drafting, revising, and editing writing pieces (New York State Education Department). Furthermore, students must write valid claims that can be
fully supported by text evidence and quotations directly from a text. This process not only entails the use of clear and specific language, but also requires students to identify and employ reliable sources to prove a particular point (Gardner and Powell 52). In establishing a formal style of writing, the standards demand domain-specific and academic-specific vocabulary, clear organization and smooth transitions between various ideas, and grammatically correct language that reflects complexity (New York State Education Department). Overall, the push for formal and informative writing accompanied by consistent practice in the classroom is deterring students from rushing and being careless when writing; in fact, the standards present a clear-cut plan and are altering students’ mindsets by steadily pushing students to become effective writers.

The Common Core State Standards uphold the belief that writing should be an active struggle for students. It is necessary that students grapple with the writing process and put forth effort because “productive struggle is a good thing” (Gardner and Powell 52). In order for students to be college and career ready, it is imperative that they utilize their critical thinking skills and are persistent in accomplishing a task without writing in short, abbreviated snippets or relying on technology do to the job for them (Rothman 11-12). Furthermore, the Common Core Learning Standards forces students to face challenges and overcome them with an increased level of mental energy and persistence. Rather than fulfilling a writing assignment by doing the absolute minimum and expressing information in a careless manner, students are pushed to critically think, write with sophistication and complexity, and spend time perfecting their writing in formal contexts (New York State Education Department). According to Gardner and Powell, the Common Core Learning Standards work to mold students into individuals who are college and career ready because they help “guide students to take responsibility and ownership over their own learning as they become critical thinkers and problem solvers” (51). Through the
development of these new standards, teachers and students can achieve this goal. Overall, lessons under the Common Core Learning Standards generate students who are independent thinkers, take ownership over their own writing, learn to write with clarity, depth, and cohesiveness accompanied by correct English grammar and sentence structure, and can recognize the differences between formal and informal writing (Gardner and Powell 52).
Chapter Three: Application

Solution to the Writing Decline

As the research proves that students’ writing is currently on the decline, it is vital that critical and substantial changes are made in schools today. Unfortunately, students fail to see the value in being able to write effectively due to technological tools that are quick to correct errors and text messaging programs that encourage socially acceptable language that is grammatically incorrect. Overall, in order for students to be successful in the competitive global economy that exists today, a drastic change in lesson planning needs to take place by a national means, and through the guidance and direction of the Common Core Learning Standards.

The incredible reliance on technology is ultimately doing our students a disservice, as they cannot distinguish informal writing from formal writing and, consequently, combine the two together as one. This significant dependence on technology is preventing our students from writing in a sophisticated and professional manner, as several aspects of informal language are being carried over to formal written tasks (Dansieh 227). Thus, today’s students are demonstrating major gaps in the writing skills that are expected and required in college and career settings (Rothman 10-11). With the utilization of the Common Core Learning Standards, it is imperative that educators develop lesson plans centered on the differences between formal and informal writing, and the contexts in which each are appropriate. Once learned and applied to various situational contexts, students will be more apt to gain a sense of appreciation for formal writing.

In current day society, students take multiple shortcuts to eliminate time spent on writing. Whether it’s the use of Microsoft programs or text messaging, students are always looking for a faster route to communicate information through writing. The Microsoft programs that “fix”
their spelling and grammatical errors, and the social acceptance of abbreviations and symbols in
texting have created an idle mindset in students that it is not necessary to write with formality,
grammatical precision, and complexity (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 24). They do not see
the importance in writing thoroughly with elaboration and precision, as they are so accustomed
to assuming the receiving party comprehends the message they are trying to informally convey.
Consequently, students’ ability to write and prove an argument through explanation and validity
is suffering, resulting in a lack of skills that are essential for college and career readiness.

The fact that students perceive written expression in an informal way is inhibiting their
ability to produce sophisticated writing that is needed in order to succeed in college and in a
professional environment. Part of the formal writing process involves writing valid claims that
can be sufficiently supported by textual evidence (2012 Common Core State Standards
Initiative). This formal style of writing, as predicated by the new Common Core Learning
Standards, needs to be emphasized and put into practice in schools today to ensure that students
not only understand the difference between informal and formal writing, but can use each form
of writing appropriately and within the most applicable and proper context. In order to
effectively support a valid argument, it is necessary that students go beyond the basic, informal
writing that promotes shortcuts and inaccuracies. For students to write formally using their
critical thinking and analysis skills, it is imperative that they learn the value in spending time
writing for a purpose; nevertheless, to accomplish this task, students need to understand that
effective writing takes time and energy with the addition of sustained mental thought and
inquisitiveness.

Writing formally is not as simple and direct as informal writing, especially within a
variety of social or academic contexts, where writing is completed on a computer or phone, and
can be “fixed” in a relatively quick manner. Therefore, it is necessary that students practice writing in a formal manner, which involves a healthy struggle, as well as taking the time to write valid arguments with relevant and detailed textual evidence (Olson and Clough 10). Once this critical step in education is taken through the guidance of the Common Core Learning Standards, the statistics of students who are college and career ready will climb to all time highest; however, if this drastic jump is to occur with time, it will take a significant amount of determination and diligence on the teachers’ part, as well as a number of developed and thought-out lesson plans in which to relay the vital importance of formal writing.

Before students can actively write valid claims, and substantial and credible text evidence, they need to know the differences between informal and formal writing. Furthermore, students need to grasp the important skill of distinguishing informal writing and formal writing, and the contexts in which each should and can be utilized. Through lesson planning, teachers need to model examples of the sophisticated and professional language, higher level vocabulary, and sentence complexity that accompany formal writing. It is critical that teachers provide students the opportunity to analyze the effects that certain words have on the overall meaning and presentation of a sentence. Students need to understand that certain words are preferably used and widely accepted as sophisticated and professional. Additionally, it is important for students to be aware of the fact that correct grammar, spelling, and mechanics are fundamental skills that are used when writing in a formal manner. That said, teachers must explain and provide students with contexts in which formal writing is required for success; for instance, students need to be able to identify the various contexts in which formal writing is used, such as classwork assignments, state test exams, regents exams, college entrance exams, college tasks and assignments, professional occupations, professional resumes, professional letters and/or
papers, etc. Once explicitly instructed on this information, students will have a clearer understanding and outlook on how to appropriately approach formal situations that entail written communication.

Informal writing is often displayed in social contexts, which is the reason why the two styles of writing cannot be viewed as one. Students write informally on a daily basis, with informal writing being observed most commonly in text messages, email messages to friends and/or family, and blogging messages. As the increased amount of time spent writing informally is at an all-time high in present day society, grammatical precision and correct sentence structure are elements that are not taken into consideration among school-aged individuals. Moreover, there is a more “relaxed feel” with little to no attention to details, and a considerable amount of misspellings, abbreviations, and symbols used to represent standard English vocabulary (Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich 35). The problem lies inherently in the students’ tendencies to combine formal and informal writing as one, which results in the appearance of informal words in writing contexts that necessitate formal and sophisticated language. In creating independent and self-sufficient learners, it is an invaluable task for students to be able to identify words and phrases that are only appropriate in informal contexts; this is a fundamental skill that students must gain in order to successfully recognize that informal words should not be interchanged between informal and formal contexts. Therefore, in order to instill this knowledge into the minds of our students, teachers need to implement lesson plans that provide examples of informal writing, including word choice and contexts in which informal writing is permitted and appropriate.

**Implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards**

In order to successfully instruct students in grades sixth through twelfth on the differences between formal and informal writing, it is key that teachers abide by the writing
standards as laid out by the Common Core State Standards. For instance, standards W6.2d, W7.2d, and W8.2d state that students need to use “precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain a topic” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 55). In addition, standards W9-10.2d and W11-12.2d require that students in ninth to tenth grade “use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic” and students in eleventh to twelfth grade “use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 58). These writing standards, as outlined by the Common Core State Standards, promote formal writing, including higher level vocabulary words and precise language in explaining a given topic. In addition, these standards highlight the significance of formal and sophisticated words and language in formal contexts. W6.1c and d, W7.1c and d, W8.1c and d are similar to the aforementioned writing standards in that they state that students need to “write arguments to support claims using “words and phrases to clarify the relationship among claims and reasons” and write with the establishment of a “formal style” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 55). Therefore, students need to be able to use formal words and phrases to discuss an argument, as well as maintain a formal style of writing to relay the information. The writing standards provided by the Common Core State Standards guide teachers in successfully teaching students the differences between formal and informal writing, as well as conveying and explicitly instructing students on the elements of formal writing.

Not only are the writing standards crucial for students to identify the differences between each style of writing, but the reading standards, as established by the Common Core State Standards, enable students to analyze the effect that certain words and phrases have on the
overall meaning of a particular sentence. Being able to examine various words and phrases in informational text allows students to distinguish words commonly used in informal writing from words generally used in formal writing. In short, these abilities drive students to become more efficient readers in identifying the prominent effects of formal writing and informal writing.

These higher level thinking skills take students a step further, as they lay the groundwork for students to evaluate and “pick apart” a wide variety of written texts to determine the impact of words and phrases on the connotations of different sentences. For instance, RI6.4, RI7.4, and RI8.4 require sixth grade students to “determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text”, and seventh and eighth grade students to “determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, and analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 50). By determining the meanings of particular words and phrases, students are already taking the necessary step to evaluate how a specific word or phrase contributes to the overall meaning of the sentence, as implied by the author and/or understood by the reader. Additionally, RI9-10.4 states that students must master the skill of “determining the meaning of words and phrases and analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 52). RI11-12.4 is similar in that students need to be able to “determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text and analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 52). These substantial skills represent the foundation to which students can assess the meanings of sentences, as meant by the author and determine the meanings of sentences, as implied and concluded by the reader. Furthermore, students can then decide whether or not these two meanings match, and generate reasons why they do or do not match using precise words and phrases within the text to
effectively guide their argument. Overall, both the reading and writing standards defined in the Common Core State Standards aim at molding students into self-sufficient learners who can successfully recognize, identify, and produce writing that is appropriate in formal contexts, as well as in informal contexts.

Once students successfully grasp the differences between formal and informal writing, and can apply that information to locate the appropriate contexts, they are equipped to grapple with formal claim writing. A formal claim is a statement of assertion that can be supported by sufficient textual evidence. It contains sophisticated, formal language and demonstrates grammatically correct writing. Grades sixth through eighth require in-depth claim practice with explicit instruction; however, grades ninth through twelfth would have already been instructed on this information and, as a result, would already have a profound understanding on how to identify and write a formal claim, as well as separate a distinct claim from other claims.

The Common Core State Standards have developed a writing standard specific to claim writing, as the ability to take a stance on a question or issue is fundamental for achievement in a college setting, as well as a career setting. As aforementioned, students in grades ninth through twelfth would have already learned how to write valid and effective claims, as well as “distinguish claims from alternate or opposing claims” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 58). W6.1a, W7.1a, and W8.1a state that students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade need to be able to “introduce a claim”, with seventh grade and eighth grade advancing the skill a step further to “acknowledge alternate or opposing claims” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 55). Developing a valid claim requires a high level of critical thinking and analysis in order to effectively draw conclusions, make inferences, and obtain main ideas of both informational and literary texts. Now more than ever, it is of utmost importance that educators
help students effectually formulate credible and convincing claims based on their analysis of a particular text.

When students can independently and successfully identify and write valid claims, it is important that they learn how to effectually support and prove their claims. A major component of claim writing is text evidence to substantially prove a point; otherwise, claims that students make remain ineffective and invalid. In order to support a specific claim and make it credible, students need to be able to isolate relevant information from irrelevant information depending on the argument that has been established. This process involves analyzing a text, and identifying details and examples that prove a particular claim statement. In short, being able to prove a claim with valid textual evidence is a skill that must be proficiently mastered in order to succeed in a college and career setting, and it is important for students to learn that credible evidence can take on a multiplicity of forms.

Text evidence can be presented in a variety of ways to effectively validate a claim. For instance, text evidence can exist in the form of quotations, details, and specific examples within a text (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative). Regardless of the method used to convey information, text evidence is written in a formal style, consisting of grammatically correct language, complex sentences, and appropriate and grade level academic vocabulary. Furthermore, constructing textual evidence to prove a claim involves critical analysis and an in-depth, thorough, and inferential comprehension of a specific text. The Common Core State Standards categorize standards by skill level to assist teachers as they guide their students in identifying and writing text evidence to support claims.

There are reading and writing common core standards that aid in this process, and promote the elaboration of text evidence and alignment to a claim. For instance, RI6.1 states that
students “cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences” drawn from informational text” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 50). Standards RI7.1 and RI8.1 take it a step further and require students to “cite several pieces of text evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences” drawn from informational text and “cite textual evidence the most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences” drawn from informational text, with the eighth grade standard represented in the latter (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 50). In addition, RI9-10.1 requires students to “cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences” drawn from informational text; this standard also states that students need to be able to “develop factual, interpretive, and evaluative questions for further exploration of the topic” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 52). Once students enter eleventh and twelfth grade (RI11-12.1), they are required to “cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences” drawn from informational text, including “determining where the text leaves matters uncertain” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 52). In addition to these informational standards, students in the aforementioned grades also need to meet the same standards above, but within the context of literature. To meet these critical literary and informational standards and, therefore, be college and career ready, it is crucial that students are able to make inferences, draw conclusions, and pull accurate details, examples, and quotes to verify a claim. As a whole, these standards guide students in the right direction as they detect and begin to write textual evidence that directly supports a specified claim.

In addition to the reading standards regarding textual evidence, there are also writing standards that students need to meet in order to productively support claims with valid and
relevant text evidence. Succeeding the mastery of the reading standards, teachers must equip their students to plan, organize, and write text evidence in a formal manner. Standards W6.1b guide students in being able to “support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text”; this becomes a bit more challenging for seventh and eighth graders (W7.1b and W8.1b), as they must learn how to “support claims with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 55). In ninth and tenth grade (W9-10.1b), students are required to “develop claims and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each”; in eleventh and twelfth grade (W11-12.1b), the standards are a bit higher in that students need to “develop claims and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 58). Through these standards, students will be able to outline and write textual evidence using their critical thinking and inference skills. More specifically, it is necessary that students write textual evidence using credible sources and accurate elements of information that correspond directly to an identified claim; it is not sufficient for students to solely pull and state textual evidence in a vague, informal, and/or inexplicit manner. To further explain, they need to elaborate on their textual evidence by using formal language, and clearly and thoroughly explaining how it proves a claim. In producing students who are college and career ready, it is significant that students are able to extrapolate textual information and transfer it to paper in a fluent, organized, sophisticated and formal manner.

Mini-units for Grades Sixth through Twelfth

The following pages illustrate one mini unit for sixth through eighth grade, ninth and tenth grade, and eleventh and twelfth grade. The mini unit for grades six through eight is
comprised of three sixty minute lesson plans. Ninth and tenth, and eleventh and twelfth grade’s mini units consist of two sixty minute lesson plans. Sixth through eighth grade will receive instruction on the differences between informal and formal writing on Day 1, formal claims on Day 2, and textual evidence on Day 3. Grades ninth through twelfth will be instructed on the differences between informal and formal writing on Day 1, as well as how to identify and write textual evidence on Day 2. The mini unit for grades nine through twelve consists of two days instead of three because multiple claim lessons are instrumental and critical elements to address in the beginning of the school year, as students in these grades need to be able to identify and write a claim, as well as “develop counterclaims and supply relevant evidence for each claim” (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative 58). Therefore, grades nine through twelve will have already mastered formal claim writing by the time this mini-unit is implemented and, as a result, will be able to use their prior knowledge and familiarity with this concept on other assignments related to it throughout the course of the mini-unit. Each mini-unit entails a variety of activities that benefit each type of learner, as various activities aim at targeting several different learning styles in order to provide students the full experience of the learning process.

Each lesson within a mini-unit encompasses an anticipatory set, modeling/guidance instruction, an independent practice activity, a group work activity, and a closure activity. In addition, hands-on activities, visual techniques, and auditory methods are incorporated and embedded within each lesson plan to engage students, as well as meet their individual needs. The elements of each lesson plan allow for an environment that suits all students and their individual learning styles. For example, an anticipatory set includes a brief activity in the beginning of class that is used to effectively engage students, “hook” them in an effort to grab their attention, and introduce them to the lesson. An anticipatory set can also be defined as a warm-up activity that
gets students acclimated to the material at hand. To continue, modeling/guidance reflects direct instruct of the content that is being covered in a specific lesson. It often involves elaborate and in-depth discussion, as well as note-taking and focus on the students’ part. Occasionally, brief independent activities are incorporated into direct instruction to provide students with the opportunity to work on a particular skill, go over the activity with the teacher so that they can see how well they understood the material, and ask questions as needed. In addition, the independent practice activity enables students to work individually on a larger task related to the skill at hand. This task assists in their understanding of the material, and allows the teacher to assess how well each individual student comprehended the content. When the time allotted for an independent practice activity is up, the teacher will go over the material with the participation of students, and provide effective feedback and clarity as needed. In short, these three aspects of a lesson are advantageous for students and teachers, as they provide students with the means to grow in a particular skill area, and provide teachers with formative assessments with which to analyze student understanding of material and note whether certain skills need to be practiced and/or re-taught.

Group work and closure activities are the final elements of a lesson that allow students to further practice the targeted skill in order to meet the lesson objective(s). Group work activities are engaging and interactive activities that provide students with the chance to collaborate with their peers, share ideas, and be exposed to others’ new and innovative perspectives. Additionally, students often provide and receive assistance as they initiate and work through a task, which heightens and enhances their ability to cooperate with others, while respecting the thoughts and opinions of others. Group work assignments promote team building and mutual respect, as a number of the activities within each lesson require the collaboration and cooperation of all
involved. When a group work activity is completed, the teacher will either go over the material with student participation or collect students’ work to assess their understanding on the content as a whole. Ultimately, the closure activity effectively summarizes the lesson and allows students to reflect on the learning process. The teacher will facilitate the “wrap up” period of the lesson by administering the closure activity, which highlights the main ideas and key details of the lesson objective. Altogether, these lesson components create an organized and appropriate lesson layout to ensure that students are left with a powerful and influential learning experience.

In its entirety, each mini-unit will represent a stepping stone to which students can gain a significant amount of knowledge regarding formal writing. Furthermore, students will be able to understand the differences between formal and informal writing, with an emphasis on the critical elements of formal writing that are directly linked to the Common Core Learning Standards. Therefore, through formal writing, students will learn how to write formal claims and support those claims with valid textual evidence. Through each lesson, students will gain an ability to distinguish between informal and formal contexts of writing and, therefore, achieve a thorough understanding of when and where formal writing needs to occur, and how to appropriately and efficiently demonstrate it.
6th-8th grade Mini-Unit
3 Sixty-minute Lesson Plans
The Exploration of Formal Writing: Claims and Text Evidence

- 6th-8th grade- Day 1, Lesson 1
  Informal vs. Formal Writing

I.) Lesson Objective:
Students will be able to identify informal and formal language.
Students will be able to identify the contexts in which informal writing and formal writing is appropriate.

Prior Knowledge:
Students need to know what text messaging is.
Students need to know and be familiar with texting “lingo”.
Students need to know correct English grammar.
Students need to know how to write a complete sentence.
Students need to know what voice, tone, and audience mean.
Students need to know what grammatical contractions are.
Students need to know what generalizations mean.
Students need to know the different points of view in literature.

Materials:
Smart Board
Pencil
Warm-up- informal vs. formal writing and photograph matching activity
Informal vs. Formal Note-taking Packet
Sound Buzzer
Independent Practice Worksheet-informal phrases and formal phrases
Group Work Magazine Activity-“Can You Magazine It”?  
“Can You Magazine It”? model example
30 pieces of colored construction paper
30 glue sticks
30 pairs of scissors
35-40 different magazines
Case of colored markers

Standards:
W6.4, W7.4, W8.4- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W6.2d, W7.2d, W8.2d- Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

W6.2e, W7.2e, W8.2e- Establish and maintain a formal style
II.) Anticipatory Set (5 minutes):

1. Hand out Warm-Up- (informal vs. formal writing and photograph matching activity) (attached)
2. Have students write their name at the top.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students and inform them that they need to match the phrases to the pictures by placing the number of the phrase on the line below the picture.
4. Provide students a few minutes to match each phrase to the picture in which it belongs.
5. When all students are finished, have students share what they had for each picture. Be sure a different person shares per picture.
6. Provide effective feedback as needed.

Modeling/Guidance (20 minutes):

1. Have students put the warm-up aside. Then, hand out the Informal vs. Formal Writing Note-Taking Packet (attached). Have students write their name on it.
2. Read the directions aloud to the students and begin explaining the differences between each style of writing. Remind students that they need to fill in the blanks where it is needed.
3. Discuss the contexts in which informal writing is appropriate.
4. Discuss examples of informal writing.
5. Discuss the contexts in which formal writing is appropriate.
6. Discuss the examples of formal writing.
7. As the teacher is presenting, he or she needs to be rotating around the room to ensure that all students are on task and correctly filling in the notes.
8. After presenting the information, ask students if they have any questions and answer further questions as needed.

Independent Practice (10 minutes):

1. Inform students that they need to place their Informal vs. Formal Writing Note-Taking Packet aside, but be sure to tell them to keep it out, as they will need it later for a group work activity.
2. Hand out Independent Practice Worksheet-informal phrases and formal phrases (attached).
3. Have students write their name on it.
4. Explain to students that they need to write 5 difference phrases that they use when texting or emailing friends and/or family. Inform the students that they need to write these phrases on the lines below. Give students about 3 minutes to do this.
5. When the 3 minutes is up, sound the buzzer and inform students that they now need to write those 5 phrases using formal language on the lines below. They have 3 minutes to do this.
6. When the final buzzer sounds, have a few student volunteers share 1 or 2 informal phrases that they use and how they changed those phrases to make them correct with formal language.

**Group Work Activity (20 minutes):**

1. Have students put this independent practice worksheet in their binders or folders.
2. Pass out “Can You Magazine It”? Activity (attached) directions and have students put their name on it.
3. Allow students to use their Informal vs. Formal Writing Note-taking Packet as a resource to guide them in identifying informal and formal phrases.
4. Go through the directions and the steps with the students. Remind students that next to or below each phrase, they need to write what context is appropriate for that particular phrase.
5. Show students the model example so that they are provided with a visual model of the mini-project.
6. After going through the directions, ask students if there are any questions. Answer any questions as needed.
7. Then, assign students to groups of 3 (Teacher will have previously created groups based on mixed abilities so that a weaker, below average student, an average student, and a strong, above average student are in the same group).
8. The teacher will then inform the students that one person in their group needs to get all of the materials (scissors, glue, magazines, construction paper, marker) from the back of the room.
9. Inform students that they have 18 minutes to complete this project. Allow students to work on this activity, but rotate around the room to ensure that all students are on task. When the 18 minutes is up, sound the buzzer and inform students that time is up. Provide students about 2 minutes to return all materials where they found them. Inform them that the same person who got all of the materials needs to return them as well.

**Closure (5 minutes):**

1. When all students are back to their groups, tell them that the class is going to go around the room and allow each group to share 1 of their informal magazine phrases and 1 of their formal magazine phrases that they found.
2. Go around the room and have each group share 1 informal magazine phrase and 1 formal magazine phrase.
3. Have students return to their seats, get their materials, and leave class.
Informal vs. Formal Writing
Anticipatory Set Warm-up

Name_________________________________________________

Directions: Match each word or phrase to the picture based on where each belongs in the context of the situation. Think about where you would use each word or phrase. On the line below the picture, write the number of the word or phrase that belongs there.

PICTURES:
WORDS/PHRASES:

1.) OMG this trip was like sooo gr8!

2.) The answer is Jack London. He wrote the book based on his own personal experiences.

3.) Wow! I can’t believe we actually got all of this stuff for 20 buckaroos! This is like freaken amazing!

4.) Oh, did you see the flowers over there? Jackie and me just saw the pink ones. Figures we would like the pink ones…duhh!

5.) The square root of 36 is 6; therefore, 6 is the correct answer on this exam.

6.) This is the correct business application for this individual. In addition, we must set up an interview if we are to consider him.
Informal vs. Formal Writing: Note-Taking Packet

Informal Writing

I.) a.) Informal writing is a style of writing that reflects familiarity and personality. It often reflects the voice and tone of the author, and the way it is written depends on the audience.

b.) Qualities of Informal Writing:

- Contractions
- Generalizations
- Vague Language
- Using you instead of specific groups
- Incomplete Sentences
- Grammatical errors
- Spelling errors
- Informal words and expressions
- Uses language that would be used in social conversation
- Lack of structure
c.) **Contexts in which Informal Writing is Appropriate:**

- Text messaging
- Emailing friends and/or family
- Blogging
- Use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

d.) **Examples of Informal Writing:**

- I wonder why he puts up wit that stuff.
- They didn’t get to see that thing that was on sale.
- 2day I’m goin’ 2 the store.
- R u serious?
- There are lots of reasons why you shouldn’t get on that bus.
- The movie was gr8. U didn’t c it?
- when we went to the park
- Yo, what’s up?
Formal Writing

I.) a.) Formal writing is a style of writing that conveys more serious topics. It includes specific words, complex language, and correct, standard English grammar.

b.) Qualities of Formal Writing:
   ➢ Specific, formal words
   ➢ Advanced vocabulary
   ➢ Third person point of view
   ➢ Replace “you” with a specific person or group
   ➢ No contractions
   ➢ No personal information
   ➢ Complete sentences
   ➢ Correct grammar and sentence structure

c.) Contexts in which Formal Writing is Appropriate:
   ➢ Business meetings
   ➢ Professional letters
   ➢ Professional writing tasks
   ➢ Professional, business applications
   ➢ School assignments and essays
   ➢ Common Core New York State Tests
   ➢ High School SATs and PSATs
   ➢ College papers
   ➢ College entrance exams
d.) **Examples of Formal Writing:**

- Many patients fail to listen to their doctors.
- School is a significant aspect of my life because it provides me with the tools that I need to be successful.
- I do not care for foods that are high in sodium.
- The writer utilizes a variety of literary elements in his writing.
- Protestors were arrested at the march.
- I attend Greece Athena Middle School.
- The scientist performed the task with incredible ease.
Informal vs. Formal Writing
Independent Practice

Directions: On the lines below, list 5 phrases that you use when texting or writing to friends and/or family members.

Example:
Did u c the game fri.?
OMG I want that shirt!!

1.____________________________________________________________________________
2.____________________________________________________________________________
3.____________________________________________________________________________
4.____________________________________________________________________________
5.____________________________________________________________________________

Now, re-write these phrases to make them formal. You may use your notes to complete this task.

1.____________________________________________________________________________
2.____________________________________________________________________________
3.____________________________________________________________________________
4.____________________________________________________________________________
5.____________________________________________________________________________
Can You “Magazine” It??

Directions: With your group, complete this magazine activity using examples of informal writing and formal writing. You can use the model example on the board to guide you.

Steps:

1. One student from each group needs to go to the back of the room and get:
   - scissors
   - glue
   - 1 or 2 magazines
   - 1 piece of construction paper
   - marker

2. Make a t-chart on your construction paper and label each column (“Informal Writing Examples” for column 1 and “Formal Writing Examples” for column 2)

3. With your group, look for 3 phrases in the magazine that reflect informal writing and 3 phrases that reflect formal writing.

4. Cut these phrases out.

5. Glue these phrases under the correct column.

6. Next to or below each phrase, write what context this phrase could be used in.
I.) Lesson Objective:
Students will be able to identify claims in formal writing.
Students will be able to write formal claims for specific textual questions.
Students will be able to write a claim based on a visual image.

Prior Knowledge:
Students need to know the differences between formal and informal writing.
Students need to be able to identify formal writing examples.
Students need to be familiar with correct grammatical forms and mechanics.
Students need to be able to write a complete sentence.
Students need to know how to do a “think-pair-share” activity.

Materials:
Pencil
Paper
Smart Board
Focus on Claims- Warm-up
Claim Note-Taking Packet
Creating a Claim Worksheet
Poster Activity Worksheet
Poster Claim Reflection
10 picture posters
10 pieces of poster board paper
Case of colored markers
Marker basket
Sound buzzer
Tape

Standards:
W6.2e, W7.2e, W8.2e- Establish and maintain a formal style.

W6.4, W7.4, W8.4- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

L6.2, L7.2, L8.2- Demonstrate the command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

II.) Anticipatory Set (5 minutes):
1. Pass out a Focus on Claims Warm-up worksheet (attached).
2. Have students put their name on it.
3. Read the directions to the students and remind them to write complete sentences.
4. Provide them with a few minutes to answer the prediction questions on what a formal claim is and what it might include.
5. When all students are finished, have a few student volunteers share what they think a formal claim is and what it might include.
6. Provide effective feedback as needed and clarify any misconceptions.

Modeling/Guidance (25 minutes):

1. Have students put their warm-up activity in their binder or folder.
2. Hand out a Claim Note-Taking Packet (attached) and have students put their name on it.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students. Remind students that they need to fill in the blanks where it is needed.
4. As the material is being presented, the teacher will rotate around the room to ensure that students are taking notes and staying on task.
5. Explain what a claim is using the definition provided.
6. Explain the claim formula for the students and inform them that each time they write a claim, they need to be sure to follow the formula.
7. Discuss examples of claims. With the examples provided, guide students as they fill in each aspect of the formula (stem+ because+ 1 general reason).
8. Provide the students with non-claim examples and ask them to explain why each is not a claim. As students are participating, fill in the notes on the Smart Board and be sure that students are staying on task and filling in the notes as well.
9. Then, provide students with a few minutes to read 7 statements and instruct them to write a “Y” on the line if the statement is a correct formal claim or an “N” if the statement is not a formal claim.
10. When all students are done, go over the answers with student participation and fill in the answers on the Smart Board as a visual representation. Explain why each is a claim or not a claim.
11. Ask students if they have any questions before moving forward. Answer all questions as needed.

Independent Practice (10 minutes):

1. Inform students that they need to keep their Claim Note-Taking packet out in case they need to refer to it.
2. Hand out Creating a Claim Worksheet (attached) and have students put their name on it. Students will be working on this task independently.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students. Inform them that they need to read each question prompt and choose 2 prompts in which to write a claim. Remind them that they need to use the formula provided. Make sure students know that after they write the claim for a particular question
prompt, they need to fill in the formula using their claim. Inform them that this will help them see how each part of their claim falls into the formula. It will also ensure that they are writing correct claims and following the formula.

4. Ask students if they have any questions and answer any questions as needed.

5. Give students about 7 minutes to do this. Be sure to rotate around the room to ensure that students are on task. When the 7 minutes are up, sound the buzzer.

6. Then, allow the students to do a “think-pair-share” with the person sitting next to them. Inform students that each person in the pair needs to share 1 of their claims and explain how it fits into the claim formula. Tell the students that they have about 3 minutes to do this.

7. Teacher will rotate around the room to provide feedback and answer any questions.

**Group Work Activity (15 minutes):**

1. Have students put their Creating a Claim Worksheet in their folder or binder. They may keep out their Claim Note-Taking Packet in case they need to refer to it during this activity.

2. Students will work on this activity with the person who did the “think-pair-share” activity with them.

3. Hand out a Poster Activity Worksheet (attached) and give 1 marker to each pair. Have students put their name on this worksheet.

4. Read the directions aloud to the students. Point to the 10 picture posters around the room and inform students that they need to write a claim for 5 of the picture posters using their marker. The poster board paper will be taped next to each individual poster. Let students know that they will be writing their claim for a poster on the poster board paper next to it.

5. Students will be given 2 minutes at each poster. When the 2 minutes is up, sound the buzzer and have students move to their next poster.

6. When students have gone to 5 posters of their choice, they need to put the markers in a basket at the back of the room and return to their seats.

**Closure (5 minutes):**

1. When all students are back to their seats, pass out a Poster Claim Reflection worksheet (attached) and have students put their name on it.

2. Read the directions aloud to the students. Tell students to look around the room at all of the claims that are written on the poster board paper next to each poster. They need to choose 1 claim that they really like and write it under “claim”, and explain why they like it under “reason.” (The poster board paper is large enough that all students could write fairly large, so students will not have a problem reading the claims from their seat).

3. Have students turn this in to the teacher as they are exiting class.
Name________________________________________________________________

Directions: Answer the questions below to the best of your ability.

1. What do you think a formal writing claim is?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. What might a claim include?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Writing a Claim

Directions: Follow along with the notes and fill in the blanks when necessary.

Claim:
a statement or a controlling idea that you make that guides the rest of the text. A claim is used in formal writing when the author wants to state a point and make an argument. You will want to make sure you that you include the general reason for the claim using the word “because”.

Formula:
Stem (Restatement of the Question) + Because + 1 General Reason

a.) Example 1:
Prompt- Why does Ms. Bronowicki like to go to the mall?
Claim- Ms. Bronowicki likes to go to the mall because she enjoys shopping.

Directions: Using the claim above, please fill in the blanks using the claim formula.

stem:_____________________________________________________________
+ because
+ general reason:____________________________________________________

b.) Example 2:
Prompt- Why does Ben enjoy playing soccer?
Claim- Ben enjoys playing soccer because he loves to run.

Directions: Using the claim above, please fill in the blanks using the claim formula.

stem:_____________________________________________________________
+ because
+ general reason:____________________________________________________
Non-Claim Examples:

Prompt- Why does Ms. Bronowicki like to go to the mall?
NON-CLAIM- Ms. Bronowicki likes to go to the mall.

Why is this NOT a claim?
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Prompt- Why does Ms. Bronowicki like to go to the mall?
NON-CLAIM- Ms. Bronowicki likes to go to the mall because she likes to buy purses, shoes, and she likes to walk around.

Why is this NOT a claim?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Prompt- Why does Ben enjoy playing soccer?
NON-CLAIM- Ben enjoys playing soccer.

Why is this NOT a claim?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Prompt- Why does Ben enjoy playing soccer?
NON-CLAIM- Ben enjoys playing soccer because he likes to run down the field and score goals, especially during overtime.

Why is this NOT a claim?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Claim or Not?

Directions: Look at each statement and write Y if the statement is a claim and N if the statement is not a claim.

1. Jen likes Tim Hortons because of their strong coffee. _____________

2. The student is smart because she does her work every day, pays attention in class, and participates every day. __________________

3. Teachers should not give homework. ______________________

4. The homework is time consuming because it is so long. __________________

5. An apple is a healthy fruit because it has lots of nutrients._______________________

6. The class was very helpful because it gave the students a lot of information about different topics like literature, writing, and claims. __________________________

7. The character was determined to survive because he never gave up.___________________
Creating a Claim

Directions: Read each prompt. Choose 2 prompts and then create a claim that can be proven. Fill out the formula based on your claim when you are done to make sure it is an effective claim. When you are done, share one of your claims with the person sitting next to you.

Stem (Restatement of the Question) + Because + General Reason

1.) Teens want privacy, but parents want to keep their kids safe. Why should parents read their children’s text messages?

stem: _____________________________________________________
+ because
+ general reason: ____________________________________________________________

2.) Why should there be a four day school week?

stem: _____________________________________________________
+ because
+ general reason: ____________________________________________________________
3.) Should students be required to wear school uniforms?

stem: ____________________________________________
+ because ________________________________________
+ general reason: __________________________________

4.) Why should students be able to choose what food is served in the cafeteria?

stem: ____________________________________________
+ because ________________________________________
+ general reason: __________________________________
Poster Activity

Directions: With your partner, follow the steps listed below to write claims for picture posters!

- Markers will be handed out. Each pair of partners needs at least 1 marker.
- As you are walking around the room, choose 5 out of the 10 posters and write a claim for each one on the large poster paper taped to the wall next to each poster.
- You may use your Claim Note-Taking Packet as a resource.
- You will have 2 minutes at each poster. When you hear the buzzer sound, move to your next poster.

Poster # 1
Directions: Look around the room at the poster board paper that is taped next to each poster. Write 1 claim from 1 poster that you really liked!! Then, explain why you liked it under “Reason”!

Claim:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Reason:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Claim
I.) Lesson Objective:
Students will be able to identify text details that support specific claims.
Students will be able to analyze text evidence in a piece of writing.
Students will be able to write text details to support claims using formal language.

Prior Knowledge:
Students need to know the differences between formal and informal writing.
Students need to know what a claim is and how to write a claim.
Students need to be familiar with writing using elaboration.
Students need to be able to write a complete sentence.
Students need to be able to write with correct grammar and mechanics.

Materials:
Smart Board
Pencil
Matching Activity Warm-up Worksheet
3 strips of text details made from card stock
Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet
Case of highlighters
Text Evidence Practice Worksheet
“Can You Prove It?” group work activity
Text Evidence YouTube Clip (internet)
Ticket-Out-The-Door Worksheet

Standards:
W6.2e, W7.2e, W8.2e- Establish and maintain a formal style.
W6.4, W7.4, W8.4- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the
development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and
audience.
L6.2, L7.2, L8.2- Demonstrate the command of the conventions of standard
English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
RI6.1- Cite textual analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences
drawn from the text.
RI7.1- Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support an analysis of the text
says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
RI8.1- Cite the text evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the
text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
W6.1a-e, W7.1a-e, W8.1a-e- Write arguments to support claims with clear
reasons and relevant evidence.
II.) Anticipatory Set (5 minutes):

1. Hand out the Matching Activity Warm-up (attached) and have students put their name on it.
2. Read the directions aloud to the students. Explain that they need to match each cardstock detail strip to the correct claim that it proves or supports.
3. Provide students about 3 minutes to do this activity on their own.
4. When the 3 minutes are up, have three different student volunteers explain where they matched each detail. Provide effective feedback.
5. Ask students if they have any questions. Answer questions as needed.

Modeling/Guidance (25 minutes):

1. Instruct students to put the Matching Activity Warm-up in their binder or folder.
2. Pass out a Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet (attached) and have students write their name on it. Provide each student with a highlighter as well.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students and inform them that they need to fill in the blanks as the notes are being presented.
4. Explain the definition of text evidence and the questions that text evidence answers.
5. Explain the examples of claims and the details that help support each claim. Be sure to explain why each detail supports the claim.
6. Have students read the informal paragraph and the formal paragraph. Instruct them to highlight key ideas and details as they read.
7. When students have finished reading both passages, have them fill in the t-chart with qualities of the informal paragraph and qualities of the formal paragraph. Instruct students to do this on their own. When all students are done, have a few student volunteers share certain qualities that the informal paragraph had and qualities the formal paragraph had. Provide effective feedback as needed.
8. Have students re-read the formal paragraph on their own. Then, have them answer the questions “Who”? “What”? “When”? “Where”? “Why”? “How”? This helps students identify specific text details that can be found in formal paragraphs. When all students are done, focus their attention back up to the Smart Board. With student participation, fill in the answers to each question on the Smart Board. Explain how detailed the formal paragraph is in comparison to the informal paragraph. Provide effective feedback and answer any questions as needed.
9. Then, have students re-read the informal paragraph and create questions that were left unanswered. Have them do this on their own. When all students are done, focus their attention back up to the Smart Board. With student participation, write questions that were left unanswered on the Smart Board. Be sure to explain that informal writing does not include many details and is often written with no adherence to correct grammar.
10. Ask students if they have any questions. Answer any questions as needed.

**Independent Practice (10 minutes):**

1. Instruct students to keep their Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet out in case they need to refer to it.
2. Hand out a Text Evidence Practice Worksheet (attached) and have students put their name on it.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students and remind them that they need to use formal language.
4. Instruct them to write a claim a detail for each question prompt. Provide students with about 8 minutes to do this.
5. When the 8 minutes are up, sound the buzzer.
6. Take about 2 minutes and have 3 different student volunteers read their claim and their detail for one of the question prompts.
7. Provide effective feedback and answer any questions as needed.

**Group Work Activity (17 minutes):**

1. Instruct students to put their Text Evidence Practice Worksheet in their binder or folder. Let students know that they may use their Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet for this group work activity.
2. Hand out the “Can You Prove It?” worksheet (attached) and have students put their name on it.
3. Focus students’ attention on the Smart Board. Inform them that they will be watching a YouTube clip on text evidence. Show about 2 minutes of the clip.
4. Teacher will have already created groups of three with varied levels of abilities (weak/below average, average, strong/above average). Teacher will assign the groups.
5. Once the groups are assigned, read the directions aloud to the students. Instruct students to read the excerpt from Story of My Life by Helen Keller and highlight key ideas and details as they read. They need to do this on their own once they get into their groups. When all students are done reading it, they need to collaborate with their group and answer the short response question. Inform them that they need to write a claim and 2 text details to prove their claim.
6. Allow students to get into their groups of 3 and tell them they will have 15 minutes to do this.
7. When the 15 minutes are up, instruct students to hand in the “Can You Prove It”? worksheet to be graded as a participation grade. They need to return to their seats after they turned this in. This activity will serve as a valuable formative assessment for the teacher, as it will allow the teacher to assess how well the students understood the lesson and whether key concepts need to be re-taught with more practice.
Closure (3 minutes):

1. On the way back to their seats, students need to be instructed to take a Ticket-Out-The-Door worksheet (attached) from the front of the room.
2. Instruct students to write their name on the worksheet.
3. Provide students with 3 minutes to write two reminders about writing text evidence.
4. As students are exiting the classroom, the teacher will collect the Ticket-Out-The-Doors.
Match each detail strip to the correct claim that it proves or supports. Under each claim, stick the detail strip that belongs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim # 1</th>
<th>Claim # 2</th>
<th>Claim # 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben enjoys soccer because he loves to score goals.</td>
<td>Ben enjoys soccer because he has a lot of friends on his team.</td>
<td>Ben enjoys soccer because it is his favorite sport.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Detail Strips:**

- For example, Ben’s best friend Drew and his brother Brian play with him.
- Ben plays offense and loves the thrill of the audience when he shoots the ball in!
- Ever since he was a little boy, Ben loved soccer and watched it on television all of the time.
Directions: As the notes are being presented, fill in the blanks where it is needed.

I.) Text Evidence

a.) Text evidence- includes details and quotes from a text that prove a particular claim.

b.) Answers the questions:

-Who?
-What?
-When?
-Where?
-Why?
-How?

c.) Examples of text details that support claims:

Claim: The weather is beautiful because the sun is out.
Text Evidence: With the sun shining, it is eighty degrees outside.

Claim: The house is very large because it has six bedrooms.
Text Evidence: Each bedroom is spacious, and has its own fireplace and remodeled bathroom.

Claim: Jill enjoys the season of summer because she loves to swim.
Text Evidence: For example, Jill does twenty laps in the pool every morning and ten laps at night.

Claim: The storm was dangerous because it destroyed many homes.
Text Evidence: The roofs of many houses were torn to shreds and trees fell through a number of windows.
d.) Read the informal paragraph below and highlight key ideas and details:

Jeffrey just gradu8ted from Penn St8 University wit a degree in Marketing. He can’t wait to get out n’ do his thing and make sum cash. Although college wuz hard, he’s ready 4 the real world. 2day he has 1 interview 4 a big position. He actually has to buy a suit! LOL. Hopefully he can find a cheap one somewhere. There is something that he doesn’t know…His friends n’ family are planning a surprise party 4 him. He’s soooo bad wit surprises… prolly bcuz he is a such a nosy person! Haha. His friendz n fam are gonna make lots of food 4 the party. They r all so happy for him and everythin he accomplished. Best of luck 2 Jeffrey in his journey as a businessman!!!

Read the formal paragraph below and highlight key ideas and details:

Sara discovered her private perch on a large boulder about two weeks after her family moved to Poplar Springs. It was the first Friday in April, and Sara’s school had early dismissal. She tossed her jacket over the sofa, dumped her backpack on the floor, and put on her heavy hiking boots. She grabbed a banana and a juice box, and hustled out the back door. She still had not made a single friend at her new school; arriving late in the term had been challenging. She felt isolated and alone. As Sara’s loneliness at school continued, trekking through the tract of deep woods behind her house relieved the frustration that had built up in her.
Fill in the chart with 3 qualities about the text details found in the informal passage and 3 qualities about the text details found in the formal passage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Passage</th>
<th>Formal Passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

e.) Read the formal passage again. Write the sentences or phrases that answer each question:

Sara discovered her private perch on a large boulder about two weeks after her family moved to Poplar Springs. It was the first Friday in April, and Sara’s school had early dismissal. She tossed her jacket over the sofa, dumped her backpack on the floor, and put on her heavy hiking boots. She grabbed a banana and a juice box, and hustled out the back door. She still had not made a single friend at her new school; arriving late in the term had been challenging. She felt isolated and alone. As Sara’s loneliness at school continued, trekking through the tract of deep woods behind her house relieved the frustration that had built up in her.
Sentences or phrases that answer each question:

Who?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

When?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Where?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Why?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
f.) Read the informal passage again. What questions are left unanswered?

Jeffrey just gradu8ted. He can’t wait to get out n’ do his thing and make sum
cash. Although college wuz hard, he’s ready 4 the real world. 2day he has 1
interview 4 a big position. He actually has to buy a suit! LOL. Hopefully he can
find a cheap one somewhere. There is something that he doesn’t know…His
friends n’ family are planning a surprise party 4 him. He’s sooo bad wit
surprises…prolly bcuz he is a such a nosy person! Haha. His friendz n fam are
gonna make lots of food 4 the party. They r all so happy for him and everythin he
accomplished. Best of luck 2 Jeffrey in his journey as a businessman!!!

Questions left unanswered:
1. ______________________________________________________________

2. ______________________________________________________________

3. ______________________________________________________________

4. ______________________________________________________________

5. ______________________________________________________________
6th-8th grade Day 3, Lesson 3
Formal Writing: Focus on Text Evidence
Independent Practice
Text Evidence Practice

Name__________________________________________________________

Directions: Answer each question with a claim and a detail. You may use your Text Evidence Note Taking Packet to help guide you. Be sure to use formal language!

1. Why is it important to be a good friend?
   Claim: ____________________________________________________________
   Detail: ____________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________

2. How has technology shaped the way we live?
   Claim: ____________________________________________________________
   Detail: ____________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________

3. Why is education important for your future?
   Claim: ____________________________________________________________
   Detail: ____________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________
6th-8th grade Day 3, Lesson 3
Formal Writing: Focus on Text Evidence
Group Work Activity
“Can You Prove It?”

Name_______________________________________________________________

Watch the video clip about proving claims with text evidence:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARw8q0HBpvY

Directions: With your group, follow the steps below:

• Read the nonfiction passage to yourselves.
• Highlight key ideas and details as you are reading.
• When everyone is done reading the passage, read the short response question.
• As a group, answer the short response question with a claim and 2 text details to prove your claim.

Passage:

Excerpt from Story of My Life
by Helen Keller

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to
put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

Short Response Question:
Closely reread the following sentences from lines 37–39 of the passage:

“Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house, every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life.”

Include:

a claim
2 text details to prove your claim.

How do these sentences reflect the author’s changing relationship with language?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Name__________________________________________________________

Directions: Answer the following question in complete sentences.

What do you need to make sure you do when you are writing text evidence? List 2 reminders for yourself.

1.______________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________

2.______________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
9th-10th grade Mini-Unit
2 Sixty-minute Lesson Plans
The Exploration of Formal Writing: Claims and Text Evidence

➢ 9th-10th grade Day 1, Lesson 1
   Informal vs. Formal Writing

I.) Lesson Objective:
   Students will be able to identify differences between formal and informal writing.
   Students will be able to identify qualities found in formal and informal writing.

Prior Knowledge:
   Students need to be familiar with correct grammatical forms and mechanics.
   Students need to be able to write a complete sentence.
   Students need to be able to compare and contrast.
   Students need to be able to know the definitions of casual and proper.

Materials:
   Smart Board
   Pencil
   Formal vs. Informal Sentence Match warm-up worksheet
   8 card stock sentence strips
   Informal vs. Formal Writing Note-Taking Packet
   Frederick Douglass’ Speech on Women’s Suffrage worksheet
   Identify, Correct, and Contrast worksheet
   Quad-Fold Exit Ticket
   Sound Buzzer
   Case of highlighters

Standards:
   L9-10.2- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.
   RI9-10.5- Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text.
   RI9-10.1- Cite strong and textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
   RL9-10.1- Cite strong and textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
II.) Anticipatory Set (5 minutes):

1. Hand out a Formal vs. Informal Sentence Match worksheet (attached) and have students put their name at the top.
2. Read the directions aloud to the students. Briefly go over the definitions of casual and proper. Ask students where they would use casual language and where they would use proper language. Call on students at random, as well as student volunteers.
3. Instruct students to match the cardstock sentence strips to the casual language column or the proper language column in the chart below.
4. Provide students about 3 minutes to do this.
5. When the 3 minutes are up, sound the buzzer.
6. With student participation, go over what sentences belong in the casual language column and what sentences belong in the proper language column. Call on a different student for each sentence.

Modeling/Guidance (20 minutes):

1. Have students put the Formal vs. Informal Sentence Match worksheet in their binder or folder. Then, hand out the Informal vs. Formal Writing Note-Taking Packet (attached). Have students write their name on it.
2. Read the directions aloud to the students and begin explaining the differences between each style of writing. Remind students that they need to fill in the blanks where it is needed.
3. Discuss the contexts in which informal writing is appropriate.
4. Discuss examples of informal writing.
5. Discuss the contexts in which formal writing is appropriate.
6. Discuss the examples of formal writing.
7. As the teacher is presenting, he or she needs to be rotating around the room to ensure that all students are on task and correctly filling in the notes.
8. After presenting the information, ask students if they have any questions and answer further questions as needed.

Independent Practice (20 minutes):

1. Instruct students to keep their Informal vs. Formal Writing Note-Taking Packet out to assist them with this independent activity.
2. Hand out a Frederick Douglass’ Speech on Women’s Suffrage worksheet (attached) and a highlighter to each student. When all students have the worksheet, have them write their names on it.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students and inform them that this excerpt is an example of formal writing. Instruct students to read this excerpt and highlight key ideas and details. Let them know that they may use their
Informal vs. Formal Writing Note-Taking Packet to help them identify formal language.

4. Inform students that when they are done reading the excerpt, they need to write 5 sentences/phrases that reflect formal language and explain the reason why each of these sentences/phrases display formal language. Remind them that this needs to be completed in complete sentences. Let students know that they should pull actual quotes from the excerpt for the sentence/phrase portion, and that they need to put quotations around each sentence or phrase.

5. Provide students 15 minutes to complete this activity. When the 15 minutes are up, have 5 different students share a sentence they wrote down and the reason why that specific sentence reflects formal writing. Have each of the 5 students come up to the Smart Board individually and write what he or she wrote down for the sentence/phrase. Then, have each student verbally share why the sentence or phrase chosen reflects formal writing.

6. Provide feedback as needed and ask students if they have any questions.

7. Answer any questions as needed.

Group Work Activity (13 minutes):

1. Instruct students to put the Frederick Douglas Speech on Women’s Suffrage in their binder or folder. They may keep out the Informal vs. Formal Writing Note-Taking Packet in case they need to refer back to it.

2. Hand out Identify, Correct, and Contrast group work activity (attached). Instruct students to put their name on it.

3. Teacher will have already created groups of 3 and will assign the groupings to the class at this time.

4. The students will be instructed to get into their groups of 3 and look up at the teacher for further instructions.

5. Read the directions aloud to the students. As a group, students need to read the informal paragraph together and correct all errors by crossing out certain words and correcting them to display formal writing.

6. When they have completed that task, they need to write 3 differences between the Informal Writing Passage and Formal Writing Passage. Therefore, they need to analyze the details, and the manner in which those details are conveyed to contrast the two forms of writing. Then, they need to write a few similarities between the two styles (they will probably only be able to come up with one or two). Remind students that they need to write in complete sentences.

7. Provide students about 13 minutes to complete this task.

8. When the 13 minutes are up, collect this activity from each group and have students return to their seats. This information will serve as a formative assessment and allow the teacher to assess whether students comprehended and correctly applied the concept. In addition, this assignment allows the teacher to identify what skills need to be reinforced and/or re-taught.
Closure (2 minutes):

1. When students are at their seats, hand out the Quad-Fold Exit Ticket (attached) and have students put their name on it.
2. Read the directions aloud to students. Instruct them to answer each question statement in complete sentences.
3. Have students hand this in to the teacher as they exit the classroom.
Informal vs. Formal Writing

**Anticipatory Set**

**Formal vs. Informal Sentence Match**

Name___________________________________________________________

Directions: Match the sentence strips to the casual language category or the proper language category. There are 4 casual language sentences and 4 formal proper language sentences.

**Sentence Strips:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence Strips:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The meeting took place at the mayor’s office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You will so not win the next soccer match.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much dough did you spend on that sweet jacket?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bridge will be closed Monday through Friday for repairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The movie was a snoozer, so we ditched early.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culminating factor lies in the shortage of food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The city plans to hold a parade on the Fourth of July.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So what r u gonna do this weekend?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Informal vs. Formal Writing

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the correct words that are on the Smart Board. Be sure to spell the words correctly.

Informal Writing

I.) a.) Informal writing is a style of writing that reflects familiarity and personality. It often reflects the voice and tone of the author, and the way it is written depends on the audience.

b.) Quality of Informal Writing:
   - Contractions
   - Generalizations
   - Vague Language
   - Using you instead of specific groups
   - Incomplete Sentences
   - Grammatical errors
   - Spelling errors
   - Informal words and expressions
   - Uses language that would be used in social conversation
   - Lack of structure
C.) **Contexts in which Informal Writing is Appropriate:**

- Text messaging
- Emailing friends and/or family
- Blogging
- Use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

d.) **Examples of Informal Writing:**

- I wonder why he puts up with that stuff.
- They didn’t get to see that thing that was on sale.
- 2day I’m goin’ 2 the store.
- R u serious?
- There are lots of reasons why you shouldn’t get on that bus.
- The movie was gr8. U didn’t c it?
- when we went to the park
- Yo, what’s up?

**Formal Writing**

I.)

a.) Formal writing is a style of writing that conveys more **serious** topics. It includes specific words, complex language, and correct, **standard English grammar**.

b.) **Qualities of Formal Writing:**

- **Specific**, formal words
➢ Advanced vocabulary
➢ Third person point of view
➢ Replace “you” with a specific person or group
➢ No contractions
➢ No personal information
➢ Complete sentences
➢ Correct grammar and sentence structure

c.) **Contexts in which Formal Writing is Appropriate:**
➢ Business meetings
➢ Professional letters
➢ Professional writing tasks
➢ Professional, business applications
➢ School assignments and essays
➢ Common Core New York State Tests
➢ High School SATs and PSATs
➢ College papers
➢ College entrance exams

d.) **Examples of Formal Writing:**
➢ Many patients fail to listen to their doctors.
➢ School is a significant aspect of my life because it provides me with the tools that I need to be successful.
➢ I do not care for foods that are high in sodium.
➢ The writer utilizes a variety of literary elements in his writing.
➢ Protestors were arrested at the march.
➢ I attend Greece Athena Middle School.
➢ The scientist performed the task with incredible ease.
Directions: Read Frederick Douglass’ Speech on Women’s Suffrage. Be sure to highlight specific details and key ideas.

**Formal Writing Passage**

*Frederick Douglass’ Speech on Women's Suffrage*

The following is an excerpt from a speech delivered to the International Council of Women in Washington, D.C., April 1888.

All good causes are mutually helpful. The benefits accruing from this movement for the equal rights of woman are not confined or limited to woman only. They will be shared by every effort to promote the progress and welfare of mankind everywhere and in all ages. It was an example and a prophecy of what can be accomplished against strongly opposing forces, against time-hallowed abuses, against deeply entrenched error, against worldwide usage, and against the settled judgment of mankind, by a few earnest women, clad only in the panoply of truth, and determined to live and die in what they considered a righteous cause.

I do not forget the thoughtful remark of our president in the opening address to this International Council, reminding us of the incompleteness of our work. The remark was wise and timely. Nevertheless, no man can compare the present with the past, the obstacles that then opposed us, and the influences that now favor us, the meeting in the little Methodist chapel forty years ago, and the Council in this vast theater today, without admitting that woman’s cause is already a brilliant success. But, however this may be and whatever the future may have in store for us, one thing is certain—this new revolution in human thought will never go backward. When a great truth once gets abroad in the world, no power on earth can imprison it, or prescribe its limits, or suppress it. It is bound to go on till it becomes the thought of the world. Such a truth is woman’s right to equal liberty with man. She was born with it. It was hers before she comprehended it. It is inscribed upon all the powers and faculties of her soul, and no custom, law or usage can ever destroy it. Now that it has got fairly fixed in the minds of the few, it is bound to become fixed in the minds of the many, and be supported at last by a great cloud of witnesses, which no man can number and no power can withstand.

The women who have thus far carried on this agitation have already embodied and illustrated Theodore Parker’s three grades of human greatness. The first is greatness in executive and administrative ability; second, greatness in the ability to organize; and, thirdly, in the ability to discover truth. Wherever these three elements of power are combined in any movement, there is a reasonable ground to believe in its final success; and these elements of power have been manifest in the women who have had the movement in hand from the beginning. They are seen in the order which has characterized the proceedings of this Council. They are seen in the depth
and are seen in the fervid eloquence and downright earnestness with which women advocate their cause. They are seen in the profound attention with which woman is heard in her own behalf. They are seen in the steady growth and onward march of the movement, and they will be seen in the final triumph of woman’s cause, not only in this country, but throughout the world.

List some qualities that make this piece an example of formal writing. Write a sentence or a phrase on the first line and the reason why that sentence or phrase reflects formal language on the second line:

1. Sentence/Phrase:_______________________________________________________________
   Reason:_______________________________________________________________________

2. Sentence/Phrase:_______________________________________________________________
   Reason:_______________________________________________________________________

3. Sentence/Phrase:_______________________________________________________________
   Reason:_______________________________________________________________________

4. Sentence/Phrase:_______________________________________________________________
   Reason:_______________________________________________________________________

5. Sentence/Phrase:_______________________________________________________________
   Reason:_______________________________________________________________________
A.) Directions: With your group, read the informal passage below and edit the informal language to make it correct, formal language. Correct the informal language by crossing out certain words and correcting them within the paragraph.

Informal Writing Passage

Between soccer fans worldwide, the name Zinedine Zidane wuz famous after the World Cup soccer match in July 1998. Zidane is the player who led the French team 2 victory over Brazil by scoring two goals wit his head. Not many pepul would of predicted such an impressive future for the son of a poor Algerian immigrant. In some ways, this French success story don’t seem different from many american success stories. Zidane learned 2 play soccer on the streets of his neighborhood in Marseille. One reason Zidane made his professional debut at sixteen was becuze he could dribble n’ stuff. Like others done, he followed his dream out of poverty. In 1994, Zidane made his debut with the French national team by scoring two goals after only seventeen minutes of play. Amazing, huh?!
B.) **Directions:** Write differences between the Informal Writing Passage and Formal Writing Passage. Write 3 qualities found in the Informal Writing Passage and 3 qualities found in the Formal Writing Passage to show their differences. Then, write 1 or 2 similarities between the two styles in the center of the Venn diagram. Be sure to write complete sentences.
Directions: Fill in each square by answering the question statement in bold. Be sure to write complete sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we about learned today…</th>
<th>This is important because…</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A picture or diagram of this topic…</th>
<th>Questions…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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9th-10th grade Day 2, Lesson 2
Formal Writing: Focus on Text Evidence

I.) Lesson Objective:
Students will be able to identify strong pieces of textual evidence.
Students will be able to write strong textual evidence to support claims.

Prior Knowledge:
Students need to know the differences between formal and informal writing.
Students need to know how to write using formal language.
Students need to know what a formal claim is.
Students need to know how to write a formal claim.
Students need to know how to elaborate on information.
Students need to be familiar with correct grammatical forms and mechanics.
Students need to be able to write a complete sentence.

Materials:
Smart Board
YouTube clip (internet)
Pencil
“What is Text Evidence”? warm-up
Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet
“Newspaper It!” activity
Model Example of “Newspaper It!” activity
15-20 newspapers
Colored construction paper
Scissors
Glue
Tape
“What Can You Find a Line”? worksheet
5 large card stock papers
Share-Out-Exit-Out closure worksheet
Case of markers
Case of highlighters
Marker basket
5 poster board posters
Sound buzzer

Standards:
L9-10.2- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

RI9-10.5- Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text.
RI9-10.1- Cite strong and textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL9-10.1- Cite strong and textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI9-10.10- By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 9–10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

II.) Anticipatory Set (5 minutes):
1. Hand out “What is Text Evidence?” warm-up activity (attached) and have students put their name on it.
2. Read the directions aloud to the students. Inform students that they will be watching a video clip about text evidence.
3. Instruct students to take 3 bulleted notes on the video as they watch it. They need to write in complete sentences.
4. Show the YouTube clip using the Smart Board.
5. When the clip is complete, call on a few students and student volunteers to share one note that they wrote down.

Modeling/Guidance (25 minutes):
1. Instruct students to put the “What is Text Evidence?” warm-up in their binder or folder.
2. Pass out a Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet (attached) and have students write their name on it. Provide each student with a highlighter as well.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students and inform them that they need to fill in the blanks as the notes are being presented.
4. Explain the definition of text evidence and the questions that text evidence answers.
5. Explain the examples of claims and the details that help support each claim. Be sure to explain why each detail supports the claim.
6. Have students read the informal paragraph and the formal paragraph. Instruct them to highlight key ideas and details as they read.
7. When students have finished reading both passages, have them fill in the t-chart with qualities of the informal paragraph and qualities of the formal paragraph. Instruct students to do this on their own. When all students are done, have a few student volunteers share certain qualities that the informal paragraph had and qualities the formal paragraph had. Provide effective feedback as needed.
8. Have students re-read the formal paragraph on their own. Then, have them answer the questions “Who”? “What”? “When”? “Where”? “Why”? “How”? This helps students identify specific text details that can be found in formal paragraphs. When all students are done, focus their attention back up to the
Smart Board. With student participation, fill in the answers to each question on the Smart Board. Explain how detailed the formal paragraph is in comparison to the informal paragraph. Provide effective feedback and answer any questions as needed.

9. Then, have students re-read the informal paragraph and create questions that were left unanswered. Have them do this on their own. When all students are done, focus their attention back up to the Smart Board. With student participation, write questions that were left unanswered on the Smart Board. Be sure to explain that informal writing does not include many details and is often written with no adherence to correct grammar.

10. Ask students if they have any questions. Answer any questions as needed.

**Independent Practice (15 minutes):**
1. Instruct students to put the “What is Text Evidence?” warm-up in their binder or folder.
2. Hand out a “Newspaper It!” activity (attached), a newspaper, and construction paper to each student. Have students put their name on the activity worksheet.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students. Instruct them to use words, phrases, and/or letters from the newspaper to form one claim. They need to form the claim by cutting these words, phrases, and/or letters out, and pasting them to the top of the construction paper. Then, they need to find three text details to support the claim that they create. Instruct them to form three details by cutting out words, phrases, and/or letters. Then, they need to paste these details and number them under the claim that they found/formed.
4. Show students the model example. Point out that the claim is pasted to the top of the paper and the three details to support the claim are numbered and pasted right below the claim. Show the creativity in the model example. Point out that they can be as creative as they would like by pasting pictures from the newspaper or drawing artistic designs.
5. Inform students that they have 15 minutes to complete this activity.
6. Teacher will be rotating around the room to ensure that students are on task and to provide feedback. This activity also serves as a formative assessment, as the teacher can effectively assess students’ understanding of the material.
7. When the 15 minutes are up, sound the buzzer. Collect these activities from students and post them around the classroom after class.

**Group Work Activity (13 minutes):**
1. Hand out “Can You Find a Line?” activity (attached) and a highlighter to each student. Have students put their name on it.
2. Teacher will have already created groups of four for this group work activity.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students. Instruct them to read “What is Your Own Big Plan?” by Barack Obama. They need to be highlighting key ideas and details. Inform them that when all group members are done reading the speech, they need to work together as a group to find a line/detail that supports each fact and put quotation marks around the line. Instruct them to
focus on specific, formal text evidence. Remind them that they need to go back into the text several times to find strong evidence.

4. Inform them that once this part if complete, they need to choose two questions and have two people from their group write the line/detail taken from the text that supports the claim for those particular questions. Each question/claim is written on a large piece of cardstock paper next to the poster board paper for that specific question. Inform them that there will be poster board paper taped next to each question/claim. On the poster board paper, they need to write the line/detail that supports the question/claim from this activity. Students can get a marker from the marker basket in the back of the classroom when they are ready. Let students know that once they have added their contribution, they need to return the markers back to the marker basket.

5. Ask students if they have any questions and answer questions as needed.
6. Assign students to their groups of four.
7. Allow students to work on this activity with their group.
8. Sound the buzzer when 13 minutes are up.
9. Have students put the “Can You Find a Line?” activity in their binder or folder. Instruct students to return to their seat and pick up a Share-Out-Exit-Out ticket from the front of the room.

**Closure (2 minutes):**

1. Read the directions aloud to the students. Instruct them to look around the room at the many difference lines/details that help prove the questions/claims from the Barack Obama speech activity. They need to choose one line/detail to write down and explain why it is a good example of formal writing.
2. As students exit the classroom, collect their Share-Out-Exit-Out tickets (attached). Teacher will use these to see whether students can identify valid text evidence and explain why it reflects formal language.
9th-10th grade Day 2, Lesson 2
Formal Writing: Focus on Text Evidence
Anticipatory Set
What is Text Evidence?

Name__________________________________________________________

Directions: Watch the following YouTube clip on text evidence. As you are watching the clip, take 3 bulleted notes about writing text evidence. Be sure to write in complete sentences.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3571UcZlFyc

Notes:

•

•

•
Directions: As the notes are being presented, fill in the blanks where it is needed.

I. Text Evidence

a.) Text evidence- includes details and quotes from a text that prove a particular claim.

b.) Answers the questions:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

c.) Examples of text details that support claims:

Claim: The weather is beautiful because the sun is out.
Text Evidence: With the sun shining, it is eighty degrees outside.

Claim: The house is very large because it has six bedrooms.
Text Evidence: Each bedroom is spacious, and has its own fireplace and remodeled bathroom.

Claim: Jill enjoys the season of summer because she loves to swim.
Text Evidence: For example, Jill does twenty laps in the pool every morning and ten laps at night.

Claim: The storm was dangerous because it destroyed many homes.
Text Evidence: The roofs of many houses were torn to shreds and trees fell through a number of windows.
d.) Read the informal paragraph below and highlight key ideas and details:

Jeffrey just graduated from Penn St8 University wit a degree in Marketing. He can’t wait to get out n’ do his thing and make sum cash. Although college wuz hard, he’s ready 4 the real world. 2day he has 1 interview 4 a big position. He actually has to buy a suit! LOL. Hopefully he can find a cheap one somewhere. There is something that he doesn’t know…His friends n’ family are planning a surprise party 4 him. He’s soooo bad wit surprises…proly bcuz he is a such a nosy person! Haha. His friendz n fam are gonna make lots of food 4 the party. They r all so happy for him and everythin he accomplished. Best of luck 2 Jeffrey in his journey as a businessman!!!

Read the formal paragraph below and highlight key ideas and details:

Sara discovered her private perch on a large boulder about two weeks after her family moved to Poplar Springs. It was the first Friday in April, and Sara’s school had early dismissal. She tossed her jacket over the sofa, dumped her backpack on the floor, and put on her heavy hiking boots. She grabbed a banana and a juice box, and hustled out the back door. She still had not made a single friend at her new school; arriving late in the term had been challenging. She felt isolated and alone. As Sara’s loneliness at school continued, trekking through the tract of deep woods behind her house relieved the frustration that had built up in her.
Fill in the chart with 3 qualities about the text details found in the informal passage and 3 qualities about the text details found in the formal passage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Passage</th>
<th>Formal Passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e.) Read the formal passage again. Write the sentences or phrases that answer each question:

Sara discovered her private perch on a large boulder about two weeks after her family moved to Poplar Springs. It was the first Friday in April, and Sara’s school had early dismissal. She tossed her jacket over the sofa, dumped her backpack on the floor, and put on her heavy hiking boots. She grabbed a banana and a juice box, and hustled out the back door. She still had not made a single friend at her new school; arriving late in the term had been challenging. She felt isolated and alone. As Sara’s loneliness at school continued, trekking through the tract of deep woods behind her house relieved the frustration that had built up in her.
Sentences or phrases that answer each question:

Who?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

What?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

When?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Where?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Why?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

How?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
f.) Read the informal passage again. What questions are left unanswered?

Jeffrey just gradu8ted. He can’t wait to get out n’ do his thing and make sum cash. Although college wuz hard, he’s ready 4 the real world. 2day he has 1 interview 4 a big position. He actually has to buy a suit! LOL. Hopefully he can find a cheap one somewhere. There is something that he doesn’t know…His friends n’ family are planning a surprise party 4 him. He’s soooo bad wit surprises…proly bcuz he is a such a nosy person! Haha. His friendz n fam are gonna make lots of food 4 the party. They r all so happy for him and everythin he accomplished. Best of luck 2 Jeffrey in his journey as a businessman!!!

Questions left unanswered:
1. __________________________________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________________________________

4. __________________________________________________________________________________

5. __________________________________________________________________________________
Directions: Using one newspaper, follow the steps below:

1. Identify or create one claim from the newspaper using letters and/or words. Cut these out and form the claim sentence.

2. Glue this claim to the piece of construction paper.

3. Find 3 phrases using letters and/or words that serve as substantial text evidence to support the claim.

4. When this is complete, find one person with whom to share your claim and the 3 phrases you created to support the claim.

Note:
You can cut out specific letters and phrases to create a sentence that can serve as a claim or text detail.
1.) Directions: With your group, read the following formal speech. Highlight key ideas and details as you read.

**What is Your Own Big Plan?**
These are excerpts from the speech by President Barack Obama, Arlington, Virginia, September 8, 2009.

… at the end of the day, we can have the most dedicated teachers, the most supportive parents, and the best schools in the world – and none of it will matter unless all of you fulfill your responsibilities. Unless you show up to those schools; pay attention to those teachers; listen to your parents, grandparents and other adults; and put in the hard work it takes to succeed.

And that’s what I want to focus on today: the responsibility each of you has for your education. I want to start with the responsibility you have to yourself. Every single one of you has something you’re good at. Every single one of you has something to offer. And you have a responsibility to yourself to discover what that is. That’s the opportunity an education can provide. Maybe you could be a good writer – maybe even good enough to write a book or articles in a newspaper – but you might not know it until you write a paper for your English class. Maybe you could be an innovator or an inventor – maybe even good enough to come up with the next iPhone or a new medicine or vaccine – but you might not know it until you do a project for your science class. Maybe you could be a mayor or a Senator or a Supreme Court Justice, but you might not know that until you join student government or the debate team. And no matter what you want to do with your life – I guarantee that you’ll need an education to do it. You want to be a doctor, or a teacher, or a police officer? You want to be a nurse or an architect, a lawyer or a member of our military? You’re going to need a good education for every single one of those careers. You can’t drop out of school and just drop into a good job. You’ve got to work for it and train for it and learn for it. … You’ll need the knowledge and problem-solving skills you learn in science and math to cure diseases like cancer and AIDS, and to develop new energy technologies and protect our environment. You’ll need the insights and critical thinking skills you gain in history and social studies to fight poverty and homelessness, crime and discrimination, and make our nation
more fair and more free. You’ll need the creativity and ingenuity you develop in all your classes to build new companies that will create new jobs and boost our economy. We need every single one of you to develop your talents, skills and intellect so you can help solve our most difficult problems. If you don’t do that – if you quit on school – you’re not just quitting on yourself, you’re quitting on your country. Now I know it’s not always easy to do well in school. I know a lot of you have challenges in your lives right now that can make it hard to focus on your schoolwork….Where you are right now doesn’t have to determine where you’ll end up. No one’s written your destiny for you. Here in America, you write your own destiny. You make your own future. So today, I want to ask you, what’s your contribution going to be? What problems are you going to solve? What discoveries will you make? What will a president who comes here in twenty or fifty or one hundred years say about what all of you did for this country? Your families, your teachers, and I are doing everything we can to make sure you have the education you need to answer these questions. I’m working hard to fix up your classrooms and get you the books, equipment and computers you need to learn. But you’ve got to do your part too. So I expect you to get serious this year. I expect you to put your best effort into everything you do. I expect great things from each of you. So don’t let us down – don’t let your family or your country or yourself down. Make us all proud. I know you can do it.

II.) Directions: After reading the excerpt from the speech by President Barack Obama, complete a scavenger hunt! Find a line that supports each fact and put quotation marks around the line. Focus on specific, formal text evidence!

1. Find a line that demonstrates Obama’s belief that determination is required for success.

2. Find a line that proves there a variety of options for success.

113
3. Find a line that proves Obama has been working hard to help students achieve goals.

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

4. Find a line that reveals what is needed to make substantial contributions to others, as well as our country.

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

5. Find a line that shows Obama’s view on what students need to do.

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

❖ Once you and your group have completed this task, have 2 people from your group write an answer for any two question numbers.

❖ The 2 people from the group need to each take 1 marker from the marker bin at the back of the room.

❖ There are 5 pieces of poster board paper hung around the room for each question.

❖ Go! Show your evidence!
Directions: Look around the room at the different lines that prove each question. Write one of the lines down and prove how it is a representation of formal writing.

Text Detail Answer Line:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Prove this line is an example of formal writing. Describe why it is formal writing.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
11th-12th grade Mini Unit
2 Sixty Minute Lesson Plans
Formal Writing: The Exploration of Text Evidence

11th-12th grade Day 1, Lesson 1
Informal vs. Formal Writing

I.) Lesson Objective:
Students will be able to identify the differences between formal and informal writing.
Students will be able to identify the contexts in which formal writing and informal writing are appropriate.
Students will be able to replace informal word choices with more formal and appropriate word choices.
Students will be able to write with formal language.
Students will be able to compare and contrast word choices.

Prior Knowledge:
Students should be able to write complete sentences.
Students should be able to write with correct grammar and mechanics.
Students should be able to compare and contrast information.

Materials:
Smart Board
Paper
Pencil
Sound buzzer
20-25 thesauruses
Job Posting: What Would You Say? warm-up worksheet
Informal vs. Formal Writing Packet
“Make It Formal” activity worksheet
Revision Assignment group activity
Pair and Share closure activity

Standards:
L11-12.1- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

L11-12.4c,d- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

RI11-12.6- Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.
RL11-12.4- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

W11-12.4- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

II.) Anticipatory Set (7 minutes):
1. Hand out a Job Posting: What Would You Say? warm-up and have students write their name on it.
2. Read the directions aloud to the students. Instruct students to read the hypothetical situation in bold and pick a sentence they would use if they were writing an email to a potential employer. Inform students that they need to write 5-6 sentences explaining why they chose the sentence that they did.
3. When students are done with this activity, have a few students explain what sentence they chose and why. This can be done by randomly calling on students and student volunteers.
4. Most students will choose “Sentence A” because the language used is more formal and proper.
5. Discuss that certain words in “Sentence A” make it sound more formal and sophisticated.

Modeling/Guidance (30 minutes):
1. Have students put the warm-up in their binders or folders.
2. Hand out an Informal vs. Formal Writing packet and have students put their name on it.
3. Instruct students to bullet certain words from “Sentence A” that appealed to them as more formal or appropriate. Discuss these words with the class.
4. Have students then compare and contrast word choices with the person sitting next to them (inquire vs. ask, recently vs. a couple of days ago, writing vs. saw). Instruct them to discuss the differences between word choices, and when and in what context each might be used. Rotate around the classroom to ensure that students are on task. Give students about 2 minutes to do this.
5. When the 2 minutes are up, call on students at random or call on student volunteers to discuss the differences in these word choices, and when and why one may be used over the other.
6. Using the Smart Board, bring up the “Inquire” visual map and explain that although “inquire” and “ask” have the same meaning, they do not convey the same tone. Explain that “ask” is used in everyday spoken language and often used in informal setting among friends and/or family. Explain that “inquire” is usually only used in formal circumstances, such as academic discussions, academic and professional assessments, interviews, professional reports, Regents exams, college entrance exams, etc.
7. Remind students that they need to be filling in the notes as needed.
8. Discuss the contexts in which informal writing is appropriate.
9. Discuss examples of informal writing.
10. Discuss the contexts in which formal writing is appropriate.
11. Discuss the examples of formal writing.
12. As the teacher is presenting, he or she needs to be rotating around the room to ensure that all students are on task and correctly filling in the notes.
13. After presenting the information, ask students if they have any questions and answer further questions as needed.

**Independent Practice (10 minutes):**
1. Inform students that they may leave their Informal vs. Formal Writing Packet out in case they need to refer to it for this activity.
2. Hand out a “Make It Formal” activity worksheet and a thesaurus to each student.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students and instruct them to list five examples of informal words that they use and five formal words that can be used to replace the informal words. Explain the examples that are provided for them, but make sure they understand that they have to come up with their own. Instruct them to use their thesaurus to identify appropriate formal words.
4. Inform them that they will have about 8 minutes to complete this.
5. When the 8 minutes are up, call on students at random or call on student volunteers to share one informal word that they use and how they will replace it with a formal word.

**Group Work Activity (10 minutes):**
1. Instruct students to place the “Make It Formal” activity worksheet in their binders or folders.
2. Hand out a Revision Assignment for students to work on in groups.
3. Have students put their name on it and read the directions aloud to students. They need to read this letter with their group and change some of the wording to make the letter sound more appropriate and formal. To do this, all they have to do is cross out certain words and replace them with formal words.
4. Remind students to use their thesauruses to create a more sophisticated, formal letter.
5. Inform students how much time they will have to complete this assignment (8 or 9 minutes)
6. Students have already received their assigned groups yesterday in class, so the teacher will instruct them to move into their groups and start the assignment.
7. When time is up, sound the buzzer. Instruct students to pick up a Pair and Share closure activity from the front of the classroom and return to their seats with their group work assignment.

**Closure (3 minutes):**
1. With the person sitting next to them, instruct students to share two informal words that were written in the letter and the formal words that their group used to replace those informal words.
2. Then, they need to exchange papers with their partner and find one other informal word that was not yet replaced by a formal word. The students need to write the informal word that they replaced in their partner’s paper to make it reflect formal writing. Then, they need to write the formal word that they used to replace the informal word.

3. As students exit the classroom, the teacher will collect this closure activity. It will be used as a formative assessment to evaluate students’ ability to utilize more formal writing in place of informal writing.
Informal vs. Formal Writing

Anticipatory Set

Job Posting: What Would You Say?

Name_____________________________________________________________

Directions: Consider the following hypothetical situation and write a journal entry in response to the prompt.

If you were writing an email or a letter to a potential employer, which sentence would you more likely use as your opening sentence? Explain why you chose the sentence you did. Which words in particular helped you make your choice?

Sentence A:
I am writing to inquire about the job you recently posted on Monster.com.

Sentence B:
A couple of days ago I saw your ad on Monster.com and wanted to ask you if I could find out more about it.

Journal Entry Response:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
11th-12th grade Day 1, Lesson 1
Informal vs. Formal Writing
Modeling/Guidance
Informal vs. Formal Writing Packet

Name_________________________________________________________

Directions: Answer the questions and fill in the blanks as needed.

Sentence A:
I am writing to inquire about the job you recently posted on Monster.com.

Sentence B:
A couple of days ago I saw your ad on Monster.com and wanted to ask you if I could find out more about it.

Question 1: Which specific words in the first sentence appealed to you as more formal or appropriate? List them in bullet form.

•

•

•

Question 2: Compare and contrast the following word choices with the person sitting next to you.

inquire vs. ask

recently vs. a couple of days ago

writing vs. saw
Example: Even though *ask* and *inquire* share the same meaning, they do not communicate the same tone.

- *Ask* - is used more often in everyday spoken language
- *Inquire* - is usually used only in more formal circumstances.

Informal Writing

1. a.) Informal writing is a style of writing that reflects *familiarity* and *personality*. It often reflects the *voice* and tone of the author, and the way it is written depends on the *audience*.

   b.) **Qualities of Informal Writing:**
   - Contractions
   - Generalizations
   - Vague Language
   - *Using you* instead of specific groups
- Incomplete Sentences
- **Grammatical errors**
- Spelling errors
- **Informal words and expressions**
- Uses language that would be used in **social** conversation
- **Lack of structure**

c.) **Contexts in which Informal Writing is Appropriate:**
- **Text messaging**
- Emailing friends and/or family
- **Blogging**
- Use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

d.) **Examples of Informal Writing:**
- I wonder why he puts up with that stuff.
- They didn’t get to see that thing that was on sale.
- 2day I’m goin’ 2 the store.
- **R u serious?**
- There are lots of reasons why you shouldn’t get on that bus.
- The movie was gr8. U didn’t c it?
- I saw that stuff on the website.
- Yo, what’s up?
- Where is the restaurant you were talking about?
Formal Writing

I.) a.) Formal writing is a style of writing that conveys more serious topics. It includes specific words, complex language, and correct, standard English grammar.

b.) Qualities of Formal Writing:
   - Specific, formal words
   - Advanced vocabulary
   - Third person point of view
   - Replace “you” with a specific person or group
   - No contractions
   - No personal information
   - Complete sentences
   - Correct grammar and sentence structure

c.) Contexts in which Formal Writing is Appropriate:
   - Business meetings
   - Professional letters
   - Professional writing tasks
   - Professional, business applications
   - School assignments and essays
   - Common Core New York State Tests
   - High School SATs and PSATs
   - College papers
   - College entrance exams

d.) Examples of Formal Writing:
   - Many patients fail to listen to their doctors.
   - School is a significant aspect of my life because it provides me with the tools that I need to be successful.
- I do not care for foods that are high in sodium.
- The writer utilizes a variety of literary elements in his writing.
- Protestors were arrested at the march.
- I attend Greece Athena Middle School.
- I am calling to inquire about the job posting on your website.
- The scientist performed the task with incredible ease.
Informal vs. Formal Writing

Independent Practice

“Make It Formal” Activity

Name_______________________________________________________

Directions: List 5 examples of informal words you use and 5 formal words that can replace the informal words. Use your thesaurus to complete this activity. Be ready to share out!

Examples: Do not use these examples. These are just model examples for you to refer to.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Words</th>
<th>More formal Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He checked up on his accountant.</td>
<td>He investigated his accountant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They put up with their neighbours.</td>
<td>They tolerated their neighbours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She caught on very quickly.</td>
<td>She understood very quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She made up for it with an early night.</td>
<td>She compensated for it with an early night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He went down with a fever.</td>
<td>He contracted a fever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of living went up.</td>
<td>The cost of living increased/rose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Informal Words → Formal Words

_________________________→ ____________________________

_________________________→ ____________________________

_________________________→ ____________________________

_________________________→ ____________________________

_________________________→ ____________________________
Dear Mr. Jones,

I thought I’d write to complain about the playground. Over the last two weeks, I have noticed a great deal of litter. I don’t even know what to do anymore. The sight of it is horrendous. It just looks disgusting and there has to be a way to solve this problem.

It is my opinion that this litter is a health hazard. For example, yesterday a year 4 boy fell over and cut his hand on a broken bottle. The boy I’m talking about needed four stitches. On top of this, the litter is an eyesore. Our school has beautiful views of the river and these are wrecked by the litter. I think there are things that you could do to fix this problem. Firstly, you could purchase additional litterbins. This would help stop people from discarding their litter in a bad way. I think that our school needs better security to prevent vandals littering. If you can think of anyone who would be fit for the job, those individuals should be interviewed. I really hope that something can be done about this problem.

In conclusion, I hope you will take my concerns seriously and I look forward to you writing back to me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ellen Thompson
Informal vs. Formal Writing

Closure

Pair and Share

Name___________________________________________________

Directions: With the person next to you, share 2 informal words that were in the letter and the formal words that you used to replace the informal words. Then, exchange papers and find other informal words that were not yet replaced by formal words in your partner’s paper, and replace them with formal words.

Write one informal word that you replaced in your partner’s paper to make it reflect formal writing. Then, write the formal word that you used to replace this informal word.

Informal Word: _____________________________  Formal Word: _______________________________
Formal Writing: Focus on Text Evidence

I.) Learning Objective:
Students will be able to read and analyze a higher level text.
Students will be able to develop text based questions.
Students will be able to identify accurate and valid examples of text evidence based on a particular claim.
Students will be able to write valid text evidence to prove a claim.
Students will be able to analyze how well certain pieces of text evidence support a claim.
Students will be able to explain the effects of formal language as it is represented in several sentences.

Prior Knowledge:
Students need to be able to write a complete sentence.
Students need to be able to write with correct grammar and mechanics.
Students need to know how to highlight and annotate information correctly.
Students need to know the differences between formal and informal writing.
Students need to know the contexts in which formal and informal writing is appropriate.
Students need to know how to identify a formal claim for a particular text.
Students need to know to write a formal claim using the claim formula.

Materials:
Smart Board
Pencil
Paper
20-25 highlighters
Sound buzzer
Young Goodman Brown: Text Dependent Questions warm-up
Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet
A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words worksheet
Evidence Scavenger Hunt assignment
Exit Cube closure activity

Standards:
RL11-12.1- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL11-12.4- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
W11-12.1-Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

II.) Anticipatory Set (10 minutes):

1. Hand out a Young Goodman Brown: Text-Based Questions warm-up to all students and have them write their name on it.
2. Read the directions aloud to the students. Instruct them to read this excerpt from “Young Goodman Brown” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. They need to be highlighting key ideas and details as they read. In addition, instruct them to make a few annotations in the margins, as this will help them complete the second portion of this activity.
3. When they are done reading and annotating, the students need to generate five higher level questions that can be answered with evidence and details from the text.
4. Provide students with about 8-9 minutes to complete this activity on their own.
5. When the 8-9 minutes are up, call on a few students to share what questions they came up with, along with the text evidence that would allow someone to correctly answer the text dependent question. Call on students at random, as well as student volunteers.
6. Provide effective feedback as needed and remind students that these questions need to require someone to go back into the text and find the correct answers based on text details and quotations as they appear in the text.

Modeling/Guidance (25 minutes):

1. Have students put the warm-up activity in their binders or folders.
2. Pass out a Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet and have students put their name on it.
3. Read the directions aloud to the students. Instruct them to complete the first part of the notes, which allows them to use a word splash to write sentences using the words to show how they think the words are connected. Inform them that they need to write three or four sentences using the words in the word splash. Provide students with about 5 minutes to complete this task.
4. Call on a few students at random and student volunteers to read their word splash prediction aloud. Provide effective feedback as needed and clarify any misunderstandings using the words in the word splash. Be sure to explain that “Valid text evidence, quotes, and details are needed to effectively prove a claim through sophisticated and formal writing.” Write this word splash statement on the Smart Board as a visual example for students. Inform them that there may be several correct word splash predictions, and that this example is just one of them.
5. Instruct students to turn to the next page and inform them that they need to fill in the notes as needed.

7. Provide them with examples of higher level text details that support formal claims. Be sure to explain how each detail proves the claim. For instance, the text evidence for the first example provides a specific example of what the author did to prove that she did, in fact, implement details about her actual life in her text. Discussing how her experience in foster care made her a more well-rounded and appreciative individual is a specific text detail to help prove the claim. Rotate around the room to ensure that students are on task and filling in the blanks as needed.

8. Instruct students to turn to the next page and read the directions aloud to the students. They need to choose three of the words that they had to fill in (in the above examples) and explain the effect each word has on the sentence as a whole. Remind them that they need to write in complete sentences for both the “word” column and the “effect” column. Provide students about 10 minutes to do this. Rotate around the room to assess students’ understanding, and ensure that all students are on task and answering the questions correctly.

9. When the 10 minutes are up, call on a few students and student volunteers to share one word that they filled in and the effect each word had on the sentence as a whole. Most students will discuss a word (ex: implement, ultimately, revolved, etc.) and explain how its formality and sophistication help create a fluent, confident, and professional feel.

10. Discuss what informal words could have been used if these sentences were written in an informal context accompanied by informal writing (ex: Instead of “implement”, what word might have been used? Instead of “inspiring”, what word might have been used?). Also, discuss other formal words that are synonyms for words in the claim examples and detail examples. Discuss some synonyms of “implement”, “molded”, “motivated”, etc. that would also serve as formal language.

11. Have students keep this packet out because they will need to refer back to it for a later activity.

**Independent Practice (7 minutes):**

1. Hand out A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words activity and have students put their name on it.

2. Read the directions aloud to the students. Instruct them to analyze this 1930’s photograph titled “Migrant Mother.” Inform them that they need to write annotated details on the side and draw arrows to those striking details based on their interpretation of the photograph. Have students write about 5 details. These details do not need to be written in complete sentences. Based on their details, they need to construct a sophisticated, formal claim that is adequately
supported by the details that they outlined in the margins. Remind them to use the claim formula to develop an appropriate and effective claim. Provide students about 4 minutes to do this independently.

3. When the 4 minutes are up, discuss this photograph, and call on students and student volunteers to share their details and claim based on their interpretation of the picture. Inform students that different people will view this photograph from a different perspective, but as long as their details adequately support their claim, it is correct. Discuss the fact that people come from different walks of life with different experiences and perspectives to bring to the table, and this will be reflected in their individual interpretation of the photograph.

4. Provide feedback and answer any questions as needed.

5. Have students put this activity in their binders or folders.

**Group Work Activity (13 minutes):**

1. Pass out an Evidence Scavenger Hunt activity and have students put their name on it.

2. Teacher will have already assigned partners and informed students of their partners a few days ago.

3. Instruct students to take their warm-up out, as they will need the excerpt from “Young Goodman Brown” to complete this activity. Let them know they may also use their Text Evidence Note-Taking Packet. Read the directions aloud to the students and inform them that in the first column, they need to develop 3 claims based on the excerpt from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown.” Then, in the second column, they need to write a text detail or quote from the text that proves each claim. In the third column, they need to analyze and explain how a particular piece of evidence proves each claim. Provide students about 12 minutes to complete this activity with their partner. Rotate around the room to assist students and ensure that they on task.

4. When the 12 minutes are up, sound the buzzer and instruct students to turn in this assignment for a grade, pick up an Exit Cube closure activity from the front of the classroom, and return to their seats. This Evidence Scavenger Hunt assignment will serve as a formative assessment that will allow the teacher to assess how well students develop claims and produce valid text evidence to prove particular claims. In addition, it will help guide the teacher’s instruction based on whether he or she has to re-teach some of these important concepts.

**Closure (5 minutes):**

1. Have students put their name on this Exit Cube closure activity.
2. Instruct them to write 6 ideas that need to be remembered when writing text evidence. Inform them that these 6 ideas may be written in bullet form.

3. As students exit the classroom, collect their Exit Cube.

4. The teacher will also use the Exit Cube as a formative assessment in observing what students retained from the lesson. In addition, the Exit Cube will show teachers what key ideas students took away from the lesson, allowing the teacher to assess what information is truly understood and what information may need to be further practiced.
I.) Directions: Read this excerpt from “Young Goodman Brown” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Highlight key details and make annotations as you read.

Young Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street at Salem village; but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap while she called to Goodman Brown.

"Dearest heart," whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, "prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she’s afeard of herself sometimes. Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year."

"My love and my Faith," replied young Goodman Brown, "of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?"

"Then God bless youe!" said Faith, with the pink ribbons; "and may you find all well when you come back."

"Amen!" cried Goodman Brown. "Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee."

So they parted; and the young man pursued his way until, being about to turn the corner by the meeting-house, he looked back and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him with a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons.

"Poor little Faith!" thought he, for his heart smote him. "What a wretch am I to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no; 't would kill her to think it. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven."

With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest
trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind. It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

II.) Directions: After reading the passage, create 5 higher level questions that can be answered with evidence and details from the text.

1. ________________________________________________________________?

2. ________________________________________________________________?

3. ________________________________________________________________?

4. ________________________________________________________________?

5. ________________________________________________________________?
Name____________________________________________________________

Directions: Read and analyze the word splash below. Write 3 or 4 sentences using the words to show how you think these words are connected. Be prepared to share!

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Directions: Fill in the notes as needed.

I.) Text Evidence

a.) Text evidence- includes details and quotes from a text that prove a particular claim.

b.) Answers the questions:
- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

c.) Examples of text details that support claims:

Claim: The author chose to implement several details that occurred in her actual life.
Text Evidence: For instance, she discusses her experience in foster care and how that experience has molded her into a “well-rounded and appreciative” individual.

Claim: The incredible view of the mountains motivated the woman to seek further educational opportunities.
Text Evidence: She ultimately ended up attending college in Pennsylvania so she could continue to study the great outdoors.

Claim: The professor enjoyed presenting lectures that revolved around British Literature.
Text Evidence: He often instructed students on inspiring authors such as Jane Austen and William Shakespeare.

Choose 3 of the above words that you had to fill in and explain the effect of each.
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I.) Directions: Analyze this 1930’s photograph that was taken from the Great Depression. Draw arrows to striking details in the photograph by writing these details in the margins.

“Migrant Mother”

Based on the details that you developed, write a sophisticated, formal claim for this photograph.
11th-12th grade Day 2, Lesson 2
Formal Writing: Text Evidence
Group Work Activity
Evidence Scavenger Hunt

**Evidence Scavenger Hunt**

Name __________________________________________

**Directions:** You will work in pairs to develop 3 claims based on the excerpt from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown.” Then, you and your partner will find textual evidence from the excerpt to prove each claim, and analyze the evidence to explain how it SUPPORTS each claim.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>Quote/Evidence Page/line number</th>
<th>Analysis How does the evidence support the claim?</th>
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Directions: Write 6 ideas that you need to remember when writing text evidence.
Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

Students’ writing is currently on the decline in the midst of an advancing technological world; it is apparent that kids depend on technology as it were their own “personal assistant.” From their perspective, technology allows for shorter words, abbreviations, smaller snippets of information, and corrects all grammatical errors. However, as technological advancements continue to rise and mark a prominent role in society today, students fail to see the value in writing effectively and do not always see the purpose in writing well. In addition, they rely too heavily and too often on technology to “write” for them. In their eyes, technology “fixes” all, and allows them to get away with a minimal amount of effort.

What students do not realize is that this idle and reliant mindset is contributing to their potential downfall as proficient members of society. Furthermore, this perspective that grabs ahold of a significant number of students ultimately leaves them without the critical writing skills that are vital for college and career success. If students today are not provided with the means to succeed, communicate information effectively, and successfully guide themselves in this increasingly competitive global economy, where are they headed and how does one guide them in the right direction? It is with these two questions that demand a significant level of thought. It is with the answers to these questions that could mean success or failure for students today. It is how educators decide to contemplate, plan, and act on these questions that can make all the difference. In reality, there is one choice that educators need to make: to either guide students solely through the use of technology that will assist them in all writing assignments or to challenge students to write independently through the use of critical thinking and analysis skills. The latter, if implemented correctly and efficiently, will place students on the road to great success, with a number of opportunities to excel as independent learners. That said, schools
nation-wide need to make the change now- the change that is most beneficial for students and the change that can guarantee them a brighter future with endless opportunities. In short, the first step in molding students into effective, independent, introspective, precise, and analytical writers lies in how effectively teachers align their lesson plans to the Common Core Learning Standards. With the implementation and guidance of the Common Core Learning Standards, students will be on track and sufficiently prepared for the increasingly high demands upheld in college and career settings.

The Common Core Learning Standards have been developed to ensure that learning goals are consistent for students on a national scale; this means that all students will be provided with an equal educational opportunity, and exposed to learning standards that reflect consistent guidelines on what students in each grade should know and be able to do (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative). The writing standards provide specific learning objectives reflective of the critical thinking, inference, and analysis skills that are essential for college and career success. For students to obtain future success, they need to know the differences between informal and formal writing so as to decrease and ultimately eliminate informal language from appearing in formal written tasks. It is crucial for students to be able to distinguish between these two styles, and identify vocabulary that is most appropriate for a formal context of writing. Otherwise, their writing will not be taken seriously in academic and professional settings, as college professors and authority figures will not view it as credible and dependable information. In addition, it is necessary that students produce valid, formal claims that are adequately supported by effective and convincing textual evidence; it is through the ability to extrapolate information and extricate relevant information from irrelevant information that sets individuals apart in the realm of academia and professionalism. The stakes are higher. The expectations are
raised. The competition is greater. The bar has been raised and our students are being asked to step up to the plate to meet higher standards. Without these critical, life-long writing skills, students will not be able to meet the increased expectations that currently exist in the academic and professional world.

The rigorous expectations upheld in college and career settings are at an all-time high. More specifically, students are expected to write in a sophisticated manner with higher-level vocabulary, complex sentences, correct spelling, grammatically correct sentence structure, organization, and clear evidence to prove specific claims. Gone are the days where students can rely on technology to complete basic writing tasks, take shortcuts in writing, and slip by in and outside of the classroom. These new standards uphold the idea that students will succeed if they are molded into independent thinkers and writers (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative). This change was uprooted by the Common Core Learning Standards in response to research that proves numerous students are ill-equipped for the challenges in the classroom and out in the career world.

Students are exiting grade school without the necessary skills needed to be sufficiently equipped, active members of society. Research has proven that students lack the writing skills that are expected and required in college and career settings. Furthermore, students are so accustomed to taking shortcuts by writing in short, abbreviated snippets that they lose sight of what is important and what they need to master in order to achieve academic and professional goals. As a result, students are not writing at the level they should be and are, consequently, unable to perform well on a variety of exams, such as the ACT, SAT, state tests, college entrance exams, and college course exams (Rothman 10-11). If students cannot write well independently, apart from the use of technological tools, and fail to see the value in writing well, our overall
global economy and societal function will suffer. In addition, we will lack proficient and skilled members of society that are so heavily relied on for a variety of issues nation-wide. Writing is a significant and prevalent communication tool, and if students cannot express themselves through writing, what will that indicate about their overall ability to think critically and convey important information in settings that require it? If we cannot depend on students to take the lead and become dynamic, assertive, and influential members of society through active, professional, and comprehensive written communication, what does the future of our nation hold? With matters soon to be left in the hands of this generation of students, it is time that school districts take a stand and make a change to successfully implement the Common Core Learning Standards so that there is a consistent approach to teaching writing across the country. In the end, we need to be able to count on this generation of students to be reliable, thorough, and professional writers that can successfully maintain important aspects of society. Why not use the Common Core Learning Standards as a guide to identify students’ challenges and weaknesses, and address them head-on in the classroom?

As a first step in the process of teaching students how to write effectively, it is important for students to get over the hurdle of distinguishing informal writing from formal writing. As aforementioned, students are taking shortcuts in their writing and embodying a lazy mindset overall, with effort and hard work not being taken into consideration. This is largely due to the difficulty students have in distinguishing between informal and formal contexts of writing. In addition, students cannot separate the two and, as a result, place informal language into formal writing contexts (Salter 2274). Students need to understand that they cannot use the same language and written expression in an academic or professional setting that they would use when writing to friends and family in informal settings; in actuality, it is unacceptable to merge the two
writing styles as one, and expect to gain success in the academic and professional world. To continue, college professors assign analytical papers, reports, and projects that need to written with formality and sophistication; additionally, it is a requirement that individuals write applications, formal reports, documents, and resumes in a professional career field (Troia and Olinghouse 344). In these environments, utilizing texting “lingo”, and abbreviated words and phrases will prevent an individual from attaining and maintaining a professional occupation, as it is imperative that individuals can convey and report information in a timely, professional, efficient, fluent, and sophisticated manner. Achieving this goal requires explicit instruction on formal versus informal writing so that students have a clear and thorough understanding of what is expected beyond grade school years.

It is necessary that students are provided with numerous activities centered on informal versus formal writing under the Common Core Learning Standards. Once students can successfully identify informal and formal contexts as two separate entities, they are equipped to learn the distinctions in vocabulary, language, sentence structure, and grammar within and between each context of writing. Furthermore, students need to be exposed to common and sophisticated vocabulary that is used in formal writing contexts, as well as vocabulary that is more appropriate and acceptable in informal writing contexts. Additionally, teachers need to make a relentless effort to model ways in which words, phrases, and sentences can and should appear in formal writing. With lesson plans built into the curriculum, it will become a more natural endeavor for students to write appropriately given each individual context of writing. Practicing these strategies through in-depth instruction and hands-on activities will not only promote future successes of students, but it will instill in them a sense of motivation and drive, ultimately resulting in precision and diligence when conquering specific writing tasks. Once
students can identify and apply their knowledge on informal and formal writing, the next step in accomplishing this feat is clear and well-thought-out instruction in formal claim and textual evidence writing.

A major aspect of instruction in formal writing is centered on evidence-based claims that are drawn and supported by valid textual evidence. In formal contexts, students need to obtain the skills that enable them to take a stance on a particular issue, write their argument with sophisticated, formal language, and prove their argument with quotations, details, and examples from a text. Besides the fact that colleges and universities are seeking out individuals who have acquired these skills, countless professional occupations require that individuals generate sufficient evidence to support a professional claim in a formal manner, cognizant of spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative). Therefore, whether in a college or career setting, an individual must be able to successfully convey information and support various arguments through written expression by using his or her critical thinking, inference, and analysis skills. Accurate written expression and the ability to relay information are skills that will be beneficial and useful for students as they grow academically and professionally. Moreover, individuals’ written expression of evidence reveals a lot about them; more specifically, the skill level that they demonstrate through writing reflects their overall ability to communicate information. In essence, a person’s writing ability is a key factor in identifying him or her, as well as his or her assiduousness in general. If a students’ method of writing is careless, vague, and discloses several grammatical and content-based errors, they are not effectively making their point; therefore, it is necessary that students are provided with increased opportunities to write formal claims and support them with comprehensive, valid, and detailed textual evidence through a formal and sophisticated style of writing.
It is fundamental for teachers to directly instruct students on formal claims and textual evidence. With the execution of the Common Core Learning Standards, it is mandatory for teachers to instruct students on what a formal claim is and how it is written. This instruction needs to be comprehensive, detailed, and thorough, with a variety of claim examples presented through visual and aural means. In addition, teachers must develop teaching methods to help students retain, identify, and write each element of a claim. It must be emphasized that a claim is a general statement of assertion that can be effectively and thoroughly supported by reliable and accurate textual evidence. Otherwise, it is perceived as unfeasible, useless, and irrelevant. Therefore, students need ample opportunities to identify and write claims on various topics, and prove what makes a claim accurate and valid.

When students can successfully identify and write formal claims, it is appropriate for teachers to instruct students in verifying and proving specific claims at hand. Because this skill is most challenging for students to master, teachers need to illustrate how text evidence is written by introducing the concept and providing model examples. The model examples should include every aspect of text evidence, such as quotations, details, examples, and elaboration in order to broaden students’ understanding of textual evidence and the many ways in which it is integrated within written tasks. In order to successfully measure students’ understanding of the concept, it is advantageous for teachers to engage students in student-centered and hands-on activities that require them to identify effective text evidence in a piece of writing, as well as text evidence that most appropriately proves a specific claim, and write comprehensive and detailed text evidence to support a variety of claims (2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative). Overall, when students can write claims and extrapolate textual evidence to substantiate claims through a
formal style of writing, they are more apt to thrive and excel in college and career settings, as their ability to express information is clear, sophisticated, and refined.

The only way these significant skills and concepts can be fully implemented into a curriculum channeled by the Common Core Learning Standards is if school districts nation-wide make a substantial effort to execute the standards through a systematic and organized process. Furthermore, districts need to offer teachers the opportunities to attend professional development workshops in order to increase their understanding and awareness of the Common Core Learning Standards, specifically in the area of writing. In addition, teachers should be encouraged to ask questions and share their concerns in an attempt to “wrap their heads around” this new and enhanced way of thinking and teaching. In an effort to develop engaging lesson plans that fall directly under the umbrella of the Common Core Learning Standards, teachers should be given the chance to meet with their department or grade level teams to share lesson plans and activities that worked well and met specific learning objectives. This collaboration exposes teachers to the varying and possibly innovative thoughts and ideas of their counterparts, all working in the effort to engage students and better prepare them for the college and career world. Through districts’ and teachers’ initiative to comprehend and implement the Common Core Learning Standards through the development of higher level and extensive lesson plans focused on writing, students will be well on their way to conquering the challenges and meeting the amplified expectations within the arena of college and careers.

The teachings of writing and writing assessments are now different to reflect the increased rigor and expectations within college and career settings. Educators on a national basis must actively work to develop Common Core lesson plans that activate and promote students’ critical thinking when writing; this entails in-depth and thorough instruction in informal versus
formal writing, claim writing, and text evidence to engrain in students the importance of formal writing and how it differs significantly from informal writing. They need to know when and where each writing style is appropriate, and in what context certain words, phrases, and sentences are applicable, as well as how to write claims and text evidence in formal contexts of writing.

Districts need to be up to the challenge. Teachers need to be up to the challenge. There is no other choice. Change needs to start within the classroom and it needs to start now. We are depending on this generation of students to be contributing members of society and intellectual beings that can essentially “hold down the fort” by communicating important information through written expression. Isn’t the future of our society important? Shouldn’t we give it the utmost best that it deserves? Sitting around and waiting for the change to occur is not going to get us anywhere. With the assistance, experience, and insight of districts and educators alike on a national basis, we can make the biggest educational change and positively impact all that are involved. Why not start now?
Works Cited


<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/instructionalstrategies/writing/poorly_prepared.html>.


<http://www.depaul.edu/magazine/articles/ss09Writing.asp>.


