

Writing to Inform and Make Arguments: Video Transcript

The Common Core State Standards ask students to master three basic types of writing: Writing arguments, writing to inform and explain, and writing narratives. Narrative writing is given early prominence as it should in elementary school, but it gives way to the other types of writing what we might call analytical writing, writing to inform and explain, and writing arguments as students move up the grades, so that by high school eighty percent of what students will be writing, will be writing to inform or explain or writing arguments, with twenty percent dedicated to narratives.

And what this does is enables a much fuller range of student writing that's much more closely connected to the demands of college and career. In those environments what's crucial is that you can argue using evidence and you can inform and take complex information and render it clear. These core standards, for the first time build a K through twelve progression in which students gradually learn to master the use of evidence in their writing, whether it's to support an argument or to support the presentation of clear information. And of course evidence has a marvelous role in narrative as well, in the details of a story and the evidence a situation.

A further emphasis of these standards is on short, focused research projects: not just a one-time research project once a year, or even once every couple of years, but several short research projects, where students gradually comprehend an area more and more deeply, or several areas, and gain knowledge about them through doing research on them. And research is at the core of these standards, and that kind of short, focused research is essential to college and career readiness, just as is more extended research.

And as you can see, the view of writing in the core standards brings them very close to reading because writing is the outgrowth of excellent reading; gathering evidence from the text, fully understanding it, gathering evidence in evaluating different sources becomes the basis for excellent writing that makes clear arguments based on evidence and presents information clearly. What's also important is that these core standards celebrate narrative writing — developing it excellently throughout K through twelve, including the core concepts of creativity and precision. But we require that students not only show their creativity and precision in narrative writing of their experience and opinions, but equally in their command of argument and their ability to convey complex information. And whether you talk to any author, whether a writer of literature, a writer of polemics, a writer of clear informative pieces; that precision and command of evidence is at the heart of their work and craft, and also is at the heart of college and career readiness, and at the heart of these standards.

The Common Core State Standards ask students to learn many ways to represent data and information, in their English language arts class, in their history and social studies class, and in their science class. So you can imagine that their writing will look very different in science, and in social studies, and perhaps writing a literary analysis in English language arts class. Still coherent, still working on grammar and conventions, but the format and the organization may be different.

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