

From Idea to Essay

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING



Greetings and Welcome!



An Outline for Today's Webinar

Objectives: By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to...

1. List several features of effective academic writing
2. Define the concept of “purpose” and talk about the role that it plays in clear, persuasive writing
3. Use a variety of different pre-writing and organization strategies to create well-developed, clearly connected paragraphs
4. Pick one strategy mentioned in the webinar and adapt it for use in their own teaching or writing

Notes on the Focus of the Webinar



Note #1

While this webinar will focus on strategies used in higher-level academic writing, it will also discuss ways to adapt these strategies for use with learners of varying proficiency levels.

Note #2

The strategies included in this webinar will be presented using a **persuasive essay** as an example.

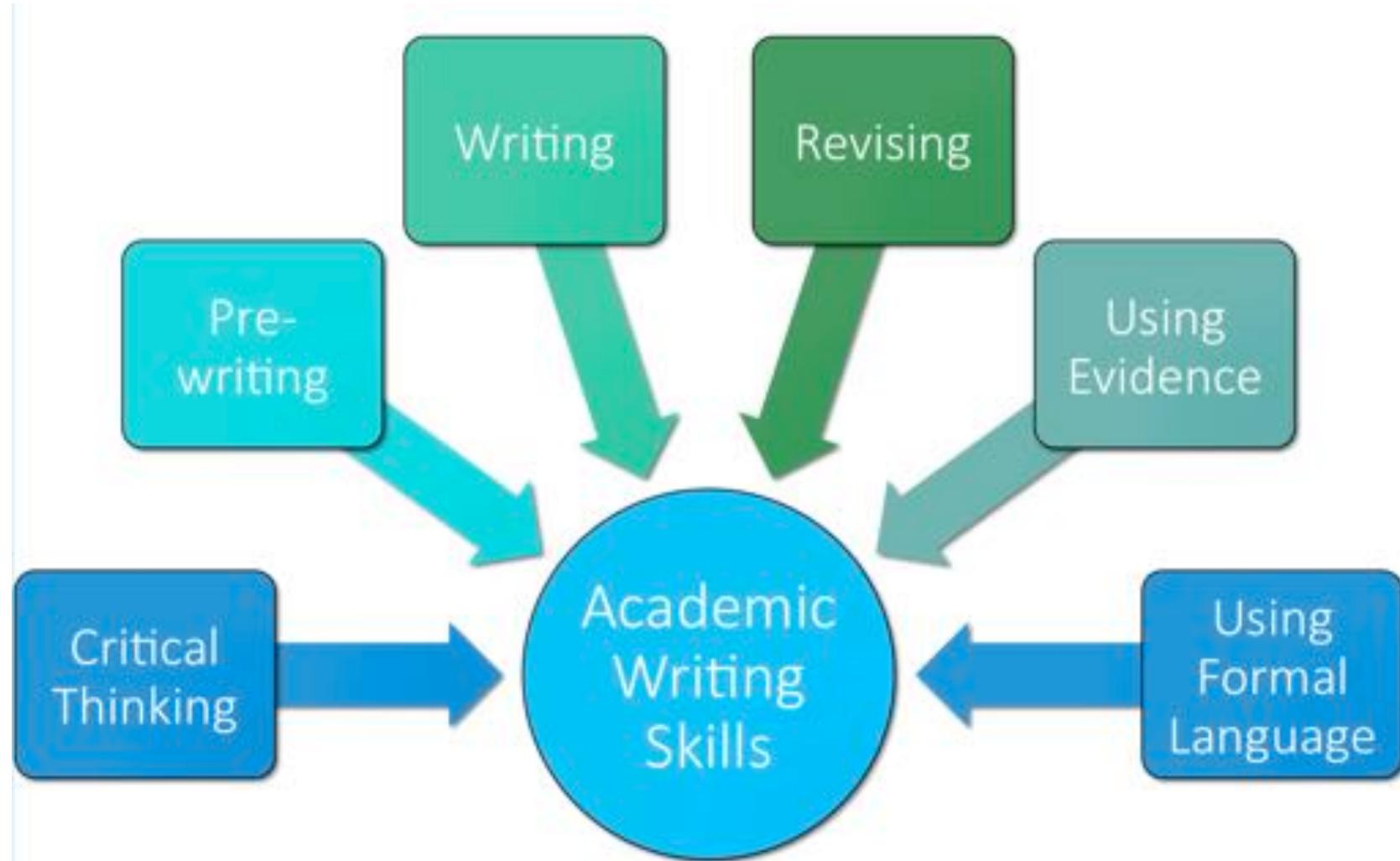
Note #3

Participants are encouraged to use the strategies presented in this webinar in their own professional writing!

Poll Question

What is the **most important** characteristic of effective academic writing?

Academic Writing is not just one skill... it is a collection of skills



These are a few of the major skill areas that writers should be familiar with.

After we identify the big “skill areas”, we need to break them down into individual skills to teach.

Pre-Writing

Reading &
Taking Notes

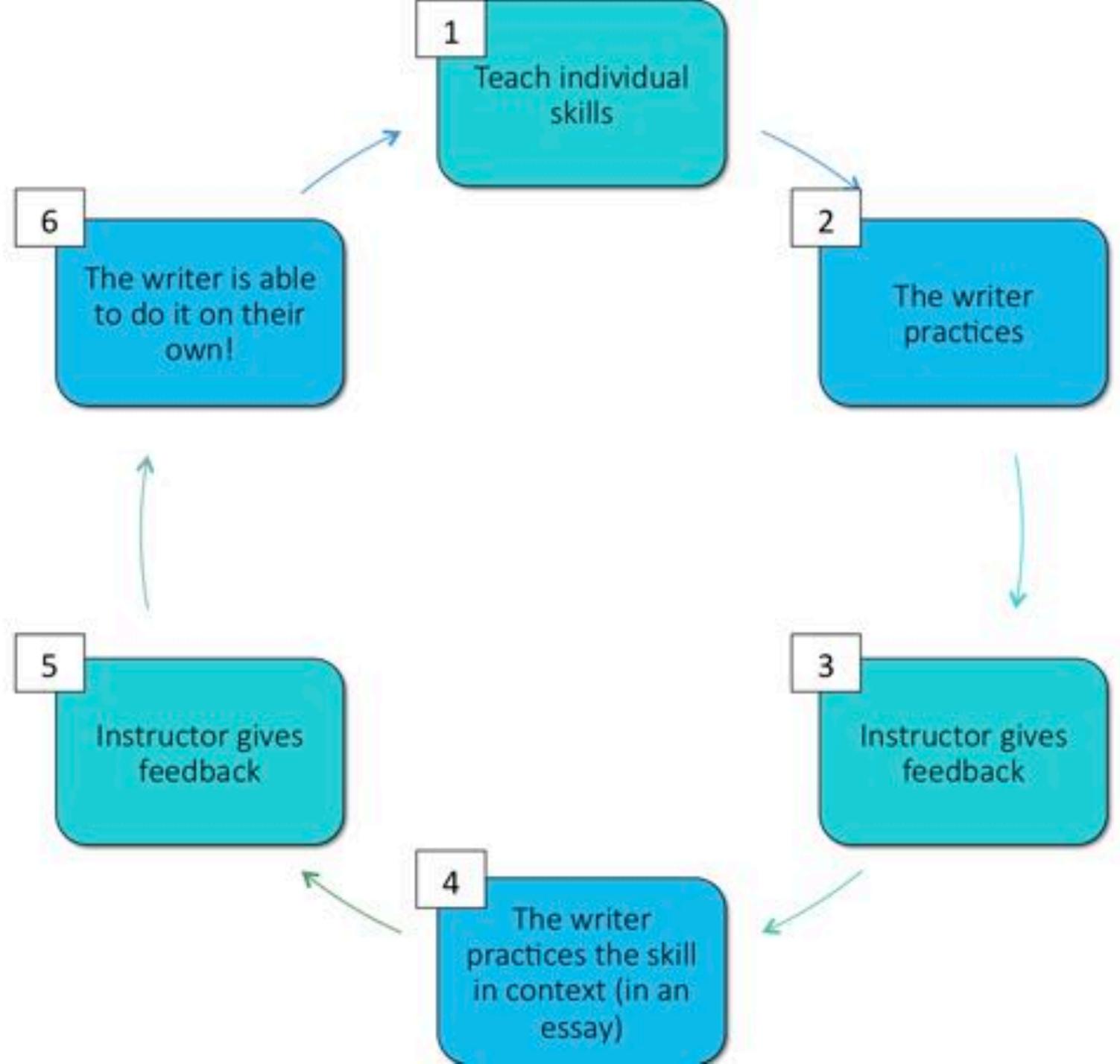
Brainstorming

“Skeleton”
Outline

“PIE” Outline

Writing is a process...

...and so is teaching writing!



Step #1 – Defining “Academic Writing”

“Academic or Not?” Instructions

In the next few slides, you will see two examples.

Example

One example is **more academic** than the other.

1. He bought a couple of things.
2. He purchased several notebooks.

Read both examples and decide which is more academic.

Try to give a reason for your answer in the chat box!

“Academic or Not?” Instructions

Example

This example uses more **formal vocabulary** and is **more specific**, so it is considered more academic.



1. He bought a couple of things.
2. He **purchased several notebooks.**

1: Which example is more academic?

Example 1

I think that writing good means taking your ideas and writing them so that other people can get your meaning.

Example 2

Effective writing presents ideas in such a way that readers can clearly grasp the writer's intended meaning.

Which example is more academic?

This example uses more **formal vocabulary and grammar structures**, so it is considered more academic.



Example 2

Effective writing presents ideas in such a way that readers can clearly grasp the writer's intended meaning.

2: Which example is more academic?

Example 1

According to a study by Smith, students that use cell phones in class are more easily distracted than those who do not. So, cell phone use should not be allowed in the classroom.

Example 2

My friend and I like to text in class, but sometimes we miss what the teacher says while we are texting! Sometimes, the stuff we miss is on the test and I score poorly.

Which example is more academic?

Example 1

According to a study by Smith, students that use cell phones in class are more easily distracted than those who do not. So, cell phone use should not be allowed in the classroom.

This example **uses research from another writer to make a point**, so it is considered more academic.



3: Which example is more academic?

Example 1

They call Paris, “the City of Lights”. New York is known as “the Big Apple”. St. Petersburg is called “the Venice of the North”. If you could visit any city in the world, where would you go? Why?

Example 2

Should teachers allow students to use cell phones and mobile devices in the classroom? Choose one side and give three reasons to support your choice.

Which example is more academic?

With its specific requirements, this question is more similar to various types of “prompts” used in academic writing classes.



Example 2

Should teachers allow students to use cell phones and mobile devices in the classroom? Choose one side and give three reasons to support your choice.

What is Academic Writing?

Academic writing involves...

- using formal vocabulary and more complex grammar
- using the work of others as evidence to support the writer's point of view
- responding to a question that includes specific requirements

However, there is one more *really important* characteristic of effective academic writing. What do you think it is?



In great academic writing, the writer's ideas are all clearly connected!

Writing Clearly

Making clear connections between the ideas in our writing is important because we want the reader to be able to focus on the ideas without getting distracted or confused.

To create clear connections in our writing, it is important to...

1. Write with a clear purpose in mind
2. Plan before writing
3. Identify and follow patterns used by good writers



Step #2 - Identifying the Purpose for Writing



The Importance of Purpose

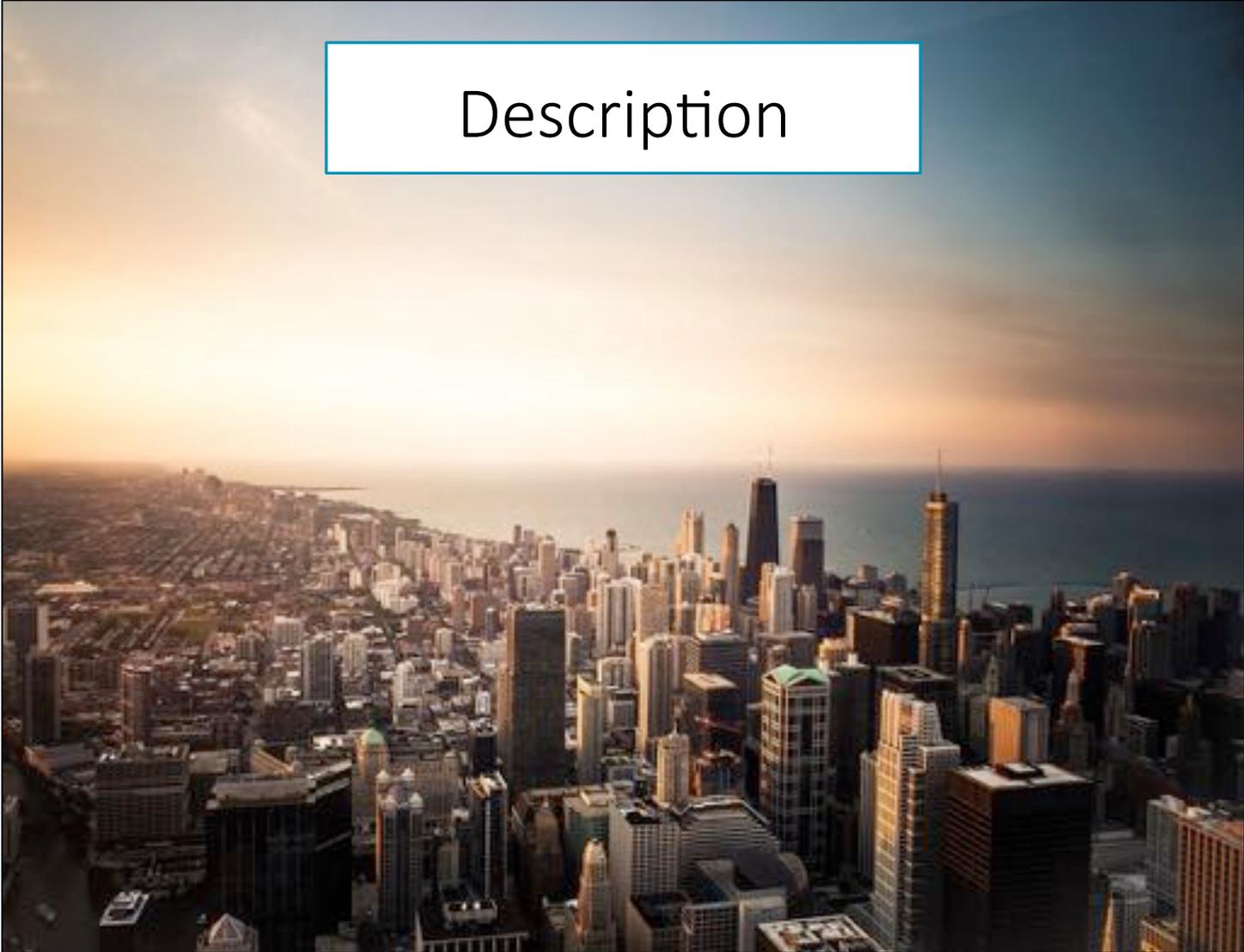
The purpose of a piece of writing is the writer's **reason for writing.**

Good writing starts with a clear purpose for writing!



The Importance of Purpose

The purpose helps the writer decide what vocabulary, grammar and organization to use in a piece of writing.

An aerial photograph of the Chicago skyline at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the city. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The city is densely packed with skyscrapers and buildings, with the Lake Michigan shoreline visible in the distance. A white box with a blue border is overlaid on the top left of the image, containing the word "Description".

Description

What is the purpose?

Chicago is a beautiful city. Its architecture is world famous and its many tall buildings and skyscrapers give it a very modern look. In addition, it is located on the shores of Lake Michigan, which gives it a lot of natural beauty, too. If I had to describe Chicago in one word, it would be “unforgettable”.

Explaining a Process



What is the purpose?

To make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, do the following:

First, get two pieces of bread, a jar of peanut butter and a jar of jelly.

Second, with a knife, take some peanut butter and spread it on one piece of bread.

Then, take some jelly and spread it on the other piece of bread.

Finally, put the two pieces of bread together and enjoy!

Question –

Can you think of any other purposes (or reasons) for writing?

SHARE THEM IN THE CHAT BOX!

Activity Idea: Identifying Purpose

To get students familiar with identifying different purposes for writing, use a simple matching activity....

1. First, create a table like the one on the right.

Purpose	Definition

Activity Idea: Identifying Purpose

2. Then, write two or three different types of purposes on the left side of the chart.



Purpose	Definition
Description	
Explanation of a Process	
Persuasion	

Activity Idea: Identifying Purpose

3. Then, give a brief definition for each kind of purpose. Include the definitions on the right side of the table.

Put the definitions out of order, so that the students have to match each purpose with the correct definition.

Purpose	Definition
Description	To give instructions on how to do something (to help someone do the same thing successfully).
Explanation of a Process	To state an opinion and give reasons and examples to support this opinion.
Persuasion	To illustrate something or someone using words. To create a picture with words.

Activity Idea: Identifying Purpose

4. Now, ask students to work with a partner and match each purpose with the correct definition.

After students finish discussing, be sure to check their answers.

Purpose	Definition
Description	To give instructions on how to do something (to help someone do the same thing successfully).
Explanation of a Process	To state an opinion and give reasons and examples to support this opinion.
Persuasion	To illustrate something or someone using words. To create a picture with words.

Activity Idea: Identifying Purpose



After students have an idea of what each term means, give them a sentence that is an example of each type of purpose and ask them to work with a partner to decide what purpose each sentence exemplifies.

Example Sentences

1. My cell phone is black and it has a camera. It was made by Sony.
2. To send a text message from your cell phone, first you need to type the message.
3. Teachers **should** allow cell phones in the classroom.

Activity Idea: Identifying Purpose

After students finish discussing, ask them to share their answers with you. When sharing, ask the students to try to explain why they chose the answer they did!

1. My cell phone is black and it has a camera. It was made by Sony.

Description – it talks about the color and features of the phone.

2. To send a text message from your cell phone, first you need to type the message.

Explanation of a process – it uses the word “first”, so there are probably other steps.

3. Teachers **should** allow cell phones in the classroom.

Persuasion – it shares an opinion (not everyone thinks this is a good idea).

Extension Activities

One way to extend the “Identifying Purpose” Activity is...

What Comes Next - Once the correct purpose for each sentence has been identified, ask each pair to write a sentence that might follow the example.

For example: Teachers should allow cell phones in the classroom. **Cell phones with dictionaries can be helpful language learning tools. Also...**

Step #3 – Getting Ideas Before Writing



The Purpose of a Question

An academic writing assignment starts with a question.

This question usually has special requirements.

By analyzing the question, we should be able to identify the purpose of the writing.



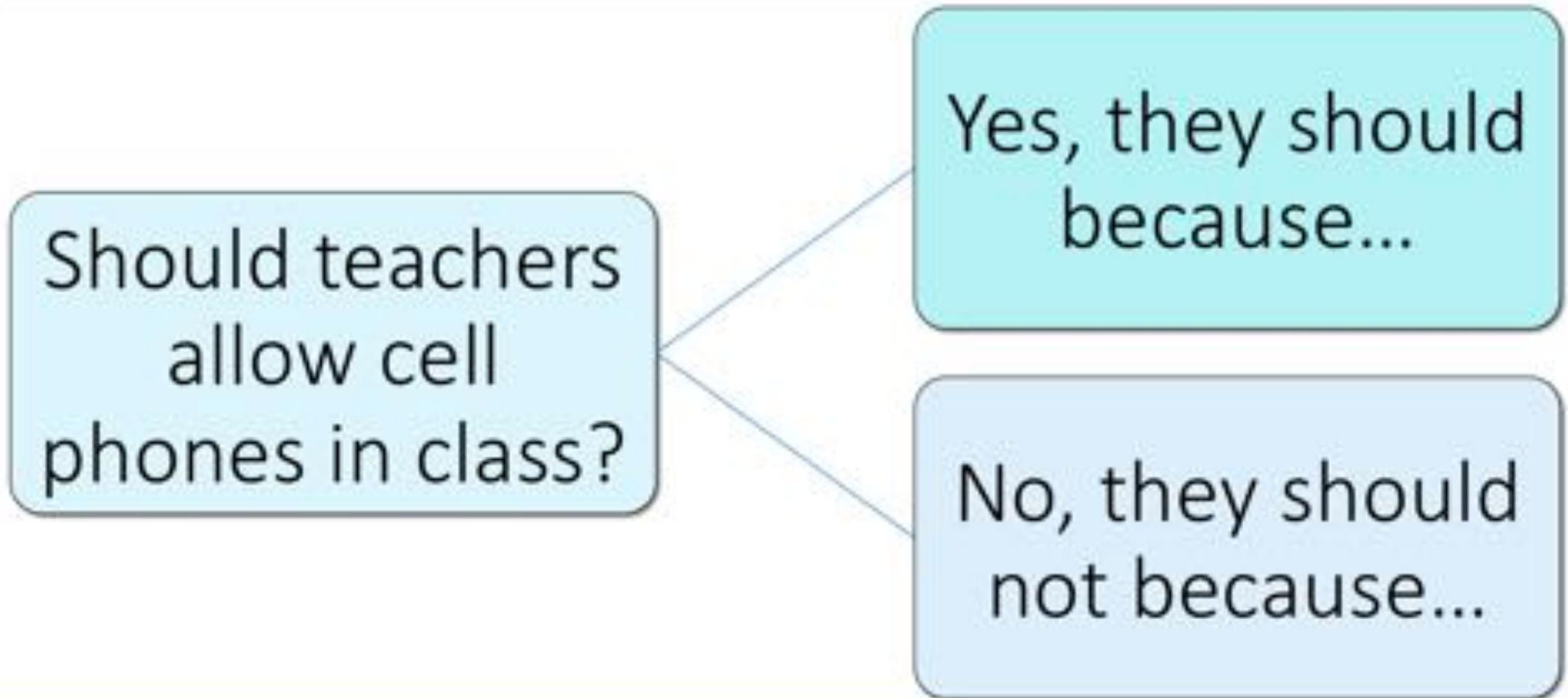
The Purpose of a Question

What kind of writing will the answer to this question be?

Should teachers allow students to use cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom? Why or why not? Give two reasons to support your opinion.

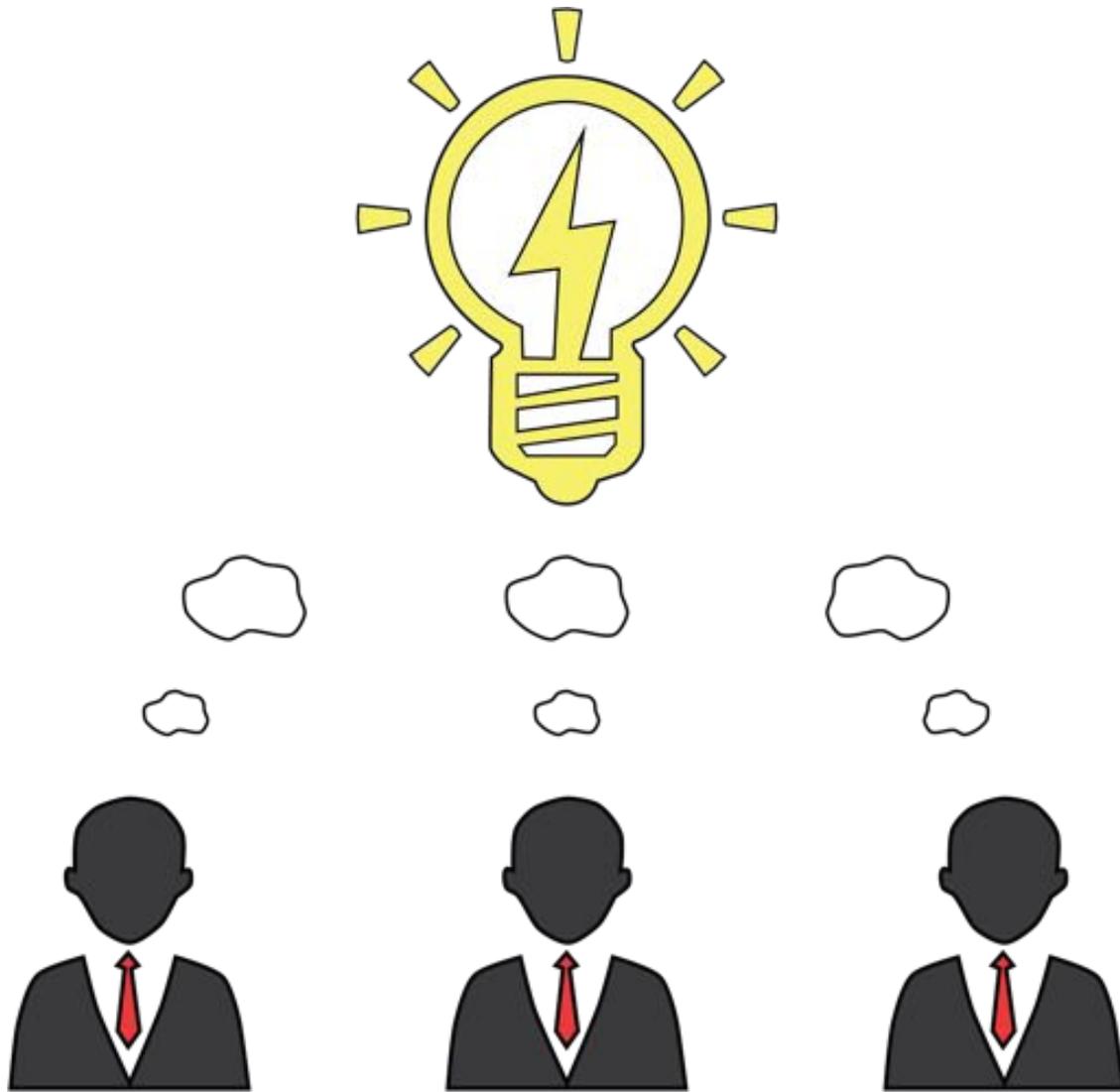
Hint: think about the different kinds of purpose from the last activity!

Purpose – *Persuasion*



Poll Question

BRAINSTORMING (GENERATING IDEAS)



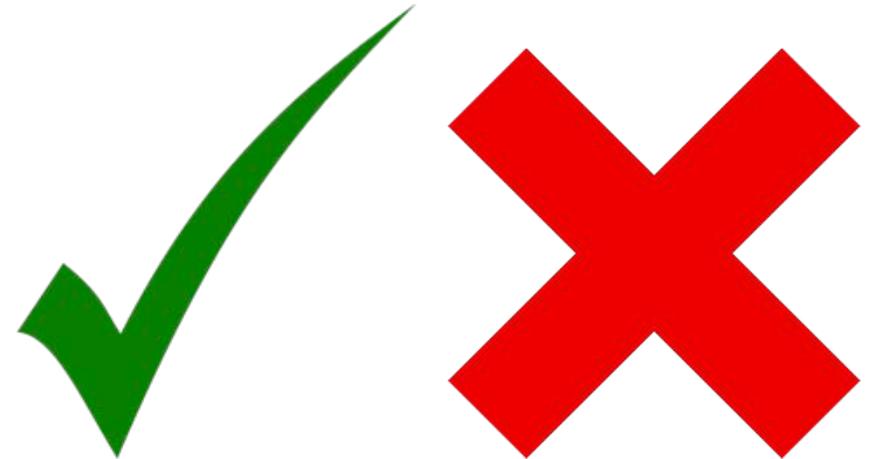
“Brainstorming”

Brainstorming is a term used to describe a discussion that tries to produce a lot of ideas that are connected to a particular topic.

“Pros” and “Cons”

There are lots of ways to brainstorm for ideas, but for persuasive writing, the best is to create a list of “**pros**” and “**cons**” about the topic.

- A “**pro**” is a good thing or an advantage.
- A “**con**” is a bad thing or a disadvantage.



Brainstorming Activity Idea

Creating a list of pros and cons is a fun, communicative way to get students ready to write.

1. Ask students to get into small groups (3 to 4 people) and share the question with them. Also, share a table like the one on this slide.

Should teachers allow cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom?	
Yes (Pros)	No (Cons)

Brainstorming Activity Idea

2. Then, give each group 5 to 10 minutes to come up with as many pros and as many cons as possible.

If possible, ask students to write down their pro and con reasons.

You can encourage them by saying that the person or group with the most persuasive pro and con will win a small prize.

Should teachers allow cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom?	
Yes (Pros)	No (Cons)

Brainstorming Activity Idea

3. Finally, bring the groups back together and ask the students to share their reasons.

If possible, write the reasons on an example table on the board. If that's not possible, ask students to write down any new ideas in the appropriate column on their papers.

Should teachers allow cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom?	
Yes (Pros)	No (Cons)

Should teachers allow cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom?

Yes (Pros)

No (Cons)

They give students access to more information

They can be distracting to the students using them as well as other students

They have helpful features like dictionaries and, in some cases, access to the internet and learning apps

They can be used to cheat on tests and exams

They allow parents to contact their children in case of an emergency

They can create bad feelings between students who have a phone and those who do not

Your end result will look something like this!

Step #4 – Planning Before Writing

Poll Question

OUTLINING (ORGANIZING IDEAS)



Creating a “Skeleton” Outline

An outline is a general plan for a piece of writing.

It contains only the most important points in the essay.

It is like the “skeleton” of the essay. It provides the structure needed to build the rest of the essay.

Creating a “Skeleton” Outline

In a persuasive essay, the “skeleton” outline will consist of two parts:

Part 1 - A sentence that tells the writer’s opinion about the topic.

Part 2 - A sentence for each reason (pro or con) that the writer will use to support his/her opinion.



Creating a “Skeleton” Outline

Ask Your Students

In your opinion, which side has better reasons, the “pro” side or the “con” side?

Should teachers allow cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom?	
Yes (Pros)	No (Cons)
They give students access to more information	They can be distracting to the students using them as well as other students
They have helpful programs like dictionaries and, in some cases, access to the internet and learning	They can be used to cheat on tests and exams
They allow parents to contact their children in case of an emergency	They can create bad feelings between students who have a phone and those who do not

Creating a “Skeleton” Outline

Ask Your Students

What are the two best reasons that support your opinion?

Should teachers allow cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom?

Yes (Pros)

No (Cons)

They give students access to more information

They can be distracting to the students using them as well as other students

They have helpful programs like dictionaries and, in some cases, access to the internet and learning apps

They can be used to cheat on tests and exams

They allow parents to contact their children in case of an emergency

They can create bad feelings between students who have a phone and those who do not

Creating a “Skeleton” Outline

Finally, ask students to complete the follow statements on a piece of paper:

Part One

Teachers ___(should/should not)___ allow students to use cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom because ___(Reason 1)___ and ___(Reason 2)___.

Part Two

1. The strongest reason is ___(Reason 1)___.

2. Another reason is ___(Reason 2)___.

Creating a “Skeleton” Outline

Part One

Teachers **should** allow students to use cell phones and other digital devices in the classroom because **they have helpful programs like dictionaries and can access the internet and learning apps** and **they allow parents to contact their children in case of an emergency**

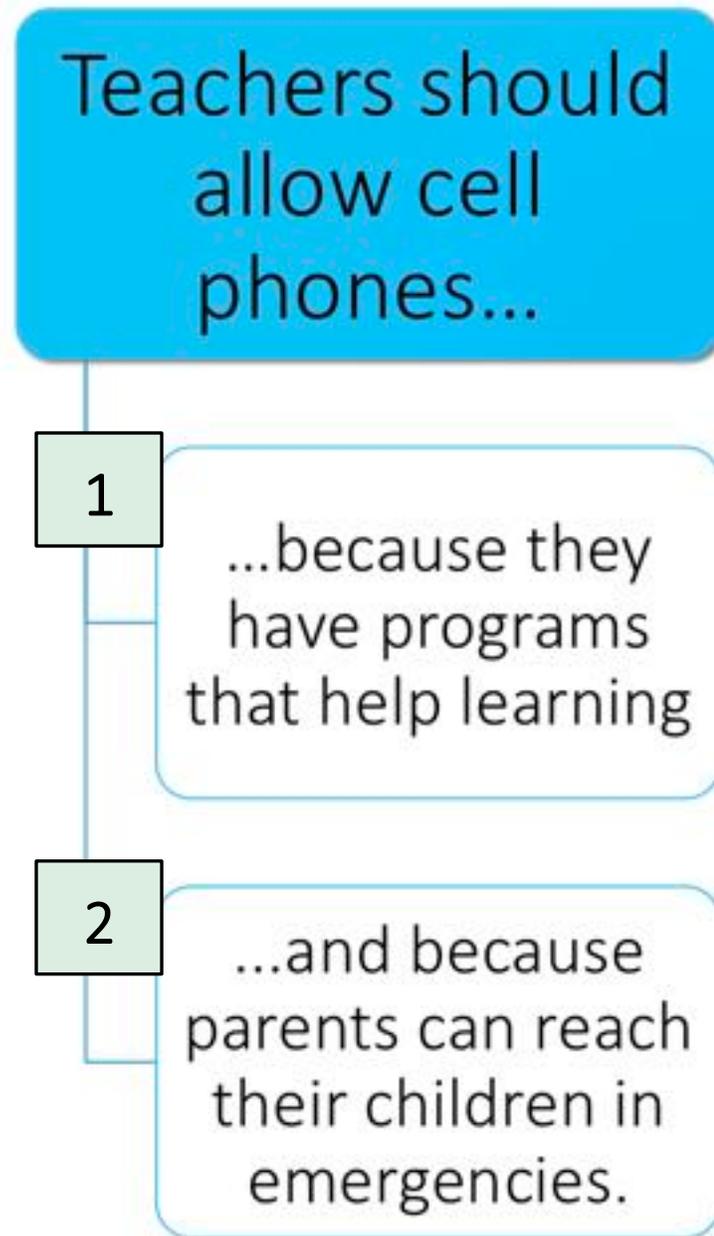
Part Two

1. The strongest reason is **that cell phones have helpful features like dictionaries and language learning apps.**
2. Another important reason is **that parents can contact their children on their phones if there is an emergency.**

Step #5 – Identifying and Following Good Patterns

Expanding the Outline

At this point, students will have the “skeleton” of their essay. Now, they will need to expand it into a full essay!



Focus on Paragraphs

While it is good to focus on having students write good, clear sentences, I prefer to focus on paragraphs because...

1. Focusing on sentences often results in too much of a focus on grammar
2. Students often demonstrate understanding of organizational strategies quicker than grammar
3. A well-organized paragraph (or essay) can still be understood by the reader, even if the sentence-level grammar is not mistake-free (Gugin, 2014)



Writing Good Paragraphs with P.I.E.

When something is very easy. We say, “it’s as easy as pie”.

When teaching paragraph writing to students, I like to tell them that, “it’s as easy as P-I-E”.

P.I.E Paragraphs

Start by giving your students an example paragraph. Ask them to read it by themselves and then, with a partner, describe the role of each sentence in the paragraph.

The strongest reason why teachers should allow students to use cell phones and digital devices in the classroom is because they have programs that can help students study. For example, if a student is reading something and does not know the meaning of a word, she can use the dictionary on her phone to find the meaning. Many students already bring their phones and devices to classes, so if a teacher can show students how to use them as learning tools, then they can help students understand more.

P.I.E Paragraphs

What is the purpose of each sentence?

The strongest reason why teachers should allow students to use cell phones and digital devices in the classroom is because they have resources and programs that can help students study. For example, if a student is reading something and does not know the meaning of a word, she can use the dictionary on her phone to find the meaning. Many students already bring their phones and devices to classes, so if a teacher can show students how to use them as learning tools, then they can help students understand more.

Sentence 1 –
“Reason 1” from the
“skeleton” outline

What is the purpose of each sentence?

Sentence 2 – An
example of the
first sentence



*The strongest reason why teachers should allow students to use cell phones and digital devices in the classroom is because they have resources and programs that can help students study. For example, if a student is reading something and does not know the meaning of a word, she can use the dictionary on her phone to find the meaning. **Many students already bring their phones and devices to classes, so if a teacher can show students how to use them as learning tools, then they can help students understand more.***

Sentence 3 – Makes a
connection between
sentences 1 & 2

Explaining P.I.E.

Part of the Paragraph	Role/Function
<u>P</u> oint	The first sentence. This is the main idea of the paragraph. It is one of the supporting reasons from the skeleton outline.
<u>I</u> llustration	The second sentence. This is an example that supports the point.
<u>E</u> xplanation	The final sentence(s). This is where the writer tries to make a connection between the illustration and the point.

Sentence 1 – [P]
“Reason 1” from the
“skeleton” outline

What is the purpose of each sentence?

Sentence 2 [I] –
An example of the
first sentence

*The strongest reason why teachers should allow students to use cell phones and digital devices in the classroom is because they have resources and programs that can help students study. For example, if a student is reading something and does not know the meaning of a word, she can use the dictionary on her phone to find the meaning. **Many students already bring their phones and devices to classes, so if a teacher can show students how to use them as learning tools, then they can help students understand more.***

Sentence 3 [E] – Makes
a connection between
sentences 1 & 2

Bonus: Using P.I.E. keeps
paragraph focused on only
one major idea, which
makes the connections
between sentences clearer!

Student Practice: Creating a P.I.E.

Part of the Paragraph	Role/Function
<u>P</u> oint	
<u>I</u> llustration	
<u>E</u> xplanation	

Teachers should allow cell phones...

...because they have programs that help learning

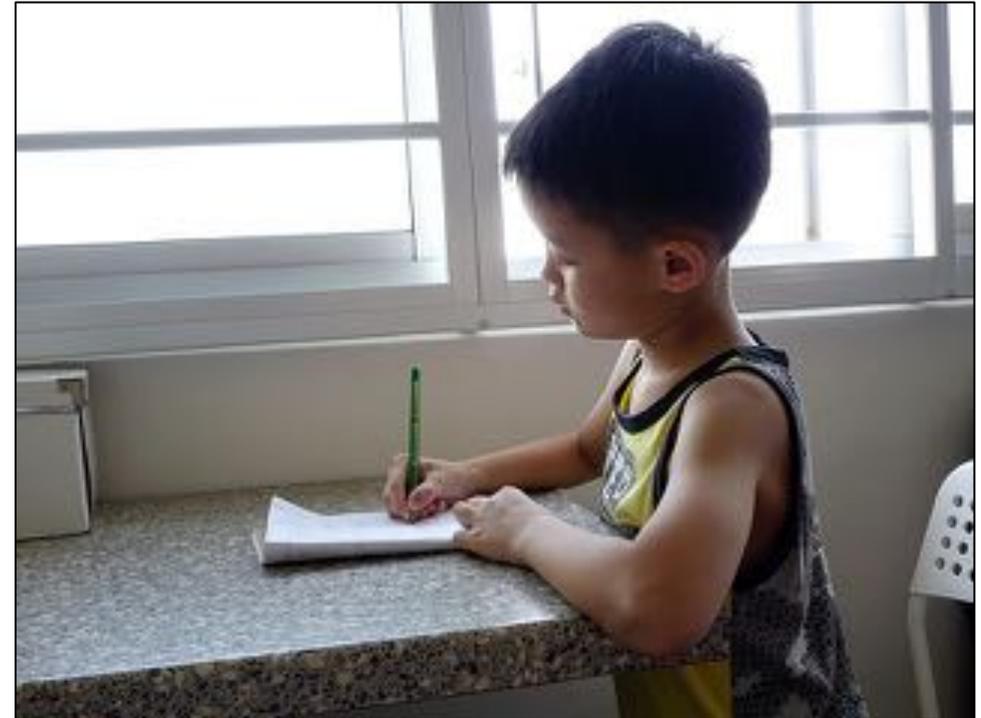
...and because parents can reach their children in emergencies.

Part of the Paragraph	Idea for the Paragraph
<u>P</u> oint	Cell phones have programs and resources to help students study.
<u>I</u> llustration	An example of this are the dictionaries on many phones.
<u>E</u> xplanation	If phones have tools to help students learn, then they should teach the students to use them to learn in class.

Writing the (First Draft of the) Essay

Finally, it is time for students to write the essay. For this first essay, the instructor has provided students with a lot of assistance.

1. We identified the purpose of the question
2. We brainstormed together
3. We created “skeleton” outlines together and...
4. We expanded the “skeletons” into full paragraphs using P.I.E



Now, it's time for the students to write!

Coming Full Circle



After reviewing what the students wrote for the first essay, I will give them feedback on what they did well and on areas that they can improve in.

Finally, I will give the students a **new question** and ask them to do each of the steps on the own to show me that they understand the process!

Should teachers assign homework to students every night? Why or why not? Give two reasons to support your opinion.

Take-Away Points

- Writing is not a single skill; it is many skills. It is important to practice each skill by itself and in combination with other skills.
- Grammar and vocabulary are important in writing, but clear connections between ideas are just as important.
- To ensure clear connections between ideas in an essay, a writer can take four steps:
 1. Identify the purpose of the writing
 2. Brainstorm for ideas
 3. Create a “skeleton” outline to organize the major points in the writing
 4. Use P.I.E. structure to create paragraphs that are clearly organized around a single idea



Practice Makes Perfect!

SO BE SURE TO DO IT AS OFTEN AS YOU CAN 😊



Additional Resources

All the example handouts will be posted to the Ning.

You will also find helpful websites and fun writing activity ideas for all levels from beginners to advanced writers.

If you have any questions or comments, please share them via the Ning discussion forum.

A bright yellow sticky note is shown at an angle, appearing to be stuck to a white surface with a piece of grey tape at the top left corner. The words "Thank You!" are written on the note in a blue, hand-drawn, textured font. The note has a slight drop shadow, giving it a 3D effect.

Thank
You!

Attributions

[All pictures are from pixabay.com](https://pixabay.com)

Gugin, D. (2014). A paragraph-first approach to the teaching of academic writing. *English Teaching Forum*, 52(3), 24-29 (36).

Kotnarowski, J. (2015). EAP essay writing: Introductions and conclusions. Invited Presentation. American Center: Moscow, Russian Federation.

Rosado, C. (2012). Body paragraph structure: P-I-E. PowerPoint Presentation at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.