

## **Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) for Opinion Writing Grades 3–5**

The Common Core categorizes writing into three types: argument, informative/explanatory, and narrative. This document provides users of the Collins Writing Program with focus correction areas (FCAs) for opinion writing in grades 3 to 5. The FCAs listed and described here do not include all writing skills (conventions of language, style, etc.) but instead focus on the critical, specialized skills that students will need to be effective opinion writers. In addition, it would be impossible to focus on the FCAs listed here and not teach many of the other Common Core State Standards; for example, the skills we list as FCAs also impact Standard 4 (clear writing), Standard 5 (revision), Standard 6 (using technology to produce and publish), Standard 7 (conduct short and sustained research), Standard 8 (gather information), Standard 9 (draw evidence), and Standard 10 (write routinely).

The Core introduces opinion writing in kindergarten with Anchor Writing Standard 1: “Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinion pieces that tell a reader the topic or name of a book they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic or book.” In grade 3, when the tests are introduced, Anchor Writing Standard 1 asks that students “write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.” In grades 4 and 5, the standard adds “and information” to the end of the standard. In grade 6, opinion writing changes into argument writing, in which students must cite sources for the information presented. The development goes from personal to research-based evidence to support the author’s position.

**Opinion Vocabulary:** On page 2 is a list of general academic vocabulary words related to opinion writing. It is not a complete list but is an excellent starting point.

**Critical FCAs List:** Beginning on page 3 is a list of critical FCAs. In column two, each FCA is described and referenced to the specific standard in the Core. Column three has examples of student-level text that would meet the standard set by each FCA.

**Eight-Step Process:** On page 5, you’ll find an eight-step process to teach FCAs to mastery. Don’t let the fact that there are eight steps cause undue concern about time. The steps include activities you are already doing and may be done over a period of days or weeks. In addition, the steps use all aspects of the Collins Writing Program, from Type One, accessing and assessing prior knowledge, to Type Five, publishing the best examples for the class to use as models. Because the FCAs listed on pages 3 and 4 are so critical, the time spent teaching and perfecting them is well worth the investment.

**Consistent Terminology:** Because the Common Core Standards are for literacy in all subjects, we encourage teachers to use the FCAs as they are presented here so that students have a consistent set of expectations and a common language across subjects and grades. Some teachers might find these FCAs too prescriptive or formulaic, and, for our most sophisticated writers, this criticism may be valid, but for many of our students, these standards and FCAs will be new and will need to be presented as clearly as possible. As students become more capable with opinion writing, consider adding qualifiers to make the FCAs more rigorous.

As you consider how specific to make an FCA, remember that the tests for the Core (PARCC and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) are same day events. Students will not have the benefit of extended time to consider and reconsider their approach and structure. The FCAs provided here will give students specific criteria that is essential for opinion writing. Students will be able to show their creativity and style through word choice, sentence structure, selection of reasons, and examples.

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**Opinion Vocabulary:** The Core divides vocabulary into two types: domain specific and general academic. Domain specific words and phrases are “specific to a particular field of study,” and, therefore, are more likely to be taught directly. General academic words and phrases are “vocabulary common to written texts but not commonly a part of speech” (CCSS, Appendix A, p. 42). David Coleman, one of the authors of the Common Core, calls general academic vocabulary “the language of power.” Others call it the language of college or the language of opportunity. As you introduce students to the Standards, take care to define words that students will need to understand. Here are some general academic terms with brief, student-friendly definitions that students will need to know:

clear/clearly	easy to understand; or, to say something in a way that is obvious and not easily mistaken
concluding statement	a way to wrap up a piece of writing; it comes at the end of a composition and reminds the reader what the central idea of the writing is
demonstrate	to make clear by explaining or showing with words
detail	facts or information about something
e.g.	a Latin abbreviation that means “for example”
evidence	information that you give to prove a point
facts	information that is true and correct
information	facts about something or someone
introduce	to tell about a topic at the beginning of a piece of writing
key	the most important thing in a group
linking words	words that connect ideas, sentences, and paragraphs together
logical	each idea that follows is connected to the one before so that it makes sense
opinion	what you think or believe about something
organizational structure	the order of ideas in your writing that makes it easy for readers to follow and understand
point of view	in opinion writing, a position or attitude a writer takes on a subject
reasons	facts or ideas that support a belief, position, or attitude
specific	exact and detailed
support	to back up an opinion with facts, details, and examples
text	any written material
topic	the subject being written about

The Collins Writing Program strongly recommends the Vocabulary Card assignment in *Improving Student Performance* (pp. 73–76) as a strategy to teach these terms.

## Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) to Address Opinion Writing, Grades 3–5

(Note: For Conventions FCAs, see Check Mate Level P or A)

**Anchor Standard:** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

FCAs for Grade 3	FCAs for Grade 4	FCAs for Grade 5
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Intro topic/clear opinion</li> <li>2. <i>n</i>+ Reasons</li> <li>3. <i>n</i>+ Linking words</li> <li>4. Strong conclusion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Intro topic/clear opinion</li> <li>2. <i>n</i>+ Reasons                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Facts/details to support</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. <i>n</i>+ Linking words/phrases</li> <li>4. Strong conclusion/tie to your opinion</li> <li>5. Paragraphs</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Intro topic/clear opinion</li> <li>2. <i>n</i>+ Reasons                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Facts/details to support</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. <i>n</i>+ Linking words/phrases/clauses</li> <li>4. Strong conclusion/tie to your opinion</li> <li>5. Paragraphs</li> </ol>

FCAs	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Intro topic/clear opinion</li> </ol>	<p>Student introduces the topic so that a reader who has not read the prompt will understand what the topic or issue is, and then clearly states opinion: yes, no, or under certain circumstances. (W.3,4,5.1a)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> As proofreading focus, have students underline topic/issue and circle opinion.</p>	<p><i>Some adults feel that Spring Elementary School needs a dress code, and I think it is a good idea.</i></p> <p><i>We have a problem. The wildlife here in (our city) is very limited. There is not a lot of opportunity to learn about conservation and wildlife preservation. I would like to take our class for a great learning experience.<sup>1*</sup></i></p> <p><i>If we had a dress code, every family would save money and students would not worry about how they look.</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <i>n</i>+ Reasons</li> </ol>	<p>Student gives general reasons (economic, personal, scientific) to support position. (W.3,4,5.1b)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Using a number (<i>n</i>) or a range (e.g., 2–3) gives student writers a sense of how much detail is enough. The number helps answer their question, “How many?”</p>	<p><i>If we went on a field trip, we will learn about the wildlife from around the world ... information would help us to understand the importance of science in our day to day life. We would use math to make a budget and figure out a way to earn money. These skills will be very useful again and again. We will learn how to make a schedule with target dates.*</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> Examples marked with an \* are from the Common Core State Standards Appendix C: Samples of Student Writing, Grade 4, “Zoo Field Trip” pp. 25–26.

## Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) to Address Opinion Writing, Grades 3–5

(Note: For Conventions FCAs, see *Check Mate* Level P or A)

<p><b>2a. Facts/details to support (grades 4–5)</b></p>	<p>In grades 4 and 5, student provides facts and details to support reasons. (W.4,5.1b)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Using a number or a range (e.g., 1 fact/detail to support each reason) gives student writers a sense of how much detail is enough.</p>	<p>Every family in our school would save money if they only had to buy a few shirts and pants instead of lots of expensive jeans and sweaters and tops. For example, a pair of jeans that kids would like costs as much as . . .</p> <p>. . . first thing . . . research, research, research! Next, we will choose a fund raiser. The parents will hopefully chip in their time. We will prepare a plan schedule.*</p>
<p><b>3. n + Linking words (grade 3)</b> <b>n + Linking words/phrases (grade 4)</b> <b>n + Linking words/phrases/clauses (grade 5)</b></p>	<p>Use linking words, phrases, and clauses to connect opinions and reasons. (W.3,4,5.1c)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Post linking words, phrases, and clauses for students to use (e.g., <i>also, and, because, next, since, for instance, consequently</i>). Give a number (n) or range (e.g., 2-3) to make the expectation clear.</p>	<p>As you can see from these examples, staying in fashion costs a great deal and school uniforms would save hundreds of dollars.</p> <p>Next, we will choose a fund raiser (with your approval, of course). This will earn money for the field trip.*</p>
<p><b>4. Strong conclusion (grade 3)</b> <b>Strong conclusion/tie to your opinion (grades 4–5)</b></p>	<p>Student ends with a concluding statement or section that pulls the opinion and reasons together. (W.3,4,5.1d)</p>	<p>A dress code will save our parents money, save us time, and cut down on competition between students to be the best dressers. Maybe we will focus our energies on other things, like school work.</p> <p>Besides the fact that the project planning, fund raising, budgeting and reporting will provide an excellent learning opportunity, it will provide education. It will also provide awareness of wildlife and the importance of conservation.*</p>
<p><b>5. Paragraphs (grades 4–5)</b></p>	<p>In grades 4 and 5, student creates an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer’s purpose. (W.4,5.1a)</p>	<p>Clear paragraph break: Students need the opportunity to express themselves. For example . . . In addition . . . Finally . . .</p> <p>We have a problem. . . . If we went on a field trip . . . The first thing to do is . . . *</p>

## Teaching FCAs for Opinion Writing, Grades 3–5

When introducing new FCAs to your students, you may want to consider the following steps, based on a modified version of P. D. Pearson and M. C. Gallagher’s gradual release of responsibility teaching model.

**Step One:** Select an FCA and ask students to complete a Type One writing assignment. For example, “*We are going to be studying positions and reasons. In at least four written lines, define ‘position’ and ‘reason’ and give an example of each. If you are not sure what to write, give your best guess. You’ll have three minutes.*” This activity will give you an immediate sense of what students know or don’t know and an opportunity to see if there are differing definitions of the terms.

**Step Two:** After sharing what students think, share your school’s official definition for the FCA and begin to explain any words in the definition that students may not know. Give students examples so they can see exactly what you mean. A great source for examples is Appendix C of the Common Core that gives samples of student writing that meet the standards. Then ask for examples from everyday life to be sure that students have a full understanding of the FCA before they have to apply the skill in a more-rigorous academic situation. For example, you might ask, “*Would ‘because I said so’ be a good reason? If so, why? If not, what would be?*”

**Step Three:** Give frequent Type Two quizzes that ask students to produce brief written answers to demonstrate that they understand the FCA. For example, after reading an article, you may ask students, “*Write your own three- to five-sentence strong conclusion,*” or “*On a one-to-five scale, rate this article on clear reasons and explain your rating.*” Many of the standards in the Core may be new to students. Asking them to demonstrate understanding of “details to support” or to rate and explain the author’s use of “organizational structure” will give students a chance to become familiar with the terminology and practice applying the concepts to others’ writing before they have to create new text to meet the standards set by the FCA. It is always easier to judge than to be judged.

**Step Four:** Have students edit past papers from their writing folders (other students’ and their own) for the FCA. Have students find examples of the FCA or find places where the FCA was missing or in error. Then have students edit directly on their past papers. This step helps make the transfer from knowing to using. For example, if the FCA is clear paragraphing and transitions, ask students to edit past opinion papers for paragraphs and transitions.

**Step Five:** Assign the FCA on an original (Type Three) paper and permit the students to peer edit for the FCA (Type Four). Many students are convinced that they know and can apply a skill only to discover a peer has a different understanding. This practice will give students an opportunity to try out the skill and get feedback before the teacher officially evaluates them. A highly effective variation of peer editing is to ask a student to volunteer to read or show on a document camera the section of the paper that demonstrates the FCA in question, with the promise that if the writing does not meet the standard, the teacher and class will fix it, guaranteeing a good evaluation.

**Step Six:** Evaluate the class set of papers for the FCAs in question and determine if the class can apply the FCA in an academic setting. In some cases, more instruction will be necessary, but you will have the benefit of authentic student examples to show the class.

**Step Seven:** Repeat the FCA on new assignments until you feel the students have mastery. One of the advantages of the Core is that it requires the same skill over many years and many subjects; for example, students are asked to state an opinion or claim and provide a concluding statement from grades 3 to 12. As students progress, some of the skills will become habits, and once the skills are habits, students’ intellectual energies can be directed to producing writing with more sophistication and nuance.

**Step Eight:** Post or publish some of the best examples of FCAs from student work (Type Five). This practice will give students examples of clearly written position statements, well-explained reasons with support, or strong conclusions. It also provides recognition and motivation for the top performers.