

## **Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) for Argument Writing Grades 9–12**

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 argument writing in grades 9 to 12. The FCAs listed and described here do not include all writing skills (conventions of language, style, etc.) but focus instead on the critical, specialized skills that students will need to be effective argument 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 source-based argument writing for the first time in the grade 6 Standards. From grade 6 on, students must support their claims with reasons and provide evidence from credible sources. Unlike persuasive or opinion writing, which can be based on emotion or personal appeal, argument writing is evidence based; that is, students must use sources (written text, video, charts, graphs, etc.) as evidence to support their reasons.

**Argument Vocabulary:** On page 2 is a list of general academic vocabulary words related to argument 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 6, 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 3–5 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 argument writers, 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 argument writing. Students will be able to show their creativity and style through word choice, sentence structure, selection of reasons, examples, and analysis.

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**Argument 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:

- analyze to consider more than one opinion on a topic or question before drawing your own conclusions *or* to consider a topic or question carefully by breaking your response to it into parts
- argument a way to convince another person of your opinion by using evidence from a text or another relevant source
- audience the person or group of people, in addition to your classmates and teacher, who may read your writing
- citation a passage or phrase from a book or other piece of writing
  - cite if you cite something, you quote it or mention it, especially as an example or proof of what you are saying
- claim an idea you believe to be true that you can support with evidence
- cohesion the order of your ideas and how you link them together
- counterclaim the response given by someone who doesn’t agree with your claim
- credible believable, trustworthy; based on data or experience
  - e.g. a Latin abbreviation meaning “for example”
- evidence the relevant and concrete information and examples you give to prove your point and support your reasons
- formal style written in a serious voice that avoids casual phrasing, slang, and contractions but can include *I*
- knowledgeable a clear understanding of a particular topic; having had extensive experience with the topic
- objective tone a reasonable voice that relies on evidence, not emotions, to develop an argument
- plagiarize to copy someone else’s words or ideas without giving credit
- precise expressed exactly and in a way that distinguishes your idea from others
- reason a statement that explains why the reader should believe your claim
- relevant closely relates to and supports the point you are making
- source the book, magazine, or internet reference in which the story, argument, or piece of research you are summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting first appeared
- substantive important, serious; not silly or extreme
- transition a word or phrase that helps the writer change from one idea to another

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 Argument Writing, Grades 9–12

(Note: For Conventions FCAs, see *Check Mate*, Level C)

**Anchor Standard:** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

FCAs for Grade 9–10	FCAs for Grade 11–12
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Counterclaim/claim/2–3 reasons/<del>I</del></li> <li>2. Acknowledge counterclaim</li> <li>3. Cite <i>n</i> + credible sources</li> <li>4. <i>n</i> Reasons/textual evidence explained</li> <li>5. Paragraph/transitions</li> <li>6. <i>n</i>+ Content-specific vocabulary</li> <li>7. Formal style</li> <li>8. Objective tone</li> <li>9. Strong conclusion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Counterclaim/claim/2–3 reasons/<del>I</del> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Significance of claim</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Acknowledge counterclaim</li> <li>3. Cite <i>n</i> + credible sources</li> <li>4. <i>n</i> Reasons/textual evidence explained</li> <li>5. <i>n</i>+ Content-specific vocabulary</li> <li>6. Paragraph/transitions</li> <li>7. Formal style</li> <li>8. Objective tone                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Acknowledge values/biases</li> </ol> </li> <li>9. Strong conclusion</li> </ol>

FCAs	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
<b>1. CC/C/2–3Rs/<del>I</del></b> <b>Counterclaim/Claim/2–3 reasons/<del>I</del></b>	Student provides a one-sentence statement that acknowledges a counterclaim (e.g., with an <i>Although . . .</i> clause), states a precise claim without using the personal pronoun <i>I</i> , and gives general reasons without details. (W.9–10,11–12.1a) <b>Tip:</b> Have students underline the claim sentence.	<i>Although many parents love the idea of a dress code, Spring High School should not adopt one for historical, aesthetic, and scientific reasons.</i>
<b>1a. Significance of claim (grades 11–12)</b>	In grades 11 and 12, student provides background information and historical context for the claim and opposing claims, adding length and depth to the argument. (W.11–12.1a) <b>Tip:</b> Have students highlight words they used to provide background/historical context.	<i>For the last two years, a group of parents and administrators have been lobbying for a strict dress code at Spring High School. This effort began . . .</i>
<b>2. Acknowledge counterclaim</b>	Student acknowledges the counterclaim in a fair and objective way. (W.9–10,11–12.1b) <b>Tip:</b> As a proofreading focus, have students circle the counterclaim.	<i>Parents do not need more stress in their lives, so we can all understand that they would love to avoid arguments about their children’s clothing choices.</i>

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<p><b>3. Cite <i>n</i> + credible sources</b></p>	<p>Student cites information from a minimum number of source materials and may comment on credibility of the information. (W.9–10,11–12.1b)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> In the left margin, have students number the sources cited.</p>	<p>Dr. Brunσμα has published studies of the effects of school policies on student achievement for the last decade.</p>
<p><b>4. <i>n</i> Reasons/textual evidence explained</b></p>	<p>Student supports a minimum number of reasons with specific information from source materials. The connection between the evidence and the claim is explained. (W.9–10,11–12.1b)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> The principle difference between opinion writing in the lower grades and argument writing in grades 6–12 is that argument is source based.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> In the left margin, have students number their reasons.</p>	<p>"Assistant professor David Brunσμα . . . reviewed past studies on the effect of uniforms on academic performance . . . [and] concluded that there is no positive correlation between uniforms and school safety or academic achievement." Brunσμα's data shows that uniforms do not work as a solution to our problem. - Marian Wilde, "Do uniforms make schools better?" greatschools.org</p>
<p><b>5. Paragraph/transitions ¶/trans</b></p>	<p>Student uses paragraphs to provide readers with clear visual signs of where the central reasons begin and end and uses transitions to make the relationship between the parts in the paragraph clear. (W.9–10,11–12.1c)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Provide examples of transitions, e.g., <i>above all, all in all, chiefly, excluding, especially, furthermore, in other words, in the final analysis, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, otherwise, simultaneously, yet.</i></p>	<p>Clear paragraph break: <i>Students need the opportunity to express themselves. For example . . . Another example . . . Finally . . .</i></p>
<p><b>6. <i>n</i> + Content-specific vocab</b></p>	<p>Student analyzes with valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence through the use of the vocabulary of the topic or domain. (W.9-10,11-12.1)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Using a number (<i>n</i>+) or range (e.g., 4–7) gives student writers a sense of how much is enough. Have students highlight or underline the content-specific words.</p>	<p>John Boyne's story, <i>The Boy in the Striped Pajamas</i>, tells the tale of an incredible friendship between two . . . boys during the Holocaust. One, . . . the son of an important German commander . . . of Auschwitz Camp, and the other, . . . a Jewish boy inside the camp. . . . forbidden friendship . . . the incredible racial boundaries . . . killed in the gas showers.<sup>1</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup> From *Common Core State Standards Appendix C: Samples of Student Writing*, Grade 9, "The True Meaning of Friendship" pp. 57–59.

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<p><b>7. Formal style</b></p>	<p>Student avoids slang, text messaging abbreviations, and casual dialogue. Student uses general academic vocabulary rather than everyday speech. (W.9–10,11–12.1d)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> In addition to having students use general academic vocabulary, have them write without using contractions. Use transition words or phrases as a way of maintaining a formal style.</p> <p>Student treats the opposing side or claim with civility. (W.9–10,11–12.1d)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Students should avoid emotions, personal opinions, and evaluative judgments.</p>	<p>Don't write <i>My mom and pop have no style. No way they can tell me how to dress. I would look a fool. Rather, write My parents' style does not reflect current trends. I would look out of place and be self-conscious.</i></p>
<p><b>8. Objective tone</b></p>	<p>In grades 11 and 12, student anticipates possible reactions and objections to claim. This FCA also relates to objective tone, showing consideration of different opinions. (W. 11–12.1b)</p>	<p><i>Our school tries to create policies that will benefit everyone (e.g., our no-bullying campaign), but this policy will only cause more problems than it solves.</i></p>
<p><b>8a. Acknowledge values/biases (grades 11–12)</b></p>	<p>Student briefly and clearly sums up the claim and reasons using different words; that is, not an exact repeat of original claim. Strong conclusions can also include a challenge, request for support, or a call to action. (W.9–10,11–12.1e)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Encourage students to limit the conclusion to approximately 10% of the paper to discourage a “Let me tell you what I told you” conclusion and promote a concise, powerful ending.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Consider the “If ..., then ...” ending.</p>	<p><i>Everyone wants our high school to be safe and secure. No one wants to create a set of rules that are unfair to any one group of students. This dress code may even save some parents money but . . .</i></p> <p><i>The proposed dress code, while well intended, runs contrary to our school mission and history, suppresses creativity and free expression, and has no data to prove it would solve the problems it is intended to solve. Speak up against the dress code!</i></p> <p><b>If</b> the proposed dress code is adopted, <b>then</b> students freedom of expression will be suppressed, and a whole new set of problems may be created.</p>
<p><b>9. Strong conclusion</b></p>		

## Teaching FCAs for Argument Writing, 9–12

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 claims and counterclaims. In at least four written lines, define a ‘claim’ and a ‘counterclaim’ 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 a parent’s review of their child’s performance in a play be an example of a ‘credible source’? 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 objective tone and explain your rating.*” Many of the standards in the Core may be new to students. Asking them to demonstrate understanding of “credible source” or to rate and explain the author’s use of “paragraphs and transitions” 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 effective paragraphing and transitions, ask students to edit past argument 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 a claim and provide a concluding statement from grades 6 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.