Problem Solution Essay: A Problem the World Faces

Teacher Guide

Problem-Solution essay writing task invites students to write about a problem that the world faces and to propose a solution that involves people working together.

This lesson sequence focuses on helping students find a problem to write about, thinking about multiple solutions, and making a case for one idea about how we might work together to meet the challenge

Lesson Sequence Overview

Lesson One	Lesson Two	Lesson Three	Lesson Four
Choose a Topic Goal: Students will choose a topic.	**Learn More** Goal: Students will build a text set to learn more about the issue and already proposed solutions.	**Get Organized and Write a Claim** Goal: Students will use a notetaker to draft their ideas and then write a claim.	**Write a Draft** Goal: Students will write a draft problem-solution essay

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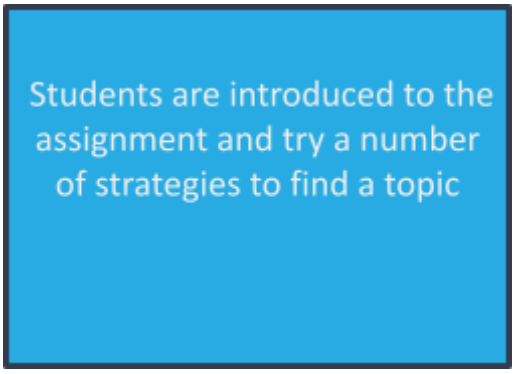
Lesson One: Choose a Topic



Lesson Focus: Support pre-writing and create a process writing environment

Goal: Students will try a number of strategies to surface topics and then free write to find out what they are excited to write about and why

Exploring Topics

In order to create a strong argument, students need both a topic worth writing about and sources to support their understanding and position. On this first lesson of the sequence, students begin by exploring issues in both the world and their own lives. Below are a few ways to support students in their topic search:

Headline Search: Use current topics and conversations in the world as a way to brainstorm possible topics. Students can look through local, state, and national newspapers or magazines. You may want to let them individually explore the digital collections of current topics below, or project some of these sites on the board and review as a class:

- Google News
- The New York Times Learning Network
- USA Today
- Newsela
- AllSides
- DOGOnews
- Science Journal for Kids (and Teens)

Issues Focused Quicklist: To create a quicklist, have students number from 1 to 10 in their notebooks. Share each prompt in the list below and have students quickly jot down their responses. After listing, students return to the list and code it using an A for every topic that lends itself to an argument.

- 1–2 List two issues that affect the world
- 3–4 Two issues that affect your state
- 5–6 Two issues that affect your school or community
- 7–8 Two issues that affect you and/or your family personally
- 9–10 Two topics of conversations you've had recently
- 11 Anything else on your mind right now!

Quickwrite

After students have selected a topic they might want to write about, invite them to write an initial response using the sentence stems below:

- *This issue matters to me because . . .*
- *This issue matters to the world around me because . . .*
- *Others in the world might think . . .*

Depending on available class time, students can repeat the process several times, selecting a new topic to write about each time. Based on this reflective writing, students arrive at a topic to further explore and write about in their letter.

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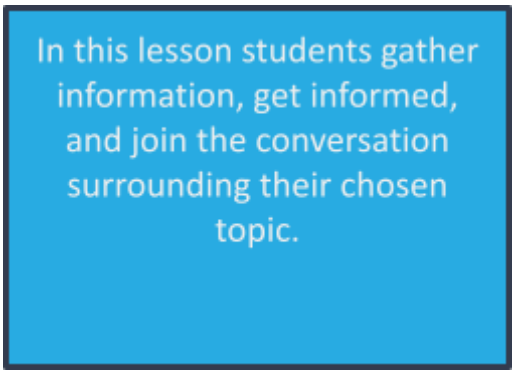
Lesson Two: Learn More



Lesson Focus: Creating a text set, reading, and annotating

Goal: Students will read more about their chosen topic

Building a Text Set

In the most effective text sets, the texts are carefully selected to present a range of positions, information, and perspectives surrounding a topic.

If your students are ready to search for texts on their own, remind them to conduct *specific* searches for information and think about possible key terms or phrases, different perspectives, and different ways to approach their topic. For example, when searching for texts on the topic of school attendance, simply typing “attendance” in the search bar will yield results that are too broad and overwhelming. Guide students to use more specific, researchable phrases, like these examples: *Dangers of chronic absenteeism, reasons students miss school, school attendance policies that work*. Here are some questions for students to consider as they gather and build their text set of three to five sources:

- Are you gathering texts that represent a range of viewpoints on the topic?
- Are your sources reliable and credible? Are the texts current and up-to-date?
- Is there important history or background your audience will need to know? If so, did you find texts that provide the information?

Read and Annotate Texts

As students work to curate source material, they can begin reading and annotating the texts in their text set. If they have hard copies of their text set, they can use the focus questions below to guide their annotation of the sources.

Focus Questions for Reading and Annotating:

- *What is each article about?*
- *Who is at the table? Who is talking about the issue?*
- *What variety of positions or opinions do the articles take?* [They Say]
- *What do I think?* [I Say]
- *What evidence supports my position that I can use when I write my letter?*

If students are using digital copies, they can take notes in their notebooks or fill out a notecatcher as they read (see below). This graphic organizer uses the same focus questions. Click here to make your own editable copy of the notecatcher.

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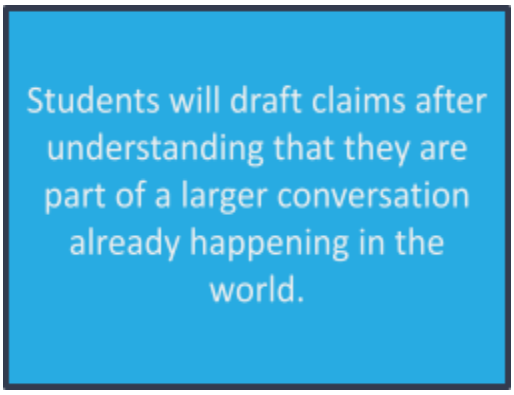
Lesson Three: Get Organized and Write a Claim



Lesson Focus: Having read and annotated some sources, students will return to their notes to capture the big ideas they want to write about, and craft a claim.

Goal: Students will organize their thinking and decide what they want to say

Activities:

After finding a few sources, students are ready to gather information about their issue. If students need support keeping their information organized, you may want to provide them with a notecatcher that captures the big ideas needed to understand and explain any issue.

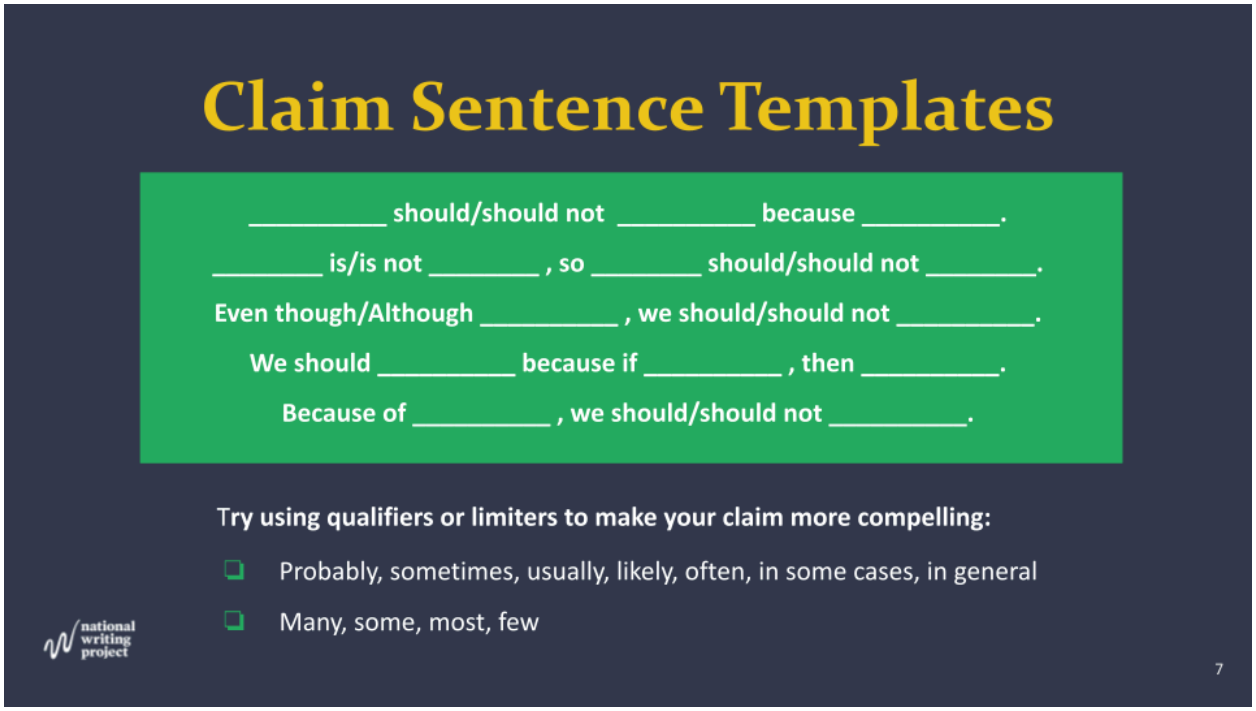
The **Four Square Notecatcher** is a general example that can work for almost any issue. As students complete the notecatcher, be sure they code their note taking in a way that identifies the source material so they can cite it properly later. Click here to make your own editable copy of the notecatcher.

Writing and Refining a Claim

After reading thinking about and writing about source information, students are ready to refine their initial claim and make a more nuanced claim that is informed by source material.

Below is an example using the standardized testing issue with a basic claim that has been refined.

To support students with this process of revising their claim, encourage them to try some of the claim templates below:



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Lesson Four: Write a Draft

Students draw from the Four Square Notecatcher to organize and draft their essay.

Lesson Focus: How to organize your essay

Goal: Students will write a draft that integrates their learning and writing from the previous lesson.

Activities:

The Four Square Notecatcher provides a guide for a logical organizational structure. Each box can become a body paragraph, or boxes can be combined or arranged to create multiple possible organizations. Students can create a traditional outline of their draft, or draw boxes to map out a structure like the example below.

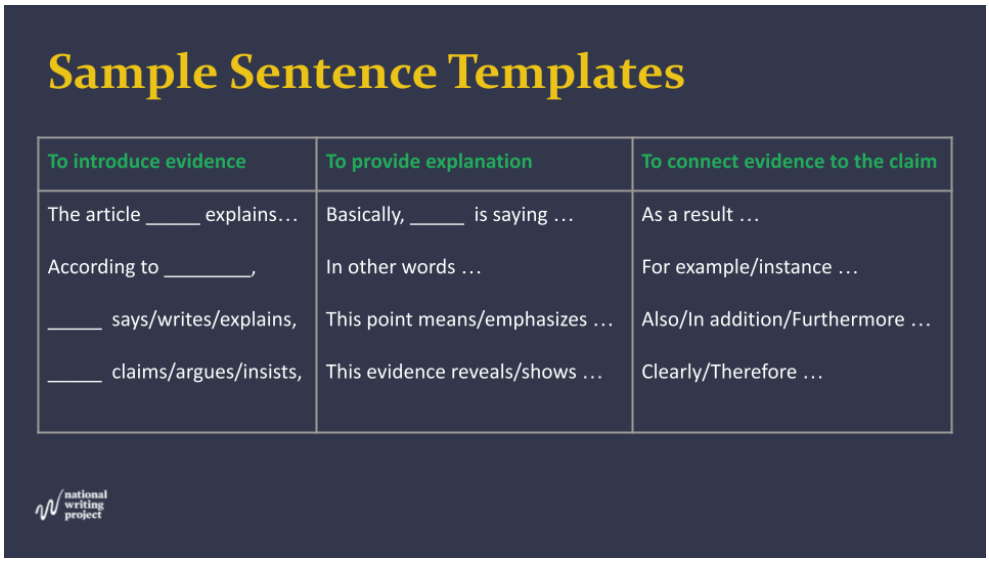
We know that students work best when they have choices. Encourage students to experiment with a variety of flexible structures that are not formulaic. Remind them that their organization should reflect their purpose and make a clear and logical argument for the reader that is easy to follow. The work of ordering and developing their own draft structure increases student agency as they move from teacher-chosen structures to ones they create themselves.

Drafting

As students begin drafting, they may want to adjust and reorder some of the information. They also might realize they need to add more source material, include additional perspectives to present a more comprehensive argument, or develop their commentary with more logical reasoning. To support drafting (and then revision), you may want to provide students with some sample sentence frames to jumpstart their thinking and writing.

Sentence Templates: One way to support students in adding and using source material is by giving them the words to get started. These words are often called sentence frames or sentence starters because they provide a way for students to get an idea started.

Together as a class, brainstorm a list of words and phrases writers use when referring to or using source material. You might also provide a list of templates that are commonly used. The examples below are based on the idea of academic writing as a "conversation" where students introduce what others have said (*They Say*) and then respond (*I Say*) to advance the argument.



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