

WBA INSTRUCTIONAL BENCHMARKS:

ARGUMENT AND EXPLANATORY WRITING

Each WBA inquiry unit concludes with either an argument or explanatory writing task. The following benchmarks are designed to help you teach those writing tasks and eventually revise the unit based on the resulting student work. They highlight the Common Core standards that are most relevant for the history classroom (e.g., stating claims, introducing historical topic, using logical reasoning and evidence, using domain-specific vocabulary, providing a supporting conclusion). In addition, WBA Instructional Benchmarks integrate historical understandings (e.g., content knowledge) and historical thinking concepts (e.g., Cause and Effect) that lie at the heart of teaching and learning history.

There are separate benchmarks for each Common Core grade band: Grade 6–8; Grade 9–10; and Grade 11–12. You should select the appropriate grade band and review the benchmarks in advance of handing out the writing task to students. For the Common Core writing standards, we have included only those aspects of the standard that we consider to be most important for social studies; you may want to add other components of the writing standards that we have omitted, or any reading standards you think are key to the unit. You will also need to decide which of the historical understandings and historical thinking concepts you expect your students to demonstrate and add those to the benchmarks in the space provided. To earn a Builder badge, you will use these benchmarks to annotate examples of student work as part of the Unit Reflection. (See How Do I Annotate Student Work)

The benchmarks can also be used to provide clear and actionable feedback to your students on how to meet a particular standard. We encourage you to provide opportunities for your students to revise their writing in response to this feedback. If revision isn't possible, using the WBA Instructional Benchmarks to review student work can help you identify which skills need to be modeled and/or practiced in subsequent writing lessons.

GRADES 6-8: INSTRUCTIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR ARGUMENT WRITING

Standard	Benchmark
<p>Common Core WH.6-8.1a Introduce own claim about a topic; distinguish claim from opposing arguments; organize reasons and evidence logically</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can present a claim (e.g., argument or thesis statement) within the first sentence or paragraph that remains consistent throughout.</i> 2. <i>Students can distinguish this claim from others by identifying an “I say” and “they say.”¹</i> 3. <i>Students can present reasons and evidence in an order that shows an attempt to prove the claim.</i>
<p>Common Core WH.6-8.1b Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can support the claim with reasons that are relevant to the claim or historical question, are expressed in the students’ own words, and are informed by primary and secondary sources from the unit/lesson.</i> 2. <i>Students can support the reasons with sufficient evidence that is either quoted or paraphrased from primary and secondary sources.</i> 3. <i>Students can select and use evidence in a way that indicates that they understand the texts.</i>
<p>Common Core WH.6-8.1e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented</p>	<p><i>Students can conclude their writing with a statement or paragraph that either restates or reinforces the claim and reasons (without repeating the claim verbatim).</i></p>
<p>Additional Common Core Standards</p>	
<p>Historical Understandings/Concepts [Identify one or more of the historical understandings and/or concepts (e.g., Cause and Effect) that you want to see evidence of in student writing for this task.]</p>	<p><i>Students can demonstrate knowledge of the identified historical information and/or concepts for the unit.</i></p>

¹ “They say/ I say” is not an instruction to write in the first person but rather an approach to teaching claims and counter-claims developed by college professors Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. Students are taught that the key to effective writing is to identify what others have said (“They Say”) to set up one’s own argument (“I say”). *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 2nd edition (W.W. Norton, 2010).

GRADES 9-10: INSTRUCTIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR ARGUMENT WRITING

Standard	Benchmark
<p>WH.9-10.1a Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, evidence</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can present a precise claim (e.g., argument or thesis statement) within the first sentence or paragraph that remains consistent throughout.</i> 2. <i>Students can distinguish this claim from others by identifying an “I say” and “they say.”² The “I say” may directly oppose the “they say,” or simply convey an alternate focus or emphasis</i> 3. <i>Students can present counter-claims, reasons, and evidence in an order that clearly helps to develop the argument.</i>
<p>WH.9-10.1b Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, by supplying data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claims and counterclaims</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can provide strong and sufficient evidence from primary and secondary sources to develop claim</i> 2. <i>Students can provide some evidence in support of counter-claim, while also pointing out its limits</i> 3. <i>Students can weigh evidence so that it favors the claim over the counter-claim</i>
<p>WH.9-10.1e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented</p>	<p><i>Students can conclude with a sentence or paragraph that either restates or reinforces the claim and reasons (without repeating the claim verbatim).</i></p>
<p>Additional Common Core Standards</p>	
<p>Historical Understandings [Identify one or more of the historical understandings and/or concepts (e.g., Cause and Effect) that you want to see evidence of in student writing for this task.]</p>	<p><i>Students can demonstrate knowledge of the identified historical information and/or concepts for the unit.</i></p>

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GRADES 11-12: INSTRUCTIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR ARGUMENT WRITING

Standard	Benchmark
<p>WH.11-12.1a Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims. Create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can present a precise, knowledgeable claim (e.g., argument or thesis statement) within the first sentence or paragraph.</i> 2. <i>Students can establish the significance of a claim (e.g. Why does this argument matter?)</i> 3. <i>Student can distinguish one claim from others by identifying an “I say” and “they say.”³ The “I say” may directly oppose the “they say,” or simply convey an alternate focus or emphasis</i> 4. <i>Students can present counter-claims, reasons, and evidence in an order that clearly helps to develop an argument.</i>
<p>WH.11-12.1b Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claims and counterclaims. Use a form appropriate to the discipline of history that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can provide strong and sufficient evidence from primary and secondary sources to develop a claim</i> 2. <i>Students can provide strong and sufficient evidence in support of a counter-claim, while also pointing out limits</i> 3. <i>Students can acknowledge limitations in a claim, while weighing evidence in favor of the claim over the counter-claim</i>
<p>WH.6-8.1e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from or supports the argument presented</p>	<p><i>Students can conclude with a sentence or paragraph that either restates or reinforces a claim and reasons (without repeating the claim verbatim).</i></p>
<p>Additional Common Core Standards</p>	
<p>Historical Understandings [Identify one or more of the historical understandings and/or concepts (e.g., Cause and Effect) that you want to see evidence of in student writing for this task.]</p>	<p><i>Students can demonstrate knowledge of the identified historical information and/or concepts for the unit.</i></p>

³ “They say/ I say” is not an instruction to write in the first person but rather an approach to teaching claims and counter-claims developed by college professors Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. Students are taught that the key to effective writing is to identify what others have said (“They Say”) to set up one’s own argument (“I say”). *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 2nd edition (W.W. Norton, 2010).

GRADES 6-8: INSTRUCTIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR EXPLANATORY WRITING

Standard	Benchmark
<p>WH.6-8.2a Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories as appropriate to achieving purpose</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can write an introductory paragraph or statement that clearly establishes a historical topic or context.</i> 2. <i>Students can write a thesis statement that provides an explanation of a problem or question related to the historical topic.</i> 3. <i>Students can organize ideas and information into subtopics that develop the explanation.</i>
<p>WH.6-8.2b Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can develop an explanation using an appropriate amount of facts, details, quotations, or examples, as called for in the task instructions (e.g., the quantity of evidence is sufficient).</i> 2. <i>Students can effectively develop the explanation with relevant facts, details, quotations, etc. (e.g., the quality of the evidence is sufficient).</i>
<p>WH.6-8.2d. Use domain-specific vocabulary from the unit to inform about the topic</p>	<p><i>Students can integrate keywords from the unit lessons and documents into an essay in a manner that indicates understanding of their meaning.</i></p>
<p>WH.6-8.2f Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented</p>	<p><i>Students can conclude their essays with a statement or paragraph that restates (ideally without repeating exact words) the essay’s main ideas and, in exemplary cases, explains their significance.</i></p>
<p>Additional Common Core Standards</p>	
<p>Historical Understandings [Identify one or more of the historical understandings and/or concepts (e.g., Cause and Effect) that you want to see evidence of in student writing for this task.]</p>	<p><i>Students can demonstrate knowledge of the identified historical information and/or concepts for the unit.</i></p>

GRADES 9-10: INSTRUCTIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR EXPLANATORY WRITING

Standard	Benchmark
<p>WH.9-10.2a Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can write an introductory paragraph or statement that clearly establishes a historical topic or context.</i> 2. <i>Students can write a thesis statement that provides an explanation of a problem or question related to the historical topic.</i> 3. <i>Students can organize ideas and information into related, yet distinct subtopics that are connected by varied transitions and topic sentences.</i>
<p>WH.9-10.2b Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can develop an explanation using an appropriate amount of facts, details, quotations, or examples, as called for in the task instructions (e.g., the quantity of evidence is sufficient).</i> 2. <i>Students can effectively develop the explanation with relevant and complete facts, details, quotations, etc. (e.g., the quality of the evidence is sufficient).</i>
<p>WH.9-10.2d Use domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic and convey a style appropriate to the discipline and context as well to the expertise of likely readers</p>	<p><i>Students can integrate keywords from the unit lessons and documents into an essay in a manner that indicates understanding of their meaning, advances the topic, and adds to the sophistication of the essay.</i></p>
<p>WH.9-10.2f Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g. articulating implications or the significance of the topic)</p>	<p><i>Students can conclude their essays with a statement or paragraph that restates (in different words) the essay’s main ideas and explains their significance or the implications they have for the topic.</i></p>
<p>Additional Common Core Standards</p>	
<p>Historical Understandings [Identify one or more of the historical understandings and/or concepts (e.g., Cause and Effect) that you want to see evidence of in student writing for this task.]</p>	<p><i>Students can demonstrate knowledge of the identified historical information and/or concepts for the unit.</i></p>

GRADES 11-12: INSTRUCTIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR EXPLANATORY WRITING

Common Core Writing Standard	Benchmark
<p>WH.11-12.2a Introduce a topic and organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on the preceding elements to create a unified whole</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can write an introductory paragraph or statement that clearly establishes a historical topic or context.</i> 2. <i>Students can write a thesis statement that provides a complex explanation of a problem or question related to the historical topic.</i> 3. <i>Students can organize ideas and information into distinct subtopics that logically follow and grow from one another.</i>
<p>WH.11-12.2b Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts and providing extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Students can develop an explanation using an appropriate amount of facts, details, quotations, or examples, as called for in the task instructions (e.g., the quantity of evidence is sufficient).</i> 2. <i>Students can effectively develop the explanation fully with the most relevant and significant facts, details, quotations, etc. from the documents (e.g., the quality of the evidence is sufficient).</i>
<p>WH.11-12.2d Use domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic; convey knowledgeable stance in a style that responds to the discipline and context as well as to the expertise of likely readers</p>	<p><i>Students can show command of a topic by integrating keywords from the unit lessons and documents in a manner that shows understanding of the terms, advances the explanation and adds to the overall sophistication of the essay.</i></p>
<p>WH.11-12.2e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation provided (e.g. the implications or significance of the topic)</p>	<p><i>Students can conclude an essay with a statement or paragraph that restates (in different words) the essay’s main ideas and explains their significance or the implications they have for the topic.</i></p>
<p>Additional Common Core Standards</p>	
<p>Historical Understandings [Identify one or more of the historical understandings and/or concepts (e.g., Cause and Effect) that you want to see evidence of in student writing for this task.]</p>	<p><i>Students can demonstrate knowledge of the identified historical information and/or concepts for the unit.</i></p>