



# Transactional Writing: Argument

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 **4** 5

## Hard Chairs

### THE LEARNING CONTEXT

This class focused on written argument and persuasive writing for four weeks.

Every day during the first week, the teacher used the overhead projector to discuss written texts based on argument and persuasion. In particular, she discussed the language features, asking: "What makes this piece persuasive? Why?"

The class practised with the topic of playground issues. They brainstormed all the points they could think of, and selected one that captured their imagination and would get them interested in developing an argument. They then devised a simple three-frame cartoon strip that met the requirements of a beginning, middle, and end.

The teacher then discussed the features of an argument in letter form that would appeal to the school's board of trustees. As a class, they selected the topic of poor-quality chairs, but they were able to choose another issue that they felt strongly about.

After the initial draft, the teacher led conferences with groups based on reading ability.

### Teacher-student conversations

At first, Hannah had some difficulty grouping and sequencing her ideas. The teacher suggested a technique, using colours to link ideas.

Teacher: This is looking pretty effective.

Hannah: I think I've got the sequence better now. It runs together better.

Teacher: I think you're right, it reads well. I wonder if there's anything else you might include to strengthen your argument?

Hannah: Like more information?

Teacher: Well, perhaps more specific information.

Hannah: I could actually add up the hours we spend sitting on the chairs – that's a fact.

Teacher: Yes, and a relevant fact too!

### INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

To support their study of the argument/persuasive writing genre during the four weeks, the teacher also focused on close reading activities:

- Reading persuasive newspaper articles and snippets (such as editorials and letters to the editor) to the students.
- Linking to their work in science by getting them to read and analyse persuasive science reports, and focusing on the choice of formal and informal language.
- Linking to their work on mythology – a study of the characters Demeter and Persephone. The students developed arguments based on these two characters for their school production.

### WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Hannah towards the next learning step, the teacher might encourage her to focus on:

Structure

- making the introduction more concise.

Sentences

- elaborating on ideas, and varying the beginnings.

Vocabulary

- taking greater risks.

Independence

- encouraging her to develop her own argument from scratch with no support from the class model.

This could be done through:

- a guided reading programme to identify these points
- modelling the points
- regular individual conferencing.



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### CURRICULUM LINKS

*English in the New Zealand Curriculum*

#### Level 4: Writing Functions

**Transactional Writing:** Students should write instructions, explanations and factual accounts, and express and explain a point of view using a range of authentic contexts, organising and linking ideas logically and making language choices appropriate to the audience.

#### Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

**Exploring Language:** Students should be able to identify, discuss, and use the conventions, structures, and language features of different texts, and discuss how they relate to the topic.

**Thinking Critically:** Students should be able to discuss and convey meanings in written texts, exploring relevant experiences and other points of view

*English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, pages 35–36

### REFERENCE

Ministry of Education. (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.



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**WHAT THE WORK SHOWS:** Hannah has a strong sense of audience and has developed a tight and well-structured piece, which she puts directly to her school's board of trustees. She maintains the momentum well, and with logic and a range of language features such as rhetorical questions and imperatives, manages to persuade her reader to a well-argued point of view.

This piece was developed over three days. It was published on a computer, after extensive discussion of her initial draft with the teacher.

Student's second draft

### Deeper features

#### Ideas

States ideas clearly and supports them well with opinions, facts, and data.

#### Vocabulary

Makes choices appropriate to audience.

#### Structure

Organises ideas into paragraphs.

#### Sentences

Uses a variety of structures for effect.

#### Language features

Uses a range of persuasive features, such as emotive language, rhetorical questions, inclusive pronouns, repetition, and the imperative.

### Chair Argument

Have you ever tried to work on hard, uncomfortable chairs for a long period of time? If you have, you will understand the distractions we students undergo at school. The very best quality chairs we have are the ones that aren't broken, and the worst you ask? Broken, bent, hard, plastic chairs which pose a risk to our safety and health as students. Health issues arise because the 'chairs' - as we call them - do not provide proper back or bottom support for our growing bodies, they also can cause injury, many a time I have been cut, bruised and scraped by these broken chairs.

How are we supposed to work and learn in this environment, and what do we do about it? We start to talk, fidget and distract ourselves and others around us. Which leads to a poor level of work when we should be producing a much higher standard of work. I know this because I've been sitting on these chairs 5 days out of 7, on an average of 40 wks a year, for 8 years. In other words: we are developing bad working habits, which are hard to break.

These bad habits may carry on through our college years to when we have jobs - if we even have jobs- What would we do then? We would have a whole generation of fidgety workers on our hands, possibly a whole new generation of unemployed people. Young unemployed people, because who would want to employ workers who cant concentrate? No one.

As a responsible Board member who cares about our learning, I'm sure you will understand and sympathize with us.

All we are asking for are some supportive, comfortable chairs, which you can provide for us, because what we want and need to work is a comfortable chair.

All we want is a simple yes.

### Surface features

Uses most grammatical conventions and spelling patterns correctly.



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