Unit 1 Writing: Boxes and Bullets: Writing Essays and Arguments

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 1**
Length: **6-8 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

The Grade 4 Unit 1 writing unit, "Boxes and Bullets: Writing Essays and Arguments," guides students through the process of crafting well-supported arguments and personal essays. This unit, spanning approximately November to January, is divided into three "bends" or phases, culminating in a celebration where students share their work.
The unit's progression is as follows:

Bend 1: Writing to Learn

◦ Students begin by writing an initial argument piece to assess their skills and then learn to generate personal narrative topics from their own experiences.
◦ They practice structured brainstorming using webs to develop ideas and then use thought prompts to elaborate on these ideas with specific details.
◦ A key focus is introduced: the "boxes and bullets" structure, where a central claim (box) is supported by reasons (bullets), which are further backed by examples and details.
◦ Students also work on basic spelling strategies, particularly with affixes.

Bend 2: Constructing a Personal Essay

◦ This bend guides students in structuring their essays with claims, reasons, and supporting examples, often using graphic organizers like the "I Like Ice Cream" chart.
◦ Students learn to draft powerful mini-stories and lists within their essays to support their points.
◦ Emphasis is placed on assembling paragraphs cohesively, crafting effective introductions and conclusions, and revising to deepen connections and improve sentence complexity.
The bend concludes with a celebration of students' growth in argument writing.

Bend 3: An Argument for Action

◦ Students apply their argumentative skills to write essays that persuade others to take action on meaningful causes, often related to social issues.
◦ They learn to conduct online research to find and embed evidence and quotes to support their claims.
◦ The focus is on refining their arguments, ensuring all parts are supported, and revising with specific goals in mind.
◦ Students enhance their writing style by incorporating prepositional phrases for added detail and sophistication.
The unit culminates in a celebration where students publish and present their essays to a chosen audience, showcasing their developed writing and advocacy skills.

This unit is designed to be part of a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including physical and social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. During this course, students are provided with opportunities to develop skills that pertain to a variety of careers.

Revision Date: June 2026

Pacing Guide

Please refer to the Language Arts Writing Workshop pacing guide for grade 3 in the curriculum folder. Sentence Study is paced and aligned within the Syntax, Style, Grammar and Conventions section. Please refer tothis folder for the scope and sequence as well as specific lessons and materials.

A sample K-5 Literacy Schedule Across a Week is accessible in instructional materials section of the Grades K-5 folder.

Standards

The identified standards reflect a developmental progression across grades/ levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness and global citizenship. The standards that follow are relevant to this course in addition to the associated content-based standards listed below.

9.4.5.CI.1	Use appropriate communication technologies to collaborate with individuals with diverse perspectives about a local and/or global climate change issue and deliberate about possible solutions (e.g., W.4.6, 3.MD.B.3,7.1.NM.IPERS.6).
9.2.5.CAP.1	Evaluate personal likes and dislikes and identify careers that might be suited to personal likes.
9.4.5.CI.3	Participate in a brainstorming session with individuals with diverse perspectives to expand one's thinking about a topic of curiosity (e.g., 8.2.5.ED.2, 1.5.5.CR1a).
P.8	Use technology to enhance productivity increase collaboration and communicate effectively. The ability to solve problems effectively begins with gathering data, seeking resources, and applying critical thinking skills.
L.WF.4.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of encoding and spelling.

L.WF.4.3	Demonstrate command of the conventions of writing, including those listed under grade three foundational skills:
9.4.5.DC.4	Model safe, legal, and ethical behavior when using online or offline technology (e.g., 8.1.5.NI.2).
L.KL.4.1	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
	Culture and geography can shape an individual's experiences and perspectives.
	Digital tools and media resources provide access to vast stores of information, but the information can be biased or inaccurate.
	Accurate and comprehensive information comes in a variety of platforms and formats and is the basis for effective decision-making.
	Different digital tools have different purposes.
RL.CI.4.2	Summarize a literary text and interpret the author's theme citing key details from the text.
W.AW.4.1	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
W.NW.4.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using narrative technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
W.WP.4.4	With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.
W.WR.4.5	Conduct short research projects that use multiple reference sources (print and non-print) and build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
W.SE.4.6	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; take notes, prioritize and categorize information; provide a list of sources.
W.RW.4.7	Write routinely over extended time frames (with time for research and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
SL.PE.4.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
SL.PI.4.4	Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.
SL.AS.4.6	Differentiate between contexts that call for formal English (e.g., presenting ideas) and situations where informal discourse is appropriate (e.g., small-group discussion); use formal English when appropriate to task and situation.

Performing Arts Standards

1.4.5.Pr6: (a). Practice drama/theatre work and share reflections individually and in small groups, and informally with an audience.

1.4.5.Re7: (a). Identify, explain, and demonstrate an understanding of both artistic choices and personal reactions made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.

1.4.5.Cn11: (a). Identify, respond to, and investigate connections to global issues including climate change, and other content areas in a dramatic/theatrical work. (b). Compare the drama/theatre conventions of a given

time period with those of the present.

Essential Questions

- How can I express my opinion clearly and support it with strong reasons and evidence?
- How do writers use structure and specific writing techniques to strengthen their personal and argument essays?
- Why is it important to consider different perspectives when writing an argument?
- How can I develop my ideas through writing to discover what I really think and believe?
- What strategies can I use to revise and improve my argument writing?

Students Will Know/ Students will be Skilled at

By the end of this unit:

- Develop a clear claim or thesis statement and support it with organized reasons and relevant evidence.
- Use essay structure effectively, including an introduction, body paragraphs with mini-stories and lists, transitions, and a conclusion.
- Generate and elaborate on ideas through brainstorming, thought prompts, and writing-to-learn strategies.
- Consider and address counterclaims to strengthen their arguments and show awareness of different perspectives.
- Revise and edit their writing using checklists, exemplars, and peer feedback to improve clarity, organization, and conventions.

Evidence/Performance Tasks

Students demonstrate differentiated proficiency through both formative and summative assessments in the classroom. Based on individual student readiness and performance, assessments can be implemented as formative and/or summative.

Developmental progression across years in both reading and writing is evidenced by multiple benchmark assessment screeners, administered three times per year. Follow up diagnostic assessments are used to target skill remediation. Student proficiency allows for additional or alternative assessment based on demonstration or absence of skill.

The performance tasks listed below are examples of the types of assessments teachers may use in the classroom and the data collected by the district to track student progress.

Formative:

- Answer essential questions
- Teacher observations/conferring notes
- Turn and talks
- Partnerships rehearsing their writing
- Peer Conferences
- Writer's Notebook (quick writes/drafts/prewrites)
- Teacher checklists using mini-lessons for measurable skills
- Writing Conferences: Individual and small group
- Writing Partnership work and discussions
- Writing folders with student work
- Writing pieces to note the growth need of the writer
- Observations
- Listening in on partnership discussion of writing piece
- Drafts online (Google Docs)
- Writing Club work and discussions

Summative:

- Students should have 2-3 final pieces to score not including the post assessment.
- Published pieces
- Score grammar and spelling in final drafts only
- Student portfolios
- During publishing students read their piece to assess oral speaking and reading skills
- Rubrics: created for the standards-based report card as well as teacher-created.
- Standards should be addressed as reported on the Standards-Based Report Card and should reflect this work:

  *Orients the reader by establishing a situation (introduction)

  *Organize your writing into a sequence that unfolds naturally and uses a variety of transitional words

  *Provides an appropriate end to their writing piece

  *Elaborates by using precise details and descriptions

Benchmark:

- Benchmark writing assessments: opinion, narrative, and informational, scored using rubrics, district-created and provided.
- Located in the shared Grades K-5 Language Arts folder on the Google Drive, reported three times per year

Learning Plan

Our upper elementary writing instruction follows a balanced literacy approach including a number of strategies and techniques in Writing Workshop. These include mini-lessons, shared writing, independent writing, small group strategy instruction, one-to-one conferencing, partnerships and/or writing clubs. Writing Workshop emphasizes immersion, independence, and choice. Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer. Each unit ends with a celebration of learning where children share their writing with others in the school community.

To assist students in reaching the goals for this unit, teachers will guide them through the following steps:

- Immersing students to study the purpose, structure, and characteristics of writing while generating possible writing ideas
- Choosing topics by considering focused areas of expertise
- Organizing information and writing pieces
- Elaborating to increase writing volume and to add a variety of detail
- Revising and editing to prepare for publishing

Through mentor text, students will be immersed in text type in order to recognize text features and structures of the particular type of writing. It is suggested that students form writing partnerships with the goal of collaborating and supporting each other throughout the writing process. Grammar and conventions mini lessons will be taught throughout this unit during Sentence Study.

Lessons should follow the mini-lesson format:

- Teaching point(s) for each lesson
- Connection: Connects new learning to previous learning/lessons
- Teach/Modeling: Uses ‘think alouds’ when modeling what you expect students to do
- Guided Practice/Active Engagement: Guides students through practice of the teaching point
- Link to Independent Practice: Helps writers understand the purpose for the writing they are about to do and the skills/craft they will be practicing/applying independently as good writers
- Independent Writing/Student Conferences: Provides time for students to do independent writing while teacher confers with individual students, works with small groups, or writing clubs.
- Closure/Sharing: Pull students back together and recognize the work they have done relating to the teaching point.

The architecture of a writing conference includes:

- Research
- Decide
- Teach and Coach with guided practice

- Link

A writing club is like a book club. It is a group of students that meet to discuss one student in the group's piece at a time. The students listen to the piece read aloud. If on Google Docs, it can be shared with the group and they can follow along. (This takes a lot coaching in the beginning.) Students provide feedback to the writer, first what they did really well, and provide evidence from the piece that supports it. Then they provide something that they can use to enhance their piece and evidence as to why it can be changed. The writer that shared can use the advice. Developing trust in the group and valuable advice takes time. Over time groups can run on their own.

*This unit of writing fits with the nonfiction unit of reading. Students can gather evidence to support their opinion during reading workshop. It will be helpful to have some quick writes or flash drafts to help students think of ideas for opinion writing.

Teachers may personalize instruction during this unit and address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students.

Before Beginning This Unit . . .

Before beginning this unit:

- Clear out writing folders from the previous unit.
- Begin by administering the Argument Writing On-Demand assessment.
- Gather and prepare mentor texts and exemplar- collect student exemplars such as "We Need a Garden" and "A True Friend," as well as anchor charts like "Ways to Push Our Thinking" and "Writing to Develop Big Ideas." Prepare printed mini-copies for student use and display materials for modeling.
- Set up writing tools and organizational systems. Ensure students have access to writer's notebooks or folders (both paper or digital), sticky notes, and printed checklists.
- Organize a classroom "Issue Wall" or chart to help students brainstorm relevant topics.

Detailed Curriculum Map

Teaching Points and lessons are located in the K-5 folder under Grade 4 Curriculum for Language Arts. These curriculum unit guides include not only aligned teaching points to standards, but also specific lessons and appropriate resources. Guidelines for preparing to teach the unit as well as goals for the end of the unit are outlined. Academic vocabulary and prerequisite skills are identified. Essential questions and possible assessments are detailed as well.

Materials

The materials used in this course allow for integration of a variety of instructional, enrichment, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

Instructional Materials

The instructional materials which correspond with this unit are linked in the detailed curriculum map under resources and housed in the Grades K-5 folder under grade 4.

The core materials for this unit include the Units of Study in Writing for grade 3, The Reading and Writing Project at Mossflower, 2026. Here is a link to the instructional materials for this unit.

Please refer to curriculum folder under grade 4 for specific materials for Sentence Study.

Possible Mentor Texts:

- Various Time for Kids articles or Scholastic News

  Newsela

  Raz Kids Plus

  Reading A-Z titles

  "Most Likely to Succeed" by Malcom Gladwell shows compare and contrast
    - Compared picking teachers to scouting football players.

  Snakes by Seymour Simon shows Ideas grouped together
    - Each page or two is about another category of snake facts with one big picture, but no chapter

headings like an essay.

Oh, Rats by Albert Marrin shows pros and cons.

- Some chapters are about problems rat cause, others about ways they help or are very interesting.

- *Should There Be Zoos?* by Tony Stead
- *Groundhog Gets a Say* by Pamela Curtis Swallow
- *All The Places to Love* by Patricia MacLachlan
- *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry
- *Animals Nobody Loves* by Seymour Simon

To use with strong/weak reasons:

- *Earrings*, by Judith Viorst
- *I Wanna Igua*na, by Karen Orloff.
- *Can I Keep Him?*, Steven Kellogg
- *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*, Doreen Cronin
- *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*, Mo Willems

Questions to ask during mentor text read to aid opinion writing:

- Can you tell how the author feels about the topic? How?
- How is the opinion stated or shown?
- What reasons are given or shown for the opinion? Are there other reasons or details the author could include?
- What key words and phrases are used to express the opinion?
- How does the author introduce the piece? Does the introduction begin to draw the reader toward the opinion? How? If not, what other ideas could the author try?
- What reasons does the author use to help convince? Who would be drawn toward these reasons?
- How did the author close the piece? If the closing doesn't move you, what other ideas could the author try?
- How is this piece organized?
- What linking words are used?
- I agree/disagree with the writer about...

Potential Teaching Charts:

- Current and Previous Student's work to use as models of writing done well and writing that could be revised.
- Teacher writing piece and examples (write along with the class)
- Sample Pieces: "Parties are Simply a Waste," "Why Not Air Dry?" "Three Cheers For Audio Books"
- Opinion Articles to dissect
- Scholastic News and Time for Kids have a 'Debate' section that provides a prompt and two opinions. These can be used to developing ideas, quick writes, etc.
- Elements of Persuasive Texts
- Ideas for Persuasive topics (Things that Bug Me!)
- Testing the Quality of my Reasons
- Notice and Name (Parts of opinion writing)

- Reasons that Support (Strong/Weak)
- Ways to Convince an Audience
- Persuasive Words (Words That Pack a Punch)
- When to Use transition words (or a list of transition words and phrases)
- Opinion writing leads
- Opinion writing closings
- Quoting Text Prompts: The author of ___stated that___, In the article___ it said, for instance, from the reading I learned, For example, according to,

Teacher Resources

- *The Writing Strategies Book*, Jennifer Serravallo
- *Feedback that Moves Writers Forward,* Patty McGee
- *Patterns of Power*, Jeff Anderson
- *Mechanically Inclined*, Jeff Anderson
- *The Story of My Thinking*, Gretchen Bernabei
- Trail of Breadcrumbs Website
- Two Writing Teachers Blog
- *Assessing Writers*, Carl Anderson
- Cranford Public School Grades K-5 Google Folder for instructional materials

Suggested Strategies for Modifications and Accommodations

Content specific accommodations and modifications as well as Career Ready Practices are listed here for all students, including: Special Education, English Language Learners, At Risk of School Failure, Gifted and Talented, Students with 504 plans.

The structure of writing workshop is designed to differentiate and address specific goals and learning for each reader:

- The unit includes presentation of material through multiple modalities such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic to address the unique learning styles of all students.
- The teacher will assign, assess and modify if necessary to address the specific needs of the learner.
- Students have individualized choice of topics within each unit.
- Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer.

Possible accommodations during writing workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Use visual presentations of all materials to include organizers, charts, word walls.
- Allow students to set individual goals for writing.
- Work in partnerships

- Give responses in a form (verbal or written) that is easier for the student
- Take additional time to compete a task or project
- Take frequent breaks
- Use an alarm to help with time management
- Mark text with a highlighter or other manipulative such as a post-it
- Receive help coordinating assignments
- Answering fewer questions or completing shorter tasks
- Create alternate assignments or homework
- Provide distinct steps in a process; eliminate unnecessary steps, as needed.
- Manage executive function by scaffolding process and amending deadlines
- Access speech to text function on computer

For possible modifications to content during writing workshop, please . . .

- Adhere to all modifications and accommodations as prescribed in IEP and 504 plans.
- Refer to Strategies for striving students
- Refer to the Pathways to Intervention documents in the K-5 folder for specific appropriate interventions.
- Consult with Cranford Problem Solving Team (CPST), as needed.

Framework for Alternative Setting (LEAP Program at Lincoln School)

In our K–5 alternative school setting, each class consists of students who require a highly personalized approach to reading instruction. The district's core Writing Units of Study will continue to serve as the primary writing curriculum framework; however, lessons will be further adapted to ensure accessibility and engagement for all learners. Teachers will use a combination of pacing adjustments, flexible timing, and individualized goal setting to meet students at their current skill levels. Instruction will be delivered through a blend of whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one settings, with intentional scaffolds in place to build confidence and reduce frustration.

To adapt any writing unit for an alternative school serving students with school avoidance, anxiety, behavior challenges, and social constraints, teachers should employ flexible, supportive modifications while aligning with grade-level writing standards (focusing on organization, elaboration, and mechanics) and speaking/listening standards (focusing on collaborative discussions).

- Timing Adjustments: Extend the pacing of instructional blocks or bends (e.g., extending a typical 2-week drafting phase to 3 weeks) with shorter daily writing sessions (20–30 minutes). Incorporate calming transitions or choice-based entry activities to ease transition anxiety.
- Activity Modifications: During the initial brainstorming and topic-generation phase, use sensory-friendly methods like drawing, sketching, or voice recording instead of demanding whole-group sharing. During structural planning, provide pre-made graphic organizers tailored to the specific genre's layout (e.g., chronological, narrative plot maps, or thesis-and-reason structures) and allow low-stakes, paired verbal rehearsals to build confidence. For the revision phase, incorporate supportive one-on-one teacher conferring for feedback, replacing peer review sessions with optional self-reflection journals. Simplify checklists and rubrics with visual icons, and offer flexible writing alternatives like

dictated drafts or digital speech-to-text tools for students with severe writing aversion.

- Intervention Programs: Integrate comprehension-focused frameworks (such as Visualizing and Verbalizing) to unpack exemplar texts, structured foundations programs (like UFLI) for keyword jotting and sentence-level drafting, and systematic phonics/morphology programs (like Sonday System) during conventions exploration (e.g., mechanics, grammar, and parts of speech).
- NJTSS Framework: Implement Tier 1 universal supports, such as explicit modeling of introductions, transitions, and conclusions with visual aids; Tier 2 targeted small-group interventions for elaboration and planning, tracked via regular anecdotal notes; and Tier 3 intensive individualized sessions for goal-setting and revision, prioritizing emotional safety and student agency.
- Data Analysis: Leverage formative assessments (e.g., conferring notes, on-demand writing samples) and summative pre/post benchmarks to personalize pacing, ensuring students produce structured, cohesive compositions in a nurturing environment that celebrates writing progress through low-pressure, voluntary sharing.