

Introducing Argumentation Structure to Elementary Students

Although claims, grounds, backing, and qualifiers reflect ideas that are too sophisticated for younger students, teachers can still introduce them to the basic argumentation structure. To do so, Marzano (2012) recommends these sentence starters to frame an opinion paper; for kindergarten, the first prompt alone might suffice.

- **"My new idea is . . .":** This sentence starter helps students learn to generate a claim. Home or school can serve as the impetus for topics, such as "My new idea is that dogs should not have to wear a leash," and "My new idea is that kids should decide their own bedtime."
- **"I think this is true because . . .":** Students can learn about grounds or reasons with this prompt. For example, "I think this is true because dogs can run faster and farther without a leash," and "I think this is true because some kids can read or play longer and still get up in time for school."
- **"I actually saw . . .":** If students are ready to tackle this prompt, they can begin to learn the concept of backing or evidence. They might augment what they witnessed firsthand with an anecdote or a quote from someone. For instance, "I actually saw dogs on short leashes at the park. These dogs seemed like they wanted to take off and run but couldn't. Then there were other dogs without leashes that were catching Frisbees and running all over the park happily." And "I actually saw my brother stay up late to color and he wasn't even cranky. In the morning, he popped out of bed for breakfast and got dressed easily."
- **"But I don't know . . .":** Students can try identifying qualifiers or evidence counter to their claim. For instance, "I don't know whether leashes must be on dogs in all neighborhoods, but I will try to find out," and "I don't know if some children get in bad moods when they wake up tired from going to bed too late. I'll have to ask my friends."

My new idea is...

I think this is true because ...

I actually saw ...

But I don't know ...