



Elaboration Guidelines: Grades 6 - 11

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DEFINITION OF ELABORATION

Elaboration is the process of selecting and integrating details that support, explain, illustrate, and/or develop ideas. Regardless of whether these ideas come from source materials or from experience, full, relevant elaboration enhances writing. Depending on the writing purpose, details can include relevant facts, sensory details, definitions, examples, anecdotes, scenarios, descriptions, quotations, etc. These details must then be adequately explained and connected. The purpose of elaboration is to develop ideas so that readers can understand and appreciate a writer’s message (theme, main idea, claim, thesis, etc.); therefore, thoughtful elaboration is always guided by the purpose for the writing and the needs of the audience.

ARGUMENTATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK FULL WRITES

For argumentative writing, elaboration is the process of providing supporting details to explain, analyze, illustrate, or develop key information. In the lower grades (opinion writing), writers elaborate on reasons that support opinions. However in grades 6 and up (argumentative writing), writers integrate and develop evidence to support claims—positions on a debatable. Argumentative writing should not be confused with persuasive writing (see CCSS document for clarification of the differences).

Levels of Elaboration

1. **Basic, listed support/elaboration:** Texts typically present a list of details that is often vague and/or loosely connected to ideas supporting the claim of a text. This list can easily be reordered without changing or confusing the meaning of the text.
2. **General layered elaboration:** Texts typically provide a sentence-to-sentence progression of ideas/points, examples, explanations, etc. These details generally develop evidence/reasons to support a claim. Source-based evidence may be in the form of general or imprecise references. Reordering of the text might sometimes alter meaning or weaken the connection of ideas.
3. **Specific layered elaboration:** Texts typically provide a sentence-to-sentence progression of ideas/points utilizing specific and purposeful techniques and precise language to build an argument. Writers integrate specific and relevant source-based evidences—facts, details, examples, etc.—into their arguments. Reordering of the text would substantively change meaning and often weaken the connection of ideas.

Elaboration Strategies

Some elaboration strategies for argumentative writing include (but are not limited to)-

- Clear claims about debatable issues
- Adequate context to explain the issue and its importance
- Definitions for related terms
- Address, acknowledgment, and/or rebuttal for alternate or opposing claims (grade 7+)
- Integration of credible evidence, including [grade-appropriate] data, statistics or similar study results, and [expert] quotations to support claims and/or reasons
- Explanations/analysis/interpretation of evidence and clarifying its significance
- Relevant commentary
- Proposed compromises or solutions (e.g., call to action), and/or qualified claims
- Examples that illustrate reasons. Note that generalizable examples—typical or generally representative—are more convincing than personal examples. Personal connections are not discouraged but do *not* substitute for the use of verifiable, source-based evidence, especially at the secondary level
- Rhetorical questions or other rhetorical devices (e.g., allusions, appeal to logos, repetition, parallelism, fragments for effect) to enhance arguments (most effective when used judiciously)
- Building argument through logical reasoning (e.g., causal, arguing from analogy or definition, etc. as appropriate to grade level)

Note: choices of elaboration/development techniques are dependent on audience and writing forms/genres (e.g., essays, speeches, editorials, etc.).

EXPLANATORY PERFORMANCE TASK FULL WRITES

Distinguishing between **informative** and **explanatory** writing: Informational texts (grades 3-5) *provide information* appropriate for the subject/audience with a focus on a “**main/controlling idea**.” Explanatory texts (grades 6+) *provide explanations* via thoughtful analysis/synthesis appropriate for the subject/audience. Explanatory texts are “**thesis-driven**.” For explanatory writing, elaboration is the process of providing supporting details to explain, analyze, illustrate, synthesize, and develop key information. A note about the difference between thesis-driven texts and arguments: explanatory writing is similar to argument in that it attempts to “prove” a thesis; one key difference between the two, however, is that argument always deals with a debatable issue and builds a case by providing evidence to support a claim and rebut counterclaims.

Levels of Elaboration

1. Basic, listed support/elaboration: Texts typically present a list of details that is often vague and/or loosely connected to ideas supporting the thesis of a text. This list can easily be reordered without changing or confusing the meaning of the text.
2. General layered elaboration: Texts typically present a sentence-to-sentence progression of ideas/points, examples, explanations, etc. These details generally develop ideas supporting the thesis. Source based evidence may be in the form of general or imprecise references. Reordering of the text might sometimes alter meaning or weaken the connection of ideas.
3. Specific layered elaboration: Texts typically present a sentence-to-sentence progression of ideas/points utilizing specific and purposeful techniques to develop and support a thesis using precise language. Writers integrate specific and relevant source-based evidence—facts, details, examples, etc.—into their explanations. Reordering of the text would substantively change meaning and often weaken the connection of ideas.

Elaboration Strategies

Some elaboration strategies for explanatory writing include (but are not limited to) -

- A clear and defensible thesis
- Connections (Text-to-text; text-to-self*; text-to-world)
- Evidence, including data, statistics or similar study results, including quotations from experts
- Definitions for relevant ideas
- Description, including purpose-specific vocabulary
- Examples (generalizable examples—typical or generally representative—are more convincing than personal examples. Personal connections* are not discouraged but do *not* substitute for the use of verifiable, source-based evidence)
- Inferences/interpretations/conclusions
- Relevant commentary
- Proving (substantiating or confirming) thesis through logical reasoning (e.g., causal, arguing from analogy or definition, etc. as appropriate to grade level)

Note: choices of elaboration/development techniques are dependent on audience and writing forms/genres (e.g., essays, letters, articles, website articles, etc.). For explanatory writing, choices of elaboration techniques are also dependent on text structure/organization used (e.g., cause/effect, compare/contrast, pro/con, process analysis/sequence, reason/example).

NARRATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK FULL WRITES

Narrative elaboration is the process of **integrating** and **developing** grade-appropriate **story elements** (e.g., setting, character(s)/narrator, conflict(s), events) through the careful selection and integration of descriptive details and/or dialogue to “show” (rather than tell) the action and/or to establish the mood/tone:

- Descriptive details provide distinguishing characteristics or information about characters, events, etc. Effective descriptive details often rely on sensory language (what/how something looks, smells, tastes, feels) and/or figurative language
- Narratives often utilize dialogue to reveal characters (including their thoughts, attitudes, and feelings), conflicts, situations, etc.

Levels of Elaboration

1. Basic, listed elaboration: “Stories” typically list events/details that are often vague and/or loosely connected. Details may be unexplained. Often, these events/details are randomly ordered, and so the plot does not advance.
2. General integrated elaboration: Stories typically present narrative elements (characters, setting, conflict, etc.) that attempt to advance a plot. These details may “tell” rather than “show” the characters/events. Source-based information¹, when relevant, may be awkwardly integrated.
3. Specific integrated elaboration: Stories typically develop narrative elements (characters, setting, conflict, etc.) that advance a strong plot. Precise language and well-developed details “show” the characters/events. Source-based information¹, when relevant, enhances the story.

Elaboration Strategies

Some **elaboration strategies** to develop narratives include (but are not limited to) -

- *Characters*, often including a narrator, who capture the reader’s attention and provide a clear point of view. Often, character traits are developed through *dialogue*
- A *plot* including *rising action*, *climax*², and *resolution* (e.g., closure and reflection). The narrative arc often goes beyond simplistic beginning, middle, end (e.g., breakfast-to-bed or “then I woke up” stories)
- A *setting* to provide background information (context) to help readers visualize the story
- A *conflict*² (internal or external)
- *Pacing*, which could include foreshadowing, flashback, transitions that show sequence of events such as slowing down or speeding up action (e.g., often through the purposeful use of long and short sentences to slow down or speed up the action)
- A *theme* that emerges
- *Style and tone/mood*, often established through the use of *sensory language* (including vivid, active *verbs*) and *descriptive details* that “zoom in/out” of the action

¹ Writing narratives based on source materials: It is important to understand that professional writers conduct research so that their settings, characters, narrative situations, etc. are more authentic and therefore plausible. Even in fantasy writing, there needs to be enough grounded-in-reality detail for readers to “suspend disbelief.”

² memoir, which is often structured as narrative, may not always have an obvious conflict or climax