



Elaboration Guidelines: Grades 3 - 5

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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 and 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 (main idea, opinion, etc.); therefore, thoughtful elaboration is always guided by the purpose for the writing and the needs of the audience.

OPINION PERFORMANCE TASK FULL WRITES

For opinion writing, elaboration is the process of providing supporting details to explain, analyze, illustrate, or develop key information. In opinion writing, writers elaborate on *reasons* that support opinions.

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 opinion 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 an opinion. 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 support for an opinion. 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 opinion writing include (but are not limited to):

- Clear statement of opinion (a position on a topic)
- Adequate context to explain the issue and its importance
- Definitions for related terms
- Integration of credible evidence, including grade-appropriate information. At grades 3-5, evidence can include survey results, statistics or similar study results, and quotations to support reasons
- Explanations of evidence (interpreting what the evidence means, clarifying why it is important, etc.)
- Relevant commentary
- 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, even at the grade 3-5 level.
- Rhetorical questions or similar word play (such as purposeful repetition, sentence fragments, etc.) to strengthen arguments

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

INFORMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK FULL WRITES

Informational texts provide information appropriate for the subject/audience. Informational text is focused on a “main or controlling idea.” For informative writing, elaboration is the process of providing supporting details to explain, interpret, illustrate, and develop key information. In informative writing, writers integrate and develop that information and evidence to support a main (or controlling) idea.

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 main/controlling idea 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 main/controlling idea. 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 main/controlling idea 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 informative writing include (but are not limited to):

- A clear main (or controlling) idea to focus the writing
- Connections (text-to-text; text-to-self; text-to-world)
- Evidence including grade-appropriate information. At grades 3-5, evidence can include survey results, statistics or similar study results, and quotations to support main/controlling ideas
- Definitions for relevant ideas
- Examples that illustrate information. 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
- Relevant commentary
- Inferences/interpretations/conclusions

Note: choices of elaboration/development strategies are dependent on audience and writing forms/genres (e.g., reports, essays, articles, website articles, etc.). For informational writing, especially by grade 5, choices of elaboration techniques are also dependent on text structure or organization used (e.g., compare/contrast, pro/con, reason/example)

NARRATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK FULL WRITES

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

- Descriptive details provide distinguishing characteristics or information about items, characters, events, etc. Effective descriptive details often rely on sensory language (what/how something looks, smells, tastes, feels)
- Narratives often include 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 information**, 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 basic plot including a beginning and rising action, a climax, and a resolution (closure)
- A *setting* to provide background information (context) to help readers visualize the story
- A *conflict* (internal or external)
- *Pacing*, which could include narrative transitions that show sequence of events
- *Style* 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.”