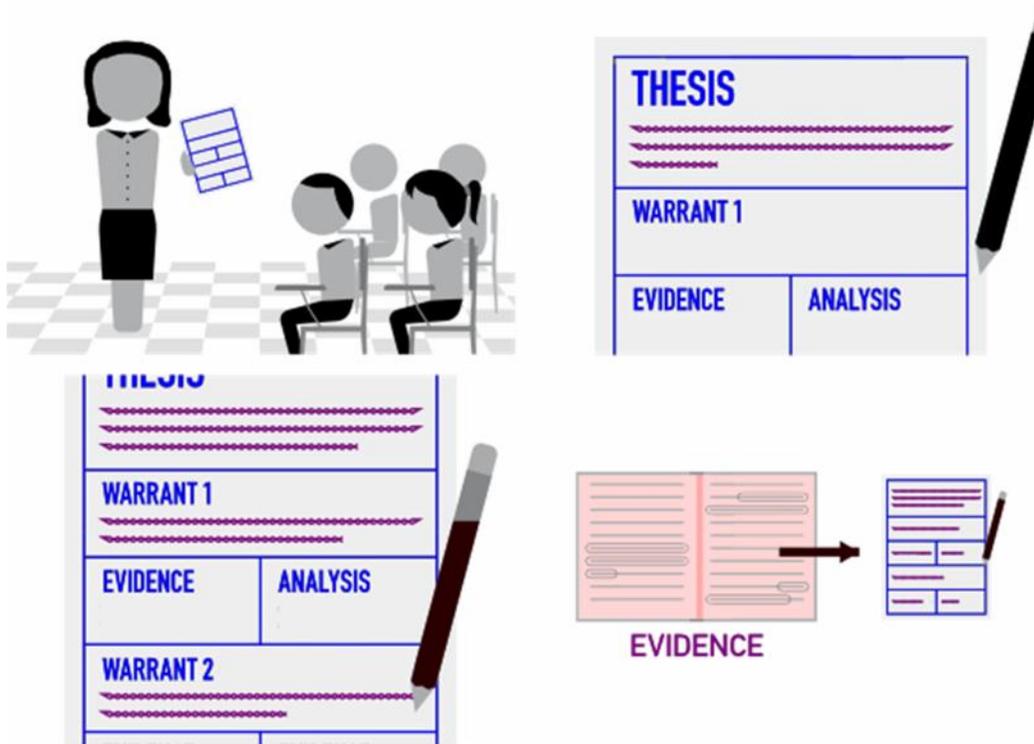


Essay Pre-Writing



Students are asked to complete a graphic organizer that breaks down a paragraph or essay into its parts (topic sentences, supporting claims and evidence to back those supporting claims). This assignment can be used to help students to write a formal essay or to prepare opening statements for a full-length class debate. To set up the activity, teachers create a graphic organizer with spaces for students to write a claim and three warrants supporting that claim. Depending on the complexity of argumentation desired, there might also be a box for a piece of textual or other evidence to strengthen each warrant, as well as one for an explanation of how the evidence, warrant, and claim are all connected.

Once students have filled out their graphic organizers, the teacher helps them transform their work into an essay using as much scaffolding as needed. (This is where teachers could map the EBA language onto whatever formulas they already use for essay-writing: MEAL paragraphs, the hamburger model, and so on.)

Teaching the five-paragraph essay is much easier when students are already familiar with EBA concepts like “claim” and “warrant.” They simply need to understand that a claim is a thesis and that each body paragraph provides its own warrant and evidence to support the overall thesis. In this activity they use a graphic organizer to make that connection. Of course, more advanced classes could incorporate counterarguments or evaluate the relative strength of warrants; what appears here is only one possible version of this activity.

The Essay Pre-Writing Activity also works as an extension of lessons like the Evidence Scavenger Hunt and the Defeating the Critic Paragraph . Students might even give a soapbox-style speech that runs through their “basic essay structures so that the class can compare and contrast strategies for organizing writing. After all, any time students find themselves having to structure complex spoken arguments, they are also working on organizing their writing—whether they know it or not.

| Step | Teacher Move | Student Move |
|------|---|--|
| 1 | Prepare and distribute a suitable graphic organizer. | Fill in the graphic organizer—individually, in groups, or as a class. |
| 2 | Provide as much scaffolding as you deem necessary to make clear the connections between claims and theses, warrants and topic sentences, and so on. | Use your graphic organizer to outline and then write a five-paragraph essay supporting your claim. |