

Multi-Day Lesson Plan: Teaching the Claim, Evidence, Reasoning (CER) Writing Strategy

Overview

Grade Level: Middle Grades (6-8)

Number of Students: 6-8

Focus: Persuasive/Argumentative writing — Planning and Drafting stages

Goal: Students will learn to write clear, logical paragraphs using CER by collaboratively and independently creating graphic organizers and paragraphs, with opportunities for peer review.

Day 1: Introducing CER & Whole-Class Modeling

Objective

- Understand the CER framework: Claim, Evidence, Reasoning
- Participate in a group creation of a CER paragraph from a shared topic

Materials

- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Markers
- CER graphic organizer (projected or printed)
- Sample topic (e.g., “School should have longer recess or Middle Schoolers still need recess.”)

Pacing & Activities (~45-50 minutes)

1. Engage & Introduce (10 min)

- This mini lesson takes a bit more time, but it is a fun way to introduce the CER strategy: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Yx_DhgffP8Lo0KY6PhfOPr75e2tIZ-YDB4lnb8SXTQo/edit?usp=drive_link Candy Bar Mini-Lesson
- Teacher narration:
“Middle schoolers love to argue, right? Today, I’m going to teach you a strategy that helps you win arguments in writing, using Claim, Evidence, and Reasoning — or CER. This will help you clearly say what you think, back it up with facts, and explain why it matters.”
- Ask students for examples of times they argued successfully or not.
 - The teacher listens and engages as students chat and share stories

2. Teach CER Framework (10 min)

- Write Claim, Evidence, Reasoning on board.

- Or display this graphic:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lbhDqR0Yj8NCkIDky-w2TjiK2AuFt16V/view?usp=drive_link Color CER Organizer
 - Define each with guiding questions:
 - Claim: What's your main point?
 - Evidence: What facts support your claim?
 - Reasoning: How does your evidence prove your claim?
 - Use a real-life example (e.g., "Recess should be longer because kids need breaks." or "Middle Schoolers need recess.")

3. Whole-Class Modeling (20 min)

- Select topic: "Middle School should have recess."
- Think aloud to write a claim.
 - "Hmmm, we don't have recess in the middle school. When do we have a break? Oh yeah, during lunch! But that's not super long. What we need is a recess!"
 - "I think middle schoolers should get recess. That sounds about right. I think I can argue that!" Teacher writes the claim in the graphic organizer.
- Ask students to help brainstorm evidence (facts, observations).
 - "What do you kids think? Why do you think middle schoolers should get recess?" Teacher writes down any and all ideas, asking questions to clarify as they speak.
 - "Ok, that's a lot of reasons. I think I need to narrow it down. I want to share the most convincing evidence. I think I will go with this, this, and this (teacher circles key evidence)."
- Teacher narrates aloud while moving to the next area:
 - "Now I need to explain why my evidence matters. Let me see. Well, one reason was that little kids get recess. But how do I explain why we should too? How about I remind the reader that middle schoolers are kids too? I could say 'Middle schoolers are kids, so they need recess just like little kids.'"
- Continue to narrate similarly with the next two ideas chosen.
- Teacher talks aloud, "Ok, so now I have my evidence and my reasons. Let me take a minute to read my organizer aloud. I want to be sure I didn't leave anything out and that I understand my plan to argue this."
- Read the completed graphic organizer aloud, stopping to correct missing words etc.
- Write a paragraph as a class from the organizer.
 - Teacher says, "Wow, that organizer really helped! Now I just need to put it all together. I bet I need to start with my claim (teacher types in the claim). Next I want to get my evidence to prove it. Should I just type in all my evidence and then explain it? No, I don't think that works. Maybe I will type one piece of evidence and then explain it, then move on to the next! That sounds best!" Teacher types in evidence, followed by the reasoning.
 1. Note: be careful to model how to remove duplicate information. Students may have "doubled up" by writing part of their evidence and reasoning on both parts of the graphic organizer. "So, I typed in 'Kids in middle school need recess like little kids' and 'middle schoolers need recess because

they are kids. I can work it out to not repeat by saying, 'Middle schoolers need recess like little kids. After all, they are kids, too.' That should work!"

- Reread the paragraph aloud to students and add a closing sentence that repeats the claim in slightly different words
 1. Teacher says, "Ok, now I am going to read it aloud and add a closing sentence." Teacher reads it aloud. "I want to end strong and repeat my claim at the end. I think I will use strong words like this 'It is so important that middle schoolers get to have recess.'

4. Wrap-Up (5 min)

- Review the three parts of CER and celebrate a successful piece of writing with mock toasts, funny claps (fireworks clap, golfer clap, etc.)
- Let them know that tomorrow they will get to work with a partner to argue their own point.

Differentiation

- Use visuals and simple language to explain each part.
- Repeat student responses aloud to reinforce understanding.
- If a student seems fearful of the upcoming work, take a moment to remind them that they can take it one step at a time. Consider having a fidget available for them tomorrow as the lesson commences.

Day 2: Partner Practice — Planning & Drafting a CER Paragraph

Objective

- Plan and draft a CER paragraph collaboratively using a graphic organizer
- Practice articulating claims, evidence, and reasoning with a partner

Materials

- CER graphic organizer handouts (one per pair)
- Web graphic organizer (one for the teacher and one for each pair)
 - https://drive.google.com/file/d/12GHME1xrPs1YbwKYm1nbplaC6TG66Sbx/view?usp=drive_link
- Writing paper or notebooks
- Sample prompt options (e.g., “Why should pets be allowed at school?” “Why is recycling important?”)
- A poster with the steps needed to complete the assignment
https://docs.google.com/document/d/18lyk7FpSo1NCyQinaiyM2N9SxINUeezapLjR1iDHEQU/edit?usp=drive_link

Pacing & Activities (~50 minutes)

1. Review & Mini-Lesson (10 min)

- Teacher narration:
“Let’s quickly review CER. Remember, your claim is what you are arguing or trying to convince someone of. Then, you find facts to back it up — your evidence. Finally, you explain how your facts prove your claim — your reasoning.”
- Show example paragraph from Day 1.
 - Consider having the student come up to the board and use tools to highlight the claim, evidence, and reasoning in different colors.
- Explain that today they will write a CER from the graphic organizer with a partner.

2. Partner Brainstorm (15 min)

- The class brainstorms multiple possible topics to write about. This can be filled in on a simple web created by the teacher. Or, use this organizer displayed on the board:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/12GHME1xrPs1YbwKYm1nbplaC6TG66Sbx/view?usp=drive_link
- Display the CER Writing Steps prominently
 - DO NOT make all steps visible, expose just 2 or 3 steps at a time to avoid overwhelm.
 - You might want to put checkmarks next to each as most of the students get them done, then move the cover down as they progress.
- Partners are assigned
- Students have a set amount of time to choose one of the topics and write their claim.

- Have students come and read their claim to an adult for approval and encouragement, before moving on to the next step.
- If the claim needs edits, the students work on it and return before the next step commences for them.
- Partners discuss and fill in the graphic organizer: the claim should already be written at the top. They can build another web on the back of their paper and brainstorm evidence if they like or you can give them a copy of the web graphic organizer to use.
 - Note: One reason to draw the organizer is to help students understand that a writer doesn't have to have a printed graphic organizer. He or she can draw one quickly. This really emphasizes the self regulation these strategies aim to teach.
- Teacher circulates, asking guiding questions:
 - “What’s your claim?”
 - “What facts support it?”
 1. This may be a good place to allow students who are catching on quickly to do a bit of research to help them find evidence.
 - a. To teach this concept use this Slides presentation:
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1csV21KjB7_sTb7V94xjFkNA8cGchfyyl3QTmxu8DBZ0/edit?usp=drive_link
 2. Only do this if you have already taught internet research skills or they have learned this before
 - “How does that fact prove your point?” “How can you make it convincing?”
- Support students needing help with sentence starters or word banks.
 - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qSIPB_IR_3lodIBD5Bpoc693m3dukNXBqV1N_4eo5sU/edit?usp=drive_link Sentence frames
 - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vLpuuMNX4PzpR6LGeuAdliUaDEzl4az_vSI4jR_0aUw/edit?usp=drive_link CER Word Banks

3. Prepare to Write

- After students show that they have completed the entire organizer, ask them to read it aloud together, just like the teacher did yesterday
- Explain that they can start to write when they are done reading their organizer aloud.
- Circulate to encourage students as they read and possibly notice some missing elements or unclear ideas.
- Give encouragement for clear ideas and perseverance.

4. Draft Paragraph Together (20 min)

- Pairs use their organizer to write a paragraph.
- Encourage simple sentences focusing on CER structure, not grammar.
- Teacher models writing alongside students for those who need extra support.
 - What does this look like?
 1. When writing “alongside” a student, the teacher is actually doing the same steps as the students are. He or she is working to go at a similar pace to them.
 2. The teacher allows students to glance at his or her work to get an idea of “what’s next” as needed.

3. Some teachers do this on the smart board so that all can see the writing as it is produced. They are welcome to “get ideas” at this stage from what they see the teacher writing.
4. This method establishes that everyone writes, even the teacher. It also reduces the sense that the teacher is hovering over them while they write.

5. Share & Reflect (5 min)

- Encourage students to “stop and read back” throughout the writing process
- Have the pairs read their paragraph aloud to each other first.
- Then, volunteers read their paragraphs aloud to the class.
- Teacher and peers give positive feedback on claim clarity and use of evidence.
 - Do any or all of these steps as time allows.

6. Teacher explains that tomorrow they will do peer reviews, volunteers will share stories, and they will write their own CER.

Differentiation

- Allow students to record responses verbally if writing is challenging.
- Provide sentence starters: “My claim is…”, “One fact that supports this is…”, “This shows that…”
- Use word banks related to the topics.

Day 3: Peer Review and Independent Writing

Objective

- Engage in peer review of partner work
- Independently plan and write a CER paragraph
- Engage in peer review of independent writing

Materials

- Blank CER graphic organizers
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cOmQlIAASUZrsJxOt77EnD-fT4wNVeyT/view?usp=drive_link
- Writing materials - pencil, paper, highlighter sets
- Peer review checklist
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1K7_k18hxQ0xcAQAhFphTuymhtK2EBp8rT_AmvXktbPU/edit?usp=drive_link

Pacing & Activities (~50 minute

1. **Review the CER strategy parts briefly by reading the anchor chart with students**
2. **Explain that today they will review a peer's writing and complete an independent piece of writing**
3. **Review writing from the previous session**
 - Pass back yesterday's written work and have them exchange their writing with one another
 - Give each student a Peer Review Checklist
 - Take time to read through the organizer and talk about its parts. Alternatively the teacher can encourage the students to read through it with a partner. *keep in mind that some students will take off here and go for it, others will need a more step by step approach and modeling, be aware of those who need more scaffolding such as sentence starters or a chance to read with an adult
 - Distribute the students throughout the room with a pencil, checklist, and the writing they will review.
 - Ask the students to read the writing sample and fill out the checklist.
 - You may want to give students a set of highlighter pens to highlight the claim, evidence, and reasoning. This will help them review their peer's work.
4. **Independent Partner Planning (15 min)**
 - Partners select a new topic or continue a previous one.
 - The teacher can display the brainstorming from previous days to utilize those ideas or begin a new brainstorm. This might be a good place to do a "silly" argument to reduce tension and encourage creativity and playfulness.
 - Be sure to give students more graphic organizers OR have them draw a web to practice self regulating

- Each student fills out the organizer individually, then compares notes with partner to share ideas.

*Keep in mind that some students will feel confident and ready to write immediately. Others will need time to confer with a peer and/or opportunities to talk about their ideas and clarify their logic. Students who are confident can get right to the assignment while the teacher provides sentence frames and feedback for those who need an assist.
- Once everyone is engaged in writing the organizer, the teacher circulates, providing feedback and prompting deeper reasoning.

5. Write Paragraph (20 min)

- Display the checklist again and uncover the parts already completed, as well as the next step or two.
- As students write, watch the progress of the room and uncover the checklist bit by bit.
- Students who have a peer who is writing on a similar topic can sit near one another and collaborate as needed.

*Be sure to let students know it is ok to talk about the work to get ideas, it's not "cheating" in this setting

- Teacher gives space for the kids to write with focus and few interruptions. Play chill hop type music if that helps, leave sentence starters and word boxes in places where kids can easily access them.
- Consider doing the writing in more than a day. Some students need more time to process.

6. Personal Review

- Once students finish writing, point out #9 on the checklist and encourage them to read their work aloud
- Remind students to make changes when they notice mistakes

7. Peer Review (10 min)

- Partners exchange paragraphs and use the checklist to give feedback

*Consider allowing students to do this step orally as needed. This will save time and decrease cognitive load.

- Encourage polite, constructive feedback.

*Students who struggle to verbalize might be given a stamp or sticker and encouraged to put it by his or her favorite part of the writing.

8. Revision & Closing (5 min)

- Students revise their paragraphs based on peer feedback, with teacher support.
- Teacher closes with encouragement, praising effort and progress.

*This might be a fun time to play a celebration song like this:

<https://youtu.be/UWLlgjB9gGw?si=J7LHHB1jsw79LdSb> “Celebrate” by Kool and the Gang

Differentiation

- Provide sentence frames for peer review comments like “I like how you said...”, “Can you explain more about...”
- Allow students to give oral feedback if writing is difficult.
- Use visuals or charts to remind students of CER steps during writing.

Additional Notes & Suggestions

Graphic Organizer Example (editable or printable)

- Section 1: Claim (What's your main point?)
- Section 2: Evidence (Facts or data that support your claim)
- Section 3: Reasoning (Explain how your evidence supports your claim)

Ideas for Topics

- Should school start later?
- Why should students have more art classes?
- Why is it important to recycle?
- Why should phones be allowed at lunch?
- Fun or silly topics (e.g., Why ice cream should be breakfast)