

CER Writing Strategy

Type of Writing Supported:

Perusasive & Argumentative

Grade Level: **Grades 6-8**
Middle School

Stage of Writing Supported:
Planning and Drafting

PURPOSE:

What does this strategy help students do?

CER helps students make a claim, support it with evidence, and explain their reasoning to write clear, persuasive arguments across subjects.

Why is this strategy effective?

CER breaks down complex writing into manageable steps, encouraging students to support their ideas with facts and explain how the evidence connects to the claim. This fosters deeper understanding and strengthens argumentation skills.

C

Claim

What is your main point or answer?

E

Evidence

What facts or data support your claim?

R

Reasoning

How does your evidence support your claim and why does it matter?

CER Strategy: Case study

Teaching the CER Writing Strategy in a Middle School Classroom

Observer: Independent Educator Coach

Grade Level: 7th Grade

Class Size: 7 students

Focus: Day 1 and Day 2 of CER instruction (Introduction and Partner Practice)

Day 1: Introducing CER & Whole-Class Modeling

What the Teacher Did:

- The teacher began with an engaging introduction linking middle schoolers' natural love of arguing to learning how to argue effectively in writing using Claim, Evidence, and Reasoning (CER).
- She wrote "Claim," "Evidence," and "Reasoning" on the board and defined each part clearly with guiding questions.
- Using the topic "Middle School should have recess," she modeled thinking aloud to write a claim, solicited evidence ideas from students, helped narrow down key evidence, and then modeled reasoning by explaining why the evidence supported the claim.
- The teacher wrote the whole graphic organizer on chart paper, reading it aloud and revising it with student input.
- She then modeled writing a full CER paragraph from the organizer, emphasizing how to avoid repeating information and how to sequence claim, evidence, and reasoning.
- The lesson ended with a fun celebration where the teacher led mock toasts and claps to acknowledge the students' work.

What Happened:

- Students were engaged and eager to share their own examples of arguments from daily life, which helped build a connection to the lesson.
- Most students understood the definitions and could contribute evidence ideas.
- Some students initially struggled to distinguish between evidence and reasoning but gradually improved during the modeling.
- The teacher's think-aloud and step-by-step writing process helped clarify the paragraph structure.

Student Work Sample:

- Graphic Organizer (partial, from class brainstorm):
 - Claim: Middle schoolers should have recess.
 - Evidence: Little kids get recess; recess helps kids take breaks; recess helps focus in class.
 - Reasoning: Middle schoolers are kids too, so they need breaks like little kids; taking breaks helps students recharge and do better in school.
- Paragraph excerpt written as a class:

"Middle schoolers should have recess. Kids in middle school need recess like little kids. After all, they are kids, too. Recess helps students take breaks so they can focus better in class. It is so important that middle schoolers get to have recess."

CER Strategy: Case study

What Needed Improvement:

- Some students needed more support distinguishing reasoning from evidence. The teacher noted she would add more examples next time.
- A few students were hesitant to speak up initially; the teacher planned to incorporate more think-pair-share to build confidence.
- Time was tight; the teacher decided to spread modeling and practice over two days to allow deeper processing.

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

What the Teacher Did:

- Began with a quick CER review, showing the class paragraph from Day 1 and highlighting claim, evidence, and reasoning in different colors.
- Guided the class to brainstorm multiple topics on a web chart, then assigned pairs to choose one topic.
- Students wrote their claims and read them aloud to the teacher for feedback.
- Partners worked collaboratively on the graphic organizer, brainstorming evidence and reasoning.
- The teacher circulated, asking questions like “What facts support your claim?” and “How does that prove your point?”
- Provided sentence frames and word banks to support writing.
- Modeled writing alongside students on the smart board, showing how to turn organizer notes into sentences.
- Ended with partner reading and positive feedback on paragraph drafts.

What Happened:

- Most pairs successfully wrote clear claims and identified supporting evidence.
- One pair chose “Why is recycling important?” Their claim: “Recycling is important because it helps protect the environment.”
Their evidence: “Recycling reduces waste in landfills and conserves resources.”
Reasoning: “Reducing waste helps keep the earth clean, and conserving resources ensures we don’t run out.”
- Some students struggled to explain reasoning fully; the teacher prompted with sentence starters like “This shows that...”
- Students were enthusiastic about peer feedback but needed reminders to focus on constructive comments.

Student Work Sample:

Claim: “Pets should be allowed at school.”

Evidence: “Pets can help reduce stress and make students feel happy.”

Reasoning: “When students are less stressed, they can concentrate better on their work.”

Draft paragraph excerpt:

“Pets should be allowed at school. Pets can help reduce stress and make students feel happy. When students are less stressed, they can concentrate better on their work. This makes the school a better place for learning.”

CER Strategy: Case study

What Needed Improvement:

- Some students' evidence was too general or opinion-based; the teacher planned to emphasize using facts or examples next lesson.
- A few pairs rushed through brainstorming without discussing reasoning deeply. The teacher planned to scaffold this step more explicitly.
- One student needed extra support with writing mechanics; the teacher worked closely with this student during writing time.

Adjustments Made by the Teacher:

- Increased use of sentence frames and word banks for scaffolding.
- Planned to add mini-lessons on distinguishing fact-based evidence from opinion.
- Decided to incorporate more think-pair-share and small group discussions to build confidence.
- Created a checklist reminder to help students avoid repeating information in evidence and reasoning.
- Scheduled extra writing time over multiple days to accommodate varied student needs.

Summary

The teacher effectively introduced the CER writing strategy with engaging modeling and scaffolding. Students responded well to the interactive, step-by-step approach and showed growing understanding of claim, evidence, and reasoning. While some students needed additional support distinguishing evidence from reasoning and focusing on fact-based evidence, the teacher's adjustments and planned strategies indicate a responsive approach to student needs. Partner collaboration and teacher modeling helped build writing confidence, setting a strong foundation for independent CER writing.

CER Strategy: Troubleshooting

Issue/Challenge	What to Do	Helpful Prompts
Student struggles to write a clear claim	Provide examples and sentence starters. Let them talk through their ideas before writing.	"What do you believe about this topic?" "Can you say your opinion out loud first?" "Try starting with: 'I think...' or 'I believe...'"
Student provides weak or irrelevant evidence	Teach how to identify strong evidence. Use guided practice with texts, videos, or data.	"Where did you find that fact?" "Does this evidence prove your point?" "Can you find a quote or data that directly supports your claim?"
Student skips or misunderstands reasoning	Model reasoning explicitly. Use sentence frames and examples to show how evidence connects to the claim.	"How does your evidence prove your claim?" "Why should someone believe this fact supports your idea?" "Try starting with: 'This shows that...' or 'This is important because...'"
Student copies evidence word-for-word	Help them paraphrase by discussing the meaning of the evidence and jotting down their explanation.	"Can you explain what that fact means in your own words?" "What do you think the author is trying to say?"
Student writes reasoning that doesn't logically connect to the evidence	Use graphic organizers to map claim → evidence → reasoning. Practice with cause-effect and "why it matters" questions.	"Does your reasoning explain why your evidence supports your claim?" "What's the connection between your fact and your opinion?"
Student struggles to generate ideas for CER topics	Use engaging, low-stakes prompts first. Let students brainstorm with peers or draw their ideas.	"Would you rather argue for something silly or something serious?" "Try drawing what you're thinking—what's your opinion?"
Student provides minimal detail in reasoning	Encourage elaboration with follow-up questions and peer discussion.	"Can you tell me more about why that matters?" "What would you say if someone disagreed with you?"
Student gets stuck on spelling and loses focus	Provide a word bank, allow voice-to-text, or offer adult spelling support.	"You focus on your ideas—I'll help with spelling if you need it." "Would it help if I wrote down some words you might use?"

Publication Details

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What is the Writing Classroom?

The Writing Classroom was developed to help educators apply effective, evidence-based writing interventions. Originating at the University of Kansas with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, this initiative supports instructional strategies for all students, especially those who struggle with writing.

What is AI SCORE?

AI-SCORE enhances writing competency for students with learning disabilities by:

- Integrating evidence-based instructional strategies
- Providing immediate AI-generated feedback
- Personalizing the writing process to improve outcomes

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