

DEVELOPING PERSUASIVE WRITING SKILLS USING AN ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING CHECKLIST ROOTED IN THE CLASSICAL ARGUMENT MODEL

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ABSTRACT

The development of argumentative writing skills is a crucial aspect of academic achievement. However, many learners struggle to effectively structure and articulate their arguments. This study explores the use of an Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC), grounded in the Classical Model of Argument, as a tool to enhance students' argumentative writing abilities. The research investigates how the AWC helps students improve their writing structure, coherence, and overall argumentative quality. A sample of 100 high school students participated in a pre- and post-assessment of their argumentative writing before and after using the AWC. Results suggest significant improvements in students' ability to present well-structured arguments, use persuasive language effectively, and maintain logical coherence. The findings demonstrate the efficacy of the AWC as a practical tool for fostering argumentative writing skills among learners.

KEYWORDS: Argumentative writing, Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC), Classical Model of Argument, writing skills, persuasive writing, academic writing, writing instruction, argument structure, evidence-based writing, co-curricular activities, educational tools, writing assessment, student engagement, writing improvement, academic success, critical thinking.



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INTRODUCTION

Argumentative writing is an essential skill that students are expected to master in both academic and real-world contexts. In an increasingly complex and information-rich world, the ability to construct and defend arguments is more important than ever. Whether it is writing research papers, engaging in debates, or participating in discussions, learners must be able to present their ideas clearly and persuasively.

The Classical Model of Argument, which dates back to ancient Greek rhetoric, remains one of the most influential frameworks for constructing persuasive arguments. The model includes five key elements: introduction (exordium), background (narratio), proposition (partitio), argument (confirmatio), and conclusion (peroratio). By adhering to these components, writers can ensure that their arguments are logically structured and compelling. Despite its significance, many students struggle with the complexities of argumentative writing, particularly in maintaining structure and coherence.

The Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC) is a tool designed to help students internalize the Classical Model of Argument, ensuring that they address each essential element systematically. This checklist serves as a guide that prompts learners to consider key aspects of argumentative writing, including claim formulation, evidence presentation, counter-argumentation, and conclusion development. By following this checklist, students can develop stronger, more persuasive arguments.

This study aims to investigate the impact of the Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC) on learners' argumentative writing skills. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether the use of the checklist helps students develop clearer, more coherent, and well-supported arguments. The research will also explore the practical applicability of the AWC in enhancing students' argumentative writing proficiency.

Argumentative writing is a fundamental skill for academic success, and its importance extends far beyond the classroom. In many disciplines, students are required to construct well-reasoned, logically coherent arguments to support their positions or research findings. Whether preparing essays, research papers, or participating in debates, the ability to present arguments persuasively and structure them effectively is essential. However, despite its significance, many students struggle with the complexities of crafting strong, coherent arguments. This challenge highlights the need for effective strategies to improve argumentative writing skills.

One of the most structured and influential frameworks for writing persuasive arguments is the Classical Model of Argument, an approach that dates back to ancient Greek rhetoric. The Classical Model, articulated by Aristotle and later developed by other philosophers and rhetoricians, is often cited as a guide for constructing logical and persuasive arguments. It includes five key components: the introduction (exordium), background (narratio), proposition (partitio), argument (confirmatio), and conclusion (peroratio). Each element serves a specific purpose in leading the audience through the argument, from introducing the issue to wrapping up the discussion in a persuasive and conclusive manner. The Classical Model provides an effective framework that helps writers organize their thoughts systematically, ensuring clarity and logical flow.

However, despite its long-standing application, students often fail to implement the model effectively in their writing. One common challenge is that students may not be familiar with the individual components of the Classical Model or may struggle to balance the complex layers of argumentation. To address this issue, various instructional tools and strategies have been proposed. One such tool is the Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC), which serves as a practical guide to help students adhere to the Classical Model. The checklist offers specific prompts to guide students through each section of their argument, ensuring that they do not miss essential components. By breaking down the writing process into manageable steps, the AWC can help students focus on the crucial elements of argumentative writing, ultimately improving their ability to construct clear, persuasive, and well-supported arguments.

The Need for Effective Argumentative Writing Instruction

The importance of argumentative writing extends across all levels of education and is particularly emphasized in secondary and higher education settings. Argumentative writing plays a crucial role in disciplines such as English, history, law, and the social sciences, where students are often required to analyze complex issues and present logical, evidence-based conclusions. Beyond academics, argumentative writing skills are vital for personal and professional success, as individuals regularly need to present arguments in a variety of settings—whether in workplace communications, public discourse, or personal discussions.

Research has shown that effective writing instruction not only improves students' academic performance but also strengthens their critical thinking and analytical skills (Bean, 2011). Writing is a cognitive activity that involves not only the transcription of ideas but also the formation, organization, and evaluation of arguments. Therefore, improving students' ability to write persuasively contributes to their overall intellectual development, enhancing their capacity to engage with complex ideas and present them clearly to others.

Despite the recognized importance of argumentative writing, studies have consistently highlighted that many students encounter difficulties when tasked with developing coherent, structured arguments. A lack of familiarity with formal argumentation methods, coupled with the complexities of integrating evidence and counter-arguments, often leads to weak or incoherent essays. Consequently, students may struggle with the key skills needed to succeed in academic writing, such as clarity, structure, and persuasion (Zinsser, 2006).

The Role of the Classical Model of Argument in Argumentative Writing

The Classical Model of Argument remains one of the most widely recognized frameworks for constructing persuasive arguments. It provides a clear and structured approach to writing, emphasizing both logical reasoning and rhetorical persuasion. The five components of the model—exordium, narratio, partitio, confirmatio, and peroratio—guide writers through the process of introducing their argument, providing necessary background information, stating their thesis, supporting it with evidence and reasoning, and concluding in a persuasive manner.

1. **Exordium (Introduction):** The exordium serves as the introduction to the argument. It is the part of the essay where the writer engages the reader's attention, introduces the topic, and sets the stage for the argument to follow. In this section, the writer often presents the issue, explains its significance, and creates an initial connection with the audience.
2. **Narratio (Background):** The narratio provides necessary background information, helping the reader understand the context of the argument. It often includes definitions, historical information, or an explanation of the issue at hand. The goal is to give the reader enough information to follow and engage with the argument.
3. **Partitio (Proposition):** This section clearly states the writer's main argument or thesis. The proposition outlines the key points that will be discussed in the body of the essay, giving the reader an overview of what to expect.
4. **Confirmatio (Argument):** The confirmatio is the heart of the argument, where the writer provides evidence, facts, and reasoning to support their thesis. This section typically includes logical arguments, data, examples, and expert testimony. The goal is to persuade the reader that the writer's thesis is valid and well-supported.
5. **Peroratio (Conclusion):** The peroratio is the conclusion of the argument. It summarizes the key points, reinforces the thesis, and provides a persuasive closing statement. The conclusion is meant to leave a lasting impression on the reader, compelling them to accept the argument presented.

Although the Classical Model is highly effective in promoting structured and logical argumentation, many students fail to apply these principles consistently. This is where the Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC) can play a vital role. By guiding students through each of these stages, the checklist serves as a structured tool that helps them produce well-organized, coherent, and persuasive essays.

The Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC) as a Tool for Instruction

The Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC) is an instructional tool designed to help students organize and improve their argumentative writing. Based on the Classical Model of Argument, the checklist breaks down each element of argumentation into clear, actionable steps. For example, the checklist may prompt students to:

- Examine their introduction: Does it effectively engage the reader? Does it introduce the topic and set the tone for the argument?
- Assess the background section: Have they provided enough context for the reader to understand the issue at hand?
- Clarify their proposition: Is the thesis clearly stated and easily identifiable?
- Support their argument with evidence: Are they using relevant and convincing evidence to back up their claims?
- Craft a compelling conclusion: Does the conclusion summarize the argument and leave a lasting impression?

By following the checklist, students can ensure that their arguments are logically structured and supported by appropriate evidence. The AWC encourages critical thinking by prompting students to consider the various components of their argument and ensuring that each part of the essay fulfills its intended purpose. This structured approach can help students improve their writing quality and develop a deeper understanding of the principles of persuasive writing.

The development of strong argumentative writing skills is critical for student success in both academic and professional contexts. However, many students face challenges in mastering this skill due to a lack of clear guidance and structure. The Classical Model of Argument provides an effective framework for constructing persuasive arguments, and the Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC) offers a practical way for students to apply this model in their writing. By breaking down the complex process of argumentative writing into manageable steps, the AWC helps students develop clearer, more coherent, and persuasive arguments. As research has shown, structured writing strategies like the AWC can significantly enhance students' writing abilities, contributing to their overall academic and intellectual growth.

METHODS

Participants

The study involved 100 high school students from a mixed-gender sample, aged 16 to 18, enrolled in an advanced English composition course. The students were selected based on their general proficiency in writing, and they had not previously received specific instruction on argumentative writing using a formal checklist.

Design and Procedure

A quasi-experimental design was used in this study, with students serving as their own controls. Participants were asked to complete a pre-assessment argumentative writing task at the beginning of the study, which was evaluated based on key criteria such as clarity of argument, use of evidence, logical coherence, and persuasive appeal.

Following the pre-assessment, students were introduced to the Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC), which was based on the Classical Model of Argument. The checklist included the following components:

1. Introduction (Exordium): Engage the reader and introduce the argument.
2. Background (Narratio): Provide necessary context and background information.
3. Proposition (Partitio): Clearly state the argument or claim.
4. Argument (Confirmatio): Support the claim with logical reasoning and evidence.
5. Conclusion (Peroratio): Summarize the argument and provide a persuasive closing statement.

Over the course of four weeks, students used the checklist to guide their writing in a series of argumentative essays. After completing the final assignment, participants were again asked to submit a post-assessment essay on the same topic as the pre-assessment.

Data Collection and Analysis

The pre- and post-assessment essays were evaluated using a rubric that assessed the following dimensions: argument structure, coherence, use of evidence, persuasiveness, and overall quality. The essays were scored by two independent raters to ensure reliability. A paired t-test was used to compare the pre- and post-assessment scores to determine if there were statistically significant improvements in the quality of the students' argumentative writing.

RESULTS

The analysis of pre- and post-assessment scores revealed a significant improvement in the students' argumentative writing abilities after using the Argumentative Writing Checklist. The mean score for the pre-assessment was 65%, while the mean score for the post-assessment increased to 82%, indicating a substantial improvement of 17 percentage points. This increase was statistically significant ($t(99) = 8.34$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that the use of the AWC contributed to enhanced argumentative writing skills.

Key areas of improvement included:

- **Argument Structure:** The post-assessment essays demonstrated more logical organization and adherence to the Classical Model of Argument, with clearer introductions, well-defined arguments, and persuasive conclusions.
- **Coherence:** Students showed greater clarity in linking ideas, ensuring that their arguments were logically connected from one point to the next.
- **Use of Evidence:** Post-assessment essays included stronger evidence and more specific examples to support the claims, reflecting a deeper engagement with the topic.
- **Persuasiveness:** The essays were more compelling, with students employing a more authoritative tone and effectively addressing counter-arguments.

These results underscore the value of the Argumentative Writing Checklist in helping students develop stronger, more effective arguments in their writing.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC) based on the Classical Model of Argument can significantly improve students' argumentative writing skills. The checklist provides a clear, structured approach to writing arguments, helping students address each key component of the argument systematically. By following the AWC, students were able to construct more coherent, logically organized, and persuasive arguments, which translated into higher-quality essays.

One of the key strengths of the AWC is its ability to simplify the complex process of argumentative writing. The Classical Model of Argument, though effective, can be overwhelming for many students, particularly those who are new to structured argumentative writing. The AWC breaks down the process into manageable steps, making it easier for students to understand and apply the principles of argumentation. Additionally, the checklist encourages students to critically engage with their writing by considering not only their own arguments but also potential counter-arguments, a crucial aspect of persuasive writing.

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of the AWC may depend on students' initial writing abilities and familiarity with the concept of formal argumentation. Future research could explore whether the AWC is equally effective for students with varying levels of writing proficiency or whether additional support is needed for those who struggle with basic writing skills.

Moreover, while the study demonstrated significant improvements in argument quality, the impact of the AWC on other aspects of writing, such as creativity and originality, was not explicitly measured. Future studies could examine whether the checklist enhances these qualities as well, or if it primarily focuses on the structural and logical aspects of argumentative writing.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the value of using an Argumentative Writing Checklist (AWC) based on the Classical Model of Argument as a tool to enhance students' argumentative writing skills. The significant

improvement in students' writing, as evidenced by the pre- and post-assessment comparison, suggests that the AWC is an effective instructional tool for promoting clearer, more coherent, and persuasive arguments. Educators can use this checklist to guide students through the complexities of argumentative writing, helping them develop essential skills for academic success and beyond. Further research is needed to explore the broader applicability of the AWC across different student populations and writing contexts.

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