1997

The effects of using comprehensive critical writing curriculum on skills assessment test performance in high school students

Barbara Ann Brown

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THE EFFECTS OF USING COMPREHENSIVE CRITICAL WRITING CURRICULUM ON SKILLS ASSESSMENT TEST PERFORMANCE IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education

by
Barbara Ann Brown

September 1997
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Date: 9-10-91
ABSTRACT

This study addresses a concern that high school students appear to be getting low scores on writing skills assessment tests. Specifically, this study will attempt to determine if there is a statistical difference in performance on skills assessment tests by those students who are taught a comprehensive critical writing skills curriculum as compared to those students who are not.

This study argues that critical thinking skills are an integral part of a good education to prepare for adulthood and that strong attention paid to teaching strategies to develop those skills will carry over into a general improvement of writing ability.

The curriculum was taught to a selected experimental group over the course of a two-semester period. Pretests were administered to both the experimental group and control group. Posttests were used to determine if any differences exist in the experimental group and the control group because of the treatment. Findings indicated that the group taught the critical writing skills curriculum scored higher on posttests. Findings indicated that teaching the
critical writing skills in a literature based program achieved desirable higher test score results. However, those higher scores were not enough to be statistically significant. This may be attributable to a variety of factors, including the fact that many students were not cognitively ready to readily assimilate critical writing skills at the 9th grade level. It is argued that those students introduced to critical writing at this grade level are further engaged in the process than those who had not, perhaps placing them in a more advantageous position for further instruction.

Although these higher test scores were not statistically significant, the students were more acquainted with the components of critical writing, and were showing progress in the development of competency of critical writing skills. Those students who had not had the opportunity of writing as frequently as the other group, showed more rudimentary development of their critical writing skills.
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The public wants to be able to quickly assess progress and competency of students particularly in the shadow of the accountability movement of the 1970's and 1980's (Spring, 1986, pg. 321). Concerned parents and taxpayers both have vested interests in the progress of pupils in the public and private school systems. Evaluation of education can also be a valuable tool to guide policies and incentives of teachers, students and school personnel to perform well (Hanushek, et al, 1995, p. 130). To perform well, most parents and educators would agree that this means performance is better than average or at least average. Educators know there are many problems associated with assessment, but the public still expects some kind of evaluation.

Prior to the 1970's, there was very little public interest in the results of school testing. In the 1970's, the accountability movement began to call for schools to provide public record and measurement of what they were purportedly accomplishing (Ryan/Cooper, 1995, p. 240). There
is a great deal of interest in scores generated by the media who publish scores in local newspapers. In many cases, school reputations for being sound learning institutions or schools producing incompetent graduates are based on the scores. In the national arena of education, two polarized views on assessment developed, one camp pro-assessment while the other camp had many misgivings about the nature of the typical assessment instrument.

The flaws associated with assessment are manifold. Educators realize that certain tests do not accurately judge a student’s academic progress nor do they test on information that reflects the student’s education. In addition, many students, who are good students, experience test anxiety and fail to perform well on the day of assessment. Still others are consistently poor test takers even though they are bright, thoughtful students. Similarly, teachers are aware that standardized tests do not reflect the education many students have received. Many realize that some elements of some tests are skewed to contain an inherent bias for some groups over others (Burton and Wildman, 1979, p. 317). Many educators believe that many tests favor factual information rather than focusing on
cognitive skills. There are also many different tests available and the choice of which one to use is very controversial. In order to decide what skills to measure, schools must decide what skills they want to produce (Hanushek, Eric, (1966), p. 135). Many times, negative results in testing causes schools to be scrutinized by the media and affects morale of students and teachers alike.

There are many teachers gravely concerned about what they believe can be an overemphasis on testing. "Measuring school excellence by standardized tests poses a danger arising from the limited and simplistic nature of the tests" (Ryan/Cooper, 1995, p. 256).

Authentic testing (the individual evaluation of each student, as compared to standardized testing) is extremely expensive and is open to all kinds of subjective interpretation. The state of Vermont uses portfolio assessment but a detailed study found that teachers score inconsistently. "One teacher’s score of 90 might be another’s 80 and yet another’s 86", (Sykes, 1995, p. 151) rendering them almost useless. Great Britain’s experiments with authentic assessment reached similar findings. Not only were such assessments extremely burdensome to manage
but unreliable from teacher to teacher. The amount of hours required to manage the portfolios used for assessment totaled up to 82 to 90 hours. This time was allocated for planning, collection of materials, administration, evaluation and recording (Sykes, 1995, p. 151). This enormous time investment is time taken away from other tasks that some may consider more important.
PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL MEASUREMENT

AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

In the sociological context of the bureaucratic model of education, the use of authentic testing is prohibitive. Whether schools or the public like it or not, schools must operate under tight budgetary constraints and existing evaluation techniques. Many people in the field of education and in the public at large, had for years objected to the used of standardized testing. Some objections were that it did not accurately reflect what students were taught, that the tests were based on a Eurocentric view of knowledge and that the tests were racially biased and culturally insensitive. The many objections to the objective tests being used encouraged the development of authentic testing to evaluate students in ways that did not have the problems associated with objective testing. In the context of most public schools, authentic assessment is considered financially prohibitive. The desire to authentically test students in the state of California led to the development of the CLAS test, widely touted to be an accurate measurement of students thinking skills that would
be free of the problems associated with objective testing. The results of the debate generated by the use of the CLAS test clearly showed the problems associated with authentic assessment. The CLAS test’s use of prompts to generate student writing for evaluation of cognitive and analytical skills backfired into an intrusive search into students’ minds and production of material extremely difficult to assess. Many parents and students objected to the questions asked. "Materials used in the exams—reading selections, questions that probe student’s reactions and essays about student’s lives invade privacy and expose yournsters to inappropriate ideas" (Merl, 1994, pg.1). Many evaluators experienced difficulties in attempting to evaluate the material. After the first administration of the CLAS test, the test was abandoned. The state’s testing system simply was not equipped financially to evaluate the tests. It took months of reading and grading the papers while those test graders had to receive compensation. The material itself was extraordinarily difficult to assess. How does one grade another’s reasoning skills? What evaluation system is used? The state’s Board of Education could not evaluate the tests to get an accurate assessment of anything. School tests do
not exist in a vacuum and must be economically feasible to administer, be able to evaluate in a consistent manner, and produce evaluations on material that the public wants to have tested. There must be some kind of consensus that the material is relevant.

I believe the public expects that the educational system operates on a rational actor model based on economic principles. That is to say that the public assumes the educational system knows what it is doing. The rational actor model has for its goals and objectives utility expressed for every action and maximizes choice within each situation and certain given restraints (Gutierrez, 1995, lecture). The public must operate on that principle in order to have any faith and confidence in the school systems. If the public is to entrust their children to the school system for their education, they must believe that the school system knows it can deliver the products. The public expects the school system to teach what is necessary to qualify as a good education. The school systems can then evaluate and monitor performance of its students. The CLAS test was a failure because it was not efficient and parents and religious groups perceived the test as an invasion of
privacy (Merl, 1994, pg. 1). It was not clear whether the test was evaluating critical or divergent thinking skills. Public confidence in the California educational system was shaken as the system publicly demonstrated the incompetency of the testing method. Parents become extremely uneasy upon being presented arguments that achievement is difficult to assess and evaluate. And rightly so, for if the system professing to do the job of providing education, cannot assess the attainment of educational goals, there is a problem.

On the other hand, the public and business operates on a functionalist perspective of society. The public and business believe there are certain elements that make up a sound education. Most would agree that students should be able to write lucidly without serious grammatical and punctuation errors. Schools are to provide the basic education of which reading and writing are the core. Failure to do so is perceived as a failure on the part of one’s education. The public and business would tend to agree there are problems within the evaluation process, but will accept those problems in light of the fact that at this time there are no other solutions.
Parents, business, administrations and the general public want to know what is the performance of students (Weber, 1979, p. 327). Even so, the public wants some kind of evaluation. Parents want an evaluation to know what is the progress of his/her student. They want some kind of yardstick to determine quickly whether their student is progressing at an acceptable rate. Many parents are not really interested in going into the fine points of the child's education or to discuss, completely, all different aspects of their child's progress. But, they still want to know if there has been progress or not in order that changes may be instituted to aid the child's progress. The need for different types of information is specific to the grade level of the child. Parents of students in the earlier grades are usually very interested in meeting with teachers and discussing a child's progress not only academically, but also socially. Typically, by the time a student enters high school, parents are less concerned regarding a student's social progress.

Pressure is particularly great in states in which newspapers publish test scores (Oakes and Lipton, 1990, p. 140). Because assessment and evaluation are so critically
important to parents, the media, and administrations, courses should be designed with achieving positive results in testing. That is not to say that other areas of coursework should be diminished in importance. It should be pointed out that in the teaching of strategies to aid students to be successful when tested, teachers are merely preparing students for what is to be encountered. Preparing students to do well is merely good teaching.
EFFECTS OF CURRICULUM

The whole language movement has an emphasis on literature with the presumption that students exposed to a variety of literature will be able to observe language usage, grammar, syntax and writing styles and will incorporate those observations into their own writing. Whole language advocates assert phonics should not be taught in isolation of material. "Teaching one key variable can distort a complex process unless its learning becomes patterned with other key variables and opportunities between variables." (Clay, 1991. p. 314). But, according to NAEP, test scores have clearly shown that students are not getting it. They are not observing writing styles, syntax, grammar and the like while reading literature. Since 1969, NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), a congressionally mandated assessment is administered by the U.S. Department of Education. It has reported on the educational achievement of American students and provided accurate and useful information to the public. According to the NAEP, only 3 percent of American fourth, eighth and twelfth graders can write above a minimal or adequate level.
per the 1992 "Writing Report Card". A standardized test given to 26,000 Americans 16 years and older "concluded that 80 million Americans are deficient in the basic reading and mathematical skills needed to perform rudimentary tasks in today's society" (Mehren, 1993).

It is quite possible then, that the whole language approach does not work and the emphasis on the literature-based curriculum to the exclusion of real practice and drill with writing is not effective. Few adults note sentence construction and grammar while reading, much less students. Students read for understanding of text, not analysis of structure. By the time students get to the high school level, they should not be learning to read and write, but rather, they should be reading and writing to learn. The basics of reading comprehension and the mechanics of writing should be taught in the elementary and middle school grades to give the students foundation for their writing in the high school grades. Adults need technical and rudimentary direction for the attainment and mastery of new skills. Our students do also.
PROJECT DESIGN

Two groups of ninth grade students were selected to sample the effectiveness of the teaching the critical writing curriculum. In order to determine whether the two groups were comparable, scores were obtained from the CAT 5 1996 spring tests of the students when in the 8th grade. For the purposes of this experiment, one group will be designated Group X, while the other group will be designated Group Y.

AVERAGE SCORES ON 1996 CAT5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GROUP X</th>
<th>GROUP Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>41.06</td>
<td>45.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>7-79</td>
<td>5-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>median</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>40.31</td>
<td>44.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>4-86</td>
<td>4-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation of the CAT5 scores between the two groups indicated: for reading, there was no difference between the groups, $t(38) = 0.599$, $p<.01$; for vocabulary, there was no difference between groups, $t(38) = .0617$, $p<.01$; for comprehension, there was no difference between the groups, $t(38) = 0.525$, $p<.01$. (See Table 1). Groups were, therefore, comparable for experimentation.

A pretest was administered to both groups, also, to yield a basis for comparison of the effectiveness of the teaching methods. The pretest is a part of a district wide pretest policy used to determine progress of the students according to the CAT 5 program. Students were given a writing situation concerning a letter to an imaginary school board regarding a hypothetical grading policy change from letter grade to pass/fail. (See Appendix A). The pretest was administered during the first three days of school and evaluated for two measurements. Rhetoric (content) was evaluated on a scale of one to six; one being incompetent
and incoherent with six representing a paper that is logical, lucid, and fully explained. Mechanics also were evaluated on a one to six scale; one being that of a paper with many grammatical, punctuation and spelling type errors, while six represented a paper that had very few or no grammatical, punctuation or spelling errors. The pretest was administered by the students' teacher. The pretest yielded similar results to that of the results of the CAT5 indicating no initial differences between the groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVERAGE PRETEST SCORES (Scale of 1-6)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of rhetorical scores indicated no difference between groups, t(53) 1.96, p< .01. Convention scores indicated no difference between groups, t(53) .271, p< .01.
(See Table 2). Equivalency between groups was established and benchmark scores noted.

The two classes would be taught the same core curriculum with its emphasis on literature. One class would be taught in a manner that has a strong emphasis on writing skills whereas the other class would be taught the same curriculum, but instead focus on the methodology as presented in the text, mainly emphasizing comprehension. Comparison of results of the same posttest administered to the two groups should yield significant differences in the writing scores of both groups. The class taught with a heavier emphasis on writing should have better assessment scores.
METHODOLOGY

In order to provide some basis of comparison between the two groups, both groups read the same pieces of literature from the Grade 9 textbook. However, Group X was taught in a manner that focused much attention on the writing process with frequent writing assignments given throughout the semester. Group Y was given some writing assignments but they were given with less frequency. Literature was discussed and concepts such as plot, setting, and conflict were addressed in both classes. Students in Group Y were assigned questions at the end of each piece regarding comprehension.

The Group X students had a greater focus on writing. Multiple assignments based on each piece of literature read in class were assigned implementing the techniques discussed in greater detail. Teaching students the critical writing process permits students to practice forms of writing that teachers have been asked to return to and place emphasis on: exposition and argument (Palumbo, 1976, p. 21-23). Narrative and descriptive writing are also valuable, but exposition and argument tend to develop critical thinking
skills that are essential to be competitive in the 21st century.

Critical writing helps students learn to think clearly. If one's writing is disorganized, illogical and difficult to understand, it may be because one's thoughts are disorganized, illogical and difficult to understand. I believe writing is an outward expression of the internal thinking process. If one learns to write logically, one learns to think logically. The two go hand in hand. If one learns how to write analytically, one learns how to think analytically. Students can be taught how to organize their thoughts by teaching them how to organize their writing. Students can learn how to convey their thoughts clearly, when they are taught how to write to convey clearly. All good writing shares common characteristics which can be taught to students.

There may be some who remember the argument was made regarding the validity of the teaching of Latin, that the teaching of that subject teaches students how to think. But it is a different type of thinking here. Learning Latin required discipline and rote memorization. It is extremely useful for those entering medicine and science in order to
understand the frequent Latin terms used. But learning Latin, is not a critical or evaluative learning process whereas that is exactly the case in learning critical writing. Students are to postulate their own theory in a thesis and then defend it throughout the rest of the essay. Learning how to write critically, requires that one make an assertion, and then prove the assertion lucidly and cogently. Learning Latin does not have the same goals.

Although many may argue that creative writing (i.e. the creation of poetry or fiction) should also be taught, this study is limited to critical writing. It is extremely difficult to teach many different domains of writing well. That means the writing should not be taught in a cursory fashion which would only be a survey of the different writing styles. It is only through many, many repetitions, that the students begin to internalize the structure and from there, develop their own style and voice.

Students will need to analyze problems for the rest of their life. The approach to analysis is always the same whether it be analysis of a business venture, a home acquisition, a career move or piece of literature. It requires that one take something apart into its separate
elements for examination and then put them together again to evaluate the whole. Students who are taught critical writing are taught to take things apart and try to look at all the meanings and implications of a piece. Those are the very same elements which make up part of good decision making. Students are going to be citizens and those citizens make important decisions, be it as voters deciding on a bond issue, or the consideration of a business venture. Teaching critical writing teaches students how to think and express themselves clearly. Creative writing is something few people will probably do for their livelihood. But every student is going to be a citizen who should know how to think well. Teaching critical writing addresses that need.

Teachers should assume students have only the most rudimentary skills. Therefore, in order to prepare students for critical writing, the instructor should review the basics regarding the writing of paragraphs. The five-paragraph essay will be the basic form for the teaching of critical writing styles. A system for teaching the five-paragraph essay was compiled by Jane Schaeffer in a sequential nine-week unit (Schaeffer, 1991, p. 1). The unit breaks down the different elements of multi-paragraph
writing into discrete processes that, combined together, comprise the whole essay. Individual paragraphs and their components are addressed in easily understandable lessons. Due to the limited amount of time to dedicate to the teaching of the five-paragraph essay, only selected lessons of the entire 45-day packet were selected. They were:

Day #1 - Thesis Sentence Lesson which gave a guide to writing thesis sentences and a practice with aids to generating student's own thesis sentences (See Appendix B). This extremely useful and important lesson was presented with emphasis and was reinforced again and again throughout the semester as the most basic element of the entire course on the rationale that a thesis is a sentence with a subject and an opinion and an essay is an opinion and its defense. Days #2 through #5 were omitted as they were basically reinforcement of the subject material presented in Day #1.

Days #6,7,8 and 9 - Commentary Packet which gave instruction as to the writing of Commentary sentences and problems encountered with writing Commentary sentences within the five-paragraph essay (See Appendix C). The Commentary sentences provide the forum for the students to provide their defense of their thesis.
Days #12 and 13 - Shaping the Essay Packet which provide a graphic guide and reinforcement to the form of the basic five-paragraph essay (See Appendix D). The lesson provided the students with a graphic representation of the form of the five-paragraph essay in order that students have a model to write to.

Outside of the lessons presented from the lesson packet provided by Jane Schaeffer, many other concepts were introduced to give the students a model. The material was not used from only one source. Many materials were compiled from various sources. The California Writing Project is a teacher-teaching-teacher program to improve student writing by improving the teaching of writing in California classes. Each year, approximately 15,000 teachers from all levels of instruction and all regions participate in a variety of summer and school year programs (Gray, 1987). The best teachers of teachers are other teachers who have validity and believability as advisors and consultants. The ideas they present have usually been field tested and are not merely theoretical models. Not only do presenting teachers share their techniques in an intensive five-week program, but follow up with regular monthly meetings that bring the
presenters from all the past institutes to continue the experience of the summer program. Staff development workshops are held throughout the school year. Twice a year, director and co-directors meet to discuss their programs and address common concerns in order to stay in touch with the projects and continue momentum.

One of the emphasized practices promulgated by the Writing Project, is the technique of teaching writing as a process that students should be exposed to time and time again. According to Cathy D'Aoust, teaching "writing as a process afforded new perspective and had tremendous implications for classroom teaching" (D'Aoust, 1987, p. 7). The process of writing should go through all of the stages of prewriting, writing, sharing, revising, editing and evaluating. But along with that process, the teacher should also model for the students his or her own writing process so that students can have a sample to mimic until they develop their own proficiency and confidence to work on their own essays (Merril, 1996, conference). As so many of the students come into to the classroom with such low skills, to ask the students to produce some writing is akin to asking students to produce a novel. Students are
overwhelmed and daunted by the task and in the face of such difficult (in their eyes) requests, will frequently decline to even attempt the assignment. On the other hand, students who are shown what is expected with the teacher showing a sample of her own process via overhead projector or blackboard, get a feel for the procedure. If student confidence is low, students may copy the teacher’s process. Eventually, even the most withdrawn students attempt to write on their own instead of merely copying an older person’s (the teacher’s!) work.

Using this format, essays were assigned frequently in order to develop proficiency and confidence. Many students show a lack of writing skills and motivation which can be attributable to infrequent modeling of the writing process (Edwards, 1995, p. 119).

Most of the coursework given in high schools is guided by the California State Board of Education “English-Language Arts Framework”. The Framework states that effective language arts programs call for “a writing program that includes attention to the various stages of the writing process--from prewriting though postwriting ...” (1987, pg. 3). As such, many school districts have language arts
aspects of their curriculum. Most critical writing assignments are addressing a literary work.

According to Merrill, the traditional approach to the teaching of writing is conceptually wrong from the outset. Teachers in the past, have been used to giving their students a writing assignment and then the assignment is corrected by the teacher. A typical high school teacher has approximately 150 students (5 classes of 30) or more. There are several basic problems with this approach. First, the task of correcting that number of papers is onerous, indeed. To carefully correct each paper takes approximately 3 to 5 minutes per paper for a skilled corrector and even longer for one who is not. The total time dedicated to correcting papers can be upwards of 7 hours per assignment: (for calculation purposes, correction time per paper is averaged at 3 minutes-low average; 150 papers x 3 minutes = 450/60 = 7.5 hours). This tends to encourage teachers to assign essay writing less frequently in order not to overwhelmed by the time demands required of the task of correcting.

Secondly, many students now have very many serious errors with their writing. Whether the problems associated with student writing is attributable to the implementation
of a Whole Language approach (with its decreased emphasis on grammar and spelling), a highly diverse and transient student population or classroom management styles that encourage a lot of movement and activities instead of quiet time permitting the students to focus and work, is not the purpose of this paper. The fact remains that many students are poor writers and come in with seriously deficient skills. Therefore, the papers to be corrected have a lot of errors. Writing corrections can be difficult as they can be numerous, problems not only with spelling and grammar, but logic and sentence structure. This tends to not only make the correcting task more difficult and longer, but the student’s paper can end up being covered with corrections. Students do not like to see a lot of red writing on their papers; it is discouraging and disheartening.

Thirdly, even though one may indicate all the things that are wrong with a paper, the students tend to continue to make mistakes because that is what the student thinks is right. The student is somehow miseducated. The situation can be compared to a mouse in a box. He cannot get out of the box until he finds a hole. Our students cannot get out
of the box of poor writing until they are shown the way out-through good writing.

Merrill believes this approach intrinsically is taking the wrong path as it shows the students what is wrong and does not show them what is RIGHT. The students cannot improve their work because they do not know, in a sense, how to improve it. The students will endlessly make errors which can be endlessly corrected as they have no idea or model of how to write. The eradication of poor habits has not been addressed or has been ignored. The teacher would do much better to model for the students a paper that shows qualities of good critical writing. That paper can either be student generated or teacher generated.

The teacher can give the criteria of what makes a good paper at the beginning of the assignment, (i.e. the use of capitalization, use of parallelism and no use of first person), or use the same criteria throughout the year. The elements of the five-paragraph essay are standard and can be presented in an outline form containing the same elements as those indicated by Schaeffer.
Paragraph 1- INTRO (author, title, thesis) logic should be presented from general to specific
Paragraph 2- BODY ("topic sentence, concrete detail, . commentary, commentary")
Paragraph 3- BODY ("
Paragraph 4- BODY ("
Paragraph 5- CONCLUSION (opinion) specific to general

The student now has some kind of a format as to what is required to write a five-paragraph essay. They now have a concept of what kind of structure to write to. Although some may object that this is too rigid a format, many teachers of writing agree that students initially need to have some idea of structure. Once a student becomes proficient in implementing basic structure, than the student can and should be encouraged to develop his own style and voice. It should be remembered though, that the five-paragraph essay format is very fluid and can be adapted to a multitude of uses. It not only applies to essays of literary criticism but can be adapted to other forms of discourse such as
expository writing and persuasion. The format can also be expanded to accommodate any size. The student has a great deal of freedom and room to grow while maintaining the same structure.

The continued use of the same structure is one of the greatest strengths of a program. Repetition helps memory and continued use of the same format again and again serves to reinforce the structure until it is internalized by the student (Woolfolk, 1990, p. 243)

A common problem frequently encountered by teachers of composition is that the students say they do not know what to write about. The students are learning literary criticism. They probably do not have the vocabulary required to express their thoughts or even any idea of how to generate ideas. It helps the students to brainstorm with them in the beginning.

After students read a piece of literature, they should be expected to analyze the work for some type of literary merit. The story can be analyzed for character development, setting, theme, tone, conflicts, irony, contrast and compare, writer's intent, imagery or some other literary aspect. Most students will have no clue as to how this can
be effected. In the beginning of writing literary criticism, the instructor will have to give the students a specific aspect to address. Brainstorming with the students models for them the different types of brainstorming techniques for specific tasks. For example, in order for the students to brainstorm an assignment which is multifaceted and can be described in one word, such as character or setting, the traditional cluster brainstorm is very useful. The instructor draws a circle with the name of a character in the center. Students are then asked to generate ideas about the character which are then written around the circle with connecting lines. The generation of ideas and illustrating them in the clustering technique helps teachers aid students to clarify their thoughts about a character, build vocabulary about character, and model a thinking process. Clustering aids fluency (O’Brien, 1987, p. 25). All ideas generated during the brainstorming, are retained unless they go too far afield from the topic. The idea is for brainstorming to focus on quantity—not quality. Quality of those ideas is addressed when the students evaluate which ones should be treated within the essay.
When the students have developed some kind of competency with the basic clustering brainstorm technique, students can then advance to other critical writing situations. If the students are going to write a compare and contrast essay, a much more useful type of brainstorm to model for them, is the T format. With a T format, ideas that are common to two literary works are written above the T, whereas topics that are addressed but treated differently by the two works, are written down parallel to each other on their respective sides on either side of the T. This format helps students to logically organize their thoughts and aids understanding through graphic representation of the commonalities and differences. Instructor should try not to generate the ideas for the students but instead ask provocative questions in order to help the students get an idea of which direction they should go to when first examining criticism. Students are not told what to write about, but are aided in creating avenues of thought to help them write.
Ex.

Compare and Contrast Two Poems

"Annabel Lee"  
Edgar Allan Poe

"I Heard A Fly Buzz When I Died"  
Emily Dickinson

both poems are about death
Both written in the 19th century

written in rhyming verse  I  Written in blank verse
author's lover dies  I  Author herself dies
death treated romantically  I  Death treated factually
focuses on emotional state  I  Focuses on physical state

If students are brainstorming an assignment which requires the generation of complex ideas (i.e. theme, author's intent), students will find it useful to have brainstorming modeled for them that generates sentences addressing the topics. For example, the instructor should ask the students what do they think is the main idea about life that the author is treating in the story.
Theme in Dorothy Parker’s “Big Blonde”

- Is it about the aimlessness of life in big city?
- Is it about the aimlessness of life devoted to drinking?
- Is it about the shallowness of friendship devoted to drinking?
- Is it about a woman’s presentation of a facade to “get” a man?
- Is it about the early 19th century need that women be supported by men?
- Is it about the purposelessness of life pursuing . . . succession of lovers?
- Is it about the gaiety induced by alcohol as being false?
- Is it about the urge to commit suicide from desperation induced by drink?

Again, students should be reminded to not qualify ideas during the brainstorm process. Ideas are generated for quantity--not quality. After eight to ten ideas have been addressed, then the students go back to qualify or select those ideas worth of writing about.

Typically, students are very fearful of criticism or
looking foolish in front of their friends. It is, therefore, up to the instructor to create an environment that lessens student anxiety and permits them to feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts. All ideas should be noted and negative comments about other student’s suggestions should be discouraged.

After engaging in the brainstorming process and modeling out loud for the students the type of questions one should ask when writing about a literary topic, students need to be taught to formulate a thesis. The thesis is the main idea of the essay. One should remember that an essay is a writer’s opinion. A writer makes an assertion in his introduction (the thesis), and then attempts to persuade the reader to accepting his argument throughout the rest of the essay. It is therefore critical that one formulate a thesis. Formulation of thesis should come after generation of the brainstorm. The thesis is the opinion the student is attempting to present and prove in his essay. It is the controlling idea. A thesis does not have only a subject, (what the student is writing about), but an opinion about it. As such, if no opinion is expressed, the essay is flawed. There is no assertion. The paper has become a
discussion of a subject rather than an opinion on a subject. Therefore, the student needs to select the points he believes he can defend successfully. The student should select what ideas he wants to present. Selection of those ideas constitute the thesis. To help the students conceptualize, it helps them to think of it as the purpose of their essay or that it is what they are trying to assert.

After the brainstorm, students should write a very quick outline of how they are organizing their essay. The outline is perhaps one of the most crucial elements to the essay although it is the aspect most resisted by the students. The outline imposes an order. Many students will tend to drift when they get to the actual task of writing. They will ramble on and frequently, their essay will end up somewhere quite remote from their original purpose or thesis. The outline prevents this from happening by demanding the student conceptualize their organization before writing. In the outline, students select and prioritize the main points of their essay. The following is an example of an outline for an essay about the character, Katerina, in Shakespeare’s The Taming of the Shrew. Note the outline is extremely brief.
EX.

The Need For Love

1 - Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*. Katherine is desperate for love (author, title, thesis)
2 - jealous of Bianca (body)
3 - lashes out to conceal hurt (body)
4 - shows kindness to inferiors (body)
5 - Shakespeare shows insight to human behavior
   (conclusion)

Students frequently resist the outline because they consider it a waste of time. But most essays fail because they do not show logic, which adherence to a planned outline prevents. With an outline, the student has a structure to follow which insures that his essay ends up where he wants it to and avoids drift.

Students are then to write their rough drafts to the model provided. *The Lively Art of Writing* by Lucille Vaughn Payne advises writers to logically organize their essay's introductory paragraph in a format that goes from general to specific points to address--from general
information to the specific thesis in order to orient the reader to purpose of the essay (Payne, 1965, p. 42). The conclusion paragraph should develop from addressing the specific purpose of the thesis to a more general outlook to provide the reader with a sense of closure (Payne, 1965, p. 65).

Merrill also suggests implementing what she calls "The Wash" (Appendix E). "The Wash" is a list of 18 rules, ranging from the most basic to more sophisticated aspects of writing. When students are given a writing assignment, they are instructed to be sure they put it through "The Wash". Rule #1 addresses the most fundamental requirements—use of a margin. Some of the other rules also address fundamental aspects such as capitalization and punctuation at the end of sentences. By making some rules extremely simple, every student can feel that they are successful at some parts of "The Wash". The rules become progressively more sophisticated in order to address increasingly sophisticated aspects of writing. One rule advises the use of prepositional clauses while another rule reminds students to use an adverbial clause in order to vary sentence beginnings. "The Wash" is prominently displayed in the room
all year and consistently adds reinforcement to the writing process. Rules addressing simple requirements are implemented first.

After students write their rough drafts of their essays, they should peer edit. When having the students peer edit, the instructor should list the elements of the five-paragraph essay for the students to see (i.e. overhead projector or on the board) and have the students check the essays for conformity with the model. If the essay being edited does not conform, for example, if the author is not mentioned in the first paragraph, the student should write a note in the margin. Students then sequentially go through the essay, checking to see if the other elements are there. At the same time, they should be editing that the paper conforms to "The Wash". Anything the reader sees in an essay that he thinks is particularly strong or impressive, (good word choice, a clever phrase, an interesting point) should be indicated by underlining in a wavy line. Comments about how to improve the paper should be written on the bottom. And always, always, insist that remarks be only constructive. Remarks should only address what can make the essay better, not what is wrong. In an environment that is
one of helping and cooperation, students anxieties are
lessened and they can write with greater freedom and
confidence. Teachers can stress that all writing in the
classroom is part of a process of learning; everyone is
trying to help one another.

Peer editing helps the students improve their writing
in a myriad of ways. First, they learn to identify the
elements of good writing and hopefully will carry it over
into their own writing. Secondly, students have difficulty
editing their own papers as they tend to miss their own
mistakes. They make the mistakes because they think that is
the correct way to do it. No one ever deliberately writes
down mistakes. Therefore, until they become quite skilled
at editing, they should have someone else edit their own
work. Thirdly, students are exposed to a variety of other
writing styles. Perhaps they will be exposed to an outlook
or perspective they would not have thought of. Fourthly,
students frequently take remarks made by other students
better than those from a teacher. Peer editing not only
teaches evaluation but also cooperation.
According to Peter Elbow in his text, *Writing Without Teachers*, (1973), the readers engaged in writing response should:

- make sure they read the writing carefully
- never quarrel with someone’s reaction
- give specific reactions to specific parts

Also, the writers should benefit if they:

- are quiet and listen
- do not reject what they have been advised.
- are not tyrannized by what a reader may say
- ask for specific feedback if desired

After peer editing, the students should write their final draft. The final draft should show evidence of changes from the rough. The final should not be an exact copy of the rough. In the final, the student should incorporate all changes he wants to make, and be sure there are no errors. The final should appear finished. It should be written in pen with no errors or with very few errors. Students need to check their work and be attentive to the fact that they are turning in a finished product. Students should be notified that they need to catch all their errors.
before the teacher does. This teaches them how to be careful of their work.

Upon receipt of the final drafts, the teacher can use one of two different approaches. One is to read deeply and correct the work in the classical style mentioned earlier. This technique should only be done every third or fourth essay assignment. The other approach is to quickly scan the papers for an outstanding example and merely give credit for work done on the assignment, say an automatic 15 points just for doing the assignment. Students need to practice writing many, many times. Those practice writings should not be graded as it is part of the process. If students are given frequent writing assignments, they become much more practiced at writing. They need the experience of writing and practicing technique again and again in order to become competent. It is not really fair to judge a student for all their writing experiences, as much of it should be considered practice. Therefore, the assignments should be quickly scanned to see if all the elements are there, (brainstorm, outline, rough and final) but the essays need not be corrected deeply by the teacher every time.
Every third or fourth essay, the teacher can grade deeply, writing down corrections and checking for spelling. Students need feedback from the teacher in order to get a balanced assessment of their writing. Also, the teacher can note if there are logic or structure problems. But with the continued practice the students receive, these problems should begin to be addressed in the practice essays and hopefully will tend to be reduced. By correcting the essays in this manner, the teacher drastically reduces his work load and makes it possible to assign frequent writing assignments. The students get frequent practice and can begin to experience real growth and change in their development as writers. Students also only rarely receive papers with corrections on them from the teacher and therefore, do not view the teacher as hypercritical. Students can then share the teachers’ comments with his other peer editors in order that teacher feedback benefit the group (Parker, 1987, p. 280).

Some may argue that this method does not have validity because the teacher is not always correcting the papers. But the truth in the matter lies in the fact that teachers infrequently assign writing assignments because of the
workload and tend to limit them to approximately one or two per month anyway. With this method, the teacher assigns essay writing four or five times a month or more giving the students ample practice and still correcting the same number of papers. If writing is perceived of as a process, students need to practice it again and again and with this technique, students are afforded that opportunity.

In either case, the instructor should seek an outstanding paper from each assignment and present it to the students for their review. Presenting a superior paper to the students permits them to see what a quality paper looks like. This modeling of a superior paper shows them what to model to. It, in a sense, shows them the hole out of the box. When the students can have a clear idea of what to write to, it empowers them in their own writing as to how to construct their own writing. Students working alone have no outside influences to aid them in the solidifying of their perception of quality writing. Students engaged in peer editing are only exposed to each other's writing. If there are no strong writers among them, the peer editing will help them catch small errors but not introduce them to strong writers.
The superior paper can be presented on an overhead projector for all the students to see. When the paper is presented, the author’s name should be obscured to maintain privacy. Only one paragraph at a time should be uncovered in order to focus attention on only the paragraph being addressed. The instructor should not tell the students why the paper is superior. Instead, the instructor should ask the students why they think the paper is superior. Again, the learning is left with the students. They are not passive recipients of the instructor’s opinion. They, themselves, must be actively engaged in the assessment. They again go through the peer editing process checking for the author, title and thesis in the introductory paragraph. They check for the internal logic structure of advancement from general to specific ideas. They should pick out if there is a well-turned phrase or good choice of words in the paper. The students are frequently exposed to more advanced vocabulary than many of them would typically use. They now see the power of vocabulary in action and the strength of a well thought out thesis.

Advancing through the essay, the instructor uncovers paragraph #2 and asks the students what is good with the
paragraph or if there are any problems. Students are reminded to look for a topic sentence, concrete detail from the story to back up the assertion and two commentary sentences. The commentary sentences reveal the writer's opinion, and therefore, reveal him as a person. As the entire essay is a writer's opinion, the writer is expressing his viewpoint and subsequently what he thinks. It reveals the writer's outlook and personality. If the writer expresses clear, succinct and insightful ideas, it reveals him to be a clear, succinct and thoughtful thinker. If the writer expresses commentary that is vague and unsophisticated, it likewise reveals him as a vague and unsophisticated thinker. Once students clearly grasp these concepts, they can begin to write with intent for their audience.

The conclusion is addressed for its summarizing opinion on the writer's effectiveness of technique and its closing tone. Ideas expressed should advance from specific to general to leave the reader with the impression of closure. Opinions should not be expressed in first person (I). Use of first person is too informal and conversational. In order for essay writing to have authority and formality, it
needs to be written in third person. Many students frequently have difficulty with this concept. It is extremely helpful to present them with the example of a doctor’s opinion on a serious operation. If the doctor said “I think we should do surgery” it sounds as if his opinion is merely that--his own opinion. But if a doctor said “The surgery should be done”, it sounds that the consensus of medical opinion indicates surgery. The metaphor helps students to distinguish the difference in tone of point-of-view between first person and third person.

Modeling good writing is critical for students to have an idea of what to write to. Giving students clear examples of writing that conforms to criteria indicated as characteristic of good writing, makes a vague concept very concrete. Providing students with a concept of structure helps them organize their thinking processes.

Teaching writing in this fashion neatly ties into the study of literature. Every piece that is read by the class can be examined through all the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy. Students are asked for identification of elements and go all the way to evaluation of the literature, the highest level. Students are asked to learn new material (characterization,
use of setting, use of irony, identification of theme, etc.), see the material in use through reading the literature, and then express their opinions in the essay. Essay writing teaches them to use thinking skills, organization skills, can expand vocabulary, exposes them to view literature critically, and in some cases, can instill an appreciation of analysis. Many students learn to enjoy analysis of literature. It becomes a game, an intellectual exercise where their opinion is sought and appreciated. Criticism can be applied to films and television which adds to the enjoyment. Students frequently find, that they can like to think and express their opinion.
CHAPTER TWO

DATA ANALYSIS

Posttests were given to students in both classes and were administered at the end of May in order to assess the effect of the year's curriculum. The posttest was an example of persuasive writing in response to a prompt regarding permitting minors under the age of 18 to attend amusement parks without their parents (See Appendix F). Again, papers were scored for rhetoric and mechanics on the one to six scale in the same manner as the pretests had been scored. In this case, the students did not write their names on the papers. The papers were collected by an student aide who recorded the student's school identification number on the papers in order that grading not be biased.
AVERAGE POSTTEST SCORES (Scale of 1-6)

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<th>Range</th>
<th>Convention</th>
<th>Range</th>
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</thead>
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<td>4.48</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Y</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>2-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of rhetorical scores indicated no difference between groups, \( t(47) = 1.402, p < .01 \). Convention scores indicated no difference between groups, \( t(57) = .448, p < .01 \) (See Table 3). The size of the groups may make it difficult to get significant differences.

Results of the grading indicated higher scores were received by Group X in both areas of rhetoric and mechanics (See Table 3). The scores of Group X were higher than that of Group Y, but they were not high enough to indicate a statistical significance. Although the scores of Group X were not high enough to be statistically significant, the students of Group X were already involved in the process of becoming critical writers whereas those of Group Y were not yet engaged in the process. In making future projections,
one may speculate that those students of Group X will show a more significant difference in writing should the program be continued into their next school year of grade 10. Perhaps there, the students will be more cognitively able to assimilate the evaluative techniques necessary for the writing of successful essays. It could be that the students' critical thinking skills and more importantly, self direction to implement critical writing techniques will be more evident in the older and more mature student.
The results of the experiment were disappointing. Although the students had been exposed to critical writing for an entire year, their posttest scores were not significantly better than those of the students who had not been instructed as deeply in critical writing. The posttest writing prompt was an exercise in persuasive writing. It is part of a district-wide assessment that is administered by all the English teachers in their classrooms. It may be, as noted, that the students were not yet cognitively ready to apply writing skills learned in class through such mediums as "The Wash" or peer editing to writing in a different domain (i.e. persuasive writing instead of the familiar critical writing). It may be that if the students were given a critical writing task they would have performed better. It may be that the assessment did not test the writing taught. It may be that the assessment instrument used was too confining. It may be that the test the district was prompted into buying is not a worthwhile assessment. It could be that attempting to teach students to think critically is not the appropriate instruction in a
9th grade English class. It could be any, all, or none of these things.

One of the most fundamental debates in education is the debate about what should be tested. The public needs assessments in order to be informed of progress but the testing instruments can be so diverse, as diverse as there are different styles of writing. And perhaps the solution to the problem lies there. Perhaps what is needed is writing assessments that address the type of writing taught. Perhaps there should be a selection of different writing instruments on the same grade level that could address different domains of writing. There could be an assessment on creative writing, reflective writing, persuasive, narrative or critical writing geared to the different grade levels but all using the same methods of scoring or rubric.

It could be that testing writing of the different types of writing taught, could provide a more accurate assessment of student’s progress and show a increase in scores.
APPENDIX A - DISTRICT PRETEST

Controversial Issue

Read and think about the WRITING SITUATION and follow the DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING. Be sure to use good writing skills and correct usage, grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and spelling.

A Change in the Grading System

Writing Situation

Your school district is considering a change in the grading system. They are considering dropping the system of grades A, B, C, D, and F, and adopting an ungraded system in which the student simply receives a "pass or fail" grade. There are people in support of each side of this controversial issue and there are convincing arguments for each side.

Your local school board has asked students to comment on this proposed change in the grading system. You have thought about this issue and the arguments for both grading systems. You decide to write a letter to your local school board stating your position.

Directions for Writing

Write a letter to your local school board either in favor of or against a grading system change in which the student simply receives a "pass or fail" grade. State your position on whether your school district should change their grading system. Support your position with reasons, examples, or evidence.

Because some of your readers may not agree with your position, present the most convincing reasons to support your position.
Writing Unit
Thesis Sentences
Day 1
Thesis Sentences Writing Unit
APPENDIX B - THESIS SENTENCES
Writing Unit
Thesis Sentences
Day 1

A thesis is a general sentence with a subject and an opinion.

Example: Australia is the best country of all for a vacation.

In this sentence, "Australia" is the subject. The rest of this sentence tells the writer's opinion about it—that it's the best country for a vacation.

REVIEW:

A thesis is a general sentence with a ____________________________

and an ____________________________

PRACTICE

For each of the following thesis sentences, underline the subject once and the opinion twice.

Example: West Hills is a wonderful place to go to school.

a) Fishing is fun to do when I'm with my dad.

b) English is my favorite class.

c) It's exciting going to a new school.

d) Tacos are my favorite food.

e) I like radio station Q106 the most.

REVIEW

What are the 2 parts to a thesis?

__________________________ and an ____________________________.
Now, write a thesis for each of your subjects.

a) ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

b) ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

c) ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

d) ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

Go back and underline each subject once and each opinion twice.

FINAL REVIEW

Fill in the blanks to review the parts of a thesis.

A thesis is a general sentence with a _______________________________________
and an _______________________________________.

Commentary means your personal opinion, response, reaction, or reflection about a specific detail you are making in an essay. When you write commentary, you are "commenting on" a point you have made. Synonyms for commentary include "analysis," "interpretation," "insight," "evaluation," "explication," "discussion," and "speculation." Commentary echoes the focus in your thesis and topic sentences in your essay.

Commentary is a difficult skill to master because all the opinions and interpretations must come from you. Your teacher will not supply the information you will need to write commentary. It is up to you to think of some original, individual statements to make about your details and examples.

Read the following paragraph that describes an experience. It does not have commentary in it.

Driving in the fog to Sacramento was a frightening experience. No signs were visible from the freeway, so I couldn't see if there were any gas stations nearby to fill my near-empty tank. In addition, it was 12:00 noon, and the fog was so thick that I couldn't read the exit signs until I started passing them. To make matters worse, a police car suddenly appeared ahead and drove at forty miles per hour for the next thirty minutes, and none of us were allowed to pass him. When I finally reached Sacramento that day, a great sense of relief permeated my body and mind.

This paragraph has a thesis, three sentences of concrete detail, and a concluding sentence. It does not have any commentary in the middle. Turn the page to see the same paragraph with commentary added.
The paragraph below is a rewritten version of the one on the previous page. It has commentary sentences inserted after each sentence of concrete detail. The commentary is underlined.

Driving in the fog to Sacramento was a frightening experience. No signs were visible from the freeway, so I couldn't see if there were any gas stations nearby to fill my near-empty tank. I panicked at the thought of being stranded alone in a strange place. I kept hoping to see a station materialize in the fog and couldn't make up my mind what to do. In addition, it was 12:00 noon, and the fog was so thick that I couldn't read the exit signs until I started passing them. I realized I had driven on for hours, dreading the never-ending blurring lines on the horizon. I had been expecting the weather to lift suddenly and let me get back on schedule. To make matters worse, a police car suddenly appeared ahead and drove at forty miles per hour for the next thirty minutes, and none of us were allowed to pass him. It was as though an invisible force field had been thrown up behind the patrol car. No one felt brave enough to dare going around him, and so we sulked behind him for what seemed like hours. When I finally reached Sacramento that day, a great sense of relief permeated my body and mind.
Here is an example of a literature-based paragraph on ANIMAL FARM by George Orwell. The concrete details are examples or quotations from the story. This paragraph does not have commentary:

In ANIMAL FARM, Clover represents a mother figure to the other animals. She talks to Mollie the horse, when others will not. Later, Clover warns Boxer to slow down and nurses him when he collapses. Throughout the story, she sees the changes in the Seven Commandments and in the pigs at the end. She works hard to help the other animals, regardless of what might happen to her.

Turn the page to see the same paragraph with commentary added.
In ANIMAL FARM, Clover is a mother figure to the other animals. She talks to Mollie the horse, when others won't. She shows she cares about keeping the animals together. She is not mean to Mollie but wants her to understand how serious her leaving the farm is to the whole community. Later, Clover warns Boxer to slow down and nurses him when he collapses. Her motherly concern for him makes us feel sorry for the old, true horse and through her eyes we see the injustice of the system. She understands the punishment of hard work and although she could have broken away she believes in Animal Farm. In addition, she sees the changes in the Seven Commandments and in the pigs at the end of the story. Her instinctive knowledge leads her to sense that things are wrong. She is the character who makes the reader want to say, "Yes, you are right: do something." Clover works hard to help the other animals, regardless of what might happen to her.
To practice commentary, you will complete a four-sentence unit of writing. This functions like part of a body paragraph. The sequence is as follows:

Sentence #1: topic sentence
Sentence #2: one sentence of concrete detail
Sentence #3: one sentence of commentary about sentence #2
Sentence #4: another sentence of commentary about sentence #2

As you write, you need to have at least 2 points of commentary for every point of concrete detail. This will help you write essays that are well developed and thoughtful.

Here is a teacher sample to use as a model:

I hate shopping for Christmas. The lines always have five or six people waiting for one cashier. It takes forever to pay for something. By the time I've done that, I'm too tired to stay any longer.

A topic sentence is given below. Write one concrete detail sentence for #2 and two commentary sentences for #3 and #4.

The walls in this classroom are dull and boring.

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________
Students may have one or more of the following problems while they are learning how to write commentary:

1. Commentary drifts:

   I like camping more than anything. The air is clean and clear. It feels good to breathe it after the smog of El Cajon. I wonder if the Native Americans appreciated the clean air they had.

   Better:

   I like camping more than anything. The air is clean and clear. It feels good to breathe it after the smog of El Cajon. My lungs always feel healthier after some time in the mountains.

2. Commentary is really concrete detail:

   I like camping more than anything. The air is clean and clear. There isn't any smog up in the mountains. There isn't the usual brown haze in the sky that I see most days.

   Better:

   I like camping more than anything. The air is clean and clear. It feels good to breathe it after the smog of El Cajon. My lungs always feel healthier after some time in the mountains.

3. Commentary repeats from the thesis:

   Football is a fun sport. We get to play in front of lots of people. It's fun to do that. I like to play in front of a crowd a lot.

   Better:

   Football is a fun sport. We get to play in front of lots of people. I like the feeling of having my friends and classmates cheering me on. It's exciting to feel the encouragement from the crowd as we do our best to win.
Commentary is generic:

Camping is the best vacation. The air is nice to breathe because it's so clean and clear. It sure is good being there. I like it a lot.

Better:

Camping is the best vacation. The air is clean and clear to breathe. It somehow feels lighter than city air and makes my lungs feel better. I like having the chance to be in a healthier place for a little while.

Commentary contradicts the thesis:

Camping is wonderful. I like the fresh air the most. I hated the bites I got there. In addition, my family argued the whole weekend.

Better:

Camping is wonderful. I like the fresh air the most. I always feel healthier after some time in the mountains. It feels good to breathe deeply after the smog of El Cajon.

Also better:

Camping is terrible. The last time I went, I hated the bites I got there, and my family argued the whole weekend. We went for a relaxed time but got nothing but trouble. I will think twice before going again.
Now try more commentary practice. Two topic sentences are given below. For each, write one concrete detail sentence and two commentary sentences.

A. "I like camping more than anything."

B. "My favorite season of the year is summer."

Trade papers with someone sitting near you and write two things you liked about your partner's commentary.

I liked ____________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

and ______________________________________________________________________________
Paragraph 3:

Sentence #1: Topic Sentence: 

Sentence 2 (cd): 

Sentence 3 (comm): 

Sentence 4 (comm): 

Sentence 5 (cd): 

Sentence 6 (comm): 

Sentence 7 (comm): 

Sentence 8 (conclusion, all comm): 

Paragraph 4: first sentence of concluding paragraph: 

THE WASH

1. Margins
2. N2SSW TSW
3. Indentation
4. End punctuation
5. Start one sentence with prepositional phrase
6. Use alliteration
7. Start with to + verb
8. Start with capitals
9. Check the spelling
10. One transition
11. Major words only once
12. Use one ;
13. Use a contrast like but, or, yet
14. Start with --ly word
15. Use one adverbial clause (when, after, if)
16. 1 BE verb per paragraph
17. Use parallel structure
18. Put adjectives into prepositional phrases
19. Use a simile.....remember like or as
Controversial Issue – Amusement Park Rules
Grade 9

Read and think about the WRITING SITUATION and follow the DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING. Be sure to use good writing skills and correct usage, grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and spelling.

WRITING SITUATION

Because of the recent high rate of accidents, amusement parks in Anaheim and North Los Angeles are considering a new rule. Under the proposed new rule, these amusement parks would no longer allow anyone under age 18 into the parks without an adult, parent or guardian. One major reason for this change is that if underage persons are hurt in the park, they cannot be treated medically until permission is given by their parents.

There are convincing reasons in support of both sides of this issue. You have thought about this issue and the arguments for both sides. You decide to write a letter stating your position.

DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING

Write a letter to the Park Manager either in favor of or against this new rule banning people under age 18 from entering amusement parks in Anaheim and North Los Angeles without an adult, parent or guardian. State the issue and give your position. Support your position with reasons, examples and evidence.

Remember you are writing to a huge corporation. Present the most persuasive reasons to convince them that your views are valid.
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### Table 2: Pretest Scores

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### Table 2: Posttest Scores

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TABLE 3

T-TEST CALCULATION FOR A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO INDEPENDENT MEANS

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#16 47 df | 47 df |
#17 2.95 significance | 2.95 significance |

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