

Weekly Academic Writing

Overview of Academic Writing

During your ninth grade year, you will be writing one, approximately 200-word paragraph in both English and Social Studies per week. These paragraphs will demonstrate fluency in academic writing: being able to define a subject, explain a process, identify and explain cause and effect, present a reasonable argument, develop a meaningful comparison, narrate an event, and summarize content. The paragraphs will respond to a variety of sources: interviews, case studies, essays, news articles, opinion pieces, research, lectures, presentations, novels, plays, poems and videos.

Through weekly academic writing, students will develop and foster the skills that will enable them to succeed throughout the four-year English and social studies cycle at Tam. Academic writing demonstrates that a student can comprehend complex information and respond to it in a coherent, thoroughly developed and stylistically proficient manner. For more on Academic Writing see rules 354-370 of Writers Inc.

Academic Writing Modes

Each paragraph assignment requires a student to respond within one dominant writing mode. Ninth grade students must become fluent in each of the following modes:

- A. Definition
- B. Process Analysis
- C. Comparison
- D. Cause and Effect
- E. Argumentation
- F. Narrative
- G. Summary

A. Definition

A definition paragraph defines a term, a concept, a period in history, a law, a policy, a person, an element of culture, etc. A definition employs precise language and is developed through a suitable combination of some of the following: explanation, concrete details, illustration with example, anecdote, vivid descriptions, logical reasoning, and supporting evidence. If you were given articles to support your reading of The Odyssey, you might be required to define oral tradition or epic poetry or the classic hero.

B. Process Analysis

A process analysis paragraph explains how a process works: how something is made, done, accomplished, achieved, or produced. Your goal is to write clearly so that readers can easily follow the explanation or directions. Parts of the process are clearly divided, precisely labeled, and logically organized. Each step of the process leads the reader clearly and logically to the next. Steps that are complicated are fully explained. Vivid

examples are used to illustrate the steps in the process. Clarity and precision is of paramount importance when explaining a process.

When a social studies teacher asks you to explain a process, you might be explaining:

- How the Palestinians came to occupy the Occupied Territories
- How the US acted as an intermediary in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- How the evacuation of the Gaza Strip was executed

C. Comparison

A comparison paragraph demonstrates increased understanding of one or more subjects by aligning and explaining the similarities and differences of the subjects. A comparison must be purposeful. When you compare two subjects, you must logically organize the development of the comparison in either a point by point or subject by subject fashion. This is commonly referred to as the AABB or ABAB format. Above all, the form you select must treat each subject equally. Meaning, you must provide thorough explanation, reasoning, illustration and detail for both subjects of the comparison. Purposeful comparisons enhance your understanding of your subjects. For instance, in World Cultures and Geography you might be asked to compare FEMA's responses to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to note if improvements in the agency's efforts had been made.

D. Cause and Effect

A cause and effect paragraph identifies and analyzes the causes and/or effects of a certain phenomenon. These paragraphs answer why something happened or analyze the results of a complex occurrence. For instance, in World Cultures and Geography you might be asked to write a paragraph that identifies, explains and illustrates Hurricane Katrina's effects on education in New Orleans. Or you might be asked to identify, illustrate and explain the causes of the levy failures in New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina. A strong cause and effect paragraph will clearly assert and precisely label the cause or effect being addressed in the paragraph. The cause or effect will be developed through a suitable combination of some of the following: explanation, illustration, reasoning, and narration.

E. Argumentation

Argumentative paragraphs present reasonable positions that are thoroughly developed through clear explanations, logical reasoning, and supporting evidence. Accuracy and specificity are extremely important when composing an argument. Supporting evidence comes in the form of specific facts; convincing examples; long term, broad-based studies; and individual case studies. In social studies, you may be required to argue whether genetically modified organisms need greater regulation or whether there should be federal funding of stem cell research or whether Intelligent Design should be allowed into the science curriculum.

F. Narrative

A narrative paragraph recounts an event or series of interrelated events. A narrative paragraph provides the essential elements of an occurrence: *who, what, when, where, and why*; in a chronological arrangement. The paragraph will contain such features as plot, conflict, suspense, characterization and description to intensify the readers' interest. In social studies, you may be required to read an article that covers the life of Rosa Parks to vividly recreate Rosa's landmark act of resistance.

G. Summary

A paragraph summary presents the main and supporting ideas of a reading selection. When given a complex reading assignment, a teacher might require you to summarize content to check for understanding. The process for summary requires you to skim the main features of a text selection (titles, chapter headings, topic sentences, illustrations), read the selection closely, take notes on main and supporting ideas and key facts, and use notes to compose a summary in your own words. In English, you might be required to write a summary of an especially challenging chapter of Great Expectations. In social studies, you might be required to write a summary of an introductory article to the AIDS crisis in Africa.