**Opinion and Argument: A Vertical Leap**

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Throughout the **Common Core State Standards**, there is a push for students to reason based on logic, to use reliable and relevant evidence to back their claims, to consider the perspectives of others, and to evaluate sources. To set the stage for this writing in grades K-12, Anchor Standard 1 indicates that students will “write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.” That’s to say, in order to build a foundation for college and career, students will need to learn to use writing effectively to support their claims.

The progression of the writing standards for argumentation steepens quickly, and as you look at the standards vertically, there is a noticeable increase in expectations at certain grade levels.

* Third through fifth grade students write opinion pieces on topics or texts that not only introduce the topic or text about which they are writing and state an opinion, but also include an organizational structure for their evidence.
* Fifth graders are expected to logically order and group their evidence for the purpose of advancing their claims. Students broaden their use of linking, or transition words, to also include words like because, therefore, since and form example to link their opinions and reasons for their opinions. Students need to have a concluding statement or section and relate it to the opinion they have presented.
* In sixth through eighth grade, students’ pieces are no longer opinion pieces, but rather argument pieces. Students write arguments to support their claims that include logically organized reasons and evidence based on credible sources. At this level students are also expected to argue both sides of an issue and to understand the relationship between claims and counterclaims in their writing. Students’ writing also includes a concluding statement or section that supports the argument presented.
* As students move through middle school and high school, there is a progression of skills for effectively making counterclaims in their argument writing. For instance, students begin by acknowledging opposing claims, then later develop claims and counterclaims by supplying evidence for each. These students are also required to recognize the strengths and limitations of both their claims and counterclaims.

**Anatomy of an Argument**Stephen Toulmin, a British philosopher, [outlines six components](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/toulmin.pdf) that exist in well written arguments. They are:

* **Data** is the facts or evidence that the writer or speaker uses to make the argument.
* **Claim(s)** are the statement(s) being argued (thesis statement).
* **Warrants** explain how the claim and the evidence are connected.
* **Qualifiers** limit the strengths of the argument so that it is not presented as an absolute truth. (i.e. Probably, may, many, often)
* **Rebuttals** are counter arguments that refute the claim.
* **Backing** supports the warrants.