

| | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Rubric Category | Comprehensive Understanding |
| Grade/Score | Grades 9-12 / Scores 2 and 3 |
| Rubric Category | Development |
| Grade/Score | Grades 6-12 / Scores 2 and 3 |
| CCSS Writing Standards | W1a |
| Argument Type | Primarily literary |

Providing Context

Students ensure they are providing effective context for their readers by asking effective questions, removing irrelevant information, and including necessary information.

Understanding the Expectations

When you write any essay, especially an essay whose purpose is to make an argument, you need to ensure that your readers or audience members have enough context to understand what you're talking about and to get hooked into being interested. Creating that combination of understanding and interest is what we mean when we say that you are "providing context."

The word context comes from the Latin words for together (con) and weave (text), which is a pretty good metaphor for what you're doing when you provide context. You are weaving together your claims and ideas with your readers' understanding. It's a tricky balance sometimes: on the one hand, you have to get into your potential readers' heads and figure out what they need to know, and on the other hand, you also need to be efficient and interesting so you don't waste their time by telling them things they already know or don't really need to know. You also want them to be interested so they get hooked into reading more.

Essays in the literary analysis genre typically make the following assumptions:

- The audience has read the text, but not necessarily as carefully or as recently as you have. Therefore, the audience is already familiar with the plot of the story and does not need you to retell it.
- The audience does not know what texts you are going to be analyzing or anything else you will be discussing until you tell them. Therefore, you need to be very careful to give them the important information they need so they don't get confused.

While providing context is a writing skill that you should apply throughout an essay, the introduction is probably the most important place to establish your context and to weave together your argument with your reader's understanding. It can be helpful to work backwards from the claim of your overall essay—its thesis—as you work to establish context efficiently.

When you are working on your introduction (or any body paragraph), you can ask yourself these questions as you consider whether you've provided your readers with strong, specific context to help them understand your argument:

- What do my readers need to know in order to understand what text I'm talking about?
 - » Be sure to include the author's full name and the full title of the text or your readers will be confused as they try to figure it out.
- What do my readers need to know in order to understand what my claim is about?
 - » You might want to mention some themes, characters, or ideas from the text right up front so your readers know where you're going with your argument.
- What do my readers need to know in order to find my claim interesting and relevant?
 - » Consider adding some information about where your argument is going to go.

- What do most people already know about the themes and issues I'm writing about?
 - » Don't waste space making general statements about life that most people already agree with. Your readers will already know that love is important or that true friendship lasts through difficult times.
- What do my readers already know if they have read this text?
 - » Don't waste space including information they would already have from reading the text. Your reader has read the text, so retelling the whole plot simply wastes time.

When you've succeeded, you should be able to step back and imagine yourself in the shoes of your readers as you bring them smoothly into the information about what text you will be analyzing, what important ideas your essay will discuss, and what your main argument or claim will be.

Playing the "Weave Together" Game

1. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and list up to three potential overall claims for your essay. If you already have a well-developed thesis for your essay, you can work with just one claim, but if you are early in the writing process, it can help to play this game with multiple claims.
2. There are three basic ways to "play" Weave Together. Two of them involve adding words, phrases, and sentences for necessary context and one involves subtracting words, phrases, and sentences because they are unnecessary (if for example, the reader would know it already or it's not really relevant).
 - Adding #1:
 - » Write down the starter phrase: "In order to understand what my claim is about, my readers need to know that..."
 - » Finish the phrase with a sentence or even a list of facts, ideas, and information about characters.
 - ♦ This list should definitely include the name of the text's author along with the name of the text.

- » **Note:** a starter phrase helps you clarify your thinking. It would be clunky to include it in a final draft, so once you have your sentences or list, delete the starter phrase, take the ideas you generated, and incorporate them in a thoughtful sentence or sentences.
- Adding #2:
 - » Write down the starter phrase: “In order to find my claim interesting, my readers need to know that...”
 - » Finish the phrase with a sentence or even a list of ideas, and themes that would help a reader see what was interesting and meaningful about your claim.
 - » **Note:** a starter phrase helps you clarify your thinking. It would be clunky to include it in a final draft, so once you have your sentences or list, delete the starter phrase, take the ideas you generated, and incorporate them in a thoughtful sentence or sentences.
- Subtracting:
 - » Write down the starter phrase: “My readers probably already know that...”
 - » Think about somebody who has read this text and finish the phrase with things you have already written in your introduction that your readers probably already know. Then, just for fun, add a few items that you might have written if you weren’t being so careful not to waste space in your intro.
 - ◆ Some examples of things your readers probably already know: major plot events, basic information about characters, general statements about life, etc.
 - » Now, look over your introduction. Did you write anything unnecessary that your readers probably already know? Are there any words, phrases, or sentences you can edit out of your essay in order to keep it efficient and more interesting for your reader?

These are all variations on the same technique: you are trying to get the maximum amount done in the minimum amount of words as you help your reader understand what you are talking about and why it’s going to be interesting and meaningful. You are weaving together your reader’s existing understanding with the new understandings you are going to provide over the course of your essay.

Writing It Up

Now, review the improved introduction materials you created during the game. If you are early in the writing process, consider organizing your materials into a really strong introduction with helpful context. As you continue to write, keep an eye out for opportunities to continue adding useful context and subtracting the less useful words and phrases. If you are working on revising a completed draft, see how much useful context you can provide in your introduction (and elsewhere) while revising out any extraneous facts or generalities.