

Map It Out

What is it?

A tool that helps students draft higher-quality arguments, explanatory pieces, and stories (Common Core Writing Standards 1–3) by teaching them to map out their ideas on visual organizers; using the organizers in this way supports the planning component of Common Core Writing Standard 5

What are the benefits of using this tool?

The value of mapping out our ideas before writing or speaking is one that everyone can appreciate—and one we need to instill in our students. Because students often struggle with traditional outlines (or worse, find them boring!), it's important to familiarize them with other outlining strategies. This tool teaches students how visual organizers can be used as outlining tools. The graphical format of these organizers makes them appealing to many students. It also promotes high-quality work by helping students visualize the structure of the pieces they're trying to write, as well as the individual elements those pieces should contain (e.g., claim, reasons, and conclusion in the case of a basic argument).

What are the basic steps?

1. Select a writing type to focus on (e.g., argument, story, comparison) and a visual organizer that matches it. See p. 67 for options, or create an organizer from scratch.
2. Use the organizer to teach (or remind students of) the elements that this writing type requires. Show them how the organizer contains “slots” for all the essential components. (“See how this argument organizer has slots for recording a claim, reasons, evidence, and a conclusion?”)
3. Present a writing task that fits the organizer type you just reviewed. Show students how to use the organizer to outline a response (explain your thinking as you fill in the boxes). Then show them how you would use the completed organizer to help you structure and organize a first draft (write it out).
4. Call students' attention to the words/strategies you used to connect the ideas from your organizer.
Tip: Prepare students to connect their ideas in a similarly smooth and organized way by reviewing the kinds of linking and organizing words that characterize this particular kind of writing piece (e.g., *first*, *next*, and *then* for a sequence piece). See *The Missing Links*, pp. 74–77, for assistance.
5. Give students a new writing task (same type), and have them map out their ideas on an organizer. Check their organizers *before* they start drafting their pieces so you can help them address any issues or deficiencies. (Have they sketched out the required elements? Are their ideas sound?)
6. Have students use their completed organizers to help them draft a response to the assigned task.
7. Review students' drafts. (Do they reflect students' outlines? Are all the components present? Did students use linking/organizing words to connect their ideas logically? Are there overall quality issues?) Provide feedback, and have students use that feedback to revise and improve their work.

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To show students how visual organizers can be used as outlining tools
- ✓ To familiarize students with the key elements and requirements of specific writing types
- ✓ To promote high-quality writing by teaching students to plan out and revise their drafts

Teachers use this tool's visual organizers to help their students outline many different kinds of writing pieces—stories, arguments, comparison pieces, etc. In total, twelve different organizers reflecting ten different writing types are available (see box below for a list). All are available for download (www.ThoughtfulClassroom.com/Tools); three are shown in the text (pp. 71–73).

Note: Because the required elements for a given writing type will vary by grade level (consult your writing standards for specifics), you should feel free to modify the organizers before using them.

Available Organizers

Argument/Opinion Organizer (three versions available: beginning, intermediate, advanced)—Use this type of organizer to help students map out the basic components of an argument/opinion piece. Select the version whose structure most closely reflects the requirements for argument/opinion writing at your particular grade level.

Main Idea Organizer—Use this organizer to help students map out pieces that have a clear main idea and set of supporting details.

Topic-Subtopic Organizer—Use this organizer to help students map out informative/explanatory pieces about topics that have clear subtopics or subdivisions. Each subtopic becomes its own section in the final piece.

Matrix Organizer—This type of organizer is similar to a Topic-Subtopic Organizer; the main difference is that it's used for pieces that discuss two or more topics/items rather than one. Specifically, it helps students map out informative/explanatory pieces that address the same subtopics, features, or focus questions when discussing or comparing multiple items.

Comparison Organizer—Use this organizer to help students map out informative/explanatory pieces whose purpose is to compare two or more items.

Sequence Organizer—Use this organizer to help students map out informative/explanatory pieces whose purpose is to describe a sequence of steps, stages, or events.

Cycle Organizer—This organizer is similar to a Sequence Organizer; the difference is that it's used to map out pieces that discuss a cyclical (repeating) sequence of steps/stages/events rather than a linear one.

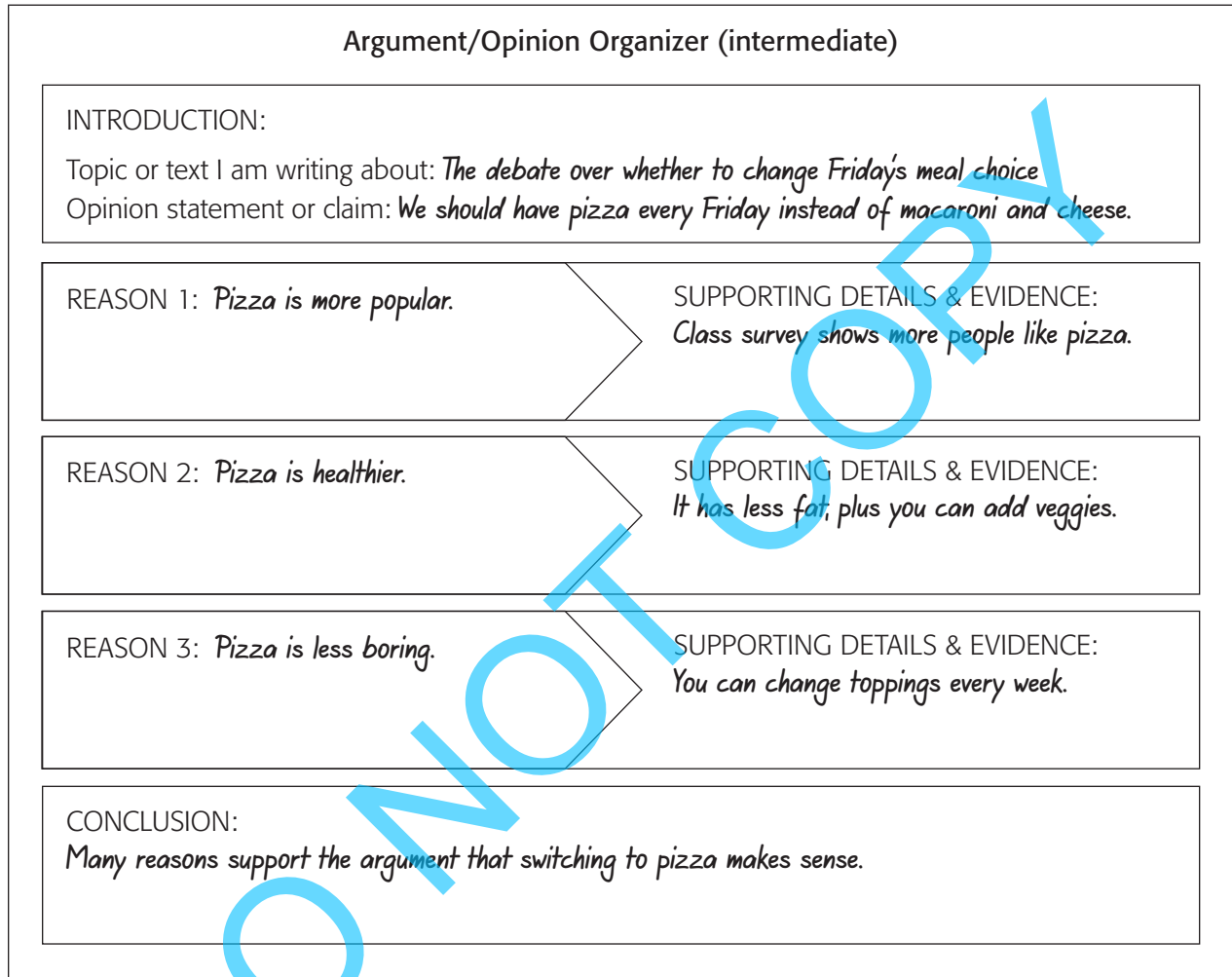
Cause-Effect Organizer—Use this organizer to help students map out informative/explanatory pieces whose purpose is to discuss the causes and/or effects of a specific issue, event, or other item.

Problem-Solution Organizer—Use this organizer to help students map out informative/explanatory pieces whose purpose is to present possible solutions for a specific problem.

Story Map—Use this organizer to help students plan out the key elements of a story before they actually write it.

EXAMPLE 1: Elementary (modeling example)

The organizer and paragraph that a fourth-grade teacher used to model the outlining and writing process for his students (Step 3) are shown below. Notice the clear correspondence between the information on his organizer and the information in his final piece (the content, as well as the way that it's structured). Notice also that he helped his students see how he had connected the ideas on his organizer (Step 4) by underlining the linking and organizing words in his final piece.



The Great Macaroni and Cheese Debate

Our school is currently debating some changes to the cafeteria menu, such as whether to continue serving macaroni and cheese every Friday. I believe that we should have pizza every Friday instead of macaroni and cheese. In the first place, pizza seems to be more popular among students. A survey of the class showed that more than half the people prefer pizza to macaroni and cheese. Second of all, pizza is a healthier option. Besides having less fat, it allows you to add vegetables in the form of toppings. Finally, students would be less likely to get bored of pizza since the toppings can be changed every week. Different toppings would make it feel like you were getting an entirely different food instead of the same thing every Friday! Taken together, these reasons support the argument that switching to pizza is a better option than sticking with macaroni and cheese.

EXAMPLE 2: Primary

Although the Common Core Writing Standards don't require providing supporting details in an argument/opinion piece until fourth grade, a first-grade teacher uses intermediate-level Argument/Opinion Organizers to develop this skill much earlier. Unlike the beginning-level organizers, which she uses at the start of the year, the intermediate ones have slots for including supporting details and evidence. The organizers that two of her students completed in preparation for a writing assignment on bedtimes are shown below—one presents an argument in favor of bedtimes, the other against.

Argument/Opinion Organizer (intermediate)

INTRODUCTION Topic/text I am writing about: <i>bedtime</i> Opinion statement or claim: <i>Yes I believe I should have a bedtime.</i>	
REASON 1 <i>You could get sick.</i>	SUPPORTING DETAILS/EVIDENCE <i>I missed school when I didn't get that much sleep.</i>
REASON 2 <i>You can get cranky.</i>	SUPPORTING DETAILS/EVIDENCE <i>People may not want to be by you.</i>
REASON 3 <i>You could fall asleep at school.</i>	SUPPORTING DETAILS/EVIDENCE <i>Miss some important things.</i>
CONCLUSION <i>It's important to have a bedtime.</i>	

Argument/Opinion Organizer (intermediate)

INTRODUCTION Topic/text I am writing about: <i>Bedtime</i> Opinion statement or claim: <i>I think I shouldn't have a bedtime.</i>	
REASON 1 <i>I could fall asleep by myself.</i>	SUPPORTING DETAILS/EVIDENCE <i>I have fallen asleep by myself before.</i>
REASON 2 <i>eats naps and watches TV.</i>	SUPPORTING DETAILS/EVIDENCE <i>you nigh tengoy it.</i>
REASON 3 <i>Sleep during the day.</i>	SUPPORTING DETAILS/EVIDENCE <i>I took a long nap in the day.</i>
CONCLUSION <i>That's why you shouldn't have a bedtime.</i>	

Teacher Talk

- ➔ This tool trains students to develop and strengthen their written work via planning, revising, and rewriting. In this regard, it's a perfect match for Common Core Writing Standard 5. To target Writing Standard 6 as well, have students write, illustrate, and/or collaborate on their pieces via computer (all three of these things can be done using Google Docs, for example).
- ➔ A scaffolding option for younger students or students who are new to the tool involves focusing on one element at a time (mapping *or* writing, rather than both). You might, for example, give students a completed organizer or create one as a class rather than having students complete their own—and then have students use the completed organizer to write their pieces.
- ➔ Emphasize the idea that if students take the time to make an organizer, it'll be that much easier for them to write a first draft—and they'll end up with pieces that are more complete and better organized as a result. (“If you’ve outlined your ideas on an organizer, all you’ll need to do is flesh them out a bit and connect them together in a logical and orderly way using transition words.”) Illustrate this point using concrete examples like the one on p. 68.
- ➔ It’s important to use the organizers regularly so that students internalize the components and structure of the different writing types. Instruct students to picture the organizers and use them as guides even if the organizers aren’t available (e.g., in a standardized testing situation).
- ➔ Before discussing the components of a particular type of piece (Step 2), review its overall purpose. (“Today we’re going to be writing a comparison piece. The goal of this kind of piece is to highlight similarities and/or differences between whatever you’ve been asked to compare.”) Making students aware that different pieces have different purposes, and that the purpose of a piece affects the way that it’s written (content/structure/style), both complements the goals of Common Core Reading Standard 6 and facilitates better writing.
- ➔ In the beginning, have students write about topics they’re familiar with, or provide them with the factual information they’d need to write their pieces (e.g., a list of reasons for/against something if they were writing an argument piece). Since the goal is to have students practice using the organizers, you don’t want a lack of content knowledge to get in the way.
- ➔ If the goal is to help students develop high-quality pieces, you need to do more than teach them what elements to include; you need to teach them what those elements (and their pieces as a whole) should look like. At the minimum, review the criteria set out by the Common Core Writing Standards for your particular grade level and discuss those criteria with students. (“What should the introduction of an explanatory piece do?” “What kind of language makes for a great narrative?”) Reviewing examples of high-quality work is another great way to help students understand and internalize the characteristics of quality.
- ➔ No time for students to fill in an organizer? Teach them to construct a checklist (mental or physical) of the required elements, and have them review their drafts to ensure that those elements are present.