LDC**BRIEFS**

AN ONGOING SERIES AIMED AT TEACHER ENGAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

HOW TO FILL IN AN LDC TEMPLATE TASK

The unique design of an LDC template task, with its blanks and partially written prompts, has a special use: to partner with you in aligning assignments in social studies/history, science, and literature studies to the literacy standards in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The design also creates a specific type of assignment, one that directs students to write in response to reading. The "filling in" process in the template design forces us to be purposeful and intentional about texts, products, and content.

As you fill in those blanks, you are making it clear to students that they must produce a written product showing evidence of their understanding and skill. You also create opportunities to teach skills and control the complexity of a task, challenging your students to learn new skills and practice ones you already have taught or students have learned in previous coursework. As well, you can make your teaching tasks closely align to specific grade level CCSS skills embedded in the ELA standards.

Each blank in the LDC templates call on you to make instructional choices related to skills and content. The discussion in this brief is meant to help you make choices for your LDC module that justify the time and effort you and your students will spend in completing the task.

LDC's Template Task Collection 1 provides you with two types of template tasks to use: one in which you design a task for research and another in which you start with a question. Choose the approach that best fits your purpose for the task you plan to design. The "After researching…" template involves multiple texts focused on a topic; the "insert question" templates can involve one or more texts.

THEME OR TEXT?

Before you begin crafting your teaching task, you need to make a decision that will determine the teaching task you select and how you fill in the blanks. A teaching task can lead students in different directions depending on the template you select, your question or the way you fill in the content blanks. Take for example the two teaching tasks below. Each addresses the same topic—existentialism— but poses the charge in the teaching tasks quite differently: one emphasizing a theme, the other a text.

Theme: Teaching Task 18: After researching essays and articles on existentialism, write an essay that explains its key themes and its emergence in one aspect of 20th-century culture (film, literature or psychology). What conclusions or implications can you draw? Cite at least 4 sources, pointing

out key elements of each source.

Text: Teaching Task 21: <u>How does Kafka invoke the main tenets of existentialism in his work, *The Metamorphosis*?</u> After reading <u>this novel</u>, write an <u>essay</u> that addresses the question and analyzes <u>Kafka's use of specific literary techniques or devices</u>, providing examples to clarify your analysis. What conclusions or implications can you draw?

The first, on theme, primarily demands research and synthesis skills. The second, on text, primarily demands a close read and analysis of a specific text.

Of course, it's possible to connect theme and text. Take for example the following exemplary teaching task:

Teaching Tasks 11: After researching <u>essays and articles</u> on <u>existentialism</u>, write an <u>essay</u> that defines <u>existentialism</u> and explains <u>its impact on Franz Kafka's work *The Metamorphosis*</u>. Support your discussion with evidence from your research.

No matter which approach you take, understand that a teaching task that analyzes one or more texts or the methods of one or more authors is closely aligned to the CCSS literacy standards. If you choose to involve students in examining a theme, you should make sure your instructional plan teaches students the reading skills aligned to the Common Core standards hardwired into the LDC framework. You can do this by writing mini-tasks that address the grade-level demands and skills in these standards.

"AFTER RESEARCHING" TEMPLATES

"After Researching" template tasks allow you to engage student in reading and synthesizing multiple texts on a topic and to focus on research skills. Those skills might include selecting texts that are relevant and credible, identifying pertinent evidence from a set of texts, and using techniques for embedding evidence and citing in compositions. Be careful when using this template task, however, so as to avoid overloading the task with too many texts. If you limit the texts to a few, you are better positioned to teach research skills such as annotation and selection of appropriate evidence. Too many texts will mean that you will not have the time or inclination to teach the reading skills outlined in the CCSS. Limiting the number

of texts also allows you to know these texts well so that you can score for students' abilities to use evidence with "precision" and "accuracy."

"INSERT QUESTION" TEMPLATES

"Insert Question" template tasks were designed to be flexible so your students can focus on either a single text or on multiple texts. If you choose an "Insert Question" template, you need to craft a question that relates to the text/s and topic. It is best to save the global, essential, or open questions for full units; right now, you are selecting a question for the LDC teaching tasks that is specific to one or more texts. This question should be central to the discipline, engaging students in a way of thinking that is key to the subject area. The question should be clearly in the mode of the template task you selected: argumentation, informational/explanatory, or narrative. Also, the question should not be biased or force a specific response from the student. The best question relates directly to a text and includes a reference to the author, issue, character, theme, structure or some other aspect of the text.

TEMPLATE TASKS CHOICE POINTS: TEXT, PRODUCT, CONTENT

Insert Text(s):

Choosing an appropriate text or multiple texts is one of the first and most important decisions you will make. Texts are the central focus of the CCSS literacy standards, and the ability to read "explicitly," understand, and analyze texts are the key skills. You should choose texts that allow you to teach a set of skills that challenge students as well as involve them in content. For example, the first task below does not involve students in texts or content relevant to the study of literature; the revision does. Both use LDC template task 2 (Argumentation/Analysis).

Version 1: *<u>Should middle school students have to wear uniforms?</u> After reading <u>editorials on this topic</u>, <u>write your own editorial</u> that addresses the question and support your position with evidence from the texts.*

Version 2: *<u>Is Chapter 3 necessary for telling the story</u>? After reading <u>Jack London's</u> Call of the Wild, write a <u>book review</u> that addresses the question and support your position with evidence from the text.*

Insert Product:

When you choose a product, you choose a set

of writing features for students to learn and use. Each written product contains its own features such as audience, structure, formality of language, tone, mode, and purpose. The unique language and structure of writing requires a commitment from the writer that is very different from speaking about a topic, and each product sets the stage for that commitment by requiring specific composition features. To support your selection of a student product, we recommend that you take a look at Professor Barrie Olson's *Academic Writing Across the Disciplines* found on the Literacy Design Collaborative website (www. literacydesigncollaborative.org). Professor Olson provides clear examples and explanations of the types of student writing products typically found in the different academic disciplines.

Below are descriptions of five common types of compositions. Students should understand what each product requires in order to make decisions about what and how to address the charge in the task.

■ **Essay:** The essay is a broad term used for a wide range of formal and informal products. For our purposes, it is an academic composition written to examine ideas and texts, requiring the writer to use a logic structure, reasoning, discipline specific language, and textual evidence to support a controlling idea articulated in a claim or thesis. It can appear in either informational or argumentation modes (or a combination of both and could include narrative techniques).

■ **Report:** The report is a term used more frequently in science, history, and technical subjects and tends to be informational or explanatory. However, there are situations where a report is in the argumentation mode, as in a proposal or arguing for a practice or a product. An important feature is the use of discipline-based language and formats. For example, the memo is a business version of a report with a distinct protocol; this also is true for a lab report. As with the essay, readers expect reports to apply reasoning and use textual evidence and data to support a controlling idea.

■ **Feature article:** A feature article is a term used in journalism and shares many of the features of the essay and report. However, the feature article is less technical and more informal in its approach and in its use of language; it often uses a narrative structure. It refers to but doesn't formally cite textual evidence to support the controlling idea.

■ **Editorial:** An editorial's goal is to convince the reader, using an emotional appeal as well as a reasoned one. It tends to be written in a journalistic, even personal, style. Editorialists often use narrative techniques to engage a general audience. Its structure is more informal, and the "punch line" is often at the end of the editorial. The editorialist sometimes uses textual and experiential evidence to support a controlling idea but relies more on credible reasoning than on facts.

■ **Narrative:** The LDC narrative template tasks are designed for two purposes: 1) to give an account of an event based on historical research or interview, and 2) to write about processes or procedures. An LDC narrative's main feature is its chronology or sequencing of events, whether it's an account of a battle or directions for assembling a gadget. The key to writing a narrative is its structure and its use of narrative techniques to help the reader imagine an event or follow a series of steps.

Insert Content:

The LDC template task is designed not only to teach literacy skills but also to teach how to think about content, particularly when it is appropriate for students to examine a central theme, concept, event, or issue in the discipline by reading about it and then writing about it. "Clear writing is clear thinking," according to William Zinsser in his seminal book, *Writing to Learn*. You can create opportunities for students to develop clear thinking by focusing on some aspect of the curriculum's content that, in the process, teaches them how to learn.

It's important that you choose content for its value to the study of the discipline and make it worth the time and effort you and your students will engage in while producing the product. The LDC templates ask you to ask you to identify your state and district content standards you are using to design your task as one way to ensure solid content and alignment with curriculum expectations.

The CCSS reading standards can also help you determine how to frame the content you want students to address. "Content" can be expressed in many different ways, and that content blank allows you to extend the verb in the templates to include other demands. For example, template task 20 reads "…write a _____that analyzes_____". For middle school, you could add to the complexity of this template and address demands in the grade level standards by focusing on the CCSS Reading Standards for Science and

Technology grades 6-8 (RST.6-8.8): "…write an essay that analyzes <u>the editorial by distinguishing among facts, reasoned judgments, and speculation."</u>

Following are additional examples of how the CCSS can help you choose content topics that work well with LDC modules:

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1:** This is the most important standard for reading because it describes skills that all readers must use to understand a text. The best way to address this standard squarely is to assign a text that lends itself clearly to content. In the study of literature, for example, content would include genre studies, and an example is a task that asks students to connect a cultural movement (e.g. existentialism) to an author's theme. The LDC module "Existentialism and Kafka" does just that.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL8.5:** This standard calls for students to "compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and how the structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style." In the LDC module, "The Power of Language," students analyze structures in four very different texts about figs to examine how structure (a poem, a recipe, prose works) affects meaning about the same topic.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9:** This standard involves a basic historical skill, to "compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources." In the LDC module, "The Great War: Evaluating the Treaty of Versailles" (Exemplar), students read a selection of articles and passages from the document to write an argumentation essay on the topic. They can use the same set of skills to examine other documents and their historical significance.

CONCLUSION

As the explanations and examples in this brief illustrate, "filling in the blanks" for an LDC template is aided by familiarity with student products, texts and content area standards, along with grade specific CCSS. The result is worth the time and effort because you will know your students are doing challenging work aligned to the CCSS literacy standards.