

# Suggestions on Strengthening the Process-Oriented Writing Guidance in High School Chinese Argumentative Writing Teaching

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**Abstract:** Process-oriented writing is the main way for teachers to precisely control the problems and weak links presented by students in each writing stage. Therefore, it is possible to design teaching activities that are in line with their cognitive levels based on students' needs; promote writing through debate, attach importance to the high integration of reading, speaking, and writing; and strengthen the subjectivity of students in writing by taking interest as the lead and life as the source.

**Keywords:** Argumentative writing; Process-oriented writing guidance; Students' needs; Integration of reading and writing; Writing subjectivity

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## 1. Introduction

A student's writing process starts from understanding the topic and ends with revising the article. If there is no intervention and guidance from teachers during this period, it is basically like "feeling one's way across the river." In the teaching process of writing, whether it is understanding the topic, determining the theme, constructing the framework of the article, correcting mistakes during the process, or revising the first draft, it should be a continuous and uninterrupted teaching process. If it is interrupted, the teaching effect may be greatly reduced. However, if it is a continuous writing process, teachers can timely and accurately control the problems and weak links presented by students in each writing link. Therefore, based on the specific problems that students encounter in the writing process, they can provide corresponding guidance. Thus, strengthening the intervention and guidance in the writing teaching process is the most direct way to control the development direction of students' writing ability.

## 2. Starting from students' needs, designing teaching activities that match their cognitive levels

Cognitive psychology holds that “students’ behaviors are always based on their cognition” <sup>[1]</sup>. When conducting classroom teaching, if the content taught exceeds students’ potential cognitive levels or falls outside their “range of needs,” it is very likely to result in an inactive classroom atmosphere. On the one hand, students lack a basic understanding of argumentative writing, as the previous survey shows that most students engage in argumentative writing because of “exam requirements” and “completing homework tasks.” From this perspective, these students lack the correct attitude towards argumentative writing. This also reflects the fact that teachers have not correctly perceived students’ needs but have used exams as a guide to lead students’ learning. Just as Hattie *et al.* said, “Too much teaching and task sheets are not designed based on students’ needs but on what teachers think they need.” This situation will ultimately lead to “they are not effective in any environment” <sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, only when learning can meet students’ needs, make them feel understood, happy, and loved, and make them aware of their own value, does the meaning of learning go beyond the subject itself and become a part of life <sup>[3]</sup>. Thus, when designing teaching activities, teachers should first deeply understand students’ real needs and interests to ensure that the teaching content not only matches their current cognitive levels but also stimulates their desire to explore the unknown. Moreover, for a thinking-oriented class like argumentative writing, “it should shift from toolism to humanism, from subject-centered and knowledge-based to virtue-first and ability-oriented; it should shift from focusing on what to teach and how to teach to focusing on learning to learn and learning to survive” <sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, when designing teaching activities for argumentative writing, teachers should start from students’ needs and design activities that match their cognitive levels, paying attention to how students can better transform knowledge into experience.

However, a problem that we have to face is that whether a teacher can design an effective teaching activity does not only depend on the teacher themselves but is also related to the school. When teachers design teaching activities or other related activities for argumentative writing, if they lack a guiding goal that meets the development of students’ argumentative writing needs in their school and lack relevant standards and requirements, it will largely lead to uneven classroom content and varying quality, and the improvement effect of argumentative writing teaching will naturally be difficult to highlight. Therefore, in addition to the teachers themselves, a complete and reasonable arrangement of teaching and research activities in the school can also provide great help for argumentative writing teaching. The design concept is shown in **Figure 1**.

When designing the teaching plan for this specific module, the teaching and research process for critical thinking writing generally proceeds as follows:

Step 1: The school’s Chinese teaching and research group organizes Chinese teachers to conduct discussions and exchanges on how to design critical thinking and writing teaching activities. During the exchanges, the group gains an understanding of the learning situation in each class through teacher reports and other means. Based on the learning situation, curriculum standards, teaching materials, and other factors, it formulates the indicators that the design of critical thinking writing teaching activities needs to meet. These indicators guide teachers to design teaching content according to the actual learning situation. Additionally, the group develops a special self-evaluation form for teaching design and a lesson observation and evaluation form specifically for critical thinking, writing teaching design.

Step 2: The teaching and research activity assigns tasks to relevant teachers, who then define specific module teaching objectives and develop the module teaching plan. Upon completion of the teaching plan,

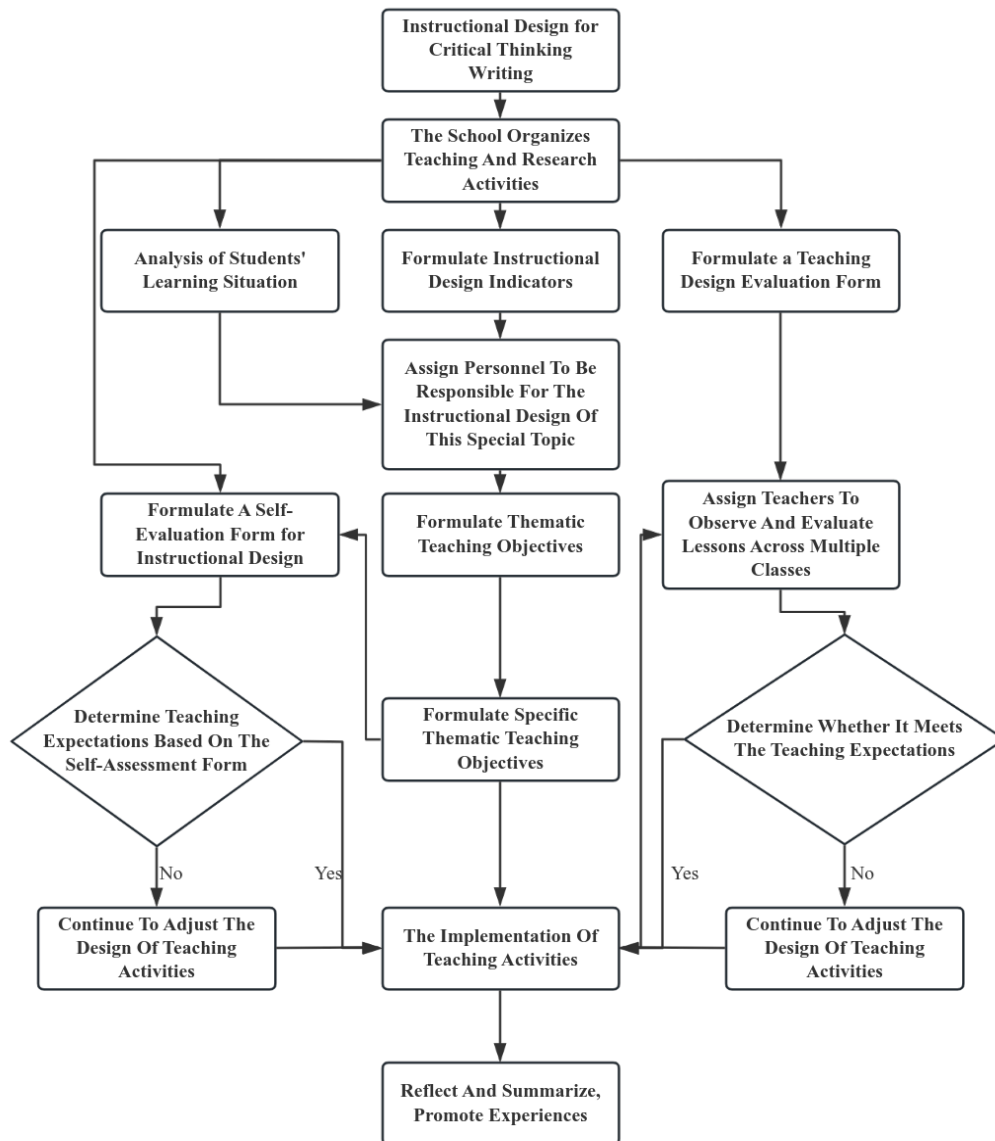


Figure 1-1: The flowchart shows the process of the teaching and research activities for critical thinking writing instruction, presenting relevant steps such as teaching design, student analysis, goal setting, and their repeated adjustments.

**Figure 1.** Design concept

teachers can use the jointly developed self-evaluation form for teaching design to assess whether the teaching plan meets the expected goals. If it meets the expectations, teaching practice is carried out; if not, the teaching plan is adjusted and revised before conducting teaching practice. During the teaching practice, the teaching and research group dispatches a certain number of teachers to observe and evaluate the lessons, fill out the teacher lesson evaluation form, and conduct an assessment of the teaching activities based on the actual teaching situation. If the teaching activities meet the expectations, a summary is made and the plan is promoted for use in teaching across the entire school. If they do not meet the teaching expectations, adjustments to the teaching activity design are made promptly, followed by another round of teaching practice.

In this way, when designing critical thinking writing teaching plans, teachers can focus their time and energy on the design of teaching activities, which truly emphasizes the importance of critical thinking writing teaching for teachers. For teachers themselves, they must firmly grasp the key point of designing teaching activities that align with students' cognitive levels to maximize the effectiveness of the teaching plan. To this end, teachers also need to achieve the following points during the design process of critical thinking writing teaching plans:

Attach importance to keeping teaching design aligned with teaching materials and make rational use of resources in the materials. These resources include unit introductions, study guide cards, unit learning tasks, unit texts related to critical thinking writing, and unit writing knowledge cards in the teaching materials. The *2025 Edition Chinese College Entrance Examination Blue Book: Analysis of College Entrance Examination Questions* clearly mentions the need to “promote the connection between teaching and examinations” <sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, teachers need to “establish a good connection with teaching materials, gain insights from them, and discover valuable content within them” <sup>[5]</sup>. Taking the composition question of the 2023 National College Entrance Examination Paper I as an example, it states: “Good stories help us express ourselves and communicate better; they can touch our hearts and inspire wisdom; good stories can change a person's fate and showcase the image of a nation... Stories have power.” The requirement is to “tell good stories.” In the fourth unit of the Selective Compulsory Middle Volume, the unit writing task “Learning to Write Argumentative Essays for Official Purposes” includes material excerpted from the article *Continuously Enhancing the Influence of Chinese Culture - On Studying and Implementing the Spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Speech at the National Conference on Publicity and Ideological Work* published in People's Daily on September 2, 2018. The unit writing task is to “write an argumentative essay of no less than 1,000 words on the topic of ‘Chinese culture going global,’ drawing on social life and choosing an angle of your choice. The requirements are a clear focus and ideological depth; completion within 90 minutes.” This obviously requires students to “tell good Chinese stories,” which is closely related to the composition question of the 2023 National College Entrance Examination Paper I and profoundly reflects the requirement of “connecting teaching and examinations.”

Ensure that the topic materials for teaching design keep pace with current events. The revision principles of the General Senior High School Chinese Curriculum Standards mention the need to “update teaching content and discourse systems in a timely manner based on new changes in economic and social development and new achievements in scientific and technological progress, reflecting the theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and new achievements in development” <sup>[6]</sup>. Furthermore, regarding the revision of curriculum content, it also states that efforts should be made to “present new achievements and developments in economy, politics, culture, science and technology, society, ecology, etc., and enrich the content related to cultivating students' sense of social responsibility, innovative spirit, and practical ability” <sup>[6]</sup>. This fully indicates that Chinese curriculum content needs to be continuously updated in line with developments in social economy, science, and culture. The *2025 Edition Chinese College Entrance Examination Blue Book: Analysis of College Entrance Examination Questions* also requires that materials “closely follow the theme of the times” and “pay attention to the vertical development of news and its horizontal connections, so as to grasp its inherent laws and interpret hot topic materials” <sup>[5]</sup>. Taking the 2024 college entrance examination composition questions as examples, the topics of “Talking about Artificial Intelligence” in the New Curriculum Standard Paper I and “About China's Aerospace Industry” in the New Curriculum Standard Paper II. The former is the widely discussed “artificial intelligence” in recent years, and

the latter is highly relevant to the “Chang’e-6” lunar landing mission, with a very short time interval between the event and the exam. These examples fully illustrate that materials need to keep pace with current events.

### **3. Promoting writing through debate, emphasizing the in-depth integration of reading, speaking, and writing**

The “four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing” are a long-discussed topic in Chinese language courses. However, for the teaching of critical thinking writing, greater emphasis is placed on the in-depth integration of three skills: “reading,” “speaking,” and “writing.” The “Critical Reading and Expression” learning task group in General Senior High School Chinese Curriculum Standards clearly includes “reading” and “expression.” Reading requires no further elaboration, but “expression” encompasses not only “written expression” but also “oral expression.” Correspondingly, the teaching guidelines in the Standards explicitly state that “the number of thematic discussions and debates shall not be less than 3”<sup>[6]</sup>. This indicates that the teaching of critical thinking writing should include not only written instruction but also oral communication activities, aiming to “promote writing through debate.”

Debate is obviously a critical thinking activity. During the process of organizing debates, various critical thinking tasks are involved, such as collecting and organizing arguments, refuting opposing views, and writing debate scripts. Therefore, in the teaching of critical thinking writing, “debate” and “writing” should not be separated; instead, they should be organically integrated through the implementation of “debate-writing classes.” “A debate-writing class is essentially a teaching attempt that improves students’ argumentative writing skills by watching debates, participating in debates, writing debate scripts, learning through imitation, and engaging in collaboration and reflection. It is based on students’ actual conditions, rooted in real-life contexts, emphasizing both learning for practical needs and learning through practice. It is an indispensable means to realize the ecological care of Chinese language education”<sup>[7]</sup>.

Secondly, it is necessary to integrate “reading” and “speaking.” When teaching text units related to critical thinking, it is inevitable for teachers to guide students in analyzing the authors’ viewpoints and perspectives. Whether students agree with or refute these viewpoints, they should develop their own opinions—and such critical teaching activities will inevitably trigger “contention of ideas.”

Taking the text Biography of Qu Yuan as an example, if we only follow Sima Qian’s perspective, “Zhang Yi” will inevitably be portrayed as a sinister and cunning figure. For instance, in Biography of Zhang Yi, Sima Qian wrote: “Zhang Yi’s deeds were even more extreme than those of Su Qin. However, people hated Su Qin more because Su Qin died earlier, and Zhang Yi publicly exposed Su Qin’s shortcomings to support his own arguments and consolidate the alliance system he advocated. In essence, both of them were truly dangerous figures!” He regarded Zhang Yi as sinister and cunning, even worse than Su Qin. In Biography of Qu Yuan, Sima Qian used many words like “pretend,” “deceive,” and “sophistry” to describe Zhang Yi, thus giving readers the initial impression of Zhang Yi as a treacherous and fickle villain.

However, if we shift our perspective to the State of Qin or Zhang Yi himself, Zhang Yi’s role and significance may change. If we look beyond the “harm” Zhang Yi caused to other states and focus instead on his contributions to the State of Qin, it is undeniable that he made remarkable achievements—he could even be regarded as a founder of the Qin Dynasty’s unification of China. According to Sima Qian’s description, Zhang Yi was a “dangerous figure,” yet it is said that after Qu Yuan drowned himself, the people of Qin created “Qulian Mo” (a type of steamed bun) to celebrate Qu Yuan’s death. This shows that authors inevitably

infuse their own stances and viewpoints into their writings. If we do not take such issues—worthy of critical thinking—seriously, students will never be able to view problems from a rational perspective.

From this, it can be seen that integrating “reading” and “speaking” in reading instruction, setting up problem-based scenarios, and fully motivating students to speak can effectively help students develop a dialectical and rational perspective on problems.

Thirdly, it is essential to achieve in-depth integration of “reading” and “writing.” The “integration of reading and writing” is a fundamental method not only for critical thinking writing but also for other writing genres. In the process of reading instruction, teachers guide students to analyze classic critical thinking texts, summarizing the authors’ perspectives on issues, methods of elaborating viewpoints, use of evidence materials, and argument structures. If students do not promptly practice and consolidate these learnings, the instruction will become “empty talk on paper,” and students’ final learning outcomes will often be unsatisfactory.

Therefore, “integrating reading and writing” is a must for teachers, as it enables students to promptly consolidate and practice the critical thinking writing skills and methods learned from texts, thereby promoting the accumulation of knowledge related to critical thinking writing. For example, *Blue Book of the College Entrance Examination: Analysis of College Entrance Examination Questions*, compiled by the Academic Committee of the China College Entrance Examination Report, summarizes the rule of composition proposition as “promoting the integration of reading and writing and innovating the proposition form” and proposes the following exam preparation strategy: “It is necessary to understand the connotation of the integration of reading and writing, grasp the internal connection between reading and writing, and organically integrate the two—gaining insights through reading, writing after gaining insights, promoting writing through reading, and verifying reading through writing”<sup>[5]</sup>.

For instance, the composition question of the 2023 National Curriculum Standard Volume II was linked to the modern Chinese reading section II, and the 2024 National Curriculum Standard Volume II continued this practice by linking to the modern Chinese reading section I. This requires teachers to achieve in-depth integration of reading and writing in daily writing instruction. For critical thinking writing, analyzing critical thinking texts not only allows students to learn excellent argumentation methods but also helps them understand the authors’ perspectives on issues—this is of great help in expanding students’ writing horizons. At the same time, when refining the authors’ viewpoints, students can express their own opinions and ideas about these viewpoints, which is of great significance in enhancing students’ critical thinking.

In conclusion, to achieve good teaching results in critical thinking writing, it is necessary to highly integrate the three skills of “reading,” “speaking,” and “writing.”

#### **4. Taking interest as a guide and life as a source to strengthen students’ subjectivity in writing**

Students’ interest in writing largely restricts the improvement of their writing ability. Moreover, students are the subjects of writing and learning; only when teachers face up to this fact can they correctly guide students’ writing habits and interests. Therefore, “writing interest, writing goal orientation, and attribution of writing performance are the main factors affecting the full exertion of middle school students’ subjectivity in writing”<sup>[8]</sup>.

As the subjects of learning, students will “gradually develop writing awareness and realize conscious writing behavior only when they themselves recognize that writing is a need for expressing emotions and ideas, a need for communicating with others, and truly feel the joy of writing”<sup>[9]</sup>. To arouse students’ interest

in the topics of critical thinking writing, “teachers need to consider whether the selected thinking materials are enlightening to students’ thinking development, whether they can promote students’ divergent thinking practice, expand students’ angles of thinking, and broaden the breadth of students’ thinking”<sup>[10]</sup>.

Thus, to enhance students’ interest in critical thinking writing and strengthen their subjectivity in writing, the following efforts can be made:

(1) Selecting popular and controversial topics from life and the Internet for critical thinking writing

Firstly, such topics are close to life, making it easier for students to “develop ideas based on the topic,” stimulate their interest in the topic, and thus create the need for debate. Furthermore, “the selection of thinking materials should be close to students’ real life and have certain enlightenment. This can not only stimulate students’ enthusiasm for exploration and cultivate the development of students’ non-intellectual factors but also help cultivate students’ divergent thinking and stimulate the creativity of students’ thinking”<sup>[10]</sup>.

Secondly, by focusing on students’ interests, teachers can start with topics that students care about, put forward different opinions, gradually guide students to explain the topic, and gradually introduce relevant argumentation methods until they finally complete the writing.

Thirdly, current affairs hotspots can be introduced into the classroom. Current affairs hotspots are often timely and widespread, which can quickly attract students’ attention. Teachers can guide students to pay attention to hot events in fields such as social news, policy changes, and technological development, select attractive and controversial topics, and encourage students to express their own views or evaluations on these events.

(2) Using the school computer lab (microcomputer lab) to change writing media and strengthen students’ subject status in writing

At present, basically all types of schools at all levels have achieved full coverage of computers. With the increasing development of the Internet, students are basically familiar with electronic products and can quickly input text on media such as computers, which is of certain value for writing teaching.

Teachers can switch from paper-based writing to computer-based writing. Firstly, this makes it easier for teachers to check students’ writing progress in a timely manner and select examples to explain critical thinking writing skills promptly. Secondly, it allows students to revise their articles repeatedly at any time. Thirdly, using computers for writing can also enrich writing forms and stimulate students’ interest in creation. For example, on computers, students can not only write and revise traditional texts in Word or WPS but also, under scenario-based tasks designed by teachers, input comments and views in response to controversial and guiding discussion questions—this stimulates students’ enthusiasm for discussing the views of the questions. Such diversified writing forms can better meet students’ personalized needs, allowing them to exert more imagination and creativity in the writing process, thereby understanding and exploring critical thinking writing topics more deeply.

(3) Teachers guiding students to condense texts into writing materials for easy accumulation

This is an important way to make up for the practical problem of insufficient reading resources for students. As an important carrier for students to learn Chinese knowledge and improve their literary literacy, textbooks contain rich writing materials. Making good use of textbooks and condensing them into materials that can be used at any time for critical thinking writing is an important means to make up for students’ insufficient accumulation of extracurricular reading materials. Therefore, teachers should consciously guide students to extract materials from textbooks to provide strong material support for students’ critical thinking writing.

To this end, teachers can make the following efforts:

Firstly, when explaining textbooks, teachers can focus on analyzing the viewpoints, arguments, and argumentation methods in the articles. By guiding students to deeply understand the content of the textbooks, teachers help students learn how to draw valuable viewpoints and arguments from the articles and try to apply these materials to their own writing.

Secondly, teachers can encourage students to develop the habit of taking notes and learn to classify materials by theme. Teachers guide students to record wonderful paragraphs, famous quotes, typical examples, and other materials from textbooks and classify them in detail by theme for students' subsequent use of materials.

Finally, teachers can regularly organize material-sharing activities for students, allowing students to exchange the materials they have accumulated with their classmates to achieve resource sharing and common progress.

Therefore, making good use of the classic texts in textbooks and condensing them into writing materials that can be used at any time is an important way to make up for the relatively insufficient reading resources of senior high school students.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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