

The Proficiency in Theme Writing Strategy: Persuasive and Argumentative Writing

Schumaker, J. B.
Edge Enterprises, Inc.

Nationally and throughout the states, education standards focus on two areas of writing: conventions and text types. Conventions involve the nitty gritty rules of writing, including such factors as sentence structure, capitalization, and punctuation. The text types standards focus on three types of writing: informative writing, persuasive and argumentative writing, and narrative writing. Not surprisingly, the instruction of these text types is much more difficult than the instruction of the conventions. Not surprisingly, the development of procedures for effectively teaching these types of writing has been neglected in the past.

This article focuses on a new instructional program for teaching persuasive and argumentative writing that is now available for teachers to use. It is called Proficiency in the Theme Writing Strategy: Persuasive and Argumentative Writing (Schumaker, 2016).

The Basic Structure of Persuasive Writing

In both persuasive and argumentative writing, the writer chooses a claim or a position to present to the reader. In persuasive writing, the writer supports the claim by *using reasons as well as emotion*. For example, a persuasive essay might focus on the claim that animals should not participate in circus acts. In other words, the writer wishes to convince the reader to believe that animals have no place in the circus. The writer might use emotion and the information currently known by the writer to present reasons for the claim, including the ideas that animals can be injured in a circus act or abused

during the training process. With regard to injuries, the writer might suggest that animals might tear a muscle while learning a flip or that animals might attack each other to cause injuries. These are general ideas that are readily known or can be surmised by most people.

Basic Structure of Argumentative Writing

In argumentative writing, on the other hand, the writer is required to provide *factual evidence* for each reason that supports the claim that the writer is making. For example, a writer might choose to argue the claim that body cameras should be worn by all police officers. Thus, argumentative writers need to conduct research to gather the needed evidence to support such a claim. They need to use resources to look for evidence, take notes, and organize the information that they have gathered into a coherent argument. For instance, an argumentative writer might find research studies that show the number of times police officers have been attacked by an arrested person and data on the outcomes of the attack. As a result, the writer might argue that one reason supporting the claim for body cameras is that video recorded by the cameras can protect police officers from being falsely accused of abuse.

Prerequisite Instruction

Before students participate in Persuasive and Argumentative Theme Writing instruction, they would benefit the most by first participating in learning about the fundamental skills associated with theme writing (Schumaker, 2003). They need to learn how to write the various types of paragraphs in a theme, how to vary the structure

"Each year in their writing, students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use..."
English Language Arts Standards » Writing » <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/introduction/>

of their paragraphs, and how to make their themes interesting with good Introductory Paragraphs and Concluding Paragraphs. They would also learn how to organize the information they want to include in their themes by using a graphic organizer called a “TOWER Diagram.” They put all these skills together by using the Theme Writing Strategy or “TOWER Steps” for planning and writing basic themes. (Fig. 1)

FIGURE 1
The Theme Writing Strategy Steps

- Step 1: **Think**
- Step 2: **Organize It**
- Step 3: **Write a Draft**
- Step 4: **Evaluate It**
- Step 5: **Refine It**

Lessons in the Persuasive & Argumentative Writing Sequence

Next, after they learn to write basic themes, students can learn to write several types of Persuasive and Argumentative Themes. In **Lesson 1**, they review the Theme Writing Strategy Steps. In the **Lesson 2**, they learn some basic terms (e.g., “claim,” “reason”) and how to write a short Persuasive Theme, one that focuses on a claim and supplies reasons supporting the claim based on their own knowledge. They

learn to use a variation of the “TOWER Diagram” where each main idea focuses on a main reason supporting the claim. (Fig. 2)

In **Lesson 3**, they learn how to write a short Argumentative Theme. Here, they learn how to do research and support a claim with evidence that they have gathered through their research. They learn how to make note cards containing the evidence that they have gathered. They also learn how to enter that information from their note cards onto their TOWER Diagrams. In **Lesson 4**, they learn how to include both reasons for and reasons against a claim. They learn to write both persuasive and argumentative themes at this new level of complexity. In **Lesson 5**, they learn how to provide examples from their personal lives and from research to support claims. In **Lesson 6**, they learn how to write longer themes that contain several sections and that focus on more than one claim. Again, they can learn to write both long persuasive and long argumentative themes.

The structure that students learn for writing Persuasive and Argumentative Themes is the main idea/detail structure, sometimes called the whole-to-part structure. In the case of Persuasive Themes, the topic is a claim. The main ideas are the major reasons supporting the claim, and the details are pieces of information that the students already know that support the claim. In the case of Argumentative Themes, the topic is a claim. The main ideas are the major reasons supporting the claim, and the details are pieces of evidence derived through research that support the claim. In

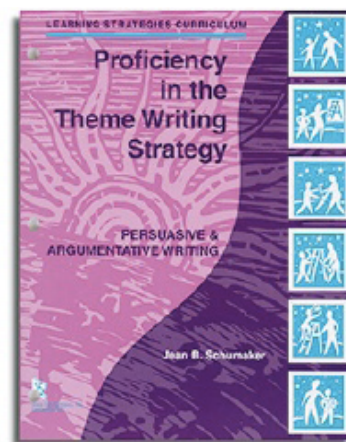
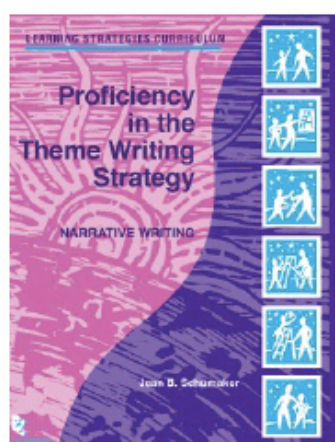
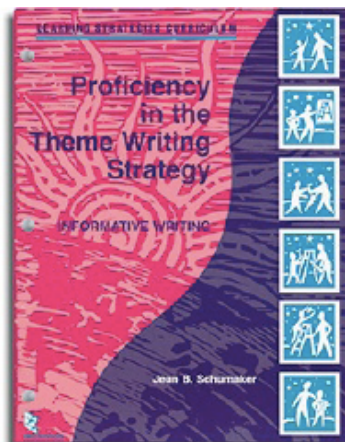
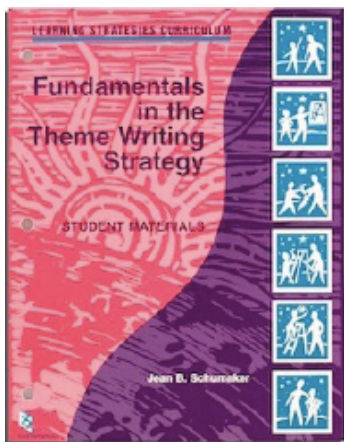
all the lessons after Lesson 2, they can write themes about subject-area information as well as the literature that they are reading.

FIGURE 2

The diagram is a template for a persuasive essay titled "Persuasive Essay TOWER DIAGRAM". At the top right, there are fields for "Name:" and "Date:". Below this, on the left, are three boxes labeled "Sequence:", "Point of View:", and "Tense:". The main body of the diagram is divided into four horizontal sections: "INTRODUCTION", "BODY PARAGRAPH", "BODY PARAGRAPH", and "CONCLUSION". Each section has a "Topic:" field and a "Details:" field. The "INTRODUCTION" section has a "Introductory Option:" field. Each "BODY PARAGRAPH" section has a "Reason:" field and a "Details:" field. The "CONCLUSION" section has a "Concluding Option:" field. On the left side of each "BODY PARAGRAPH" section, there is a vertical list of circles labeled "order of ideas within paragraph". The diagram is copyrighted by Schumaker Edge Enterprises, Lawrence, KS.

The Instructional Process

The instructional process for Persuasive and Argumentative Theme Writing involves several major stages. First, the teacher describes to the student the parts of a persuasive or argumentative theme and how to write them. As each part is explained, the teacher displays an example paragraph and a section of the TOWER Diagram to the students. Next, the teacher displays example themes to the students. Students might be asked to analyze and discuss the example theme. Third, students practice planning and writing a theme. They might



be asked to work cooperatively on various tasks. For example, pairs of students might be asked to do research and make note cards together for the same claim. Then they might be asked to work together to put the information they have gathered onto a TOWER Diagram. At this point, the teacher reviews the students' notes and the diagram and provides feedback. Finally, once the diagram is acceptable, the students might be asked to write the theme individually. Once a theme has been drafted, students are asked to evaluate and refine their own theme and/or a partner's theme. The teacher then scores the theme and the diagram and provides feedback to the student.

In addition to the instructor's manual (Schumaker, 2016), several types of instructional materials are available for free through the Internet to aid teachers in providing the instruction for Persuasive and Argumentative Writing. These materials include cue cards, example themes and diagrams, score sheets, feedback sheets, and handouts for students. They can be downloaded onto personal computers and printed as the need arises. A hyper link is provided in the instructor's manual that allows teachers to have access to the materials.

Sequencing Instruction

Instruction in all of the types of themes within the Persuasive and Argumentative, Informative, and Narrative Writing programs probably cannot be accomplished successfully within one school year. Personnel within schools and school districts need to plan how to sequence the instruction across several grades and several types of courses. Clearly, instruction in the Fundamentals of Theme Writing Strategy program (Schumaker, 2003) will be a key prerequisite for any of these programs. Prior prerequisites for that program also include the Sentence Writing Strategy and Paragraph Writing Strategy. After that, school personnel should check state and district standards and coordinate the sequence of instruction with those standards and other demands that students will be facing (e.g., state writing competency exams, college entrance

exams) and the schedule for those demands. Since many states require students to write persuasive or argumentative themes for their state competency exams, instruction in these types of writing should be scheduled well in advance of these exams.

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SIM Theme Writing Strategies Professional Learning Workshop

June 11-14, 2019 • SpringHill Suites Marriot • Lawrence Kansas

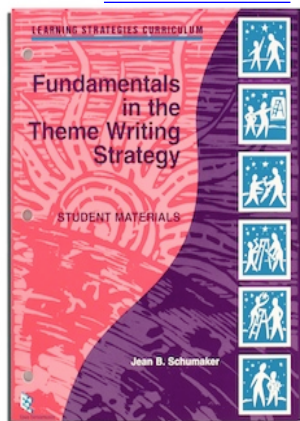
The SIM Writing Strategies program is a comprehensive, evidence-based curriculum that teachers at all levels can implement in their classrooms to guide students into becoming competent writers. Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year's grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades. A well written theme is embedded in the standards at all levels, from Pre-K-12. This institute will focus on and provide practice on instructing students in producing sophisticated themes that meet standards.

Who Should Attend?

- Teachers/Educators
- Literacy/Instructional coaches
- Curriculum & Instruction Administrators
- Writing Tutors

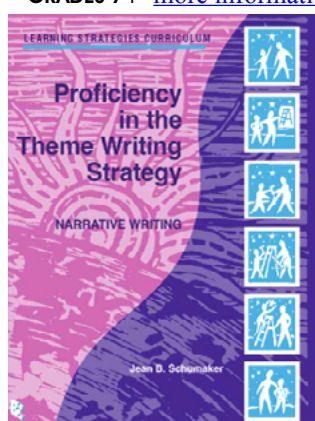
FUNDAMENTALS IN THE THEME WRITING STRATEGY

GRADES 5+ [more information](#)



PROFICIENCY IN THE THEME WRITING STRATEGY: NARRATIVE WRITING

GRADES 7+ [more information](#)



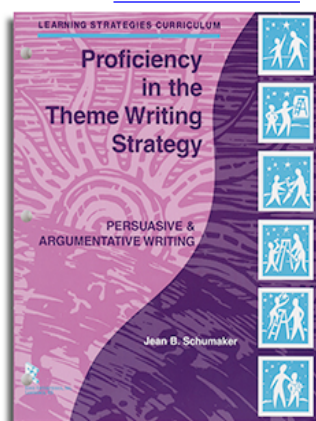
Pricing Information

The fee for this institute is \$1,500 per person* and includes:

1. Four Theme Writing Manuals and accompanying student materials, and 2 electronic programs to teach foundational paragraph and theme writing skills to students.
2. Refreshments each day and lunch on Friday
3. A personalized certificate of attendance with a value of 25 class participation hours
4. Electronic **microcredentials** verifying your attendance at this institute and each strategy learned (can be posted on e-portfolios, websites, LinkedIn, etc.)

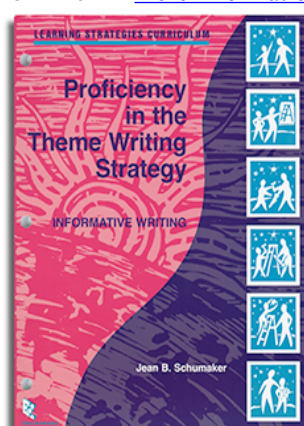
PROFICIENCY IN THE THEME WRITING STRATEGY: PERSUASIVE & ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

GRADES 7+ [more information](#)



PROFICIENCY IN THE THEME WRITING STRATEGY: INFORMATIVE WRITING

GRADES 7+ [more information](#)



Workshop Agenda

Day 1

Fundamentals in the Theme Writing Strategy

Day 2

Proficiency in Theme Writing:
Informative Writing
Star Writer Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing

Day 3

Proficiency in Theme Writing:
Persuasive/Argumentative Writing
Star Writer Fundamentals of Theme Writing

Day 4

Proficiency in Theme Writing: Narrative Writing

Instructor



Janet Atallah has been in education for over 38 years, teaching learners of all ages. Many of those years included working with other educators to achieve success with their struggling learners through professional development and coaching, and coordinating with schools, districts and universities on a variety of levels and research projects with the Strategic Instruction Model. Janet has successfully instructed students and teachers in all of the SIM writing strategies for many years. She is a SIM Professional Developer Leader, recognized as an expert by KUCRL.

Participants will also receive the **Star Writer Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing** and **Star Writer Fundamentals of Theme Writing** electronic programs for students who may struggle with prerequisite skills such as constructing sentences, structuring paragraphs, and using correct tense and point of view. Teachers will be asked to spend an hour in the evening on Days 2 and 3 exploring these programs.

Space is limited, register today:
<https://sim.ku.edu/sim-theme-writing-strategies-institute-teachers>

Xtreme Reading Professional Learning Workshop

June 11-14, 2019 • SpringHill Suites Marriot • Lawrence Kansas

Hit the ground running!

Attend this workshop and be ready to go with Xtreme Reading on day 1 of your school year.

Before this workshop you will...

- learn about the research behind Xtreme Reading.
- familiarize yourself with the structure of the curriculum.

During this workshop you will...

- interact with developers, researchers, and implementers of Xtreme Reading.
- participate in hands-on instruction in 6 intensive reading strategies designed to increase vocabulary development and reading comprehension.
- engage in 2 strategies designed for classroom behavior, motivation, and goal setting.
- learn about assessment for enrollment and EOY reporting.

After this workshop you will...

- have the opportunity to engage in two live online ZOOM Coaching Sessions that will be recorded and archived for multiple viewings.
- have the opportunity for more coaching.

Xtreme Reading ...

- is a nationally recognized, [evidence based intervention](#) program that works!
- is for older students who are performing 2 or more years behind grade level but reading minimally at about a fourth grade level.
- is a spiral curriculum that includes instruction in 8 foundational reading and motivation strategies daily across a single school year.
- provides daily, detailed lesson plans with a rigorous pace to keep students engaged.

What is Included?

The fee for this institute is \$2700 per person* and includes:

I. A Complete Instructor's Set of Xtreme Reading:

- **Instructor Notebooks (one of each)**
 1. Expect to Achieve (*Race to the Finish DVD, Tools for Efficiency & Effectiveness CD, SCORE Skills & Talking Together manuals included*)
 2. Word Mapping Strategy
 3. Word Identification Strategy
 4. Possible Selves
 5. Self-Questioning Strategy
 6. Paraphrasing Strategy & Fundamentals of Paraphrasing & Summarizing
 7. Inference Strategy
 8. Visual Imagery Strategy
- **Teacher Edition of passages (one of each title) (reproducible)**
 1. Word Identification Passages: Teacher Edition
 2. Self Questioning Passages: Teacher Edition
 3. Paraphrasing Passages: Teacher Edition
 4. Inference Strategy: Student Book with answer key
- **1 Student Workbook in Binder (consumable, not reproducible)**

II. A personalized certificate of attendance with a value of 25 class participation hours

III. An electronic microcredential attesting to your participation in this institute that can be posted on e-portfolios, websites, linkedIn, etc.

IV. Refreshments each day and **lunch** on Friday

** teams of 3 or more will receive a discounted rate of \$2500 per person*

Who Should Attend?

- Teachers/Educators
- Literacy/Instructional Coaches
- Curriculum & Instruction Administrators
- Reading Tutors

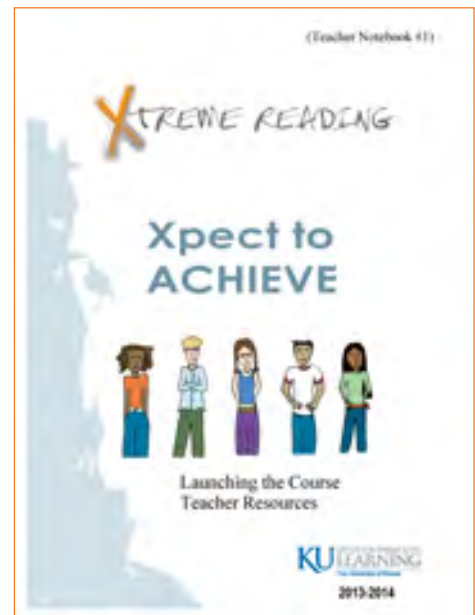
What student will benefit from Xtreme Reading?

Students who exhibit:

- Poor Reading Fluency
- Small sight vocabularies
- Limited understanding of words and multiple word meanings
- Limited background and conceptual knowledge
- Few skills in using strategies that enhance understanding and remembering of oral and written language

For answers to Xtreme Reading FAQ's, visit:

<https://sim.ku.edu/xtreme-reading-faqs>



**Space is limited,
register today:**

<https://sim.ku.edu/2019-xtreme-reading-program-professional-learning-workshop>

SIMPOSIUM

SAVE THE DATE

JULY 16-18, 2019

LAWRENCE, KS



We invite you to join us at the 2019 SIMposium, where education experts and practitioners will lead presentations and learning sessions focused on high-impact learning strategies, content enhancement routines, and more. We're excited to bring the SIM Network together to make connections, share best practices, solve problems, and work toward creating the future of schools committed to a shared goal of excellent instruction, for every student in every classroom.

We are considering devoting part of the conference to deep dive all-day or half-day sessions. Some of those deep dive sessions would feature expert professional developers presenting a strategy or routine, allowing the participant to approach the subject as both a learner AND a professional developer. Other suggested sessions are based on queries to the Center.

We can't wait to see you in July!

SIM ONLINE RESOURCES

SIM Website
<http://sim.ku.edu/>

SIM Events
sim.kucrl.org/classes

SIMville
sim.kucrl.org/simville

Publication List
https://kucrl.ku.edu/research_publications

Report your professional development online at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SIMPDSessions>



SIM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPERS
2019 SIM VIRTUAL CONFERENCE
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Work Address: _____

City: _____ State/Province: _____ ZIP: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____ State/Province: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone (home): _____ (work): _____

Email address to be used for communication about this conference: _____

Choose your virtual conference session:

☐ **Winter:** Jan. 14-Feb. 11, 2019; webinar dates Feb. 13 & 14 **REGISTRATION DEADLINE:** Jan. 11, 2019

☐ **Spring:** Apr. 8-May 6, 2019; webinar dates May 8 & 9 **REGISTRATION DEADLINE:** April 5, 2019

AMOUNT ENCLOSED:

☐ Registration: Streaming video \$425 (U.S. funds) \$ _____

☐ Stateworks membership renewal (optional) \$50 (U.S. funds) \$ _____

Total \$ _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION

☐ **Check** (made payable to KUCRL)

☐ **Credit card** (Visa or MasterCard) # _____

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Billing address (req.): _____

Authorization signature: _____ Phone: _____

Email for paid credit card receipt: _____

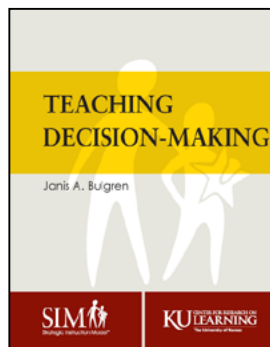
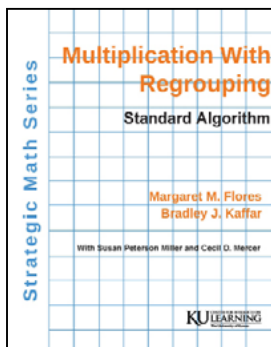
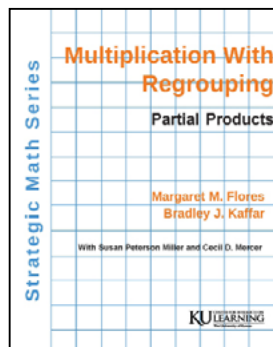
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[Winter Virtual Update for SIM Professional
Developers](#)

February 5-7, 2019

[2019 Florida SIM Update](#)

February 13, 2019

Analyzing Text Complexity: Close Reading -
Austin, TX

March 19-20, 2019

[2019 Southeast SIM Update - Concord/Charlotte,
NC](#)

April 8 - May 6, 2019

[Spring Virtual Update for SIM Professional
Developers](#)

June 10-14, 2019

[CE Potential Professional Developers Institute \(PPDI\)
- Austin, TX](#)

June 11-14

[SIM Theme Writing Strategies Professional
Learning Workshop - Lawrence, KS](#)

June 11-14

[Xtreme Reading Program Professional Learning
Workshop - Lawrence, KS](#)

June 17-21, 2019

[SIM LS and CE PPDI - Cumming, GA](#)

July 16-18, 2019

SIMposium, International SIM Conference
Lawrence, KS

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