

Using the dictionary to help with writing

Introduction

This lesson helps you walk students through their first experience of using the iWriter to write their own discussion essay on a sample topic. Once students are familiar with the iWriter and its many useful features, they can use it to write essays of any type on any topic of your or their choice – either as classroom tasks, for homework, or on their own for individual practice.

The lesson focuses on helping students use the **My text** section of the iWriter, which assists them in planning, writing, and checking their own work. Most importantly, it guides students in structuring an essay in a clear and logical manner, including an introduction, main paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Students will break into five small groups, and each group will use the iWriter to write one or two paragraphs of a discussion essay. These paragraphs will then be combined to create a complete essay, and the iWriter will be used to add any missing transitions and check students' work. The lesson easily accommodates a class consisting of writers of varying levels of ability.

Procedure

- Aim:** to guide students in using the Oxford iWriter software to structure an essay in a clear and logical manner, including an introduction, main paragraphs, and a conclusion
- Timing:** 50 minutes
- Resources:** Access to the Oxford iWriter on 6 separate computers: one for the teacher, and one for each small group
 one copy of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 10th edition* per small group
 an interactive whiteboard (IWB) or laptop projector to be used with the teacher's computer will be very useful (but is not essential)
 access to email or USB memory sticks on each computer would also be helpful (but is not essential)

Preparation

Take a couple of minutes to familiarize yourself with the **My text** section of the iWriter. Refer to the "Orientation" activity below for step-by-step instructions on accessing **My text**.

Activity

Lead-in (5 minutes)

- Divide students into five groups.
- Discuss first within small groups, then feed back to the whole group:
 'What are the 3 main parts of a discussion essay?'
 (Answer: introduction, body (or main points), and conclusion)
- Discuss first within small groups, then feed back to the whole group:
 'Which part do you find the most difficult to write, and why?'

Activity: Orientation (5 minutes)

Guide students into opening the **My text** section of the iWriter by selecting **Discussion essays** from the **Essays** section, then clicking on **My text**. Briefly present an overview of the main content pane of the iWriter. Point out the framework, notes, and content fields included for each paragraph of the essay plan. The notes fields and content fields are where students can key in their own text.

Discuss the paragraph structure for the **Discussion essay** as it is presented in the iWriter.

- 1 Introduction
- 2 First argument for your case
- 3 Second argument for your case
- 4 Counterarguments
- 5 Evaluation or argument against the counterarguments
- 6 Summary and conclusion

Check students' understanding of 'counterargument'.

Activity: Planning to write (10 minutes)

As a class, brainstorm on arguments, counterarguments, and arguments against the counterarguments for your choice of one of the following prompts. Use the chosen prompt as your essay title.

- Is vegetarianism a healthy diet for children?
- Should students be required to participate in sport?
- Does a school uniform requirement help students succeed in school?

As ideas are presented, make notes in the appropriate notes fields in the iWriter on your computer. Instruct students to similarly make notes in their own versions of the iWriter. Be sure to make notes for each of the four main paragraphs.

Activity: Writing (15 minutes)

Assign each small group a paragraph or two as follows:

- Group 1: introduction
- Group 2: arguments for your case 1
- Group 3: arguments for your case 2
- Group 4: counterarguments and arguments against the counterarguments
- Group 5: summary and conclusion

Note: a single group could be assigned to write both the introduction and the conclusion paragraphs, requiring only four groups in total.

Inform each small group that they have 10 minutes to write their 1 or 2 paragraphs for this essay. One person in each small group will key the text into the content field for their paragraph, but everyone in the group must contribute to the paragraph.

When 10 minutes have passed, instruct the small groups to stop writing. Each group should then transfer (perhaps by copying and pasting into an email or onto a USB memory stick) their text to the teacher's computer.

While the teacher takes a few minutes to copy and paste each group's paragraph into the iWriter software on her computer, each small group can either

- rotate around from one computer to the next to read the paragraphs written by each group, or
- read their paragraphs aloud to the whole group, in order, beginning with the introduction.

Activity: Adding links and checking (10 minutes)

With all the text pasted into the teacher's iWriter screen, click the 'While you are writing' line in the **Tips** panel.

Expanding the 'Tell me more' text will bring up a list of linking words and phrases that you can use to connect the paragraphs to one another. You and your students can come up with others.

Finally, click the **Checklist** and walk through the final checklist with your students.

Then click the **Export** link to output the essay to a Microsoft Word document that you can then email to your students or print out for them.

Consolidation (5 minutes)

Discuss with the whole group:

How might we have structured the essay differently?

Why might we want to use a different structure for a discussion essay?

Homework (optional)

Instruct students to take the essay that you have written as a class and make it their own. Edit, proofread, and add or delete text as they like.

If students are preparing for a timed examination like the IELTS or TOEFL exam, you may want to consider instructing them to time themselves for this task, giving themselves perhaps 5 or 10 minutes to edit and proofread.