**PD Module on TASC Informational Essay**

**Goals:**

* Teachers will understand the demands of the TASC informational essay
* Techers will know how to teach specialized vocabulary used in TASC essay prompts
* Teachers will understand common areas of difficulty for students writing the TASC essay--such as understanding the prompt, paraphrasing, planning an organizational framework, writing introductions and conclusions—and learn methods to address them.

**Part One: What are we Aiming for with the TASC Informational Essay?**

Materials: Prompt for the TASC sample essay on part time work for high school students; two accompanying texts; anchor papers

Steps:

1. Briefly review the goals for the training. Tell teachers that it’s important for them to clearly understand the demands of the TASC informational essay if they are going to prepare students for it. To this end, they are going to look at two anchor papers that have been scored by TASC scorers. Before they read the anchor papers, they will need to read the source texts. Hand out the source texts.
2. Give out the anchor papers. Teachers should work in groups of two or three to read the anchor papers, decide which of the two is stronger. They should then make sure they can answer the discussion questions. Allow ten minutes or so for this part of the session and walk around as teachers are talking in groups to get a sense of what they are noticing.
3. Bring the group back together and ask for a report back. What did they notice? What were their points of agreement and disagreement? As the report back continues, use teacher observations to make a list on the board of the main criteria for the TASC essay:

* It’s organized. Each paragraph is about one main idea and the main ideas are elaborated with more detailed examples.
* The question is answered.
* Some information from the text is used, even if it is not quoted.
* There is an introduction and conclusion

1. If none of the teachers points it out, you may want to point out that the “2” essay is organized—it’s just that the ideas are not developed and the conclusion is extremely brief. Make sure teachers understand that the “2” essay has a passing score.

**Part II: Understanding the Prompt**

Materials: Prompt on Global Warming and test question; Prompt on Television Viewing in Young Children; Prompt on Opioid Addiction

Steps:

1. As teachers come in, each teacher receives a copy of the prompt and the test question. Teachers read the prompt in pairs, answer the test question and identify the part of the prompt substantiates their answer.
2. Bring teachers together and briefly introduce the goals of the training. Explain that the informational essay has special demands. One of these demands is the question itself—unlike argumentative essay, where the “job” of the writer is always to argue one side or the other, the informational essay may have a wide variety of questions and it is not possible to prepare beforehand. That is why it is important to call students’ attention to the prompt.
3. Give out the second prompt (Television Watching for Young Viewers), and have teachers work in pairs to write a new test question for the second prompt. Repeat the process with the prompt about Opioid Addiction.

**Part III: Reading and Note-taking**

Materials: Source texts for Global Warming Essay

1. Tell teachers that for this part of the training they will be wearing their “student” hats and you will teach as if they are students. If they were students, you would say that it’s important to read the texts and get the information they are going to use in their essays quickly and efficiently. As soon as possible, they want to get to the gist or main idea. Oftentimes informational texts will have a certain structure, which will give you certain categories of information. An informational text might be organized chronologically as a series of steps. It might be organized as problem/solution or cause/effect. As soon as they can, they want to find out the structure and main ideas/categories of information in the text. Read out loud the first paragraph of the text “How Does Global Warming Affect Daily Life?” Ask students: What is the article going to be mainly about—causes of global warming, effects of global warming, or solutions for global warming? Where did you find the information?
2. Tell students that each paragraph will most likely be about one main idea, and this main idea will often be stated at the beginning. Read the second paragraph (“Food prices…”). Ask students: what is the main idea?
3. Explain that it’s a good idea to demonstrate for students how to underline and write notes. Project the paragraph on the board and think aloud as you underline. Point out that you want to underline as little text as possible to get the gist and also take notes. For the “food prices” paragraph, your notes might say: *Food prices rising……rainstorms damage crops…changing precipitation patterns cause floods and drought*.
4. Have teachers pair up and take turns demonstrating this process and thinking aloud for the next two paragraphs (*Fresh water* and *Rising ocean levels*).
5. Bring the teachers back together and discuss any takeaways.

**Part IV: Planning the Essay**

Materials: Template

Steps:

1. Explain that the informational essay is much harder to organize because the question that must be addressed is not known beforehand. Students need to think in terms of the question and the categories of information in the articles. Is it about causes and effects? Problems and solutions? Advantages and disadvantages? Students should know how important it is to write a brief outline so that their essay is organized.
2. Point out that for the global warming essay they were asked to write about *effects* and *solutions*. Write a brief outline on the board:

I. Introduction

II. Effects

III. Solutions

IV. Conclusion

1. …But there is one *whole text* about effects and another *whole text* about solutions! What to do? They can’t put all of the information from the texts into the essay, so they are going to have to *summarize*. They already have the notes with the important information. Give out the template and walk students through the instructions for the middle paragraphs—they want to start with a general statement with their main idea, then add in the details. Have students help you model a general sentence to start off, something like: *There are many effects of global warming*, then use the notes to write a few sentences to flesh out the paragraph. Point out that when they are “translating” from note form to essay they need to use full sentences. Have teachers write a second paragraph for “Solutions,” then discuss what they notice about the process and what they think students might have trouble with. Look at a few student papers: what are they struggling with?

**Part V: Writing the Introduction**

* Materials: Original prompt for Informational Essay (Benefits/Disadvantages of Part-Time Work)

1. Ask teachers to brainstorm the elements of a good introduction and their particular methods for helping students write an introduction.
2. Look at the introduction of the student who scored a “3” and a “4” on the informational essay—what do these introductions accomplish?
3. Tell teachers that you will introduce ONE method of helping students write an introduction, which is to rewrite the prompt.
4. Look at the original prompt with teachers, and lead them in rewriting the first sentence by substituting words, changing the order of words, omitting, adding, etc. Try rewriting the sentence with them a few times. Discuss what is involved, and what might be difficult for students.
5. Have teachers work in pairs to rewrite subsequent sentences, then put them on the board. Which are best? Rewrite the introduction together as a group.

**Part VI: Writing the Conclusion**

Materials:

* TASC Informational Anchor Paper scored”2,” and “3.”

Steps:

1. Have teachers work in two groups. One group should read the “3” anchor paper and the other group should read the “2” anchor paper. What do they notice about each conclusion? What do they have in common (they don’t introduce new material, and they relate back to the topic). What makes the “3” conclusion stronger? (it includes more of what was in the essay, in summarized form—“negatives and positives.”
2. Have teachers write a new sample conclusion for the “2” paper. Have teachers return to their groups. One group should write a strong conclusion and the other a weak conclusion. They should present these to the whole group as teaching tools to be analyzed by students before they write their own conclusions.