This unit focuses on expository critique and rhetorical analysis, a necessary, though often overlooked curricular area. How often have teachers read immaculate essays – unblemished by errors in grammar, spelling, usage, and perhaps even structurally sound with an introduction, body, conclusion, topic sentences, thesis statements – but vacuous, devoid of clear thinking, laden with confused logic.

Teachers labor through these papers, struggling to discern and follow the student’s trail of logic. Not willing to let these murky passages go unmarked, yet not quite sure of what to say, teachers resort to weak comments in the margin to note these rhetorical difficulties: “??” “AWK” – for awkward, “Huh?” “Diction,” “Illogical,” “What are you trying to say?” “I can’t follow your thinking here.” Of course, these comments are not helpful to students because they don’t know what they mean, and wouldn’t know how to improve/revise the passage in any case. This unit attempts to systematically address specific areas of expository critique and rhetorical analysis so that students can not only recognize these skills understandings in their reading, but can apply them to improve and revise their expository writing.

**Strengths:**

- Strong alignment among content standards, Criteria for Success, Opportunities to Learn and Perform, the assessment, and scoring guide.
- Recognition of the need to teach expository critique, a difficult topic in all aspects.
- Attempt to elevate revision beyond proofreading and editing skills to clarifying logic and thinking, strengthening coherence, and attending to audience and purpose.
- After examining student work, teachers recognize the insufficiencies of their unit and the need to re-teach, expand, or intensify their teaching.

**Concerns:**

- Logic, coherence, tone, diction, audience, and purpose are difficult concepts to teach.
  “Two main indicators of coherence/logic problems” are identified in the unit: 1) Information out of order; 2) Information is irrelevant or unnecessary. A third indicator of coherence/logic problems is that thoughts are disconnected or confused, making it difficult to follow the thread of logic. This indicator is not addressed in the unit even though it may be the most prevalent logic/coherence/thinking problem in student writing.
- The unit requires many more lessons to help students apply these concepts (logic, coherence, tone, diction, audience, purpose) to the revision of their own writing.
- Some training may be needed to help some teachers identify problems of logic and coherence in student writing, learn to make meaningful commentary and provide guidance to improve students’ powers of exposition.
I. BACKGROUND

Unit Title: Expository Critique
Grade Level: Ten

Unit Designers: Geo Barker, Michael Crawford, Teresa Kramer, Lauren McLennan, Emery Petchauer

Discipline/Course Title: English Ten

Timeframe: Ten days

Teacher to Teacher Notes:
Expository Critique falls into the realm of rhetorical analysis, a somewhat obscure and remote discipline from the point of view of many English teachers, who are far more comfortable thinking, discussing, and teaching about literature. This unit addresses specific aspects of expository critique we feel will be highly useful for students. We don’t assume much in the way of background knowledge on the part of practitioners, and we have attempted to embed the instruction in readings and discussions which will be of intrinsic value in classrooms. Teachers are the best judges of what will and will not work in their own classrooms. The lessons presented here are samples only: we anticipate that they will work on our campus with our students, but make no specific claims beyond these. The activities we have outlined may be found by others to be nothing more than a broad outline. Different prompts may need to be designed for use in different settings. Different sample readings could also be identified.

Expository Critique for the purposes of this unit is taught as a vehicle for increased student achievement in revising their own writing. All too often, students conceive of revision as being limited to low level editing and proofreading activities. Unfortunately, teacher feedback often focuses almost exclusively on those same issues in student writing. We are becoming increasingly aware that it is the content of what students write that is the most unsatisfactory aspect of their work. Probably every English teacher working today has had the daunting experience of attempting to explain to a student why his/her paper, perfect in all aspects of grammar, usage, and spelling, is still failing work. When parents are involved in these conversations, matters often go from bad to worse.

Teacher corrections are often limited to conventions and organization (introduction, body, conclusion, topic sentences, etc.) Some teachers will need to learn how to provide commentary which will help students improve logic and coherence in their writing.
It is our hope that in this unit, teachers will find an entrée into meaningful discussions of content, leading to insights which students will find helpful in improving their own writing.

Printed Materials
Needed: _______________________

Resources (non-print): _______________________

Internet Resources: _______________________

II. **CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED**
The required content knowledge

**State/District:** Sweetwater Union High School District  
Language Arts Standards: Level 10—Journey Across Genres

Content Standard 10.3: Analyzing and evaluating the logic of paragraphs and functional documents. Critique the logic of functional documents by examining the sequence of information and procedures in anticipation of possible reader misunderstandings and also analyze the logic in a series of paragraphs.

Content Objective 10.3.1 Analyze a series of paragraphs for the logic and coherence of the organization and controlling perspective, by taking into consideration audience, purpose, and formality of the context.

Content Objective 10.3.2 Analyze a series of paragraphs for precision of word choice and tone, by taking into consideration audience, purpose, and formality of context.

We believe that any meaningful effort to address with students issues of content in expository prose they read and write must be broken down into discrete issues and skills. The skills addressed in Content Standard 10.3 are those which our district judges the most appropriate as a beginning point in this study. They were chosen with supporting student achievement on the CAHSEE as a primary goal.

**Enabling Prerequisite Skills:**

1. Mastery of the written conventions of Standard American English
2. Skills in editing/proofreading
3. Ability to read and effectively respond to a prompt
4. Understanding of essay format

Many difficult skills and understandings are embedded in these standards. Students are to:

**Analyze and evaluate**
- Logical thinking
- Sequence of information
- Coherence
- Reader concerns and bias
- Controlling perspective
- Word choice, tone

**Taking into consideration**
- Audience
- Purpose
- Formality of content

**And apply these skills and understandings to their own writing**

Anticipate that students will have difficulty in transferring their understanding from analyzing reading to their own writing.
III. THE ASSESSMENT
What students will need to do to provide evidence that they have met the standard.

Type(s) of Evidence Required to Assess the Standard(s):

Assessment Method(s):
Portfolio Requirement: Revise any essay’s coherence and logic by considering audience, purpose, and formality of context.

* Note: all students in our district prepare a standards-based writing portfolio each year, grades 7-12. This writing portfolio stands as the end of course exam in all English and ELD courses taught in our district. Items in the portfolio are scored by the district-wide writing rubric, which is closely related to the CAHSEE scoring guides for writing.

Teacher to Teacher Notes:
To begin this unit, students will be asked to write an essay to a prompt. Following instruction, students will revise the essay in light of their new understandings and skills.

Assessment Prompt(s):
Other cultures hold various beliefs and values about education which are different from ours in America. You are an American exchange student in Paris. Your teacher has asked you to write a statement explaining common American values about the purpose of education. Prepare your statement in the form of a well organized, multi-paragraph essay. Refer to your personal values and experiences to illustrate your ideas.
IV. CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

What will be expected of the students on the assessment:

Characteristics of a High Quality Response to the Assessment:

1. Structures ideas and arguments in a sustained and logical fashion.

2. Utilizes language register appropriate to audience.

3. Recognizably evolves from previous draft(s) while adding logic and coherence.

4. Effectively elaborates on previously generated material.

5. Demonstrates a clear awareness of reader bias and concerns.

6. Demonstrates a mastery of the conventions of standard written English.

Should add coherence to #1: “Structures ideas and arguments in sustained, logical and coherent fashion.”
V. OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND PERFORM

Instructional plan to assure that every student has adequate opportunities to learn and practice what is expected.

Opportunities to Learn:

1. Lesson on logic and coherence
2. Lesson on purpose
3. Lesson on audience/assumptions
4. Lesson on tone and diction

Opportunities to Perform:

1. Practice in critiquing logic and coherence
2. Practice in identifying purpose and critiquing author’s effectiveness in achieving it.
3. Practice in identifying the audience of a text and making conjectures as to its expected biases.
4. Practice in analysis of use of tone and diction in a text.

As teachers noted in the section, “VII. Samples of Student Work with Commentary,” they need to develop more lessons that help students apply their skills and understandings of logic and coherence and incorporate these understandings in the revisions of their own writing.

A suggestion for a lesson connecting tone, diction to audience:
Tone and diction are closely related to audience. Depending on the audience, students can adjust their language through word choice, shifts in register, and resultant changes in tone. A practice lesson: Write about the same topic with different audiences, adjusting word choice, and adopting an appropriate tone to suit the audience; e.g., asking for $100 from
Your mother or father
Your teacher or principal
A good friend
A foundation
VI. **THE PERFORMANCE STANDARD**
Rubric or other form of scoring guide

4 Clearly and thoughtfully addresses all parts of the prompt.

- Structures ideas and arguments in a sustained and logical fashion.
- Maintains effective awareness of audience.
- Provides a range of sentence types and uses precise, sophisticated language.
- Few if any errors in conventions.
- Recognizably evolves from previous drafts.

3 Clearly addresses all parts of the prompt.

- Ideas and arguments are presented in a logical fashion.
- Shows consistent awareness of audience.
- Provides a variety of sentence types and effective descriptive language.
- Few if any errors in conventions.
- Notable improvements over first draft.

What is “sophisticated” language?
2  Addresses the prompt in a fashion that is limited or may lack clarity.

   Shows limited control of logic and coherence.

   Shows limited or no distinguishable awareness of audience.

   Presents some sentence variety and descriptive language.

   Some errors in the conventions of standard written English are present but do not interfere with readers’ understanding.

   Shows few improvements over the first draft.

1  May or may not address the prompt.

   Fails to maintain focus; little or no control of logic and coherence is evident.

   Shows little or no awareness of audience.

   Presents little or no sentence variety and basic, predictable language.

   Errors in conventions interfere with readers’ understanding.

   Shows only superficial improvements or no improvements over the first draft.

Why switch from “provides” in score points 4 and 3 to “presents” in score points 2 and 1?

What is “basic” language? Perhaps clearer to say: “Provides little or no sentence variety and uses predictable language.”
Commentary – Overview:

We decided to teach this unit to a wider range of students than we had first envisioned. In addition to tenth graders, some eleventh and twelfth grade students also participated. We made this decision in the belief that analyzing work from a broader range of students would tell us more about our unit and lessons. We have not included information about what grade level the work samples come from: what we want to know from the work is whether our instruction really worked and what additional refinements are needed. What we found at this point is that our original prompt needs additional fine tuning. We also believe that students need far more help with revision than we had originally thought. Our opportunities to learn may be insufficient to bring students to the level of expertise we feel they critically need.
MEETS THE STANDARD: 4

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<th>Example</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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| Within the American civilization the purpose of education follows a social structure, education advances a person in the social hierarchy. To a student in the American school system education is a tool, which gives you additional opportunities for employment and prestige. This comes from American idea of individual prestige, social competition, and educational prejudice. In our society the honor of the one person is more important than the honor of the nation or group as a whole. Because of this fact and the additional opportunities for increasing success with education, people strive in education so that they can later be a successful person. Even those who attain success through other means, we still try to branch out in education for additional prominence. Within social competition in America the educated rule the politics and even culture of the nation. To be a powerful community member in America one must be educated in the sense of being certified by a degree from an established educational institute. Educational prejudice within America is also extremely powerful. The uneducated are treated almost as an inferior class of people who are left in poverty and silence. To avoid becoming one of these sub humans one must attain success in the educational system, this essay evidences clear and thoughtful development of an assertion which reflects mature understanding of American society and values and the place of education in that context. Though its structure is not especially sophisticated, it is sustained and logical. Sentence types utilized show complexity and variety: subordination is used correctly. There are few errors in the conventions of standard written English. The Weak paragraph with superficial thinking: The educated rule politics and culture and to be a powerful community member one needs a degree from an established educational institute. No development beyond the assertion of these two easily challenged opinions (a college degree is a requisite to be a powerful community member?). The student may be unsure of what he/she means by "social competition."
An American views education as important almost with an insane fear of failure. Because of the goals American’s set for themselves, involving power, fame, riches, and acceptance education is extremely important to the success of a person.

original draft was fairly strong, so there was less opportunity to improve than some other student work afforded.

The student identifies three major American values about education: individual prestige; social competition; educational prejudice. However, paragraphs on social competition and educational prejudice are underdeveloped, characterized by shallow thinking. If, in fact, there was little evident revision, this essay exemplifies all the descriptor of a “3” score.
Here in America, education is not all it's cracked up to be. We are often fooled into a false idea of education that has been brought up by our government and country. It is not so much the value of knowledge to expand your horizons, as it is the value of "knowledge" to expand your wallet, which many of us have been trained to think.

Our education system gives us enough "knowledge" to earn money and work solely to help our economy. To little do people seek knowledge or education, to think for themselves and build their own ideas and live their own life. It's all about what you own. Who cares about being individualistic if we can conform to what the norm is and make big bucks, right? That is the mind frame bestowed upon Americans since practically birth. To grow up and have a job that brings in a lot of money.

Although we are given enough information to live off of through education here, we are not very independent with our thoughts. This is ok to most, which is why our economy does so well. This is not necessarily a bad thing, it just depends on your views of what a good education is. The overall purpose of education here is to learn enough to work for the economy, but not enough to think for yourself and form your own ideas. American education is not all it's cracked up to be.

Clearly addresses the prompt, and presents a meaningful but underdeveloped critique. Coherence is strong, but some assertions seem based on logic which is not so much faulty as too shallow. The language of the piece is vivid and mirrors the 'in your face' tone of the argument. There are few errors in conventions. This writer unfortunately didn't progress much beyond his/her first draft. The raw material is here for a much stronger paper.

This essay is much more assertive than the comparatively bland "4" essay with, as the teacher's commentary notes, an "in your face tone." Paragraphs 1 and 2 are more elaborated on than the paragraphs in the "4" essay; however, in the third and last paragraph, the writer loses track of his/her thinking and lets a good idea slip through the cracks: American education does not foster independent thinking.

The essay concludes abruptly with the last sentence of the essay a reiteration of the first sentence.

It would be interesting to see the student's first draft and the teacher's comments for revision to determine if the teacher provided specific guidance to the student to strengthen and improve the arguments in the essay, or to see if the student simple ignored the suggestions.

This is a stellar example of a problem with logic and coherence mentioned earlier under "Concerns" about the unit: Thoughts are disconnected or confused, making it difficult to follow the thread of logic. One sentence is not connected to the next.
Education is a vital part of life. It is imperative that every child receives the most adequate of education that is necessary to be successful in life. Other cultures hold various beliefs about education which are different from ours in America. Americans believe that the most education one receives deems him or her more or less responsible.

I believe that education is one of the most important aspects of life. No one can ever learn everything, and therefore people never stop learning. Knowledge is the key to a successful future, and consequently knowledge is power. When people are knowledgable in more than one aspect, it can prevent ignorant beliefs and ignorant actions.

The purpose of education is not only to provide knowledge to the youth of today, but to prepare individuals for life after education (schooling). Education is to be well known in all areas of school, be it athletics, math, English, communication, and social classes.

Other cultures believe that America does not prepare students good enough for the real world, because we are given so many opportunities. Other countries are faced with hardships and therefore education is key to a good and comfortable life.

I believe that without education there would be no point to living. Everyday I learn something, and I am delighted that I have the opportunity to do so.
I believe that the purpose of education is to prepare kids for the real world. High school gives students skills that will allow them to succeed in adulthood and make necessary decisions to survive. Also, the way that high school is scheduled, prepares students for the work force. Two hrs.; then a small break; 2 more hours, then lunch; and finally 2 more hours, and then home. High school also gives students the opportunity to find their passion in life. With six periods a day, students could choose from many electives such as woodshop, art, foreign languages, and newspaper. This is why I believe that the purpose of education is to prepare kids for the real world; without it the world would explode.

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<td>This writing presents very little information, and specifically focuses on the writer's very particular beliefs rather than generalizing to the values of our society. It lacks logic in that it fails to address important aspects of education in America and devotes itself to more trivial issues. There is no attempt at paragraphing: this juxtaposes disparate ideas in jarring and incoherent ways. Language use is simplistic, and there are multiple errors in the conventions of standard written English.</td>
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The student does not understand that the focus of the essay needs to be American values about the purpose of education, and instead, writes about what he/she sees as the purpose of education: to prepare students for the real world. Perhaps the prompt could be refined to clearly define for students what they need to address.

A dire consequence if we do not prepare students for the real world: "...without it the world would explode." Without teaching logical, coherent thinking the world might implode.
Student Assessment
Assessment

Other cultures hold various beliefs and values about education which are different from ours in America. You are an American exchange student in Paris. Your teacher has asked you to write a statement explaining common American values about the purpose of education. Prepare your statement in the form of a well organized, multi-paragraph essay. Refer to your personal values and experiences to illustrate your ideas.