

# Cognitive and Linguistic Features of Adolescent Argumentative Writing



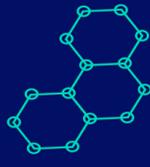
This study examined persuasive writing of middle school students including types of argument and use of connectives in writing.

## Challenges of Argumentative Writing



### A Reasoned Point of View

Argumentative writing requires students to take a reasoned point of view and defend it.



### Sophisticated Thinking and Reasoning Skills

This requires sophisticated thinking and reasoning skills on top of the skills already needed to write an essay within a particular genre.



### No improvement

Adolescent literacy has not improved in over three decades



### Basic Writing Proficiency

Many adolescents fail to achieve basic writing proficiency, meaning they are also unable to write coherent argumentative texts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).



### Low scores

Only 27% of students at 8th grade scores at or above proficiency level on a national writing assessment

## Connectives as a helpful tool for argumentative writing

1

Connectives are words or phrases that help indicate the connections of ideas across sentences.

2

They can be causal (therefore, as a result), additive (furthermore, in addition), adversative (however, despite this), or temporal (then, after that, finally).

3

These words can be challenging for adolescents to grasp, but they have been shown to be a predictor of successful reading comprehension (Crosson & Lesaux, 2013).

4

By understanding when to use these words, this also signifies children know how to connect ideas of different or similar natures.

## Findings



### Types of argumentative sentences

- The students in this study wrote an average of 5 non-argumentative sentences per essay. They wrote nearly 3 sentences on average from their own perspective/side of the argument, a little more than 1 from two perspectives/sides, and only .5 from an integrative perspective.
- The percentage of students who wrote non-argumentative sentences in their essay was 97%. 86% of the essays had a student's own perspective included, whereas only 50% of essays included a dual perspective-taking and 42% included the integrative perspective.
- All of the argument types were attempted at least once across all essays



### Connective usage

- Overall connective usage was low.
- Additive connectives made up 5% of each essay, causal connectives were 2% of each essay, whereas adversative and temporal connectives each only comprised of 1% of each essay.
- Adversative connectives specifically were found to positively predict argument sophistication. The other types of connectives did not have as strong interactions.
- Overall, there was a good amount of variability in the usage of connectives across students.
- The differences in connective usage may be explained by the different functions and styles of each argument type.

Reference: Taylor, K. S. et al. (2018). *Cognitive and linguistic features of adolescent argumentative writing: Do connectives signal more complex reasoning?*

Infographic by: Jiali Wang and Sasha Stone, University of California, Irvine