The Boxing Match:  
A Strategy for Analyzing Questions and Identifying Supporting Ideas

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Introduction

This strategy was developed to be used in seventh grade social studies classes at Depew Middle School and in eleventh grade classes at Springville-Griffith Institute High School to help students focus their knowledge and ideas when writing responses to essay questions. Although within the classroom we have a variety of levels of ability, this tool can be used to channel ideas from all students to achieve a final outcome. It is evident that many students have difficulty in expressing their knowledge in written form and concentrating efforts toward the goal of answering the question. Because of this, the writing often seems unfocused and not aligned with what the task is asking. The “Boxing Match” allows students to concentrate their efforts by focusing on specifics within the question and within given documents, without jeopardizing the outcome with unnecessary information. Once this strategy is completed, students will be able to logically organize the material and have enough information to write a first draft.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy

This lesson helps students to analyze the test question (including task, directions, guidelines, overview, situation) and to help “dig out” from the information given, the material that is appropriate for the content of the essay.
Step 2: Modeling the Strategy

Teacher provides an essay question that gives written pieces of information for the students to read and use in the essay. (For English ELA Regents Session One Essay B and Session Two Essay A, and for social studies any essay that is document based are appropriate). This strategy should be applicable to any subject area in which students are given written or visual pieces of information, and must write an essay using supporting material given in the piece of information.

After a brief introduction and a check that everyone has a highlighter, the teacher reads through the question with the students and looks for key words or phrases to highlight that identify to the student what content must be included in the essay. The teacher will model the practice once with an essay question. Then the teacher will use the Boxing Match Thinksheet to help students identify information and understand where to put these ideas in the boxes and how to answer the questions asked. Then the teacher will take details from the first piece of writing that support the key idea and put them in the box. The teacher will go on to the next box and repeat the process, continuing to duplicate the process for each of the remaining boxes.

Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy

After the first modeling, the teacher will ask for student input into choosing words that signal what content is expected to be in the essay. Then, the teacher will repeat the process with students at least once more before asking students to choose words on their own. This will be followed by a paired sharing of their word choices. If partners have not chosen the same words, they will raise their hands and discuss the discrepancies with the class. When each partnership has agreed upon the key words, the key words will be entered on the thinksheet in the appropriate places. The partners will then find information from the first piece that will support the key words. When students have completed their work with the first piece, they will go on to the second piece. Ultimately students should be able to go through the strategy by themselves and will either not need the thinksheet by the time they take the exam, or will be able to set up on scrap paper their own thinksheets with boxes for entering the information.

Step 4: Providing Additional Practice

Students will be given several essays to write throughout the year and each time will be given a thinksheet and more independence in completing this strategy. For the first time or two they will be able to use their notes and
teachers will help the students complete the thinksheet as a class. Then, students may use their notes and a paired share for input and questioning before they begin the essay. Next, students may use notes, but will work independently. Eventually they will not use notes and will use only the thinksheet for assistance. Finally, they will not be provided with a thinksheet, but will be able to set up the sheet on scrap paper before they write a draft of the essay.

Conclusion
This strategy has many benefits to the student test taker. By using highlighters, students will make key ideas clear and visible, which will signal what the expected content will be. By entering these words into the boxes, the words become reinforced, and by entering supporting ideas under the words, the paragraphs are essentially formed for the essay. Students can be sure that they are answering the question asked and are appropriately focused so that they have enough to write about.

Thinksheets
Copies are attached.
Thinksheet

BOXING MATCH

BEFORE THE FIGHT

1. Pre-match strategy

   • Carefully read the Overview, Situation, Task and Guidelines.
   • In the Situation highlight the key words that tell you what content you must include in the essay.

2. List here the key words or phrases you have highlighted: (number may vary)

   1. __________
   2. __________
   3. __________
   4. __________

3. These words tell me that what I have to write about is:

   ____________________________________________________________

4. Enter the key words in the spaces at the top of each box.

5. After reading the first piece given, enter appropriate information from the piece into the box where it will be a supporting detail.

6. After reading the second piece given, enter appropriate information from the piece into the box where it will be a supporting detail.

7. Repeat if there are more than two pieces.

Now you are prepared to fight the good fight! Use what you have learned about BOXING to help you win!
BOXING MATCH

sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key word or phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. connect key word or phrase to piece #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. supporting details explanation from piece #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– (minimum of 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. my comment on details or explanation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIRST PIECE OF INFORMATION

1.
2.
3.

SECOND PIECE OF INFORMATION

1.
2.
3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key word – 1 strength –</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. label the strength by writing in a full sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explain the strength in 2 – 3 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Comment on your explanation – (analysis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2nd strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. label the strength by writing in a full sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explain the strength in 2 – 3 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Comment on your explanation – (analysis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3rd strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. label the strength by writing in a full sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explain the strength in 2 – 3 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Comment on your explanation – (analysis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thinksheet

1. Read the question
2. Note words in bold and italics
3. Note structure of question -  
4. Enter your key words into the boxes provided.
5. In the first box – label the key word and write this in a sentence.
6. In the first box – explain the key word in 2–3 sentences.
7. In the first box – comment on your explanation in one sentence.
8. Then go to box # 2 and repeat steps # 5 – 7
9. Then go to box # 3 and repeat steps # 5 – 7
10. Do you have enough information in each box?

11. Additional practice -
   - day before each test – 5 minutes to go over thinksheet – first semester
   - day of test – give them the thinksheet – 1st semester and beginning of second semester
   - kids develop own think sheet end of second semester

12. Applies to any content area that asks for writing an essay or explanation of a process.
Thinksheet

1. Read the question

2. Note words in bold and italics

2. List these words

3. Note structure of question -

3. What does structure tell you about the essay you have to write?

4. Enter your key words into the boxes provided.

5. In the first box – label the key word and write this in a sentence.

6. In the first box – explain the key word in 2–3 sentences.

7. In the first box – comment on your explanation in one sentence.

8. Then go to box # 2 and repeat steps # 5 – 7.

9. Then go to box # 3 and repeat steps # 5 – 7.

10. Do you have enough information in each box?