The Gatekeeper Approach – *Unlocking the Keys to Success:*
A Strategy for Critical Analysis and Synthesis

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Introduction
This strategy is designed to help students determine which pieces of information are critical components for their essays. The purposes for reading and writing include reading for information, analyzing data, and finally synthesizing the components to form a new whole. After determining the main points, students will later distinguish what information can serve as supporting details, evidence, and examples. Additional activities can include paraphrasing as well as the use of quotations and attribution. This reading and writing assignment is geared toward Session One Part B (Task II) on the ELA Examination, yet these methods can be applied to any critical reading activity in every discipline.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy
Students often appear to have difficulties deciding which pieces of information from a text are necessary and beneficial to their arguments. They need to be aware that using only a part of the document can create a focused and organized discussion. Weaker students may rely merely on a plot summary of the textual information, never applying critical thinking techniques. Knowledge of how to supply adequate details and supporting evidence is frequently lacking in essays that require a formal argument. With the help of
this strategy, students should be able to determine, after reading any given piece, which points are critical pieces of information.

The thinksheet we developed is called the Gatekeeper Approach. The idea behind this title is the fact that as a gatekeeper, it is the students' job to realize that all the material from the text is not required for their discussions. They must carefully analyze the text and determine which are the critical points to include in their essays, and which points to leave out.

The thinksheet is separated into four keys. The first key is designed to ensure that the students fully comprehend the task and what they are being asked to do. They will identify who their audience is, what the purpose of their writing is, and finally what the task is asking them to do. After hearing or reading the given information, the students will use the second "key" on the thinksheet. This key is where students will identify the main points in the text that meet the task objectives. The third "key" will take the main ideas a step further by listing supporting evidence from the text in the form of major concepts, details, examples, key phrases, and important quotes. Finally, the fourth "key" gives a formula where the students can check their work. This is a way to insure that all of their objectives of the task have been met.

**Step 2: Modeling the Strategy**

This strategy was originally designed for Session One Part B (Task II) on the ELA Exam, yet it is not limited to that task. To begin modeling this strategy, each student will need a copy of the Gatekeeper Approach Thinksheet as well as a copy of the writing assignment.

As with every other part to the ELA exam, the first step is to read through the task, the situation, and the guidelines. The teacher and the students will read these together and discuss each part as needed. After reading through the actual task, the students should be able to write, in their own words, what they are being asked to do. The main goal is for the students to identify the audience, the purpose of their writing, and the actual task. As a visual aid, we would suggest that the teacher have a copy of the thinksheet on the overhead for the whole class to see. Key #1 on the thinksheet can now be filled in.

The next step to modeling this strategy is reading through the information in the assignment with the students. At this point, the teacher should remind the students that they are now a gatekeeper and as they read, they should begin distinguishing between important facts and supporting ideas. This is something that should be discussed as a group. After determining what information the students and the teacher think is important, students can now begin categorizing the information into main ideas. At this point, the students should also be able
to determine which information is not applicable to their writing assignment and rule it out as a possible main idea. Referring back to the thinksheet, Key #2 contains three boxes. As a group, students should decide which information is to be used as main ideas, keeping in mind that each main idea will require details to support it. Now students can fill in the boxes in Key #2. Students should be reminded that not every task will have three main ideas.

When Key #2 is complete, the class can move on to Key #3. The teacher and the students should refer back to their reading and discuss which details could possibly support the main ideas. Remind the students again that they are gatekeepers and now that they have found their main ideas, they cannot let any information into the gate that does not belong. The details that do belong can be referred to as their supporting details. Key #3 contains boxes where the students should fill in the supporting details. Keep in mind that only relevant information is allowed into each box. Again, this should be discussed as a class and agreed upon before anything is written in. With this information, students need to be able to develop a complete paragraph. If there is not enough information to do this, the idea is no good or more supporting details need to be identified.

Key #4 gives students the opportunity to check their work. When they fill in the formula with their main ideas, the outcome should equal the task objective. As a group, they should fill in the three circles on the thinksheet with the main ideas. These main ideas should fill the task requirement located in Key #1. If there are any discrepancies, chances are one of the main ideas does not fit and needs to be re-evaluated.

Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy

At this point, the teacher may continue with the writing process and complete this essay, or can move on to a new Session One Part B (Task II) assignment.

Assuming that the teacher has chosen to do another writing assignment, the students should read the task through on their own and begin filling in the thinksheet. Checking students' progress will be important. In order to do this, students should stop after completing each individual key and review it as a class. The teacher should pay close attention to Key #2, reminding students of the Gatekeeper Approach and that they need only the key facts for their main ideas.
Step 4: Providing Additional Practice

The additional practice includes using this strategy and its thinksheet each time a Session One Part B (Task Two) essay is assigned. Each time the assignment is done, the students will depend less on the teacher’s input. However, the teacher’s input is always beneficial to the students’ progress.

Conclusion

The whole idea of the Gatekeeper Approach should allow students to visualize in their heads that they are in charge and have the final say in what information is let into their essay, and what is left out. Although we have focused mainly on an ELA Session One Part B (Task II) assignment, the teacher can also use this strategy with a Session One Part A (Task I) assignment. Instead of the students reading a textual piece, they will listen to a piece as it is read to them and will also take notes. From this point, the same process can be used as a Session One Part B (Task II).

Suggestions for Adapting the Strategy in other Grades or Content Areas

This strategy can be used in any content area and with any writing assignment that uses informational sources. Key #1 is designed for the Regents ELA exam, so it would need to be changed if used in other content areas.

Thinksheet

Copy is attached.
Thinksheet

**Gatekeeper Approach**
*Unlocking the Keys to Success*

On the ELA Exam, read the **Your Task** and **The Situation** boxes that will provide all the required components of the writing task. After reading through the instructions a second time, highlight each critical step of the instructions by underlining key points.

**Key #1: Understanding the Task**

To ensure that the task requirements are clear, rewrite what you are being asked to do in your own words. Identify the following three components of the writing assignment:

- **Audience?**
- **Purpose?**
- **Task?**

**Key #2: Selecting Main Points**

As a gatekeeper, you must realize that all the material from the text is not required for your discussion. You must carefully analyze the text and determine which are the critical points that you should include into your essay, and which points to leave out. In the top of the boxes, identify the main points in the text that meet the task objectives.

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<th>Main Point #1</th>
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Thinksheet

Key #3: Selecting Supporting Evidence

After careful analysis of the text, determine the main points that emerge from the discussion. In the top of the boxes, identify the main points in the text that will fulfill the objectives of the task. Below each main point, list supporting evidence from the text in the form of major concepts, details, examples, key phrases, and important quotes.

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Key #4: Checking Your Work

After each main point has been fully supported, you must insure that the selected key ideas will fulfill the needs of the task itself. Rewrite your main points in each circle and verify that all of the objectives of the task have been met.

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= TASK OBJECTIVE