

CERS: Claim-Evidence-Reasoning-Synthesis

Your opinions are based on more than pulling answers from thin air.

- When you read a story, you are getting new information from what you read; at the same time, you are connecting that new information with things you already know.
- When answering a question that asks what you think, you may have to use one or both of the kinds of information noted above.

THINKING Follow these steps:

1. What is your first response to the question?
2. What are the reasons for that response? Jot these down as ideas rather than sentences and paragraphs. This is your prewriting.
3. Determine where each reason comes from. Is it from prior knowledge and experience, or from what you have read/researched?
4. If all or most of your information is from prior knowledge:
 - a. When writing about a story, return to the story to see if there is additional information that supports your opinion.
 - b. When writing about a general interest topic, ask yourself if your information consists of evidence that can be verified rather than ideas that relate only to your personal experience.
5. Confirm your approach.
 - a. When writing about a story, if there is little or no information from the story to support your opinion, reconsider your opinion.
 - b. When writing about a general interest topic, if you have little or no information that can be verified through other sources, rethink your position.

WRITING Once you have determined that your opinion can be supported properly, write your answer with these points in mind:

- A. **Restate the question in the first sentence of your answer (without saying "I think").** This is the first part of your CLAIM.
- B. **In the next sentence, give a general reason. Make sure it is stated as a real reason.** This is the rest of your CLAIM.
- C. **Include appropriate supporting reasons with explanations.** This is your EVIDENCE and REASONING.
EVIDENCE is made up of the specific information that supports your claim. REASONING is the explanation of what the evidence means.
- D. **Write a concluding section that summarizes or restates the main idea of the question.** This is what we are calling a SYNTHESIS, although it is really a conclusion. In later grades, you will be writing an actual SYNTHESIS. For now, think of the SYNTHESIS as the last chance to drive home your claim by giving your reader another way to think about it. (Don't write "That is why" followed by your first sentence written again. Instead, restate Parts A and B with new words in a new way.)

SAMPLE QUESTION for answering about a story

Consider the story "The Pudding Like a Night on the Sea" (tiny.cc/puddingnight), in which two boys are punished for eating a pudding that their father has made for their mother. The boys watch the father make the pudding, and then are left alone with it while Dad takes a nap. When their father wakes up and discovers the pudding is gone, he has the boys make a second pudding while he supervises and their mother looks on.

Here is a question you could be asked about that story:

In "A Pudding Like a Night on the Sea," is the father testing his sons?

One reader followed steps 1-5 in the **THINKING** section above for both sides of the question to determine these reasons:

Yes: Boys have to help with first pudding, but don't get a taste
Dad emphasized how good it is
Dad leaves boys alone with pudding
Perhaps not really sleeping "sitting straight up" in a chair
Has "beating" and "whipping" remarks ready to go
Mom and Dad both use unusual phrase to describe pudding – talked about it before?

No: Dad is in control; seems to expect obedience (gives orders in the kitchen)
Boys hear Dad present the pudding to Mom – he seems to expect the pudding to be there

The reader determined that the "yes" evidence outweighed the "no" evidence. With this information, the reader wrote the following response. She followed steps A - D in the **WRITING** section above. (In Part C, *EVIDENCE* is in italics, and REASONING is underlined.)

(A) In "The Pudding Like a Night on the Sea," the father is testing his sons. (B) All of his actions seem to follow a script with an ending that the father already knows.

(C) To begin with, he would be aware that he is tempting his sons with the description of the pudding at the same time that he tells them they must not eat it. Then he leaves the boys alone with this temptation as if to see how they will act when no one is watching them. After the inevitable happens and the boys eat the pudding, *the father's lesson depends on the clever double meaning of "whipping" and "beating,"* words he uses so quickly that he seems to have prepared for this. Finally, *Mom uses the same unusual phrase of the title to describe the pudding as Dad does, even though she is not at home to hear it when Dad speaks the phrase to the boys.* This makes it seem that the parents must have spoken of it together at an earlier time.

(D) As if he is acting in a play that he has written, the father sets up a situation that gives him the opportunity to teach his sons a lesson.

(over)

SAMPLE QUESTION on a general-interest topic

Should Halloween continue to be celebrated with door-to-door trick-or-treating?

Here is one answer that needs revision. The letters A, B, C, and D indicate the parts of the paragraph. My notes follow.

A

C

We should all keep door-to-door trick-or-treating the way it is. Kids love to get free candy, and wearing a costume is a lot of fun. But Halloween can also be dangerous, because accidents can happen in the dark, and people can poison candy. Still, going from house to house is what kids look forward to.

D

That is why I say that we should keep door-to-door trick-or-treating the way it is.

Notes:

- Write essays for me in the third person unless instructed otherwise.

- A.** Restate the question accurately: “Halloween should continue to be celebrated with door-to-door trick-or-treating.”
- B.** This is missing. There should be a short reason that all of the evidence in **C** will fit under. Example: “It is an important part of Halloween.”
- C.** Most of the evidence here fits, but some does not. The writer needs to stay focused on the question and the position he or she has taken. But this writer has included information that supports the other position (that Halloween can be dangerous). The writer should take out the part that doesn’t support his or her position. Also, the writer uses the word “Halloween” to stand in for “trick-or-treating.” They are not the same thing.
- D.** This writer has chosen the worst method of writing a conclusion. The writer should be restating the ideas of **A** and **B** in a new way. Example: “Without the fun custom of dressing in costume and collecting candy from neighbors, Halloween just wouldn’t seem like Halloween.”

Here is a very good paragraph. The letters A, B, C, and D indicate the parts of the paragraph. The underlined sections show REASONING for the EVIDENCE. My notes follow.

A

B

Halloween should not continue to be celebrated with door-to-door trick-or-treating. It’s too

C

dangerous! There have been reports of people poisoning candy to harm young children. Even worse, many children—alone in the dark—are a perfect target for kidnappings. Some children even become sick

D

from cold October air and too much candy, resulting in harmful illnesses like pneumonia and the flu. It’s just not safe anymore to go seeking candy out in the streets on Halloween.

Notes:

- A.** This is a good restatement of the question.
- B.** This is a good general reason that is true for all of C.
- C.** All of the evidence lines up with B.
- D.** The conclusion restates the ideas of A. and B. in a new way.