

## **Abandoning the Rhetoric of Assertion: An Anglo Model Alternative?**

Critical thinking is an important skill in academia, a skill which arguably begins with critical reading and culminates in critical writing. With that in mind, I call attention to what I argue to be, within Anglo-American academic writing, a distinctly “Anglo model,” one that differs from traditional textbook-based models in U.S. writing classes, the latter illustrated below:

Introduction – State one’s opinion on the subject (i.e. the thesis statement)  
Body – Support one’s opinion  
Conclusion – Restate one’s opinion

While the model above can be refuted in light of more modern, post-process approaches to teaching writing, it is nevertheless a model that has been widely taught as the standard, certainly in textbooks. I argue the existence of a somewhat different, Anglo model:

Introduction – State one’s intentions regarding the subject  
Body – Explore the subject from both sides  
Conclusion – State one’s opinion on the subject

I base this claim of an Anglo model on my experiences teaching writing in England since 2003, literature on British academic writing, and advice offered on British university websites. For the purpose of this letter, I focus on the nature of the Anglo model as a means to encourage critical thinking skills in students.

This model suggests a more “organic” way of writing, one that exhibits how a student’s opinion is arrived at after having first investigated the subject through consideration of different sides. Kastely (1999) suggested that the nature of the U.S. thesis statement in the introduction is premature. He argued that by initiating an essay with one’s central claim, “argument is not a mode of inquiry but a way of presenting conclusions that have been discovered prior to the argument” (p. 227). The chief difference is that the Anglo model displays just how a student’s central opinion has been reached. It is thus a point of arrival, not a point of departure.

In the Anglo model, the body of the essay functions as a discussion of various sides and used as the means to reach a final opinion, which is, of course, fittingly placed in the essay’s conclusion. Thus, the Anglo model is comparatively more explicit in terms of revealing the critical thinking that is wholly needed in order to reach a well-reasoned conclusion. While Kastely implied that there is a lack of critical thinking in the U.S. model precisely because there is a lack of consideration of opposing views in the body, in the Anglo model a student is expected to engage with a wide variety of literature, but strictly on the basis of seriously considering multiple viewpoints in order to then arrive at a final opinion. In the United States, certainly within the context of argument essays per se, a student has been taught to raise the opposing side to an argument merely to refute it, however; “the serious engagement with alternative positions is limited to figuring out responses to counter gaps in one’s support” (Kastely, 1999, p. 223).

A good classroom example of how the Anglo model can involve more critical thinking is an assignment I have introduced in which students have to argue for the writing school they deem superior—product or process. Because they are expected to discuss the pros and cons of both schools, and not just support one within the essay’s body, I believe that this has contributed to many students arguing that a combination of both schools is the ideal pedagogy. This is due, presumably, to the fact that students must reflect on both sides within their essay, as opposed to leaving that aspect of the writing to prewriting exercises or discussion with classmates.

Olson (1999) regarded the U.S. model—an example of what he called “the rhetoric of assertion”—as essentialist and, at least, limiting and stated that we need “to move away from a discourse of mastery and assertion toward a more dialogic, dynamic, open-ended, receptive, nonassertive stance” (p. 14). The Anglo model is a step in this direction.

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**References**

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