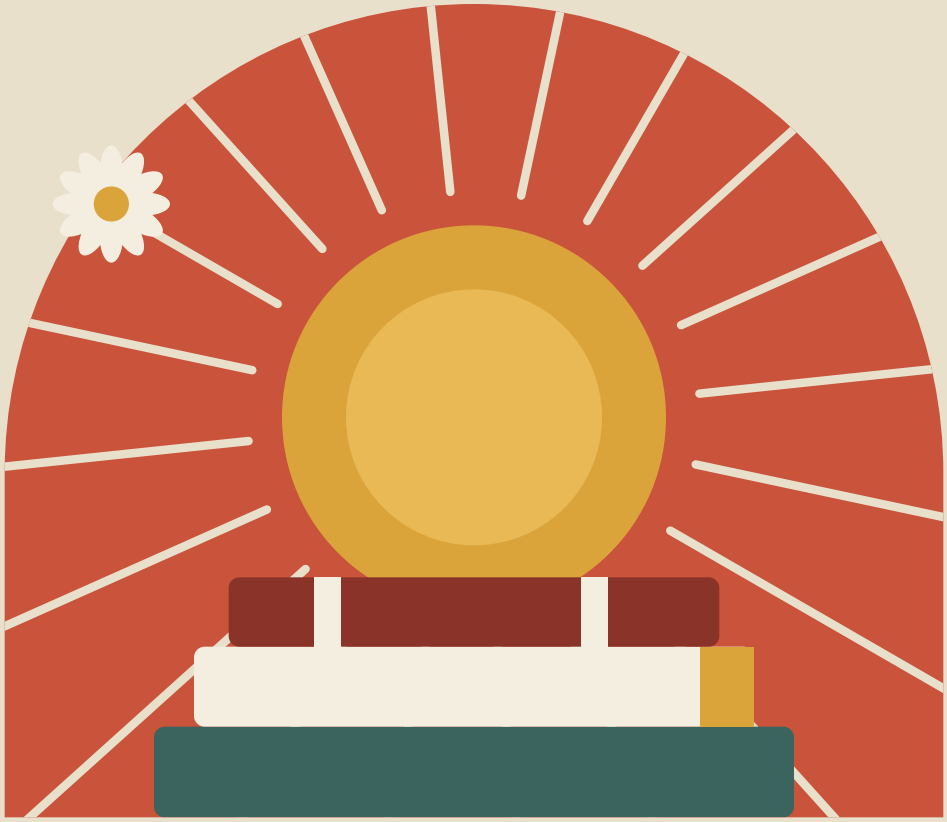
THE FOURFOLD PARENT GUIDES



The Commonplace Book
PARENT GUIDE

Sources, arguments, and where you found them

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

TEACH IT WITH CONFIDENCE

BUILT ON THE FOURFOLD METHOD · GINA GLENN STEFFY

WRITING IN THIS COURSE

Writing

What Commit looks like, and how to help your student say it well

Every unit ends with Commit: your student says it in their own words, usually in writing. Here's what to expect, and some starters for when the page stays blank.

WHAT COMMIT LOOKS LIKE

Level or kind	What they write	Your expectation
Source pages	Exact quotations with full citations and the four questions	Copied word for word; every question answered
Accounts That Disagree	Two sources on the same event, each stated fairly	What each can and can't tell us
Arguments	A one-sentence claim built from sources already in the book	Sourced evidence and the strongest objection answered

SENTENCE STARTERS FOR THE FIVE COMMON TOPICS

Topic	The question it asks	Starters
Definition	What is it? What does this word really mean?	"___ means..." "A real ___ is..."
Compare & Contrast	How is it like or unlike something else?	"Both ___ and ___..." "Unlike ___, ___..."
Circumstance	What was happening around it?	"Because it was ___, ..." "At the time, ..."
Relationship	What caused it, and what did it cause?	"___ led to ___ because..." "As a result, ..."
Authority	Who says so, and how would they know?	"According to ___, ..." "I trust this because..."

STARTERS FOR THIS COURSE

- "According to ___ (date), ..."
- "This source wanted readers to think..."
- "From this I can conclude ___, but not..."

> **WHEN THE PAGE STAYS BLANK**
>
> *Ask your student to say it out loud first. Write down what they say, then have them write it in their own hand and improve one sentence.*

AFTER THE WORK IS DONE

Responding

Five minutes a week, not an evening of grading

Level or kind	Check for	A good note sounds like
Source pages	Exact words and a complete citation	"Perfect citation. What did the author want readers to think?"
Accounts That Disagree	Both sides stated so their authors would agree	"Fair to both. What explains the difference?"
Arguments	A claim proved by indexed sources	"Strong claim. Find one more source in your index to support it."

THE RULE OF ONE

Point out one thing done well and one thing to try next time. Never more than one correction at a time. Students who get one clear next step improve fastest.

RUBRIC FOR PARAGRAPHS AND ESSAYS

	4	3	2	1
Claim	Clear, specific and arguable	Clear but general	Vague or only a topic	Missing
Evidence	Two or more specific details, named	One specific detail	General or from memory	None
Reasoning	Explains how each detail proves the claim	Explains one	Restates the evidence	Missing
Own words	Clearly the student's voice	Mostly their own	Close to the source	Copied

Add the four rows for a score out of 16. Use it for the longer pieces, not every short answer.

GRADING TIP

Read once for the claim and once for the evidence. Most growth comes from the Reasoning row: ask your student to explain out loud how each example proves the claim, then write down what they said.

FOR THIS COURSE

Copywork is real work here. Copying a source exactly, with its citation, trains the attention that every later argument depends on.

Writing Skills

One skill every three weeks, practiced in the Commit step

Work on one skill at a time. When you read an entry together on Friday, look for that skill first, then use the Rule of One: one thing done well, one thing to try next time.

Weeks	Skill	What to look for
Weeks 1–3	Writing in your own words	Commit is written without the book. Check that it doesn't echo the source.
Weeks 4–6	Precise words	Replace vague words ("stuff," "good," "a lot") with exact terms from the subject.
Weeks 7–9	Using evidence	Every claim gets one specific detail, with page, date or source.
Weeks 10–12	Explaining evidence	After each detail, one sentence that begins "This shows..."
Weeks 13–15	Cause and effect	Use "because" and "as a result" to link ideas.
Weeks 16–18	Comparing	"Both ___, but ___" in at least one entry a week.
Weeks 19–21	Writing a claim	Commit opens with an arguable sentence, not a summary.
Weeks 22–24	Answering the other side	State the strongest objection fairly, then answer it.
Weeks 25–27	Paragraph structure	Claim, evidence, reasoning, closing: one paragraph per entry.
Weeks 28–30	Strong verbs and clear sentences	Cut "there is" and "it is"; one idea per sentence.
Weeks 31–33	Revising	Rewrite one old entry and note what improved.
Weeks 34–36	Looking back	Write how your thinking changed this year, with two entries as evidence.

A MODEL TO SHOW YOUR STUDENT

Sample Entry

Sample Source page: Washington's Farewell Address, 1796

Show this to your student once, early in the year, so they see what all four moves look like together. Then put it away; their entries should sound like them, not like this.

1 GATHER

Exact quotation copied with author, title, date and paragraph. Primary source. Keywords: religion, morality, republic, virtue.

2 TEST

Who: Washington, leaving office. How would he know: eight years as president. What he wanted: to warn that liberty needs virtue. Anything else: Adams's 1798 letter to the Massachusetts militia says much the same.

3 CONNECT

Timeline peg between the Constitution (1787) and the election of 1800. Indexed beside Adams so the two can be found together.

4 COMMIT

Washington believed self-government depended on private virtue. I can't conclude from this one source that all founders agreed.