

SRSD Writing Strategy

Self-Regulated Strategy Development: POW + TREE

A Research-Backed, Science-of-Writing Approach to Argument and Analysis

What is SRSD — and why does it matter? Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) is the most extensively researched writing strategy in the world. Developed by Dr. Karen Harris at Arizona State University, SRSD has been validated in studies on five continents and has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse at its highest evidence level. It does not just teach you a writing formula — it teaches you how to plan, write, check your own work, and improve it. In a government course, SRSD gives you the tools to write a clear, organized argument about any political question you will face in this class, in college, and in civic life.

Structured Thinking

SRSD breaks the writing process into concrete, manageable steps. You never stare at a blank page again — you always know exactly what to do next.

Self-Regulation

SRSD teaches you to set your own goals, monitor your own progress, and revise your own work — skills that transfer to every course, every job, and every challenge you face.

Proven Results

Research shows SRSD produces the largest effect size of any approach to writing instruction. Students write longer, more complete, higher-quality arguments — and they do it with confidence.

The Strategy: POW + TREE

Two mnemonics work together. POW guides your entire writing process. TREE organizes your argument.

POW — Your Writing Process

P

Pick Your Idea

Before you write a single sentence, choose and commit to your position. What is your argument? What side are you on? Write it in one sentence at the top of your paper.

O

Organize Your Notes

Use the TREE organizer to map out your response before drafting. Fill in your topic sentence, reasons, explanations, and ending before you write full sentences.

W

Write and Say More

As you draft, keep asking yourself: Can I add more? Can I be more specific? Can I explain this better? More detail and deeper explanation almost always make a response stronger.

TREE — Your Argument Structure

T

Topic Sentence — State your claim directly

Your very first sentence must state your position clearly and completely. Do not ease into it. Do not ask a question. Do not say "I think" or "In my opinion." State the claim directly, as a fact you are prepared to defend: "The Electoral College should be abolished because it undermines the democratic principle of equal representation."

R

Reasons — Give at least two reasons that support your claim

Each reason is a separate point that supports your claim. In a government class, reasons often come from the Constitution, historical precedent, policy data, current events, or political theory. A reason is more than a fact — it is an explanation of why your claim is correct. Aim for at least two strong reasons; three is even better.

E

Explanations — Explain HOW each reason proves your claim

This is the most important — and most often skipped — part of argument writing. For every reason you give, you must explain the connection between that reason and your claim. Do not assume the reader sees it. Use language like: "This demonstrates that..." or "This matters because..." or "Without this, the claim would fail because..." Your explanations are where your thinking becomes visible.

E

Ending — Wrap up and restate your position

Your ending does two things: it restates your claim (in new words — do not copy your opening sentence) and it gives the reader a sense of why this argument matters. In a government course, this often means connecting your position to a larger principle of democracy, justice, constitutional law, or civic life. Your ending should feel like a conclusion, not just a stop.

The Six Stages of SRSD: How You Will Learn This Strategy

SRSD is not just a formula you fill in — it is a learning process. These six stages move from teacher-led to fully independent.

1

Develop Background Knowledge

Learn what you need to know first

Before you use the strategy, you learn the content and vocabulary you need. In a government class, this means understanding the political question well enough to take a position. You cannot write a strong argument about a policy you do not understand. This stage also includes reviewing the TREE structure and understanding what each component asks you to do.

2

Discuss the Strategy

Understand what it is and why it works

You and your teacher talk through POW + TREE together. What does each letter mean? When do you use it? Why does organizing before drafting produce better writing? Research shows that students who understand why a strategy works use it more consistently and more effectively. This is not memorization — it is understanding.

3

Model the Strategy

Watch it in action — then think aloud yourself

Your teacher models the entire process out loud, including planning with TREE, drafting, and revising. You see exactly what it looks like to think through each component. Then you practice thinking aloud yourself — narrating your own decisions as you plan and write. This makes your thinking visible and correctable.

4

Memorize the Strategy

Own the steps without looking at a sheet

You memorize POW and TREE until you can recall them without prompting. This is not busywork — research shows that students who have to look up each step while writing cannot focus on the actual argument they are making. The goal is to make the structure automatic, so your mental energy goes into the ideas, not the steps.

5

Support the Strategy

Practice with help — then less and less

You practice using POW + TREE with teacher and peer support. You might write collaboratively first, then with a partner, then mostly on your own with a checklist. Support is gradually reduced as your confidence grows. This stage is where most of the actual writing happens, and where you will start to see your writing improve measurably.

6

Independent Performance

Write on your own — strategy fully internalized

By this stage, you apply POW + TREE independently, without prompts or support. You set your own goals, organize your own argument, write your own draft, and check your own work. The strategy has become part of how you write — not a checklist you follow, but a habit of mind.

The Self-Regulation Tools: What Makes SRSD Different

Most writing strategies teach structure. SRSD also teaches you how to manage yourself as a writer.

Tool	What It Is and How to Use It
Goal Setting	Before you write, set a specific, measurable goal for your response. Not "I will write a good essay" but "I will include a clear topic sentence, two reasons with explanations, and a conclusion that connects to a larger principle." Specific goals produce specific results.
Self-Monitoring	As you write and after you finish, check your own work against your TREE organizer. Did you include every component? Did you explain each reason, or just list it? Self-monitoring turns revision from a chore into a targeted, purposeful process.
Self-Instruction (Self-Talk)	As you write, talk yourself through the process: "What am I trying to say here? Does this sentence support my claim? What comes next?" Research shows that students who narrate their own thinking while writing produce higher-quality arguments and catch more of their own errors.
Self-Reinforcement	After you complete each component, acknowledge the progress — even briefly. "I finished my topic sentence." "I have two complete reasons with explanations." Recognizing your own progress builds the confidence and motivation to finish strong.

SRSD in a Government Classroom: Example Prompts

POW + TREE applies directly to the political questions you study in Federal Government.

Prompt	What a Strong TREE Response Includes
Should the Electoral College be replaced by a national popular vote?	Topic sentence stating a clear position → Reason 1: equal representation principle + explanation of how winner-takes-all undermines this → Reason 2: historical precedent or recent election data + explanation of what it demonstrates → Ending restating position and connecting to democratic values
Should the federal minimum wage be raised to \$20 per hour?	Topic sentence with a defensible claim → Reason 1: economic impact evidence with explanation of how it supports or undermines the claim →

	Reason 2: state-level data or policy comparison + explanation of what the evidence shows nationally → Ending connecting to the federal government's role in economic policy
Should the Supreme Court's power of judicial review be limited by Congress?	Topic sentence with a constitutional position → Reason 1: separation of powers and checks and balances + explanation of how judicial review fits within or violates this framework → Reason 2: historical case examples (Marbury v. Madison, Bush v. Gore) + explanation of what they reveal about judicial power → Ending restating position and connecting to constitutional design
Should 16-year-olds be allowed to vote in federal elections?	Topic sentence with a clear position → Reason 1: civic education and engagement research + explanation of connection to the claim → Reason 2: existing precedents (local elections, tax paying, criminal prosecution) + explanation of why consistency matters → Ending restating position and connecting to democratic participation

How SRSD Builds Writing Literacy

Writing Readiness Skill	How SRSD Develops It
Writing a clear claim	The T in TREE requires a direct, arguable topic sentence from the very beginning. Goal-setting in the self-regulation phase means you define what a strong claim looks like before you write it.
Supporting that claim with evidence	The R in TREE requires at least two reasons — and self-monitoring requires you to check that both are present and specific before you submit.
Explaining how the evidence proves the point	The second E in TREE (Explanations) is dedicated entirely to this skill. SRSD is one of the only writing strategies that makes explanation a named, required structural element, not an afterthought.
Paraphrasing rather than copying	The W in POW (Write and say more) pushes students to elaborate in their own voice. Because SRSD is taught through think-alouds and collaborative practice, students develop the habit of expressing ideas in their own words from the start.
Quoting briefly and correctly when needed	During the Reasons step, students learn to integrate evidence from sources — paraphrasing when possible, quoting briefly when the original language matters. Self-monitoring includes checking that evidence is properly attributed.

Organizing a short response logically	POW + TREE provides the structure. Students who have internalized the mnemonic never produce a disorganized response — every element has a designated place in the architecture of the argument.
Answering the question directly and fully	Goal-setting before writing means students always define what 'fully' means for a given prompt. Self-monitoring after drafting checks that the response actually addresses what was asked, not just what was easy to say.
Revising for clarity	Self-monitoring and self-instruction are revision tools built into the strategy. Students do not revise randomly — they revise with a specific checklist tied to each TREE component, targeting clarity in exactly the places that matter most.

Common Mistakes — And How to Fix Them

 What Looks Like SRSD Writing But Isn't	 What Actually Works
Skipping the organizer and going straight to drafting	Always complete your TREE organizer before you write a single sentence of your draft. Students who plan with TREE first consistently write longer, more complete, higher-quality arguments than those who draft without planning.
Writing a topic sentence that is really just a restatement of the prompt	Your topic sentence must state a position — an arguable claim, not a description of the topic. 'The Electoral College is a system used to elect presidents' is a fact. 'The Electoral College should be abolished because it systematically underrepresents urban voters' is a claim.
Listing reasons without explaining them	Every reason requires an explanation. If you write a reason and do not follow it with 'This demonstrates that...' or 'This matters because...' — go back and add it. Explanation is where your analysis lives.
Writing a conclusion that just copies the opening sentence	Your ending should restate your position in new words and connect it to a broader significance. Ask yourself: why does this argument matter beyond this classroom? What principle of government, justice, or democracy is at stake?
Setting vague goals like 'write a good response'	Set specific, measurable goals before every writing task: 'I will write a topic sentence, two reasons each followed by an explanation, and a conclusion that connects to a constitutional principle.' Specific goals produce specific, checkable results.

SRSD POW + TREE Practice Template

Complete your TREE organizer fully before you write a single sentence of your draft.

Name:

Prompt / Political Question:

Date:

P — PICK YOUR IDEA | Write your position in one sentence before you do anything else.

My position on this question is:

O — ORGANIZE | Complete every section of TREE before drafting.

T

**Topic
Sentence**

Write your claim directly — not a question, not "I think," not a description of the topic. A position you are prepared to defend.

R

Reasons

Reason 1:

Reason 2:

Reason 3 (optional):

E Explanations	How does Reason 1 prove your claim? ("This demonstrates that..." / "This matters because...")
	How does Reason 2 prove your claim?

E Ending	<i>Restate your position in new words — then explain why this argument matters beyond the classroom.</i>
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MY SPECIFIC GOAL FOR THIS RESPONSE (Write this before you draft)
I will include:

W — WRITE YOUR DRAFT (Use your TREE organizer — say more than you think you need to)

SELF-MONITORING CHECKLIST (Check before submitting — this is your revision)

- ☐ ☐ My topic sentence states a clear, arguable claim
- ☐ ☐ I included at least two distinct reasons
- ☐ ☐ Reason 1 is explained — not just listed
- ☐ ☐ Reason 2 is explained — not just listed
- ☐ ☐ I paraphrased sources in my own words

- ☐ ☐ My ending restates the position in new words
- ☐ ☐ My ending connects to a larger principle
- ☐ ☐ I met the specific goal I set before drafting
- ☐ ☐ I revised at least one sentence for clarity
- ☐ ☐ The response answers the question fully

Self-Reinforcement: After you finish, take a moment to acknowledge what you did well. Identify one thing you did successfully in this response. Then identify one thing you want to do better next time. Write both below.

I did well at:

Next time I want to improve: