



Subject: ELA

Grade Level: Middle School/High School

DI Strategy: Anchor Example

## ELA Anchor Examples and Instructions for Implementation

**\*Note to User: An anchor is not a strategy in and of itself, but a critical component in effectively managing a DI classroom.**

Anchors are tasks students automatically move to as soon as they complete an assignment. The purpose of Anchors is to provide meaningful work for students when they finish an assignment. As with all assignments, Anchors must have clear instructions, materials, responsibilities, checkpoints, and expectations.

I used Anchors in my classroom all year long. I assigned four Anchors a month, updating them on the first class period of the month and making them due the last class period of the month. I created an Anchors bulletin board to help display the monthly Anchors and to help my students understand what was expected of them. On the bulletin board I had four pockets, one for each category of Anchor that I used.

### Four Anchor Categories:

Every month students had a RAFT, which stands for Role, Author, Format, and Topic. For instance, my students were all reading different novels and we were going to be talking about conflict in class, so that month's RAFT was for the students to write a letter to "Dear Abby" from the main character of their book, explaining the conflict and asking for advice. The next month they composed a letter in response, giving advice.

Students also had a journal to complete. One month, during the holiday season, I had the students write about their favorite childhood holiday memory. We had been talking about setting and how authors use setting to help create the mood. We discussed how authors incorporate "sensory" details, telling not only what the setting looks like, but also what it feels like, what it smells like, what it tastes like, what it sounds like. Students were encouraged to consider these things as they wrote about their favorite childhood memory.

There was also an "enrichment" activity, which usually had to do with relating what we were doing in class to music or art, which were two things my students were very interested in. One month the students created a "soundtrack" for the novels they were reading, choosing songs that fit the mood of the novel.

Lastly, there was a "mystery" category, which could be anything. For instance, the first mystery anchor was a learning style quiz. The following month the students created their own settings to a short story, completing a graphic organizer to help them brainstorm the sensory details of the setting. In later months, they created characters, plot, and then wrote a short story.



### Procedures for introducing and implementing Anchors:

When I introduced the Anchors at the beginning of each month I explained what the assignments were orally and I also had the assignments typed out and copies made for each student. When the students were ready for each assignment they went to the back of the room and took the assignment from the pocket on the bulletin board, completed the assignment and stapled it in their notebooks.

To help students keep track of their Anchors they received a checklist each month. This checklist was taped into their notebook, and every time students completed an anchor, they checked it off and recorded the date. There was also room on the checklist for the grade they received and for me to write comments to the students. I usually made the anchors all worth the same amount of points and the grade was based on both effort and content. I like to use these anchors to help build confidence and I try to keep the activities simple so that all students will be able to complete them and experience success.

Some months, like November and December were shorter due to days off for holidays, so during those months I assigned the Anchors in November and let the students know that they would be due at the end of December.

Again, students completed these assignments at the end of class if they finished the day's assignment(s) early. I checked in with students throughout the month, keeping track of where they were with their anchors. If I noticed that a student was having trouble finishing up the anchors for the month I would have the student work on them during SSR—sustained silent reading (because I teach Critical Reading, we start each class with 10 minutes of SSR). Students could also take them home and work on them during the last week of the month if they needed to in order to finish them by the last class of the month.

### Student response to Anchors:

Overall, my students have responded positively to the use of Anchors. I noticed they were less likely to rush through assignments thinking they would get free time because they had another assignment to do once they finished. They tended to take their time on each assignment because they knew they would not be “done” for the day until the bell rang. This was a good way to help students cultivate the habit of using time wisely and with a clear purpose.

I also thought about how to make these assignments interesting and fun. I tried to stay away from activities with “boring” topics because I knew my students would not be motivated to complete these activities. They did tend to enjoy these activities. The favorite was the first “enrichment” of the year, in which I had my students come up with a top 10 list of songs to read to and explain why. They enjoyed thinking about these things so were much more cooperative when it came to completing these assignments than if I had them write, for instance, an essay.



### Alternative way to using Anchors:

There are many other ways to use Anchors in class. While I used these at the end of class, a teacher could use them at the beginning as students enter the classroom, serving as a “Do Now” or warm up activity. Another option for Anchors would be for a student to use them as (s)he is waiting for help from the teacher. A third alternative would be for the class to work on an anchor while the teacher works with an individual student or a small group of students. Then they could switch and the student/group you just worked with could do the anchor while you moved on and worked with the other students/groups.

I made up the anchors for my students, but teachers could also think about creating/brainstorming a list of anchors with the students as part of the decision making process. Teachers could also give students a list of possible anchors where the students could choose which ones they would complete from that list.

Instead of giving the whole class an Anchor that they must all complete, teachers may also choose to tier assignments to meet the needs of different readiness levels of the students, depending on the goals the teacher has.

Anchors can be short term as many of mine are, or long-term lasting a marking period, semester or the year. For instance, the anchor I spoke about earlier where students created a setting, they later created characters, a plot and wrote a short story. I got the idea from a realistic fiction novel I just finished reading. The teacher in the story gave his students the assignment to create an autobiography, with 26 chapters, each chapter corresponding to a different letter in the alphabet; so the first chapter title would start with A, the second B, and so on. This could be a year-long Anchor for students to complete.

### To start make sure:

- Expectations are clear to the students. I explained directions orally when activities were introduced in the beginning of the month. I also had the directions typed on the page or posted on the bulletin board.
- Students are held accountable for on-task behavior and task completion.
- The first time you do Anchor activities, especially if you are going to do the same type again, think about teaching the whole class to work independently and quietly on the Anchor activity. To introduce a new Anchor, I would start with a shorter lesson and leave time at the end of the period to explain and complete the Anchor. I walked my students through the process of putting away their work for the day, going to the back bulletin board to check out the four Anchors for the month, choosing one and working on it. When students were completed, they then were told to check it off from their check list and write the date.
- Know and explain to students ahead of time how they will be graded on this assignment. My students were graded for their completion, following directions, and effort on the assignment. They also received points for on-task behaviors. I have a general rubric that I use to grade Anchors.
- You may also want to explain why you are using Anchors. I know with my students, they always want to know why they have to do things and how it will affect them.
- Think about how you will set this up. It was easy in my case because I have my own



classroom, but that is not always the case. If you are a “floating” teacher this may be a challenge for you because you may not have the space to set this up. You may want to get baskets and keep them in one location, such as the window sill.

- A concern in larger classes is classroom management. If students are up and moving around the room picking up assignments that may invite conversation and cause distraction. In that case, maybe you want to give them a packet in the beginning of the month/marking period and have the students keep it in their folders and take it out when they are done.
- Another challenge may be keeping up with grading, again this is especially true in larger classes. You can think about grading this for completion only, making it self-checking, or using checklists or rubrics.
- Lastly, the logistics may cause concern; the time it takes to think of, plan out the anchors, setting them up, the movement in the room.

With Anchor Activities, like all DI strategies, think big and start small, implementing where you know you can succeed.