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Making Students “Safe” Writers with the SAFE Model in the Age of AI

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Abstract: University students can develop opinion-writing skills through strong argumentative reasoning, while technological advancements should support high-quality text production without relying too heavily on AI text-generating tools. This study investigates students’ responses regarding the challenges and needs in writing argumentation-based opinion texts. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 97 students enrolled in the Indonesian Language Education Study Program in West Java, Indonesia. Data analysis employed percentage calculations based on the 6+1 Traits of Writing framework, encompassing ideas, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. Argumentative reasoning was examined using the framework of claim, evidence, and reasoning. The findings reveal that students experience the greatest difficulty in writing conventions, while weaknesses in argumentative reasoning are primarily related to the presentation of evidence. To address these challenges, this study integrates the 6+1 Traits of Writing with an argumentation-based reasoning framework to develop the SAFE writing instruction model, consisting of Surveying, Arguing, Framing-Writing, and Editing. The SAFE model utilizes artificial intelligence as scaffolding in the writing process and responds to debates on text ownership in Generative Artificial Intelligence by positioning students as the primary agents of text production.

Keywords: argumentation, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), opinion writing, SAFE model, text ownership

Introduction

The writing of arguments for popular articles or opinion pieces can be facilitated by artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots, including ChatGPT, Gemini, DeepSeek, and other text-generation tools (Aydin et al., 2025; Hysaj et al., 2024; Salvagno et al., 2023). However, the ease of writing afforded by AI does not necessarily yield texts rich in argumentation. The language produced by AI often appears unnatural, indicating that argumentative writing still requires the writer's voice to convey perspectives meaningfully in response to particular events (Hinton & Wagemans, 2022). This is because opinion articles constitute a form of scholarly writing that articulates the author's viewpoint on contemporary issues. AI systems are not yet capable of performing this task effectively, as limitations in accessing or interpreting up-to-date events require writers to elaborate their arguments independently. Nevertheless, AI can still serve as scaffolding, assisting writers in organizing ideas that can subsequently be developed in detail within the text (Li & Wilson, 2025).

For university students in Indonesia, particularly those enrolled in Indonesian Language Education programs, writing popular articles is a compulsory course that requires students to produce opinion texts. In completing such tasks, AI serves as a supportive tool that facilitates students' writing processes (Tseng & Warschauer, 2023). However, the use of AI without a clear structure and a sound framework for opinion writing may become counterproductive for students (Guo et al., 2025). Arguments in AI-assisted texts tend to be weak and show limited authorial voice. As a result, opinion pieces often read like summaries of facts or others' views rather than presenting a clear argumentative stance by the writer. Although AI can produce texts with near-perfect adherence to conventions, its word choice often remains limited. Recurrent patterns can also be identified in the writing, particularly in concluding sentences that signal closure, which tend to follow similar formulaic structures (AlAfnan & MohdZuki,

2023). While AI functions as a tool to assist users, the prompts provided must be grounded in a solid conceptual understanding of opinion writing (Ranade et al., 2025). Effective prompts should integrate an appropriate writing model with a strong argumentative framework to ensure that the resulting texts demonstrate high quality and substantive argumentation (Budiharso, 2017).

Writing models in the twenty-first century have continued to evolve, and their application has increasingly been adapted as structured prompts for use with artificial intelligence (AI) systems (Mezzadri & Paita, 2025). Fundamentally, writing models originate from a process-oriented approach to writing (Patthey-Chavez et al., 2004). Within this framework, writing is commonly classified into several stages, namely prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Williams, 2014, pp. 106–107). While these stages emphasize writing as a process, they do not sufficiently address the contextual and content-related dimensions of a text. To address this limitation, Spandel (1997) developed the 6 Traits of Writing model, which consists of the components of ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. This model was later refined by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) by adding a sixth trait, presentation, resulting in the 6+1 Traits Writing model. The 6+1 Traits Writing framework became a registered trademark of NWREL—now known as Northwest Education—and has been widely recognized for its effectiveness in supporting students' writing development. Empirical studies have demonstrated that the 6+1 Traits Writing model functions both as an evaluative tool and as an instructional framework that effectively enhances students' writing skills (Culham, 2003).

The 6+1 Traits of Writing have been empirically proven to be effective in improving writing skills. This evidence motivated the present study to integrate the seven traits with the argumentative reasoning framework proposed by Sampson et al. (2011). Accordingly, this study addresses the following Research questions:

- 1) What needs and challenges do university students face in writing opinion articles based on the 6+1 Traits of Writing combined with an argumentative reasoning framework?

- 2) What affirmative opinion-writing instructional model can be developed for AI-assisted writing by integrating the 6+1 Traits of Writing with an argumentative reasoning framework?

To address the research problems, this article is supported by a literature review that discusses the 6+1 Traits of Writing, the argumentation framework proposed by Sampson and Clark (2008), and the use of artificial intelligence in opinion writing. Furthermore, a descriptive qualitative methodology is employed to facilitate the synthesis of findings related to students' needs and challenges in writing opinion texts. Based on these findings, the study proposes a writing model that utilizes artificial intelligence as scaffolding to support the development of arguments in opinion writing. These findings provide a foundation for developing an AI-supported opinion-writing model. In principle, artificial intelligence is not merely an assistive tool that diminishes users' argumentative abilities, but rather functions as cognitive scaffolding that stimulates critical reasoning, strengthens argument construction, and supports the writing process without displacing the central role of the human writer.

Literature Review

The 6+1 Traits of Writing

According to Coe et al. (2011), the 6 Traits of Writing were developed in the 1980s as a classroom-based assessment approach intended to provide a clearer structure for both teachers and students in understanding what constitutes effective writing (Culham, 2003). The approach also draws on elements of the writing process, including the recursive use of planning, drafting, evaluating, and revising, as developed by Flower and Hayes (1981). The 6+1 Traits of Writing are integrated with stages of the writing process. The model emphasizes six core characteristics of effective writing: ideas and content, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and voice, along with an additional trait, presentation. Each trait aligns with writing process stages, including prewriting,

drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. During prewriting, writers identify purpose, audience, and form, and engage in brainstorming. Drafting focuses on developing central ideas and organizing them coherently. Revising attends to the flow of ideas and sentence variety, while editing emphasizes corrections in spelling, grammar, and mechanics. The publishing stage involves presenting the final text clearly and effectively to the intended audience. The model helps writers understand that writing is a recursive process that requires systematic thinking, structuring, and refining ideas.

The 6+1 Traits of Writing can be implemented across age levels and learning contexts. Culham (2003) developed practical guidelines for applying the model in schools in her book *The 6+1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide for Grades 3 and Up*. The model is not only applicable in formal instruction but also recommended by educators for use in writing training programs, as reported in an evaluation study by Werkmeister (2010). Nevertheless, research on this model remains limited, partly because the traits themselves are inherent components of writing, leading educators to favor more familiar instructional models such as mind mapping, brainstorming, or roundtable activities. The 6+1 Traits of Writing model shifts the focus of instruction from traditional approaches to the development of writing skills and the provision of meaningful feedback (Kalsum, 2020). It provides explicit criteria that help students improve writing proficiency and critical thinking by clarifying the rationale behind the scores they receive (Culham, 2003).

We found that previous studies on the 6+1 Traits of Writing model consistently demonstrate its effectiveness in improving students' writing skills. Un-udom (2020) found that the 6+1 Traits of Writing model had a positive impact on the writing performance of Thai EFL students, as evidenced by a significant improvement between pre-test and post-test scores ($p = 0.00 < 0.05$) and students' attitudes categorized at a high level ($M = 4.18$). These results align with the study conducted by Qoura and Zahran (2018), reporting that the 6+1 Traits of Writing model was effective in developing students' critical thinking and writing skills through an emphasis on the writing process, rubric-based assessment, and sustained practice. In addition, Werkmeister (2010) concluded that 71% of teachers perceived 6+1 Traits of Writing training as effective as an initial step, while the remaining 29%

considered it less effective due to the need for more time, deeper engagement, and more focused training formats. Overall, previous research suggests that the 6+1 Traits of Writing model enhances writing skills and is suitable for use as a writing training model. However, the integration of the 6+1 Traits of Writing model with argumentation has not yet been explored. Therefore, this article seeks to develop an adaptive, contemporary writing model that employs artificial intelligence as a supportive scaffold during the writing process.

Sampson and Clark’s Argumentation Framework

This research employs the scientific argumentation framework developed by Clark and Sampson (2008) and Sampson and Clark (2008). According to Sampson and Clark (2008), scientific arguments consist of three core components: explanation, evidence, and reasoning. Explanation functions as the answer to the research question and presents a claim that must be evaluated. Evidence consists of observations or measurements that support or refute the claim, while reasoning links the evidence to the explanation by demonstrating why the evidence is valid as a basis for support. The quality of an argument is then assessed through empirical criteria, such as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence, and theoretical criteria, including completeness, usefulness, and consistency of the explanation with established theory.

The scientific argumentation framework, adapted from Sampson and Clark (2008) in the study *The Impact of Collaboration on the Outcomes of Scientific Argumentation*, explains how scientific arguments are constructed through three components: explanation, evidence, and reasoning. Explanation presents the claim or proposition to be examined and must align with evidence that is logically justified through reasoning. Evidence may include trends over time, differences between groups, or relationships among variables, and is used to support or challenge the explanation. Reasoning justifies, explaining how and why the evidence supports the explanation, and why it can be considered a valid basis for the claim.

Sampson & Clark (2008) further clarify that argument quality is evaluated using two groups of criteria: empirical and theoretical. Empirical criteria

include fit with evidence, sufficiency of evidence, predictive power, and quality of evidence. Additionally, theoretical criteria include the sufficiency, usefulness, and consistency of the explanation with other accepted ideas. These considerations indicate that the quality of a scientific argument is determined not only by the strength of its empirical evidence but also by the precision and coherence of its theoretical explanation. Effective argument evaluation requires balancing valid evidence with reasoning that is logically coherent and theoretically justified.

Sampson and Clark's argumentation framework, also known as Argument-Driven Inquiry (ADI), focuses on examining the strength of scientific arguments in both oral and written forms (Sampson et al., 2011). The ADI model has been widely applied in science disciplines such as biology and chemistry to assess the quality of students' argumentation. The three components of Sampson and Clark's argumentation framework, namely claim, evidence, and reasoning, are not merely features of scientific argumentation but constitute the fundamental foundation of effective argument construction. These components are also more accessible for novice writers than Toulmin's argumentation model, which is more detailed and includes six elements, namely claim, data, warrant, backing, rebuttal, and qualifier (Stofiana et al., 2025). Existing studies predominantly employ argumentation frameworks to analyze texts rather than to design writing instruction models. The development of argumentation-based models as a foundation for writing instruction remains limited. However, integrating an argumentation framework with a writing model has the potential to produce a robust and effective formula for writing instruction. Therefore, this study integrates Sampson and Clark's argumentation framework into a writing model that employs artificial intelligence as scaffolding.

The Use of AI in Opinion Writing

Artificial intelligence (AI) can generate texts, including argumentative texts, in accordance with user instructions (Macagno, 2021; Vassiliades et al., 2021). In higher education writing instruction, AI has become a tool that facilitates

students' idea generation processes (Črček & Patekar, 2023). However, AI exhibits notable limitations, particularly in voice, as generated texts often appear rigid and overly formal (Jiang & Hyland, 2025). This contrasts with student-produced writing, which tends to demonstrate a stronger authorial voice supported by arguments grounded in the most up-to-date factual information. Despite its limitations in conveying authorial voice, AI should not be viewed as detrimental to writing instruction, as instructors play a central role in integrating AI effectively into writing pedagogy. In practice, AI-supported writing often relies on tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly. However, their application in developing argumentative writing tends to be limited, functioning primarily as tools for linguistic editing (Stofiana et al., 2025). However, through appropriate utilization, AI has the potential to support the production of texts that approximate the quality of professional writing.

Writing opinion articles for the media is a form of public-oriented communication that requires alignment with readers' needs and expectations (Anshori, 2023, p. 203). The development of opinion writing skills, especially for novice writers, can be facilitated through the application of effective and systematic writing steps. Writing may be conceptualized as a staged process that involves selecting a theme or idea, preparing relevant references, identifying the target audience, determining an appropriate development strategy, formulating an engaging title, composing an introduction, developing the main body, articulating a clear stance, and constructing a coherent conclusion (Abed, 2024; Flower & Hayes, 1981). Structurally, an opinion article typically consists of a title, lead, body, and conclusion, with each component adapted to comply with the word limits and editorial standards of the target media outlet.

University students often encounter multiple challenges in academic writing, including fear of starting, uncertainty about when to begin, difficulties with organization, and linguistic limitations (Mammadova, 2023). These challenges align with findings from previous research, which identify difficulties such as generating ideas, organizing thoughts, and dealing with limited information literacy (Hyland, 2019; Tardy, 2016).

Method

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design with a survey approach to analyse students’ needs regarding an opinion writing model based on the 6+1 Traits of Writing and argumentative reasoning. This approach was selected because it aligns with the Research objective, which aims to systematically map students’ perceptions and needs.

Participants

The participants consisted of 97 undergraduate students of Indonesian Language Education from public and private universities in West Java Province. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) currently active as undergraduate students, (2) have completed a course in opinion writing, and (3) voluntarily agreed to participate. The distribution of participants by gender and semester is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants

N		97
Gender	Female	84
	Male	13
Semester	3	30
	4	38
	5	29

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

The research instrument consisted of an online questionnaire developed using Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised three main sections. The first section collected demographic information. The second section included twenty closed-ended statements using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure students' needs related to the components of the 6+1 Traits of Writing (fourteen items) and argumentative reasoning (six items). The third section consisted of five open-ended questions designed to explore challenges and learning needs in opinion writing in greater depth. The development of the questionnaire was based on the theoretical framework of the 6+1 Traits of Writing proposed by Culham (2003) and the argumentation framework by Sampson and Clark (2008), with two items designed for each examined aspect.

Data collection was conducted from October to November 2025 using a survey method, with questionnaires distributed through class WhatsApp groups facilitated by lecturers teaching the opinion writing course. Student participation in this study was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time without any academic consequences. In the opening section of the questionnaire, participants were required to provide informed consent before proceeding to items exploring challenges and needs related to opinion writing. All data provided by participants were treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. No personal identifying information is reported in this article, and participants are identified using the code “R” (respondent) followed by a numerical sequence corresponding to the order of questionnaire completion.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by integrating quantitative and qualitative datasets. Quantitative data from the twenty closed-ended items were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the calculation of means and standard deviations to describe the overall tendencies of student responses. The percentage of

agreement levels was then computed using an index formula with interpretation intervals of 0 to 19.99 percent (Strongly Disagree), 20 to 39.99 percent (Disagree), 40 to 59.99 percent (Neutral), 60 to 79.99 percent (Agree), and 80 to 100 percent (Strongly Agree).

Meanwhile, qualitative data from the five open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis through a systematic process that included: (1) data transcription and familiarization, (2) generating initial codes based on patterns in student responses, (3) identifying and categorizing themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes for consistency, and (5) reporting the findings supported with representative excerpts from student responses. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of students' needs in learning to write opinions.

A single researcher conducted data analysis in this study; therefore, inter-rater agreement was not applied. This approach is consistent with the interpretative nature of linguistic analysis (Willis & Harvey, 2025). To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed four key strategies: (1) prolonged engagement through the researcher's sustained involvement in data collection and analysis; (2) triangulation by comparing data obtained from multiple data collection techniques; (3) an audit trail through systematic documentation of all stages of the research process; and (4) peer debriefing through discussions with colleagues to examine the consistency and accuracy of the analytical findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Findings

The 6+1 Traits of Writing as Student Needs

Based on the 14-item measure of the 6+1 Traits of Writing, 97 students provided 1358 responses. The responses consisted of 23 Strongly Disagree, 72 Disagree, 329 Less Agree, 511 Agree, and 423 Strongly Agree. The total score obtained was 5313. The highest possible score for Strongly Agree was 5 multiplied by

1358, which equals 6790. The lowest possible score for Strongly Disagree was 1 multiplied by 1358, which equals 1358. Using the index formula, the resulting score was 78.25 percent, which falls into the Agree category. These results indicate that the 6+1 Traits of Writing are perceived as highly necessary for students in opinion writing.

A descriptive analysis of the 14 items assessing students’ perceived needs for the application of the 6+1 Traits of Writing in opinion writing showed consistently high results. The combined mean score for the seven traits was 3.85 (SD = 0.95), reflecting a strong overall level of agreement. These findings suggest that students view the 6+1 Traits of Writing as highly relevant and essential for developing their competence in opinion writing. Further analysis of each trait revealed variation in perceived need levels, as summarized in Table 2. The two traits with the highest mean scores were Presentation (M = 4.09, SD = 0.98) and Conventions (M = 4.03, SD = 0.98), both of which fall within the very high category. Conversely, Organization received the lowest mean score (M = 3.72, SD = 0.95), although it still falls within the high category. Descriptive statistics of students’ needs regarding the 6+1 Traits of Writing can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Student Needs on the 6+1 Traits of Writing

Traits	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Presentation	4.09	0.98	Very High
Conventions	4.03	0.98	Very High
Voice	3.84	0.95	High
Ideas	3.77	0.90	High
Word Choice	3.75	0.92	High
Sentence Fluency	3.75	0.99	High
Organization	3.72	0.95	High
Overall	3.85	0.95	High

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

The high perceived need for Presentation and Conventions indicates strong student awareness of the importance of technical and formal aspects of writing. This may reflect their academic experiences with formal writing standards that emphasize mechanical accuracy, formatting, and layout. The relatively lower score for Organization suggests that students face challenges in constructing coherent, logically structured texts. These challenges include the ability to systematically arrange ideas, establish clear relationships between paragraphs, and build an effective argumentative flow. Although the aspects of Ideas ($M = 3.77$) and Word Choice ($M = 3.75$) fall within the high category, these scores indicate the need for deeper development of idea elaboration and lexical precision. The findings for Voice ($M = 3.84$) indicate that students wish to express their unique identity and perspective in writing, though this expression may not yet be fully developed or consistent.

Overall, these results reveal a profile of students' needs, showing their confidence in and priority for the technical and mechanical components of writing (Presentation and Conventions). In contrast, they place comparatively less emphasis on components that require higher-order thinking and complex reasoning (Organization and Ideas).

Needs for Argumentative Reasoning Skills

Six items were administered to assess students' needs regarding the application of argumentative reasoning in opinion writing. 97 students completed the six items with a total of 580 responses. The responses consisted of 14 Strongly Disagree, 34 Disagree, 134 Less Agree, 251 Agree, and 147 Strongly Agree. The total score obtained from these responses was 2223. The highest possible score for Strongly Agree was 5 multiplied by 580, for a total of 2900. The lowest possible score for Strongly Disagree was 1 multiplied by 580, which equals 580. The index formula yielded a score of 76.66%, placing it in the Agree category. These findings demonstrate that the argumentative reasoning framework by Sampson and Clark is perceived as necessary by students in opinion writing.

Analysis of the six items measuring students’ needs in argumentative reasoning revealed high levels of agreement. The combined mean score for the three components of argumentation was 3.78 (SD = 0.96), indicating strong awareness of the importance of argumentative structures in opinion writing. As shown in Table 3, the component with the highest mean score was Evidence (M = 4.00, SD = 0.98), followed by Reasoning (M = 3.68, SD = 0.97) and Claim (M = 3.66, SD = 0.93). The students’ needs for argumentative reasoning components are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Students’ Needs for Argumentative Reasoning Components

Components	Mean	SD	Category
Evidence	4.00	0.98	Very High
Reasoning	3.68	0.97	High
Claim	3.66	0.93	High
Overall	3.78	0.96	High

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

The high Evidence score reflects students’ strong understanding of the importance of supporting arguments with data, facts, and credible sources. This aligns with their academic experience, where the use of references is a standard expectation in scholarly writing. However, the lower scores for Claim and Reasoning highlight areas requiring additional support. Difficulties formulating clear, assertive claims suggest that students still struggle to articulate their argumentative positions explicitly. Meanwhile, the Reasoning component, which also falls within the high category, indicates the need for students to improve their ability to build logical relationships between evidence and claims and to evaluate the strength of their own arguments.

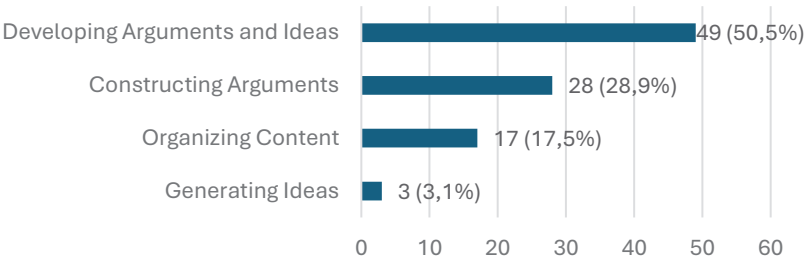
Overall, these findings indicate a gap between students’ ability to gather evidence and their ability to formulate clear argumentative statements and construct coherent chains of reasoning. This discrepancy highlights the need

for instructional approaches that not only emphasize evidence gathering but also strengthen students' skills in claim formulation and logical reasoning.

The Most Difficult Aspects of Writing an Opinion

Students' responses regarding the most difficult aspects of writing an opinion were classified into four categories, namely (1) developing arguments and ideas, (2) constructing arguments, (3) organizing content, and (4) generating ideas. In these four categories, each respondent provided only one primary answer, and the total prevalence is 100 percent. This is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Most Difficult Aspects of Writing an Opinion



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Figure 1 shows that the most difficult aspect of writing an opinion is developing arguments and ideas, with a prevalence and distribution of 50.5 percent. The second most difficult aspect is constructing arguments, with a prevalence and distribution of 28.9 percent. Meanwhile, the lowest category is generating ideas, with a prevalence and distribution of 3.1 percent. Based on these responses, it can be concluded that most students reported difficulties in developing arguments and ideas.

Writing an opinion requires the writer to develop arguments and ideas so that the resulting text exerts a strong Influence on readers. One response from R (55) indicated that difficulty in developing arguments occurs because it requires logical reasoning and involves critical thinking skills, as shown in excerpt 1.

- 1) “In my opinion, the most difficult part of writing an opinion is constructing an argument. The reason is that constructing an argument does not only require personal views, but must also be supported by logical reasoning, strong evidence, and concrete examples to convince readers. Sometimes, ideas are already present, and the content is well organized, but it is difficult to formulate reasons that are truly relevant and accountable. In addition, when constructing an argument, we also need to consider different reader perspectives so that the writing does not appear one-sided. Therefore, this stage requires critical thinking skills and the ability to choose appropriate words so that the opinion is conveyed clearly and persuasively”. (R-55)

The difficulty experienced by R-55 is similar to other responses. The key terms related to challenges in developing arguments and ideas found in students’ answers include “evidence”, “logical”, and “critical thinking”. This can be seen in several responses presented in excerpts 2, 3, and 4.

- 2) “In my opinion, the most difficult part is constructing an argument. This is because it requires critical thinking skills to connect opinions with relevant evidence, and to write with a logical flow so that readers can easily understand the intention”. (R-47)
- 3) “The most difficult part for me is constructing an argument. This is because I need to ensure every opinion is supported by logical reasoning and evidence, and arranged in a convincing flow so that readers can understand my perspective”. (R-12)
- 4) “In my opinion, the most difficult part of writing an opinion is constructing an argument. This is because constructing an argument requires critical and logical thinking so that the opinion expressed is not only...” (R-18)

Based on the four categories of difficulties students experience in writing opinions, each can be further summarized into five main points. The explanation

of these categories and key points related to difficulties in writing opinions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary Points of Opinion Writing Difficulties by Category

No.	Category of Difficulties	Main Summary Points
1.	Developing Arguments and Ideas	a) Difficulty in constructing a logical and systematic framework of thought b) Challenges in connecting personal ideas with relevant supporting data or facts c) Concerns about the ability to persuade readers with strong reasoning d) Need for concrete evidence and examples to support the opinion e) Difficulty in developing initial ideas into complete and structured arguments
2.	Constructing Arguments	a) Difficulty in articulating ideas into effective and persuasive sentences b) Challenges in selecting precise words to convey opinions c) Concerns about the alignment of arguments with proper writing conventions d) Need for critical thinking skills when constructing reasons e) Difficulty in balancing personal opinions with objective facts
3.	Organizing Content	a) Difficulty in constructing a coherent and easily understandable writing structure b) Challenges in organizing the flow from introduction to body to conclusion c) Concerns about coherence between paragraphs and sentences d) Need for a clear writing framework without losing the main idea e) Difficulty in maintaining focus to keep writing on the main topic
4.	Generating Ideas	a) Difficulty in identifying topics that are interesting, relevant, and current b) Challenges in selecting an original and meaningful point of view c) Concerns about the feasibility of developing an idea into a full opinion piece d) Need for broad insight and adequate references e) Difficulty in determining an appropriate issue that aligns with personal interests and knowledge

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Based on Table 4, it can be concluded that, in developing arguments and ideas, the primary obstacle lies in constructing a logical, systematic framework and bridging the gap between subjective ideas and relevant empirical support. In the dimension of argument construction, students face challenges in transforming abstract thoughts into effective sentences that adhere to linguistic conventions while maintaining a balance between personal perspectives and factual objectivity. The aspect of content organization reveals difficulties in building structural coherence, including establishing a systematic flow from introduction to conclusion and sustaining focus without topic deviation. Meanwhile, in the stage of idea selection, the main issues revolve around identifying current topics that are original and sufficiently promising to be developed into substantive opinion discourse, which requires comprehensive insight and adequate references.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the university students in this study have not yet fully developed proficiency in opinion writing. The primary challenge identified lies in writing conventions, while, in terms of argumentative reasoning, students experience significant difficulty presenting evidence. These challenges prompted the proposal of an opinion-writing model that integrates the 6+1 Traits of Writing with an argumentative reasoning framework (Clark & Sampson, 2008, 2007; Sampson et al., 2011). This proposed writing model, termed SAFE—an acronym for Surveying, Arguing, Framing-Writing, and Editing—is also grounded in a process-oriented approach to writing (Coffin et al., 2003, p. 34). Such an approach is essential to ensure that writers clearly understand the stages involved in constructing opinion texts. A schematic representation of the SAFE model is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. A Diagram of the SAFE Model for Opinion Writing

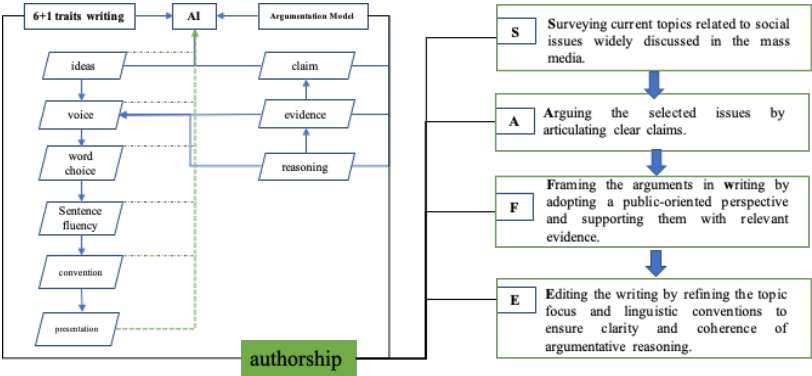


Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The SAFE model is designed to be particularly effective and easily applicable for novice writers through the strategic use of AI. The authorship of opinion texts remains with the writer, as the articles are based on the writer's own ideas. In principle, AI operates solely based on user-generated instructions; therefore, the quality of the resulting opinion text depends on the clarity and substance of the prompts and inputs provided by the writer. The tension between human authorship and AI assistance can be addressed through the SAFE model. SAFE functions as a syntactic framework in which AI is positioned as a mediating tool between the 6 + 1 Traits of Writing and the argumentative reasoning framework. Argumentative reasoning informs and shapes the application of the 6 + 1 Traits

of Writing. At the same time, AI is used solely as scaffolding to support writers in exploring ideas, selecting words, and ensuring grammatical accuracy. Control over the writing process remains entirely in human hands. A detailed explanation of the SAFE model’s hypothetical design is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Inputs and Processes of the SAFE Model for Opinion Writing



Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Based on Figure 3, the SAFE model’s inputs are fundamentally divided into two components: the 6+1 Traits of Writing model and the argumentative reasoning model. The SAFE model originates from an academic claim grounded in current and relevant events. This claim is closely connected to the idea’s component of the 6+1 Traits of Writing. At this stage, AI can be used to support idea exploration, enabling writers to develop an initial conceptual framework for composing opinion texts. Furthermore, evidence and reasoning are associated with voice, which constitutes a defining characteristic of argumentative writing. Voice cannot be replaced by any level of sophistication in text-generating AI. It remains inherently human, as each writer possesses a distinctive way of articulating arguments, while AI functions solely as scaffolding in this process. The remaining traits, including word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation, can be refined through the use of AI tools. For instance, applications such as Grammarly can be employed to check grammatical accuracy and suggest

more appropriate lexical choices. Grammarly also offers thesaurus features that enable greater lexical variation. Nevertheless, AI exhibits limitations in selecting vocabulary that is fully relevant to specific disciplinary domains and argumentative contexts. Therefore, human intervention remains essential to ensure that word choice aligns appropriately with the subject matter and the intended argumentative stance.

The SAFE model explicitly positions artificial intelligence as a supportive tool in the process of opinion writing rather than as a substitute for the writer's critical and argumentative thinking. This conceptual stance underscores that the primary strength of opinion writing continues to rest on human capacity to construct claims, select relevant evidence, and formulate reasoning grounded in personal experience, knowledge, and perspective (Akinwande et al., 2024; Bouziane & Bouziane, 2024). Furthermore, voice is an essential dimension of argumentative writing that cannot be replicated by AI, as it is inherently subjective, contextual, and ideological (Lehman, 2026; Lehman & Sułkowski, 2021). This perspective is reinforced by previous research demonstrating that digital technologies do not replace the human role in meaning-making and the formation of argumentative stance, as both processes are closely tied to the writer's critical awareness and ideological positioning (Alt & Kapshuk, 2022; Deep & Chen, 2025).

One of the primary difficulties identified among students in this study concerns the conventions aspect of writing, which can be effectively addressed through the use of AI. The capability of AI to detect and correct spelling errors is well established. However, users must possess sufficient prior schematic knowledge of orthographic rules to make informed decisions when applying AI-generated corrections. In the Indonesian context, orthography is regulated by the Decree of the Head of the Agency for Language Development and Fostering of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, Number 0424/1/Bs.00.01/2022, concerning the Indonesian Spelling System. This regulation is commonly referred to as *Ejaan yang Disempurnakan (EYD)*. It provides comprehensive guidelines on letter use, word formation,

punctuation, and the spelling of loanwords¹. The use of artificial intelligence is particularly relevant for addressing the conventions component, as this aspect of writing is mechanical, rule-based, and relatively stable normatively. The existence of standardized spelling and orthographic rules enables AI systems to perform technical corrections consistently, although the interpretation of communicative context and purpose remains beyond the scope of such technology. Therefore, writers' mastery of orthographic conventions remains a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring that AI-generated corrections can be accurately understood and appropriately applied (Yang, 2025). AI thus functions solely as a technical support tool in writing instruction rather than as a substitute for writers' linguistic competence, a position reinforced by digital literacy studies that conceptualize technology as scaffolding in the development of writing skills (Arseven & Bal, 2025; Wang & Wang, 2025).

The SAFE model functions as a syntactic framework for writing. Each stage of this model incorporates the core elements of argumentative reasoning, namely claim, evidence, and reasoning (Sampson et al., 2011). Inputs derived from the 6+1 Traits of Writing and the argumentative reasoning model, which AI scaffolds, are processed through the SAFE model. The surveying stage requires writers to explore current issues that reflect public concerns. Such issues can be identified through mass media sources, particularly online news outlets. The use of AI helps writers map contemporary issues by examining trending or popular topics on mass media platforms. The arguing stage involves selecting a focal issue and formulating a claim in response. This claim serves as a foundation for determining a tentative title, which can later be refined. Writers tend to apply their ideas more effectively when a clear title anchors a text. Title construction based on the formulated claim can also be supported by AI, which can generate alternative title options for further consideration.

¹ The EYD is publicly accessible online at <https://ejaan.kemendikdasmen.go.id/>. However, AI systems such as ChatGPT have not yet been fully updated to reflect the latest version of the Indonesian Spelling System and may still rely on the earlier Ejaan Bahasa Indonesia (EBI) framework, which is no longer in effect.

The SAFE model positions the argumentation process as the core of opinion writing, while artificial intelligence supports the stages of idea exploration and initial formulation. The sophistication and speed of AI in processing large volumes of information enable writers to map issues and generate alternative titles more systematically, without taking over the process of determining argumentative stance (Zhao, 2025). Nevertheless, writers retain a central role in constructing claims and directing the text's overall trajectory as thinking subjects. AI functions solely as scaffolding to enhance the efficiency and organization of the writing process (Cardon et al., 2023). This approach aligns with research on argumentative writing that emphasizes integrating human reasoning and technological support in writing instruction in the digital era (Khampusaen, 2025).

Rejecting the integration of AI in writing instruction means denying the role of technological advancements in education. Such concerns are comparable to earlier resistance to adopting word-processing or reference-management software. In principle, AI is not intended to replace human writers; rather, its presence facilitates the articulation of ideas, particularly in the construction of arguments (Alexander et al., 2023; Sułkowski et al., 2025). In argumentative writing based on the SAFE model, AI is positioned as a pedagogical resource that enhances students' argumentation and writing skills. AI is employed to support the development of argumentative structures grounded in claim, evidence, and reasoning, as well as to provide formative feedback on the 6+1 Traits of Writing. The use of AI is directed as cognitive and linguistic scaffolding rather than as a text-generating agent, thereby ensuring that critical thinking, creativity, and academic responsibility remain fully under students' control.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that students' difficulties in writing opinion texts are not limited to mechanical aspects of writing or conventions, but also involve weaknesses in argumentative reasoning, particularly in presenting relevant and logical evidence. These findings highlight the importance of helping students

combine basic writing skills with a clear structure for presenting arguments, so they can write opinion texts that are logical and academically sound. Within the context of writing instruction in the digital era, the use of artificial intelligence has the potential to support students; however, its application must be carefully regulated to prevent the displacement of the human writer's role and the emergence of overreliance on technology.

Within process-oriented and argumentation-based writing pedagogy, the SAFE model offers a human-AI hybrid framework that positions AI as cognitive support rather than a text generator. Grounded in the 6+1 Traits of Writing and argumentative reasoning, the model reinforces writers' agency and textual ownership, thereby refining conceptual understandings of authorship in literacy and language education amid the growing use of generative AI. The findings also demonstrate that the SAFE model provides lecturers with an ethical, structured guide for integrating AI into opinion writing instruction, while fostering students' awareness of authorship, argumentative competence, and responsible AI use. In addition, the model is relevant to digital literacy curriculum development and the design of instructional materials that balance technological integration with the development of critical thinking.

Several limitations should be noted, as the research involved respondents from a single study program comprising 97 students. In addition, the study did not conduct an in-depth analysis of the quality of the students' opinion texts. Future research should assess the SAFE model through direct implementation in AI-supported opinion writing and analysis of students' written products across the SAFE stages.

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