Thinking Organizers: Tools for Candidates to Organize and Record Their Thinking During Both Formative and Summative edTPA Experiences

Purpose: As teacher candidates undergo the edTPA assessment process, they can experience difficulty keeping track of the reasoning and thinking behind all of the decisions that they made during the process. These thinking organizers provide an avenue through which candidates can record their thoughts, reasoning, and evidence of practice throughout the edTPA process and then have easy access to that information when they are ready to write their commentaries.

These thinking organizers were created by Elisa Palmer (edTPA coordinator, Illinois State University) to assist candidates with the organization of their thoughts prior to writing their official responses to the edTPA commentary prompts. These supports provide a table for each commentary question that the candidate fills in with his or her thoughts. The teacher candidate can then use that table to write his or her official response to that question.

Use of the thinking organizers is not limited to work on the summative edTPA portfolio. Instructors can use the tables in formative experiences leading up to the summative edTPA portfolio creation. For example, a course may have an assignment or clinical experience that requires reflections upon professional practice. The course instructor can utilize some of the thinking organizers and adapt them to the particular questions asked in that assignment or clinical reflection.

Overall, the thinking organizers are helpful in aiding teacher candidates in their documentation of their thinking and reasoning throughout the completion of their edTPA portfolio as well as providing a tool for creating and organizing responses in formative course work.

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Thinking organizers are available for the following edTPA handbooks:

- Agriculture
- Business Education
- Early Childhood
- Elementary Education
- Elementary Literacy
- Elementary Mathematics
- English as an Additional Language
- Family and Consumer Sciences
- Health Education
- K-12 Physical Education
- K-12 Performing Arts
- Middle Childhood English Language Arts
- Middle Childhood Mathematics
- Middle Childhood Science
- Middle Childhood Social Studies
- Secondary English-Language Arts
- Secondary History/Social Studies
- Secondary Mathematics
- Secondary Science
- Special Education
- Technology and Engineering Education
- Visual Arts
- World Languages

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Planning Commentary Thinking Organizers and Helpful Hints (Middle Childhood Science)

Please note: The purpose of this thinking organizer is to help you gather and organize your thoughts in preparation for writing your planning commentary. You will still need to write your answers in paragraph form in the official edTPA planning commentary template.

1. Central Focus

a. Describe the central focus and purpose for the content you will teach in the learning segment.

Sentence starters:

The central focus of this learning segment is …

I am teaching this content because…

b. Given the central focus, describe how the standards and learning objectives within your learning segment address the use of science concepts and the ability to apply scientific practices through inquiry to develop evidence-based explanations of or reasonable predictions about a real-world phenomenon.

Organize your response:

List the standard or learning objective	Identify if it is connected to a science concept, a science practice, developing an evidence-based explanation or making a reasonable prediction about a real-world phenomenon.	Explain how these are connected.

c. Explain how your plans build on each other to help young adolescents understand relationships between scientific concepts, scientific practices, and the phenomenon in the learning segment.

Clarification: Explain how you will take students from the introduction of the concept to developing an evidence-based explanation or argument about the phenomenon.

Organize your response:

Identify the science concept, practice or phenomenon being addressed	Explain how it is addressed in Lesson 1	Explain how Lesson 2 builds on Lesson 1	Explain how Lesson 3 builds on Lesson 2

d. Explain how you will help young adolescents make interdisciplinary or integrative connections between the central focus of the learning segment and other subject areas.

Central Focus	What other subject area do you want your students to connect the central focus to?	How will you help young adolescents make this connection?

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2. Knowledge of Students to Inform Teaching

For each of the prompts below (2a–c), describe what you know about your students with respect to the central focus of the learning segment.

Consider the variety of young adolescent learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

a. Prior academic learning, prerequisite skills, and understanding of the nature of science related to the central focus— Cite evidence of what young adolescents know, what they can do, and what are they are still learning to do.

Organize your response:

Students	Related content already learned	Related skills students already have	What the students are learning to do related to the learning segment
Class as a whole			
Students with IEPs			
Students with 504 plans			
Other groups of learners			

b. Personal/cultural/community assets related to the central focus—What do you know about your students' everyday experiences, cultural backgrounds and practices, and interests?

Organize your response:

Students	Students' everyday experiences related to the learning segment	Students cultural backgrounds related to the learning segment	Students' practices related to the learning segment	Students' interests related to the learning segment
Class as a whole				
Students with IEPs				
Students with 504 plans				
Other groups of learners				

Notes: Stay positive – discuss your students' assets
Keep the learning segment in mind – only discuss student assets related to the learning segment

c. Young adolescent developmental assets related to the central focus—What do you know about your students' cognitive, physical, and social and emotional development?

Students	Students' cognitive development related to the central focus	Students' physical development related to the central focus	Students' social/emotional development related to the central focus
Class as a whole			
Students with IEPs			
Students with 504 plans			
Other groups of learners			

3. Supporting Students' Science Learning

a. Justify how your understanding of your students' prior academic learning (from prompt 2a above) guided your choice or adaptation of learning tasks and materials. Be explicit about the connections between the learning tasks and students' prior academic learning and research/theory.

Organize your answer:

Chosen learning task or material (or adaptation of either)	Associated prior student learning	Why did you make this choice?	What research supports this choice?	How does the research support this choice?

b. Justify how your understanding of your students' personal, cultural, community, and developmental assets (from prompts 2b–c above) guided your choice or adaptation of learning tasks and materials. Be explicit about the connections between the learning tasks and students' assets AND research and/or theory.

Organize your answer:

Chosen learning task or material	Associated student asset	Why did you make this choice?	What research supports this choice?	How does the research support this choice?

c. Describe and justify why your instructional strategies and planned supports are appropriate for the whole class, individuals, and groups of young adolescents with specific learning needs.

Consider young adolescents with IEPs, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students needing greater support or challenge.

Organize your answer:

Instructional strategy or planned support	How is this tied to the learning objective?	Explain why is this appropriate for the whole class, a particular group of students or specific individual students.

d. Describe common preconceptions (based on prior academic learning and experiences) within your central focus and how you will identify and address them.

Organize your answer:

Possible student preconception	How will you identify if students have this preconception?	How will you address it during instruction?

4. Supporting Science Development Through Language

a. Language Function. Identify one language function from the list below, essential for young adolescents to learn within your central focus.

Analyze	**Explain**	**Interpret**	**Justify with evidence**

Sentence starter: "The language function essential for student learning within my central focus is _____."

b. Identify a key learning task from your plans that provides young adolescents with opportunities to practice using the language function. Identify the lesson in which the learning task occurs. (Give lesson day/number.)

Sentence starter: "The key learning task that gives students the opportunity to practice using the language function is _____. This task occurs on day _____ in Lesson _____."

c. Additional Language Demands. Given the language function and learning task identified above, describe the following associated language demands (written or oral) young adolescents need to understand and/or use:

- Vocabulary and/or symbols

- Plus at least one of the following:

- Syntax

- Discourse

Consider the range of young adolescents' understandings of the language function and other language demands—What do students already know, what are they struggling with, and/or what is new to them?

Organizing your response:

Language demand	What do students already know?	What are they struggling with?	What is new to them?
Vocabulary			
Symbols			
Syntax			
Discourse			

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d. Language Supports. Refer to your lesson plans and instructional materials as needed in your response to the prompts.

Identify and describe the planned instructional supports (during and/or prior to the learning task) to help students understand, develop, and use the identified language demands (function, vocabulary and/or symbols, syntax, or discourse).

Organizing your response:

Language demand	Language support planned	How does this language support help students develop or use this language demand?
Language function		
Vocabulary and/or symbols		
Syntax and/or discourse		

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5. Monitoring Student Learning

In response to the prompts below, refer to the assessments you will submit as part of the materials for Task 1.

a. Describe how your planned formal and informal assessments will provide direct evidence of young adolescents' understanding of science concepts, the real-world phenomenon, and the application of scientific practices through inquiry throughout the learning segment.

Organize your response:

Area of Targeted Student Learning	Description of assessments designed to monitor the targeted student learning.	Explain how this assessment will provide evidence of student mastery of this area of targeted student learning?
Understanding of science concepts		
Understanding of real-world phenomenon		
Application of scientific practices through inquiry		

b. Explain how the design or adaptation of your planned assessments allows young adolescents with specific needs to demonstrate their learning.

Consider all students, including young adolescents with IEPs, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students.

Organize your response:

Description of assessment or assessment adaptations	The students(s) for whom the assessment was designed or adapted	How does this assessment allow this student(s) to demonstrate his/her learning?

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Instruction Commentary Thinking Organizers and Helpful Hints (Middle Childhood Science)

Please note: The purpose of this thinking organizer is to help you gather and organize your thoughts in preparation for writing your instruction commentary. You will still need to write your answers in paragraph form in the official edTPA instruction commentary template.

1. Which lesson or lessons are shown in the video clips? Identify the lesson(s) by lesson plan number.

Sentence starters:

"The lesson shown in the clips is Lesson #_____"
OR
"The lesson shown in Clip 1 is Lesson _____ and the lesson shown in Clip 2 is Lesson _____."

2. Promoting a Positive Learning Environment

a. How did you demonstrate mutual respect for, rapport with, and responsiveness to young adolescents with varied needs (academic and developmental) and backgrounds, and challenge young adolescents to engage in learning?

Organize your answer:

Characteristic of Positive Learning Environment	Video segment(s) with time stamps that demonstrates this characteristic	How does this clip demonstrate this characteristic?
Mutual respect for students		
Rapport with students		
Responsiveness to students' needs		
Challenging students to engage in learning		

b. If relevant, describe what you did to ensure safety during the inquiry seen in the video clips.

Organize your answer:

Description of Safety Component	Video segment(s) with time stamps that shows this safety component	How does this clip demonstrate your attention to safety?

OR

"Safety precautions were not needed in the video clip lesson(s) because…"

3. Engaging Students in Learning

a. What was the process by which young adolescents selected or collected evidence and/or data to support evidence-based explanations of or predictions about the real-world phenomenon being investigated?

The students collected evidence by…

OR

The students collected data by…

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b. Explain how you engaged young adolescents during a scientific inquiry in

- using evidence and/or data and science concepts to construct **explanations of** or **predictions about a real-world phenomenon** and

- critiquing explanations **OR** predictions of peers.

Organize your answer:

Student action	Video clip with time stamps that shows this action	How is this action seen in the video?
Students are using evidence, data or science concepts to construct an explanation or prediction about a real-world phenomenon		
Students explain how the data or science concepts support their claims.		
Students critiquing the explanations or predictions of peers.		

c. Describe how your instruction linked young adolescents' prior academic learning and personal, cultural, community, or developmental assets with new learning.

Instructional connections between student characteristics and new learning	Video clip with time stamps that shows this connection	How is this connection seen in the video?
Students' prior learning		
Students' personal assets		
Students' cultural assets		
Students' community assets		
Students' developmental assets		

4. Deepening Student Learning during Instruction

a. Explain how you elicited and built on student responses to promote thinking and develop understandings of science concepts, scientific practices and inquiry, and/or the phenomenon being investigated.

Evidence of eliciting responses from students related to…	Video clip (including time stamps)	Describe how you elicited responses and deepened student thinking in this clip
Understanding science concepts		
Science practices and inquiry		

The phenomenon being investigated		

b. Explain how your instruction supported young adolescents in using science concepts, quality of evidence and/or data (e.g., accurate measurement or recording of data, inconsistent results), and scientific practices while they are analyzing evidence and/or data during a scientific inquiry.

Science Pedagogy	Video clip (including time stamps)	Describe how this clip provides evidence of this science pedagogy
Students are presenting or recording evidence and/or data		
Students are using tables, maps, diagrams, or other graphical displays		
Candidate is facilitating a data analysis discussion		
Students demonstrate the ability to find patterns to indicate relationships		

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5. Analyzing Teaching

a. What changes would you make to your instruction—for the whole class and/or for students who need greater support or challenge—to better support young adolescent learning of the central focus (e.g., missed opportunities)?

Consider the variety of young adolescent learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (such as students with IEPs, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

Organize your response:

Learning need seen in video	Video segment (Including video # and time stamps)	Related proposed change in teaching practice

b. Why do you think these changes would improve young adolescent learning? Support your explanation with evidence of young adolescent learning and principles from theory and/or research, including young adolescent development.

Organize your response:

Proposed change in teaching practice	How would this change assist students with achieving the learning objective?	What research is this change based on?	How does this research support your proposed change?

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Assessment Commentary Thinking Organizers and Helpful Hints (Middle Childhood Science)

Please note: The purpose of this thinking organizer is to help you gather and organize your thoughts in preparation for writing your assessment commentary. You will still need to write your answers in paragraph form in the official edTPA assessment commentary template. The exception to this is your response to 1b.

1. **Analyzing Student Learning**

a. **Identify the specific learning objectives measured by the assessment you chose for analysis.**

Organize your answer:

Learning Objective	Explain how this is measured in the assessment

b. **Provide a graphic (table or chart) or narrative that summarizes student learning for your whole class. Be sure to summarize student learning for all evaluation criteria submitted in Assessment Task 3, Part D.**

Create a table that shows the student learning/performance by question or activity aligned to objective or standard.

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c. Use evidence found in the 3 student work samples and the whole class summary to analyze the patterns of learning for the whole class and differences for groups or individual learners relative to

- **conceptual understanding**
- **use of scientific practices during inquiry AND**
- **evidence-based argument about a scientific phenomenon**

Consider what young adolescents understand and do well, and where they continue to struggle (e.g., common errors, confusions, need for greater challenge).

Organize your answer:

Pattern of student learning observed (What are they doing well or what are they struggling with?)	Is the pattern relative to conceptual understanding, use of scientific practices, or creating evidence-based arguments?	Students showing this pattern	Evidence from whole class summary	Evidence from student work samples

2. Feedback to Guide Further Learning

b. Explain how feedback provided to the 3 focus students addresses their individual strengths and needs relative to the learning objectives measured.

Hints: Be sure to provide feedback to students on both their strengths and their errors.
Be sure to provide equal feedback to all student work samples.

Focus student	Description of feedback provided (identify question, page, etc.)	Associated learning objective	How does the feedback address the students' strengths?	How does the feedback address the students' needs?
1				
2				
3				

c. Describe how you will support each focus student to understand and use this feedback to further their learning related to learning objectives, either within the learning segment or at a later time.

Focus student	How student will understand and use the feedback for further learning to their current work?	How you will support the student in understanding and using the feedback?
1		
2		
3		

3. Evidence of Language Understanding and Use

Explain and provide concrete examples for the extent to which your students were able to use or struggled to use the

- **selected language function,**

- **vocabulary and/or symbols, AND**

- **syntax or discourseto develop content understandings.**

Organize your response:

Language demand	Evidence of use or struggle (be specific)	How does this evidence show the students using or struggling to use the language demand to develop their content understanding?
Selected language function (write it in)		
Vocabulary		
Symbols		
Syntax		
Discourse		

4. Using Assessment to Inform Instruction

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a. Based on your analysis of young adolescent learning presented in prompts 1c–d, describe next steps for instruction

- **for the whole class**
- **for the 3 focus students and other individuals/groups with specific needs**

Consider the variety of young adolescent learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students needing greater support or challenge).

Students	Learning Need Seen On Video	Next steps for instruction
Whole class		
Focus student 1		
Focus student 2		
Focus student 3		
Individuals with specific needs		
Groups with specific needs		

b. Explain how these next steps follow from your analysis of young adolescent learning. Support your explanation with principles from research and/or theory as well as young adolescent development.

Next step for instruction	What learning need is this in response to?	Why did you choose this as your next step for instruction?	What research supports this instructional choice?	How does this research support this instructional choice?