Sixth Edition

Creating Writers

6 Traits, Process, Workshop, and Literature

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PEARSON
Six-trait writing is not a program, curriculum, or formula. It’s a vision. A way of thinking and talking about writing that helps teachers, and most important, helps students answer the question all writers must ask: What makes writing work? What makes such a tiny question so powerful? Just this: In answering it, students learn to revise with purpose and take charge of their own writing process.

How important is that? Try vital. Writers are thinkers. They’re not just poets and story tellers. They are analysts. Writers work their way through mountains of information and make sense of it. Writers educate us—and educate themselves in the bargain. The act of writing, thinking on paper, takes our students inside math, history, science, and technology. Moreover, writing, like reading, holds one critical key to lifelong success. In Because Writing Matters, Carl Nagin and the National Writing Project (2006, 105) underscore how essential writing skills are for our students, both in the classroom and beyond:

Writing helps students become better readers and thinkers. It can help students reflect critically about the information and ideas they must understand and make use of both in academia and in the world outside its doors. It can improve achievement in schools and in the professions students aspire to. It supports their growth as adult independent thinkers. Writing is a gateway to students’ emerging role in our nation’s future as participants and decision makers in a democratic society.

Enter the Traits . . .

Where do the six traits fit into this picture? In a word . . . everywhere. For one thing, they make the teaching of writing easier by breaking it into manageable components—ideas, organization, voice, and the rest.

Second, the traits offer us a language for talking about writing in meaningful, productive ways. “That was great!” is a positive comment—but it’s virtually useless to a writer. Writers need to know precisely what is working and why. A helpful comment sounds more like this: “Your lead—‘I knew I shouldn’t have gone in’—pulled me right in. It created tension.” Conferences turn into meaningful writer-to-writer conversations when students feel comfortable with words like lead, pacing, message, conclusion, detail, voice, strong verbs, sentence variety, dialogue, and so on.

The biggest difference, however, lies in the impact traits have upon writing process. We have known for a long time that writing is a process—or a combination of processes. It takes planning, drafting, and revising. But somehow this insight has not dramatically simplified the teaching of writing. Why not? Much of the answer rests within one word: revision. Teachers are relatively comfortable teaching planning or prewriting. And drafting is fairly painless from the teacher’s perspective because most—not all, but most—of the work falls to the writer. But what do writers do when they revise? How do we teach this? How do we model it for our students? This has been the challenge. This is where, for many writers (and teachers), process comes unraveled. And this is precisely where the traits shine—because a good rubric is so much more than a list of criteria.

Look carefully at Figure 1.1. What do you see? Perhaps you see a tall, elegant vase. But if you look at the picture another way, you’ll see two people looking at each other. A good writing rubric should be just like that: Look at it one way, and it’s a guide to assessment, but look at it in another way, and it’s a guide to revision. As you read through the criteria, you should find yourself saying, “These are the very things writers do when they revise.” They add detail. They cut clutter. They unleash the voice. They write leads that hook readers, conclusions that leave you thinking . . . This means that when you teach
the traits, you literally unlock the door to revision for your writers. You teach them to think by asking them to continually analyze writing—their own and that of others. This puts students in charge of their own writing process, so that you do not need to choreograph every tiny revision line by line. What a relief for you. What a gift to them. (Figure 1.2 offers six reasons for teaching the traits as part of your writing curriculum.)

And finally, keep in mind that this book isn’t just about success in grade school or high school or college, or even improving scores on state tests. It is about students becoming strong and confident writers for life—in any context, for any purpose.

The College Board’s National Commission on Writing issued a report in 2003 (The Neglected “R”: The Need for a Writing Revolution) that cites several critical writing skills students need to work successfully in a twenty-first-century environment. Among them are “first-rate organization” (16), ability to generate “convincing and elaborate” text, the use of “rich, evocative and compelling language” (17), knowledge of “mechanics of grammar and punctuation” and a “voice and . . . feel for the audience” (20). Do these traits sound familiar? We should not be surprised. The six traits are, after all, the very foundation of good writing—not some superficial extension, but the essence of writing itself.

This same report points out that many Americans “would not be able to hold their positions if they were not excellent writers” (10). But this is only the beginning. “At its best,” the report continues, “writing has helped transform the world. Revolutions have been started by it. Oppression has been toppled by it. And it has enlightened the human condition. American life has been richer because people like Rachel Carson, Cesar Chavez, Thomas Jefferson, and Martin Luther King, Jr., have given voice to the aspirations of the nation and its people. And it has become fuller because writers like James Baldwin, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Edith Wharton have explored the range of human misery and joy” (10).

Our student writers will soon add their voices to the mix. What sorts of things will they write about? With each year, we view our solar system and indeed our whole universe differently. New moons and planets appear, while others, like Pluto, retire. Through DNA research, we track the genetic history of the human adventure, discovering ancestors, cultures, and landscapes we never imagined. Facebook changes the very definition of “friend,” while blogs and tweets topple regimes and reshape our world. We uncover life forms we didn’t know existed, conduct heroic rescues, predict natural disasters and cope with the aftermath, create customized “super” foods to sustain life, design cars that anticipate accidents, and develop virtual relationships with computers that read us.

What will help us to understand, recall, or connect these events to our own lives? Writing. In their capacity as writers, our students will document the human story through film and television scripts, dramas, speeches, textbooks, greeting cards, cartoons, journals, poems, advertisements, picture books, novels, editorials, song lyrics, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and more. We will all, through most of our working lives, be

| Figure 1.2 |

6 Reasons for Teaching the 6 Traits

1. **Building students’ understanding** of concepts like “voice”
2. **Providing language** for thinking and talking about writing
3. **Giving students options** for revising
4. **Teaching students to think**—by making them evaluators
5. **Connecting reading and writing** through mentor texts
6. **Putting students in charge** of their own writing process

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You write in order to change the world . . .

—James Baldwin

In Mary Pipher, Writing to Change the World, 2006, introduction

In the past 30 years, researchers and theorists have come to know that teaching writing entails teaching thinking.

—George Hillocks Jr.

The Tasting Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning, 2002, 6
writing to inform, record, define, and explain; to condense, summarize, and interpret; to teach, persuade, amuse, or inspire. And because, as Mem Fox (1993, 38) tells us, "No one writes for no one to read," knowing how to touch a reader's soul can only help us to do it better.

Who Invented the 6 Traits?

No one. Though the number of persons who take credit for having "invented" or "developed" the six traits seems to grow geometrically each year, the truth is that the traits themselves are not anyone's invention. Like stars or planets awaiting discovery, the traits have been around as long as writing itself and are an inherent part of what makes writing work. It is impossible to write without ideas, words, sentences, or conventions of some kind, without organizing information or giving voice to the message. What is new (within the past three decades) is a written description of what the traits look like at different levels of performance. In other words, a rubric, or writing guide—a term I prefer.

The original six-trait guide for assessing and teaching writing came not from a publisher, governmental agency, or national laboratory, but from teachers. It was developed in 1984 by the Analytical Writing Assessment Committee, a group of seventeen teachers from the Beaverton, Oregon school district with whom I was privileged to work. These teachers wanted a better way of assessing and teaching writing. They wanted to be able to talk to their writers in conferences, to encourage them about what was going well and help them figure out problems they couldn't solve on their own. They invited me to help.

We understood from the beginning that to meet the district's goals we had to identify the qualities that make writing work. So we read and read—and read some more. In all, we read more than 15,000 student papers, grades 3 through 12, and took endless notes, identifying those things that separated the truly successful papers from those that were "just making a beginning" or "about halfway home." And when we compared notes, we found that we were all, every single one of us, influenced by the same six qualities that became known as the six traits. The notes we made were combined and revised multiple times, and gradually they evolved into a six-trait rubric or writing guide. See Figure 1.3 for an in-process draft of the original with my handwritten notes. (For more information on the history of the six-trait model—including the pioneering work of Paul Diederich—please see Appendix 1.)
Figure 1.3

In-Process Draft of the Original Six-Trait Rubric


IDEAS AND CONTENT (Development)

6: This paper is clear, focused, and interesting. It holds the reader's attention.
   Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme or storyline. Ideas are fresh and original.
   
   - The writer seems to be writing from experiences and shows insight into how events unfold, how people respond to life, and to each other.
   
   - Supporting relevant, telling details give the reader important information that he or she could not personally bring to the text.
   
   - The writing balance. Main ideas stand out.
   
   - The writer seems in control and develops the topic in an enlightening, entertaining way that makes a point or tells a story.

5: The paper is clear and focused. The topic shows promise, even though development is
   still limited, sketchy or general.
   
   - The writer is beginning to define the topic, but it is not there yet. It is pretty easy to
     see where the writer is headed, though more information is needed to "fill in the blanks."
   
   - The writer does seem to be writing from experiences, but has some trouble going
     from general observations to specifics.
   
   - Ideas are reasonably clean and purposeful, even though they may not be explicit,
     detailed, personalized, or expanded to show in-depth understanding or a strong
     sense of purpose.
   
   - Support is attempted, but doesn't go far enough yet independent clarifying details
     and adding new insights.

4: As yet, the paper has no clear sense of purpose or central theme. To extract meaning
   from the text, the reader must make inferences based on sketchy details. More than ever, the
   following problems are likely to be evident.
   
   - Information is very limited or unclear.
   - The text is very repetitious, or reads like a collection of random thoughts from which
     no central theme emerges.
   
   - Everything seems as important as everything else; the reader has a hard time sorting
     out what's critical.
   
   - The writer has not yet begun to define the topic in a meaningful or personal way.
   
   - The writer is still in search of a real topic or sense of direction to guide development.

A Quick Overview

Following are definitions of each trait, together with examples that show the traits in
action.

IDEAS . . .

The heart of it all, the writer’s main message together with all the details that support or expand that message.

A Quick Overview
Example

Detail is the sine qua non of all good description—as in this passage where Roald Dahl (*Boy*, 2009, 108) helps us picture Captain Hardcastle:

> On the football field he wore white running shorts and white gymshoes and short white socks. His legs were as hard and thin as a ram’s legs and the skin around his calves was almost exactly the color of mutton fat. The hair on his head was not ginger. It was a brilliant dark vermilion, like a ripe orange. . . . The parting in his hair was a white line straight down the middle of the scalp, so straight it could only have been made with a ruler. On either side of the parting you could see the comb tracks running back through the greasy orange hair like little tramlines.

**ORGANIZATION . . .**

The internal structure or design that guides a reader through a story, explanation, or discussion.

Example

Good organization involves creative and logical design, connections between ideas, and a conclusion that leaves us thinking—and often, wanting more. It all begins, however, with a strong lead, words that pull us in and won’t let go, like these words that open Gus Lee’s riveting novel *China Boy* (1991, 1):

> The sky collapsed like an old roof in an avalanche of rock and boulder, cracking me on the noggin and crushing me to the pavement. Through a fog of hot tears and sick blood I heard words that at once sounded distant and entirely too close. It was the Voice of Doom.

"China Boy," said Big Willie Mack in his deep and easy slum baseo, "I be from Fist City. Gimme yo’ lunch money, ratface."

**VOICE**

The writer’s fingerprints on the page, that special something that keeps readers reading.

Examples

Voice can chill the blood or warm the heart. It can have comic overtones—as in this passage from *The Wednesday Wars* by Gary D. Schmidt (2007, 119). Middle schooler Holling Hoodhood has marched through a blizzard to take a standardized achievement test. Expecting the room to be frigid, he is amazed (and dismayed) to discover the radiators are working overtime:

> The room was now downright tropical. And I had on thermal underwear—thermal underwear that was supposed to keep me warm in minus-ten-degree temperatures. I was starting to sweat everywhere—even my fingernails—and I think that I was probably turning the color of the rusted radiators.

Voice can also be intensely serious, as in the closing chapter from *Sugar Changed the World* by Marc Aronson and Marina Budhos (2010, 125):

> Sugar turned human beings into property, yet sugar led people to reject the idea that any person could be owned by another. Sugar murdered millions, and yet it gave the voiceless a way to speak.
WORD CHOICE . . .

Words or phrases that clarify meaning or create an image or impression in the reader's mind.

Examples

In *Brave Irene* (2011, unpaginated), author William Steig uses strong verbs to show how the wind, like a persistent thief, tries to snatch a valuable bundle from the hands of the plucky Irene:

The wind wrestled her for the package—walloped it, twisted it, shook it, snatched at it.

In informational writing, precise word choice defines a concept—like *terminal velocity*—as in this passage from “The Cats That Fly by Themselves” by David Quammen (*The Boilerplate Rhino*, 2000, 118):

*Terminal velocity is the speed at which a body falling through air stops accelerating. The force of gravity (which corresponds to body weight) reaches equilibrium with the force of air resistance (which corresponds to the size, shape, and posture of the falling body), and at that point of equilibrium, the speed of descent remains constant . . . A plummeting human will reach terminal velocity at about 120 miles per hour. For a plummeting cat . . . the figure is just forty miles per hour.*

SENTENCE FLUENCY . . .

Rhythm and flow, the music and poetry of language—how it all plays to the ear.

Example

The name Sandra Cisneros is virtually synonymous with fluency—and this writer shows us definitively how breaking the rules can be every bit as effective as following them. In *The House on Mango Street* (1989, 74), her prose dances over the page with such grace that we forget all about sentence variety and celebrate the beauty of rhetorical echoes sounding their notes in all the right places:

*Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city . . . Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roost beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger.*

CONVENTIONS & PRESENTATION . . .

Skill in using an editor's tools (punctuation, spelling, grammar, capitalization, paragraphing, and design) to enhance readability and meaning, while giving readers access to information.

An Example of Conventions at Work

Conventions are about editorial correctness—and so much more. Consider how conventions help you to read the following passage from *Lousy, Rotten, Stinkin’ Grapes* by Margie Palatini (2009, unpaginated) in precisely the way the author intended:

"Excellent! Look and listen. Here’s the plan,” explained Fox. “You stand—here. I will stand on your head—there. On the count of three—you give a bit of a boost—and voila! Grapes!!"
As for Presentation . . .

Take a moment to leaf quickly through the book you are reading right now. Pay attention to the overall look of the pages, the placement of illustrations and figures. You will notice variations in font style and size, some purely for aesthetics and some done to draw your eye to certain parts of the text. You will also notice features such as boxes, shading, or bulleted lists, designed to help you, the reader, find or scan information easily and quickly. Are there other books and documents around you right now? Take a moment to notice covers or illustrations. Think about where your eye is drawn, or where you linger longest. Color and design are used to package a message so that number one, you’ll notice it, and two, you’ll remember it.

Responding to Student Writing

To really understand the traits, to get right inside them, you need to work with them personally by responding to samples of writing. In introducing the traits, I like to use “The Redwoods” and “Mouse Alert” (see Figures 1.4 and 1.5).

Reading and responding to these papers right now will help define the traits in your own mind. You can also use them when introducing the traits to students or to adults (colleagues, parents). Begin by

- reading each paper aloud,
- having participants talk about the paper with partners or in small groups, and finally,
- identifying those traits that you think are especially strong or weak in each paper.

Reading aloud is important. We are very visual in our response to writing, and hearing a piece causes us to assess with our ears—not just our eyes. Your ears will tell you far more about voice or fluency than your eyes alone ever could.

Note: Don’t use a writing guide (or rubric) right now. Use your own judgment about what is strong or weak in each paper. If possible, print copies of the papers so you can make notes or underline moments that stand out.

Questions to Ask about “The Redwoods”

Here are four interesting questions to ask about the paper titled “The Redwoods”:

1. What are the strongest—and weakest—traits, in your opinion?
2. Is the writer male or female?
3. How old is the writer?
4. What writing assignment prompted this piece?

What are the strongest—and weakest—traits?

Most readers (teachers and students alike) see conventions as the strength of the piece. (That’s sad in a way because no one ever says, “You’ve got to read this book—remarkable conventions.”)

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**Figure 1.4**

The Redwoods

Last year, we went on a vacation and we had a wonderful time. The weather was sunny and warm and there was lots to do, so we were never bored.

My parents visited friends and took pictures for their friends back home. My brother and I swam and also hiked in the woods. When we got tired of that, we just ate and had a wonderful time.

It was exciting and fun to be together as a family and to do things together. I love my family, and this is a time that I will remember for a long time. I hope we will go back again next year for more fun and an even better time than we had this year.

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Occasionally someone mentions organization as a relative strength. The weakest trait, for most readers, is voice. But close seconds are ideas (no detail) and word choice (everything was just so wonderful). Here are a few recurring comments:

- Boring—it put me right to sleep.
- Safe.
- The person was writing just to get it done.
- It doesn't say anything.
- What Redwoods? The title doesn't go with the paper.

Is the writer male or female?

Readers are divided about whether this writer is male or female (female is correct). This is an interesting question to ask because it's a good lead-in to teaching voice. Voice, after all, is the person behind the words. So—what sort of person do you picture or hear? The first things most of us try to identify in a writer are sex and age. Which brings us to the next question . . .

How old is the writer?

Many people initially hear this as a first or second grade piece, but the strength of the conventions gives them pause. The most popular answers are third and fourth grade. But middle school teachers often say, “I have kids who write just like this. I know it’s a middle school student.” All these guesses, however, are wrong. Actually, the writer is an eleventh grader.

Knowing the grade level leads to some intriguing discussions about assumptions we routinely make as we read. Teachers often say, “Well, for eleventh grade I expected more, you know? If you’d told me it was third grade, I would have felt different.” But would they really? Would you?

I agree that the conventions would be excellent if this were a third grade paper. But would it say more? Or would we say, “Well, for grade 3, this is a powerhouse in voice.” No. When the voice is missing, it is just missing.

Still, as one teacher pointed out, “Look, she’s in eleventh grade, and she wants to go vacationing with her family. I’d like to give her a couple points for that.” Me, too. There’s a likeable tone to this piece that makes me want to say, “Come out of hiding. I know you have more to share.”

What was the assignment?

You might be thinking that the assignment was some offshoot of the cliché “My Summer Vacation”—or “A Time with My Family”—but you would be mistaken. You could guess for a year and not come up with it, so let me end the suspense: The assignment was to describe an experience in which the five senses play an important part. If you’ve been to the Redwoods in California, felt the mist on your face, felt the bark, stared up at gigantic trees that provide a built-in ecosystem for hundreds of animals and plants, trees so big that they make their own rain, then you can appreciate what a stellar topic choice this was. Perfect. But it’s never just the topic—it’s what you do with it.

Questions to Ask about “Mouse Alert”

Ask the same four questions about this paper—plus one more:

1. What are the strongest—and weakest—traits, in your opinion?
2. Is the writer male or female?
3. How old is the writer?
Mouse Alert

As soon as school was out, we left on vacation. Nothing went the way it was supposed to. Dad backed into a tree on the way out of the driveway, pushing the bike rack through the rear window and nearly scaring my sister to death. She was cranky the rest of the trip. We had to take our other car, which is smaller and you can’t hook the bike rack up to it. Now my sister and me were crowded together so much she kept complaining about me breathing on her and taking up all her air and foot room. Plus now Dad knew a big bill would be waiting for him when we got home. It put everyone in a lovely trip starting mood.

We were supposed to go to Yellowstone Park. Well, actually, we did but just barely. I think we hold the world’s record for shortest time spent in the park. This was all due to my mother’s new attitude toward animals. The night before Yellowstone we stayed in a cabin on the edge of the park. It had a lot of mice, but most of them had the good sense to stay hidden in the walls. One poor furry guy had a death wish and showed himself. The whole family went into action. My father got a broom, which looked like an oversized weapon for a mouse. My mother hugged her pink flannel nightgown around her knees, jumped up on a wood chair and started shrieking “Kill him! Kill him!” Her eyes were as big as her flakes. I had never seen her quite so blood thirsty.

My sister spent the whole time dancing on the bed crying her eyes out and yelling, “Don’t kill it Dad! Don’t kill it!” It was up to Dad and me to trap it. We got it in a pickle jar and took it down to the lake and let it go. It seemed really happy to get away from us. I thought I knew how it felt.

The next day we raced through Yellowstone and then headed home. My Mother said she had enough of animals. For weeks afterwards, this was the big story she told everyone who asked about our vacation. You’d have thought the whole point of our trip was to go on a mouse hunt. Dad said all the money we saved by not staying at Yellowstone could go to pay for the broken car window, so for him the trip worked out perfect. As for me, I’m still planning to get back to Yellowstone one day. I want to see something bigger than a mouse.

4. What was the writing assignment that prompted this piece?
5. Could you make a movie of this?

What are the strongest—and weakest—traits?

Students love this paper—so do teachers. True, there are minor problems with conventions, many more than in “The Redwoods,” but the text is also more complex.

Most readers identify voice and ideas as the strongest traits. My litmus test for voice is always whether I would read the piece aloud to a friend. In this case, yes, I would. I would not read “The Redwoods” aloud for fun—and am assuming you would not, either.

The weakest trait, most people agree, is conventions. Interestingly, however, many a veteran teacher reads through this piece barely noticing the errors. This is understandable. We tend to be forgiving of conventional errors when we have a good time. If the writer of “The Redwoods” made this many errors, we might be downright annoyed.
Teachers' comments on "Mouse Alert" typically include these:

- I can just see it. I feel like I'm in that car. (Actually, I was once.)
- I love this piece because I identify with it—I feel as if I'm reading about my own family.
- I love the line "Her eyes were as big as her fists."
- This writer is having a good time.
- This is a story teller—can I get him next year?
- It comes full circle—great organization.
- I love how this writer doesn't try to tell us everything.
- You get every point of view—even the mouse's!

Is the writer male or female?
Readers nearly always hear this writer as male, perhaps because the writer helps Dad rescue and release the mouse. But—that might be a stereotype. This writer is female. Does that surprise you?

How old is the writer?
Almost always, readers hear this as a middle school voice, and this time, they're right. It's a seventh grader.

What was the assignment?
The assignment for this paper was very general and open—"An experience you still remember." That can be just about anything, and a writer with imagination (like this one) will sift through memories and come upon the one that feels just right. Make no mistake, though: Identifying the moment that will make a fine story is a skill. (More about this in Chapter 3.)

Could you make a movie of this?
To test the strength of ideas (in any piece of writing—not just this one), I often ask students, "Could you make a movie of it?" I cannot imagine—nor can they—a film of "The Redwoods." But they immediately get excited about a film version of "Mouse Alert." Why? Maybe because it's already a video in our heads. We see Dad backing into the tree. We see Mom in her pink nightgown and hear the sister shrieking as she bounces on the bed. We smell the juice in that pickle jar, and cheer as the terrified but relieved mouse makes his escape. Students even cast the movie, putting Chevy Chase or Steve Martin in the role of Dad.

What Teachers Value in Writing

We have seen how teachers responded to "The Redwoods" and to "Mouse Alert." Take additional teacher comments, based on responses to many pieces of writing, group them together by trait, and the result is Figure 1.6: What Teachers Value in Writing.

Most likely you see many things on this list that you value as well. Understand, though: A list, however complete, is not yet a writing guide. Why not? Because it does not yet define performance at multiple levels. Put these same qualities along a performance continuum that ranges from a beginning level (score of 1) to strong or proficient (5 or 6), and you have a guide or rubric.

The writing guide in this chapter (see Figure 1.7) is intended to cover virtually any type of prose writing that is not research-based: narrative, expository, persuasive,
### What Teachers Value in Writing

#### Ideas
- Clear—makes sense
- Topic narrowed to manageable size
- Has a key message (or messages)
- Teaches me something
- Holds my attention
- Fresh, original perspective
- Important, telling details
- Details go beyond common knowledge
- Minimal filler (unneeded information)
- Insight
- Authenticity
- New information

#### Word Choice
- "Just right" words
- Memorable words—worth highlighting, quoting
- Creates word pictures, movies in the mind
- Accurate, precise
- Enlightening—helps me "get it"
- Strong verbs
- Easy on the modifiers (adjectives, adverbs)
- Simple, everyday language used well
- Repeats as necessary—or for effect
- Concise and to the point
- Uses language to teach, not impress
- Uses terminology well (as needed)

#### Organization
- Inviting lead that draws me in
- Starts somewhere, goes somewhere
- Compelling sense of direction
- Provides connections—detail to detail,
  thought to thought, paragraph to paragraph
- Well-paced, spending time where it matters
- Easy to follow—like a good road map
- Satisfying conclusion—sense of resolution
- An occasional surprise
- Not formulaic or too predictable
- Organization supports the message or story

#### Sentence Fluency
- Easy to read on the first try
- Has rhythm, flow, cadence
- Easy to read with voice, expression
- Carefully crafted sentences
- Variety in length, structure . . . OR
- Repetition of patterns for effect
- Concise, direct sentences in informational or technical writing
- Fragments used only for effect
- Run-ons used only for effect (as in dialogue)
- Authentic dialogue
- Consistency in tense (past, present, future)

#### Voice
-Sounds like this writer and no other
-Writer is "at home" in the writing
-Writer seems engaged by the topic
-Brings topic to life for me, the reader
-Shows concern for me as a reader
-Individual, distinctive—unlike others
-Makes me cry, laugh, get chills
-Confident—the writer knows his/her stuff
-Lively, energetic, passionate
-Writing I want to reread or share

#### Conventions & Presentation
- Clean, carefully edited text
- No distracting errors
- No "mental editing" needed
- Conventions guide reader
- Conventions support meaning and voice
- Design draws reader's eye to key points
- Design makes information easy to find
- Free of distracting visuals, hard-to-read fonts
- Uses graphics as needed to enhance text
- Makes good use of white (open) space
### Figure 1.7

#### Teacher Six-Point Writing Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ideas</strong></th>
<th><strong>Organization</strong></th>
<th><strong>Voice</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear, focused, compelling, holds reader's attention</td>
<td>Thoughtful structure guides reader through text</td>
<td>As individual as fingerprints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong main point, idea, story line</td>
<td>Provocative opening, satisfying conclusion</td>
<td>Writer AND reader love sharing this aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striking insight, in-depth knowledge of topic</td>
<td>Well-crafted transitions create coherence</td>
<td>Mirrors writer's innermost thoughts, feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes reader on journey of understanding</td>
<td>Balanced pacing—slows or speeds up as needed</td>
<td>Passionate, vibrant, electric, compelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant, intriguing details paint a vivid picture</td>
<td>Easy to follow—may have a surprise or two</td>
<td>Pulls reader right into the piece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear and focused</td>
<td>Purposeful organization, sense of direction</td>
<td>Original, distinctive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evident main point, idea, story line</td>
<td>Strong lead, conclusion provides closure</td>
<td>A good read-aloud candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects thorough knowledge of topic</td>
<td>Thoughtful transitions connect ideas</td>
<td>Reveals writer's thoughts, feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic, intriguing information</td>
<td>Good pacing—time spent on what matters</td>
<td>Spontaneous, lively, enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important, helpful, well-chosen details</td>
<td>Easy to follow—stays on track</td>
<td>Shows sensitivity to readers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear and focused more often than not</td>
<td>Organization somewhat loose—or formulaic</td>
<td>Sporadic—voice comes and goes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main point, story line easily inferred</td>
<td>Lead and/or conclusion need work</td>
<td>Not quite ready to share, but getting there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient knowledge for broad overview</td>
<td>Transitions sometimes needed—or overdone</td>
<td>Needs more voice—or a different voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some new info, some common knowledge</td>
<td>Too much time spent on trivia</td>
<td>Restrained, quiet, cautious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality details outweigh generalities</td>
<td>Not always easy to follow without work</td>
<td>Reader awareness? Sometimes, perhaps...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writer still defining, shaping message</td>
<td>Order more random than purposeful</td>
<td>Writer not really &quot;at home&quot; in this writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main idea or message hard to infer</td>
<td>Lead/conclusion missing or formulaic</td>
<td>Hint of voice—or we could be reading in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer struggles to fill space</td>
<td>Transitions unclear or missing</td>
<td>Reader cannot tell who writer is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad, unsupported generalities</td>
<td>Hard to tell what points matter most</td>
<td>Distant, encyclopedic—or wrong for the purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition, filler, minimal support</td>
<td>Requires rereading to follow writer's thinking</td>
<td>Not yet &quot;writing to be read&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal text</td>
<td>No clear sense of direction</td>
<td>No sense of person behind the words—yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic not defined yet in writer's mind</td>
<td>Starts right in (no lead)—just stops (no ending)</td>
<td>Writer is not ready to share this piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader left with many questions</td>
<td>A challenge to follow the writer's thinking</td>
<td>Writer's thoughts/feelings do not come through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes, first thoughts</td>
<td>Everything is as important as everything else</td>
<td>Something (topic choice?) is stifling the voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer needs help choosing/defining topic</td>
<td>Writer needs help sorting/organizing ideas</td>
<td>Writer needs help with topic—or voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 1.7

**Teacher Six-Point Writing Guide**

#### Word Choice
- Clear, fresh, original language adds voice
- Quotable—the right word at the right moment
- Every word counts—any repetition is purposeful
- Powerful verbs, unique phrasing, memorable moments
- Words create vivid message, striking images/impressions

#### Sentence Fluency
- Easy to read with inflection that brings out voice
- Rhythm you want to imitate—poetic, musical
- Striking variety in sentence style, structure, length
- Fragments or repetition rhetorically effective
- Strong sentences make meaning instantly clear

#### Conventions & Presentation
- Only the pickiest editors will spot problems
- Creative use of conventions enhances meaning, voice
- Complex text shows off writer’s editorial control
- Enticing, eye-catching presentation
- Virtually ready to publish

| 6 | Readable even on the first try |
| 5 | Readable with minimal rehearsal |
| 4 | Readable with rehearsal and close attention |
| 3 | Readable sentence-to-sentence flow needs work |
| 2 | Hard to read in spots, even with rehearsal |
| 1 | Reader may pause or reread to get meaning |

- Pleaseant, rhythmic flow dominates
- Some sentence variety
- Fragments or repetition are not a problem
- Sentences are clear and connected
- Sentence-to-sentence flow needs work
- More sentence variety needed
- A few moments cry out for revision
- Sentences not always clear at first

- Problems (choppiness, run-ons) disrupt the flow
- Reader must pause or reread to get meaning

- Many sentences need rewording
- Minimal variety in length or structure
- 2

- Distracting or repeated errors
- Errors may interfere with writer’s message
- Shaky control over basics—reads like a hasty first draft
- Immediately noticeable problems with presentation
- Line-by-line editing needed prior to publication

- Serious, frequent errors make reading a challenge
- Reader must “decode” before focusing on message
- Writer not yet in control of basic conventions
- Writing not yet ready for final design or presentation
- Writer needs help with editing

descriptive, and so on. It is formatted here as a “One-Pager,” which many teachers find handy because, as the name suggests, everything is right there on one page (front and back). Please note that if a piece requires research (that is, the writer cannot pull the information out of his or her head, but must consult an outside source), you should use the Informational Writing Guide (Figure 9.1, Chapter 9).

What Happened to the Five-Point Scale?

The original six-trait rubric was based on a five-point scale defined at three levels: 5, 3, and 1. This came about because as the Beaverton team was reading and making notes, we also ranked the writing samples, sorting them into three piles: strong, midlevel, and beginning. It was logical to move from these rankings to a five-point scale, with a score of 5 representing strong performance; a score of 3, midlevel; and a score of 1, the beginning level. Scores of 4 and 2 were seen as “compromises.” Only a few people use the five-point scale these days, and so, for purposes of simplification, it does not appear in this chapter. However, some people do like it because of the richness of the language. You can find a copy in Appendix 2.

Leaping the River with the Six-Point Scale

The six-point scale was developed partly to provide a way of responding to those papers that exceeded expectations—the 5+ papers, we might say. Such papers could be considered exemplars, or papers you could teach from: “This is what I mean by strong word choice.”

In addition, the six-point scale eliminated a big problem—namely, assigning too many 3s. When rats (or classroom teachers) get tired, they tend to see everything as a 3 (lunch, the weather, you name it). But on a five-point scale, a score of 3—maddeningly right there in the middle—doesn’t tell us whether strengths outweigh problems or vice versa, and for assessment purposes, this is troublesome. The six-point scale requires a rater to make a choice: A 3 is a midlevel score tending down. A 4 is a midlevel score tending up.

I nicknamed the six-point scale the “Leaping the River” model because as you cross from 3 to 4, it’s like leaping into the “land of proficiency.” Remember jumping a creek as a child? Maybe you barely got to the other side, pulling yourself up by a tree branch—that’s a 4, a “just made it.” Or maybe your feet found no purchase, and you slipped down the muddy bank and into the water—that’s a 3, an “almost.” The scale is designed to separate the just-made-its from the almosts with this fundamental question: Does it leap the river?

Remember: It’s the Discussion That Matters—Not the Scores

When you teach the traits to students, use scoring as a basis for generating discussion. If some students think a piece is a 5 or 6, while others think it’s a 3 or 4, you have an outstanding basis for conversation about what constitutes good writing. The scores themselves are just stepping stones into that conversation.

What Teachers Value in Writing

For other writing guides . . .

What about a “leap-the-river” version of the One-Pager writing guide?
See Chapters 3 through 8 for the same writing guide, in trait by trait, leap-the-river format.

What about a student-friendly version of this writing guide?
Ready to go. Check Chapters 3 through 8 for trait by trait student versions.

What if I prefer a five-point scale?
In the Appendix you will find three-level scales for both teachers (Appendix 2) and students (Appendix 3). I have modified them so that they can be used as five- or six-point scales—your choice. These scales have the advantage of richer language because performance is defined only at three levels: beginning (1 or 1-2 split), developing (3 or 3-4 split), and strong (5 or 5-6 split).

Where will I find a Spanish translation?
See Appendix 4 for a Student Writing Guide in Spanish. See Appendix 5 for a Student Checklist in Spanish.
Basking in Entertainment

A Personal Essay by Kaylee (Grade 5)

The idea of going on vacation with your family might make you fall asleep. It might make you scream. It might make your lunch squirm around in your stomach. At least at one point in your life, you probably thought exactly this: Why do my parents make such a big deal about taking me on vacation? Well, I can think of lots of reasons why they’d make a big deal out of it. And I think you should too.

It’s important to go on vacation with your family, because you get good food.

“I’m starved!” I moaned, “I’m dying of hungeriness!”

“Don’t worry. We’ll get food soon,” my dad said calmly.

I couldn’t believe he wasn’t hungry. We’d been strolling down the streets of Monterey ALL DAY.

“Does soon mean now?” my sister, Emily, asked.

“No – wait! Yes!” my mom replied.

Everyone cheered. My mom pointed to a crepe place down the street. We tore off down the road, pushing past people, our stomachs growling the whole way. We didn’t care if we looked like crazy chickens. Our minds were set on one thing: FOOD. Even my mom was running. My dad wasn’t, though, so we had to wait even longer while he caught up to us. Finally, we got the crepes. Food had never tasted this good. My teeth sank into the thin, creamy pancake full of strawberries. Maybe I can be a magician when I grow up. I was thinking, because my crepe disappeared like magic. It’s REALLY important to go on vacation with your family, because you get good food.

Another reason going on vacation with your family is important is because you don’t have to worry about your house burning down. (All your stuff’s with you!) One day, my friend Kira was sitting in front of her fireplace, when SNAP! The fire turned into Rice Krispies. CRACKLE! POP! Kira’s heart was beating fast. She was breathing so hard, she almost ran out of air. Kira’s eyes were fixed on the fire. Sparks were flying. She thought about peering up the chimney, but decided not to. She didn’t want to watch her house catch on fire. Because sparks are so bouncy, she was sure they’d jump up there and land on the roof. Her brain was telling her to frantically run around the house and grab everything she could, but apparently Kira’s legs weren’t listening. They stayed right where they were. Lucky for her, she didn’t need to run around screaming. The house didn’t catch on fire. But if she’d been on vacation, she wouldn’t have been able to jump in her fireplace.

Perhaps the most important reason to go on vacation with your family is because, even if it’s in your own backyard, it’s special. One time, my friend Kari and I were making a tropical resort for my mom to “Stay at for a week” in my backyard. We tried to make it as real as possible. We tacked dolphin photos on trees, wrote room numbers on cards, and set out tiny cups of milk. When my mom came, we’d tell her it was coconut milk. After two hours of preparing magic tricks for entertainment, and food in case mom wanted room service, we were ready. Kari and I made a grand entrance into the house.

“Would you like to stay in our 5 star resort and bask in entertainment?” we asked.

Of course my mom had to say yes.

I let out a quick “Yippee!” then went back to being an owner of a fancy resort. We led my mom to the refreshment table.

“Would you like some coconut milk?”

My mom picked up a cup and took a sip. “Blech!”

Because we were kids, we immediately wanted to find out how horrible it tasted. It definitely was a 0 on the great beverage scale. Because my mom hated coconut milk in the first place, she really believed that it was coconut milk. Or at least she pretended to believe it. I will never forget that “coconut milk.”

Yep. Even if it’s in your own backyard, it’s special.

This makes me realize that vacationing with your family isn’t just for fun. It’s for making memories to last a lifetime.
Warming Up with the One-Pager

Our earlier assessment of “The Redwoods” and “Mouse Alert” focused on personal responses—but likely you have an idea about how you would score both papers. To give you more of a challenge, let’s look at a new piece, also on the vacation theme. It’s “Basking in Entertainment” by fifth grader Kaylee (Figure 1.8). Read it once, thinking about your first impressions; then read it again and score it, using the six-point One-Pager writing guide (Figure 1.7). If you are working with a group, allow time for discussion. Note that you can score the piece for just one trait—or all six. Your choice. My suggested scores and comments appear at the end of the chapter.

9 Tips for Scoring Well

You will have an opportunity to score many more papers, trait by trait, in upcoming chapters. Here are some tips for making your assessment of these papers—and your own students’ papers—more consistent, efficient, and fair.

1. Remember—there is no “right” score.
All the student papers in this book have been scored by experienced teachers/raters, but their suggested scores should not be considered the “correct” scores. There is no such thing. They are suggestions and cannot be more. The goal is to come up with a defensible score, one based on thorough reading of the paper and analysis of the rubric.

If you and your partner or your group disagree by only one point on a given score, you can still consider that agreement. On a continuum, remember, a high 3 and a low 4 would actually be quite close.

2. Refer to the writing guide often.
Print a copy so you can write on it, and highlight phrases that help you distinguish among scoring levels. Make it your own, but don’t try to memorize it. You’ll be surprised how quickly it will feel comfortable and familiar. You may want to revise the guide as you and your students think of other important features that should influence assessment.

3. Remember that a score of 1 indicates beginning performance, not failure.
When you give a score of 1, you are saying to the student, in effect, “You have made a beginning. Now let’s try to build on those first thoughts.”

4. Remember that a score of 5 or 6 represents strength, not perfection.
Papers that receive 5s and 6s are not all alike. Some are hilarious, and some are profoundly moving or well researched. If you feel that a paper has strength, go for the gusto; don’t wait for that mythical “better” paper that is waiting around the bend. You can give another 5 or 6 tomorrow.

5. Spend your time reading the paper.
Sometimes people ask whether, since there are six traits, they must read a paper six times. Thankfully, no. Reading one time will do the trick—provided you take your time and concentrate on the writer’s message. This is why scoring holistically (just one overall score for the paper as a whole) isn’t really the time saver it’s often cracked up to be. No matter how you score the paper, you still have to read it.

6. Consider grade level—but don’t make it the factor.
Grade level does not count as much as performance per se—but it still counts. That’s why we are surprised to learn that the author of “The Redwoods” is a young adult.
Nevertheless, we can—and should—have high expectations at all grade levels. We should not assume, for example, that students in second or third grade will have only minimal voice. It does not work that way. What changes, with experience and sophistication, is a writer’s control over a trait. An eleventh grader might have more consistent voice throughout a piece of writing, but a third or even a first grader could have moments of voice that would rival that of any writer—even an adult.

7. Watch out for rater bias.
Many little things get in the way of scoring fairly or appropriately. Here are the most common sources of bias, in both large-scale assessment and the classroom:

- **Having a “high/low” tendency**
  Some teachers have a tendency to be too hard (or too easy) on everyone as a matter of principle. We’ve all known the teacher who cannot bear to give anything but an A—and the one who is holding an A in reserve for that special student he or she hopes to meet one day.

- **Reacting to appearance**
  We may find ourselves irritated by messy or tiny handwriting, especially when we’re tired. But poor handwriting, while often annoying, is not the same thing as weak voice, unsupported ideas, or faulty conventions, and it should not influence trait-based scores. (Note: If you are scoring a published piece for Conventions & Presentation, do consider appearance—but go beyond neatness to include such features as overall design, use of illustrations or color, fonts, and so on.)

- **Assuming longer is better**
  Is it? We might like to think so. In fact, though, many students who write well for one or two pages have enormous difficulty sustaining the flow. They just run out of juice. Furthermore, ability to condense is often a virtue; it may give voice just the boost it needs.

- **Loving—or hating—the topic**
  Do you love football? Hate cats? Vice versa! These little quirks and preferences can and do get in the way of fair scoring. Assess the writing, not the topic (it’s not as simple as it sounds).

- **Letting preconceptions influence you**
  Researcher and writer Paul Diederich (1974) discovered that raters actually scored the very same essays higher when told they had been written by honors English students. If I told you The “Redwoods” had been written by Hemingway, would you see its simplicity as ingenious?

- **Skimming**
  Some readers think that they can tell after the first few lines whether a paper will be strong. Rarely is this true. A strong lead may disintegrate into generalities; a slow start may explode into a burst of inspiration.

- **Self-Scoring**
  Are you a perceptive reader? If so, be careful that you score the work of the writer and not your own talent in deciphering the “hidden message.”

- **Personal response to violence or vulgarity**
  How do you respond to vulgar language in student writing? To profanity? To extreme violence? Some people have a very ho-hum attitude; others are readily offended. Take a position, and let your students know what it is.

  Profanity is part of the landscape in a narrative on war; but it may seem jolting, cumbersome, or self-conscious in a persuasive essay on school locker searches. The question (for me) is not really about violence or profanity per se, but about whether the writing works and whether the language is appropriate for the context and intended audience.
8. Be aware of pet peeves.
Everyone has a pet peeve. Some of us have many. The trick is to know what they are so that they will not trap you into assessing unfairly by overreacting. See Figure 1.9 for a list—and as you read through them, ask yourself whether any of these might influence you.

Keep a list of your own pet peeves, and share it openly with your students. It can teach us all a little about the way we respond to writing.

9. Remember that no writing guide tells all.
Writing guides are by nature simple documents, intended to capture the essence of what we are likely to see at various levels. They cannot capture everything because the variety in writing samples is infinite.

| Figure 1.9 |
| Pet Peeves |

- Big, loopy writing
- Teeny-tiny writing
- No margins!
- Commas or periods outside the quotation marks
- Shifting tenses with no reason
- Writing in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS
- Mixing it’s and its
- Mixing are and our—Do they even sound alike?
- Mixing their, there, and they’re—when we just finished a unit on it
- Goes for said, as in So he goes, “Let’s dance,” and I go, “Yeah, cool.”
- Endless connectives: and, but then, because, and so, so then, so
- The words and phrases yuck, awesome, dude, radical, rad, in the zone, humongous, pushing the envelope, I mean, like, as it, cool (I use cool, but hate it in print)
- Missing words—Did the writer notice?
- Sudden endings
- Writing just to fill the page—nothing goes with anything else
- Empty words used to snow the reader: His unobstructed prejudice presupposed the obliteration of his potential. Just say, His prejudice held him back.
- The End (as if I would look for more)
- The phrase You know what I mean? (I can’t tell if it’s more annoying when I do or when I don’t)
- A lot (If you can have A lot, what’s wrong with A little?)
- No punctuation at all—like driving without traffic signs
- No title—Take a minute and think of one
- A title that doesn’t seem to go at all with the paper
- A lead that repeats the prompt or assignment—if I can’t tell what the topic is, there’s a problem with the writing
- Exclamation points after every breathless line!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- Between you and I (versus me)
- Me and my friend . . . (as a sentence subject)
- Her and me . . . (as a sentence subject)
- Cliché adjectives: crashing waves, blue skies, fluffy clouds
- Tired words: nice, good, great, wonderful, special, exciting . . .
- No paragraphs!
- Paragraphs for every single sentence
- Cliché leads: In this paper . . . Hi, my name is . . .
- The ending That’s all for now . . .
- Fifteen different fonts on one page

9 Tips for Scoring Well
In The 9 Rights of Every Writer (2005, 93–95), I tell the story of a student paper titled Ginweed that I have carried with me since 1987. That’s a long while to care about a piece of writing. Each time I read the story of a young boy and his 4-H calf, I am moved all over again. I laugh, I get tears in my eyes, and the unexpected ending still gives me chills. The county fair judge in the piece still reminds me of actor Melvyn Douglas in the classic film Hud—especially when he remarks, “When you get a jersey like this, it almost makes me want to change breeds.” But of course, we cannot very well incorporate such personal responses into a writing guide:

- Causes the reader to tear up
- Compels the reader to carry it around for twenty years or more
- Reminds the reader of famous actors

Personal responses cannot and should not be transformed into expectations. These are things we must convey in conferences and through our comments. A score, no matter how accurate, can never take the place of words from your heart. You need both.

In addition, a writing guide is more than words on paper. It has three parts: the written document (like the One-Pager you have been using in this chapter); samples of performance that help us understand the criteria (like “The Redwoods” and “Mouse Alert”); and your own teacher judgment, the result of experience, insight, intuition, and your own skill in using a writing guide (or any assessment tool) wisely and well. See Figure 1.10 for a summary.

### Connecting the 6 Traits to Research

In 2007, Steve Graham and Dolores Perin prepared a report for the Carnegie Corporation of New York titled Writing Next: (Alliance for Excellent Education, 4–5). In that report, they identified eleven instructional strategies that (according to the extensive research cited) appear to have a significant impact on student writing performance. Although the report targets middle and high school students, it is not much of a stretch to infer that many of these strategies—perhaps all—could make a measurable difference even for our youngest writers.

It is not my intention to summarize the report here (to access a copy, type in “Writing Next” online); however, I wish to point out five very strong connections to trait-based instruction:

1. **Specific Writing Strategies**

   First, the report cites the importance of teaching specific “writing strategies” that improve students’ skills in planning, drafting, and revising their writing. Trait-based instruction emphasizes such strategies, through the sharing of literature, assessment of writing samples, and presentation of focus lessons. Many such strategies are detailed, trait by trait, in Chapters 3 through 8.
2. Collaborative Writing
Second, the report notes the value of "collaborative writing," which encourages students to work together in designing and carrying out writing tasks. In a trait-based writing classroom, students work together continuously. They discuss writing samples, assess them together, and design revision. They plan their own writing together, brainstorming and discussing possibilities. They also share their writing—both during drafting and as part of revision.

3. Specific, Reachable Goals
Third, the report notes how critical it is to provide students with "specific, reachable goals" so that they have no confusion about what success looks like or what they must do to achieve it. Making goals clear is precisely what a good writing guide does. Further, in trait-based writing, students have a voice in setting those goals.

4. Analyzing the Writing of Others
Fourth, the report cites how helpful it can be for students to "read, analyze, and emulate" carefully selected models of good writing. This occurs every time students look at and discuss samples of other students' work, or use literary mentors to discover the power of strong details, powerful leads and conclusions, honest voice, original phrasing, and more. Trait-based instruction emphasizes the use of both student writing models and good literature.

5. Focusing on Process
Fifth, the report emphasizes the importance of a process-based approach to writing instruction. In any successful trait-based writing approach, process is foundational. As Chapter 2 shows, the traits are interwoven throughout the cycle of writing process, but are particularly critical to purposeful revision.

   I encourage you to read the report in its entirety. And if you teach the traits now, I am confident that you will feel validated.

Connecting the 6 Traits to the Common Core Standards for Writing

INTRODUCTION

The Common Core State Standards represent an initiative to—

- Lay out a clear vision for what is expected of students for success in college and work.
- Give students, parents, and teachers a clear vision for success in every school.
- Create consistency in expectations from state to state.

The Standards are a collaborative effort of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), with input from professional educators, scholars, assessment developers, parents, students, and other members of the public. They are intended to be rigorous, to build upon existing state standards, to increase clarity and continuity among those standards, to align well with the expectations of colleges and universities, and to reflect requirements from other top-performing countries in order to prepare U.S. students to compete in a global economy. In short, developers say, "the Standards lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century" (www.corestandards.org).
SETTING UP YOUR OWN REVIEW

Distinct standards have been developed for mathematics and for English language arts, and the language arts standards are intended to cross over into other content areas, such as science, history, and social studies. The consistency from grade to grade makes the Standards fairly easy to review. If you have not already done so, I urge you to check the website (www.corestandards.org), and to begin by reviewing the Anchor Standards, those that lay out general guidelines for college and career readiness.

Once you have done that, go on to the individual grade-level standards, where you will find additional detail on writing (or other) expectations for each grade. The grade-level standards are direct derivatives of the Anchor Standards, demonstrating a kind of stairway to success that begins in kindergarten and grows increasingly complex and demanding up through grade 12.

You will notice that conventions and vocabulary development have their own strand, under Language Arts Standards. The reason for this is that while both are integral to writing, they are also critical to reading, speaking, and listening, and so the developers did not want to link them exclusively to writing. The Language Arts Standards include components for Conventions and Standard English, Knowledge of Language, and Vocabulary Acquisition and Use.

To facilitate your review, I recommend printing out copies of—

1. The Anchor Standards that define college and career readiness
2. A copy of the Writing Standards that pertain specifically to the grade level you teach
3. A copy of the Language Arts Standards for the grade level that you teach
4. A copy of “Key Points in Language Arts,” which will highlight some things to look for

THE ANCHOR STANDARDS

The Anchor Standards for Writing define expectations for college or career readiness. You may be thinking, “Why would I begin here if I am teaching younger writers?” Two reasons: First, all other standards are derivatives of this list. And second, it is easier to get where we are going if we know what the end goal is. The Anchor Standards are divided into four broad sections:

1. Text Types and Purposes (genre and related skills)
2. Production and Distribution of Writing (process and use of technology)
3. Research to Build and Present Knowledge (research, quoting and paraphrasing, citing of sources, and use of technology)
4. Range of Writing (writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, and writing both over time and on-demand)

See Figure 1.11 for a quick summary of how these four sections connect directly to the six traits of writing. (All bold-faced trait connections in Figure 1.11 are mine.)

Section 1: Text Types and Purposes (Standards 1–3)

The first section, Text Types and Purposes, focuses on three umbrella genres:

- Opinion pieces or arguments
- Informative/explanatory texts
- Narrative texts
Figure 1.11

Connection Between College and Career Readiness
Anchor Standards for Writing and the Six Traits of Writing

Text Types and Purposes (Genre and Related Skills)

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (Trait connection: Ideas)

2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. (Ideas, Organization)

3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. (Ideas, Organization, Voice)

Production/Distribution of Writing (Process & Technology)

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience. (All Traits, notably Ideas, Organization, Voice)

5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (All Traits)

6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others. (All Traits, notably Conventions & Presentation)

Research to Build & Present Knowledge (Research & Technology)

7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. (Ideas)

8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism. (All Traits, notably Ideas and Conventions & Presentation)

9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. (All Traits, notably Ideas and Conventions & Presentation)

Range of Writing (Purpose/Genre, Audience, Time)

10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. (All Traits)

Note
The Career- and College-Readiness Standards for Language include additional writing standards connected specifically to conventions and word choice.

Source:

I call these “umbrella” genres because obviously these categories are extremely broad and comprise many subgenres of writing—as the developers note in their Appendix A. For example, informational writing could include textbooks, encyclopedias, signage for a museum, histories, journalistic articles, lab reports, police reports, and hundreds of other things. Narratives might include memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, journals, news stories, picture books, film scripts, and other types of stories. Persuasive
pieces might include film or book reviews, editorials, speeches, position papers, proposals, advertisements, and so on. The expectations or skills related to each genre begin at a very basic level in kindergarten, growing in complexity and difficulty through grades 11 and 12.

**Informational writing and research.** For example, tasks connected to informational writing range from naming a topic and providing information on that topic (kindergarten or grade 1) to presenting a complex topic supported by research, expanding that topic through examples and graphics, and tying all elements together with organizational elements such as subheads and transitional language (grade 12). Research requirements also grow more rigorous with each grade level. Primary students are asked to engage in teacher-supported research (W.K.2), perhaps responding to a text and related questions shared by the instructor. By grade 12, students are expected to pose an important informational question and research it independently, over time (W.11-12.2).

**Narrative writing.** Students from kindergarten through grade 12 are expected to write narratives, but again, the range of expectations is very great. Kindergarteners are asked to use a combination of “drawing, dictating, and writing” to tell about an event or several related events (W.K.3). By grade 8, students are asked to include such elements as dialogue, pacing, description, and character development, and to develop real or imagined experiences or events using “effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences” (W.8.3). By grade 12, students are asked to create sophisticated and engaging stories that may include “multiple points of view” or even “multiple plot lines.” They are also asked to use rhetorical techniques (such as pacing, description, dialogue, or reflection) not only to develop the plot and characters, but also to create a particular tone, mood, or voice within the piece: “a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution” (W.11-12.3).

**Argument.** Argument, often considered a challenging genre, is emphasized at all levels as well, beginning with kindergarten. Very young writers may be asked to “name a topic” or “tell the name of a book” they are writing about and to state an opinion about that topic or book (W.K.1). By grade 12, students are expected to explore and analyze a complex topic, setting forth a well-supported opinion backed by research, acknowledging and refuting counterarguments, and organizing all information (claims, counterclaims, reasons, evidence) in a rhetorically effective manner (W.11-12.1).

**Connection to traits.** The connection to the traits is very strong in Standards 1 through 3 because all three major genres require trait-based skills. Throughout these first three standards, emphasis is on development of central ideas, effective use of detail or support (also relating to the trait of ideas), and strong organization of information—particularly in terms of a strong lead and conclusion, as well as transitions to link ideas.

Interestingly, “words, phrases, clauses” and “varied syntax” (what we will subsequently call word choice and sentence fluency) are seen as primarily fulfilling a transitional purpose, although word choice is also implicitly connected to expectations regarding clarity or use of sensory detail. The word voice is not used directly—but voice is a definite presence, both in references to tone and in the recurring emphasis on addressing the needs of the audience (or what we might call the reader-writer connection).
Section 2: Production and Distribution of Writing (Standards 4–6)

The second section, Production and Distribution of Writing, focuses on all steps of the writing process, particularly emphasizing development and revision. It also covers publication—which may involve the use of technology.

Younger writers are encouraged to work with peers and to receive support. For example, a kindergarten or first-grade student might share writing with a group and use feedback to add one detail to her piece (W.K.6). By grade 12, students are expected to match “development, organization, and style” to “task, purpose, and audience” (W.11-12.4). In addition, secondary writers are expected to use technology proficiently “including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information” (W.11-12.6). This means that by their senior year, students must not only conduct research online, but also draft and revise using technology, as well as create multi-voiced documents, such as wikis—and publish online as well (more on this in Chapter 8).

Again, the connection to the traits is very strong. “Clear and coherent writing,” emphasized in Standard 4, is writing in which ideas, organization, and word choice shine. Standard 5 focuses on writing process. As Chapter 2 makes clear, each step of writing process is linked inexorably to the traits, but revision in particular is strengthened dramatically by knowledge of the traits. Knowing how to read and revise one’s own work is the key to independence. Standard 6 calls for the use of technology to publish writing. This standard connects most closely to the trait of conventions & presentation.

Section 3: Research to Build and Present Knowledge (Standards 7–9)

The third section, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, covers integration of information from multiple sources, summarizing or paraphrasing information, and identifying passages within written works that will support a particular point of view, as well as quoting and citing such passages and works correctly.

The youngest writers engage in “shared research” (W.K.7) under the direction and guidance of a teacher, who may present a book or film to the whole class, for example, or assist writers in recalling the details of a personal experience (W.K.8). By grade 4, students are expected to also begin exploring informational texts independently (W.4.9). Older writers take responsibility for coordinating their own research, and are expected to use multiple and diverse sources to conduct “advanced searches” while “avoiding plagiarism” or “overreliance on any one source” (W.11-12.8). They are also required to document sources appropriately.

Because research is primarily about the gathering and sorting of information, Standards 7 through 9 connect most strongly to the traits of ideas and organization. However, appropriate citing of sources is an important element of conventions & presentation.

Section 4: Range of Writing (Standard 10)

The fourth section, Range of Writing, distinguishes between writing that occurs over an extended period and requires ongoing research and continual revision, and writing that may take place in one sitting (such as on-demand writing for an assessment). This standard also emphasizes writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences—and hence connects directly to all traits.
CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE WRITING
STANDARDS AND LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

In summary, as you look through the Writing Standards for your grade level, you will notice a particularly strong emphasis on the traits of ideas and organization. As you review the Language Arts Standards, you will find more emphasis on the traits of word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions & presentation.

In addition, though, notice the recurring references to style and the importance of ensuring that any document is appropriate not only for the task and purpose, but for the audience as well. Matching style to audience is a hallmark of voice, and style embraces three traits that always work in harmony: voice, word choice, and sentence fluency.

Overall, keep in mind that all six traits are important in every piece of writing. Nevertheless, many people are more comfortable when they can identify specific words or phrases that directly connect to each trait. See Figure 1.12 for a guide to help you do just that.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait Language in the Core Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The trait of . . .</strong> is referenced in words or phrases like . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Choice</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sentence Fluency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions &amp; Presentation</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 1 Getting Acquainted with the 6 Traits
As you will notice in your own review, the Common Core Standards for Writing repeatedly reference writing process, from planning through publishing. This is where the link to the traits becomes perhaps the most powerful because in teaching traits to students, we help them to become independent planners, drafters, revisers, and editors. Planning and drafting may link most closely to the traits of ideas and organization, but revision links to all traits, and editing depends heavily on conventions & presentation. In short, the connection between the traits and the Standards is very strong.

Developers of the Common Core Standards are quick to point out that this is a work in progress. They welcome input. Write to them. Be heard.

Some Closing Thoughts

Isn’t assessment an odd place from which to begin writing instruction? Actually, no. It’s the very best place, once we understand what assessment is.

When we think assessment, we usually think grading or testing. This is a very limited view. Assessment is looking within. It means getting an insider’s perspective. Isn’t this what we want for our students? To be insiders? We can list dozens of strategies and create hundreds of standards, but nothing meaningful happens until students themselves can look at their own work and figure out the next step—without help.

In the quotation that opens this chapter, Donald Graves reminds us that we must teach children to “read their own work.” That doesn’t mean looking it over or checking the spelling. It means teaching them to read the way we read—with insight and understanding, looking for strengths and problems, noticing what’s working and what isn’t there yet. If we don’t show them how to assess on this very personal level—not with numbers or grades, but with language—their writing will not improve. But if we do show them, their skills will soar. The very core of this book rests on one foundational belief: What you can assess, you can revise. And if you can revise with purpose, the world of writing is yours.

STUDY GROUP

Interactive Questions and Activities

1. **Discussion.** Which term do you prefer—rubric or writing guide? In your mind, do they have different connotations?

2. **Activity and Discussion.** Discuss your scores for Kaylee’s paper titled “Basking in Entertainment” (Figure 1.8). Your scores need not match mine (see below), but be sure you can back your scores with sound reasons, just as if you were conferring directly with Kaylee. For additional practice, choose a piece of student writing from one of your own classes to score on all six traits. Go for something that is not immediately obvious, that is, neither clearly strong nor problematic. Jot scores down individually—then open up the discussion. Notice the kinds of questions and issues that emerge when scores do not agree.

3. **Activity and Discussion.** Make a group list of your pet peeves. Compare it with the list in Figure 1.10. Did you include anything that is not on that list?

4. **Activity and Discussion.** Expand your scoring skills by looking at writing not generated by students. Consider a blog, short story or essay, news story, excerpt from a textbook, letter to the editor, or any writing that is part of your life. Score it on any trait using the One-Pager guide. Then, consider how you might create lessons in which students assess and discuss similar kinds of writing.

5. **Activity and Discussion.** Consider keeping a writer’s notebook as you read this text. As one of your first entries, create your own vision of writing success,
focusing on writing within your classroom (now or in the future). Ask yourself this question: What would successful performance look like in my classroom? List things you feel are important in terms of product (actual student writing), classroom atmosphere (the general philosophy that guides how you teach), and writing workshop and process (how students behave as writers). Don’t try for an exhaustive list. Think of this as a rough draft that you will revise as you go through the rest of the book. When you finish (days or weeks from now), compare your vision with those of your colleagues. Continue to revise that vision, not only during the time you are reading this book, but throughout the time you are teaching.

6. **Activity and Discussion.** Get a copy of *Writing Next* by Steve Graham and Dolores Perin (available online). Read and discuss it with your group, seeing how many connections you can make to trait-based instruction.

7. **Activity and Discussion.** Check out the Common Core State Standards online (www.corestandards.org) and print out relevant copies for yourself and other members of your group. (Be sure to include Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards in your discussion.) Go through them with a highlighter and pencil, marking your own connections to the traits. What are the strongest connections? Is there anything you feel is missing and should be included? Consider writing a response to the Standards from your own point of view.

8. **Activity and Discussion.** This chapter talks about the traits of successful writing. What about the traits of successful writers? List the qualities you think a successful writer would need (you may wish to include this in your notebook). Then compare your list with qualities listed by your colleagues—and with those in Figure 1.13. Why is it important to focus on the writer, and not just on the writing?

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**Figure 1.13**

**The 6 Traits* of Successful Writers**

1. **Perseverance**
   Successful writers never give up. It isn’t an option for them. When the writing isn’t working, they know to leave it alone for a time and come back, or get more information and come back. But they **keep coming back** until they are satisfied.

2. **Watchfulness**
   Writers notice what others overlook. They have a knack for identifying what matters. And they think like writers all the time, with their senses on high alert.

3. **Courage**
   Successful writers are daring—and bold. Because they’re willing to take risks, they rip the limits off what they can achieve. They also know how to sift through criticism thoughtfully, making use of what’s helpful, and quieting voices that only get in the way.

4. **Insight**
   Successful writers are thinkers. They’re good at analyzing human nature, solving problems, anticipating outcomes, and making connections. When they write, we tune in—because they help us to think more clearly, too.

5. **Curiosity**
   By nature, writers are people who always want to know more—about everything. They’re nosy. They ask questions. They enjoy research. And they use the best of what they learn to teach and entertain the rest of us.

6. **Honesty**
   The most successful writers are unflinching. They look life right in the eye and share what they see. The result can be stirring, disarming, or intensely comical in its truth.

*There are undoubtedly more than six! Please add your own thoughts to this list.

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