

6+1 Traits of Writing Overview

The following is a brief overview of 6+1 Traits, which is widely used in the ELA/English classes in PSCD, grades K-12. It is a research-based model of teaching and assessing writing. It gives teachers and students a common vocabulary for talking about writing across the disciplines and helps to create consistent expectations for what good writing looks like. This is not the complete review of the program, but an overview intended to give you some information about writing instruction in our schools.

The 6+1 Traits model grew out of the work of a number of research projects, including a major endeavor by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory in Portland Oregon. Researchers there wanted to develop a performance assessment for writing that would be simple for teachers and students to use and understand. What's essential for good writing, no matter what kind of writing it is? The answer to that question is the 6+1 Traits.

What are the 6+1 Traits? See the following descriptions of each element. A rubric for assessing each element is also included at the end of this document.

Ideas
Organization
Voice
Word Choice
Sentence Fluency
Conventions
Presentation

Ideas

This trait deals with the heart of the piece of writing. What is the topic? Is the topic narrow enough so that the writer can be specific with lots of good details? Is the topic interesting, and does the writer have knowledge or experience on that topic to make the writing come alive?

To help students with this trait, encourage them to follow these steps early in the writing process – during the brainstorming, or prewriting, stage.

- Select a topic or decide how you'll deal with the topic that's been assigned.
- Narrow the topic.
- Elaborate on that specific topic with details and description.
- Make sure your details help support your main topic.

Here are some tools for helping students to select topics, narrow them down, and brainstorm appropriate details.

- Brainstorming Guide
- Is My Topic Narrow Enough?
- Web of Details
- RAFT Paper
- Building Blocks
- Don't Tell Me – Show Me!

Organization

This trait details with the structure of a piece of writing. Whether you're writing a poem, an essay, or a business letter, the structure of the writing should contribute to its overall theme. That means that a piece of writing should begin with a solid introduction, that ideas should be presented in a logical order with appropriate pacing, and that it should end with a satisfying conclusion that ties up all the loose ends.

To help students with this trait, encourage them to use this checklist in the rough draft revision stage of their writing.

- My piece begins with an introduction that grabs readers' attention and gives a taste of what is to come.
- The ideas in my piece of writing move in a logical sequence from one to another.
- My piece has an appropriate pace. I've moved quickly through some parts (using a wide angle lens) and slowed down to include vivid details (zoom lens) in other parts.
- I've used transition words to show how ideas are connected to one another and to make my writing move along smoothly.
- My piece ends with a conclusion that wraps things up and feels satisfying to the reader.

Here are some tools for helping students with the trait of Organization.

-Writing a Lead -Sequencing Activity -Outlining Ideas -Transitions -Writing a Conclusion

Voice

This trait is probably the most difficult to define. Voice in a piece of writing gives readers a sense of a real person, with a real personality, behind the written words. The voice you use in your writing will vary according to your audience and purpose, but it should sound like you. For example, a personal narrative about your grandfather might be written with a very sentimental, personal voice. A persuasive essay about gun control would probably have a more formal, authoritative voice. Your writing should sound like there is a real person behind it – not just some computer program spitting out facts and sentences.

To help students with this trait, encourage them to use this checklist in the rough draft revision stage of their writing.

- When I read my piece of writing out loud, it sounds like me.
- My piece of writing makes a connection with the reader because it's clear that there is a real person behind the words.
- The tone of my writing is appropriate for my audience and purpose.
- My writing has conviction and insight that could only come from me.

Here are some tools for helping students with the trait of Voice.

-Exploring Voice through Music

-Exploring Voice through Art

-Comparing Voices

-Changing Voices

Word Choice

This trait deals with choosing the right word at the right time to make your writing sparkle. Word choice is the difference between writing that paints pictures in the reader's mind and writing that sits flat on the page. Great writers choose words that are colorful and precise, without sounding forced. They use strong verbs, adjectives, and figurative language to describe things in a way that is fresh and vivid.

To help students with this trait, encourage them to use this checklist in the rough draft revision stage of their writing.

- The verbs in my writing are precise and powerful – not vague. I've used words like stride or amble, instead of walk.
- My descriptions are vivid and give readers a colorful picture of what I've described.
- I've used precise adjectives to describe things.
- I've used figurative language, where appropriate, to make my writing more interesting and precise.
- I've used words that catch the reader's eye and add to the meaning of my piece.

Here are some tools for helping students with the trait of Word Choice:

- General to Specific
- Expand on That
- Figurative Language
- Find and Replace

Sentence Fluency

This trait has to do with the way your writing sounds when it's read out loud. Sentence Fluency means writing sentences of varied lengths and structures that are a pleasure to read. Sentence fluency means beginning sentences in different ways and writing with a rhythm that makes sentences flow together smoothly, adding to the meaning of the piece. Sentence Fluency makes writing easy to read and almost musical to the ear.

To help students with this trait, encourage them to use this checklist in the rough draft revision stage of their writing.

- I've read my piece out loud, and there are no parts that are difficult to read.
- My sentences don't all start the same way.
- My sentences are varied in length. Some are longer and more complex, and some are simpler, providing a comfortable pace.
- I've asked a friend to read my paper out loud and point out places where he or she stumbles or has difficulty reading.

Here are some tools for helping students with the trait of Sentence Fluency:

- Combining Sentences
- Finding and Fixing Run-On Sentences
- Highlighting Sentence Variety

Conventions

The Conventions Trait is probably the one that many adults remember when they recall their own writing instruction. All those things that were marked in red pen – the spelling errors, grammar and usage problems, capitalization mistakes, and missing punctuation – refer to conventions. While conventions are important, they're not the most important part of writing. You might compare the other five traits of writing to the building of a house – laying the foundation, putting up the walls, installing plumbing and electricity, and putting up drywall. The conventions are the finishing touch – the paint that makes the final product look good. As a result, students should focus on conventions at the end of the writing process. Editing for conventions is a final but important step in preparing a text for the reader.

Here is a checklist to help students with conventions:

- Are my words spelled correctly?
- Is my grammar and usage correct?
- Do my subjects and verbs agree with one another?
- Have I capitalized proper nouns and words at the beginning of sentences?
- Does each sentence end with appropriate punctuation?

Here are some tools for helping students with Conventions:

- Editing Checklist
- Spelling Monsters

Presentation

Presentation is included in the Traits as a “+1” because while it's important, it's not as meaty as the other traits. Presentation refers to the look of the product – how appealing it is before it's ever read. Good writers know that what they have to say is important, but they also realize that presentation affects how their readers view their writing, too.

Here are some questions to help students check writing for presentation:

- If my product is handwritten, is the writing legible, neat, and easy to read?
- Are my letters formed clearly with appropriate space between letters and words?
- If my product is word processed, have I made use of font styles and sizes in a way that enhances the message of my text?
- Have I made use of white space to make my piece easy to read and pleasant to look at?
- Have I used titles, numbering, spacing, and bullets in a way that adds to the meaning of my text?
- Have I used illustrations, images, charts, graphs, maps, and tables where appropriate to enhance my meaning? Are these visuals presented in a way that complements the text?

Ideas Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Developing	Needs Work
Topic	Topic is focused, narrow and manageable.	Topic is focused but may need to be narrowed down a bit more.	Topic is somewhat unfocused, may be too broad.	Topic is not focused and is too broad for a detailed piece of writing.
Elaboration	Writer has elaborated on his or her topic in great, interesting details.	Writer has elaborated on his or her topic with some details.	Writer has made some attempt to elaborate on his or her topic, but needs to expand with more details.	Writer has made little attempt to include details and has written only basic information.
Interest and Enthusiasm	Writer is established as an authority on topic, either through experience or research, and writes with enthusiasm. Ideas are fresh and original.	Writer has established some authority on topic, through experience or research. Ideas are somewhat original.	Writer has some experience and/or has done some research on topic but needs to write with more confidence. Ideas are somewhat ordinary.	Writer does not sound like he or she completely understands the topic of the piece of writing. Ideas do not go beyond basic, restatements of the topic.

Organization Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Developing	Needs Work
Sequencing and logic	Writing follows a logical natural sequence that enhances meaning. Pacing is appropriate and varied, with appropriate details adding to meaning.	Writing follows a logical sequence but may be too predictable at times. Pacing is generally appropriate, and details are included at appropriate times.	Writing follows a somewhat logical sequence with a few ideas that seem out of place. Pacing sometimes feels too quick, without enough development, or too slow, with irrelevant details.	Writing does not follow a logical sequence. Many ideas seem out of place and unconnected. Pacing feels too quick, without enough development, or too slow, with irrelevant details.
Introduction	Introduction gives a taste of the piece to come and grabs readers' attention in an interesting, appropriate way.	Introduction gives a good overview of the piece to come but is more straightforward.	Introduction gives only a general idea of what's to come in the piece.	Introduction is missing or inappropriate for the piece.
Transitions	Writer uses effective transitions that make the flow of the piece seem smooth and natural.	Writer uses some transitions that help move the reader from one idea to the next.	Writer makes some attempt to use transitions, but ideas sometimes seem abrupt or unconnected.	Writer makes no attempt to use transitions. Ideas feel random and unconnected.
Conclusion	Conclusion is appropriate, creative, and satisfying, and feels like a natural way to end the piece.	Conclusion is appropriate and wraps up all the loose ends.	Conclusion is present but awkward and/or abrupt.	Writer makes no attempt to wrap up the piece with a conclusion, and readers are left hanging.

Voice Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Developing	Needs Work
Audience and Purpose	Voice is very appropriate for audience and purpose and enhances meaning.	Voice is generally appropriate for audience and purpose.	Voice is sometimes inappropriate for audience and purpose.	Voice is inappropriate for audience and purpose.
Individual Voice	Writing makes a clear connection with the reader and gives a vivid sense of individual personality behind the words.	Writing makes a connection with the reader and has some glimpses of the writer behind the words.	Writing makes little connection with the reader and is straightforward, lacking a sense of individual personality.	Writing feels distant and monotone, with no sense of an individual behind the written words.

Word Choice Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Developing	Needs Work
Word Choice	Writer has selected vivid and precise words that convey meaning. Strong, active verbs, precise nouns, and descriptive adjectives and figurative language paint pictures. Striking words and phrases often catch the reader's eye.	Writer has selected accurate, appropriate words that convey meaning clearly, if not vividly. Writer has included some precise, vivid words and phrases but has used mostly common language.	Writer has used mostly simple, grade level vocabulary that conveys meaning only on a basic level. Words are generally vague and lack precision.	Writer has used only simple repetitive language that fails to convey much meaning. Words are almost never precise and are sometimes used incorrectly, taking away from understanding.

Sentence Fluency Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Developing	Needs Work
Sentence Fluency	<p>Writing has an easy flow and a smooth, natural cadence. Sentences are well built and varied in length and structure. Writing is smooth and easy to read aloud.</p>	<p>Writing moves along clearly but is more businesslike than musical. Sentences are put together correctly but sometimes lack variation and seem to be routine. Writing is generally easy to read out loud but occasionally feels choppy or awkward.</p>	<p>Writing is somewhat choppy or disjointed. Not all sentences are formed correctly, and those that are correct are simple and choppy. Writing may contain fragments, run-ons, and other problems with sentence structure that make it challenging to read out loud at times.</p>	<p>Writing often feels too choppy or rambling and contains numerous fragments and run-on thoughts. Writing is awkward and difficult to read out loud because of problems with sentence structure and relationships.</p>

Conventions Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Developing	Needs Work
Conventions	<p>Writer shows clear mastery of conventions. Paper has few errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation, and none that interfere with comprehension.</p>	<p>Writer shows basic mastery of conventions. Paper has some errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation, but none that interfere with comprehension.</p>	<p>Writer shows only partial mastery of conventions. Paper has numerous errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation that make paper difficult to understand at times.</p>	<p>Writer has little control over conventions. Paper has many errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation that make it difficult or impossible to read.</p>

Presentation Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Developing	Needs Work
Presentation	Presentation is neat, creative, and pleasing to the eye. Writing or word processing is neat, with font sizes and styles that enhance meaning. Images, graphs, charts, maps, and tables are used, where appropriate, to enhance meaning.	Presentation is mostly neat and pleasing to the eye. Writing or word processing is basic but neat. Visuals may be used, where appropriate to enhance meaning.	Presentation is somewhat messy in places but text is readable. Writing or word processing is somewhat messy, and visuals, if used, are not always tied closely to text.	Presentation interferes with understanding of text. Writing or word processing is messy enough to interfere with understanding. Visuals are not used or are used in a way that distracts from meaning.