

APPENDIX III

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory

6+1 Trait Writing Model

The 6+1 TRAIT analytical model for assessing and teaching writing comprises six +1 key qualities that define strong writing. These are: Ideas, the heart of the message; Organization, the internal structure of the piece; Voice, the personal tone and flavor of the author's message; Word Choice, the vocabulary a writer chooses to convey meaning; Sentence Fluency, the rhythm and flow of the language; Conventions, the mechanical correctness, and Presentation, how the writing actually looks on the page.

IDEAS

The ideas are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, together with all the details that enrich and develop that theme. The ideas are strong when the message is clear, not garbled. The writer chooses details that are interesting, important, and informative—often the kinds of details the reader would not normally anticipate or predict. Successful writers do not tell readers things they already know: e.g., “It was a sunny day, and the sky was blue, the clouds were fluffy white...” They notice what others overlook, seek out the extraordinary, the unusual, the bits and pieces of life that others might not see.

ORGANIZATION

Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the pattern, so long as it fits the central idea well. Organizational structure can be based on comparison-contrast, deductive logic, point-by-point analysis, development of a central theme, chronological history of an event, or any of a dozen other identifiable patterns. When the organization is strong, the piece begins meaningfully and creates in the writer a sense of anticipation that is ultimately, systematically fulfilled. Events proceed logically: information is given to the reader in the right doses at the right times so that the reader never loses interest and never the “big picture”—the overriding sense of what the writer is driving at. Connections are strong, which is another way of saying that bridges from one idea to the next hold up. The piece closes with a sense of resolution, tying up loose ends, bringing things to closure, answering important questions while still leaving the reader something to think about.

VOICE

The voice is the writer coming through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to us and cares about the message. It is the heart and soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, he/she imparts a personal tone and flavor to the piece that is unmistakably his/hers alone. And it is that individual something—different from the mark of all other writers—that we call voice.

WORD CHOICE

Word choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. In good descriptive writing, strong word choice clarifies and expands ideas. In persuasive writing, careful word choice moves the reader to a new vision of things. Strong word choice is characterized not so much by an exceptional vocabulary that impresses the reader, but more by the skill to use everyday words well.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

Sentence Fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear—not just to the eye. How does it sound when read aloud? That’s the test. Fluent writing has cadence, power, rhythm, and movement. It is free of awkward word patterns that slow the reader’s progress. Sentences vary in length and style, and are so well crafted that reading aloud is a pleasure.

CONVENTIONS

Conventions are the mechanical correctness of the piece—spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing (indenting at the appropriate spots), use of capitals, and punctuation. Writing that is strong in conventions has usually been proofread and edited with care. Handwriting and neatness are not part of this trait. The key is this: How much work would a copy editor need to do to prepare the piece for publication?

PRESENTATION

Presentation is the way we exhibit our message on paper. Even if our ideas, words and sentences are vivid, precise, and well constructed, our paper will not be inviting to read unless the guidelines for presentation are observed. Our world is print-rich, and no one can read it all on any given topic. We pick and choose based on need and accessibility. Good writers are aware of the necessity of presentation, particularly technical writers who must include graphics to guide the reader through the text such as maps, graphs, and visual aids.

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