6+1 Trait® Definitions

The 6+1 Trait® Writing analytical model for assessing and teaching writing is made up of 6+1 key qualities that define strong writing. These are:

- **Ideas**, the main 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 main message, the content of the piece, the main theme, together with all the supporting 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 ..." Successful writers "show" readers that which is normally overlooked; writers seek out the extraordinary, the unusual, the unique, the bits and pieces of life that might otherwise be overlooked.

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**Organization**
Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the pattern and sequence, so long as it fits the central idea. 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. 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 a satisfying closure, answering important questions while still leaving the reader something to think about.

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**Voice**
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 descriptive writing, strong word choice resulting in imagery, especially sensory, show-me writing, clarifies and expands ideas. In persuasive writing, purposeful word choice moves the reader to a new vision of ideas. In all modes of writing figurative language such as metaphors, similes and analogies articulate, enhance, and enrich the content. Strong word choice is characterized not so much by an exceptional vocabulary chosen to impress 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, beginnings, structure, and style, and are so well crafted that the writer moves through the piece with ease.

Conventions
The Conventions Trait is the mechanical correctness of the piece and includes five elements: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar/usage, and paragraphing. Writing that is strong in Conventions has been proofread and edited with care. Since this trait has so many pieces to it, it's almost an analytical trait within an analytic system. As you assess a piece for convention, ask yourself: "How much work would a copy editor need to do to prepare the piece for publication?" This will keep all of the elements in conventions equally in play. Conventions is the only trait where we make specific grade level accommodations, and expectations should be based on grade level to include only those skills that have been taught. (Handwriting and neatness are not part of this trait. They belong with Presentation.)

Presentation
Presentation combines both visual and textual elements. It is the way we exhibit or present our message on paper. Even if our ideas, words, and sentences are vivid, precise, and well constructed, the writing will not be inviting to read unless the guidelines of presentation are present. Some of those guidelines include: balance of white space with visuals and text, graphics, neatness, handwriting, font selection, borders, overall appearance. Think about examples of text and visual presentation in your environment. Which signs and billboards attract your attention? Why do you reach for one CD over another? All great writers are aware of the necessity of presentation, particularly technical writers who must include graphs, maps, and visual instructions along with their text. Presentation is key to a polished piece ready for publication.
### 6-POINT WRITER'S RUBRIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDEAS</th>
<th>1 Beginning</th>
<th>2 Emerging</th>
<th>3 Developing</th>
<th>4 Capable</th>
<th>5 Experienced</th>
<th>6 Exceptional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not proficient</strong></td>
<td>No main idea, purpose, or central theme exists; reader must infer this based on sketchy or missing details</td>
<td>Main idea is still missing, though possible topic/theme is emerging</td>
<td>Main idea is present; may be broad or simplistic</td>
<td>Topic or theme is identified as main idea; development remains basic or general</td>
<td>Main idea is well-marked by detail but could benefit from additional information</td>
<td>Main idea is clear, supported, and enriched by relevant anecdotes and details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td>No topic emerges</td>
<td>Several topics emerge; any might become central theme or main idea</td>
<td>Topic becomes clear, though still too broad, lacking focus; reader must infer message</td>
<td>Topic is fairly broad, yet author's direction is clear</td>
<td>Topic is focused yet still needs additional narrowing</td>
<td>Topic is narrow, manageable, and focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td>Support for topic is not evident</td>
<td>Support for topic is limited, unclear; length is not adequate for development</td>
<td>Support for topic is incidental or confusing, not focused</td>
<td>Support for topic is starting to work; still does not quite flesh out key issues</td>
<td>Support for topic is clear and relevant except for a moment or two</td>
<td>Support is strong and credible, and uses resources that are relevant and accurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td>There are no details</td>
<td>Few details are present; piece simply restates topic and main idea or merely answers a question</td>
<td>Additional details are present but lack specificity; main idea or topic emerges but remains weak</td>
<td>Some details begin to define main idea or topic, yet are limited in number or clarity</td>
<td>Accurate, precise details support one main idea</td>
<td>Details are relevant, telling; quality details go beyond obvious and are not predictable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>Author is not writing from own knowledge/experience; ideas are not author's</td>
<td>Author generalizes about topic without personal knowledge/experience</td>
<td>Author &quot;tells&quot; based on others' experiences rather than &quot;showing&quot; by own experience</td>
<td>Author uses few examples to &quot;show&quot; own experience, yet still relies on generic experiences of others</td>
<td>Author presents new ways of thinking about topic based on personal knowledge/experience</td>
<td>Author writes from own knowledge/experience; ideas are fresh, original, and uniquely the author's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td>No reader's questions have been answered</td>
<td>Reader has many questions due to lack of specifics; it is hard to &quot;fill in the blanks&quot;</td>
<td>Reader begins to recognize focus with specifics, though questions remain</td>
<td>Reader generally understands content and has only a few questions</td>
<td>Reader's questions are usually anticipated and answered by author</td>
<td>Reader's questions are all answered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>Author doesn't help reader make any connections</td>
<td>Author does not yet connect topic with reader in any way although attempts are made</td>
<td>Author provides glimmers into topic; casual connections are made by reader</td>
<td>Author stays on topic and begins to connect reader through self, text, world, or other resources</td>
<td>Author connects reader to top with a few anecdotes, text, or other resources</td>
<td>Author helps reader make many connections by sharing significant insights into life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key question:** Does the writer stay focused and share original and fresh information or perspective on the topic?

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## 6-Point 3-12 Writer's Rubric

### Organizational Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Exceptional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td>There is no lead to set up what follows, no conclusion to wrap things up</td>
<td>The lead and/or conclusion are ineffective or do not work</td>
<td>A recognizable lead and conclusion are present; lead may not create a strong sense of anticipation; conclusion may not tie up all loose ends</td>
<td>An inviting lead draws readers in; satisfying conclusion leaves reader with sense of closure and resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td>Transitions between paragraphs are confusing or nonexistent</td>
<td>Weak transitions emerge yet offer little help to get from one paragraph to next and not often enough to eliminate confusion</td>
<td>Transitions are logical, though may lack originality; ideas are chunked in proper paragraphs and topic sentences are properly used</td>
<td>Thoughtful transitions clearly show how ideas (paragraphs) connect throughout entire piece, helping to showcase content of each paragraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td>Sequencing doesn’t work</td>
<td>Little useful sequencing is present; it’s hard to see how piece fits together as a whole</td>
<td>Sequencing shows some logic, but is not controlled enough to consistently showcase ideas</td>
<td>Sequencing is logical and effective; moves reader through piece with ease from start to finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>Pacing is not evident</td>
<td>Pacing is awkward; it slows to a crawl when reader wants to get on with it, and vice versa</td>
<td>Pacing is fairly well controlled; sometimes lingers too long but quickly or hangs up on details that do not matter</td>
<td>Pacing is well controlled; author knows when to slow down to elaborate, and when to move on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td>Title (if required) is absent</td>
<td>Title (if required) doesn’t match content</td>
<td>Uninspired title (if required) only restates prompt or topic</td>
<td>Title (if required) settles for minor idea about content rather than capturing deeper theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>Lack of structure makes it almost impossible for reader to understand purpose</td>
<td>Structure fails to fit purpose of writing, leaving reader struggling to discover purpose</td>
<td>Structure generally works well for purpose and for reader</td>
<td>Structure flows so smoothly reader hardly thinks about it; choice of structure matches and highlights purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key Question:** Does the organizational structure enhance the ideas and make the piece easier to understand?

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# 6-Point 3-12 Writer’s Rubric

## Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Beginning</strong></td>
<td><strong>5 Experienced</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Emerging</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 Exceptional</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A. Author does not interact with reader in any fashion; writing is flat resulting in a disengaged reader
- Author relies on reader’s good faith to hear or feel any voice in phrases such as “I like it” or “It was fun.”
- Author’s voice is hard to recognize, even if reader is trying desperately to “hear” it.
- Author seems sincere, yet not fully engaged or involved; result is pleasant or even personable, though topic and purpose are still not compelling.
- Author attempts to address topic, purpose, and audience in sincere and engaging way; piece still skips a beat here and there.
- Author speaks directly to reader in individual, compelling, and engaging way that delivers purpose and topic; although passionate, author is respectful of audience and purpose.

### B. Author reveals little yet doesn’t risk enough to engage reader
- Author’s voice is hard to recognize, even if reader is trying desperately to “hear” it.
- Author seems sincere, yet not fully engaged or involved; result is pleasant or even personable, though topic and purpose are still not compelling.
- Author attempts to address topic, purpose, and audience in sincere and engaging way; piece still skips a beat here and there.
- Author speaks directly to reader in individual, compelling, and engaging way that delivers purpose and topic; although passionate, author is respectful of audience and purpose.

### C. Tone is not evident
- Author does not interact with reader in any fashion; writing is flat resulting in a disengaged reader.
- Author’s voice is hard to recognize, even if reader is trying desperately to “hear” it.
- Author seems sincere, yet not fully engaged or involved; result is pleasant or even personable, though topic and purpose are still not compelling.
- Author attempts to address topic, purpose, and audience in sincere and engaging way; piece still skips a beat here and there.
- Author speaks directly to reader in individual, compelling, and engaging way that delivers purpose and topic; although passionate, author is respectful of audience and purpose.

### D. Commitment to topic is missing; writing is lifeless or mechanical; it may be overly technical, formulaic, or jargonistic
- Author does not interact with reader in any fashion; writing is flat resulting in a disengaged reader.
- Author’s voice is hard to recognize, even if reader is trying desperately to “hear” it.
- Author seems sincere, yet not fully engaged or involved; result is pleasant or even personable, though topic and purpose are still not compelling.
- Author attempts to address topic, purpose, and audience in sincere and engaging way; piece still skips a beat here and there.
- Author speaks directly to reader in individual, compelling, and engaging way that delivers purpose and topic; although passionate, author is respectful of audience and purpose.

### E. Voice is inappropriate for purpose/mode
- Author does not interact with reader in any fashion; writing is flat resulting in a disengaged reader.
- Author’s voice is hard to recognize, even if reader is trying desperately to “hear” it.
- Author seems sincere, yet not fully engaged or involved; result is pleasant or even personable, though topic and purpose are still not compelling.
- Author attempts to address topic, purpose, and audience in sincere and engaging way; piece still skips a beat here and there.
- Author speaks directly to reader in individual, compelling, and engaging way that delivers purpose and topic; although passionate, author is respectful of audience and purpose.

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**Key question:** Would you keep reading this piece if it was longer?
## 6-Point 3-12 Writer's Rubric

### Table: Word Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Beginning</td>
<td>Vocabulary is limited; author searches for words to convey meaning; no mental imagery exists</td>
<td>Vocabulary is more precise and appropriate; mental imagery emerges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Emerging</td>
<td>Vocabulary is flawed, resulting in impaired meaning; wrong words are used; and reader can't picture message or content</td>
<td>Vocabulary is powerful and engaging, creating mental imagery; words convey intended message in precise, interesting, and natural way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Developing</td>
<td>Vocabulary is understandable yet lacks energy; some interpretation is needed to understand parts of piece</td>
<td>Vocabulary is functional yet still lacks energy; author's meaning is easy to understand in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Capable</td>
<td>Vocabulary includes familiar words and phrases that communicate, yet rarely capture reader's imagination; perhaps a moment or two of sparkle or imagery emerges</td>
<td>Vocabulary is strong; it's easy to &quot;see&quot; what author says because of figurative language—similes, metaphors, and poetic devices; mental imagery lingers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Experienced</td>
<td>Words work and begin to shape unique, individual piece; message is easy to identify</td>
<td>Vocabulary is striking, powerful, and engaging; it catches reader's eye and lingers in mind; recall of handful of phrases or mental images is easy and automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Exceptional</td>
<td>In most cases words are &quot;just right&quot; and clearly communicate message</td>
<td>Words are precise and accurate; author's message is easy to understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Question:

Do the words and phrases create vivid pictures and linger in your mind?

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# 6-Point 3-12 Writer’s Rubric

## SENTENCE FLUENCY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not proficient</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Beginning</strong></td>
<td>Sentences are incorrectly structured; reader has to practice to give paper a fair interpretive reading; it’s nearly impossible to read aloud</td>
<td>Sentences have flow, rhythm, and cadence; are well built with strong, varied structure that invites expressive oral reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Emerging</strong></td>
<td>Sentences vary little; even easy sentence structures cause reader to stop and decide what is being said and how; it’s challenging to read aloud</td>
<td>Some sentences are rhythmic and flowing; a variety of sentence types are structured correctly; it flows well when read aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Developing</strong></td>
<td>Sentences are technically correct but not varied, creating sing-song pattern or fulling reader to sleep; it sounds mechanical when read aloud</td>
<td>Sentence structure flows well and moves reader fluidly through piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Capable</strong></td>
<td>Sentences are varied and hum along, tending to be pleasant or businesslike though may still be more mechanical than musical or fluid, it’s easy to read aloud</td>
<td>Sentence structure is strong; correct construction and variety is used; few examples of dialogue or fragments are used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Experienced</strong></td>
<td>Some sentences are rhythm and flowing; a variety of sentence types are structured correctly; it flows well when read aloud</td>
<td>Sentence sense is strong and contributes to meaning; dialogue, if present, sounds natural; fragments, if used, add style; sentences are nicely balanced in type, beginnings, connectives, and rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Exceptional</strong></td>
<td>Sentence structure is strong, underscoring and enhancing meaning while engaging and moving reader from beginning to end in fluid fashion</td>
<td>Varied sentence beginnings add interest and energy; four sentence types are balanced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **A** Sentence structure is choppy, incomplete, run-on, rambling, or awkward
- **B** No sentence sense—type, beginning, connective, rhythm—is evident; determining where sentences begin and end is nearly impossible
- **C** Incomplete sentences make it hard to judge quality of beginnings or identify type of sentence
- **D** Weak or no connectives create massive jumble of language; disconnected sentences leave piece chaotic
- **E** Rhythm is chaotic, not fluid; piece cannot be read aloud without author’s help, even with practice

**Key question:** Can you feel the words and phrases flow together as you read it aloud?

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# 6-Point 3-12 Writer’s Rubric

## Conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
<th>1 Beginning</th>
<th>2 Emerging</th>
<th>3 Developing</th>
<th>4 Capable</th>
<th>5 Experienced</th>
<th>6 Exceptional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Errors in conventions are the norm and repeatedly distract reader, making text unreadable</td>
<td>Many errors of various types of conventions are scattered throughout text</td>
<td>Author continues to stumble in conventions even on simple tasks and almost always on anything trickier</td>
<td>Author has reasonable control over standard conventions for grade level; conventions are sometimes handled well; at other times, errors distract and impair readability</td>
<td>Author stretches, trying more complex tasks in conventions; several mistakes still exist; for secondary students, all basic conventions have been mastered</td>
<td>Author uses standard writing conventions effectively to enhance readability; errors are few and only minor editing is needed to publish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A: Spelling errors are frequent, even on common words
- Spelling is phonetic with many errors
- Spelling is usually correct or reasonably phonetic on common grade-level words, but not on more difficult words
- Spelling is usually correct, even on more difficult words

### B: Punctuation is often missing or incorrect
- Simple end (., ?!) punctuation is correct; internal (‘: ; : . . . . .) punctuation is usually wrong or missing
- Punctuation is inconsistent
- Punctuation is correct and enhances readability in all but few places
- Punctuation is correct, creative, and guides reader through entire piece

### C: Capitalization is random, inconsistent, and sometimes nonexistent
- Only the easiest capitalization rules are correctly applied
- Capitalization is applied inconsistently except for proper nouns and sentence beginnings
- Capitalization is mostly correct
- Capitalization is thoroughly understood and consistently correct

### D: Errors in grammar/usage are frequent and noticeable, making writing incomprehensible
- Serious grammar/usage problems of every kind make comprehension difficult
- Inappropriate grammar/usage results from heavy reliance on conversational oral language; meaning is confusing
- Proper grammar/usage remains inconsistent and inaccurate though problems are not serious enough to distort meaning
- Grammar/usage is usually correct; there are few grammar mistakes yet meaning is clear
- Grammar/usage is correct and contributes to clarity and style; meaning is more than clear; piece is engaging and inviting to read

### E: Extensive editing (on virtually every line) is required to polish text for publication; reader must read once to decode, then again for meaning
- There’s still a lot of editing required for publication; meaning is uncertain
- Too much editing is still needed to publish although piece begins to communicate meaning
- Moderate editing (a little of this, a little of that) is required to publish; meaning is clear
- Several things still need editing before publishing; conventions are more correct than not; meaning is easily communicated
- Hardly any editing is needed to publish; author may successfully manipulate conventions for stylistic effect; meaning is crystal clear

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**Key question:** How much editing would have to be done to be ready to share with an outside source?

(Note: For the trait of conventions, grade level matters. Expectations should be based on grade level and include only skills that have been taught. Expectations for secondary students are obviously much higher than those of the elementary grade levels.)

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## 6-Point 3-12 Writer’s Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENTATION</th>
<th>Not proficient</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Beginning</strong></td>
<td>Presentation/formatting of piece confuses message</td>
<td>Presentation/formatting enhances understanding of message; piece appears finished and is pleasing to eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Emerging</strong></td>
<td>Presentation/formatting delivers a message clear in places and confusing in others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Developing</strong></td>
<td>Presentation/formatting of piece delivers clear message, yet lacks a finished, polished appearance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Capable</strong></td>
<td>Presentation/formatting of piece works in standard, predictable fashion, delivering a clear message that appears finished</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Experienced</strong></td>
<td>Presentation/formatting of piece works best of finished pieces; formatting extends understanding of message; finished appearance is of superior quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Exceptional</strong></td>
<td>Handwriting is neat, readable, and consistent; spacing is uniform between letters and words; text is easy to read</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **A** Handwritten letters are irregular, formed inconsistently or incorrectly; spacing is unbalanced or absent; reader can’t identify letters
- **B** Many fonts/sizes make piece nearly unreadable
- **C** No thought is given to white space—it is random and confusing; identifying beginning and ending of text is difficult
- **D** Visuals/graphics/charts are nonexistent, incomprehensible, and/or unrelated to text
- **E** No markers (title, bullets, page numbers, subheads, etc.) are present

### Key question: Is the finished piece easy to read, polished in presentation, and pleasing to the eye?

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