



# 6 Traits of Writing

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# **Description/Ideas**

- Demonstrates knowledge of the topic.
- Main idea is easily recognizable.
- Accurate and relevant supporting details

# Organization

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- Inviting introduction that draws the reader in.
- Sequencing is logical and effective.  
Details fit where they are placed.
- Choice of structure matches the purpose and audience.
- Thoughtful transitions

# Voice

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- Shows that the writer likes the topic.
- Shows that the writer wants the reader to like the topic.
- Text shows enthusiasm.
- Reader hears the voice of the writer in the text (E.g. joy, sadness etc.)

# Word Choice

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- Lively verbs add energy while specific nouns and modifiers add depth.
- Words create an image.
- Carefully chosen words help the reader see, hear, touch, taste and smell the action and events.

# **Sentence Fluency**

- Sentences vary in length as well as structure.
- Sentences relate to one another.
- The text flows. It has rhythm.
- The text is easy to read.

# Conventions

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- Spelling is generally correct, especially for commonly used words.
- Punctuation and capitalization were revised.
- Evidence that the text was read several times and corrected.
- Used the correct verb tenses (\*e.g. present, future).
- Adjectives are used correctly.

# Strategies for “Ideas”

- Stress the importance of preparing for the writing task by allowing a lot of time to pre-writing and planning activities. Competent writers spend 2/3 of their total writing time to planning.
- Brainstorming (topics and ideas)
- Ask students to think about their audience. Who are they talking to? What is the main thing they want to say? Why are they writing this piece?



# Strategies for “Ideas” (cont’ d)

- Teach students to narrow their focus to one story, one event. For example, instead of describing an entire birthday party, the writer focuses on the incident when the birthday girl’s hair caught in fire.
- Encourage students to start with themselves (their experiences and interests).
- Tell students to concentrate solely on ideas during their first draft. Conventions are very important too... but not at this moment.

# Strategies for “Ideas” (cont’ d)

- Students discuss their ideas orally with their peers and/or with the teacher during conferencing about their ideas. It helps them to develop and clarify their ideas.
- Students should have different topics to choose from.
- Use strategies such as Storyboard, Drama, and Story mapping to help build creative ideas.

# **Strategies for “organization”**

- Graphics organizers (1 per genre; Phase 2)
- Text comparisons and deconstruction (Phase 2)
- Identification of transition words during general reading activities.
- Shared writing phase allows the teacher to show how to organize a text.
- Selecting ideas from a brainstorming activity.
- Brainstorming from main ideas for supporting details.

## **Strategies for “organization”**

- Teach strategies for planning such as:
  - “STOP - Suspend judgment, Take a side, Organize ideas, Plan as you write” ,
  - “DARE, Develop a topic sentence, Add supporting ideas, Reject an argument for the other side, End with a conclusion” and...

# Strategies for “organization” (cont' d)

## Stratégie CRAFT

*C'est une stratégie développée par Strong (2006) que j'ai adaptée en français.*

- C - Contexte - Le contexte pour le scripteur. Quelles bases de connaissances utilisera-t-il/elle (des expériences personnelles aux documents de recherche)?
- R - Rôle du scripteur - Quelle position le scripteur adoptera-t-il? En d'autres mots, quel sera son intention d'écriture?
- A - Auditoire - Pour quel auditoire le scripteur écrit-il?
- F-Format - Quel est le genre de texte? Quelle est sa structure textuelle?
- T - Thème - Quel est le sujet du texte, le thème traité?

# Strategies for “Voice”

- Provide examples of bland voiceless writing, then rewrite.  
Example:

- Our neighbors have a new car. It's a nice white minivan. I wish we had one. I will get to ride to school with Timmy in it next week.

- Rewrite: Our neighbors brought home a new sparkly white-like-teeth minivan last night. It's cool. Timmy told me he'd show me how the moonroof works when I ride to school with them next week. My mom said that's just what they need. My dad said, “I wonder how much that set them back?” ([www.cyberspaces.net/6traits/strat.html](http://www.cyberspaces.net/6traits/strat.html))

# Strategies for “Voice” (cont’ d)

- Give the students a situation and ask them to write short texts with different voices. For example, how would a young shy boy tell this situation? How would a confident athlete tell this same situation?
- Show students how to integrate dialogue in their texts.

## **Strategies for “Word Choice”**

- **Word categorization:** Students need to see and work with family of words, synonyms, antonyms, thematic words, words that end with the same sounds and words that start with the same sound.
- **Commonly used words:** Find various ways to recycle words in different contexts. The teacher uses special signs or clues to indicate to students that they know these commonly used words.



## **Strategies for “Word Choice”** (cont’ d)

- Word wall: During text comparisons and reading, look for key words, beautiful and meaningful words. Post them on the wall.
- Give a song or a poem to students. Ask them to change certain words by using a synonym. How does it transform the song or the poem?
- Teach the students how to use “Dictionnaire des cooccurrences”, “thesaurus” etc.

## **Strategies for “Word Choice”** (cont' d)

- Bring certain objects to class and let students feel, smell, taste and listen to them. Then ask the students to describe their attributes. Write the students suggestions on chart paper.
- Develop with the students list of “sensory” words.
- Teach students to replace generic words by precise words. Ex. Dog - Poodle

## **Strategies for “Sentence Fluency”**

- Poetry is the easiest way to illustrate the flow and the rhythm of writings.
- For flow and rhythm, use choral reading, chants, reader’s theater.

# Strategies for “Sentence Fluency” (cont’ d)

- Sentence-combining: - More than 80 studies conducted over last 40 years demonstrated that it is an effective method for helping students produce more syntactically mature sentences (Saddler, 2007).
  - Give students a base sentence “The bird flew.” and a modifying sentence “The bird was blue.”
  - Combination: “The blue bird flew.” At the beginning, give clues to the students by underlining the word. Here it is “blue”. Put the connecting word in brackets. When students are comfortable, remove the clues.
  - Start with contrived exercises but move away as rapidly as possible for students to do in their own text.

# Strategies for “Sentence Fluency” (cont’ d)

- During a reading activity, the teacher highlights different sentence structures and makes students aware that sentences vary in length and structure.
- Ask students to deconstruct fluent sentence structures on authentic texts, so they can see the simple ideas and how they were combined.

## **Strategies for “conventions”**

- The student corrects his/her own text. The teacher can provide the students with a verification list or guide. For example, the teacher can offer suggestions like “Change at least one sentence beginning” or “Add one detail to help your reader to ‘see’ your text.” or he/she can ask questions like “Do we hear your voice?”, “Is there a main idea in your text?” or “Did you check your spelling by using the word wall?”

It is important to give a focus to the students while they correct. Try to avoid giving more than 1 to 3 things at the same time.

# Conventions (cont' d)

- The students correct a text written by someone else.
- The student reads his/her text aloud to help him/her find mistakes. Students often “hear” their mistake easier than they can “read” them.
- Base your mini-lessons on a common problem noticed in your students’ writing while conferencing.
- Develop a list of “fautes communes” with your students with mistakes such as “J’ ai a”, J’ ai mourru” and so on.

# Conventions (cont' d)

- Use a particular acronym to help your students on certain aspects. For example, in French, “Pommes”  
Ponctuation, Orthographe, Majuscules, Masculin/ féminin, Ecriture correcte et propre, Singulier/pluriel - noms, verbes, adjectifs.
- Demonstrate to you students the importance of punctuation by illustrating the different meanings that a sentence can take depending on the punctuation. Then, give different sentences to the students to punctuate.



# Conventions (cont' d)

- For example, an English professor wrote the words, “a woman without her man is nothing” on the board and directed the students to punctuate it correctly. The women wrote: “A woman: without her, man is nothing.” The men wrote: “A woman, without her man, is nothing.” ([www.cyberspaces.net/6traits/strat.html](http://www.cyberspaces.net/6traits/strat.html))
- Teach students to recognize their own spelling mistakes. For example, immersion students have difficulties with words that are similar in French and in English. They often spell them according to the English conventions: “La class” instead of “la classe”.

# Conventions (cont' d)

## Reformulation

- Ask a student for his/her draft
- Reformulate the text like a proficient writer would have wrote it. (Try not to change the student' s idea.)
- Type both texts.
- Group students in groups of 2.
- Ask them to compare the two texts and to take note of the differences. What was changed or added? Why there changes or additions were made?
- Whole class discussion. (This step is the most important. It allows the class to pool and to construct knowledge together.)
- Collect the two texts. Do not let the students keep them.
- Note: I explain to students first that I am taking a first draft that has not been revised by them. Also, I explain that what has to be improved in a particular text is what has to be improved in the other students writing. Students did not mind giving me their draft. It was anonymous, but they usually told the class themselves.

## **Strategies for “conventions” (cont’ d)**

- Teach students own to evaluate their writings using a rubric.

# General strategies

- To illustrate the good use of a particular trait, use as much as possible examples from you students' texts.
- Use picture books to illustrate a particular trait of writing.
- Similarly, when you teach any convention during a mini-lesson, try to take the examples from the students' texts and show them how to improve what they wrote.

# General strategies

- When you do a contrived activity after a mini-lesson, move as quickly as possible to the students' texts. You do not want to know if they are able to do a grammar exercise, but if they can apply their knowledge in their writing.
- Model as much as possible every skill or strategy (including social and affective): How to choose a subject, How to brainstorm, How to revise and correct and so on. It is especially important to teach the students how to give "constructive criticism" during the revision process and to set ground rules for behavior.

## **General strategies (cont' d)**

### **Independent Writing**

- In a specific place in the class, place all the tools the students will need to write (Visual dictionaries, Theme books, Adjective basket, Linguistic dictionaries and so on.)
- Also provide newspapers, postal card, notes/ messages. Lists. Scrapbooks or books as these shows students varied contexts to explore writing without corrections or publication!

## **General strategies** (cont' d)

### **Guided Writing**

- Small groups (Can be formed according to areas of particular concerns.)
- To help students improve their text.
- Each group works on a specific trait of the text.
- The teacher plays the role of a guide for the revision and the improvement of the text already written in a group.
- During that time, the other groups on other activities to improve the texts. (Ex. Find synonyms, draw images to accompany the text)

# Resources

- Calkins, L. (2006) *First Hand: Units of Study for the Teacher of Writing*. Heineman.
- Graham, S., MacArthur, C. and Fitzgerald, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Best Practices in Writing Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York.
- Spandal, V., Hicks, J. (2005) *Ma trousse d'écriture - Guide d'exploitation pédagogique*. Beauchemin
- Trehearne, M.P. (2006) *Comprehensive Literary Resource. Grades 3-6*. ETA Cuisenaire.
- Trehearne, M.P. (2004) *Teachers Resource Book. Grades 1-2*. Thompson Nelson
- [www.cyberspaces.net/6traits/strat.html](http://www.cyberspaces.net/6traits/strat.html)