

Christine Reinholt
English Faculty
Hobart High School

Writing in the content areas / 6 Traits

Writing and Thinking

“Writing is thinking on paper.” – William Zinsser, American author, editor and teacher



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Let's consider ...



- Why do we ask students to write?
- How does a written response differ from other types of assessment?

"Process" writing vs. "once and done" writing

"PROCESS" WRITING

- involves multiple drafts , lots of revision
 - Essays for argumentation, persuasion, personal narrative
 - Reports and research papers
 - Imaginative writing: poems, stories, etc.

"ONCE AND DONE" WRITING

- serves a single purpose and students don't have an opportunity for a lengthy revision process:
 - high-stakes tests like ISTEP/ECA and SAT/ACT/AP
 - Writing to learn activities, including Constructed Response (more on these later!)

Goal: stronger student writing

- If we want our students to become stronger writers, that means they need to write frequently: using “process writing” AND “once and done” writing.
- What makes “good” writing? How can we make these concepts clear for our students, in every subject area?
- In every classroom: teacher modeling, sample papers, common language to discuss writing

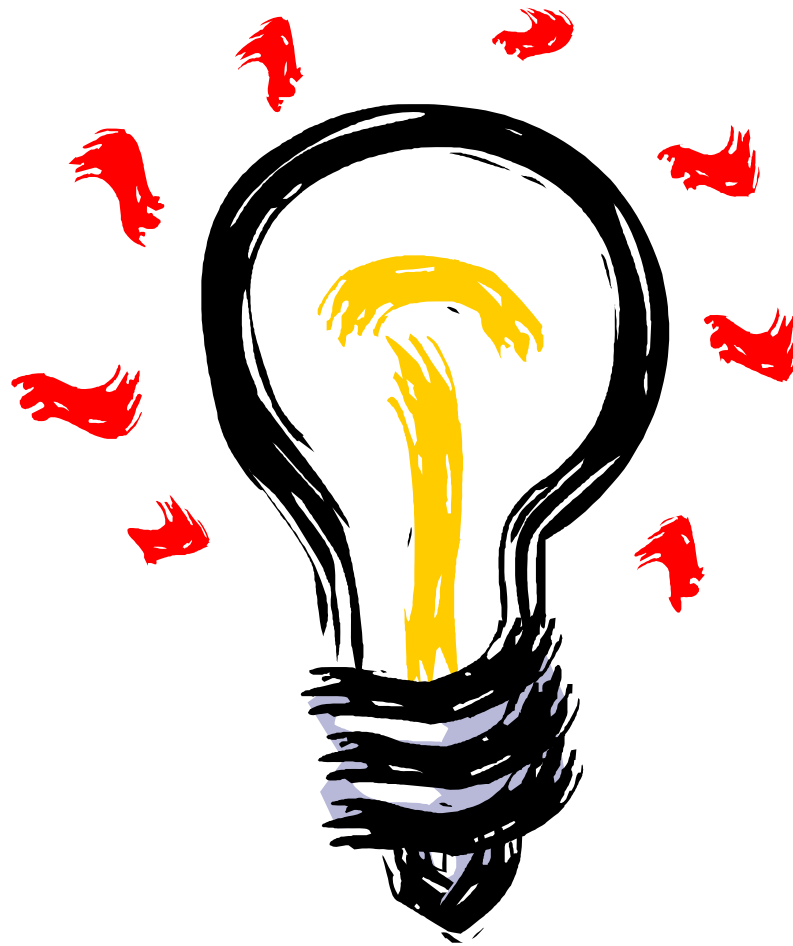
What are the 6 Writing Traits?

- Designed for teachers, by teachers in a consortium of northwestern states.
- School City of Hobart utilizes these traits from K-12, and has used them for a long time. Your students already know this common language.
- All students are expected to write frequently.
- At the secondary level, each department has a specific trait that they must grade.

6 Trait Icons...

The icons on the following slides were developed by Kristina Smekens, and adapted across our district for this year. Students will associate these icons with their given traits. Posters with these icons on them will be created for all elementary classrooms and for secondary English/ language arts classrooms.

Ideas (Content)

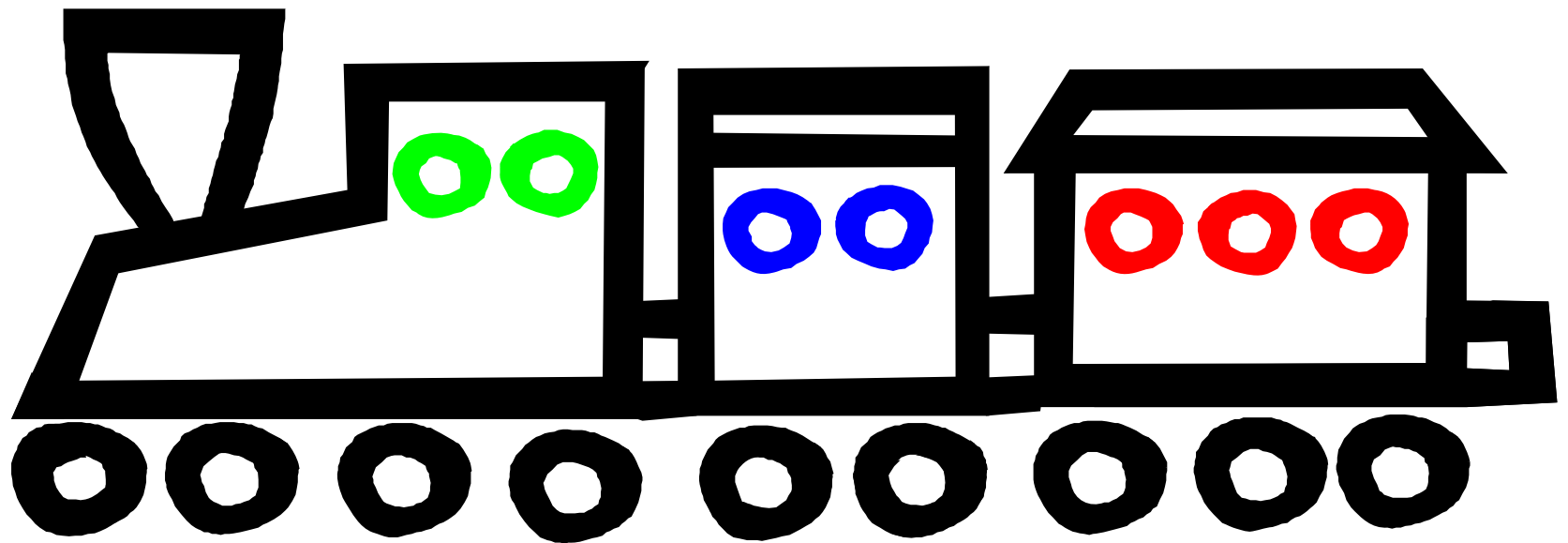


Trait 1: Ideas (Content)

the piece's details, development, focus.

- The topic is narrow and manageable.
- Clear ideas.
- Quality details support the ideas.
- Reader's questions are answered.
- Stays on topic.
- Strategies for idea generation: grocery list, fill the balloon, etc. (Smekens)

Organization

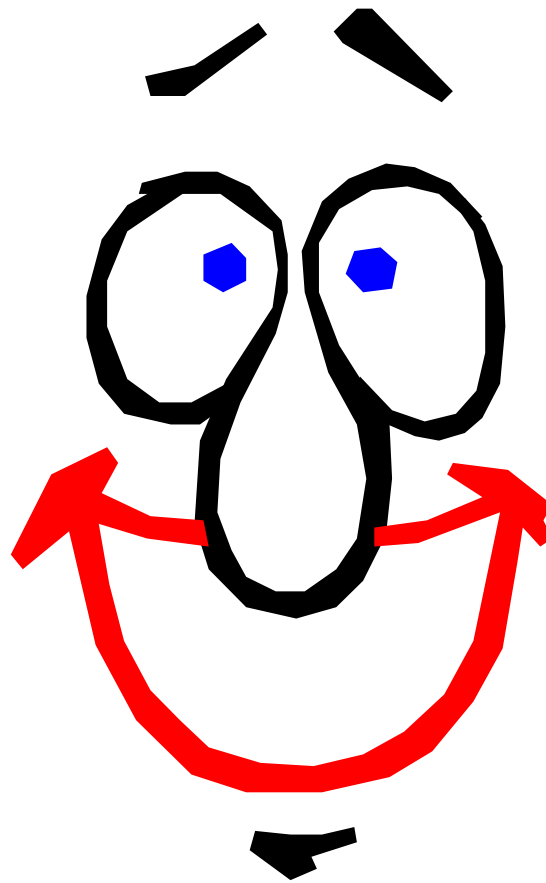


Trait 2: Organization

**internal structure, transitions, title,
introduction, body, conclusion**

- Logical sequencing
- Controlled pacing
- Details support main idea
- Transitions lead the reader through the piece
- Strategies for organization: grouping the list, dissected web, T-chart

Voice

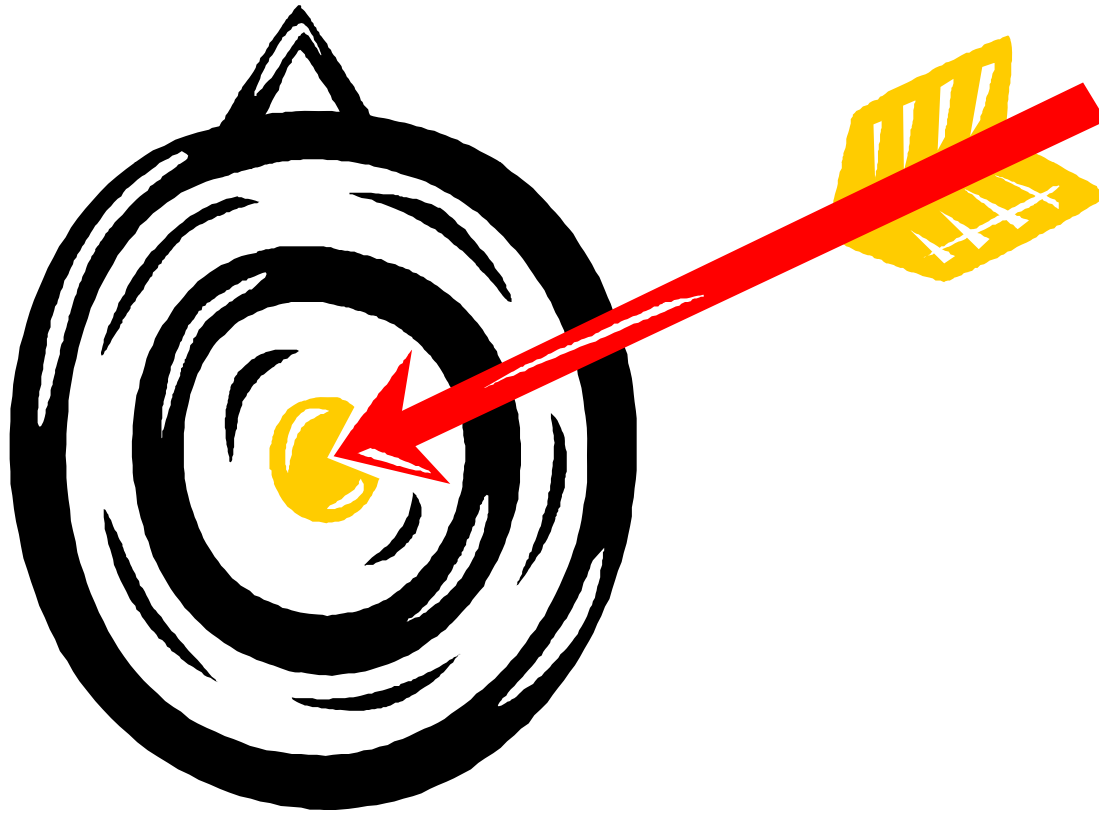


Trait 3: Voice

writer incorporates:

- tone (serious, humorous, friendly)
- style (conversational, formal, journalistic)
- purpose (persuasive, narrative, imaginative)
- audience (who is the intended reader?)
- Reader feels interaction with writer
- Some risk on the writer's part
- Writer's personality shines through

Word Choice

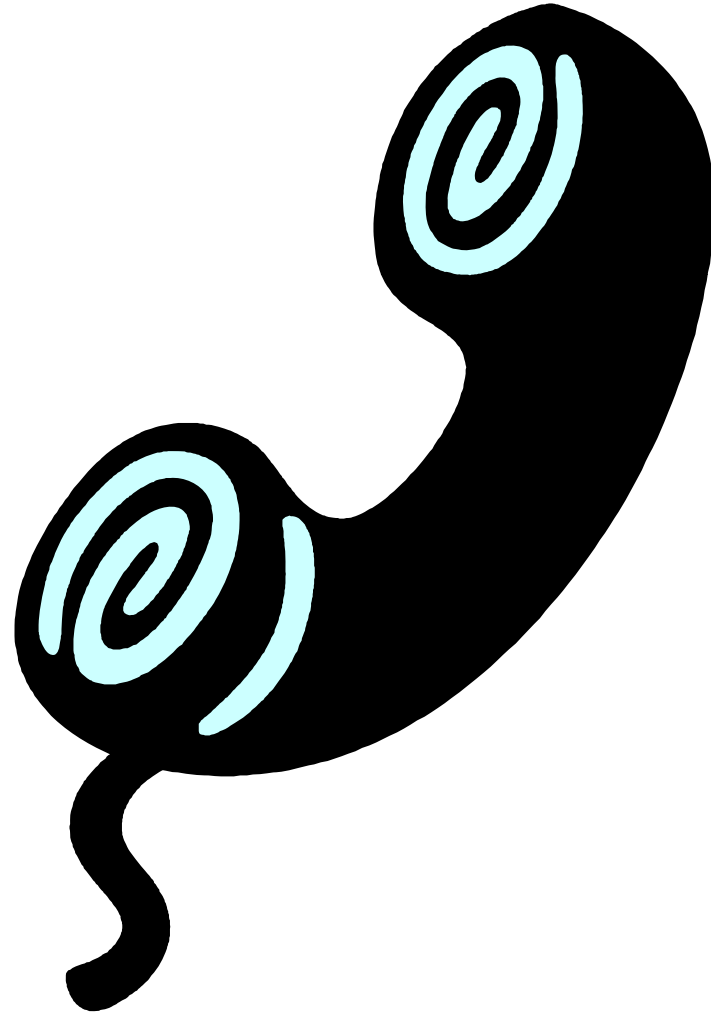


Trait 4: Word Choice

Writer uses precise language and phrasing, chooses the best word or phrase for the job.

- Words used correctly, accurately
- Action verbs, specific nouns and modifiers replace “dead” words. Which is better?
 - They ran down the street.
 - The neighborhood kids raced down Pine Street.

Sentence Fluency

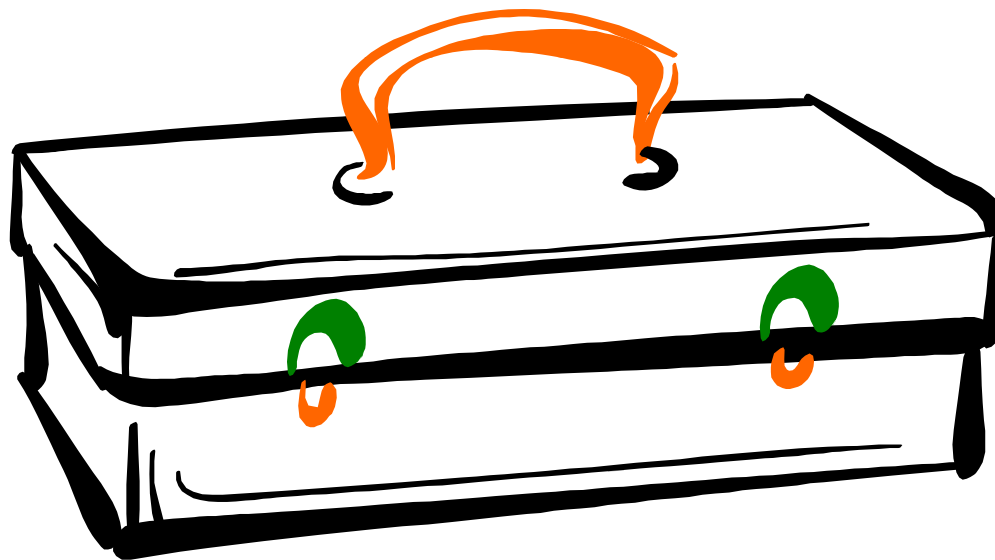


Trait 5: Sentence Fluency

Paper exhibits correctness, rhythm and cadence, transitions, control

- Correct construction
- Sentence beginnings vary
- Overall sentence structure varies to avoid repetitive, immature style.
- The real test: The piece sounds right when it is read aloud! Have students read their paper aloud!

Conventions



Trait 6: Conventions

Conventions = mechanical correctness

- Includes: spelling, grammar and usage, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraph structure . . .
- Papers that score low in this trait tend to have serious errors that interfere with the reader's understanding OR have not been carefully proofread and edited.
- Strategy: Read up/Write down. (Smekens)

6 Trait Writing Model and the Writing Process Model (Handout)

PROCESS MODEL (RECURSIVE)

- Prewriting
- Drafting/discovering
- Responding to writing
post-draft feedback and
questions
- Revising

- Editing
- Publishing

6 TRAITS MODEL

- ideas, organization
- ideas, organization, word
choice

- ideas, organization, word
choice, sentence fluency,
and voice
- Conventions
- Presentation (this is the
“+1” trait)

Before we take a break, let's write...

- Choose something you're wearing or something in your briefcase, handbag or pocket. Write an advertisement for this item that would convince someone to buy it.
- We'll write for about ten minutes, and then we'll put our papers aside and take a short break.
- We'll be using these papers later...

6 Traits Rubric Handout

- These rubrics can be used for: grading, scoring, peer revision, self-reflection
- Most teachers modify them for the individual pieces they are assessing.
- Rubrics should be developed along with students, or, at minimum, shared with them prior to their final drafts of a piece. There should be no mystery to how a piece is scored.

ISTEP Rubric vs. 6 Traits Rubric

*Handout

- Ideas and Content
- Organization
- Style (Notice ISTEP rubric combines both word choice & sentence fluency)
- Voice
- Language Conventions Rubric

Let's practice scoring a few papers

- *Handout
- It will be easier to choose one or two traits and score ONLY on the traits you've chosen.
- As you teach these traits, begin scoring only one or two, then add traits to score as the year progresses.

Let's score OUR papers!

- First, let's choose a trait or two to assess.
- Next, score your own, but don't write your score on the paper.
- Then in pairs or trios, read and score the other papers.
- Did you come to consensus? Let's discuss the process.

Writing across the curriculum...

- Why write in a “content” class?
- Not just for state exams... students write to:
 - Activate prior knowledge/connect ideas
 - Make sense of a new or challenging concept
 - Prepare for discussion or presentation
 - Process the content in a new text
 - Report new learning
 - Reinforce procedures and concepts (math/science)

Writing across the curriculum...

- Students practice thinking AND writing with these small daily pieces.
- Teachers read these small daily pieces to quickly and informally assess:
 - what students already know or need to learn
 - what they learned in class today (exit slip)
 - what they remember from yesterday's class (entrance slip or bell ringer)
 - what content needs to be reinforced
 - what skills students still need to master

Constructed Response as “writing to learn”

- After reading a teacher-selected piece of text, students are given an *open-ended* question to answer.
- Students generate their own responses to the question, based on what they have just read.
- For students, practice in constructed response builds reading, thinking and writing skills that go beyond passing state tests: they learn to “read the world.”

Constructed Response

- Informational texts are chosen by grade level or department to avoid replication of the same assignments
- Texts are chosen to complement the concepts already being studied in the content area classes
- You'll hear more about this in your building...

One Strategy: RAFT writing

- Consider RAFT writing when assessing student progress/ knowledge:
- Design a writing assignment, with choices for students, according to:
 - Role (who is writing),
 - Audience (who is reading)
 - Format (what type of writing is being done)
 - Topic (the topic/ angle you are studying).

RAFT Writing

- Let's assume your class is studying 2010 Gulf Oil spill and students have read some articles about it. Here's one writing strategy you could try with them to see how much they understood, and to let them practice those important writing skills...

RAFT sample assignment: The 2010 Gulf Oil Spill

Role	Format	Audience	Topic
An Environmental Scientist working in the Gulf	Phone Conversation	His or her boss at a major research university	The long term health of the Gulf coast
A Gulf Coast Restaurant Owner	Magazine Advertisement	Tourists/ Diners	Why you should visit us soon
Oil company CEOs	Testimony	U.S. Congress	Why we should keep drilling in the deep sea
Jon Stewart/ President Obama	Interview	The Daily Show viewers	U.S. Energy policies and goals

You try it...

- The previous example could be used in science, social studies, business or health classes.
- Considering your own content area, design a RAFT assignment for a unit you are planning now.
- Create a rubric for your assignment based on 6 trait assessment

Resources

- www.educationnorthwest.org is the source for everything 6 Traits
- www.writingfix.com/wac has some excellent ideas for designing writing assignments.
- Gallagher, Kelly. *Teaching Adolescent Writers*. Portland: Stenhouse, 2006. A great book for the whys and the hows of working with teen writers.
- Teacher resource center on SCOH website

Thank You

- Best wishes to you as you begin your work in Hobart!
- Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions:
- reinholtclass@hobart.k12.in.us