

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #61: Six Trait Writing

The Anchorage School District has been immersed with six trait writing for years. Teachers recognize that the traits of ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions are found in quality writing. We all have varying degrees of background knowledge with these traits, so I thought I could provide a refresher email with various resources attached.

Background

Looking for a general introduction to what these traits are and the history behind them? Go to the web site below. I have surfed around this site in depth and can recommend some links to read.

www.nwrel.org/assessment/department.asp?d=1

ABOUT

In the *about* section, read the FAQs and the trait myths.

SCORING

The *scoring* link provides practice in scoring, but it is based on 5-point rubrics. Anchorage moved to a 6-point rubric a few years ago. However, you can find a good blackline master of trait definitions including the newest one, presentation. If you Xerox these and distribute them randomly, you can have students form groups finding 7 members (6 + 1 traits).

Each student can read the definition and on the reverse side paraphrase it. Challenge your students to create a slogan and even a graphic to represent the trait. Each student in the group can become the expert on that trait. Mix up students one more time and have all the students in the class who randomly chose ideas, for example, to work together as a team to design a poster that teaches others about the trait. Display these trait posters all year as handy references.

TEACHING

In the *teaching* link, don't miss the getting started ideas and the lesson plan bank. There are 23 different lesson ideas for middle school grades 6-8 that address the various traits. There is also a link to prompts, which you might find useful for good writing topic ideas.

Practice

Maybe you (or your students) would like some authentic practice in assessing with the six traits? Oregon has an excellent web site that allows you to practice scoring (using a 6-point rubric) on benchmark papers at certain grades.

www.openc.k12.or.us/scoring/index.php

There are nine writing samples to score at 8th grade in various modes of writing:



narrative, expository, persuasive, and imaginative. Once you determine what you think the scores should be, you can compare it to anchor scores. In this manner, you can calibrate yourself to make sure you are accurately scoring students with the six trait rubrics.

M.O.V.I.E.S

M.O.V.I.E.S. posters have been floating around our district for a while now. Each year I reproduce more to give out to new teachers and to content area teachers who want to reinforce this in their classrooms. Here is the web site from which to download your own blackline masters for these posters:

http://readinglady.com/Six_Trait_Writing/index.html

Please note that you will have to change "conventions" to "mechanics" if you want to use M.O.V.I.E.S. as an acronym. Although a handy mnemonic device for remembering the traits, it can lead students to believe that mechanics is the most important since it is at the beginning of the acronym. Be careful to introduce the traits systematically in the following order: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. (This is how they are presented in the *Write Traits* kits referenced below.)

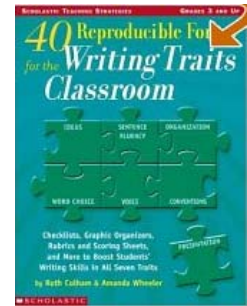
Write Traits

Language arts teachers have a classroom kit called the Write Traits, which is written by Vicki Spandel. These kits contain four sequenced lesson plans for each of the six traits including copymasters. Also in the kit are post-it notes, a couple of glossy posters, and an envelope of transparencies. Four writing samples for each trait are in the transparency

envelope. In the teacher's edition, Vicki suggests the score she would give each of those papers. Perhaps content area teachers on teams might enjoy practice scoring with the students, too.

Great Rater Checklist

If your team embraces the idea of assessing student work with the six traits, use the [Great Rater Checklist](#) to guide you. This idea comes from Ruth Culham's book, *40 Reproducible Forms for the Writing Traits Classroom* (Scholastic, 2003). If you choose to reproduce this document, be sure to purchase a copy of this book to be copyright compliant.



It is reasonably priced at \$13.99. I have this in the Literacy Lending Library for you to use, too.

Here is a link to order this resource book:

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0439556848/qid=1098722755/sr=12-1/103-4188036-9333427?v=glance&s=books

Good Models

You may need some good models of writing to use throughout the year as you introduce the various modes of writing. All LA teachers have access to a set of *Write Source 2000* handbooks. Did you know there is a support web site that Great Source provides? Check out:

www.thewritesource.com

Start by looking at the 22 student models from the link, *Write On*. If you need



models at a lower level or higher level, those can be referenced, too.

You will especially like the multimedia presentation models. Do you find it hard to get students to build effective Power Points without overdoing the graphics, the transitions, and the text? There is a Power Point on hurricanes and an interactive report on Ginga, a seventeenth-century African ruler. (Be aware that the references back to the *Write Source* text are for the newest copyright, which we do not have in our classrooms. We have the *Write Source 2000* handbook; the newest copyright is just called the *Write Source*. There is a separate text for 6th, 7th, and 8th unlike the handbooks we currently have.) You will find an additional print chapter on multimedia computer reports for the *Write Source 2000* handbook; however, the multimedia presentation and the interactive report examples both use Hyperstudio.

Electronic Bibliography

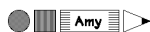
Finally, here is an [electronic bibliography that has Internet links](#) to some excellent materials that support the six traits of writing. All of the books referenced are in our Literacy Lending Library. Let me know if you would like to borrow any of them.



Great Rater Checklist for Students

When scoring papers, whether a sample paper or your own, it is important to watch for things that may cause you to score unfairly. Make sure that you have done your best by reviewing the following list and checking off each item after you have scored the paper.

	<p>Positive – Negative Factor I chose not to be too hard and not to be too easy on the writer. I have been objective.</p>
	<p>Appearance I did not score this paper high because it was neat or low because it was messy. I scored it for the content of the writing.</p>
	<p>Length of Writing I know that longer is not always better, so I scored this writing for a length that is right for the topic.</p>
	<p>Best Scoring Possible I gave this writing my full attention. I was alert and ready to do my best scoring job.</p>
	<p>Topics Even though I may not like this topic, I scored it based on the quality of the writing and not on how I felt about the subject matter.</p>
	<p>Skimming I read the entire piece and scored it for the total work, not just for a few sentences.</p>
	<p>My Reading Skills When scoring this piece, I made sure that the writing told me everything to complete the puzzle, and I did not fill in the missing pieces myself while reading.</p>
	<p>Sympathy Scoring I made a point to score the piece for the writing, and not for the emotions it generated.</p>



Six Trait Electronic Bibliography

Compiled by Amy Goodman and Mardell Kiesel

Spandel, Vicki

Creating Writers Through 6-Trait Writing Assessment and Instruction

Addison Wesley Longman, 2001

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0801332524/ref=pd_sim_books_2/103-9911786-7691057?v=glance&s=books

Spandel, Vicki

Books, Lessons, Ideas for Teaching the Six Traits (elementary and middle grades)

Great Source, 2001

http://www.greatsource.com/default.sph/ProductCatalogStub.class/com.hmco.ecommerce.product.catalog.ProductCatalogController?cmd=Browse&subcmd=LoadDetail&division=G01&level1Code=09&level2Code=090&level3Code=041&sortProductsBy=SEQ_TITLE

Spandel, Vicki

Books, Lessons, Ideas for Teaching the Six Traits (middle and high school)

Great Source, 2001

(See web site above)

Culham, Ruth

6 + 1 Traits of Writing

Scholastic, 2003

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0439280389/qid=1097888873/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/103-9911786-7691057?v=glance&s=books

Culham, Ruth

40 Reproducible Forms for the Writing Traits Classroom

Scholastic, 2003

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0439556848/ref=pd_bxgy_img_2/103-9911786-7691057?v=glance&s=books

Culham, Ruth

Picture Books

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 1998

<http://www.nwrel.org/comm/catalog/detail.asp?RID=15533>

(It seems as if the latest edition is no longer by Ruth Culham.)

Web Sites of Interest:

<http://www.openc.k12.or.us/scoring/index.php>

O.P. E.N (Oregon Public Education Network) provides practice scoring on 8th grade Benchmark papers and offers additional information on the six traits.

<http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/about.asp?odelay=1&d=1>

Northwest Regional Laboratory has excellent background information and other links to six trait information. Currently they use a 5-point rubric unlike Anchorage that is using a 6-point rubric.

<http://www.pesd.org/technology/writeprocess/>

In this online self-tutorial, Conn McQuinn from Puget Sound ESD in Burien, Washington guides teachers and students alike through the Writing Process with analogy of creating a "Magnifique" pizza. Included with the information is an informative online streaming video presentation for each of the writing processes. There are additional links providing information about the Six-Trait writing.

<http://ccweb.norshore.wednet.edu/writingcorner/writingprocess.html>

To help students become better writers we need to help them internalize the processes that bring about quality written communication. This site articulates the writing process - Six Trait Writing and the First Steps Frameworks. Includes an overview of the writing process, modes and forms of writing, including mode-specific writing prompts and six-trait scoring guides. All of these pages are downloadable in either ClarisWorks or Word.

<http://www.olympus.net/personal/skoehler/6trait/>

Includes descriptors for all grade levels for each trait with downloadable lesson plans from Sunny Sequim.

<http://www.fno.org/sept98/infolit5.html>

This is a professional development module created by Jamie McKenzie. Questions to ask about the Six Traits in student language are posed.

<http://senior.billings.k12.mt.us/6traits/index.htm>

Includes trait explanations/descriptors, rubrics for scoring examples. Exercises provided here will give students and teachers a chance to read sample writings, rate them, and compare their ratings with those of others. (Billings, Montana)

<http://www.kent.k12.wa.us/staff/LindaJancola/6Trait/6-trait.html>

Web site from Kent, Washington, which includes useful symbols for each of the six traits and lesson plan ideas.