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# **A Parent's Guide to Writing**



**Central Kitsap School District**

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The content of this booklet has been adapted from work by the  
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory,  
the Issaquah School District, and  
the Auburn School District  
in September 1999.

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# 1

## ***District/State Essential Learnings***

### ***Washington State Essential Academic Learnings***

The student . . .

- ❖ writes clearly and effectively
- ❖ writes in a variety of forms for different audiences and purposes
- ❖ understands and uses the steps in the writing process
- ❖ analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of written work

### ***CKSD Grade-Level Essential Learnings for Writing***

#### **Kindergarten**

##### **Writing** ✍

- Draws pictures to communicate ideas
- Dictates a story/idea in sequence
- Writes letters and word strings
- Writes own name and a few words
- Dictates ideas, tells a story, narrates an event, describes drawings
- Generates ideas through experience (e.g., observing, listening, touching, tasting, smelling)
- Uses letter strings to depict meaning
- Edits for upper and lower case letters in a name
- Identifies changes in drawing and writing over time, with teacher help
- Listens to feedback of others

##### **Capitalization and Punctuation**

- Uses upper and lower case letters correctly in own name
- Explores the use of periods and question marks

## **Handwriting**

- Forms upper and lower case letters
- Writes from left to right
- Holds pencil correctly

## **First Grade**

### **Writing**

- Writes two or more sentences that focus on a topic
- Uses drawings that show attention to detail
- Writes to tell a story, to narrate an event, to give information, and to describe something
- Orally identifies beginning, middle, and end of a familiar story
- Develops connected ideas with words and pictures
- Contributes descriptive words to group writing
- Writes complete sentences
- Draws, makes lists, responds to stories, and brainstorms to generate ideas and questions
- Gets ideas on paper by using drawing, conventional spelling, and invented spelling
- Develops a bank of correctly spelled words
- Edits for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization explicitly taught
- Identifies own growth in writing over time, with teacher help
- Listens to the feedback of others

### **Capitalization, Punctuation, and Grammar**

- Capitalizes first letter of months, days, holidays, familiar names, first letter of first word in a sentence, and the pronoun "I"
- Uses periods, question marks, and exclamation marks

### **Spelling**

- Uses knowledge of phonics to spell words
- Spells sight words correctly

### **Handwriting**

- Holds a pencil correctly
- Writes upper and lower case manuscript letters correctly
- Prints legibly
- Spaces appropriately between words
- Writes on lined paper

## **Second Grade**

### **Writing**

- Writes a four-sentence paragraph that focuses on one topic
- Elaborates in writing on main point or story with useful or interesting details
- Uses beginning, middle, and end to organize own writing
- Sequences ideas and details in own writing to make sense
- Uses descriptive words and phrases in own writing to create images
- Writes complete sentences
- Writes to tell a story, to narrate an event, to describe something, to explain, to give information, and to express original ideas
- Generates own writing ideas (e.g., draws, makes lists, brainstorms, webs, clusters)
- Gets ideas on paper by using drawing, invented spelling, and conventional spelling

- Re-reads and adds missing information to revise
- Edits own writing for conventions explicitly taught
- Identifies strengths in own writing and sets goals for improvement, with teacher help
- Listens to feedback from teacher or peers and selects suggestions to use

### **Capitalization, Punctuation, and Grammar**

- Capitalizes beginning of sentences and proper nouns
- Uses end punctuation (!?), commas in a series, and apostrophes in contractions
- Recognizes nouns, adjectives, and action verbs

### **Spelling**

- Uses knowledge of spelling rules and phonics to spell words correctly

### **Handwriting**

- Prints legibly
- Spaces between words

## **Third Grade**

### **Writing**

- Writes a complete paragraph
- Includes relevant details that support the main idea and topic
- Organizes text with a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Uses transitional words and phrases (e.g., next, then, so, but, while) to connect ideas
- Organizes ideas into paragraphs with related details
- Uses similes and metaphors in writing
- Uses a variety of sentence lengths and types
- Writes in complete sentences
- Writes to gather information, to present information, to describe, and to write both personal and fictional narratives
- Cites sources when writing reports
- Organizes and plans writing (e.g., outlines, webbing, story mapping)
- Revises to clarify meaning, improve organization, and elaborate on ideas based on feedback from others and self-evaluation
- Edits own and others' writing for conventions explicitly taught
- Analyzes own writing for strengths and areas to improve
- Accepts feedback and selects suggestions to use

### **Capitalization, Punctuation, and Grammar**

- Uses correct capitalization in proper nouns in book titles, friendly letters, simple quotations, titles, initials, and abbreviations
- Uses correct punctuation in friendly letters, simple quotations, and contractions
- Uses commas in a series
- Identifies simple subject and predicate
- Forms plural nouns correctly
- Uses subject, object, and personal pronouns correctly
- Uses correct subject/verb agreement in simple and compound sentences
- Uses comparative and superlative forms of adjectives correctly
- Indicates paragraphs consistently by indenting or double spacing

### **Spelling**

- Uses a dictionary and spell checker
- Uses a study method to learn and retain spelling of new words

- Uses spelling strategies and rules to spell words correctly

## **Handwriting**

- Uses correct letter formation in manuscript writing
- Uses correct letter formation in cursive writing
- Produces legible text in manuscript and cursive

## **Fourth Grade**

### **Writing** ✍️

- Maintains focus on topic in multiple paragraphs
- Includes relevant details that support the main idea and topic
- Organizes text with a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Uses a variety of transitional words and phrases (next, then, so, but, after that, etc.)  
to construct ideas
- Organizes ideas into paragraphs with related details
- Uses similes, metaphors, and personification in writing
- Varies sentence length and complexity to support meaning
- Writes complete sentences
- Writes to gather information, to present information, to describe, to write both personal and fictional narratives, and to persuade
- Organizes and plans writing (e.g., outlines, webbing, story mapping)
- Revises to clarify meaning, improve organization, and elaborate on ideas based on feedback from others and self-evaluation
- Edits own and others' writing for conventions explicitly taught
- Analyzes own writing for growth, strengths, and areas to improve
- Accepts feedback and selects suggestions to use

### **Capitalization, Punctuation, and Grammar**

- Uses correct capitalization and punctuation in titles, friendly and business letters, simple quotations, initials, and abbreviations
- Uses apostrophes in contractions and possessives correctly
- Uses subject, object, and personal pronouns correctly
- Uses correct subject/verb agreement in simple and compound sentences
- Uses comparative and superlative forms of adjectives correctly
- Identifies simple subject and predicate
- Forms plural nouns correctly
- Indicates paragraphs consistently by indenting or double spacing

### **Spelling**

- Uses a dictionary and spell checker
- Uses a study method to learn and retain spelling of new words
- Uses multiple spelling strategies and rules to spell words correctly

### **Handwriting**

- Uses correct letter formation in manuscript and cursive writing
- Produces legible text in manuscript and cursive

## **Fifth Grade**

### **Writing** ✍️

- Maintains focus on topic in multiple paragraphs
- Supports and develops central idea with details that are interesting, important, and informative

- Writes and sequences paragraphs with transitions to organize ideas
- Develops a focus and central idea in paragraph and multiple paragraph forms
- Uses similes, metaphors, personification, and alliteration to convey meaning
- Varies sentence beginnings, structures, and lengths to support meaning
- Combines simple sentences into compound sentences
- Writes to gather information, to present information, to describe, to write both personal and fictional narratives, and to persuade
- Writes in response to what is read, viewed, and discussed to explain ideas and concepts, to question, and to discover new ideas
- Uses a variety of strategies (e.g., brainstorming, mapping, talking) as preparation for writing
- Forms questions to direct research
- Gathers information from a variety of sources
- Arranges ideas, words, and sentences deliberately to clarify meaning
- Edits own and others' writing for conventions explicitly taught
- Uses criteria to analyze own writing for strengths and weaknesses
- Accepts and uses feedback when appropriate

### **Capitalization, Punctuation, and Grammar**

- Uses writing conventions correctly: capitalization, commas, quotation marks apostrophes in contractions and possessives
- Uses correct subject/verb agreement; correct subject, object, and personal pronouns
- Uses regular and irregular verb correctly
- Uses comparative and superlative forms of adjectives correctly
- Organizes text with consistent margins and title
- Indicates paragraphs consistently by indenting or double spacing

### **Spelling**

- Uses a study method to learn and retain spelling of new words
- Uses multiple spelling strategies and rules to spell words
- Learns the correct spelling of frequently misspelled words

### **Handwriting**

- Produces legible text in manuscript and cursive forms

## **Sixth Grade**

### **Writing** ✍️

- Maintains focus on topic in multiple paragraphs
- Supports and develops central ideas with details that are interesting, important, and informative
- Writes and sequences paragraphs with effective transitions to organize text
- Develops a focus and central ideas in paragraph and multiple paragraph form
- Uses similes, metaphors, personification, and alliteration to convey meaning
- Combines simple sentences into compound and complex sentences
- Writes to gather information, to present information, to describe, to write both personal and fictional narratives, and to persuade
- Writes in response to what is read, viewed, and discussed to explain ideas and concepts, to question, and to discover new ideas
- Independently uses a variety of strategies (e.g., brainstorming, mapping, talking) as preparation for writing
- Forms questions to direct research

- Gathers information from a variety of sources
- Arranges words, sentences, and graphics deliberately to clarify meaning
- Edits own and others' writing for conventions explicitly taught
- Uses criteria to analyze own writing for strengths and weaknesses
- Accepts and uses feedback when appropriate

### **Capitalization, Punctuation, and Grammar**

- Uses writing conventions correctly: capitalization, commas, quotation marks, and apostrophes in contractions and possessives
- Uses correct subject/verb agreement in simple and compound sentences
- Uses comparative and superlative forms of adjectives correctly
- Uses correct subject, object, and personal pronouns
- Uses tenses of regular and irregular verbs correctly
- Organizes text with title page, table of contents, subtitles
- Indicates paragraphs consistently by indenting or double spacing

### **Spelling**

- Uses a study method to learn and retain spelling of new words
- Uses multiple strategies and rules to spell correctly
- Learns correct spelling of frequently misspelled words
- Produces final drafts free from spelling errors

### **Handwriting**

- Writes legibly

# 2

## ***Why Do We Write?***

The Central Kitsap School District believes that becoming an effective writer is essential for students' academic and personal well-being. Teaching writing is important, and the District is committed to helping writing teachers do their jobs better, more efficiently, and with greater joy. In addition, the District supports and encourages parents to assist in that effort. The publication of this brochure is one small step in that direction.

The Central Kitsap School District has a responsibility to prepare students to communicate effectively in their daily lives. Effective communication, both at home and at work, demands a variety of writing. The forms of writing most commonly taught and used include the following:

***Narrative*** writing recounts a personal experience or tells a fictional story. All details work together to create a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end.

***Descriptive*** writing creates a vivid impression in the reader's mind. This enables the reader to feel part of the writer's experience.

***Persuasive*** writing attempts to convince readers to change their thinking or actions. A second objective is to convince readers to expand their thinking - to see the logic in another point of view, even though they continue to hold their own.

***Informational*** writing tells the reader something new, in language the reader can understand. Effective informational writing is well-structured. The information included has been selected with the reader's needs in mind. ***Expository*** writing gives information, explains, clarifies, or defines. It amplifies the reader's understanding through a carefully crafted mix of key points and supporting details. ***Technical*** writing is used in research papers, computer manuals, reference manuals, reference books, brochures, and many other formats.

***Business*** writing presents information in an organized and efficient manner. Formats include memos, letters, reports, tables, charts, and e-mail.



# 3

## The Writing Process

<i>Writing is . . .</i>	<b>1</b> <i>Prewriting - Idea Generating</i>	<b>2</b> <i>Drafting - Getting It Down On Paper</i>
<p>Writing is a process, usually defined as a series of <u>five</u> steps. Writers move around in the writing process freely, back and forth among the steps as needed. It is not necessary for writers to go through every step, nor is it necessary for teachers to grade every phase of student work. It is our goal for students to internalize and use this process.</p>	<p>Some possibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Think</li><li>▪ Observe</li><li>▪ Brainstorm</li><li>▪ Research – gather evidence</li><li>▪ Select topic</li><li>▪ Select audience</li><li>▪ Consider purpose</li><li>▪ Talk and write</li><li>▪ Take notes</li><li>▪ Outline</li><li>▪ Select form<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• book</li><li>• letter</li><li>• news article</li><li>• report</li><li>• other</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Fast-write</li><li>▪ Focus on content, not mechanics</li><li>▪ Use invented spelling when needed</li><li>▪ Double space</li><li>▪ One side only</li><li>▪ Need not erase</li><li>▪ Date rough copies</li><li>▪ Use for conferences</li><li>▪ Save everything</li></ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Revising - Re-thinking, Re-seeing</i></b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>4</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Editing - Cleaning Up</i></b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>5</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Publishing - Presenting</i></b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read aloud</li> <li>▪ Seek response from:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self</li> <li>• teacher</li> <li>• peers</li> <li>• parent</li> <li>• other adult</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Focus on content: check for important details, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, varied sentence patterns</li> <li>▪ Add, delete, change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on mechanical correctness:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• capitalization</li> <li>• grammar</li> <li>• punctuation</li> <li>• spelling</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Use standard proof-reading marks with:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self</li> <li>• peers</li> <li>• adult</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Clarity, appropriateness to audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Final draft:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• polish and recopy</li> <li>• format, appearance, legibility</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Share finished writing with an appropriate audience:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• peers</li> <li>• family</li> <li>• community</li> <li>• school staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Publish writing in appropriate form:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• newspaper</li> <li>• letter</li> <li>• class book</li> <li>• other</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Get feedback and reflect on quality</li> </ul>

# 4

## ***The Six Traits of Effective Writing***

*No one invented the six traits. They are an inherent part of what makes writing work, and they have been around virtually as long as writing itself. What teachers and writers have invented is a language for describing the qualities that most other teachers, writers, and readers think are important in good writing.*

Vicki Spandel and Richard J. Stiggins  
*Creating Writers*, Second Edition, 1997

In the 1994-95 school year, the District adopted the six-trait writing model for both teaching and assessing student writing. A District Direct Writing Assessment was also established at grade levels 3, 5, and 9. The results generated from the assessment provide information that is useful for students, teachers, and parents about how well students can apply what they know about writing.

The model is also very useful in helping students learn to assess and improve the quality of their own work. Six-trait writing model matches the Washington State Essential Academic Learnings for writing. However, a two-trait model is used by the state to assess student writing at the fourth, seventh, and tenth grade levels. The two-trait model is more useful in conducting these large scale assessments, but it does incorporate all the elements of the six-trait model.

### **Ideas and Content**

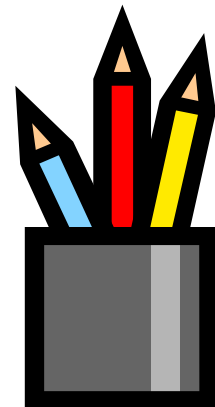
- Does it make sense?
- Sounds like writer knows topic well.
- Details, details, details!

### **Organization**

- Inviting beginning and satisfying ending.
- Order makes sense.
- Fun to predict, but some surprises, too!

### **Voice**

- Sounds like the person who wrote it.
- Personality, pizzazz!
- Makes the reader feel something  
... shocked, involved, energized.



### **Word Choice**

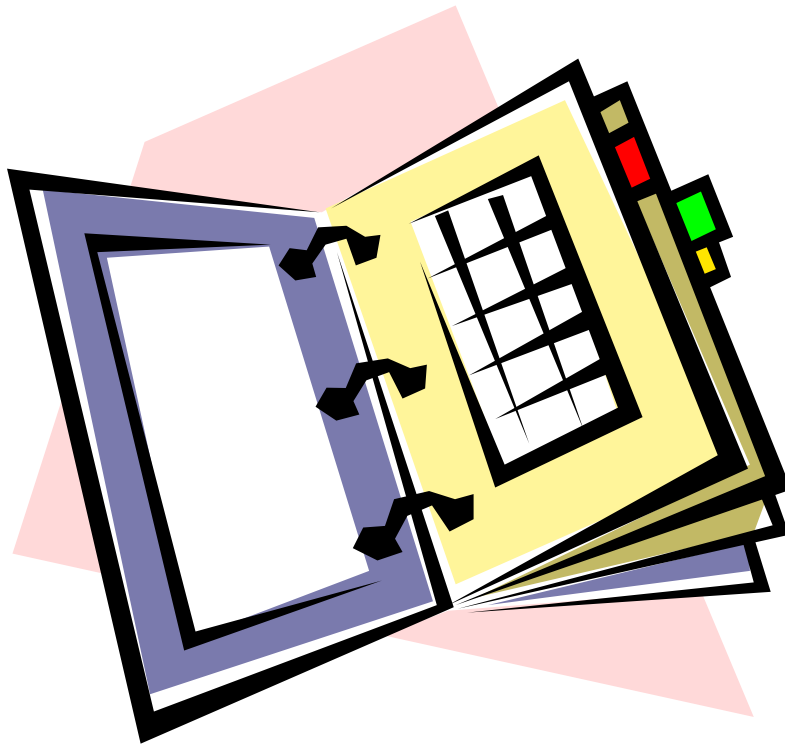
- Using words correctly.
- Vivid images.
- Minimal redundancy

### **Fluency**

- Varied, purposeful sentence beginnings.
- Short and long sentences.
- Rhythm and flow.

### **Conventions**

- Capitals, punctuation, spelling, and grammar used correctly.
- Looks clean, edited, polished.



## ***Ideas and Content***

*Clear thinking will produce clear writing.*

Donald Murray

The first of the six basic writing traits is ***ideas and content***. A paper with good ideas and content is clear and focused. It holds the reader's attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme or story line. This trait includes:

- Clarity/focus
- Detail
- Original thinking
- Attention to what is interesting and important

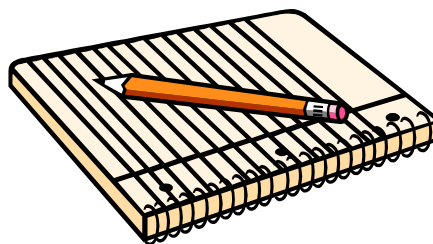
Ideas are the heart of the message of the writing; it's what you have to say. It is the reason you are writing. To write well, it is important for you to really know about your subject, either because it is connected with your own experience or because you have thoroughly researched the topic.

Some questions parents can suggest their child ask to direct attention to ideas and content are:

- Is my message clear?
- Do I know enough about my topic?
- Did I try hard to make it interesting?

One of the best ways to understand the meaning of this trait is to look at the scoring guide for ideas and content on the next page. The column on the right, labeled 5, describes the characteristics of a paper with strong control of ideas and content. The

column on the left, labeled 1, describes aspects of a paper written by a person who has not yet learned to write clearly. The column labeled 3 describes a paper that is "half way there," reflecting a balance of strengths and weaknesses.



## ***Scoring Guide for Ideas and Content***

<b>1 Just Beginning</b>	<b>3 Not There Yet</b>	<b>5 Exactly What I Intended</b>
Just beginning to figure out what I want to say.	Some really good parts, some not there yet.	Focused, clear, and specific.
When someone else reads my paper, it will be hard for them to understand what I mean or what it is all about.	The reader usually knows what I mean. Some parts will be better when I tell just a little more about what is important.	My writing is full of the kinds of details that keep the reader's attention and show what is really important about my topic.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I haven't shared much information. I guess I don't know enough yet about this topic to write about it.</li> <li>▪ My details are so vague it is hard to picture anything.</li> <li>▪ I'm still thinking aloud on paper. I'm looking for a good idea.</li> <li>▪ Maybe I'll write about this, but then, maybe I'll write about that . . .</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some of the things I say are new, but other things everybody knows already.</li> <li>▪ Some details I have used are pretty general like: "Her hat was nice," or "It was a sunny day."</li> <li>▪ I think my topic might be too big and I got bogged down trying to tell a little about a lot instead of a lot about a little.</li> <li>▪ Sometimes I was very clear about what I meant, but at other times, it was still fuzzy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I know a lot about this topic, and when someone else reads it, they'll find out some new or little-known information.</li> <li>▪ I made sure to show what was happening ("The wildly spiraling tornado aimed straight for our barn.") rather than telling what happened ("It was scary.").</li> <li>▪ I filled my paper with interesting tidbits that make reading it fun and lively.</li> <li>▪ I made sure my topic was small enough to handle. "All About Baseball" was too big - I changed it to "How to Steal a Base."</li> <li>▪ I could easily answer the question, "What is the point of this paper or story?"</li> </ul>

## **Organization**

*Organization is the hardest trait.*

K-12 Student Writers Across America

It is **organization** that gives direction to your writing. It is the internal structure of your piece; it provides the backbone to which all the parts are connected. The organization enhances and showcases the central theme or story line. The order, structure, or presentation of information is compelling and moves the reader through the text. Organization includes:

- A captivating lead
- Logical sequencing
- A sense of resolution
- Internal structure
- Strong transitions
- Helping the reader move the ideas in a purposeful way

Some questions parents can suggest their child ask to direct attention to organization are:

- Does my paper have a good beginning?
- Did I tell things in the best order?
- Does my paper have a good ending?



As a writer, you should help your writing carefully build toward the most important point or idea. Take care to link all your details into the total organization of your piece.

In the scoring guide on the next page you can see descriptions of organization. Where does your writing fit?

## ***Scoring Guide for Organization***

<b>1 Just Beginning</b>	<b>3 Not There Yet</b>	<b>5 Exactly What I Intended</b>
I'm not comfortable sharing what I truly think and feel yet.	What I truly think and feel only shows up sometimes.	Clear and compelling direction.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There isn't really a beginning or end to my paper. It just "takes off."</li> <li>▪ I'm confused about how the details fit with the main idea or story.</li> <li>▪ My ideas seem scrambled, jumbled, and disconnected. It's confusing.</li> <li>▪ Conclusion? Oops, I forgot.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I have a beginning, but it really doesn't grab you or give clues about what is coming.</li> <li>▪ Sometimes it is not clear how the details I have used connect to the main idea or story.</li> <li>▪ Some of my details are in the right spot, but some should come earlier or later.</li> <li>▪ I've lingered too long in some places, and sped through others.</li> <li>▪ I have a conclusion, it just isn't the way I want it yet. I may have gone on too long or just tried to sum it up in a ho hum way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ My beginning gets the reader's attention and gives clues about what is coming.</li> <li>▪ Every detail adds a little more to the main idea or story.</li> <li>▪ All my details are in the right place; everything fits like a puzzle.</li> <li>▪ I ended at a good spot and didn't drag on too long. I left my reader with something to think about.</li> </ul>

*I look back and forth and see potential endings and titles and leads. I'm looking for a trail through the material I have . .*

Donald Murray

## **Voice**

*Voice separates writing that is read from writing that is not read.  
Voice is the writer revealed.*

Donald Murray

It is through your **voice** that the reader understands who you are and what you care about. It is what gives your writing personality, flavor, and style. In a paper with good voice the writer speaks directly to the reader in a way that is individualistic, expressive, and engaging. Clearly, the writer is involved in the text, is sensitive to the needs of an audience, and is writing to be read. Voice includes:

- Liveliness
- Passion
- Energy
- Awareness of audience
- Involvement in the topic
- A capacity to elicit a strong response in the reader

Some questions parents can suggest their child ask to direct attention to voice are:

- Does this writing sound like me?
- Did I say what I think and feel?

To help develop voice in your writing, think about your reader as you write. Your writing will show your sense of connection to the reader, your honesty, and your courage to say what you truly think and feel.



## ***Scoring Guide for Voice***

<b>1 Just Beginning</b>	<b>3 Not There Yet</b>	<b>5 Exactly What I Intended.</b>
Not yet me.	Individuality fades in and out.	Really individual and powerful
I'm not comfortable sharing what I truly think and feel yet.	What I truly think and feel only shows up sometimes.	My paper has lots of personality. It sounds different from the way anyone else writes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If you didn't already know, it might be hard to tell you wrote this paper; you can't really hear my voice in there yet.</li> <li>▪ I'm not comfortable taking a risk by telling you what I really think – I've taken the safe route by hiding my true feelings.</li> <li>▪ My paper is all telling and no showing at all.</li> <li>▪ I've held myself back by using general statements like, "It was fun," "She was nice," I like him a lot."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Although readers will understand what I mean, it won't make them feel like laughing, crying, or pounding on the table.</li> <li>▪ My writing is right on the edge of being funny, excited, scary, or downright honest - but it's not there yet.</li> <li>▪ My personality pokes through here and there, but then gets covered up again.</li> <li>▪ My writing is pleasant, but a little cautious.</li> <li>▪ I've done a lot of telling and not enough showing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I have put my personal stamp on this paper; it's really me!</li> <li>▪ Readers can tell I am talking right to them.</li> <li>▪ I write with confidence and sincerity.</li> <li>▪ My paper is full of feelings and my reader will feel what I feel.</li> <li>▪ I'm not afraid to say what I really think.</li> <li>▪ You can tell that I wrote this. No one else sounds like this!</li> </ul>

*Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader - not the fact that it's raining but the feeling of being rained upon.*

E. L. Doctorow

## **Word Choice**

*I do not choose the right word. I get rid of the wrong one.*

A. E. Houseman

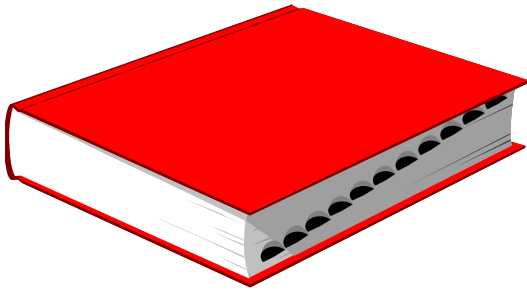
It is **word choice** that enriches and enlivens your writing. Using words precisely adds energy and clarity to your work. In a paper with strong word choice, words convey the intended message in a precise, interesting, and natural way. Word choice means:

- Just the right word
- Simple language used well
- Phrasing
- Vivid verbs and precise nouns
- A love of words
- Sensitivity to the reader's understanding

Some questions parents can suggest their child ask to direct attention to word choice are:

- Will my reader understand my words?
- Did I use words I enjoy?

As you choose the words for your writing you use language to “paint a picture.” You will want to use precise, vivid language to create a strong and clear picture in the mind of a reader.



*Verbs are the most important of all your tools. They push the sentence forward and give it momentum . . . flail, poke, dazzle, squash, beguile, pamper, swagger, wheedle, vex. Probably no other language has such a vast supply of verbs so bright with color.*

William Zinsser

## **Scoring Guide for Word Choice**

<b>1 Just Beginning</b>	<b>3 Not There Yet</b>	<b>5 Exactly What I Intended</b>
Confusing, misused words and phrases abound	Correct but not striking	Extremely clear, visual, and accurate
My reader is often asking, "What did you mean by this?"	The words in my paper get the message across, but don't capture anyone's imagination or attention.	I picked just the right words for just the right places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A lot of my words and phrases are vague: "We liked to do things." "We were friends and stuff."</li> <li>▪ My words don't make pictures yet. "Something neat happened." "It was awesome."</li> <li>▪ Some of my words are misapplication - Oops, I mean misused.</li> <li>▪ Over and over I use the same words, over and over, and then over and over again until my paper was over.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I used everyday words pretty well, but I didn't stretch for a new or better way to say things.</li> <li>▪ Most of the time the reader will figure out what I mean even if a few words are goofed up.</li> <li>▪ Occasionally, I may have gone a bit overboard with words that tried to impress the reader.</li> <li>▪ My words aren't real specific. Instead of saying, "The sun went down," I should have said, "The sun sagged into the treetops." Better, juicier details were needed!</li> <li>▪ There are as many tired-out cliches ("bright and early," "quick as a wink") as there are new, fresh, and original phrases: "My mother made me feel more special than all her potted plants."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All the words in my paper fit. Each one seems just right.</li> <li>▪ My words are colorful, snappy, vital, brisk, and fresh. You won't find overdone, vague, or flowery language.</li> <li>▪ Look at my energetic verbs!</li> <li>▪ Some of the words and phrases are so vivid that the reader won't be able to forget them.</li> </ul>

## ***Sentence Fluency***

*Clarity. Clarity. clarity. When you become hopelessly mired in a sentence, it is best to start fresh . . .*

Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*

It is **sentence fluency** that gives your writing a sense of rhythm and grace. Writing with strong sentence fluency has an easy flow and rhythm when read aloud. Sentences are well built, with strong and varied structure that invites expressive oral reading. Sentence fluency is:

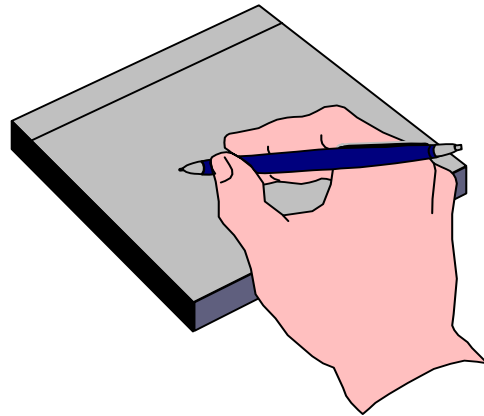
- Rhythm and flow when read aloud
- Smooth sentence structure
- Variety, enhancing the meaning
- Logical sentence structure

Your sentences should be clear and powerful. Every word should work hard to create just the right meaning. You will create this through logic, creative phrasing, parallel construction, alliteration, absence of redundancy, and variety in sentence length and structure. As you grow as a writer you will learn more and varied ways to sculpt your writing.

Some questions parents can suggest their child ask to direct attention to sentence fluency are:

- Is my paper easy to read out loud?
- Do my sentences begin in different ways?
- Are some sentences long and some short?

A good way to assess your writing for sentence fluency is to read your work aloud. Do you hear a rhythm and flow of words?



## ***Scoring Guide for Sentence Fluency***

<b>1 Just Beginning</b>	<b>3 Not There Yet</b>	<b>5 Exactly What I Intended</b>
Needs work	Routine and functional	Varied and natural
Because there isn't enough "sentence sense" yet, this paper is difficult to read aloud, even with practice.	The paper has some really smooth parts; others need work.	The sentences in my paper are clear and delightful to read aloud.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As I read my paper, I have to go back, stop, and read over, just to figure out the sentences.</li> <li>▪ I'm having a hard time telling where one sentence stops and another begins.</li> <li>▪ The sentence patterns in my paper are so repetitive they might put my reader to sleep!</li> <li>▪ I have to do quite a bit of oral editing (leaving some words out, putting some others in) just to help the listener get the meaning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some of my sentences are smooth and natural, but others are halting.</li> <li>▪ Sentence beginnings are more alike than different.</li> <li>▪ I need to add linking words (therefore . . . later . . . when this happened . . .) to show how sentences connect.</li> <li>▪ Some sentences should merge; others need to be cut in two.</li> <li>▪ I have used more words than necessary - I still need to trim some dead wood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some sentences are long and stretchy, while some are short and snappy.</li> <li>▪ It's easy to read my paper aloud. I love the sound.</li> <li>▪ Sentence beginnings vary; they show how ideas connect.</li> <li>▪ You can tell that I have good "sentence sense" because my paper just flows.</li> <li>▪ All excess baggage has been cut. I've economized with words.</li> </ul>

*There is no minimum length for a sentence that's acceptable . . . Among good writers it is the short sentence that predominates.*

William Zinsser

## **Conventions**

*The first editor of any piece is always the writer . . .*

Nancie Atwell, *In the Middle*

*Editing is easy. All you have to do is cross out the wrong words.*

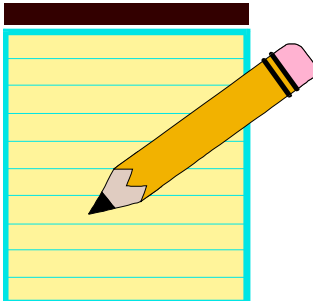
Mark Twain

When you have finished revising your work, you are ready to edit and proofread. It's like wrapping a package or preparing for guests - you want to prepare your writing so others can read and enjoy it. The writer who uses **conventions** effectively demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions (e.g., grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, paragraphing) and uses conventions effectively to enhance readability.

Conventions deal with fixing your work. It is making sure the material is as error-free as possible. Conventions are:

- Overall correctness
- Attention to detail
- Being an editor

Some questions parents can suggest their child ask to direct attention to conventions are:



- Did I use paragraphs?
- Is it easy to read my spelling?
- Did I use periods and question marks?
- Did I use capital letters in the right place?

*One of the hardest tasks of the writer is to read what is on the page, not what the writer hoped would be on the page.*

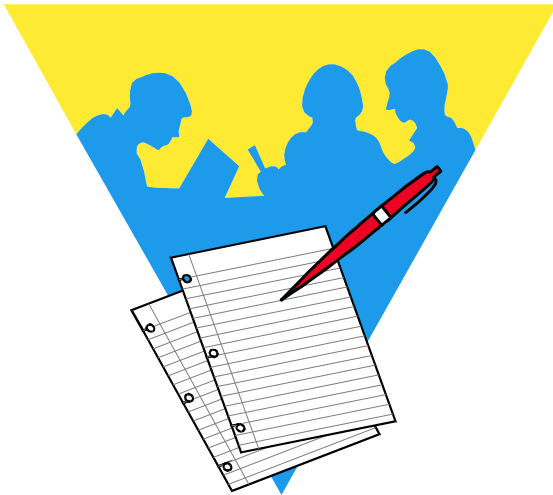
Donald Murray

## ***Scoring Guide for Conventions***

<b>1</b> <b>Just Beginning</b>  Editing not under control yet	<b>3</b> <b>Not There Yet</b>  About half-way home	<b>5</b> <b>Exactly What I Intended</b>  Mostly correct
It would take a first reading to decode, and then a second reading to get the meaning of my paper.	A number of bother-some mistakes in my paper need to be cleaned up before I am ready to publish.	There are very few errors in my paper; it wouldn't take long to get this ready to publish.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spelling error our commun, evin on simple werdz.</li> <li>▪ My papor, have errors in punctuation? and grammar that send the reader back two the beginning from a sentence to sort thing out</li> <li>▪ 'i've got caPital lEttErs scattered in All Over tHe pLaCe or NOT aT all.</li> <li>▪ I haven't got the hang of paragraphs yet.</li> <li>▪ The truth is, I haven't spent much time editing this paper.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spelling is correct on simple words. It may not always be right on the harder words.</li> <li>▪ Most sentences and proper nouns begin with capitals, but a few have been over-looked.</li> <li>▪ Paragraphs are present, but not all begin in the right spots.</li> <li>▪ A few problems with grammar and punctuation might make a reader stumble or pause now and again.</li> <li>▪ My paper reads like a first draft; I was more concerned with getting my ideas down than making sure all the editing was taken care of.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I have used capitals correctly.</li> <li>▪ Periods, commas, exclamation marks, and quotation marks are in the right places.</li> <li>▪ My spelling is accurate.</li> <li>▪ Every paragraph is indented to show where a new idea begins.</li> <li>▪ My grammar usage is consistent and shows control.</li> </ul>

# 5

## ***Suggestions to Parents***



talk

✍️ Keep a copy of the scoring guide for the six traits, and get to know the criteria so the language feels familiar and comfortable.

✍️ Use the terms of “ideas,” “organization,” “voice,” etc., when you and your child talk about writing.

✍️ Encourage your child to read his/her writing aloud to you (or even a part of it), and praise what the child does well, using language from

the

scoring guide to help you be specific. For example:

I could really picture \_\_\_\_\_. (Ideas)

I liked the way you decided to begin. (Organization)

That ending was such a surprise! (Organization)

I could really hear your voice coming through when you said \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Voice)

The word I noticed was \_\_\_\_\_. (Word Choice)

I really liked your use of the word \_\_\_\_\_. (Word Choice)

I noticed your sentences did NOT all begin the same way. (Fluency)

✍️ Read with your child - aloud - often! Read books you love, and encourage your child to read aloud to you as soon as he/she is ready to do so. Read poems, too (a great way to build a sense of fluency), newspaper and magazine articles, letters - whatever! Talk about what you read - the ideas, the voice, the words, how the writer begins or ends, how the writer creates suspense or humor.

- ☞ Find and read some not-so-good samples, too! Browse through junk mail. Notice travel brochures, ads, menus, directions, and instructions. Find something you think could use some revision. Share it with your young writer and talk about what the writer could do to make it better.
  
- ☞ Let your child see you read and write. There's no better way to say, "These are important and enjoyable activities."
  
- ☞ Ask for your young writer's help when you write. Even the youngest children can help decide what to say: how to begin a thank you note; what to include in a holiday or birthday greeting; which words are most appropriate in a business letter. When you give your child practice making these decisions, you teach him/her the thinking part of writing, and that's the hardest part of all.
  
- ☞ Ask your child to help you edit, too! Can't remember how to spell a word? Ask your child to look it up for you. Not sure whether to use a comma or semicolon? Figure it out together. Ask for help often on capitalization, paragraphing (should I begin a new paragraph here?), grammar, and spelling. When you write or type a short document, ask your writer/editor to proof it for you. This is how your child develops a proofreader's eye.
  
- ☞ Notice a mistake or two in the daily paper? Other printed material? See if your child can find it, too. Make a game of it.
  
- ☞ Encourage your child to write even when it isn't assigned - a list of things to remember for a vacation or shopping trip, a grocery list, a reminder note to you or another family member, a thank you note, a letter, an invitation, or ANY kind of writing. All practice helps!!

## ***CELEBRATE WRITING EVERY WAY YOU CAN!***

Suggestions to Parents from Vicki Spandel,  
Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, Portland, Oregon