

What Teachers Value in Writing

IDEAS

- Clear—makes sense
- Topic narrowed to manageable size
- Has a key message (or messages)
- Teaches me something
- Holds my attention
- Fresh, original perspective
- Important, telling details
- Details go beyond common knowledge
- Minimal filler (unneeded information)
- Insight
- Authenticity
- New information

ORGANIZATION

- Inviting lead that draws me in
- Starts somewhere, goes somewhere
- Compelling sense of direction
- Provides connections—detail to detail, thought to thought, paragraph to paragraph
- Well-paced, spending time where it matters
- Easy to follow—like a good road map
- Satisfying conclusion—sense of resolution
- An occasional surprise
- Not formulaic or too predictable
- Organization supports the message or story

VOICE

- Sounds like this writer and no other
- Writer is “at home” in the writing
- Writer seems engaged by the topic
- Brings topic to life for me, the reader
- Shows concern for me as a reader
- Individual, distinctive—unlike others
- Makes me cry, laugh, get chills
- Confident—the writer knows his/her stuff
- Lively, energetic, passionate
- Writing I want to reread or share

WORD CHOICE

- “Just right” words
- Memorable words—worth highlighting, quoting
- Creates word pictures, movies in the mind
- Accurate, precise
- Enlightening—helps me “get it”
- Strong verbs
- Easy on the modifiers (adjectives, adverbs)
- Simple, everyday language used well
- Repeats as necessary—or for effect
- Concise and to the point
- Uses language to teach, not impress
- Uses terminology well (as needed)

SENTENCE FLUENCY

- Easy to read on the first try
- Has rhythm, flow, cadence
- Easy to read with voice, expression
- Carefully crafted sentences
- Variety in length, structure . . . OR
- Repetition of patterns for effect
- Concise, direct sentences in informational or technical writing
- Fragments used only for effect
- Run-ons used only for effect (as in dialogue)
- Authentic dialogue
- Consistency in tense (past, present, future)

CONVENTIONS & PRESENTATION

- Clean, carefully edited text
- No distracting errors
- No “mental editing” needed
- Conventions guide reader
- Conventions support meaning and voice
- Design draws reader’s eye to key points
- Design makes information easy to find
- Free of distracting visuals, hard-to-read fonts
- Uses graphics as needed to enhance text
- Makes good use of white (open) space

FIGURE 1.7

Teacher Six-Point Writing Guide

WORD CHOICE

- 6
 - Clear, fresh, original language adds voice
 - Quotable—the right word at the right moment
 - Every word counts—any repetition is purposeful
 - Powerful verbs, unique phrasing, memorable moments
 - Words create vivid message, striking images/impressions
- 5
 - Natural language used well, confidently
 - Engaging—moments to remember or highlight
 - Concise yet expressive—a good balance
 - Strong verbs, striking expressions
 - Words create a clear message, image, impression
- 4
 - Functional, clear language used correctly
 - Understandable—sometimes noteworthy
 - Minimal wordiness or unintended repetition
 - Strong moments—few clichés, overwritten text
 - Words help reader get the “big picture”
- 3
 - Vague words (*special, great*)—OR thesaurus overload
 - An occasional stand-out moment
 - Moments may need pruning—or expansion
 - Writer rarely stretches for individual expression
 - Images/impressions still coming into focus
- 2
 - Words may be unclear, vague, or overused
 - Writer settles for first words that come to mind
 - Fuzziness, wordiness, unintended repetition
 - Words lack energy, life, vitality
 - Reader must work to “see” and “feel” the message
- 1
 - Getting words on paper seems a struggle
 - Word choice feels random—not a real “choice”
 - Writer says very little—or repeats a lot
 - Overworked words—*nice, good, fun*—flatten voice
 - Writer needs help with message or wording

SENTENCE FLUENCY

- 6
 - Easy to read with inflection that brings out voice
 - Rhythm you want to imitate—poetic, musical
 - Striking variety in sentence style, structure, length
 - Fragments or repetition rhetorically effective
 - Strong sentences make meaning instantly clear
- 5
 - Readable even on the first try
 - Easy-on-the-ear rhythm, cadence, flow
 - Variety in sentence style, structure, length
 - Fragments or repetition add emphasis
 - Readily understandable
- 4
 - Readable with minimal rehearsal
 - Pleasant, rhythmic flow dominates
 - Some sentence variety
 - Fragments or repetition are not a problem
 - Sentences are clear and connected
- 3
 - Readable with rehearsal and close attention
 - Sentence-to-sentence flow needs work
 - More sentence variety needed
 - A few moments cry out for revision
 - Sentences not always clear at first
- 2
 - Hard to read in spots, even with rehearsal
 - Many sentences need rewording
 - Minimal variety in length or structure
 - Problems (choppiness, run-ons) disrupt the flow
 - Reader must pause or reread to get meaning
- 1
 - Reader must pause or fill in to read this aloud
 - Many sentences need rewording
 - Hard to tell where sentences begin or end
 - Sentence problems may block meaning
 - Writer needs help revising sentences

CONVENTIONS & PRESENTATION

- 6
 - Only the pickiest editors will spot problems
 - Creative use of conventions enhances meaning, voice
 - Complex text shows off writer's editorial control
 - Enticing, eye-catching presentation
 - Virtually ready to publish
- 5
 - Minor errors that are easily overlooked
 - Correct conventions support meaning, voice
 - Shows writer's control over numerous conventions
 - Pleasing, effective presentation
 - Ready to publish with light touch-ups
- 4
 - Errors are noticeable but not troublesome
 - Errors do not interfere with the message
 - Shows control over basics (most spelling, punctuation)
 - Acceptable presentation
 - Good once-over needed prior to publication
- 3
 - Noticeable errors may slow reader
 - Reader may pause to mentally “correct” text
 - Some problems even on basics
 - More attention to presentation needed
 - Thorough editing required prior to publication
- 2
 - Distracting or repeated errors
 - Errors may interfere with writer's message
 - Shaky control over basics—reads like a hasty first draft
 - Immediately noticeable problems with presentation
 - Line-by-line editing needed prior to publication
- 1
 - Serious, frequent errors make reading a challenge
 - Reader must “decode” before focusing on message
 - Writer not yet in control of basic conventions
 - Writing not yet ready for final design or presentation
 - Writer needs help with editing

Teacher Six-Point Writing Guide

IDEAS

- 6
 - Clear, focused, compelling, holds reader's attention
 - Strong main point, idea, story line
 - Striking insight, in-depth knowledge of topic
 - Takes reader on journey of understanding
 - Significant, intriguing details paint a vivid picture
- 5
 - Clear and focused
 - Evident main point, idea, story line
 - Reflects thorough knowledge of topic
 - Authentic, intriguing information
 - Important, helpful, well-chosen details
- 4
 - Clear and focused more often than not
 - Main point, story line easily inferred
 - Sufficient knowledge for broad overview
 - Some new info, some common knowledge
 - Quality details outweigh generalities
- 3
 - Some undeveloped text—or a list
 - Reader must work to get the message
 - Gaps in writer's knowledge of topic
 - Mostly common knowledge, best guesses
 - Generalities, broad brush strokes
- 2
 - Writer still defining, shaping message
 - Main idea or message hard to infer
 - Writer struggles to fill space
 - Broad, unsupported generalities
 - Repetition, filler, minimal support
- 1
 - Minimal text
 - Topic not defined yet in writer's mind
 - Reader left with many questions
 - Notes, first thoughts
 - Writer needs help choosing/defining topic

ORGANIZATION

- 6
 - Thoughtful structure guides reader through text
 - Provocative opening, satisfying conclusion
 - Well-crafted transitions create coherence
 - Balanced pacing—slows or speeds up as needed
 - Easy to follow—may have a surprise or two
- 5
 - Purposeful organization, sense of direction
 - Strong lead, conclusion provides closure
 - Thoughtful transitions connect ideas
 - Good pacing—time spent on what matters
 - Easy to follow—stays on track
- 4
 - Organization supports message/story
 - Functional lead and conclusion
 - Helpful transitions keep ideas flowing
 - Balanced—most time spent on key points
 - Easy to follow—sometimes predictable
- 3
 - Organization somewhat loose—or formulaic
 - Lead and/or conclusion need work
 - Transitions sometimes needed—or overdone
 - Too much time spent on trivia
 - Not always easy to follow without work
- 2
 - Order more random than purposeful
 - Lead/conclusion missing or formulaic
 - Transitions unclear or missing
 - Hard to tell what points matter most
 - Requires rereading to follow writer's thinking
- 1
 - No clear sense of direction
 - Starts right in (no lead)—just stops (no ending)
 - A challenge to follow the writer's thinking
 - Everything is as important as everything else
 - Writer needs help sorting/organizing ideas

VOICE

- 6
 - As individual as fingerprints
 - Writer AND reader love sharing this aloud
 - Mirrors writer's innermost thoughts, feelings
 - Passionate, vibrant, electric, compelling
 - Pulls reader right into the piece
- 5
 - Original, distinctive
 - A good read-aloud candidate
 - Reveals writer's thoughts, feelings
 - Spontaneous, lively, enthusiastic
 - Shows sensitivity to readers
- 4
 - Stands out from many others
 - Share-aloud moments
 - Writer seems "present" in the piece
 - Earnest, sincere
 - Shows awareness of readers
- 3
 - Sporadic—voice comes and goes
 - Not quite ready to share, but getting there
 - Needs more voice—or a different voice
 - Restrained, quiet, cautious
 - Reader awareness? Sometimes, perhaps . . .
- 2
 - Writer not really "at home" in this writing
 - Hint of voice—or we could be reading in
 - Reader cannot tell who writer is
 - Distant, encyclopedic—or wrong for the purpose
 - Not yet "writing to be read"
- 1
 - No sense of person behind the words—yet
 - Writer is not ready to share this piece
 - Writer's thoughts/feelings do not come through
 - Something (topic choice?) is stifling the voice
 - Writer needs help with topic—or voice

FIGURE 12.2

Focused Holistic Scale

Holistic Six-Trait Scale*

Strengths Outweigh Problems at the 4 to 6 Level

6

- Clear, focused main idea enriched with telling, unusual details
- Inviting lead, satisfying conclusion, reader never feels lost
- Irresistible voice that asks to be shared
- Vivid, memorable, precise words—no wasted words
- Clear, fluent sentences that make expressive reading easy
- Only minimal touch-ups needed prior to publication

5

- Clear, focused main idea with striking details
- Strong lead and conclusion, structure that guides the reader
- Individual, confident voice speaks to readers
- Accurate, well-chosen words that make meaning clear
- Clear, fluent sentences that make expressive reading possible
- Very light editing needed prior to publication

4

- Clear main idea, supported by details (description, examples, etc.)
- Functional lead and conclusion, reader can follow story/discussion
- Moments of strong voice speak to readers
- Functional, clear language carries general message
- Clear sentences that can be read without difficulty
- A good once-over needed prior to publication

Problems Outweigh Strengths at the 1 to 3 Level

3

- Main idea can be inferred—a broad, unexpanded overview
- Some details/elements could be relocated—lead and conclusion are present, structure may be formulaic
- Voice comes and goes—or not always a good fit with audience
- Marked by tired, overused words, phrases—OR overwritten
- Limited variety in sentence length, structure
- Thorough editing needed prior to publication

2

- Reader must guess at main idea—few details or just a list
- Hard to follow, lead and/or conclusion missing
- Distant voice—writing to get it done
- Filled with tired, overused language—OR overwritten, wordy
- Problems with repetitive, awkward, or run-on sentences
- Line-by-line editing needed prior to publication

1

- No main idea yet—random collection of thoughts
- Reader consistently goes back—no apparent link thought to thought
- Hard to “hear” the writer in the text
- Word choice confusing, general, repetitive, vague, or incorrect
- Hard to tell where sentences begin or end—many problems
- Word-by-word editing needed prior to publication

*Please note that a perfect match is not necessary. Choose the set of descriptors that best fits a given writing sample.

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