

Six Trait + One Writing Model

Much of the following information is from: *Creating Writers through 6-trait Writing Assessment and Instruction 3ed.* By Vicki Spandel (2001).

1. What is the six trait-writing model?

- It is a model designed to **enable** and **enhance** students to become better writers.
- It **enables** students by allowing them to
 - “take charge” of their own writing processes.
 - understand the difference between strong and weak writing.
 - use their “discernment” of writing to use better and more effective written communication.
 - revise and edit their own writing.
- It **enhances** student writing by giving them the information, skills, and practice to determine if their own writing meets the “target.”
 - Rubrics give students a clear picture of what their writing should do.
 - The six trait model allows students to evaluate their own writing, and to be less dependent on the teacher.

Peter Elbow—writing guru—says, “A student who remains dependent on the teacher’s grades for evaluation is defectively taught in a simple, functional sense. He cannot, strictly speaking, do what he was supposedly taught to do because he cannot do it alone, without help; he cannot tell whether he did it right” (*Enhancing Contraries*, 1986).

2. Why are we using the six trait + one model?

- It is a model embraced by a majority of school districts in the USA.
- We need to prepare our students to leave here with the skills necessary to succeed.
- We need to stress all forms of communication, oral, written, and reading.

3. What difference can the six trait + one model make in student writing?

- It can help student writing become more detailed, interesting, and complex.
- It can help the writer focus on ways to aid the reader in understanding text.
- It can help students become critical thinkers and readers.

4. What does this mean for the teacher?

- The six-trait model is designed to **enhance** student writing—not to replace good instructional practices now in place.
- By **enabling** students to become responsible for their own writing, it means that teachers spend less time as an editor and can assign more writing practices for students.

- Teachers must give clear criteria to students to allow them to function on their own.
 - Instead of “Be more specific” students will need to be able to consider:
 - Details—chosen to go beyond common knowledge.
 - Readers—what does the piece teach or tell them?
 - Visual—can the reader picture what the writer is talking about?
 - Questions—are the readers’ questions answered?
 - Knowledge and experience—what does the writer know about writing that helps the piece?

Wouldn't it be wonder if our students could write the following?

When she marched—Miss Truchbull never walked, she always marched like a storm trooper with long strides and arms aswinging—when she marched along a corridor you could actually hear her snorting as she went, and if a group of children happened to be in her path, she ploughed right on through them like a tank, with small people bouncing off her to left and right (Roald Dahl Maltida 1988, p. 67).

They can!

5. How can I motivate students to be responsible for writing?

- It would be wonderful if students were inherently motivated to write—were engaged in their writing, and inspired to write better.
- Many students, however, are afraid to write, do not like to write, or feel they have nothing to say.
- Students do like to be in charge, to be the critic, the assessor. When we ask them to be the evaluator of writing, we show that we respect their opinions—that they have authority.
- Richard Strong (“What do Students Want” *Educational Leadership* 1995) gives three ways to help motivate students.
 - Clearly articulate the criteria for success and provide clear, immediate and constructive feedback.
 - Show students the skills they need to be successful are obtainable by clearly and systematically modeling skills.
 - Show students that success is valuable to them.

6. How can the 6 traits make a difference?

- They can help students learn to interpret prompts thoughtfully.
- They can help students understand differences among the modes of writing (expository, persuasive, reflective, narrative).
- They can help students think and respond quickly to questions.
- They can help students understand what makes writing good.

7. What do teachers need to provide?

- Time for students to write.
- Mental elbowroom—students have a choice of prompts or think of their own.

- Time for revision—teach students the meaning of revision through checklists or other written aids.
- Assessments (tests) of what was taught.

8. What do teachers value in Writing?

- **Ideas**
 - Clear—makes sense
 - Topic—narrow and manageable
 - Information—plentiful
 - Perspective—original, fresh
 - Details—important, interesting
- **Organization**
 - Lead—inviting
 - Direction—starts and ends somewhere
 - Connection
 - Builds
 - Surprise—now and then
 - Resolution, completion
 - No cliché endings
 - Ending not redundant, trite, or preachy
- **Voice**
 - One voice—not a committee
 - Involvement not boredom on the writer's part
 - Topic comes to life
 - Involves the reader
 - Connections to writer
 - Reader response to writing
 - Energy
- **Word Choice**
 - Memorable moments
 - Memorable words and phrases
 - Word pictures
 - Clear expressions
 - Strong verbs
 - Simple language—used well
 - Precise words and phrases
 - Minimal redundancy
 - Written to inform or entertain—not to impress

- **Sentence Fluency**
 - Easy to read
 - Inviting, playful rhythms
 - Well-built sentences
 - Direct, concise structure (business writing)

- **Conventions and Layout**
 - Clean, edited, polished
 - Correctness—mostly
 - Easy to decipher and follow
 - No distracting errors
 - Key points prominent
 - Graphics (if used) enhance writing
 - Follows standard conventions—American English

These are the six traits.

9. How are the six traits taught?

- Take time to introduce the concept of traits—and the traits themselves.
- Surround students with writers' language.
- Teach students to be assessors of their own and others' work and to use their self-assessments in revising and setting goals.
- Use written works to illustrate strengths and weaknesses in writing.
- Use focused lessons—including practice revision—to help students develop skills in each trait.
- Teach students to do focused revision.

Start by asking students what the traits of a good lunch? What things make it good? Then read several examples of writing to students (some good some not). Ask which they liked better. What do the good ones have in common? These are traits. Brainstorm. Model. Read. Model. And model.