

Traits and the Writing Process

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The six traits of writing and the writing process are essential elements of effective writing instruction. While they may be taught and understood separately, they should be viewed as parts of a coherent and complete instructional whole. The traits define and support the writing process, simplify instruction, and facilitate a clear understanding among students of what makes writing work. To demonstrate the relationship between traits and process, let's discuss and define each separately.

Steps of the Writing Process

The writing process is cyclical, recursive, and composed of five steps: **Prewriting**, **Drafting**, **Revising**, **Editing**, and **Publishing**. Instructionally, we must take care to recognize that these steps are not necessarily sequential. During the development of a composition, a proficient writer will certainly employ each of these steps, but the organic evolution of the writing itself will determine the sequence and manner in which the steps are negotiated. In teaching the steps of the writing process explicitly, we help students to understand how good writers go about crafting their work.

Writing Traits

If the writing process is the "how" of excellent writing, then the traits of writing represent the "what." The traits are the specific elements that writers focus upon in each step of the process. They are the six observable, assessable, revisable, and editable features that characterize all writing. The traits comprise a comprehensive way of looking at writing. This model also simplifies our understanding of writing because it allows us to focus our attention upon the

Writing Traits

Ideas

Ideas represents the concepts, thoughts, insights, assertions, and details that the author wishes to express to the reader.

Organization

Organization relates to the effectiveness of the "blueprint" that the author uses to sequence and arrange ideas for the reader.

Voice

Voice is closely related to the tone established by the author and the affective mood that results from the way the writing is crafted. **Voice** also reflects the personality, attitude, and enthusiasm of the author.

Word Choice

Word Choice influences **Voice**. Excellent **Word Choice** results when a writer uses exactly the right words to carry the message. Typically, this means that nouns and verbs are clear and precise, carrying the author's message with support from a few carefully chosen modifiers.

Sentence Fluency

Sentence Fluency may be described as the rhythm or flow of sentences that results from variations in length, structure, and beginnings.

Conventions

Conventions includes grammar, usage, and mechanics. A talented writer may even control **Conventions** in creative or unique ways to convey or underscore meaning with extreme effectiveness.

individually manageable traits themselves: **Ideas**, **Organization**, **Voice**, **Word Choice**, **Sentence Fluency**, and **Conventions**.

Traits and Process

In the final analysis, traits and process may be taught and understood separately, but their true partnership and power comes from their interplay during authentic writing. For example, in **Prewriting**, a writer selects ideas and organizes them according to the needs of a specific audience; envisioning one's audience helps the writer establish a stronger voice. In **Drafting**, a writer supports ideas with good word choice, writing these words into sentences that flow, contributing to good sentence fluency. A writer may **Revise**

for ideas, organization, voice, word choice, or sentence fluency, then **Edit** for conventions. During **Publishing**, a writer might pay special attention to the conventions that make the work correct and neat.

Ultimately, the relationship between traits and process is clear: In every step of the writing process, a good writer skillfully and purposefully manages some combination of traits. *Strategies for Writers* fully incorporates the traits of writing within each step of the writing process. Students who use *Strategies for Writers* will learn, practice, and apply writing strategies that support this model in every step of every lesson.