Introducing the 6 Traits to Students

1. Do it fast enough (6-12-18 days)
2. Do it with a common theme or thread
3. Remember, this is only the introduction

Identify Trait & Simple Definition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Simple Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>Write, write, write your thoughts. Make your ideas clear, Tell the reader what you know And what you hold most dear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Writing has a good beginning, strong conclusion, and builds bridges. Writing has a good beginning. The order just makes sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>If you're happy and you know it, that's your voice. If you're thoughtful and you know it, that's your voice. If you're spunky, and you know it, then your words will surely show it. If you're happy and you know it, that's your voice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>Writing with your best words— Finding lots of new words— Sparkle! Dazzle! The words stand out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
<td>Sentence fluency. Sentence fluency. The writing flows. The writing flows. Sentences are longer. Sentences are shorter. It sounds smooth; it sounds right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>You put your periods in, You pull some spelling out. You put your capitals in, And you shake them all about. You make your paper better When you edit it just right. That's what it's all about.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 6-Traits Songs

THE IDEAS SONG
(sing to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”) Write, write, write your thoughts. Make your ideas clear, Tell the reader what you know And what you hold most dear.

THE ORGANIZATION SONG
(sing to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb”) Writing has a good beginning, strong conclusion, and builds bridges. Writing has a good beginning. The order just makes sense.

THE VOICE SONG
(sing to the tune of “If You're Happy and You Know It”) If you’re happy and you know it, that’s your voice. If you’re thoughtful and you know it, that’s your voice. If you’re spunky, and you know it, then your words will surely show it. If you’re happy and you know it, that’s your voice.

THE WORD CHOICE SONG
(sing to the tune of “Ring Around the Rosie”) Writing with your best words— Finding lots of new words— Sparkle! Dazzle! The words stand out.

THE SENTENCE FLUENCY SONG
(sing to the tune of “Frere Jacques”) Sentence fluency. Sentence fluency. The writing flows. The writing flows. Sentences are longer. Sentences are shorter. It sounds smooth; it sounds right.

THE CONVENTIONS SONG
(sing to the tune of “The Hokey Pokey”) You put your periods in, You pull some spelling out. You put your capitals in, And you shake them all about. You make your paper better When you edit it just right. That’s what it’s all about.

Songs by Ruth Culham

Consistent Icons

Consistent Icons

Icons available as a FREE download at www.SmekensEducation.com Search “icons.”

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The light bulb is used for ideas. It represents the topic of the writing. Depending on the size of the lightbulb, it can also represent how narrow the topic is. If you think of the light bulb on a dimmer switch, it can be compared to the number of details — few details, the light is low; many details and the light is bright!

For organization, the concrete image of a three-car train reminds students they can have multiple sentences/paragraphs within the body of their writing (middle cars), but they should always have an engine (beginning) and a caboose (ending). Note also that the train cars are in order (sequence), and they are hooked together (transitions).

A writer’s voice can change, depending on the topic he is writing about. A reader should be able to “hear” a writer’s voice, tone, or attitude about the topic — frustrated, hopeful, confident, serious, etc. The use of facial expressions can help students determine their voice. How do they feel about the topic?

Specific vocabulary or word choice comes down to the right word in the right spot. Think of this as exact language, right on target, bull’s-eye writing. The outer ring of the target represents the general and vague words (e.g., blue). The middle ring represents a more specific word, (e.g., light blue), but still not exact word choice. The center ring identifies the specific word choice or WOW words that are exact and precise (e.g., periwinkle blue).

Sentence fluency is an auditory trait. You don’t read fluency; you hear it. You hear the variety of sentences and the way they play off each other. You hear the music of figurative language. You hear the ease and readability of the piece. In the classroom, teachers often have students reread their writings aloud into a whisper phone to check for sentence completeness and whether or not it “sounds good.”

All writers utilize tools from their conventions toolbox. These include capitalization, spelling, punctuation, grammar, paragraph indents, word spacing, etc. These tools are designed to help the reader through the writing more easily.

Consistent Visual Icons
Consider incorporating a building-wide set of visual icons that represent each trait. Not only do students hear the same trait words from year to year, but they see the same graphics. This begins to develop building-wide consistency in implementation and writing expectations. Below is a set of graphic icons developed by Kristina Smekens. The icons can be downloaded for free at www.SmekensEducation.com, search “icons.”
Kristina’s Favorite Picture Books

IDEAS
K-1  This is My Hair, Todd Parr
2-4  Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, Mem Fox
5-6  Fireflies! Julie Brinckloe *
7-12  Saturdays and Teacakes, Lester Laminack *

ORGANIZATION
K-1  One Duck Stuck, Phyllis Root
     The Napping House, Audrey Wood *
2-4  When Sophie Gets Angry, Molly Bang *
     Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type, Doreen Cronin
5-6  Harriet, You’ll Drive Me Wild, Mem Fox *
7-12  The Relatives Came, Cynthia Rylant *

VOICE
K-1  The Feelings Book, Todd Parr
     Monster at the End of this Book, Jon Stone
     Today I Feel Silly, Jamie Lee Curtis
2-4  How Are You Feeling? Saxton Freymann
     Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse, Kevin Henkes *
     Recess Queen, Alexis O’Neill *
     Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! Mo Willems
     Diary of a Worm/Spider, Doreen Cronin *
5-6  Little Miss/Mr. Men series, Roger Hargreaves
     True Story of the Three Little Pigs, Jon Scieszka
     Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude, Kevin O’Malley
7-12  Voices in the Park, Anthony Browne
     Arnie the Doughnut, Laurie Keller
     The Harmonica, Tony Johnston *
     Relatives Came, Cynthia Rylant *

WORD CHOICE
K-1  Max’s Words, Kate Banks
     Big Words for Little People, Jamie Lee Curtis
2-4  Fancy Nancy, Jane O’Connor *
     I’m Dirty, Kate & Jim McMullan
5-6  Piggie Pie! Margie Palatini *
     Hello, Ocean, Pam Munoz Ryan
7-12  Up North at the Cabin, Marsha Wilson Chall
     Hoop Kings/Hoop Queens, Charles R. Smith, Jr.

SENTENCE FLUENCY
K-1  The Magic Hat, Mem Fox
2-4  Saturday Night at the Dinosaur Stomp, Carol Diggory Shields *
     Soft House, Jane Yolen *
5-6  My Dog is as Smelly as Dirty Socks, Hanoch Piven
     Mr. George Baker, Amy Hest
7-12  Come On Rain, Karen Hesse *

CONVENTIONS
K-1  CDB, William Steig
     Yo! Yes? Christopher Raschka
2-4  Punctuation Takes a Vacation, Robin Pulver
     Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type, Doreen Cronin
5-6  Eats, Shoots & Leaves (commas), Lynne Truss
     Girls Like Spaghetti (apostrophes), Lynne Truss
7-12  20 Odd Ducks (20 different punctuation marks), Lynne Truss
     Scaredy Squirrel, Melanie Watt

* Denotes titles that would be appropriate to introduce all 6 Traits.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>MINI-LESSON STRATEGY <em>(e.g., picture book title, song, icon, trigger, activity, etc.)</em></th>
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Independent Writing Time Activities

You want to dabble with the traits in a writing task each day. However, both you and your writers need to remember that the quality of the writing will not necessarily be fabulous. These first drafts are simply an opportunity to experiment with the traits.

**PRIMARY GRADES**

- **Ideas:** After introducing the trait of ideas in a short mini-lesson, simply invite students to try and write/draw about an idea (or topic) they know a lot about. Encourage them to write about something they have actually experienced and remember. The more they know about their topics, the more details they can add.

- **Organization:** After introducing the trait of organization in a short mini-lesson, invite students to write about a topic that lends itself to order. For example, have them write/draw about what they did to get ready for school that morning. Have them consider the different steps in order. Again, the product won’t be great, but they are playing with organization in a first attempt.

- **Voice:** After introducing the trait of voice in a short mini-lesson, ask students to select a topic that stirs strong emotion. Have them think of an event or memory that made them especially happy or mad. Then unleash them to start writing/drawing about that topic.

- **Word Choice:** After introducing the trait of word choice in a short mini-lesson, encourage students to write a new piece and be conscious of using lots of Wow! words in their writing or oral explanation of their writing.

- **Sentence Fluency:** (Kindergarten) Fluency first appears in oral retelling. Have students start a new piece and then explain their drawings to a peer, attempting to sound smooth and fluent while doing it. (Grades 1-2) After introducing the trait of sentence fluency in a short mini-lesson, invite students to look back at previous pieces and identify a short sentence they’ve written. Encourage them to add words to the sentence and make it longer. Or, they could turn a telling sentence into an exclamatory sentence and/or a question sentence to provide sentence variety.

- **Conventions:** (Kindergarten) Have students include more letters in their writing/drawing today. Remind them that readers need letters and words in order to understand the writer’s ideas. Encourage them to use the letter strip and other classroom resources when playing with conventions. (Grades 1-2) After introducing the trait of conventions in a short mini-lesson, reinforce the idea that conventions are for the reader and not the writer. Consequently, have students pull out a writing from several days ago and try to read it. (They may no longer remember what it says, so they are forced to look at it like a reader.) They can check for capitals, punctuation, spaces, spelling, grammar, etc.

**UPPER GRADES**

- **Ideas:** After introducing the trait of ideas in a short mini-lesson, simply invite students to try and write about an idea (or topic) they know a lot about. The more they know about their topics, the more details they can develop.

- **Organization:** After introducing the trait of organization in a short mini-lesson, invite students to write about a topic that lends itself to order. For example, have them write about what they did to get ready for school that morning. Again, the product won’t be great, but they are playing with organization in a first attempt.

- **Voice:** After introducing the trait of voice in a short mini-lesson, ask students to select a topic that stirs strong emotion. Have them think of an event or memory that was silly, embarrassing, or frustrating. At the top of the paper, have them note the emotion word they are trying to convey. Then unleash them to start writing. The word at the top helps them remember to write with voice.

- **Word Choice:** After introducing the trait of word choice in a short mini-lesson, encourage students to write a new piece and be conscious of using lots of Wow! Words in their writing. NOTE: An alternative activity would be for students to reread the three first-drafts they wrote over the past three days (ideas, organization, voice). They could revise those pieces for stronger word choice.

- **Sentence Fluency:** After introducing the trait of sentence fluency in a short mini-lesson, invite students to look back at previous pieces and identify long sentences and short sentences and middle-length sentences they’ve written. You may also encourage them to start a new piece and be conscious of having several short and several long sentences among their middle-length ones.

- **Conventions:** After introducing the trait of conventions in a short mini-lesson, reinforce the idea that conventions are for the reader and not the writer. Consequently, have students swap any previously written draft with a peer. Have them attempt to read one another’s writing. They can read for capitals, punctuation, spaces, spelling, grammar, etc.
Trait-Based Mini-Lessons