

## 6 + 1 Trait Writing

Back in the 1980's, creative teachers in school districts across the country decided they didn't want to live with their standardized or holistic writing assessments (one single score for the entire writing process) anymore. They knew there must be a better way to get accurate, reliable and useable information about student writing performance. Descriptors of quality writing were compiled and common characteristics, or TRAITs, emerged. After teachers determined that writing was influenced by the same six (plus one) characteristics they had to decide how they would teach these six (plus one) characteristics.

They realized that for writing assessment to be instructive it has to mirror what good writing looks like. Since the method of analytic writing assessment (looking at the components of good writing traits one at a time) began to surface, teachers shared the common belief that these characteristics show up in everyone's list as attributes of good writing and modeling would be necessary. The foundation for 6 + 1 Trait model of writing assessment became a set of criteria describing the qualities of good writing at different levels of achievement. Those criteria or TRAITs are:

- 1) **Ideas** (details, development, focus)
- 2) **Organization** (internal structure)
- 3) **Voice** (tone, style, purpose, and audience)
- 4) **Word Choice** (precise language and phrasing)
- 5) **Sentence Fluency** (sentence structure, rhythm, and cadence)
- 6) **Conventions** (mechanical correctness)
- +1) **Presentation** (handwriting, formatting, layout)

Teachers use the 6 TRAITs as the basis of lessons that specifically focus and model one or two of the traits at a time for students who then revise their writing around that trait. These lessons are called Mini Lessons and often begin the writing instruction of the day. A brief modeling session is provided for students around a particular trait, and then students are asked to apply the new information to his or her writing sample. Peer editing is encouraged and constant feedback is necessary as students revise and share their work at the end of the lesson. Writing requires daily practice to achieve levels of proficiency that become increasingly more sophisticated as the child moves up each grade level.

Rubrics describing the TRAITs required for each genre of writing are provided for children beginning in first grade. They are simple and direct, but very helpful for children as they begin to analyze each trait within their writing. The goal is always independent writing application of the 6 + 1 Traits in any genre. Using the language of rubrics, which supports looking at each writing trait individually and instruction inherent in analytic assessment, a clear understanding that writing has a purpose and an audience where ideas are communicated around a topic, information, or stated opinion defines the level of mastery students work to achieve by the end of their elementary education. These writing skills are essential as students move into the intermediate and high school grade levels, and throughout their adult life.