The Six Traits of Writing NOTES for Spiral

Find out about the 6 traits of writing and how they can make writing easier for you. Each trait breaks down your writing into easy tasks. You'll also learn about how teachers use this method to evaluate your essays.

Purpose

Have you ever sat and tapped your pencil on the table or ended up surfing the Internet instead of typing up the essay you were supposed to be working on? We all have. Why do we do this when we know we're just eating up the time we need to spend writing? Perhaps it's because writing can seem like such a big task. But, what if you had a method to make writing seem less like a looming mountain and more like a few easy hills?

Lucky for you, there is! The **six traits of writing** is a resource for both students and teachers. For students, these six areas break the task of writing into pieces so that you can focus on one part at a time. It also makes it easier for your teacher to provide a consistent grading method and for you to understand why your writing receives a certain score.

The Six Traits of Writing

1. **Content**

This trait is also called **ideas**. It's the subject matter of your paper, all the details from your mind that go down on the paper or in the digital document. Your content should be focused so that all of your ideas make sense together. Some people call this having a theme.

2. **Organization**

Organization goes hand-in-hand with keeping your content focused. You want to make sure your readers understand what you are saying, and in order to accomplish successful communication, your words must be arranged in a logical order. You start with a hook that gives the reader a reason to care about your topic. Then, you provide supporting details organized into paragraphs. Each paragraph should have some kind of transition so that the order makes sense.

3. **Voice**

Voice is perhaps the hardest of the traits to define. It is, in a nutshell, making your writing sound authentic and appropriate. You select a voice that is appropriate to your audience, so in a homework assignment, this might mean using more formal grammar than you would when speaking with friends and family. But, it's also allowing your personality to come out on the page. In rhetoric, this is akin to **ethos**, or establishing your credibility. One form of credibility is writing like you care about the topic.

4. **Word choice**

When you look at the word choice in your writing, you zoom in from the more global level of organization and voice. Instead, you look at individual words in order to present your content with the biggest impact you can. One example of this is using strong action verbs. Which is a stronger sentence--'She put the book down angrily,' or 'She slammed the book onto the desk and huffed.'? The second sentence is stronger because it gives readers a better visualization of what actually happened. Note the verbs: the verb in the first sentence is 'put', and the verbs in the second sentence are 'slammed' and 'huffed'.

5. **Sentence fluency**

You always have multiple choices for how you word any sentence. However, if you follow the same patterns over and over again, your writing becomes tedious. Imagine a piece of writing where every sentence begins with the word 'I'. Rather than lull your readers to sleep with that rhythm, stir things up by starting a sentence with a prepositional phrase or an adverb. For example, 'I ride my bike every weekend' can be rearranged as 'Every weekend, I ride my bike,' or 'Usually, I ride my bike on weekends.'

6. **Conventions**

No, we're not talking about the fun kind of conventions where you dress up as Wonder Woman or The Incredible Hulk while you buy comic books and fried food. This means writing conventions--i.e. spelling, grammar, and punctuation. These are the 'rules' that make it easier for each of us to pick up the same piece of writing and understand what it says.