

Pattern Based Writing: Parent's and Teacher's Guide to Student Writing Success

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Welcome to your Parent's and Teacher's Guide to Student Writing Success

This guide focuses on teaching writing in grades 2-6 and what I would consider to be remedial writing instruction in grades 7-9. It would be great if all students went from simple sentences to writing in consistently beautiful paragraph form with natural introductions and conclusions, however this is often not the case.

I have taught writing across quite a few grades and I have rarely come across a class in any grade that did not need a firm re-teaching of correct paragraph form along with how to write natural introductions and conclusions.

Furthermore, through coaching, teaching in my off-track time, substitute teaching, and tutoring I have experienced literally hundreds of classrooms. My experience is that far too many students across far too many grade levels struggle with writing.

This guide's main focus is on making the jump to multi-paragraph writing, as well as ensuring mastery of correct multi-paragraph writing.

After reading this, I hope you will go to my website at www.patternbasedwriting.com and explore what "Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay" has to offer. Let's begin!

The Six Traits of Writing

In teaching students to write well there is "grammar" and there is "writing." Many teachers teach A LOT of grammar because when it comes to teaching writing, they are at a loss.

What does it mean to teach "writing?" A useful model that can help teachers is the "Six Traits of Writing" model. "The Six Traits of Writing" was developed in the 1980's by several groups of researchers and teachers in order to bring about a more reliable method for bringing structure to writing and writing instruction.

Starting With the End in Mind: The Six Traits of Writing

The “Six Traits of Writing” model describes what good writers do. Like many breakthrough methods of instruction, this model was created by working backwards. The starting point was examining samples of excellent writing and then determining what made them excellent. The outcome of this project was these six common traits that produce good writing.

Overview of the Six Traits of Writing

Trait #1 Ideas – The message along with the main theme and details

Trait #2 Organization – The internal connecting structure

Trait #3 Voice – The unique expression and point of view of common words and ideas

Trait #4 Word Choice – Finding the right words to express ideas in a creative way

Trait #5 Sentence Fluency – Connecting strings of sentences with rhythm and flow

Trait #6 Conventions – Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and everything else us nitpickers love to pick over.

The Six Traits Writing Model in Elementary and Middle School Writing

Understanding this model can be very valuable for teachers. This model can be an excellent guide and reference in planning instruction and in evaluating student writing. Most writing we teach in elementary and middle school falls under at least one of the six traits listed above. This model puts a name and structure to what we are teaching.

The Six Traits Are Not All That Elementary and Middle School Teachers Must Teach

There are many aspects of elementary and middle school writing instruction that are not addressed in the above “Six Traits” by name. Let’s look at some more “vocabulary words” that the writing teacher must know:

Poetry, report writing, writing a friendly letter, writing with a purpose, writing to inform, writing to persuade, writing to explain, narrative writing, first person narrative, expository writing, compare and contrast writing, creative writing, journal writing, process writing, descriptive writing, the writing process, revising, prewriting, writing a summary, research papers, editing, proofreading, fantasy writing, genres of writing, vocabulary, writing lists, writing short answers, writing a newspaper article, writing a business letter, literary response, writing a critique or review, technical writing...

The Six Trait Model is Big Picture Thinking for the Teacher

The teacher will definitely want to be giving lessons on the above six traits. The teacher also will want to keep a constant eye on all of these traits as they conference with students and evaluate student writing.

As educators, we want to develop artistic writers! However, we also want to be sure to develop students who have the writing skills and the writing knowledge that will help them to be successful students. Fast and effective writers are happy students!

For many student writers, “voice” is not nearly as important as simply being able to create writing that both they and their teacher can understand and enjoy reading. Too many students struggle with simply getting the job done.

Organization: The Hardest and Most Important Trait

A pioneer of Six Traits writing was Paul B. Diederich. His traits were a little different than the current “Six Traits of Writing” however they did include both 1) Organization and 2) Ideas.

For Diederich “ideas” and “organization” were the most important of the traits and received greater weight.

Middle school teachers I have talked with believe that middle school success comes easier and is much more likely if students arrive with a FIRM MASTERY of the organizational structure of good writing.

Organization is the hardest trait.

K-12 Student Writers Across America

This is quite a famous quote in the world of Six Traits writing. Not only is organization one of the most important traits, but it is also one of the hardest traits for students to master.

Organizational Skills are Important in Writing, as Well as Across the Curriculum!

It's difficult to be successful and disorganized. A certain minimal level of organization seems to go hand in hand with success in almost any endeavor. With the majority of students, if you improve their organizational skills, you will improve their likelihood of success in school.

I keep students pretty organized across the board; however I have not found any form of organization to be as effective in bringing about overall student success as bringing organization to their writing.

What I learned was that many, many students don't really understand what they have written when they read it back to themselves. They can read the "words" but compared to the books they read, their own writing is confusing. Change this and it becomes a major paradigm shift for them. This becomes the first step towards students taking real pride in their work!

Disorganized Boys

The New York Times published an article by Alan Finder in January 2008 entitled, "Giving Disorganized Boys the Tools for Success."

The article addressed the educational achievement gap that is growing between boys and girls. These days it is girls who are having more success in school. The major premise of the article is that the lack of organizational skills may be holding boys back.

The article quotes Judith Kleinfeld, a psychology professor at the University of Alaska as saying, "The guys just don't seem to develop the skills that involve organization as early."

The article then goes on to explain how certain \$100 per hour tutors were getting these boys organized. I can offer two solutions that don't cost \$100 per hour. The first is "The Notebook Organizational System" that I have included below.

The other is "Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay." Yes, it improves the organization of student writing, but it also does much more than this. It teaches thinking in an organized way. It adds a visual component to language.

Mass Idea Generation: Another Important Trait from the Six Traits of Writing

Along with organization, ideas are the other trait that Paul B. Diederich felt deserved greater weight.

Good prewriting skills lead to good ideas. If students think the first idea that pops into their head is a good idea, it's unlikely they will become effective writers or take great pride in their writing. Students need to understand that the first ideas that pop into their heads are just the tip of the iceberg.

Mass idea generation through prewriting makes this kind of thinking a habit. It's not so much that students (and adults) must do prewriting for every assignment they have, but they must be aware that they are not choosing from among just a few ideas. They are in fact choosing from an unlimited number of possible ideas.

With the prewriting system I use students get in the habit of generating at least 80 unique ideas over a range of main ideas in anywhere between 5-10 minutes.

Here are Eight Qualities of an Excellent Prewriting System:

1. Quick, useful, repeatable, and practical.
2. Improves students writing (I've seen prewriting systems that actually make children write worse!)

3. A skill students **can use and will use** to get started writing and when they are stuck in their writing. (If the prewriting system is too complicated, students won't use it. The prewriting system needs to be so accessible that students will naturally use it when they are stuck.)
4. Will not distract children or prevent children from starting the “**real writing.**” The real writing is the part that people are going to read and for which they will be graded. (Some prewriting systems can be like an art project and prevent students from getting started on the real writing. They are fun and interesting, but not useful for everyday assignments.)
5. Provides an opportunity for mass idea generation. (More ideas to choose from means better ideas get written on the paper.)
6. Is easy for students to connect their prewriting to the actual writing. (There is an art to connecting prewriting to the actual writing. This art needs to be built into the prewriting system.)
7. Helps students learn how to see **both** the “big picture” and the “fine details” of their subject or story.
8. Student created. If the teacher has to “pass it out” it is not practical, and likely not allowed in many testing situations. As well, the student will not develop the self-reliance for organizing their own writing.

The “Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay Writing” program does all this and much, much more!

The Main Reason Why So Many Students Struggle with Writing!

I've never seen an entire classroom of 3rd graders that could do math better than an entire classroom of 6th graders. However, I have seen entire classes of 3rd graders who could write MUCH better than entire classrooms of 6th graders.

The 3rd graders had been taught to write using Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay. (Of course, after I had taught the 6th graders to write using the Pattern Based Writing program, that situation disappeared.)

Here is the main reason why it is possible for this situation to exist. There is no one teacher, grade level, or writing program that takes the sole responsibility for ensuring the mastery of multi-paragraph essay and report writing.

The usual way for multi-paragraph writing to be taught is that a little bit is added here and a little bit is added there. We add a part of the process here and another part of the process there. **When you try to build a thoroughbred racehorse by adding bits and piece together... you end up with a camel.**

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay writing takes sole responsibility for ensuring mastery of multi-paragraph writing. It puts all the pieces of the puzzle together in a systematic and simple way. The teacher who takes on the commitment of using the program will end up with students who are far ahead of the pack both in skill and in understanding.

Teaching Essay Writing to Elementary and Middle School Students

What Exactly is an “Essay?”

The term “essay,” can be a little confusing to many students (and teachers.) What exactly is an essay? There is also a little confusion as to when and how to teach essay writing. The truth is much of what students write in both elementary and middle school can be considered an essay.

Aldous Huxley, a famous essayist said, “The essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything.”

That's quite a... vague, yet accurate description. Essay writing is a little easier to understand when you see what it has in common with **reports** and **stories**.

Here Are Five Common Types of Writing that Students do in School

1. **Essay** – From the author's personal point of view
2. **Report** – Based on research
3. **Fiction story** – Story from the imagination
4. **Short answer** – Usually gives an answer to a specific question; a short answer can be anywhere from one word to possibly a couple paragraphs
5. **Poetry** – Artistic use of language

There are MANY Different Kinds of Essays

Here are just a few: Narrative essay, personal narrative essay, cause and effect essay, descriptive essay, compare and contrast essay, argumentative essay, definition essay, 5-paragraph essay, expository essay, evaluation essay, persuasive essay.

A general guideline for the term “essay” is:

- ❖ **An essay** is written from the author's personal point of view.
- ❖ **An essay** discusses, explores, describes, or analyzes one subject or topic.
- ❖ **An essay** is a multi-paragraph piece of writing.

Is an Essay a Story? AND Is a Story an Essay?

Let's Take a Look:

- ❖ **Personal Narrative Essay** – Narrative story from the authors point of view based on the author's personal experience
- ❖ **Fiction Story** – A narrative story that comes from the author's imagination

These are both “stories.” One is a true story, one comes from the imagination. Though they are both stories, they are not both essays. Notice that the “Fiction Story” is not an essay.

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay does teach essay writing. However, when looking at the Aldous Huxley definition of what an essay is, I think you will find that the program **greatly improves** all writing that elementary and middle school students will do, including both stories and reports.

When Should Essay Writing be Taught and by What Grade Should it Be Mastered?

Often student writing is not held to the same high standard that student work is in many of the other subjects.

Here are a few reasons why:

1. Writing is an art. There is not an “easy answer key” for the writing teacher.
2. The way writing is taught can often seem “esoteric” to children. It seems to them that the rules of “good writing” sure do seem to change a lot. “The teacher liked what I wrote yesterday, but today they say this is not good. I don’t get it.”
3. Staying on top of student writing is hard work for teachers. As such, students have more opportunities to slack off and practice writing the wrong way.

“Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay Writing” has made it easy for all teachers and students to get a hold of all these issues. What exactly does that mean?

Here is a link to an excellent video on essay writing. Copy and paste the link into your web browser. (Or just click on it.)

http://patternbasedwriting.com/elementary_writing_success/teaching-elementary-writing/students-can-master-essay-writing-in-elementary-school/

What is interesting about this video is that it is from Ashworth University and is designed for high school students. (It’s an excellent video on the 5-paragraph essay. The teacher is very clear and concise.)

As you watch it, imagine an entire class of 3rd graders sitting there watching this video and saying, “Yes, we can do all that. We learned that last month. We can organize and write one of those 5-paragraph essays in less than 30-minutes.”

The 3rd graders I am talking about are from the inner city and their teacher had become ill early in the year. This began a **long** string of substitute teachers. I came in at the end of their school year and took them from unorganized sentences to excellent 5-paragraph essays in just 37 days.

“Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay” solves the essay problem! Whether your students are in elementary school or middle school you can revolutionize their writing quickly and easily. This should not be an issue in high school.

Here Are Some Common Signs that Your Students Have Not Mastered Essay Writing:

- Students fail to answer the essay question or don't follow the directions. They are off topic.
- Students don't understand what a true introduction or conclusion is.
- Students believe "paragraph form" means you simply start a new paragraph every 3-5 sentences.
- Students repeat ideas or paragraphs. The more they write, the more they repeat.
- Students' prewriting turns into an “art project.” This prevents them from finishing, and sometimes even starting the assignment.
- Students write whatever pops into their minds. The more they write, the more they ramble.
- Students focus on many, many tiny details that go on and on whenever they are writing more than a paragraph or two.
- Students find it difficult to connect their prewriting to their writing.
- Students use inconsistent form within an essay. (Sometimes a paragraph is about one main idea, sometimes it's about many.)
- Students use inconsistent structure from essay to essay. (Sometimes they write correctly, sometimes they don't.)
- Students don't have a system for getting their work started, and for getting the work finished.

If your students are making these mistakes, either they have just begun moving from paragraphs to multi-paragraph writing or...

They Just Don't “Get It”

If students continue to make the same mistakes after they have been reminded a thousand times an “easy out” for teacher is thinking that the students are just being lazy. I have come to realize that this is not really the case. I realized this when I first started coming up with the patterns in Pattern Based Writing and all of a sudden my entire class started saying, “I can't even read what I was writing before.”

I had heard students say that from time to time over the years, but I had never heard an entire class say the same thing, all within a month of beginning to teach them to write.

The truth is teachers are often surprised to discover what their students' real understanding of a concept is. They believe they have done a great job teaching something, and then a student says something which lets them know that their understanding is not what they had thought it was.

Students Convinced Against Their Will Are of the Same Opinion Still

Before it seemed the best I could get would be a few students begrudgingly admitting that their writing had improved so much that they couldn't read what they had written before. Teaching writing always reminded me of the Dale Carnegie quote, "A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still."

To me it always seemed as if students were not convinced that I was being consistent with what I was telling them. I assure you I was being consistent. The problem was that there was not enough that was CONCRETE for students to grab hold of. Writing is "an art" after all.

As I discuss on my blog, I have studied patterns extensively. Among the most interesting are patterns in language and communication. I finally put it all together with the 3rd grade class I mentioned who had been without a permanent teacher for most of the school year. (I took over their class while I was on my off-track vacation time.)

In those final 37 days of their school year I was able to get them writing better than any class I had ever taught before. The results literally brought tears to the principal's eyes when she saw the before and after writing samples.

Because I only had 37 days to get them up to speed I committed to the patterns and I stopped the explanations. It made sense to the kids and a month into the program nearly the entire class was saying, "I can't even read what I was writing before." I knew then that this was a major breakthrough in writing instruction.

When I discovered the patterns in “Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay” I realized that the truth was that many students simply just had not got it. They were not being stubborn or lazy. They just didn't get it! Now is your chance to make sure they GET IT!

Important State Writing Standards Explained in Easy English:

- Write stories that have a beginning, middle, and end and contain details creating and supporting the setting, character development, and plot.
- Write an interpretation or explanation of an informational text using evidence from the text that supports the interpretation or explanation.
- Write formal business letters to professional audiences such as businesses, newspapers, or government leaders.
- Write multi-paragraph essays and reports that contain easy to follow organization, topic development, effective use of detail, and a variety of sentence structures.
- Student writing develops a central idea. Their writing demonstrates knowledge of their audience and their purpose.
- Students successfully utilize all the stages of the writing process which include prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing successive versions.
- Students successfully write multiple-paragraph compositions that have an introductory paragraph, establish and support a main idea, contain supporting paragraphs that develop the main idea, and conclude with a paragraph that summarizes what was written.
- Use appropriate structures for communicating information such as compare and contrast, cause and effect, asking and answering a question, and chronological order.

- Students write expository, narrative, persuasive, and descriptive compositions of between 500 and 1000 words.
- Students create narrative compositions that establish and develop a plot or situation. They describe the setting and present an ending.
- Students create multiple-paragraph expository compositions that establish a topic and develop it with important ideas and events. They provide details and transitions linking paragraphs and ideas. The composition contains a concluding paragraph which summarizes important ideas and details.
- Students write narratives that include sensory details and concrete language which develop the plot and characters.

Special Bonus Section: The Notebook Organizational System

I have seen MANY students using this exact system many YEARS after I taught them! This system may last a lifetime...

Improving student organizational skills is one of the surest ways of having a lasting effect on a student's life. This is especially true with students who are struggling. Here is a system that has impressed administrators and helped change the lives of students.

The Student Notebook System:

Supplies Needed:

- ❖ 1 Three-ring notebook
- ❖ 6 Pee-chee style folders (The kind that has a "pocket" on each side. Google "Pee-chee" if you are not sure.)
- ❖ 1 pencil bag that can fit on the rings of the notebook (Some notebooks have them built-in and that works also)
- ❖ Pencil sharpener (Covered and that won't leak. Place it in a plastic baggie if needed)
- ❖ 3 Pencils (Minimum)
- ❖ 1 Erasure (Minimum)

How to Label the Folders

Use white labels as opposed to writing on the folders. This creates consistency and will make it easier to read. For an entire class you can create and print these labels off your computer. (It's a little work figuring out exactly how to print labels on your computer, but well worth it if you plan on using the system for at least a few years.)

The labels below are grouped into PAIRS because each folder has two pockets. Include the NUMBERS on the label as well. Do not include the notes I put in parentheses.

These days many folders have the holes already punched in them. If not, the holes need to be punched. Once the folders are labeled and you have holes, place them on the rings along with the pencil bag.

Label Them:

- 1. Writing paper** (This is their paper supply. Either I keep it filled or they do. Solves many problems such as having to pass out paper during class time, as well as dealing with messy edges from paper ripped out of notebooks.)
- 2. Homework, Returned Slips, Notes Home** (All those important papers? You know exactly where they are!)

- 3. Reading Program**
- 4. Reading Program**

- 5. Writer's Workshop (including Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay!)**
- 6. Writer's Workshop (including Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay!)**

- 7. Math**
- 8. Math**

- 9. Science**
- 10. Social Studies**

11. Other (Includes all subjects and papers which don't fit in the other folders.)

12. It's Mine (Corrected papers, completed work, and stuff that is "theirs." At home students remove all these papers daily or weekly. When I tell students "it's yours" they put a little "X" up in the corner of the paper.)

Note: You will likely want to name your folders a little different in order to meet your own needs. Teachers, if you like the system, you may want to stock up on the folders when they have them on sale for \$.10. (It will be handy to have some in the class for replacements etc.)

Please visit www.PatternBasedWriting.com and see how Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay can bring about true writing success.

Teach writing THEIR way!

Sincerely,

Paul Barger

www.PatternBasedWriting.com

P.S. You may pass this eBook along to your friends and colleagues as long as it is passed along for free and is kept fully intact.

Wishing you Total Writing Success!