



- Teaching Writing in Elementary School and Middle School -



How to Use the Six Traits of Writing and the Common Core Traits to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum



A Free Teaching-Writing Resource Presented by:
[Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#)

Do you teach beginning writers? Do you teach struggling writers? [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#) is the missing piece of the puzzle that makes everything else you teach about writing and grammar work. It's the fastest, most effective way to teach students organized multi-paragraph essay writing... Guaranteed!

✓ Beginning Writers	✓ Struggling Writers
✓ Remediation	✓ Review

Please Note: This ebook is not a part of the *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* curriculum. However, I do recommend that teachers who use the curriculum also read this once they are getting results with the program. I hope that all the teachers who use my curriculum and all the teachers who don't find this teaching resource of equal value.



Be sure to print this out for a better reading experience and to help with active reading.

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The Page-One Checklist

My goal with this ebook is to help teachers take action in teaching writing across the curriculum. Students already read and write across the curriculum, and we can use that reading and writing to teach writing. Of course, any writing activity that teachers can do across the curriculum can be done during writing time.

I link to a few different free resources throughout this ebook, but here are two that I will list upfront.

1. [Nine Strategies for Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum](#)
2. [The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills, Strategies, Concepts, Categories, and Models.](#)

This ebook largely builds on the *Nine Strategies* listed above, so you may want to read that first. I list those two resources because both of them contain information that I refer to in this ebook and that help teachers take action teaching writing across the curriculum. Furthermore, they provide additional context and background information for what I present here.

Please note: This ebook is not about using rubrics, the Six Traits, or Common Core Traits to assess writing. The goal of the ebook is to help teachers see traits in a way that lets them talk about writing all day long if they so desire. The goal of this ebook is to help teachers put down the traits rubric and to see and discuss the writing in front of them from a traits perspective. The goal of this ebook is to help teacher take action in three areas: **1) Running a Writing Classroom, 2) Creating a Classroom Full of Writers, and 3) Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC).**

Why Do I Place the Checklists Upfront at the Beginning?

On the next four pages, you will find four checklists:

1. Teacher Preparation Checklist
2. Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC) Checklist
3. State and District Writing Assessments Checklist
4. Classroom Writing Assessment and Evaluation Checklist

I've placed the checklists upfront because I want teachers to see right from the start that everything in this ebook is directed at helping them take action. When you are done reading this ebook, you will be able to look over these checklists and think, "Yes, I *can* take action! I understand most of what's on these checklists, and this ebook has directed me towards even more resources that will help me take action."

Let's get started!

Teacher Preparation Checklist: Classroom time is valuable, and teaching writing is a challenge. Therefore, teachers need to prepare themselves for teaching writing across the curriculum. In this ebook, I link to lots of resources that will help you prepare. And this checklist will help you figure out what actions to take and remind you to take action.

TEACHER: I have gathered a collection of Six Traits rubrics and checklists.						
TEACHER: I have gathered a collection of Common Core Traits rubrics and checklists.						
TEACHER: I have extracted, created, and/or memorized a list of important vocabulary words that expand my knowledge of writing. These are words that I want to bring into my writing instruction.						
TEACHER: I have extracted, created, and/or memorized a list of important writing skills that I want to teach my students to help them score high using a rubric. I also understand which traits and genres these writing skills most closely relate to.						
TEACHER: I have analyzed my collection of writing lessons that I already use, and I can relate them back to the traits and rubrics that I now use.						
TEACHER: I downloaded the free ebook: The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills, Strategies, Concepts, Categories, and Models . I analyzed the various skills and techniques, and I can relate them back to the traits I teach. I have created a list of various trait-specific skills and techniques that I want to teach.						
TEACHER: I have examined and studied how rubrics and checklists are constructed and have learned how to construct them myself.						
TEACHER: I have figured out which rubrics and checklists work best with my students. I have learned how to change them or modify them as needed as my students' writing skills and knowledge grows.						
TEACHER: I have studied enough traits-based rubrics, checklists, and writing skills that I can look at any piece of writing and discuss it and lead a discussion from a traits-based perspective. In short, I have learned how to think about writing in terms of <i>traits</i> .						

Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC) with Six Traits and Common Core Traits: This checklist will help teachers take action in teaching writing across the curriculum. The goal not to do all of these activities, but instead, to do one—and then to do another—and then another. Soon you will have an arsenal of techniques that you love to use.

TWAC: I asked my students to describe a piece of writing using one or more traits. In short, I led a traits-based discussion.

TWAC: Before my students began writing, I listed one or more traits on the front board. I then asked my students what kind of traits-related writing was required on this assignment.

Students told me the types of ideas, organization, sentence fluency, etc., that was required. I wrote brief notes on the board, and after my students finished writing, I had them evaluate or rate how they did using the criteria on the board.

In short, my students informed me as to the traits-based criteria and expectations they are required to meet, and I held them accountable for meeting those criteria and expectations.

TWAC: I had my students read over two different versions of a rubric or checklist, and we discussed the similarities and differences. Possibly, we analyzed the rubrics or checklists using the traits.

- e.g., a student-friendly version vs. a state-writing-assessment version
- e.g., a Six Traits version vs. a Common Core version

TWAC: I had my students analyze and score a piece of their own writing using a rubric. We then discussed one or more pieces of writing.

TWAC: Multi-Day: I had my students analyze and score two or more different types of professionally written text using a rubric:

- e.g., exceptional vs. boring; good vs. bad; expository vs. argument; narrative story vs. personal narrative essay; 4th-grade textbook vs. 9th-grade textbook; magazine article vs. encyclopedia article vs. newspaper article, etc.

We then discussed the pieces of writing and the requirements of the genres. We also discussed genre-specific rubrics and checklists.

TWAC: I taught my students how to create a checklist of skills they want to include in their writing. I taught my students how to turn that checklist into a basic rubric.

<p>TWAC: I have made using and discussing traits-based rubrics and checklists a normal part of our classroom activity. I have become skilled at using them formally and informally. Additionally, I have become skilled at using them as a quick reminder, or thoroughly when time permits.</p>						
<p>TWAC: I have learned how to guide classroom discussions (both in depth and quick discussions) using traits in a way that improves my students writing. I have taught my students how to analyze and describe writing using the language of the traits, along with the writing skills that writers use to write well in the traits.</p>						
<p>TWAC: I have taught my students how to relate their opinions about a piece of writing back to traits and the writing skills the writer used.</p>						
<p>TWAC: I have expanded my students' vocabulary of traits and other ways to describe writing. I have expanded my students' vocabulary of various writing skills as they relate to traits and genres.</p>						
<p>TWAC: I have my students write down an adjective that describes a piece of writing, and we discuss what trait the adjective most closely relates to and describes. We discuss the specific writing skills that the writer used to create that effect. If the writing needs improvement, we discuss ways the writer could improve the piece of writing.</p>						
<p>TWAC: Students understand the differences and similarities between the Six Traits and the Common Core Traits—and all of the other traits. They understand the purpose of traits and traits models. When presented with a list of traits, students can create a well-rounded traits model. Students can identify similar traits (synonyms) that address the same basic traits. My students have a large traits vocabulary.</p>						
<p>TWAC: I remind my students throughout the writing process to think about each trait and to write well in each trait. Sometimes I tell my students to focus on one or two traits, and sometimes I tell them that I will assess them on those traits.</p>						
<p>TWAC: When I name a trait, students can name a writing skill that relates to that trait.</p>						
<p>TWAC: I have trained my students to connect traits to the writing process. We use traits as a writing-process tool.</p>						

Please note: Although I don't discuss assessment in this ebook, I do discuss rubrics, which are used for assessment. These two small checklists relate to what is covered in this ebook; they don't address what is not covered in this ebook.

State and District Writing Assessments						
STATE ASSESSMENT: I have trained my students on our state and district writing rubric(s). My students can name the traits on the rubric(s), along with a number of writing skills that they can use to score well.						
STATE ASSESSMENT: I have had my students do at least one dry-run using a similar writing situation: i.e., similar time, similar type of writing prompt in the same genre using released writing prompts , etc.						
STATE ASSESSMENT: I have trained my students on dissecting writing prompts and creating prewriting that aligns with the traits on the rubric.						

Classroom Writing Assessment and Evaluation						
CLASS ASSESSMENT: I have used rubrics and checklists to teach my students how their writing will be assessed. Students understand that their writing will be evaluated fairly using traits and objective criteria.						
CLASS ASSESSMENT: I have trained my students how to self-assess and peer-evaluate writing using rubrics, checklists, and assessment sheets (RCAs).						
CLASS ASSESSMENT: Students can create a simple, well-rounded traits-based rubric or checklist and evaluate a piece of writing.						

Outline

How to Use the Six Traits of Writing and the Common Core Traits to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum

1. Introduction: Why Did The Six Traits of Writing Catch On?
2. Traits: The Six Traits vs. The Common Core Traits
3. Moving Past Three Traits: 1) Grammar, 2) Mechanics, and 3) Writing
4. How Did They Create the Six Traits of Writing? They Began with the End in Mind and Worked Backwards
5. Six Traits and Questions: Teaching Writing by Looking at Writing and Asking Questions
6. The Six Traits in Question Format
7. Six Traits Checklists and Rubrics: The Formal Kind
8. The Problem with Six Traits Rubrics and Checklists
9. Student-Generated Six Traits Checklists and Daily Writing Across the Curriculum
10. The Six Traits in Answer Format: What's Required on this Writing Assignment?
11. Six Traits and Genre-Specific Rubrics and Checklists
12. The Six Traits Model is a Teaching-Writing Tool
13. The Six Slots of Writing: How Will You Fill the Slots?
14. The Six Traits is a Two-Way Street: Guiding and Analyzing
15. Know The Limits of the Six Traits: Teach Writing!
16. Traits: Nouns vs. Adjectives
17. Describing Writing vs. Describing Writing Skills
 - a. Two ways of Thinking: The Six Traits vs. The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills
 - b. Adjectives to Describe Writing
 - c. Categories Related to Writing: i.e., Nouns or Traits:
18. Other Traits Models
19. The Common Core Writing Traits
20. The Common Core Writing Standards in Checklist and Table Form
21. Common Core Traits-Based Writing Rubrics

1. Introduction: Why Did The Six Traits of Writing Catch On?

In most subjects, teachers will be fine if they do these two things:

1. Turn pages in a curriculum.
2. Supplement the curriculum with a bit of interesting or necessary information and activity.

If that were the case with teaching writing, most teachers would have never heard of the Six Traits. And they wouldn't have heard of Writer's Workshop, either. In short, curriculums can't box up **what the research says works**. That's why the Six Traits caught on.

I've come to see it this way: To improve students' independent writing, how you teach writing is more important than what you teach about writing. The Six Traits falls into the category of **how you teach writing**. The reason being: it creates a structure and framework for **what you teach about writing**.

If teachers don't have structures, frameworks, and systems to teach writing within, it's either random chaos or just turning pages.

Although the Six Traits began as an assessment tool, it has become more than that. It's a model that creates a structure and framework for teaching and understanding writing. By the way, I don't discuss **Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay** in the body text of this ebook beyond this paragraph. But I must say this now: **Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay** creates a structure, foundation, framework, and methodology in much the same way that the Six Traits does. For this reason, it makes teaching writing easier. Yes, you will get clear, obvious, objective, and measurable results fast—results that will have your students saying, "I get it! I finally get it!" But equally important, the **Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay** foundation, structure, and framework will make everything else you teach about writing easier. Be sure to check out the curriculum. There! I said it!

Okay, the Six Traits caught on because it provides a structure and framework to teach writing within. But there had been other traits models before. Why did these particular traits catch on? Well, it caught on for a few reasons:

1. The Six Traits began with a great rubric that brought a much-needed objectivity to writing assessment.
2. The Six Traits is a nice, well-rounded model.
3. The Six Traits uses the right words and the right phrasing for student writers.
4. Many teachers connect with all six traits. The Six Traits includes everything that they love about writing, reading, and teaching writing.

5. For those teachers who don't love all Six Traits, it forces them to confront their biases and areas of weakness. In short, student writers must aspire to more than simply creating readable and logical text, and the Six Traits captures that aspect.

I guess there is one more practical reason that the Six Traits caught on. It was created with government funding, and that makes it difficult for one person or entity to own. But that's beside the point. It's still a great model.

2. Traits: The Six Traits vs. The Common Core Traits

As you will learn in this ebook, traits in writing are as old as time. But for the last few decades, the Six Traits has been the clear winner in the traits contest. In fact, there hadn't even been a serious contender until the Common Core came along. Of course, the Common Core isn't a traits model per se, but most states have a Common Core writing rubric based on the Common Core writing standards, and all of those writing rubrics contain a traits model. Later, I present twenty different Common Core traits models, but for now, here are two:

1. **Common Core Gr. 6-8 Argument Rubric (New York State):** 1) Content and Analysis, 2) Command of Evidence, 3) Coherence, Organization, and Style, 4) Control of Conventions
2. **Common Core Gr. 5 Narrative Rubric: (Elk Grove U.S.D., CA):** 1) Focus/Setting, 2) Organization/Plot, 3) Narrative Techniques, 4) Language

In short, teachers should understand two different traits models:

1. The Six Traits of Writing
2. The traits models that are on their state and district writing assessment rubrics. These days most of these rubrics are Common Core traits-based rubrics.

In this ebook, I focus on the Six Traits model. The reason being: it would be confusing to attempt to address all of the traits models, let alone all of the traits. So I focus on a specific *six traits*. But what I say about these six traits applies to most traits. In most sections, readers can substitute in any traits they want.

3. Moving Past Three Traits: 1) Grammar, 2) Mechanics, and 3) Writing

When teaching elementary and middle school students how to write well, teachers have often thought of writing as having three traits: 1) grammar, 2) mechanics, and 3) writing. That's an easy and natural division to make. One result of that division is that teachers have taught an enormous amount of grammar and mechanics using worksheets. When it came to teaching writing, they were at a loss.

Unfortunately, the research says that **grammar instruction and isolated skill drills don't improve student writing**.

“Decades of research (Elly, 1979, Hillocks, 1986, Freedman, 1993, Freedman and Daiute, 2001) have shown that instructional strategies such as isolated skill drills fail to improve student writing.”

The Neglected “R”: The Need for a Writing Revolution (2003) by The National Commission on Writing

So, what does it mean to teach *writing*? That’s where the Six Traits of Writing model comes in. In the 1980s, groups of researchers and teachers got together and created the Six Traits of Writing model. Their goal was to create a more reliable method for analyzing and evaluating student writing.

4. How Did They Create the Six Traits of Writing? They Began with the End in Mind and Worked Backwards

To be clear, the Six Traits team did not start from scratch. The creators certainly owe a big debt to Paul B. Diederich’s *Five Traits of Writing with Fifty-Five Categories of Comment* (1961): 1) Ideas, 2) Form, 3) Flavor, 4) Mechanics, and 5) Wording. You can see all fifty-five categories of comment in my free ebook: [The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills, Strategies, Concepts, Categories, and Models](#).

Modeling backwards—that’s how the Six Traits team created the Six Traits of Writing. They did what people have done for thousands of years—they examined excellence and problems and modeled backwards. That’s what Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) did with acting, and the result was this: “the truth in usable form.” That’s also a nice description of the Six Traits.

Vicki Spandel, one of the original Six Traits team members, put it this way, “Who invented these traits? No one. The six traits are nothing new. They're simply a handy way of talking and thinking about writing.” Below are two quotes from towering figures in their respective arts that clarify what Spandel meant. These two quotes illustrate how modeling backwards has been a part of many important advancements through the ages:

One may still... hear... objections against Logic and Rhetoric, and even Grammar. Cicero has been gravely cited (as Aristotle...) to testify that rhetorical rules are derived from the practice of Oratory, and not vice versa.

Elements of Rhetoric (1846) by Richard Whately

There is no claim made here to actual invention. The author is most ready to point out that a genius like Salvini or Duse may use without theory the right emotions and expressions that to the less inspired but intelligent student need to be taught. What Stanislavski has undertaken is not to discover a truth but to bring the truth in usable form.

An Actor Prepares (1936) by Konstantin Stanislavski

The Six-Trait model describes what excellent and problematic writing looks like. The creators examined numerous examples of writing and then determined what made them excellent and problematic. The result of this way of thinking was the Six Traits.

Keep in mind that *traits* in writing are not new. I've come across informal models created hundreds of years ago that contain the core of the Six Traits model. However, the Six Traits has caught on largely because it works so well with student writers.

5. Six Traits and Questions: Teaching Writing by Looking at Writing and Asking Questions

The Six Traits is primarily an evaluative tool. However, teachers also use it as a tool that helps guide numerous aspects of writing instruction: e.g., lessons, discussions, instruction, feedback, analysis, and more. Unfortunately, when you look at a Six Traits rubric, it doesn't tell you how to teach writing.

Both writing and teaching writing are active. Fortunately, the Six Traits is an active tool, and asking questions is an active tool. If a teacher can ask questions like those that follow below, they will certainly be able to teach writing effectively across the curriculum. Think about it: We have writing in front of us all day long in all of the books we read and in all of our students' writing. We have plenty of writing available to us that we can ask six-trait questions about. For this reason, I present the Six Traits in question format.

6. The Six Traits in Question Format

- ➔ Trait 1: Ideas: Does the piece of writing have a clear, high-quality overall message or point? Are the details relevant and important, and do they effectively support the main ideas? Do the main ideas effectively support the main message? Are the details, the main ideas, and the main message all important, necessary, interesting, and novel?
- ➔ Trait 2: Organization: Is there a clear hierarchy of ideas? Is that hierarchy made clear with the use of appropriate structural techniques: title, headings, thesis statement, controlling idea, main ideas, and topic sentences? Do the paragraphs have a clear purpose within the context of the whole composition? Is the order logical? Is the sequence effective? Are effective patterns of

organization used in the overall structure and the paragraphs? Does the writer use compare-contrast, cause-effect, pro-con, chronological order, order based on importance, and other common thought patterns to make things clear to the reader? Is the organizational structure communicated with an effective use of transitions?

- ➔ Trait 3: Sentence Fluency: Do the strings of sentences have rhythm and flow? Does the effective use of transitions help keep the reader reading? Does the effective use of a variety of sentence lengths and sentence structures help to keep the reader reading? Does the writing have flow?
- ➔ Trait 4: Word Choice: Does the writer use the best words, the most effective words, the right words, to express ideas clearly, concisely, creatively, and effectively? Does the writer avoid the overuse of tired and boring words?
- ➔ Trait 5: Conventions: Does the writer adhere to the commonly accepted rules of writing? Is the grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization all correct? Is the paragraphing effective?
- ➔ Trait 6: Voice: Does the piece of writing contain an original, unique, or exciting expression of words and ideas? Is there a real person behind the words and ideas who cares about the topic and is interested in the topic? Is the writer excited about what he or she is communicating? Can the reader tell? Does the writer fall into the trap of breaking grammar rules to create *voice*?

As you can see, the Six Traits model helps teachers move away from focusing solely on grammar and mechanics, and it helps teachers to see pieces of writing as a whole. Teachers can get quite far in improving student writing by using a few generic Six Traits checklists and rubrics with their students, along with teaching writing skills, and along with providing plenty of opportunities for their students to write. Furthermore, by using the Six Traits model, teachers can more easily score student writing holistically. This means that teachers can assess more papers quickly and hold students accountable across the curriculum.

Do You Need a Foundation, a Framework,
and a Methodology for Teaching Writing?
Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay

7. Six Traits Checklists and Rubrics: The Formal Kind

That list of Six Traits questions above is halfway home to the creation of a checklist, which is halfway home to a rubric. But the goal is to teach writing, not to use a rubric and checklist. Most teachers soon discover that rubrics and checklists don't teach writing. Teachers can't simply hand students a rubric or checklist and have them use it correctly.

My purpose here is not to go into how to use formal rubrics and checklists to assess and teach writing; however, I do want to touch on them. They are definitely helpful in understanding the Six Traits and in teaching writing.

Teachers should accumulate a small collection of rubrics and checklist over time. Here are a few reasons why:

1. **Different Styles and Formats:** Many different styles of rubrics and checklists exist. Although some of them are quite similar, many of them are created with a specific audience or purpose in mind. When you collect a number of different rubrics and checklists, not only will you be able to find the ones that work best for you, but you will also be able to draw ideas from all of them.
2. **Student Starting Level and Growth:** Your students' knowledge and understanding of the Six Traits will grow and change. At the beginning of the year, to capture your students' interest and to prevent your students' eyes from glazing over, you may wish to begin with a simple, student-friendly version. As you teach your students writing concepts and as your students progress, you want your rubrics and checklists to reflect what students have learned and now understand about writing. Furthermore, you also want to challenge your students as they grow as writers.
3. **Test Which Ones Work:** With a variety of rubrics and checklists in stock, you'll be able to test and see which ones click with your students. Furthermore, you will be able to shake things up when writing progress seems stalled.
4. **Learn by Comparison:** Students learn a great deal about writing by seeing, using, and comparing-and-contrasting different versions. In fact, the different versions serve as models that illustrate the six traits in action. Students come to see that writers can express the same or similar ideas with different words, a different voice, and a different style. Furthermore, students better learn the language of checklists and rubrics, which places the classroom in a better position to create their own checklists and rubrics and take complete ownership and responsibility for their writing.

Early in my teaching career, I tried to teach my third-grade students the most important and the only rubric I had available—the rubric from our district writing assessment. It did not go well. Put simply, the rubric was not created for third-grade students. The wording in that rubric was created for teachers, and the rubric was probably used across many grades. Although it did not go well, it wasn't a waste of time either. My students did grasp what the rubric was, and they did better understand the writing-assessment process.

I tell you about that experience for one reason: As you collect your rubrics and checklists, it's worth knowing what you are looking at. Naturally, you want to find the ones that work for you right now. But you may not want to discard the rest. You never know when they will come in handy, and you can learn from all of them. Here are nine categories that may help you identify and classify the rubrics and checklists you find. Please keep in mind that these categories overlap.

1. Original Six-Traits Rubrics
2. State and District Writing Assessment Six-Traits-Based Rubrics
3. The Student-Friendly Versions
4. Highly-Academic Assessment Versions
5. Genre-Specific Rubrics and Checklists
6. Grade-Level Specific Rubrics and Checklists
7. Multipage Trait-by-Trait Rubrics
8. Simplified Single-Page Rubrics
9. Various Types of Checklists

State and District Rubrics: A Note and a Link

Be sure to download your state and district writing assessment rubrics. That's the place to begin. State and district writing assessments often determine the best checklist and rubric to use. If you can't find this year's rubric, keep in mind that last year's rubric is likely to be quite similar to this year's rubric, so that's also a great place to begin. You can find many state rubrics and testing resources here:

1. [State Writing Assessment Tools and Resources](#)

Original Six-Traits Rubrics: A Note and Some Links

The Beaverton School District in Oregon was a big part of the creation of the Six Traits model. From what I gather, the United States Government, through its agencies, including the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), supported or funded the creation of the Six Traits model.

Apparently, Education Northwest is the contractor for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), which is a government-funded program.

In short, anyone connected to those institutions and who presents a Six Traits rubric is probably presenting a so-called original Six Traits rubric. Here are a few that I've found:

1. [An Investigation of the Impact of the 6+1 Trait Writing Model on Grade 5 Student Writing Achievement Final Report \(2011\) Appendix E. Scoring rubrics for student essays.](#) This appendix describes the two types of study rubrics applied by the scoring teams: the holistic rubric and the six analytic rubrics. ERIC Number: ED527445
2. [Traits Rubric for Grades 3–12 \(2014\) - Education Northwest](#)
3. [Traits Rubric for Grades 3–12 \(2013\) - Education Northwest](#)

Student-Friendly Versions: A Note and a Link

Here is an excellent "Student Friendly Scoring Guide." Even though the scan is not the best quality, the handbook as a whole provides a friendly overview of 6-Trait writing.

1. [Dear Parent: A Handbook for Parents of 6-Trait Writing Students \(1997\) by Vicki Spandel](#)

8. The Problem with Six Traits Rubrics and Checklists

A Six Traits rubric and checklist won't solve all our teaching-writing problems. Let me illustrate one problem that Six Traits rubrics don't solve. If a teacher spends valuable class time teaching students about the common homophones, shouldn't the teacher then hold students accountable for using those common homophones correctly in their writing? Yes! That's how you make the information stick.

Point being: Six Traits checklists and rubrics don't hold students accountable for all the specific strategies and techniques that students learn. And the specific skills that students learn are at least as important as the general skills that they learn.

Another problem with rubrics and checklists (in general) is that they often mean absolutely nothing to the students. Teachers plop down a generic checklist or rubric, and students don't know what to make of it. Here's an example:

The Checklist Says: I used correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

The Student Responds: Yes, of course, I did. It's all correct. Why wouldn't it be? After all, it's *me* we're talking about!

There is an art to using rubrics and checklists in the classroom, and the Six Traits does not address that. Ideally, rubrics and checklists reflect what students have learned about writing. Of course, teachers can also use them to guide writing instruction.

To be honest, using rubrics and checklists to teach writing is a large topic, and I have to keep our discussion short here. But one key to exceptional success with rubrics and checklists is to make students active participants in the creation of rubrics and checklists. We want to foster students' ownership of their writing and their writing process, and that includes the use of rubrics and checklists.

9. Student-Generated Six Traits Checklists and Daily Writing Across the Curriculum

One of my mantras is this: *Always be teaching writing*. Here are two important parts of that mantra:

1. Hold students accountable for using what they have learned about writing in their writing.
2. Continually review with students what is important in writing.

Here's how this works across the curriculum. Let's say that we just finished a science unit, and students are going to be answering some comprehension questions. Naturally, I'm interested in their answers, but I'm also interested in the quality of their writing. Therefore, I may quickly write this on the front board: 1) Ideas, 2) Organization, 3) Voice, 4) Word Choice, 5) Sentence Fluency, and 6) Conventions. Now, I ask my students to tell me what's required in their writing. They answer. I write it down. And they get to work. It's that simple!

Of course, I don't do this with every assignment because we don't have the time, but I do it enough to set the standard and keep our list of writing skills and writing concepts fresh in my students' minds. Students will tell you what you have taught them about writing and what they have learned about writing—and you can hold them accountable for using what they have learned. That's fair. And students believe it's fair.

10. The Six Traits in Answer Format: What's Required on this Writing Assignment?

I presented the Six Traits in **question format** earlier. You may remember how we can teach a great deal about writing by analyzing pieces of writing (both student writing and professional writing) and asking questions that focus on the Six Traits.

However, I also like to use the Six Traits to set the standard before students begin writing. I do this by listing the traits on the front board and asking questions. In short, I ask students this question: ***What kind of writing is required on this writing assignment?***

When teachers ask this question, students tell the teacher what they understand about writing and what the teacher has taught them about writing. Of course, teachers can guide the discussion to any area of writing that they want to focus on:

- ➔ e.g., The specific skills and techniques that students have learned.
- ➔ e.g., The current problem areas that the class is working on.
- ➔ e.g., General Six Traits concepts and guidelines.
- ➔ e.g., Specific Six Traits strategies and techniques.

I presented the Six Traits in ***question format*** earlier. Now, I will present the Six Traits in ***answer format***. Admittedly, the *answers* are not going to come out of your students' mouths in perfect form. It's likely that students will use many fragments and keyword phrases. But you will still be able to see what your students understand about the Six Traits.

Please Note: This informal questioning does not replace the formal rubrics and checklist that you use. However, you can take what students give you and formalize it into rubrics and checklist that the students own. But that discussion is for another day.

Important Note on Student Answers: I created these "class answers" by thinking about what answers I would like to hear and what answers my students might give. My answers are based on what I hope to have taught my students. In short, I did not try to replicate a typical Six Traits rubric or checklist. Six Traits rubrics and checklists are a picture of an end result—they are like maps on a wall. A map is not the same thing as being there. In short, the skills that create the result are different from the result, and students' answers will reflect that difference.

Trait 1: Ideas: What kind of IDEAS do we want to include in this piece of writing?

The Class Answers: We will include the best ideas, and by that, we mean the best ideas that belong and the best ideas that help us to make our points. Our ideas will be powerful and create unity of purpose—i.e., oneness. Additionally, we will leave out the bad ideas, the ideas that don't belong, and the unnecessary ideas. Our biggest idea will be the point that our whole composition makes, and that point will be made up of more points. Our details will be relevant, important, and interesting. But more important, our details will make our points clear, understandable, and conclusive.

Trait 2: Organization: What kind of ORGANIZATION do we want to use in this piece of writing?

The Class Answers: Our whole composition will be a hierarchy of ideas. The whole composition will have a beginning, middle, and ending, and our paragraphs will have or will feel as though they have a beginning, middle, and ending. We will have two levels of beginning, middle, and ending in our whole composition. We will arrange our ideas in a logical order, and the divisions will be clear to our reader. We will transition effectively and artfully to create an easy-to-follow pathway for our reader. We will use common thought patterns in a natural way to organize our ideas and to make our points clear.

Trait 3: Sentence Fluency: What kind of SENTENCE FLUENCY do we want to create in this piece of writing?

The Class Answers: We will create an effective rhythm and flow with our sentences. We will achieve this in part by organizing our sentences logically. Upon our logical structure, we will vary our sentence structure. We will use a variety of the sentence-structure patterns and techniques that we have learned, including different types of sentences, engaging sentence openers, effective transitions, and interesting interrupters.

Trait 4: Word Choice: What kind of WORD CHOICE do we want to use in this piece of writing?

The Class Answers: We will stretch our vocabulary in this piece of writing. We will choose the right words, the best words, the most precise words, the most effective words, and the most beautiful words. We will avoid all of the tired and boring words.

Trait 5: Conventions: What kind of CONVENTIONS do we want to use in this piece of writing?

The Class Answers: We will use correct spelling and punctuation and proper grammar. We will pay special attention to all of the concepts and rules that we have studied in class. We will use several proofreading techniques to help us proofread our writing critically and objectively. We will make sure that we have no careless errors or typos.

Trait 6: Voice: What kind of VOICE do we want to use in this piece of writing?

The Class Answers: We will use an enthusiastic and knowledgeable voice that is captivating and irresistible to our readers. Our voice will be unique because we will choose our

words carefully and string our sentences together in ways that are natural, artful, and creative all at the same time. We will keep our writing appropriately professional as determined by the genre. We won't fall into the trap of breaking grammar rules to create *voice*.

Trait 7: Genre: How do we apply the Six Traits to our GENRE in this piece of writing?

The Class Answers: We understand that certain universal writing skills and rules exist, especially at school. But we also understand that certain skills and techniques are genre specific or at least more appropriate for specific genres. In short, we effectively use skills that are appropriate for our genre. We can analyze our writing and explain to others why our writing meets the criteria of the genre.

How much time do you spend teaching writing? Is it working?

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay

11. Six Traits and Genre-Specific Rubrics and Checklists

You may have noticed that I included "Trait 7: Genre." Genre should really be Trait #1 for this one reason: If a writer doesn't meet the requirements of the genre, the piece of writing is probably not going to be well received—that is, unless the writer reinvents or transcends the genre. Writing is evaluated in the context of its genre.

Genre is a neglected and misunderstood topic. Netflix understands genre, and they use it as a tool. For a writer, genre is a target, but it is also something that a writer takes charge of and creates. Genre simply means "shares similar characteristics." One easy way to look at genre is this: We start with one of the four main genres (narrative, description, expository, and argument) and add appropriate adjectives and categories: e.g., personal narrative essay, expository newspaper article, etc.

When teachers teach students genre, they are teaching students at least two things:

1. They are teaching students a specific set of writing skills.
2. They are teaching students what is appropriate and what is expected in a piece of writing.

Note: In my free ebook, [The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills](#), I have a page devoted to “Genre: Build a Genre,” and several pages devoted to “Story Techniques and Concepts,” which also relates to genre.

A narrative fairy tale will surely have characteristics that are different from an argument essay. Can we use the same Six Traits checklists and rubrics for both genres of writing? Yes and no. Yes, because we do. No, because it’s leaving out one of the most important ingredients—genre.

If students are going to write a narrative fairy tale or an argument essay, presumably the students have learned what characteristics the genre requires. Haven’t they? Therefore, a great place to begin in constructing a genre-specific rubric or checklist is to ask the students what’s required. Here is how that looks for the trait of **IDEAS**:

- ➔ **Narrative Fairy Tale: Trait 1 - Ideas:** What types of ideas should a **narrative fairy tale** contain?
- ➔ **Answer:** Descriptions, actions, events, magical ideas, etc.

- **Argument Essay: Trait 1 - Ideas:** What types of ideas should an **argument essay** contain?
- **Answer:** Claims, reasons, facts, evidence, refutations, etc.

As you can imagine, if a piece of writing is missing all of the types of **ideas** that make the genre what it is, it’s not going to be an effective piece of writing.

12. The Six Traits Model is a Teaching-Writing Tool

I’ve concluded that how we teach writing is more important than what we teach students about writing. I think that’s the point the modern research on teaching writing attempts to make. As you can see, I believe that the Six Traits should be part of our daily conversation. The Six Traits model is an extremely valuable tool, as it serves as an excellent guide and framework for almost everything we teach students about writing. Also, it’s an excellent guide and framework for building our own rubrics and checklists.

However, I would be remiss if I didn’t point out one important truth: The Six Traits model does not specifically address much that is important in writing and teaching writing. It doesn’t tell a teacher how to teach writing in a way that gets results. These two quotes largely explain how people learn to write:

Nobody but a reader ever became a writer.
– Richard Peck – 2001 Newberry Award Winner

You can only learn to be a better writer by actually writing.
– Doris Lessing – 2007 Noble Prize in Literature Winner

These two quotes are the first two sentences on [My Nine-Sentence Blueprint for Teaching Writing](#).

13. The Six Slots of Writing: How Will You Fill the Slots?

I enjoy (not love) browsing over different rubrics and checklists. It's a fast and effective way to get ideas and to review the important writing skills, techniques, and concepts that I want my students to learn. Browsing over and analyzing a number of different rubrics and checklists helps teachers to see the big picture and to create clear goals for teaching writing.

Ideally, teachers will collect a number of different rubrics and checklists, and they will study them, and they will learn the vocabulary of effective writing. Furthermore, teachers will have a few rubrics and checklists that they like to use to teach writing and to evaluate writing.

But there comes a time when we must put down our rubrics and checklists and teach writing. Luckily, even when we put down our rubrics and checklists, we still bring the Six Traits with us.

The six traits are simply six useful categories for thinking about and talking about writing. And that's why we always bring the Six Traits with us. Below you will find an empty table that contains the heart of the Six Traits of Writing. What you and your students understand about writing and how you fill in the slots is the important part of the Six Traits. Put simply: What skills and techniques do writers use to create effective writing? How does a teacher teach students to create effective writing?

1. Ideas	2. Organization	3. Sentence Fluency	4. Word Choice	5. Conventions	6. Voice

So, how will you fill in the slots? Here are some questions to get you thinking and help you on your way.

- Ideas:** What are good ideas? How do writers create or find good ideas? How can I evaluate the quality of ideas in a piece of writing?
- Organization:** What is effective organization? How does a writer create effective organization? How can I distinguish good organization from poor organization? How do I know if the organization in a piece of writing is effective? How can I improve the organization in a piece of writing?

3. **Sentence Fluency:** How do writers create sentence fluency? What are the specific skills and techniques that create sentence fluency? How can I distinguish effective sentence fluency from poor sentence fluency?
4. **Word Choice:** What kinds of words should a writer choose and include? What effects do the words that a writer chooses have on a piece of writing? What's a good word and what's a bad word? What's the best word?
5. **Conventions:** What are conventions? How does a writer learn all of the rules for all of the conventions? How does a writer make sure that he or she has used proper conventions? Can a writer break any rules of conventions and still create an effective piece of writing?
6. **Voice:** What is voice and how does a writer create voice? How can a writer create voice without breaking grammar rules?

That list of questions is the *real* Six Traits. And if we pose those questions to the greatest writers in history or even the greatest writers alive today, we are going to get many different answers, and possibly, many conflicting answers. We are not going to end up with a simple one-page rubric. Writing is far more complicated than that. The truth of effective writing does not fit on a rubric or a checklist. Rubrics and checklists are just helpful tools. They are helpful tools from a writer's perspective and from an evaluator's perspective.

14. The Six Traits is a Two-Way Street: Guiding and Analyzing

We can all use the Six Traits beyond pure academic analysis and assessment. The Six Traits is an effective, flexible, and active tool that teachers can use all day long. Please note that I am not suggesting that we overuse the Six Traits. But I am saying that it's always available to us and that it's extremely useful. It's one of the more important and effective teaching-writing frameworks to work within.

Although I am not recommending that we do so, we can connect everything we teach students about writing to the Six Traits. Here's how it looks:

The Six Traits is a Two-Way Street		
1. The Six Traits	→ Guides →	Our Conversation, Our Thinking, Our Analysis, and Our Writing
2. Our Conversation, Our Thinking, Our Analysis, and Our Writing	→ Relates Back To →	The Six Traits

As a Writer: Even though the Six Traits model was created for assessing writing, it is something we can think about constantly across the curriculum and while writing. Most writers would use simpler words and simpler sentences if they were not constantly thinking, “I must do better.” Of course, everyone wants to write well, but we all must actively challenge ourselves to write our best, which creates new skills that lets us write even better next time. The Six Traits is a model that reminds writers to challenge themselves on six different levels.

As a Reader: We frequently come across writing that we love and writing that we find problematic. Instead of simply taking guesses at what we love or dislike, we can analyze the piece of writing using the Six Traits. But we don’t need to stop the class and pull out a rubric to analyze the piece of writing. We can instead just *think of it*, *analyze it*, and *discuss it* using the Six Traits.

We like it or we don’t like it—but what is it that we like or don’t like? Is there something about the ideas? The organization? The sentence structures? The word choices? The conventions or the twisting of conventions? Or the author’s voice? Or how the writer combines it all in powerful ways?

15. Know The Limits of the Six Traits: Teach Writing!

One way or another, all teachers have to interact with their students’ writing. It’s unavoidable. Ideally, we provide feedback and guidance, and we assess our students’ writing. The Six Traits is extremely helpful in doing all this. Additionally, the Six Traits creates a structure and a framework to teach writing within.

But some teachers make the Six Traits a teaching-writing prison. The traits stifle and limit how they view pieces of writing and how they teach writing. Of course, this is not the Six Traits’ fault. The Six Traits is popular primarily because it creates a structure and a framework to work within. That structure and framework is supposed to set teachers free, not restrict them

The Six Traits was created as an assessment tool, but it has become something more. However, the fact that it has become something more does not mean that we must dismiss 2,000 plus years of literary theory and literary analysis. Furthermore, we don’t want to throw away our own ideas, our own vocabulary, and our own analysis and replace it with just six traits. And we don’t have to. The Six Traits is an extremely flexible tool if we make it so.

Always remember that anything we have to say about a piece of writing or anything that anyone has ever said about a piece of writing can go on a Six Traits rubric or checklist. Think about a map on the wall. Which came first—the territory or the map? The territory came first, and the mapmakers created a map to reflect the territory. In case you are still wondering about that analogy, the best

writing and the most problematic writing throughout history is the territory, and the Six Traits is the map that was created after the fact to help teachers navigate the territory.

16. Traits: Nouns vs. Adjectives

I have a complete methodology for using rubrics, checklists, and assessment sheets (RCAs) for teaching writing and assessing writing across the curriculum, but I won't go into that here. Please note that there is a distinct difference between using RCAs to teach writing and to assess writing. At times, the Six Traits is a part of my methodology—but at other times, it isn't. When I use RCAs to teach writing across the curriculum, my goal is not to create a professional RCA. My goal is to teach my students writing, and in fact, my students frequently lead the way in creating my RCAs. That's teaching writing.

Of course, I do teach my students many of the best practices in creating RCAs. And the Six Traits model is an important foundation for understanding RCAs and for understanding writing assessment. Probably the first thing a person should understand about the Six Traits is this:

- ➔ Definition: *TRAIT*: (noun) a quality or characteristic.

The word *TRAIT* is a noun. That's why all of the six traits (1. Ideas, 2. Organization, 3. Sentence Fluency, 4. Word Choice, 5. Conventions, 6. Voice) are nouns. Additionally, all of the traits listed in all of the other traits models that I have found are also nouns. I think it's safe to say that in a professional assessment model the traits must be nouns.

It does seem slightly strange that all of the traits are nouns, but we use adjectives to describe pieces of writing. After all, if one were writing a comedy, one would think that FUNNY should be a trait. But in a professional assessment model, we must change that word to the noun HUMOR. If one were writing an adventure story, one would think that EXCITING should be a trait. But we must change that word to the noun EXCITEMENT.

We use traits (nouns) on a rubric because rubrics have a section called the "Performance Rating Descriptions," which describe the nouns. Informally, it may not matter much, but I figure I should point out the true nature of traits. Here are two examples of rubrics. Do you think the adjectives or the nouns make the better traits? You be the judge.

Trait: EXCITING (adjective)		vs.	Trait: EXCITEMENT (noun)		
Score: 5	Score: 4	Score: 3	Score: 2	Score: 1	
exceptionally exciting	very exciting	exciting	somewhat exciting	not exciting	

Trait: FUNNY (adjective)		vs.	Trait: HUMOR (noun)	
Score: 5			Score: 1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jokes are well setup with clear targets and strong, surprising punchlines. The humor is based in truth, character qualities, and human nature. Plays on words are novel, new, and funny. Situations are funny, and the tone throughout is appropriate for humor. Skilled use of the common principles of humor: e.g., surprise, exaggeration, etc. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jokes lack setups, targets, or punch lines. Attempts at humor lack skill or technique. They don't use any of the common principles of humor: e.g., surprise, exaggeration, etc. Attempts at humor are based on overused or inappropriate stereotypes and clichés. 	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some jokes have a setup, a target, and a punchline and some don't. Some of the humor is novel and surprising, while some it obvious and cliché. Adequate use of the common principles of humor: e.g., surprise, exaggeration, etc. Situations and overall tone are sometimes appropriate and sometimes not. 	

Hopefully, this section will leave teachers wanting to take a closer look at the words and structures of their rubrics and checklists.

17. Describing Writing vs. Describing Writing Skills

It's a shame for students to hear words like *style*, *coherence*, and *focus* and say, "Those aren't traits." What have they learned about writing if that's what they think? A trait is a noun that is a quality or characteristic. And as Paul B. Diederich's 1961 traits model points out, traits are qualities or characteristics that we can comment on. Although the Six Traits is an excellent model, teachers and students should understand writing beyond six traits.

Please download my free 38-page ebook, titled [The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills](#). That's a lot of writing skills! If we focus too much on Six Traits, what are we neglecting? On the other hand, if we focus on an endless list of writing skills without using the Six Traits, students learn that writing is an endless list of writing skills, which it is not.

Let's make a distinction between two ways of thinking:

- The Six Traits:** We want our students to be able to analyze and describe their own writing and other's writing. Why?

- a. If our students can analyze and describe writing, every piece of writing they read serves as a model from which they can learn. They read like writers.
 - b. When our students can analyze and describe their own writing, they not only attempt to write with skill while they write and while they prewrite, but they can also improve their writing in revision.
2. **The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills:** We want our students to understand all of the different skills that help create an effective piece of writing. Furthermore, we want our students to be able to use all of those different writing skills—with skill. We want our students to have an active knowledge of writing—that is, we want our students to be able to write with skill.

Now that we have made that distinction, here is a more complete list of adjectives and nouns that are helpful in analyzing and describing writing:

Adjectives to Describe Writing: clear, concise, confusing, compelling, atmospheric, moving, exciting, boring, satirical, funny, sad, strange, beautiful, full of surprises, engaging, etc. We could add adjectives to this list all day long, but that is not our purpose here. Be sure to see my entire list of [4,800 Adjectives: The Giant List of Adjectives](#).

Keep in mind that certain traits are more genre-specific than others—that is, some traits are especially important in one genre compared to another. For example, if a writer is going to write down directions to go to a party, ACCURACY is extremely important.

Categories Related to Writing: i.e., Nouns or Traits: clearness, conciseness, style, technique, structure, arrangement, selection, creativity, tone, audience, purpose, irrefutability or conclusiveness, trustworthiness, persuasiveness, originality, proportion, focus, power, force, presentation, logic, accuracy, appropriateness, consistency, paragraphing style, sentence structure, sentence variety, believability or credibility, authoritativeness, message-to-audience match, vividness, authenticity, sincerity, liveliness or energy, compactness or brevity, emotion, concreteness, precision, beauty, flow or readability, unity, coherence, emphasis, connection, relatibility, development, support, proof, suspense, eloquence, excitement, thrills, mystery, relevance, introduction, body, conclusion, spelling, use of sources, citing sources, use of sensory details—and any category of conventions: e.g., subject-verb agreement, punctuation, etc.

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay

Put simply, it works.

18. Other Traits Models

Let's say that we are producing a movie with a \$50 million budget, but our script has problems. Wisely, we decide to hire a *script doctor* to help us fix our script. What do we want our script doctor to focus on? The Six Traits? Probably not. Here are eleven categories (traits) that we may want our script doctor to analyze, critique, comment on, improve, and fix:

- ➔ 1) Genre, 2) Character, 3) Setting, 4) Plot, 5) Problem, 6) Conflict, 7) Theme, 8) Resolution, 9) Pace, 10) Symbolism, 11) Dialogue

A skilled script doctor can transform a script by making improvements in each of these categories (traits). Furthermore, we can create a rubric for each trait to guide the process.

The Six Traits is a great model for understanding student writing; however, a comparison of models is also extremely valuable. And comparing various traits models will help one better understand the Six Traits of Writing. Comparisons create objectivity and understanding and reveal the truth.

While the Six Traits was created to bring objectivity to performance evaluation, it still has its own biases built into the model. This is why I like to understand other models and compare. Here is an interesting model that I came across recently. It's from a dance-competition show, and it uses a traits model that reminds me of the Six Traits.

- ➔ **World of Dance (2018) TV Show:** 1) Performance, 2) Technique, 3) Choreography, 4) Presentation, and 5) Creativity.

In a moment, we will look at an entire page of Common Core traits-based rubric models. However, it behooves us all to understand a few models that came before. If you look at the table of contents or index of any old (or new) English composition book, you will likely find a list of traits.

- ➔ **English Composition (1889) by John Nichol:** 1) Accuracy, 2) Clearness, 3) Strength, 4) Precision, 5) Grace, 6) Energy, 7) Beauty, and 8) Versification
- ➔ **Popular 1900s Traits Model:** 1) Unity, 2) Coherence, and 3) Emphasis
- ➔ **Paul B. Diederich's 1961 Model:** 1) Ideas, 2) Form, 3) Flavor, 4) Mechanics, and 5) Wording

19. The Common Core Writing Traits

The Common Core added a new collection of traits to our writing instruction. That's a good thing! It did not remove or invalidate the Six Traits. But it did change the focus a bit.

Although the Six Traits is an excellent model, it's not perfect. It's a biased model (not in an intentionally bad way), and the Common Core revealed just how biased it is. To be honest, I was a little disappointed to hear the responses that several *Six Traits gurus* had to the Common Core writing standards. Their biases prevented them from seeing anything good in the Common Core writing standards, and it was clear that they couldn't see the weaknesses inside of their own model.

In short, the Six Traits model presents a biased vision of writing that **does not emphasize** what's most important in academic writing. The Common Core presents a biased vision of writing that **does emphasize** what's most important in academic writing. It's a perfect marriage!

One great thing about the Common Core is that it (in effect) made GENRE the main trait. As you will see below, every Common Core-based rubric listed is genre specific: 1) narrative, 2) informational/ explanatory, or 3) opinion/ argument. The traits on the rubrics change to meet the requirements of the genre.

The Common Core does not require that we must abandon the Six Traits, and why would it? For anyone who likes the Six Traits, the Common Core has done just one thing: it's added a new arsenal of traits to work with and a new viewpoint to help teachers get results teaching writing.

20. The Common Core Writing Standards in Checklist and Table Form

You can [download The Common Core Writing Standards in Checklist and Table Form here](#). I have (lightly) modified the standards to create a "The writer" present-tense version. Teachers can use these checklists and table-formatted standards in many different ways. In particular, the genre-specific requirements of the Common Core are so clear and concise that they serve as an excellent resource for teaching writing.

Be sure to download the CCSS writing standards for your grade, but also download the Grade 9-10 standards. The Grade 9-10 standards are my favorite version. As you look over the Common Core writing standards, be sure to pay special attention to the vocabulary and the skills that are required to meet the standards. The reason being: those are the traits, the vocabulary, and the skills found on the Common Core-based rubrics outlined below.

21. Common Core Traits-Based Writing Rubrics

If you do a Google search for any of the twenty rubrics listed below, you are going to find a ton of Common Core traits-based writing rubrics. So that's one thing. But my purpose with this list of rubrics

is to illustrate the various models of TRAITS. If you analyze, compare, and contrast these models, you will learn a great deal about traits and probably improve your writing vocabulary in the process.

1. **New York State (Gr. 6-8) (Argument Rubric):** 1) Content and Analysis, 2) Command of Evidence, 3) Coherence, Organization, and Style, 4) Control of Conventions
2. **Elk Grove U.S.D., CA (Gr. 5) (Opinion/Argument AND Informational/ Explanatory Rubric):** 1) Focus/Opinion, 2) Organization, 3) Support/Evidence, 4) Language
3. **Elk Grove U.S.D., CA (Gr. 5) (Narrative Rubric):** 1) Focus/Setting, 2) Organization/Plot, 3) Narrative Techniques, 4) Language
4. **Elk Grove U.S.D., CA (Gr. 7-8) (Argument Rubric):** 1) Focus/Claim, 2) Organization/Structure, 3) Evidence/Support, 4) Analysis, 5) Language
5. **Elk Grove U.S.D., CA (Gr. 7-8) (Informative/Explanatory Rubric):** 1) Focus, 2) Organization/Structure, 3) Development, 4) Language
6. **Elk Grove U.S.D., CA (Gr. 7-8) (Narrative Rubric):** 1) Focus/Exposition, 2) Organization/Plot, 3) Narrative Techniques, 4) Language
7. **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: (Gr. 3-5 and Gr. 6-11) (Informative-Explanatory and Opinion/Argument Rubric):** 1) Purpose/Organization, 2) Evidence/Elaboration, 3) Conventions
8. **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: (Gr. 3-5 and Gr. 6-11) (Narrative Rubric):** 1) Purpose/Organization, 2) Development/Elaboration, 3) Conventions
9. **Los Angeles Unified, CA (Gr. 5) (Opinion):** 1) Statement of Purpose: a. Purpose/Focus, b. Organization, 2) Development: a. Elaboration of Evidence, b. Language and Vocabulary, 3) Conventions of Standard English: a. Grammar & Usage, b. Punctuation, Spelling, Capitalization
10. **Georgia Milestones Assessment (Gr. 9) (Informational/Explanatory):** 1) Idea Development, Organization, and Coherence, 2) Language Usage and Conventions
11. **Florida Standards Assessments (Gr. 6-11) (Informative/Explanatory):** 1) Purpose, Focus, and Organization, 2) Evidence and Elaboration, 3) Conventions of Standard English
12. **Florida Standards Assessments (Gr. 4-5) (Opinion):** 1) Purpose, Focus, and Organization, 2) Evidence and Elaboration, 3) Conventions of Standard English
13. **Texas STAAR (Gr. 4) (Expository Rubric):** 1) Organization/Progression, 2) Development of Ideas, 3) Use of Language/Conventions

14. **Riverside USD, CA (Gr. 3) (Opinion/Argument Rubric):** 1) Focus/Information, 2) Organization, 3) Support/Evidence, 4) Language-Conventions of Grammar, Capitalization, Punctuation, and Spelling
15. **Tulpehocken Area SD, PA (Gr. 2) (Narrative Rubric):** 1) Focus, 2) Organization, 3) Content, 4) Style, 5) Conventions
16. **West Ada SD, ID (Gr. 3-4) (Narrative Rubric):** 1) Narrative Focus, 2) Organization 3) Narrative Technique, 4) Language and Vocabulary, 5) Conventions/Format
17. **Folsom Cordova USD, CA (Gr. 3-4) (Narrative Rubric):** 1) Narrative Focus, 2) Organization, 3) Elaboration of Evidence, 4) Language and Vocabulary, 5) Conventions
18. **Goleta USD, CA (Gr. 5) (Narrative Rubric):** 1) Purpose, 2) Organization, 3) Elaboration/Details, 4) Language
19. **Goleta USD, CA (Gr. 5) (Informational/Explanatory Rubric and Opinion/Argument Rubric):** 1) Purpose, 2) Organization, 3) Evidence/Elaboration, 4) Language
20. **South Carolina (Gr. 5) (Informational/Explanatory Rubric):** 1) Focus/Information, 2) Organization, 3) Support/Evidence, 4) Language

A Final Note: Don't Get Stuck!

In teaching writing, many teachers never move beyond stuck. They turn pages in curriculums and hope to get results, and they are disappointed, frustrated, and mad when they don't create writing success for their students.

Or perhaps they become lost in theories. They try Writer's Workshop and Author's Chair; they train students to Read Like Writers; they harness the Reading-Writing Connection; they do what the research says works. In the end, everyone is confused and wishes things were more concrete and tangible.

Without a doubt, Six Traits and Common Core rubrics and checklists are concrete. They create a clear picture of writing success and writing failure. They are extremely useful tools, but they don't teach writing.

If you are ever feeling stuck in teaching writing or you are not getting the results you want, be sure to check out [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#). I guarantee that you will get clear, objective, measurable results FAST. But more importantly, you will see the path forward in teaching writing. You and your students will all be saying, "I get it! I finally get it!"