



Writing Tips for Parents

A Handbook for Parents of Six Trait Writing Students



Brevard County School District



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What Is Six Traits?

Writing has certain characteristics or “traits” in order to be a successful piece. When the student can recognize and copy each trait, better writing is the result. There are six such traits for good writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions.

Traits are usually introduced one at a time to the student. Typically one trait is taught and practiced over a month long process. Conventions (capitalization, spelling, word usage, grammar and punctuation), however, is a trait that begins at the start of the school year and continues through to the end of school. By January all traits have been introduced and practiced thoroughly.

A rubric is a scoring guide. Brevard County School District uses the rubric established by the state to score the writing assessments. It is a 6 point rubric. Six is the highest score attainable. For an example of the state rubrics, see page 15 of this book.

Additionally, Six Traits uses a rubric to evaluate the strengths of each trait. These are infused into the writing curriculum as the trait is learned and practiced to provide feedback to the students. For example, it is likely to hear a student say to another, “I need to work more on *Voice*, but I am really strong in *Organization*.” (See pages 13, 14 for examples of Six Trait rubrics.)

Six Trait rubrics and state rubrics are used together to strengthen the writing process and provide feedback.

Ideas

- ✓ Clear message
- ✓ Focused on the topic
- ✓ Information that is fresh and imaginative
- ✓ Helpful details that go beyond the obvious
- ✓ Details that paint a picture

Organization

- ✓ Use a hook or grabber to capture the reader's attention
- ✓ Clear and organized
- ✓ Easy to follow
- ✓ Every supporting detail connects to the main idea
- ✓ Interesting ending

Voice

- ✓ Personality shines through
- ✓ Makes the topic come to life
- ✓ Is appropriate to the audience, topic, purpose

Word Choice

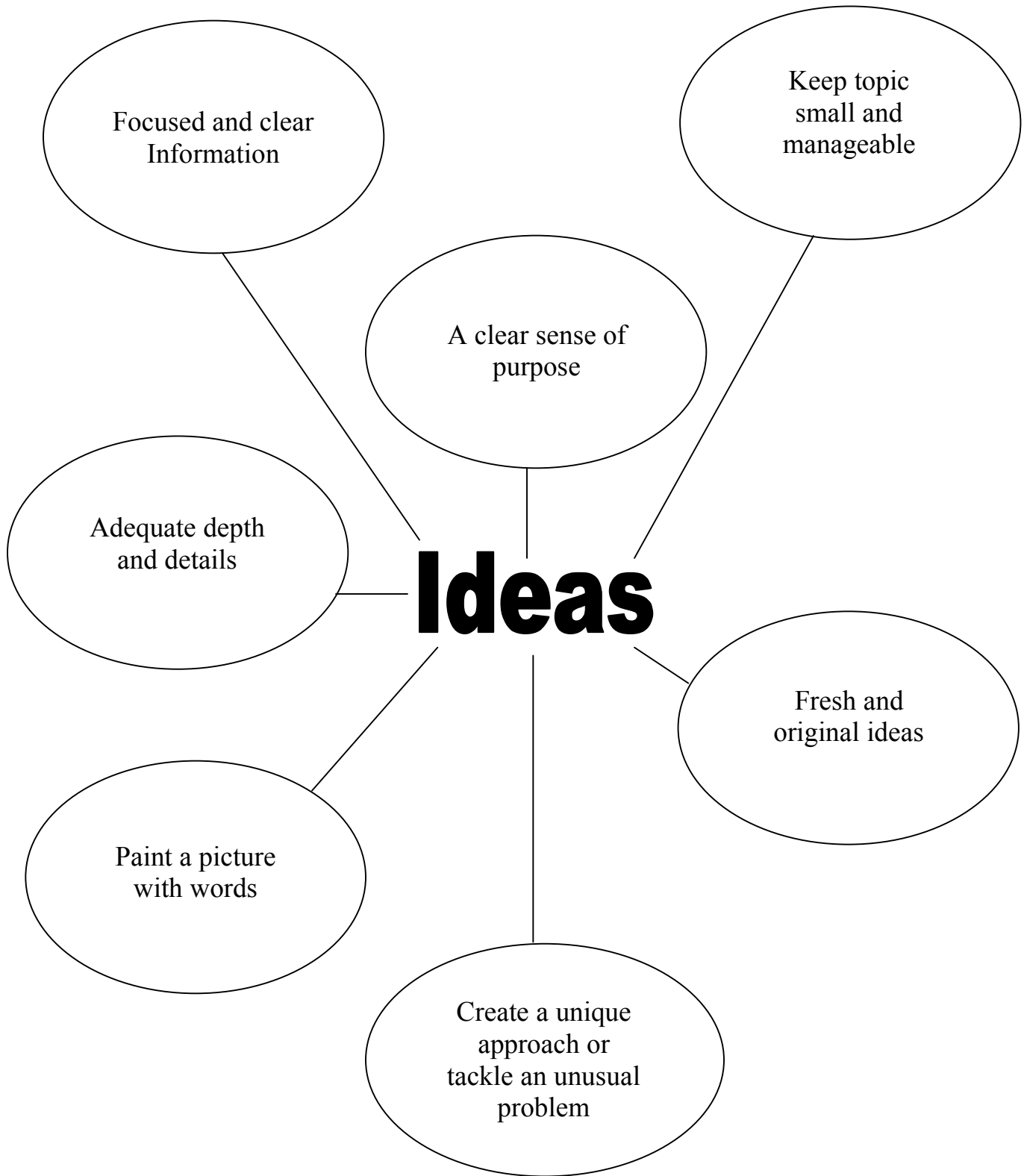
- ✓ Exciting uses of action verbs, descriptive adjectives, and precise nouns
- ✓ Uses sensory descriptors
- ✓ Minimal redundancy
- ✓ Language that suits the topic, purpose, and audience

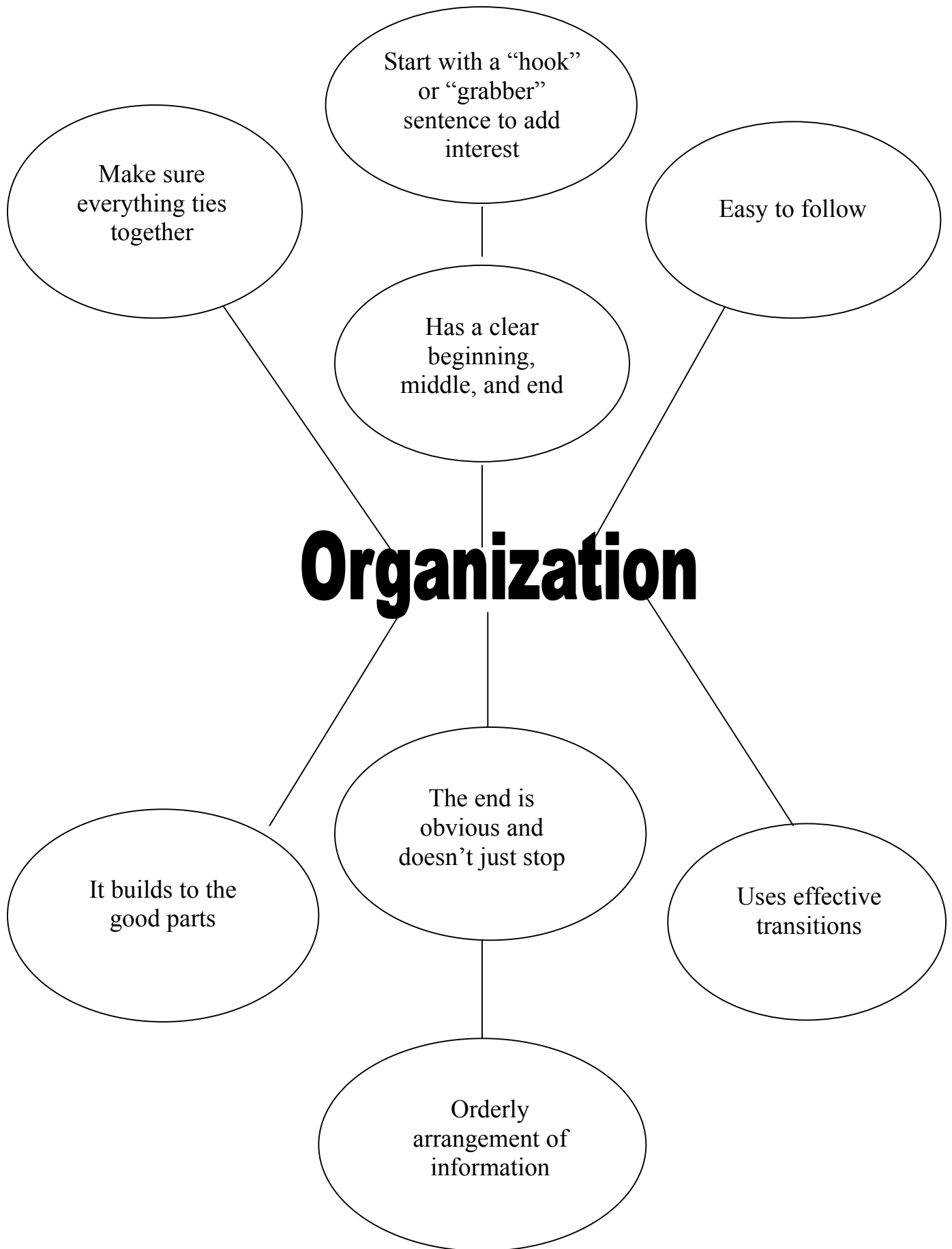
Sentence Fluency

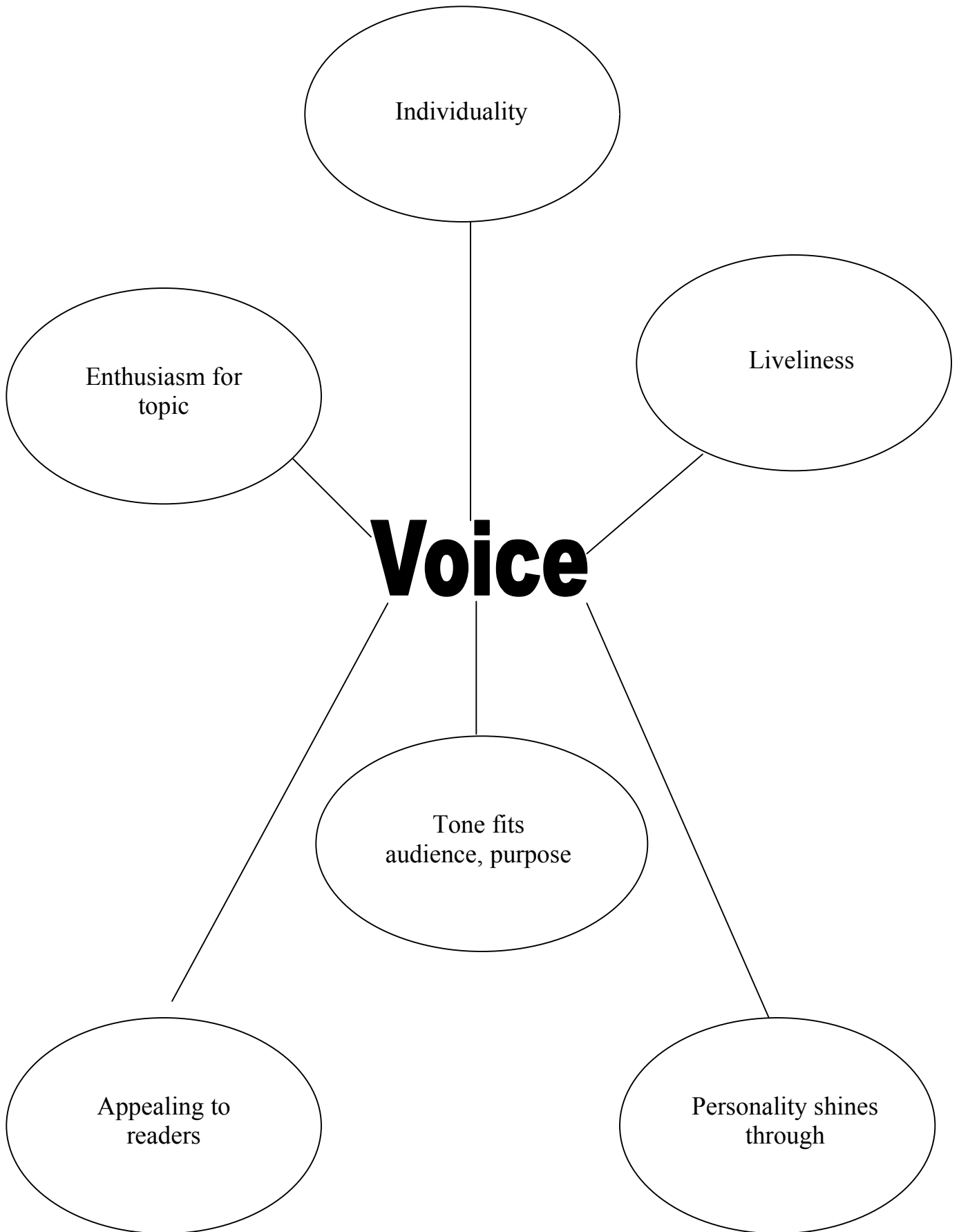
- ✓ Rhythmic
- ✓ Easy to read aloud
- ✓ A variety of sentence lengths and types
- ✓ Use of transitions to flow from one point to another

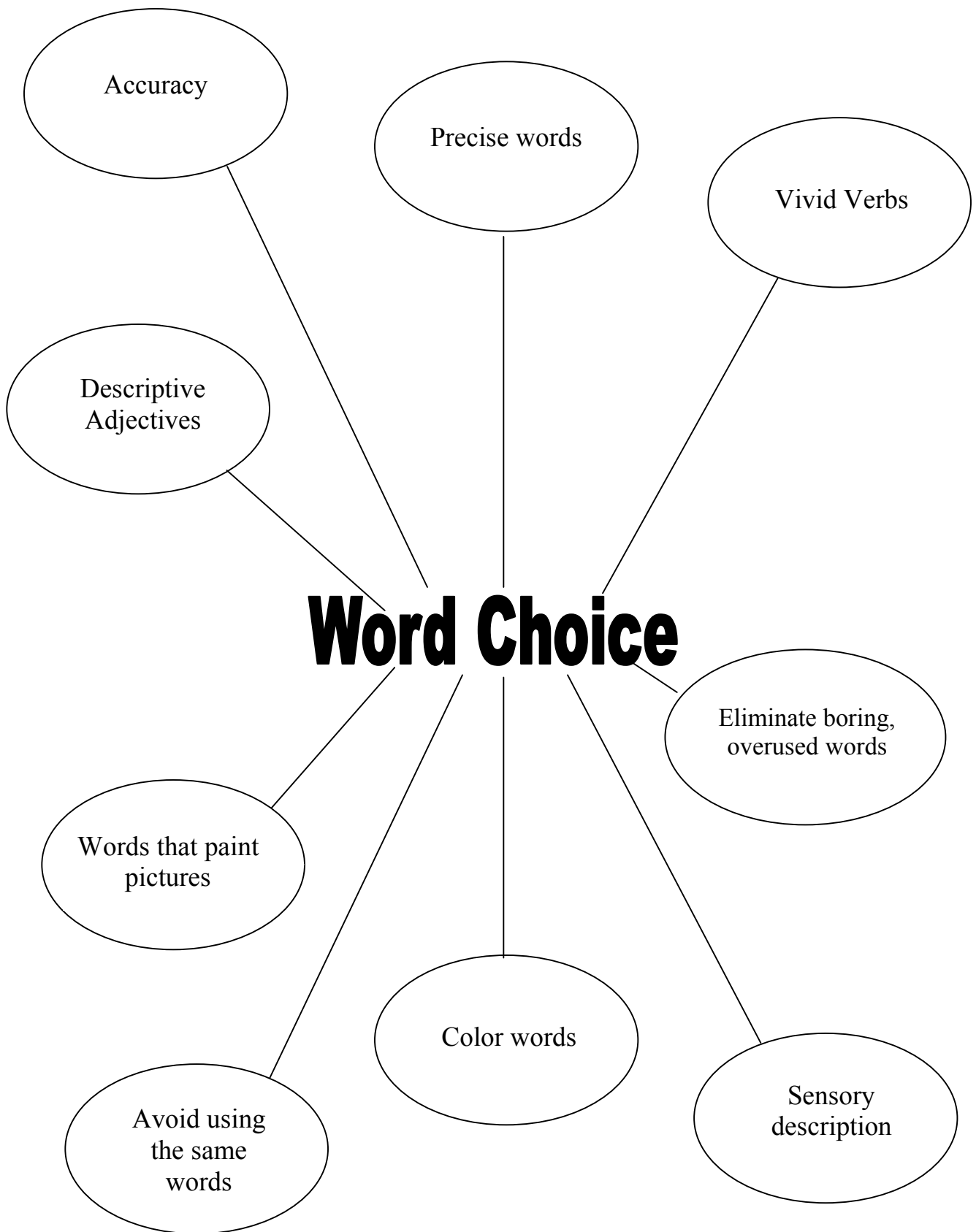
Conventions

- ✓ Correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and word usage
- ✓ Correct tenses
- ✓ Subject-verb agreement

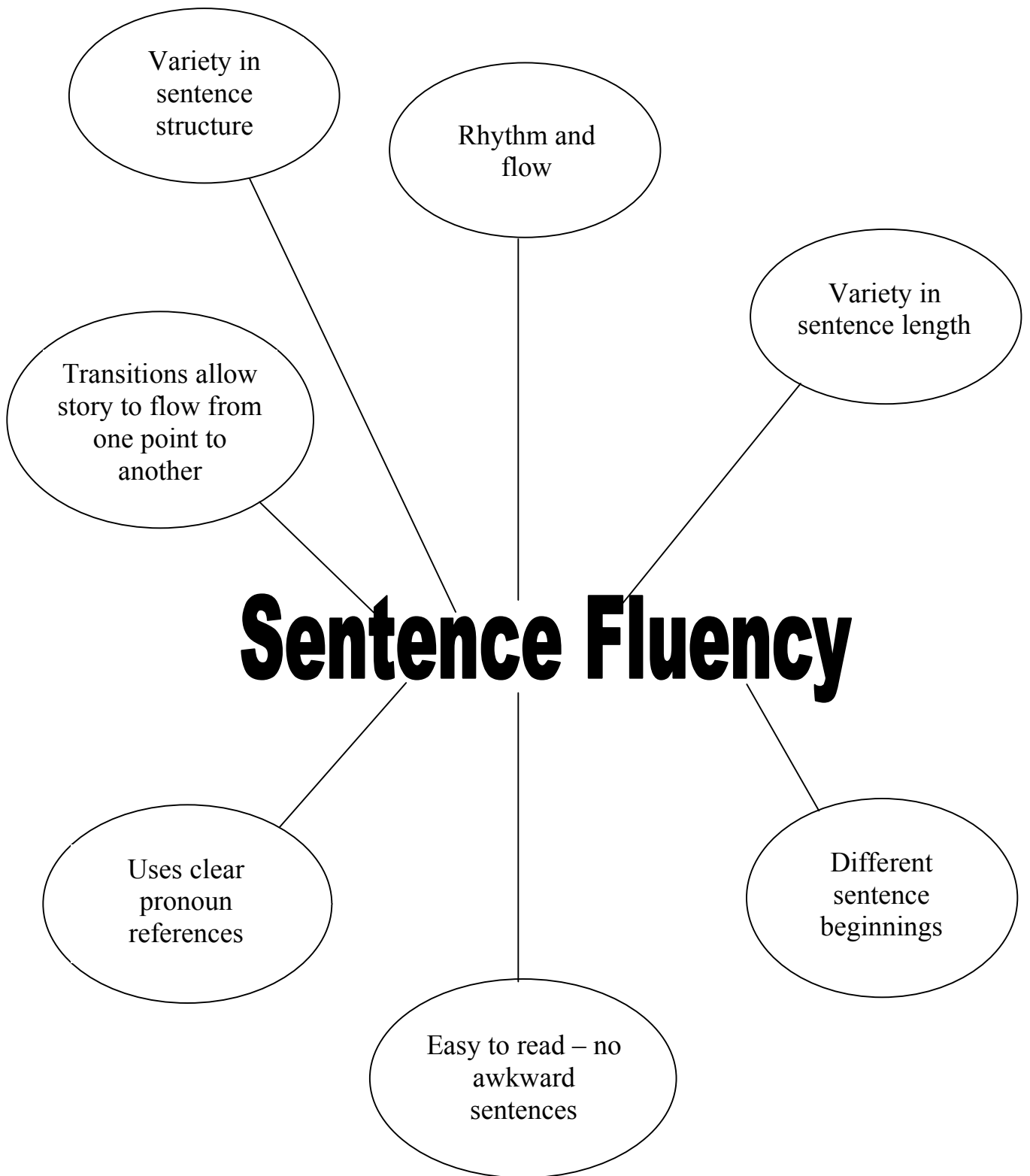


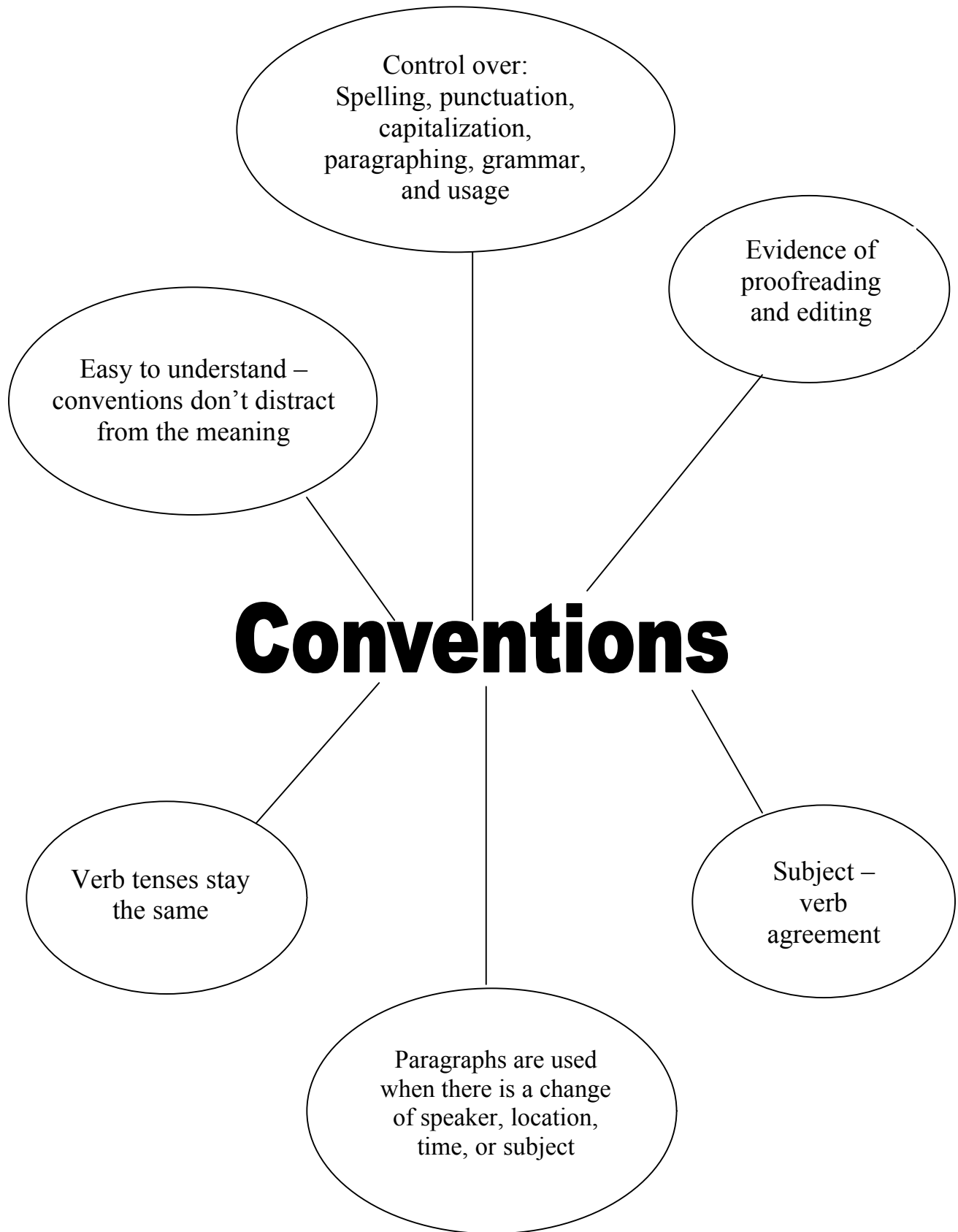






Sentence Fluency





How Can I Help My Child?



READ! Read often. Read aloud. Read silently. Read books. Read short stories. Read poems. Read cookbooks. Read letters. Read greeting cards. Get the idea? Read, read, read, and read some more!



PROVIDE WRITING MATERIALS! Provide plenty of writing materials – paper of all kinds, colors, textures, and sizes, pens, pencils, felt tip pens, post-its – whatever will invite your student writer to explore writing in original, colorful ways.



Take Turns! Be the reader sometimes. Other times, let your child read aloud to you. Reading aloud builds comprehension skills, a sense of voice, and much more.



Write Notes! A personal note – just a few words – tucked in a lunch box or left under a pillow can be a wonderful surprise. If you're lucky, you'll get a response. Writing doesn't always have to be BIG.



READERS' THEATER! Read a play or any book that lends itself to two voices. Your young writer will soon have an "ear" for sentence fluency.



RESOURCES! Have a dictionary handy! A thesaurus? Grammar handbook? If not, shop together for books both of you like. Use them with care. For example, when you use a thesaurus, don't take the first word on the list. Choose the word that's just right!



BROWSE! Discover the fine art of browsing at the local bookstore or the library. Look at books, handle books, read pieces from books. What is it about this book that intrigues you? An opening sentence? The layout (organization)? The title?



BE A WRITER YOURSELF! You don't have to be writing a novel to teach valuable writing strategies – a simple grocery list hold a dozen potential lessons on word choice, organization, and conventions.



READING CORNER! Where you read can be almost as important as what you read. In school, children usually must read sitting straight up in hard unforgiving chairs. But most of us, given a choice, would prefer to curl up on the sofa or a favorite chair. A love of reading will lead to a love of writing!



SHARE! Do you write as part of your job? Letters? Memos? Reports? Evaluations? Advertising or promotional materials? Directions? Almost everyone in every occupation writes something. Share some of your work-related writing with your student writer.

IDEAS–

Be a good observer. Look for the little things. The less-than-obvious. Ask your child this question, “What do you see through your eyes that someone in a rush would probably miss?”

ORGANIZATION–

We organize hundreds – make that thousands – of things in our lives, not just writing. Let your child help plan and structure as many things as possible, simple to complex. Setting the table. Reading a road map. Planning a garden.

VOICE–

Be a listener. See if you can identify voices on the radio or on television (without looking). Play tapes in which writers or professional readers read good literature aloud. Talk about differences and favorites. How would this story sound if _____ read it?

WORD CHOICE–

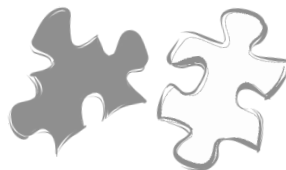
Play word games. The synonym game – How many synonyms can you think of for big hungry... angry... dangerous... hot? The rhyming game-- What rhymes with bold...leaf...sigh... over...now... funny...down...shower...run? The opposites games – What’s the opposite of meticulous...enraged... docile...frustrating...curious?

SENTENCE FLUENCY–

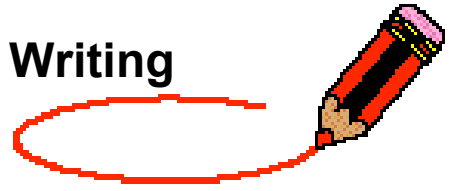
As you’re composing, revising, or editing, read sentences aloud, and try out different versions. See which plays to the ear best. 1.) The students were tired. They were tired from a long year of studying. They were ready for some fun. 2.) A long year of studying behind them, these students felt ready for fun.

CONVENTIONS–

Here are a few questions to help you think broadly about conventions. What are the conventions of a dinner party? What kind of conventions keep city traffic flowing? What would convention-less traffic look like? How does this relate to convention-less writing?



Responding to Your Child's Writing



Keep it Positive!

Look first for what is well done, and praise this work lavishly. Remember the wise words of Pulitzer Prize winning author and teacher Donald Murray who reminds us, “We learn to write primarily by building on our strengths.” So often, in the name of helping, we feel tempted to point out all of the problems and errors we see in others’ writing. This approach tends not to work well. If overdone, criticism makes young writers feel both hopeless and defensive. It is usually much more effective to help them see what they are doing well.

Be Excited!

No kidding – this is one of the most important things you can do, Who wants to read a piece of writing aloud to someone who’d rather be doing something – anything – else? Eager listeners usually get more and better writing next time. So, let your student writer know you value his/her efforts, and cannot wait to hear the next piece.



When There is a Problem...

Don’t get the idea that writers do not need suggestions for improvement. Of course they do. But the power of your suggestions may lie a great deal in how you phrase them. Avoid beginning comments with “You” or “Your writing.” Such comments tend to sound accusatory, even when we do not mean them that way. Instead, try focusing on your own response as a reader and begin with “I saw” or “I felt.”

Instead of “You need a stronger opening here.”

You could say “When I read this opening comment on horses, I expected your paper to be about that. I felt confused when you switched topics. I wonder if other readers would feel that way.”

Be the Coach - - Not the Writer

Tempting as it is to help by “doing,” It’s important for you to know when to back away and say to your writer, “Run with it.” You can help your young writer by:

- ~ Brainstorming topics and ideas
- ~ Talking through a story or informational piece
- ~ Providing ideas on how/where to get information
- ~ Being a listener – or reader – during the writing process
- ~ Asking questions to guide revision
- ~ Brainstorming possible leads or endings
- ~ Sharing correct spelling of words, correct use of punctuation, or other editorial tips



Frequently Asked Questions

Does six-trait writing replace the writing process?

No! Six-trait writing complements the writing process; it doesn't replace it. Normally the writing process includes these steps: prewriting, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. The traits fit into every one of these steps because they influence how students think about writing. The step that is influenced most, however, is revision. In revision, students attend each of the first five traits. The trait of conventions fits well in the editing step of the writing process. After all, spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage, paragraphing, and capitalization are all things copy editors attend to.

Are we using the Six-Trait Writing Model because of the FCAT testing?

Instructing students about the six traits of good writing is simply the best way to help students improve their writing skills.

Sometimes my child brings home a paper with only two or three traits scored instead of all six. Shouldn't the teacher score all six?

Not necessarily. It makes good sense for the teacher to assess student on those traits they've taught or emphasized for a particular assignment. For example, a teacher may be focusing on a particular trait such as organization. In that case, it might be inappropriate to evaluate a student on the traits voice or word choice. However, in almost all cases, the trait of conventions should be scored along with each of the other five traits. There will be occasions where all six traits are scored, once the student has learned and practiced them all.

Sometimes I notice errors in my child's writing that the teacher has not marked. Should I bring it to the teacher's attention?

Previously we stated that conventions should be scored on each paper. However, the trait of conventions covers a lot of information! It is very probable that a teacher might choose to look at a student's writing for spelling only, grammar usage only, paragraphing only, punctuation or capitalization only. If a teacher has scored a paper looking at punctuation only, this does not mean that he/she did not notice the misspelled words on the paper. Remember, we want to build on strengths. It may not always be in the student's best interest to point out each and every minor error.

What are some signs of a strong writing program?

We want students to experience variety, not only in the kinds of writing they do, but also in the instruction approaches through which those experiences are presented. Characteristics of a strong writing program would include numerous opportunities to write, multiple purposes and multiple audiences, opportunities to have writing read aloud, and students assessing their own and each other's work. Students will be familiar with six-trait and writing process vocabulary.

Ideas

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, focused, compelling-holds reader's attention. • Striking insight, in-depth understanding of topic. • Takes reader on a journey of understanding. • Satisfying rich with significant, intriguing details. <p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and focused throughout. • Strong main ideas, thesis, or story line. • Authentic, convincing, based on research, experience. • Main idea expanded, well supported by detail, evidence. <p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and focused more often than not. • Identifiable main topic, thesis, story line. • Quality detail outweighs generalities, filler | <p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and focused moments overshadowed by fuzzy, underdeveloped, rambling text. • Main concept, thesis, story line can still be inferred with careful reading. • Generalities and filler outweigh quality detail <p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hint of these or story line to come (just a glimmer). • Predominantly fuzzy, confusing loosely focused. • Factlets and tidbits wander in search of a main idea. <p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes and random thoughts hastily assembled. • Reader can only guess at meaning. • Main idea as yet unknown, even to the writer |
|---|--|


Organization


- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful structure guides reader through text • Design smoothly embedded in text – never too obvious. • Satisfying, well-crafted transitions. • Structure enhances reader's understanding, enjoyment of the topic. • Unforgettable opening – enlightening, provocative. <p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order works well with topic, purpose. • Structure evident, but not overpowering. • Main ideas, turning points stand out. • Strong lead, appropriate sense of closure that "feels right." • Strong, thoughtful transitions. <p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order functional – reader never feels lost. • Structure supportive – occasionally predictable. • Functional lead and conclusion. • Transitions present – usually helpful. | <p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some out-of-place information – needs re-ordering. • Re-reading sometimes required to follow thought or story line. • lead and conclusion attempted – one or both need work. • Transition unclear or too formulaic, predictable. <p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard to follow – even with effort. • Much re-ordering needed. • Lead and/or conclusion missing or formulaic. • Transition unclear or missing. <p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disjointed list/collection of details, events. • No "big picture" – nothing goes with anything else. • No real lead or conclusion – it just begins, it just stops. • Transition not attempted. • No recognizable structure. |
|---|--|

Voice

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As individual as fingerprints. • Begs to be read aloud –you cannot wait to share it. • Passionate, compelling – but never overdone. • Uses tone, flavor as a tool to enhance meaning. • Tough to put down – holds readers enrapt. <p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiasm engaging, lively, expressive. • Tone and flavor well suited to topic, audience, purpose. • Consistently reaches out to audience. <p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows some sparks, moments of spontaneity. • Tone and flavor acceptable for topic, audience, purpose. • Voice comes and goes. Strong moments. | <p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional, often sincere—though sometimes distant. • Occasionally questionable tone for topic, purpose, audience. • Rarely "speaks" right to audience in engaging manner. <p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distant, encyclopedic, overly formal – or too informal, chatty, or sarcastic. • Tone, flavor inappropriate for audience, purpose, topic. • Minimal concern for audience. • Minimal involvement in topic. <p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice difficult to identify, find, or describe. • No sense of person behind the words – is anyone there? • No noticeable concern for audience – no involvement in topic. Voice...just...missing. • Once you put it down, you just can't pick it up again. |
|---|---|


Word Choice

- 6**
- You want to read it more than once-just to savor it.
 - Uses everyday language in original ways-every word carries its own weight.
 - You wish you'd written it.
 - Powerful, stunning verbs.
 - Precise, delightful, thoroughly original-quotable in spots.
- 5**
- Precise, vivid, natural language.
 - Word choice enhances meaning.
 - Lively, appealing verbs-we'd like more!
- 4**
- Functional, clear language used correctly.
 - Some clichés, jargon, or over-written phrases.
 - Some strong verbs-we'd like more!
 - Generalities and mechanical phrasing intermixed with originality.
 - Strong, promising moments.
- 


- 3**
- Moments of imprecise, stilted, or incorrectly used language create confusion, detract from message.
 - Now and then-a "gem" amidst numerous agates.
 - Verbs lack power-nouns lack precision.
 - Vague or flat language outweighs clarity, sparkle.
- 2**
- Flat, dull, dry language or thesaurus overload.
 - Deciphering this message takes work.
 - Words used incorrectly or with annoying repetition.
 - Adjective avalanche – where are the verbs??!!
 - Over-written-OR under-written (weak, general words like nice, fun)
- 1**
- Meaning unclear-or buried under mounds of jargon.
 - The message? It's anybody's guess...
 - Words seem chosen at random.
 - What is the writer trying to say?
- 


Sentence Fluency

- 6**
- Easy to read with inflection to bring out every ounce of meaning.
 - Virtually every sentence begins differently
 - Information writing crisp and to the point
 - Creative, personal writing lyrical, poetic, musical
 - Skims, sings, dances, along like a lively script
 - You have to hear it to appreciate it fully. You'd like to hear it more than once.
- 5**
- Easy going flow, rhythm, cadence
 - Highly readable – a joy to share aloud
 - Varied sentence structure, length
 - Purposeful sentence beginnings
- 4**
- Grammatical, natural, pleasant phrasing
 - Few awkward moments
 - Some variety in length, structure
 - Some repetition in sentence beginnings

- 3**
- Mechanical, but reasonable
 - Awkward moments outweigh smooth, natural phrasing.
 - Gangly, tangly run-ons, or chop-chop-choppy sentences.
 - Repetitive beginnings.
- 2**
- Awkward enough to make you stumble, re-read often.
 - You can get through it-with patience.
- 1**
- Very hard to read-you slow down, re-read, but still...
 - Does not always make sense-is this a sentence?
 - Can only be read aloud with extensive oral editing (e.g. filling in many missing words or rephrasing awkward patterns.)
- 

Conventions

- 6**
- Only the pickiest editors will spot errors
 - Conventions cleverly applied to bring out meaning
 - Complexity of text lets writer showcase a wide range of conventions-semicolon, ellipses, dashes, italics, etc.
 - Enticing layout
 - Virtually ready to publish.
- 5**
- Minor errors that are easily overlooked.
 - Text appears edited, proofed.
 - Sufficient complexity to show off many conventions.
 - Pleasing layout
 - Ready to publish with minor touchups.
- 4**
- Noticeable, but minor errors that do not obscure meaning.
 - Basics (e.g., periods, caps, simple spelling) are OK.
 - Some errors on difficult spelling, usage, punctuation, etc.
 - Acceptable layout
 - A good once-over needed before publication.
- 

- 3**
- Noticable, distracting errors that may affect meaning.
 - Errors even on basics: period, simple spelling, cap's etc.
 - More attention to layout required.
- 2**
- Noticeable, frequent, distracting errors.
 - Numerous errors even on basics.
 - Limited attention to layout.
 - Line-by-line editing required to prepare text for publication.
- 1**
- Serious, frequent errors make reading all but impossible.
 - Even patient, attentive readers struggle.
 - Errors obscure meaning, put up road blocks.
 - Extensive, word-by-word editing required for publication.
- 

3rd – 6th Grade

FCAT Writing Rubric

3 rd -6 th grade	1	2	3	4	5	6
FOCUS <i>Refers to how clearly the paper presents and maintains the main idea, theme or unifying point.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimally addresses the topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slightly related to the topic Offers little relevant information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally focused on the topic Includes extraneous or loosely related material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally focused on the topic May include extraneous or loosely related material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused strongly on the topic
ORGANIZATION <i>Students plan with the aid of a graphic organizer. Story has definite pattern of beginning, middle, and end. Writing shows definite order of events/ideas through the use of signal words.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not exhibit organizational pattern Has few, if any transitional devices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows little evidence of organizational pattern May lack sense of wholeness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has attempted organizational pattern Has some transitional devices Lapses occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows an organizational pattern May has some lapses occurring Demonstrates a sense of completeness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has an organizational pattern May have a few lapses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has an organizational pattern with a logical progression of ideas Expresses a sense of wholeness/ completeness
SUPPORT <i>Complete sentences. Word choice paints picture with words. Stays on topic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contains few, if any supporting ideas. Limited or immature word choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequately supported or illogical Limited or immature word choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details without elaboration Grade level vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May contain specifics and details, although development is uneven Shows inadequate word choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has adequately developed supporting ideas Has word choice that is adequate, but lacks precision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has ample development of supporting ideas Reveals a mature command of language Communicates a precise choice of words
CONVENTIONS <i>Refers to punctuation, capitalization, spelling, pacing, and sentence structure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequent errors in sentence structure may impede communication Common words may be misspelled Simple sentence structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little variation in sentence structure Frequent errors in basic capitalization and punctuation Common words may be misspelled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows an attempt to use variety in sentence structure Shows knowledge of conventions and usage is usually demonstrated Has commonly used words spelled correctly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows an attempt to use variety in sentence structure Has proper conventions and spelling is generally correct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various sentence structures Proper conventions and spelling is generally correct Occasional errors do not impede communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various sentence structures Complete sentences Shows subject /verb agreement and correct verb/noun forms

