CHAPTER

3

The Writer's Craft

Noah's "Wicked Cool" Writing

"This year I'm learning how to make my writing wicked cool," Noah explains. "You've got to think of interesting ideas and add lots of details so readers can have a movie playing in their minds." I'm talking to Noah in Mrs. Chase's fifth grade classroom, and I ask him where he gets his ideas. "From my life," he explains. "I do lots of interesting things: I take karate; I'm a purple belt. I play golf with my grandpa, but right now he's better than I am. And I have a little sister named Maddison—you spell it with two *d*s. It seems like she's always getting in trouble. My dad says she lives in Time-Out City. I've written two Time-Out City books about Maddison and her Webkinz that live there."

Noah continues talking about how he adds details to his writing: "That's easy. I just start thinking about the topic, and it becomes a movie in my mind. I write down everything I see. I try to use 'dollar words'—that's what Mrs. Chase calls them—and I'm wicked good at making comparisons. The kids in my revising group are always asking me to think of comparisons for their writing. Sometimes I add too many details, so I'm always asking my buddies if I have just the right amount."

I ask about his revising buddies. "Oh, they're Jordan, William, Ivan, and Amie. Sometimes we meet with Mrs. Chase, but lots of times I just take my draft over to William and get his opinion. He's a good writer, and he always tells me what he really thinks.

"The second reason why I'm a wicked good writer is my voice: It's got to be strong if you want people to like the stuff you write. You never want your voice to be boring," Noah continues. "I think Greg's voice in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* [Kinney, 2007] is totally awesome. He sounds like a real kid. In fact, he's a lot like me. He has a big brother named Roderick who makes trouble for him like my little sister does to me. Greg's funny, and sometimes he gets embarrassed. I know about that; sometimes my dad embarrasses me. Greg always tries to do what's right, but he also wants to be popular, and causes a lot of problems.

"Another thing is presentation; that's what we're studying now," Noah explains. "We've been looking at nonfiction books to see how words, headings, illustrations, charts, and other stuff is put on pages. Writers add illustrations and charts and diagrams and maps because books can be very confusing unless you know what's going on. Mrs. Chase asked us to bring in books from home with interesting layouts, and I immediately thought of my Geronimo Stilton books. I brought in *Shipwreck on the Pirate Islands* [Scholastic, 2003] to share. We looked at each other's books in small groups and then William and I made this list of the cool stuff we found in my Geronimo Stilton book." Noah pulls their list out of his writing folder and shows it to me. Here's their list of "cool stuff":

Words in different styles and colors
Rebus words
Really exciting chapter titles!
Big colorful illustrations
Bios of Geronimo, Thea, Trap, and Benjamin

A chart of the staff at "The Rodent's Gazette"
A guidebook for pirates
Box with information about a galleon
Maps of New Mouse City and Mouse Island
A guidebook with survival tips
A box of sailor jokes
Directions for Geronimo's joke contest
A glossary called the Pirate ABCs
A box with the recipe for Pirate Soup

Noah continues, "If you count everything on our list, there's 14 things. Our list was the longest one in the whole class." I wonder why their list was the longest, and Noah replies that it's because the Geronimo Stilton books combine elements of fiction and nonfiction. "Think about this," Noah explains, "Marisa and Jamie's list was the next longest, and it had 11 things on it. They used one of The Magic School Bus books—I think it was *The Magic School Bus and the Electric Field Trip* [Cole, 1999]—and those books are a combination of a story and an informational book."

Currently, Noah's working on a nonfiction book about rocks: "My dad and I—we're rockhounds. We go looking for interesting rocks almost every weekend, and last summer we went to an awesome rock and mineral show in Chicago, and I bought a wicked cool piece of amber with a bug in it for my collection." I ask about his plans for the book, and Noah explains: "I'm going to have four chapters. The first one is about collecting rocks and minerals, and the second one is about how they're formed. I have the rough drafts done of them, and now I'm working on a chapter about the different kinds of rocks. If there's enough time, I'm going to write one more chapter about classifying rocks." Noah explains that he's writing about topics he already knows well: "I really know a lot about rocks so I know I can write about these subjects, but I'm still learning about gems and metals."

He's writing this book on the computer, and he's going to make the chapter titles and headings larger so they'll stand out and add a special font to highlight technical words. He also plans to include some special features in his book: He's already uploaded the digital photos he took of his rock collection to use as illustrations, drawn a diagram showing how rocks are formed and scanned and imported it into his document, and written a guidebook with tips about collecting rocks safely. Noah plans to add a glossary at the end of the book that he'll call "The Rockhound ABCs," following the style he found in his Geronimo Stilton book.

Mrs. Chase's goal in this writing project is for the fifth graders to focus on the writer's craft and the presentation trait, in particular, but I ask Noah if he's thinking about any other traits while he's writing. "Yes, I am," he answers. "If you want your writing wicked cool—and I do—you have to use all of them. Of course, voice is important because I want to sound like a scientist, and my topic is complicated so my organization is important. One more thing: I have to pick my words carefully. I'm writing words like *specimen, luster, quartz*, and *geology,* and some kids don't know them; that's why I'm adding a glossary."

THE SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES and tools writers use to capture readers' attention and convey meaning are referred to as the *writer's craft*. Establishing a clear voice, incorporating a useful organization, choosing precise words, and fashioning effective sentences are often mentioned as essential components of the writer's craft. People often compare the writer's craft to what a master carpenter does to build chairs, tables, and cabinets: The skilled furniture craftsman chooses a design that balances form and function, constructs dovetail joints, inserts corner blocks for strength, enhances the style with carved moldings, and stains the wood to bring out its grain. Writers are artisans, too, but they work with language to build stories, essays, autobiographies, poems, and other types of writing.

THE SIX TRAITS

Nearly 20 years ago, researchers at Education Northwest identified six techniques of the writer's craft, which they called *traits*: *ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency,* and *conventions*. Later *presentation* was added as the seventh quality, but these qualities are still referred to as "the six traits" or "the six traits plus one." An overview of these traits is presented in Figure 3–1. Two of the researchers who developed the six traits—Ruth Culham (2003, 2005, 2010) and Vicki Spandel (2008, 2009)—continue to design instruction and assessment procedures and share them with teachers.

FIGURE 3–1 THE SIX TRAITS

Trait	What Writers Do	The Impact on Readers
Ideas	Writers use big ideas and pertinent details to convey their message.	Readers are more engaged in reading when the ideas are stimulating.
Organization	Writers create an effective internal structure that emphasizes the big ideas.	Readers grasp the author's message more easily when the structure is clear.
Voice	Writers enhance their message through the personality or tone they adopt.	Readers continue reading when the author's voice is compelling.
Word Choice	Writers choose precise, descriptive words to convey their message more effectively.	Readers enjoy reading when the author's words evoke strong feelings and sensory images.
Sentence Fluency	Writers develop a within-sentence rhythm and weave sentences together so they flow smoothly.	Readers appreciate the lyrical quality of expressive language.
Conventions	Writers use correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar as a courtesy to readers.	Readers read the text more easily when the writing is reader-friendly.
Presentation	Writers arrange the words and visuals to highlight the big ideas and make their compositions appealing.	Readers are more likely to want to read a composition when the presentation is clear and inviting.

Ideas

The ideas are the heart of a composition—the message and its meaning. Writers pick a topic they're knowledgeable about and stick to it. They arrange their writing to fit a genre or form of writing, such as a story or persuasive letter, and they present their ideas clearly using words and illustrations. This trait provides the foundation for the composition, and "all other traits take their cue from this foundational trait and work in harmony to ensure that the message from writer to reader is clear and intriguing" (Spandel, 2009, p. 66). This trait involves these components:

> ***Choosing a Topic.*** Writers select a topic that's personally meaningful and important.
>
> ***Focusing the Topic.*** Writers address the topic with a clear sense of purpose.
>
> ***Identifying the Genre.*** Writers choose the genre—biography, story, or letter, for example—that best suits their purpose.
>
> ***Developing the Topic.*** Writers expand and clarify the topic by including details to make their compositions more vivid.

Writers know that they've developed their ideas effectively when readers keep reading because the ideas are compelling.

Teachers often use mentor texts to examine this trait. In *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street* (Schotter, 1996), for instance, a girl named Eva has a homework assignment to write about what she knows. She observes the goings-on in her neighborhood, expecting the activity to be boring, but she's wrong. There's plenty of drama for an exciting story. Teachers also like to share *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (Van Allsburg, 1996), a collection of 14 fantastic drawings with titles and captions that lure students to create their own stories. A list of mentor texts for this trait appears on page 60.

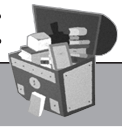
Writers use this trait throughout the writing process, but it's especially important in prewriting and drafting. Students begin a writing project by brainstorming ideas and choosing the most promising one to develop into a composition. Often, the best ideas deal with familiar topics that are examined in fresh, unexpected ways.

Organization

Organization provides the skeleton or structure for a composition, and when it's effective, this structure enhances the ideas by providing readers with a clear sense of direction (Spandel, 2009). Elements of story structure, expository text structures, and poetic forms provide organization. Writers also use flashbacks, alternating or different voices in each chapter to provide organization. This trait includes these components:

> ***Crafting the Lead.*** Writers create interesting leads to quickly grab their readers' attention. To hook readers, they state an opinion, share a personal experience, ask a question, present a bold statement, or use figurative language in the first sentence or paragraph they write.
>
> ***Structuring the Composition.*** Writers present ideas logically using structures and genre patterns they've learned. Stories are built with narrative structures; nonfiction with expository structures, and poems with poetic formulas. Stories, for example, are usually organized into a beginning, middle, and end.
>
> ***Providing Transitions Between Ideas.*** Writers use transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of a text to clarify the organization and signal relationships among ideas.

MENTOR TEXTS IDEAS



COMPONENT	BOOKS
Choose a Topic	Baylor, B. (1995). *I'm in charge of celebrations*. New York: Aladdin Books. P–M Paulsen, G. (2000). *Worksong*. San Diego: Voyager. M Schwartz, D. (2005). *If dogs were dinosaurs*. New York: Scholastic. P–M Thomson, S. L. (2005). *Imagine a day*. New York: Atheneum. P–M Van Allsburg, C. (1996). *The mysteries of Harris Burdick*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. M–U Wyeth, S. D. (2002). *Something beautiful*. New York: Dragonfly. M
Focus the Topic	Almond, D. (2008). *My dad's a birdman*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. M Bunting, E. (1997). *A day's work*. San Diego: Sandpiper. P Kajikawa, K. (2009). *Tsunami!* New York: Philomel. M Paulsen, G. (2007). *Hatchet*. New York: Simon & Schuster. M–U Pilkey, D. (1999). *Paperboy*. New York: Scholastic. P–M Woodson, J. (2009). *Feathers*. New York: Puffin Books. U
Identify the Genre	Domeniconi, D. (2002). *G is for golden: A California alphabet*. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press. M Jenkins, S. (2003). *What do you do with a tail like this?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin. M Kinney, J. (2007). *Diary of a wimpy kid: A novel in cartoons*. New York: Abrams. M Rathmann, P. (1995). *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. New York: Putnam. P Schlitz, L. A. (2008). *Good masters! Sweet ladies! Voices from a medieval village*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. M–U Wiesner, D. (2001). *The three pigs*. New York: Clarion Books. P–M
Develop the Topic	Almond, D. (2009). *Skellig*. New York: Delacorte. M–U Law, I. (2008). *Savvy*. New York: Dial Books. M–U Mayhew, J. (2004). *Katie's Sunday afternoon*. New York: Scholastic. P–M Ryan, P. M. (2002). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic. M Stewart, T. L. (2008). *The mysterious Benedict Society*. Boston: Little, Brown. U Willems, M. (2004). *Knuffle bunny: A cautionary tale*. New York: Hyperion Books. P
Teaching Tools	Duke, K. (1992). *Aunt Isabel tells a good one*. New York: Dutton. P Fletcher, R. (2007). *How to write your life story*. New York: HarperCollins. M–U Schotter, R. (1999). *Nothing ever happens on 90th Street*. New York: Scholastic. P–M–U Spinelli, E. (2008). *The best story*. New York: Dial Books. P–M Wong, J. S. (2002). *You have to write*. New York: McElderry. M

P = primary grades (K–2); M = middle grades (3–5); U = upper grades (6–8)

Transition words, including *for example, next, in summary*, and *therefore*, provide directions for understanding a text.

Ending With a Satisfying Conclusion. Writers wrap up their compositions thoughtfully. They satisfy readers and answer important questions.

Writers need to know how to organize their writing and learn ways to make their structure clear and logical for readers.

Teachers share mentor texts exemplifying different structural patterns, including *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin, 2008), a predictable book with a repetitive structure and rhythmic language that entice young children to create their own predictable books, and *This Is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness* (Sidman, 2007), a collection of apology poems purportedly written by a class of sixth graders and the responses their poems generated. This

MENTOR TEXTS ORGANIZATION

COMPONENT	BOOKS
Crafting the Lead	Choldenko, G. (2004). *Al Capone does my shirts*. New York: Putnam. M–U Cronin, D. (2005). *Click, clack, moo: Cows that type*. New York: Scholastic. P–M O'Brien, P. (2009). *You are the first kid on Mars*. New York: Putnam. P–M Schachner, J. (2003). *Skippyjon Jones*. New York: Puffin Books. P Schmidt, G. D. (2007). *The Wednesday wars*. New York: Clarion Books. U
Structuring the Composition	Fleischman, P. (2004). *Seedfolks*. New York: Harper Trophy. M Gratz. A. (2009). *The Brooklyn nine: A novel in nine innings*. New York: Dial Books. U Jenkins, S. (2009). *Never smile at a monkey and 17 other important things to remember*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. P–M Perkins, L. R. (2005). *Criss cross*. New York: Greenwillow. U Wiesner, D. (2006). *Flotsam*. New York: Clarion Books. M
Providing Transitions	McNaughton, C. (1998). *Suddenly! A Preston Pig story*. New York: Sandpiper. P–M Paulsen, G. (2007). *Hatchet*. New York: Simon & Schuster. U Ryan, P.M. (1999). *Riding Freedom*. New York: Scholastic. M Steig, W. (2010). *Sylvester and the magic pebble*. New York: Atheneum. P–M Teague, M. (1996). *The secret shortcut*. New York: Scholastic. P–M
Ending With a Satisfying Conclusion	Gollub, M. (2000). *The jazz fly*. Santa Rosa, CA: Tortuga Press. P–M Hemphill, M., & Riddleburger, S. (2009). *Stonewall Hinkleman and the Battle of Bull Run*. New York: Dial Books. M Klise, K. (2005). *Regarding the trees*. San Diego: Harcourt. M–U Ryan, P. M. (2001). *Mice and beans*. New York: Scholastic. P Sachar, L. (2008). *Holes*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. U Yang, G. L. (2008). *American born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish Books. U
Teaching Tools	Brown, M. W. (1990). *The important book*. New York: Harper Trophy. P Brown, M. W. (2006). *Another important book*. New York: Harper Trophy. P Janeczko, P. B. (2005). *A kick in the head: An everyday guide to poetic forms*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. M–U Spinelli, E. (2008). *The best story*. New York: Dial Books. P–M

book is an invitation for children to experiment with this poetic form. The box on this page lists mentor texts for this trait.

One other mentor text deserves special mention: Newbery Medal–winning *Holes* (Sachar, 2008), a sophisticated novel for seventh and eighth graders with dual intertwined plots. One plot focuses on Stanley Yelnats, a boy with a palindromic name and a family curse. He's unjustly sent to a juvenile detention facility where boys are required to dig 5-by-5-foot holes every day in the hot Texas sun, and the second plot explains the family curse: Stanley's great-great-grandfather stole a pig from a one-legged Gypsy who, in return, put a curse on him and his descendants. By the story's end, these plots come together and Stanley is redeemed.

Writers focus on organization during the prewriting and drafting stages of the writing process. The organization needs to enhance the ideas—showcase them in the best way possible. Writers create diagrams to explore their ideas, searching for an effective organizational scheme that fits with the topic and the genre. Sometimes students reconsider their organization plan during revising, and when it isn't working, they devise a different arrangement to highlight their most important ideas.

Voice

The writer's distinctive style is called *voice*; it's the quality that breathes life into writing. Spandel (2009) explains that "voice is the imprint of the writer on the page. It is the heart, soul, and breath of the writing—the spirit and the flavor" (p. 91). Each writer's voice is unique. According to writing guru Donald M. Murray (2004), "voice allows the reader to hear an individual human being speak from the page" (p. 21). This trait includes these components:

> ***Choosing Personally Meaningful Topics.*** When writers care about their topics, their voices are stronger. That's one reason why it's important for students to have opportunities to choose their own topics and to write about things that are important to them.
>
> ***Writing With Passion.*** When writers are passionate about a topic, their voices have more energy.
>
> ***Writing With Knowledge.*** Writers' confidence shines through their writing when they understand what they're writing about and can use related terminology. Their voices often disappear when they're expected to write about unfamiliar topics.
>
> ***Adopting a Tone.*** A writer's tone is his or her opinion or feeling about a topic; it ranges from serious to silly and casual to formal. Examples include approving, teasing, anxious, objective, admiring, angry, witty, sarcastic, mischievous, gloomy, ironic, critical, disappointed, confusing, patriotic, hopeful, and sincere. Writers craft the tone through their choice of words and arrangement of words into sentences.

Writers' personalities emerge through these components. During the drafting and writing stages, students craft their voices using their knowledge and passion about a topic, words they choose, the way the sentences flow, and the tone they adopt.

Creating an effective voice depends on the words writers choose and how they arrange them into sentences and paragraphs. Some writers craft lyrical rhythms, as Jane Yolen does in *Owl Moon* (2007); some show their mischievous side, as Mo Willems does in his sarcastic pigeon series that began with *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* (2003); and others create mesmerizing stories with hopeful themes, such as *Savvy* (Law, 2008). Kate Klise projects multiple voices in her popular multigenre books. She uses letters, memos, and other texts to tell the story objectively in *Regarding the Bathrooms: A Privy to the Past* (2008) and other punny books in the "Regarding the . . ." series and in the 43 Old Cemetery Road series, which began with *Dying to Meet You* (2009). The Mentor Texts box on page 63 lists additional books with strong author voices.

Word Choice

Writers choose words carefully to convey the precise meaning they intend. As students craft their pieces, they learn to choose lively verbs and specific nouns, adjectives, and adverbs; create imagery through colorful language and sensory words; and use idiomatic expressions. The goal is to find a fresh, original way to express the message while being concise. This trait links ideas with voice (Spandel, 2009). Word choice includes these components:

> ***Painting a Picture With Words.*** Writers use descriptive language, including words representing the five senses, to bring their writing to life.
>
> ***Choosing Precise Words.*** Writers select specific, accurate, powerful, and engaging words to add depth, enhance meaning, and clarify understanding.

Energizing Writing With Strong Verbs. Writers add energy by avoiding all forms of the verb *to be* and replace common action words, such as *ate, said,* or *walked*, with more descriptive ones, such as *gulped, insisted*, or *trudged*.

Playing With Words. Writers use poetic devices and other inventive techniques, including puns, alliteration, metaphors, personification, onomatopoeia, and palindromes (words that read the same left to right and right to left), to evoke images and make their writing memorable.

Writers focus on these components of word choice as they draft and revise their writing.

Children's books have many wonderful examples of this trait. For example, *Skippyjon Jones* (Schachner, 2005) and its sequels feature a hyperactive Siamese kitten who thinks he's a Chihuahua super hero named El Skippito. The author has sprinkled Spanish words and expressions through each book in the series, and these word choices energize the writing. *Savvy* (Law, 2008) is the story of a family where each child has a magical power that the author calls a "savvy"; and the characters use these powers to protect and save the family. Ingrid Law demonstrates how to develop a story around a single interesting word—*savvy*. And in *Open Wide: Tooth School Inside* (Keller, 2000), the author shows how to integrate technical vocabulary, including *crown, incisor, gargle, crooked, enamel, permanent,* and *decay,* into a story. The Mentor Texts box on page 64 lists additional books to use to teach this trait.

MENTOR TEXTS VOICE

COMPONENT	BOOKS
Choosing Meaningful Topics	Alexie, S. (2009). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. Boston: Little, Brown. U Dahl, R. (2009). *Boy: Tales of childhood*. New York: Puffin Books. M–U Ryan, P. M. (2002). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic. M Soto, G. (2005). *Neighborhood odes*. New York: HarperCollins. M Willems, M. (2004). *Knuffle bunny: A cautionary tale*. New York: Hyperion Books. P Woodson, J. (2005). *Show way*. New York: Putnam. P–M
Writing With Passion	Cronin, D. (2005). *Click, clack, moo: Cows that type*. New York: Scholastic. P Curtis, C. P. (2000). *The Watsons go to Birmingham—1963*. New York: Laurel Leaf. M–U Frazee, M. (2006). *Rollercoaster*. New York: Sandpiper. P–M Pennypacker, S. (2008). *Clementine*. New York: Hyperion Books. M Schmidt, G. D. (2008). *The Wednesday wars*. New York: Clarion Books. U White, E. B. (2006). *Charlotte's web*. New York: HarperCollins. M
Writing With Knowledge	Cronin, D. (2007). *Diary of a fly*. New York: HarperCollins. P Cushman, K. (2005). *Catherine, called Birdy*. New York: HarperCollins. U Dana, B. (2009). *A voice of her own: Becoming Emily Dickinson*. New York: HarperCollins. U George, J. C. (2003). *Julie of the wolves*. New York: Harper Trophy. U Schulman, J. (2008). *Pale Male: Citizen hawk of New York City*. New York: Knopf. P–M Thimmesh, C. (2006). *Team moon: How 400,000 people landed Apollo 11 on the moon*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. M
Adopting a Tone	Erickson, J. R. (2003). *Hank the cow dog*. New York: Puffin Books. M Hesse, K. (2003). *Witness*. New York: Scholastic. U MacLachlan, P. (2005). *Sarah, plain and tall*. New York: Scholastic. M Raschka, C. (2007). *Yo! Yes?* New York: Scholastic. P Scieszka, J. (1996). *The true story of the 3 little pigs!* New York: Puffin Books. P–M Yolen, J. (2007). *Owl moon*. New York: Philomel. P–M

MENTOR TEXTS WORD CHOICE

COMPONENT	BOOKS
Painting a Picture With Words	Almond, D. (2009). *Skellig*. New York: Delacorte. M–U Babbitt, N. (2007). *Tuck everlasting*. New York: Square Fish Books. U Fletcher, R. (1997). *Twilight comes twice*. New York: Clarion Books. M Frame, J. A. (2008). *Yesterday I had the blues*. New York: Tricycle Press. P–M Horowitz, R. (2004). *Crab moon*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. P–M Rylant, C. (1991). *Night in the country*. New York: Atheneum. P
Choosing Precise Words	O'Connor, J. (2008). *Fancy Nancy's favorite fancy words.* New York: HarperCollins. P–M Frasier, D. (2007). *Miss Alaineus: A vocabulary disaster*. San Diego: Voyager. M Lowry, L. (2006). *The giver*. New York: Delacorte. U Patron, S. (2008). *The higher power of lucky*. New York: Atheneum. U Scieszka, J. (2001). *Baloney (Henry P.).* New York: Viking. M Soto, G. (2005). *Neighborhood odes*. Orlando: Harcourt. M
Energizing Writing With Strong Verbs	Hale, S. (2007). *Princess academy*. New York: Bloomsbury. M–U Paulsen, G. (2007). *Hatchet.* New York: Simon & Schuster. M–U Sachar, L. (2008). *Holes.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. U Schaefer, L. M. (2003). *Pick, pull, snap!* New York: Greenwillow. P–M
Playing With Words	Cleary, B. P. (2006). *Rhyme and PUNishment: Adventures in wordplay.* Minneapolis: Millbrook Press. M Clements, A. (1998). *Frindle*. New York: Aladdin Books. M Most, B. (2003). *The cow that went OINK.* New York: Sandpiper. P Prelutsky, J. (2002). *Scranimals.* New York: Greenwillow. M Raschka, C. (1992). *Charlie Parker played be bop*. New York: Orchard Books. P–M Rosen, M. (1999). *Walking the bridge of your nose: Wordplay, poems, rhymes.* New York: Kingfisher. M–U Wiles, D. (2006). *Each little bird that sings*. New York: Sandpiper. M–U
Teaching Tools	Banks, K. (2006). *Max's words*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. P Leedy, L., & Street, P. (2003). *There's a frog in my throat! 440 animal sayings a little bird told me.* New York: Holiday House. P–M Schotter, R. (2006). *The boy who loved words*. New York: Schwartz and Wade. M Terban, M. (1992). *Funny you should ask: How to make up jokes and riddles with wordplay*. New York: Clarion Books. M Terban, M. (2006). *Scholastic dictionary of idioms*. New York: Scholastic. M–U Terban, M. (2007). *In a pickle and other funny idioms*. New York: Sandpiper. M Terban, M. (2007). *Mad as a wet hen and other funny idioms*. New York: Sandpiper. M

Sentence Fluency

Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of language. Writers vary the length and structure of sentences so their writing has a natural cadence and is easy to read aloud. They vary how they begin sentences, use sentence fragments sparingly, and invent natural-sounding dialogue to add style (Spandel, 2008). This trait includes these components:

Achieving a Rhythmic Flow. Writers invent natural-sounding dialogue and use transition words so that their writing flows smoothly.

Constructing Effective Sentences. Writers carefully craft complete sentences that enhance the text's meaning.

Varying Sentence Patterns. Writers vary the structure of sentences, including types of sentences, sentence beginnings, and sentence lengths, to create a natural cadence.

Breaking the Rules. Sometimes writers break the rules and use sentence fragments, nonstandard English, or slang to create fluency.

As students examine these components, they acquire a better understanding of sentences and this trait's relationship with the writer's voice. They develop this trait as they draft and revise their writing.

Teachers share mentor texts to demonstrate how authors develop sentence fluency. In *Crab Moon* (Horowitz, 2000), the author uses rhythmic sentences to tell how a boy and his mother go to a moonlit beach to witness horseshoe crabs laying their eggs in the sand. *How I Learned Geography* (Shulevitz, 2008) is a first-person narrative that reads like a fable; it's the story of the author's father who buys a map at the bazaar to feed his family's dreams instead of food to fill their stomachs. After responding to the story and its message, students can examine the effective sentences in this award-winning story. Jacqueline Woodson's *Show Way* (2005) tells how her freedom-seeking slave ancestors used quilts as maps to escape from their owners. She uses lyrical language as well as sentence fragments and nonstandard English to tell her story effectively. The Mentor Texts box on page 66 lists additional books that teachers use in teaching this trait.

How to Solve Struggling Writers' Problems

The Problem	The composition has weak sentence structure.
What Causes It	Students write the way they talk, and those who speak in short, choppy sentences, use run-on sentences, or lack sentence variety in their conversation will sound the same way on paper.
How to Solve It	**QUICK FIX:** During revising, have students read their rough drafts aloud to locate short, choppy sentences that they can combine, run-on sentences that they can correct, or places where they can vary the types of sentences they're using. And as students participate in revising groups, they can ask their classmates for suggestions about how to improve the flow of sentences in their drafts. **LONG-TERM SOLUTION:** In a series of minilessons, teach students about the types of sentences, run-on sentences and how to eliminate them, and how to combine sentences to make their writing more interesting. Students can work in small groups to practice combining sentences and improving the sentence variety of sample compositions. In addition, they can examine the variety of sentences in books they're reading and practice imitating their favorite sentences.
How to Prevent the Problem	Students who do lots of reading learn more sophisticated sentence structures and can apply these structures in their own writing.

Conventions

The term *conventions* refers to the correct application of the rules of Standard English spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar and usage. When these conventions are used effectively, they reinforce writers' ideas and enhance the readability of compositions. Writers check each word, sentence, and paragraph as they prepare their pieces for publication. This trait includes these components:

Spelling Words Conventionally. Writers spell words correctly as a courtesy to readers.

Paragraphing Accurately. Writers use paragraphing to highlight the composition's organization and hierarchy of ideas.

MENTOR TEXTS SENTENCE FLUENCY

COMPONENT	BOOKS
Achieving a Rhythmic Flow	Aylesworth, J. (1995). *Old black fly*. New York: Henry Holt. P DiCamillo, K. (2009). *Because of Winn-Dixie*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. U Gray, L. M. (1999). *My mama had a dancing heart*. New York: Scholastic. P–M Lowry, L. (2009). *Crow call*. New York: Scholastic. M Schachner, J. (2005). *Skippyjon Jones*. New York: Puffin Books. P
Constructing Effective Sentences	Babbitt, N. (2007). *Tuck everlasting.* New York: Square Fish Books. U Dahl, R. (2007). *James and the giant peach*. New York: Puffin Books. M–U Davies, N. (2001). *One tiny turtle*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press. P–M Rylant, C. (1993). *The relatives came*. New York: Aladdin Books. P–M Waldman, N. (2003). *The snowflake: A water cycle story*. Minneapolis: Millbrook Press. P–M
Varying Sentence Patterns	Avi. (2005). *Poppy.* New York: HarperCollins. M Lowry, L. (2006). *The giver.* New York: Delacorte. U MacLachlan, P. (2004). *Sarah, plain and tall*. New York: HarperCollins. M Schaefer, L. M. (2003). *Pick, pull, snap!* New York: Greenwillow. P–M White, E. B. (2006). *Charlotte's web*. New York: HarperCollins. M–U
Breaking the Rules	Horse, H. (1999). *The last cowboys*. Atlanta: Peachtree. M Taylor, M. D. (2004). *Roll of thunder, hear my cry.* New York: Puffin Books. U Williams, S. A. (1997). *Working cotton.* New York: Voyager. P–M Wisniewski, D. (1999). *Tough cookie.* New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard. M

Punctuating Effectively. Writers use within-sentence and end-of-sentence punctuation correctly to make their compositions more reader-friendly.

Capitalizing Correctly. Most of the time, writers capitalize proper nouns and adjectives correctly; sometimes, however, they avoid using capital letters, especially in poems.

Applying Standard English Grammar and Usage Rules. Writers use Standard English and adhere to mainstream usage rules unless they're writing dialogue.

Students who have a good grasp of these conventions correct most errors during editing to make their compositions "reader ready" (Culham, 2010b, p. 261).

Teachers can pick up almost any favorite book to use as a mentor text to teach this trait because most books apply Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and grammar conventions. In addition, a number of books focusing on punctuation are available, including *The Girl's Like Spaghetti: Why, You Can't Manage Without Apostrophes!* (Truss, 2007), *Punctuation Takes a Vacation* (Pulver, 2003), *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really Do Make a Difference!* (Truss, 2006), *Greedy Apostrophe: A Cautionary Tale* (Carr, 2009), and *Twenty-Odd Ducks: Why, Every Punctuation Mark Counts!* (Truss, 2008).

Presentation

Presentation means making the final copy of a composition look good; Ruth Culham (2010b) compares a visually appealing piece to a welcome mat because it invites readers to enter. The way the text is formatted enhances readers' ability to understand the message. Writers use titles, headings, margins, and white space to emphasize their purpose, and they integrate the words and illustrations and make clear connections between them. In addition, it's essential that students produce final copies carefully with legible handwriting, or they use word processing so classmates and other readers can read the compositions. Presentation includes these components:

> ***Adding Text Features.*** Writers add titles, headings, and bullets to guide readers through the text and experiment with font styles and rebus symbols to represent words. They also create a variety of illustrations to provide additional information and extend the text, including drawings, photos, and charts. Adding these text features is easy to do when writers use word processing and have Internet connections.
>
> ***Arranging Words and Illustrations on the Page.*** Writers consider margins, headings, paragraph breaks, and placement of titles and illustrations because they want to make the best use of white space to enhance their presentation.
>
> ***Using Legible Handwriting.*** When writers handwrite their final copies, their goal is legibility. They strive to make their writing neat, without distracting smudges or corrections, because readers don't want to struggle to figure out what a writer is saying.
>
> ***Using Word Processing Effectively.*** Writers want their compositions to be "reader-friendly" so they choose legible fonts for their compositions, make sure the font size is appropriate, and limit the number of fonts they use on a page.

When students take pride in their work and apply these components, their presentations will be effective.

Students examine fiction and nonfiction mentor texts to learn how authors add text features and arrange the text and illustrations on the page. In *The Night I Followed the Dog* (Laden, 1994), the story of a boy who follows his dog one night to see exactly what dogs do when they're on their own, the author handwrites the text and inserts rebus symbols to make this charming story more fun to read. *Do Not Open: An Encyclopedia of the World's Best Kept Secrets* (Farndon, 2010) is a remarkable collection of nearly 100 mysteries and unexplained phenomena with strong visual appeal: Foldouts, liftable flaps, and other features convey detailed information effectively, and traditional nonfiction features, including a table of contents and an index, are incorporated as well. The Mentor Texts feature on this page lists additional books teachers use in teaching this trait.

MENTOR TEXTS PRESENTATION

COMPONENT	BOOKS
Adding Text Features	Balliett, B. (2005). *Chasing Vermeer*. New York: Scholastic. M–U Bosch, P. (2008). *The name of this book is secret*. Boston: Little, Brown. M Cole, J. (2010). *The magic school bus and the climate change*. New York: Scholastic. P–M Gibbons, G. (2008). *The vegetables we eat.* New York: Holiday House. P–M Osborne, W., & Osborne, M. P. (2001). *Pirates* (a nonfiction companion to *Pirates past noon*). New York: Random House. M Sands, E. (2005). The *Egyptology handbook: A course in the wonders of Egypt.* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. M–U
Arranging Words and Illustrations on the Page	Ering, T. B. (2008). *The story of frog belly rat bone*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. P–M Frazee, M. (2008). *A couple of boys have the best week ever*. San Diego: Harcourt. M Marceau, F. (2009). *Panorama: A foldout book*. New York: Abrams. P–M Selznick, B. (2007). *The invention of Hugo Cabret.* New York: Scholastic. U Watanabe, E. (2009). *My Japan*. New York: Kane/Miller. P Wilkinson, P., Leslie, J., Roberts, D., & Bridgman, R. (2009). *Pick me up.* New York: DK. M–U

Students focus on this trait during publishing, the final stage in the writing process. They add text features and plan their layout before they handwrite or word process their final copies. Presentation matters whenever writers take their writing through the writing process: Young children, for example, add titles and page numbers and integrate their use of drawing and writing when they make little books; middle graders explore ways to use white space and font size as they arrange text and illustrations in multigenre reports; and older students insert boldfacing, headings, and bullets to highlight ideas in their professional-looking essays.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES

Students expand their knowledge of the writer's craft each year through lessons about the six traits and more reading and writing experience. The traits aren't taught only at one grade level; rather, teachers build on and refine students' understanding each year by teaching minilessons on each trait, having students read and analyze authors' use of the writer's craft in mentor texts, and encouraging them to apply what they're learning in practice activities and independent writing during writing workshop. The Instructional Overview feature on page 69 sets goals for students in the primary, middle, and upper grades.

Introducing the Writer's Craft

Teachers draw students' attention to the effectiveness or quality of writing when they introduce the writer's craft. Some teachers divide students into small groups and distribute anonymous samples of student writing (from a different classroom or written in previous years) that range in effectiveness for each group to read. Then they ask students which samples they liked better and why they preferred them. Fourth graders offered these reasons:

> The story was so funny. We were laughing.
> The topic was fascinating and we learned a lot.
> This story was good because it was like a comic book and it had all these crazy sound words.
> This book was like a movie that we could see in our minds.
> It was so sad; it made us almost cry.
> The words were so beautiful, like in a book called *Owl Moon* [Yolen, 2007].

Other teachers share favorite books and ask students what makes these books good, and they offer similar reasons. Once students have begun to think about what makes writing effective, they're ready to learn about the six traits.

Teaching the Six Traits

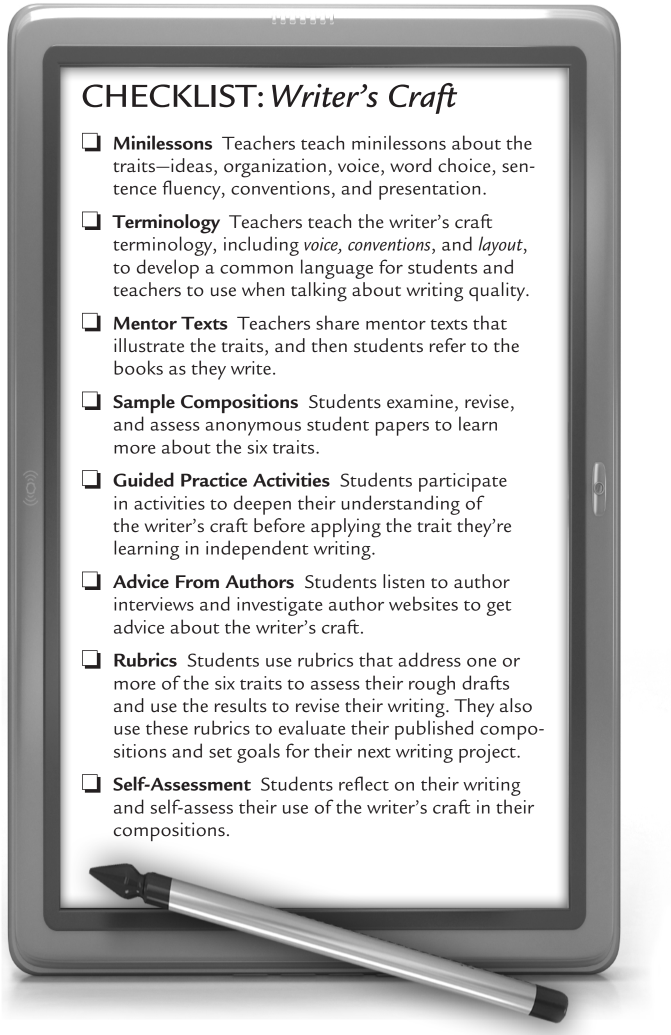
Teachers use a combination of minilessons, mentor texts, and guided practice activities to teach one or more components of each trait, and then students apply what they've learned in their own writing. Fletcher (2010) recommends teaching students about the writer's craft—language play, in particular—because it energizes their writing. The Checklist feature on page 70 reviews the guidelines for teaching the writer's craft.

As students learn about the six traits, they internalize what good writers do. They learn to recognize effective writing, develop a vocabulary for talking about writing, and acquire techniques for improving the quality of their writing. In addition, they gain valuable experience in evaluating their own writing.

INSTRUCTIONAL OVERVIEW

The Writer's Craft

GRADE LEVELS	GOALS
Kindergarten–Grade 2	● *Ideas:* Children choose and narrow topics. ● *Organization:* Children structure ideas to include a beginning, middle, and end or to highlight big ideas. ● *Voice:* Children demonstrate their knowledge about personally meaningful topics. ● *Word Choice:* Children add specific information, paint word pictures, and incorporate sensory details. ● *Sentence Fluency:* Children write in complete sentences and combine sentences to avoid overuse of "and." ● *Conventions:* Children spell high-frequency words correctly; use end-of-sentence punctuation marks; capitalize beginnings of sentences, names, and the word *I*. ● *Presentation:* Children print final copies legibly and add illustrations to extend the text's meaning.
Grades 3–5	● *Ideas:* Students develop topics and vary writing according to genre. ● *Organization:* Students craft leads, structure transitions, and write satisfying conclusions. ● *Voice:* Students develop a tone that connects with readers. ● *Word Choice:* Students choose precise vocabulary, energize writing with strong verbs, and play with words. ● *Sentence Fluency:* Students craft strong sentences that vary in structure and length, and demonstrate a rhythmic flow of words. ● *Conventions:* Students paragraph accurately to reflect the text's organization, and apply Standard English spelling, capitalization, and punctuation conventions. ● *Presentation:* Students use word processing effectively, and arrange the words and illustrations on the page to highlight big ideas and enhance appearance.
Grades 6–8	● *Ideas:* Students develop ideas in genre-appropriate ways. ● *Organization:* Students structure writing with clear and logical patterns that fit the genre. ● *Voice:* Students set the tone, and allow their writer's voice to emerge through the writing. ● *Word Choice:* Students select words to convey the precise meaning they intend. ● *Sentence Fluency:* Students craft sentences with an easy cadence that demonstrates a strong sense of "sentence." ● *Conventions:* Students apply Standard English spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar conventions correctly. ● *Presentation:* Students add text features, connect illustrations with text, and use formatting to enhance the look of their compositions.



CHECKLIST: *Writer's Craft*

- ☐ **Minilessons** Teachers teach minilessons about the traits—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation.
- ☐ **Terminology** Teachers teach the writer's craft terminology, including *voice, conventions*, and *layout*, to develop a common language for students and teachers to use when talking about writing quality.
- ☐ **Mentor Texts** Teachers share mentor texts that illustrate the traits, and then students refer to the books as they write.
- ☐ **Sample Compositions** Students examine, revise, and assess anonymous student papers to learn more about the six traits.
- ☐ **Guided Practice Activities** Students participate in activities to deepen their understanding of the writer's craft before applying the trait they're learning in independent writing.
- ☐ **Advice From Authors** Students listen to author interviews and investigate author websites to get advice about the writer's craft.
- ☐ **Rubrics** Students use rubrics that address one or more of the six traits to assess their rough drafts and use the results to revise their writing. They also use these rubrics to evaluate their published compositions and set goals for their next writing project.
- ☐ **Self-Assessment** Students reflect on their writing and self-assess their use of the writer's craft in their compositions.

TEACHING THE IDEAS TRAIT Teachers involve students in activities to expand their knowledge about ideas that make interesting stories and to learn how to develop ideas. They use these activities to teach about the ideas trait and provide guided practice opportunities:

Read-Alouds. Teachers read aloud mentor texts with well-developed ideas and books illustrating the other traits using the interactive read-aloud procedure that's described in the Step-by-Step box on page 71. This procedure is recommended because students are actively engaged while teachers are reading.

Wordless Books. Students learn how authors develop ideas by writing texts to accompany wordless books, such as *The Lion and the Mouse* (Pinkney, 2009), *Pancakes for Breakfast* (dePaola, 1978), and *The Red Book* (Lehman, 2004) for younger children; and *Wave* (Lee, 2008), *Frog Goes to Dinner* (Mayer, 2003), and *Flotsam* (Wiesner, 2006) for older students.

Folktales. Students compare several versions of a familiar folktale, and then they create a new version. For example, young children can compare some of these Gingerbread Boy stories before writing a new version: *The Gingerbread Boy* (Egielski, 2000), *The Gingerbread Girl* (Ernst, 2006), *The Gingerbread Cowboy* (Squires, 2006), and *Gingerbread Baby* (Brett, 1999), and older children can examine these versions of Cinderella: *Princess Furball* (Huck, 1994), *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987), *The Rough-Face Girl* (Martin, 1998), *Cindy Ellen: A Wild Western Cinderella* (Lowell, 2001), *Ella's Big Chance: A Jazz-Age Cinderella* (Hughes, 2004), *Ella Enchanted* [novel] (Levine, 2004), and *The Amaranth Enchantment* [novel] (Berry, 2009).

TEACHING THE ORGANIZATION TRAIT Teachers direct students' attention to the internal structure of compositions by having them examine anonymous student writing, mentor texts, and their own writing. Culham and Coutu (2008) compare well-organized writing to "a highway that gets the readers to where they want to go" (p. 48). In these activities, students examine the overall organization of a piece of writing, its internal structure, and how to effectively begin and end a composition:

Drawing Diagrams. Students analyze the overall structure of a book by making diagrams that highlight its structure. To focus on the beginning-middle-end of stories, for instance, students divide a sheet into thirds and draw a picture and write a summary sentence about each part. Or, to explore a story's plot development, they make a mountain-like diagram and use pictures and words to label the problem, the roadblocks, the high point, and the resolution. For nonfiction books, students examine the structure and draw a diagram that fits the organization. For example, for a life cycle book, students draw a circle diagram, or for a book comparing two topics, they make a Venn diagram.

Collecting Effective Leads/Endings. Students examine how effective authors grab the reader's attention at the beginning of a story by rereading the first sentences of mentor texts, choosing their favorites, and writing them on sentence strips. Then students share the sentences and sort them into categories such as "just one word," "an opinion," "sound words," "a quick action," or "a question." Teachers can also have students use the same procedure to examine how authors wrap up a story.

Building Paragraphs. Teachers copy the sentences in a well-crafted paragraph taken from a mentor text onto sentence strips for students to sequence. Working in small groups, students read the sentences and arrange them to build a paragraph. Sometimes teachers include a sentence that doesn't belong in the paragraph for students to remove. Or, teachers can cut apart paragraphs in one episode or chapter for students to sequence.

TEACHING THE VOICE TRAIT The writer's voice reflects the person doing the writing; it sounds natural, never stilted. Pulitzer Prize–winning author and teacher Donald Murray says that a writer's voice is the person in the writing (Newkirk & Miller, 2009). As students gain experience, their writer's voice will emerge, especially when they're writing on topics they're passionate about. They learn to vary their tone depending on their purpose for writing, and they recognize

STEP-BY-STEP INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUDS

1. **Select a book.** Teachers choose award-winning and other high-quality stories and nonfiction books that are appropriate for students and that exemplify the writer's craft.
2. **Prepare to share the book.** Teachers practice reading the book to ensure that they can read it fluently and to decide where to pause and engage students with the text; they write prompts on self-stick notes to mark these pages. Teachers also think about how they'll introduce the book and highlight concepts and vocabulary that might be unfamiliar to students.
3. **Introduce the book.** Teachers activate students' background knowledge, set a clear purpose for listening, and preview the text.
4. **Read the book interactively.** Teachers read the book aloud and ask questions to direct students' attention to specific points in the text. For stories, they also ask them to make and revise predictions at pivotal points, share connections, assume the persona of a character and share the character's thoughts, or reenact a scene. For nonfiction books, teachers encourage students to ask questions or share information, raise hands when specific information is read, take notes, or complete graphic organizers.
5. **Reread the book.** Teachers reread the book aloud, stopping periodically to focus students' attention on the writer's craft.
6. **Involve students in after-reading activities.** Students participate in discussions and other response activities.

that some genres require a more formal voice. Teachers use these practice activities to highlight this trait:

Lots of Reading. As students read books and listen to the teacher read others aloud, they deepen their appreciation of how the writer's voice affects a piece of writing. Teachers highlight the lyrical tone in *My Mama Had a Dancing Heart* (Gray, 1999), the uproarious spirit in *Barn Dance!* (Martin & Archambault, 1988a), the exaggeration in *Straight to the Pole* (O'Malley, 2006), and the soothing repetition in *The Napping House* (Wood, 2000). As students become aware of these techniques, they experiment with them in their writing.

Lots of Writing. At the same time they're examining authors' voices in books they're reading, students do lots of informal writing to develop their own voice. They need to write every day to become fluent. Keeping a personal journal is a good way to get started, and more experienced writers make entries in reading journals and write journal entries from the viewpoint of book characters.

Writing From Different Viewpoints. Students write from varied viewpoints to personalize a story and experiment with tone. They can compare characters' different viewpoints in a story, or in a collection of related stories such as *The Three Little Pigs* (Marshall, 2000), *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001), *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* (Trivizas, 1997), and *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs!* (Scieszka, 1996); in each of these stories, the wolf's viewpoint is different than the pigs'.

Look for examples of students applying their knowledge of the writer's craft in the four classrooms featured on the CD that accompanies this text.

TEACHING THE WORD CHOICE TRAIT Good writers use words effectively. They learn to use "dollar words," as Noah explained in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter: They choose more precise words for *said,* such as *cried* or *mentioned,* and more descriptive words for *noise,* such as *racket* and *uproar*; energize sentences with vivid verbs; and enrich their writing with figurative language. These practice activities provide opportunities for students to expand their knowledge about words:

Examining Alphabet Books. One way that students acquire word knowledge is by examining alphabet books designed for K–8 students, such as *Fancy Nancy's Favorite Fancy Words* (O'Connor, 2008) and *America: A Patriotic Primer* (Cheney, 2002). Sleeping Bear Press has published a series of alphabet books celebrating each state and a variety of other topics, including *A Is for Anaconda: A Rainforest Alphabet* (Fredericks, 2009), *S Is for Story: A Writer's Alphabet* (Hershenhorn, 2009), and *B Is for Battle Cry: A Civil War Alphabet* (Bauer, 2009). These books also provide models for students' writing.

Posting a Word Wall. Teachers collect words related to a book they're reading or a thematic unit on a word wall hanging in the classroom. They use construction paper squares or sheets of butcher paper that have been divided into alphabetized sections for the word wall. Usually students choose the words to add, and they may even do the writing themselves, but teachers add any important words that students' haven't chosen. Then students refer to the words when they're writing journal entries, books, and essays. The procedure for completing a word wall is presented in the Step-by-Step box on page 73.

Using a Thesaurus. Teachers teach students how to use a thesaurus to locate synonyms, and they have students create lists of synonyms for imprecise and overused words, including *eat, said, nice*, and *walk*. The best thesaurus to introduce to young children is *A First Thesaurus* (Wittels, 2001), and students in the middle grades use *The Clear and Simple Thesaurus Dictionary* (Wittels & Greisman, 2006) and *The American Heritage Children's Thesaurus* (Hellweg, 2009a). *The American Heritage Student Thesaurus* (Hellweg, 2009b) and *Scholastic Student Thesaurus* (Bollard, 2007) are appropriate for students in sixth through eighth grades. These reference

STEP-BY-STEP WORD WALLS

1. **Prepare the word wall.** Teachers prepare a blank word wall using sheets of construction paper, and labeling them with letters of the alphabet.
2. **Introduce the word wall.** Teachers introduce the word wall and explain how it will be used.
3. **Add words.** Students suggest "important" words for the word wall as they're reading a book or participating in a thematic unit. Students and the teacher write the words in the alphabetized blocks, making sure to write large enough so that most students can see the words. If a word is misspelled, it's corrected because students will be using the words.
4. **Use the word wall.** Teachers use the words on the word wall for a variety of vocabulary activities, and students refer to it when they're writing.

books are arranged in alphabetical order; students look up the word and select the most appropriate synonym. One of the hardest lessons for writers to learn is that even though a word is a synonym for another, it may not fit the meaning of the word in a particular sentence. For example, *scampered, dashed, sprinted, flowed, jogged, chased, escaped*, and *galloped* are synonyms for *ran*, but only a couple make sense in this sentence: *The dog ran after the boy*.

Inserting Vivid Verbs. Teachers remove verbs from a passage in a mentor text, and students work in small groups to choose replacements. It's often helpful to have students consult a thesaurus or lists of vivid verbs they've brainstormed to find the most effective replacements. Afterward, students compare their word choices with the author's.

TEACHING THE SENTENCE FLUENCY TRAIT Teachers teach students that sentences express a complete thought and that depending on the number of independent and dependent clauses they contain, sentences are classified as simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. Students locate examples of each sentence type in mentor texts, and they examine the author's sentence structure and explore how the meaning would change if another structure were used. They acquire the terminology for parts of sentences—*dependent clause, prepositional phrase, coordinating conjunction*, for example. Students also learn to combine short, choppy sentences to smooth the flow. Anderson (2005) argues that zooming in at the sentence level is valuable because when students examine sentences in mentor texts, they'll "understand the connections between mechanics, craft, style, and meaning" (p. 19). Teachers use these guided practice activities as they teach about sentence fluency:

Collecting Favorite Sentences. Students write favorite sentences from mentor texts and other books they're reading on sentence strips and post them in the classroom. Later, teachers have students choose sentences from the collection to use in language arts activities.

Composing Sentences. Killgallon (1997) recommends that students compose sentences using well-crafted sentences taken from mentor texts as models. The first activity is sentence unscrambling: Teachers select a sentence and break it apart into phrases, and then students rearrange the phrases to build a sentence and compare their sentence with the original one. The second activity is sentence imitating; in which students write a new sentence that imitates the structure of a sentence from a mentor text. The third type is sentence combining: Teachers choose a sentence and break it into several simple sentences; then students combine the short sentences to build a more sophisticated one and compare their sentence with the original one. The fourth activity is sentence expanding: Here teachers select a sophisticated sentence, and students expand the nucleus of the sentence into a longer sentence in the author's style. Then students compare their sentence with the original one. Killgallon's four sentence-composing activities are reviewed in Figure 3–2 with sample sentences from E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (2006).

FIGURE 3–2 KILLGALLON'S SENTENCE-COMPOSING ACTIVITIES

Sentence Unscrambling
Students reassemble a sentence that's been broken apart to examine how authors structure sentences. Here are the parts of a sentence to unscramble:

in the middle of the kitchen
teaching it to suck from the bottle
a minute later
with an infant between her knees
Fern was seated on the floor

The model sentence from E. B. White's classic *Charlotte's Web* (2006) is "A minute later Fern was seated on the floor in the middle of the kitchen with an infant between her knees, teaching it to suck from the bottle" (pp. 6–7).

Sentence Imitating
Students create new sentences that imitate the structure of a model sentence. The model sentence from *Charlotte's Web* is "Avery noticed the spider web, and coming closer, he saw Charlotte" (p. 71). A group of sixth graders wrote this imitation sentence: "The police officer noticed the car parked at the side of Route 99, and coming closer, he saw a woman running away from the car and a man racing after her."

Sentence Combining
Students combine short sentences, examine possible combinations, and compare their results with the original sentence. Here are the short sentences:

No one ever had such a friend.
The friend was so affectionate.
The friend was so loyal.
The friend was so skillful.

The model sentence from *Charlotte's Web* is "No one had ever had such a friend—so affectionate, so loyal, and so skillful" (p. 173).

Sentence Expanding
Students expand an abridged version of a sentence so that the text they compose blends in with the rest of the author's sentence. The model sentence from *Charlotte's Web* is "There is no place like home, Wilbur thought, as he placed Charlotte's 514 unborn children carefully in a safe corner" (p. 172). Students expand "There is no place like home . . ." One sixth grader wrote, "There is no place like home, like his home in the barn, cozy and warm straw to sleep on, the delicious smell of manure in the air, Charlotte's egg sac to guard, and his friends Templeton, the goose, and the sheep." Although the students' sentence differs from the model, it retains the character of E. B. White's style.

Teaching Transitional Words. Teachers teach students to use transition words to keep the sentence-to-sentence rhythm going in their writing. Sequence transitions, including *first, second, next, finally*, and *later,* are the most common, but teachers also teach these types:

- Cause-and-effect transitions: *therefore, as a result, since, because of*
- Comparing transitions: *on the other hand, however, in contrast, nonetheless*
- Connecting-ideas transitions: *besides, for example, meanwhile, in addition*
- Spatial-relationship transitions: *above, below, next to, across from*

Students often overuse the transition word *suddenly*, so Colin McNaughton's *Suddenly! A Preston Pig Story* (1998) is a good book to use to experiment with other transition words.

TEACHING THE CONVENTIONS TRAIT Students learn that mechanical correctness is a courtesy to readers, and they proofread their rough drafts during the editing stage to correct errors. Through these practice activities, teachers connect the skills they're teaching about capitalization, punctuation, and spelling to writing:

Using Spell Checkers. Teachers teach students to use spell checkers to search their compositions for misspelled words and correct the errors they find. Spell checkers draw students' attention to misspelled words, but they don't recognize incorrect inflectional endings on words or homonym errors; for instance, students may write *their* and spell it correctly, but if the word should be *there*, this software won't catch the error. Students can also learn to use other editing software, including grammar checkers and online dictionaries and thesauri.

Examining Capitalization. Students often begin writing using only capital letters but during kindergarten and first grade, they learn to print lowercase letterforms and to capitalize *I,* the first word in a sentence, and names and other proper nouns and adjectives. Within a few years, their most common problem is capitalizing too many words, and this problem persists because students have trouble differentiating between common and proper nouns: Too often, they assume that all "important" words should be capitalized. With instruction, students learn that capital letters divide sentences and signal important words within sentences, and teachers provide opportunities for them to examine how writers use capitalization in mentor texts. Sometimes teachers remove the capital letters in a passage from a mentor text and have students work in small groups to replace them.

Investigating Punctuation. It's a common misconception that punctuation marks signal only pauses in speech, but they play a greater role (Wilde, 1992). Some punctuation marks—periods, question marks, and exclamation points—indicate sentence boundaries, but others—commas, semicolons, and colons—mark grammatical units within sentences. Quotation marks and apostrophes express meaning within sentences: Quotation marks often indicate dialogue, but they also express irony, as in *He "loves" to wash dishes*. Apostrophes are used in contractions to join two words and in possessive nouns to show relationships. Teachers teach students about the punctuation marks and locate examples of them in mentor texts and in students' own writing.

TEACHING THE PRESENTATION TRAIT The presentation trait reflects the technological advances of the past decade, and it's evolving as a component of the writer's craft. Teachers work with students to examine the trait in mentor texts and in their own writing, both handwritten and word processed compositions, and to teach them how to use technology to make their compositions more reader-friendly. These practice activities suggest some ways to focus on presentation:

> ***Examining Presentation in Books.*** Students examine fiction and nonfiction books to see how authors make use of white space in the layout; the effect of font style, size, and color on readability; the impact of formatting options, such as boldface, underlining, and italicizing; and the usefulness of headings and other markers. To begin, teachers make copies of a page from a book and examine it with students, and then students work in small groups to analyze books they're reading and mentor texts.
>
> ***Assessing Handwriting.*** Students assess their published compositions to determine whether their handwriting is legible. They consider these elements of legibility:
>
> - Are the letters formed correctly?
> - Is the proportional size of uppercase to lowercase letters appropriate?
> - Is there adequate spacing between letters in words and words in sentences?
> - Is the slant consistent so letters are parallel?
> - Are the letters uniform in size?
> - Do the letters touch the baseline?
>
> Teachers review students' evaluations and provide minilessons to address handwriting problems.
>
> ***Teaching Keyboarding.*** Teachers use tutorial programs to introduce students to keyboarding and teach the home keys and correct fingering on the keyboard. One of the best-known comprehensive online programs is Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing®. Other tutorial programs, such as JumpStart® Typing, use an arcade game format and are designed to develop typing speed. Keyboarding is important because students who don't know the locations of keys on the keyboard depend on the hunt-and-peck technique to arduously produce their compositions, and on bad keyboarding habits that are hard to break. Many teachers recommend teaching children basic keyboarding skills as soon as they begin to use computers, but others suggest postponing keyboarding instruction until third or fourth grade (Roblyer, 2006).

Teachers use these guided practice activities as part of minilessons and to provide additional support for struggling students.

Writing Workshop

Students apply what they're learning about the writer's craft in writing workshop as they write compositions using the writing process and publish them.

TEACHING MINILESSONS Teachers teach minilessons on the writer's craft during writing workshop, but they're careful to balance the amount of time they spend on instruction with independent writing time. As they teach each trait, teachers describe the trait, delineate the components, show examples from mentor texts and anonymous students' writing, and involve students in activities to investigate the trait and internalize what good writers do. Then students apply their new knowledge as they write independently during writing workshop. A minilesson on word choice is presented on page 77.

INDEPENDENT WRITING Students apply what they're learning about the writer's craft during independent writing. It's natural to connect the six traits with the writing process

Minilesson

Vivid Verbs

Mrs. Hernandez is concerned that her sixth graders use common, familiar words instead of more powerful and precise words that would energize their writing, so she's teaching a series of minilessons about the word choice trait. She's introduced the thesaurus and explained the importance of choosing words carefully. Today, she's focusing on using vivid verbs.

1. Introduce the Topic

"The focus of today's minilesson is on verbs because verbs are often the most powerful words in a sentence. They're the motor that drives the sentence," Mrs. Hernandez explains.

2. Share Examples

The teacher passes out copies of two anonymous compositions (written by students the previous year) and asks students to highlight the verbs as she reads the compositions aloud; she accentuates each verb as she reads to assist students in identifying them. Then students read aloud the verbs they highlighted. Verbs in the first composition include *is*, *wanted*, and *thought; annoys*, *startled*, and *crackle* appear in the second composition. The sixth graders quickly notice that the verbs in the first composition are lackluster when compared to those in the second composition.

3. Provide Information

Mrs. Hernandez explains that during revision, writers should make sure the verbs they've used are vivid. Tami asks if they should highlight the verbs in their own writing, and the teacher agrees that it's a good way to check. Then, she continues, if students find that the verbs aren't vivid, they should substitute better words. Sometimes they can think of more powerful words themselves, and sometimes they should use a thesaurus to find better words.

4. Guide Practice

Next, Mrs. Hernandez passes out copies of the thesaurus and asks students to work in pairs to substitute more vivid verbs in the first composition to make the writing more powerful. As students work, she circulates around the classroom, checking that the synonyms they choose are appropriate.

5. Assess Learning

As she ends the lesson, Mrs. Hernandez asks students to highlight 10 vivid verbs in the compositions they're working on now, and if they don't find that many, to revise so that they do.

because the six traits focus on writing effectiveness, and the writing process describes what students do as they develop quality compositions (Spandel, 2009). As students use the writing process, they set goals using one or more traits during prewriting, get feedback from classmates in revising groups about how to improve their application of the traits, focus on conventions with editing partners, and design an eye-catching layout before preparing the final copy. During conferences, teachers also base many of their comments on the trait they're teaching and the ones they've already taught. Figure 3–3 shows how the six traits fit into the writing process.

FIGURE 3–3 HOW THE SIX TRAITS FIT INTO THE WRITING PROCESS

Trait	Description	Stages
Ideas	Writers choose topics and gather ideas during prewriting, get these ideas down on paper during drafting, and make refinements during the revising stage.	Prewriting Drafting Revising
Organization	Writers plan their organization during prewriting, and it evolves during drafting. Later, during revising, writers make changes to ensure a logical presentation of ideas.	Prewriting Drafting Revising
Voice	Writers do their voices during drafting as they choose words and create a rhythmic flow of sentences, and during revising, they make changes to improve their "personality."	Drafting Revising
Word Choice	Writers substitute descriptive language and precise words during revising to make their message clearer and strengthen their voice.	Revising
Sentence Fluency	Writers improve sentence fluency during revising by rereading their drafts aloud to listen for a rhythmic flow, checking for sentence variety, and reviewing transitions.	Revising
Conventions	Writers check that they've applied spelling, paragraphing, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar rules during editing to ensure that their writing is clear and readable.	Editing
Presentation	Writers design the visual layout of their compositions, including page arrangement and illustrations, to enhance readers' ability to understand their message during the publishing stage.	Publishing

INCORPORATING TECHNOLOGY Computers are changing the way writers write and how students learn about the writer's craft. These online resources are available to support teachers as they teach the writer's craft:

> ***The Six Traits.*** The Education Northwest website (www.educationnorthwest.org/traits) provides a wealth of information about teaching and assessing writing using the six traits, including lesson plans, writing prompts, rubrics, scored sample compositions, and student papers to use to practice scoring activities. In addition, grade-level instruction and assessment kits can be purchased at the website as well as posters and bulletin board materials, board games, rubrics, self-inking rubber stamps and sticky-note checklists to use on student papers, and teacher-training materials.
>
> ***The Presentation Trait.*** As students learn to combine text with images and sound in multimedia compositions, the presentation trait takes on greater importance. They need to learn to use computer software to design a layout that enhances their message, align the text with images and sound, and add headings and other features to guide readers through the composition.

DIGITAL TOOLKIT: *Online Author Information*

Authors create websites and do interviews to publicize their books and reach out to their readers. Some authors also share information about how they get ideas, how they deal with writer's block, how they revise their writing, and how they handle rejection. Here are several ways teachers and students can locate online information about authors:

- **Online Author Directories**
  Search online directories to locate authors' websites, including the American Library Association's Great Web Sites for Kids (www.ala.org/greatsites)*, HarperCollins Children's site* (www.harpercollinschildrens.com; *click on Kids and then on the Authors and Illustrators tab*)*, and KidsReads.com* (www.kidsreads.com; *click on the Authors tab*).
- **Author Websites**
  Use search engines to locate authors' websites. Besides a biographical sketch, lists of publications and awards, information about upcoming events, the best sites also include a blog, video clips, advice for writers, contact information, games, and contests. Among the best websites are Jane Yolen's (www.janeyolen.com)*, Chris Van Allsburg's* (www.chrisvanallsburg.com)*, Jack Prelutsky's* (www.jackprelutsky.com)*, and Linda Sue Park's* (www.lindasuepark.com).
- **Video Interviews**
  Go to the Reading Rockets website (www.readingrockets.org) *and select Children's Books and Authors on the menu, or go to All About Adolescent Literacy* (www.adlit.org) *and select Books and Authors on the menu to access video interviews of Avi, Jerry Pinkney, Lois Lowry, Jerry Spinelli, Kate DiCamillo, Walter Dean Myers, and others. In these interviews, authors talk about themselves, how they write, and the books they've written. Many interviews are available online or as podcasts.*
- **Other Websites**
  Scholastic's website (www.scholastic.com/kids/stacks) *provides a wealth of information about Blue Balliett, Christopher Paul Curtis, Carl Hiaasen, Pam Muñoz Ryan, Brian Selznick, and other authors. Click on the Books and Authors tab to locate author biographies, "Authortube" video interviews, and games featuring authors and their books.*

At these websites, students learn about authors and gain a new appreciation of the writer's craft.

Online Author Information. Students visit author websites to learn more about favorite authors and how they write. They read blogs and FAQ features, listen to interviews, play games, and enter contests at these websites. They also access other information about authors at publishers' websites and websites for teachers and librarians. To learn more about author websites and other online information about authors, check the Digital Toolkit on this page.

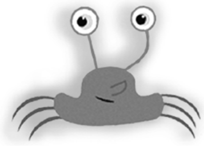
More and more technological resources about the writer's craft become available each year.

Accommodating EL Writers

English learners learn how to make their writing more effective as they study the writer's craft, and they expand their knowledge of technical vocabulary, such as *leads, plot, metaphor, sentence fragment,* and *layout*, words they can use to talk about their writing and reflect on their growing ability to use written language effectively. Teachers nurture English learners' knowledge about the writer's craft in these ways:

Explicit Instruction. ELs often need more explicit instruction to learn these written language concepts and extra guided practice activities to be able to apply the six traits in their own writing.

Mentor Texts. Teachers read aloud mentor texts that aren't too difficult for English learners to understand and provide opportunities for ELs to reread these models of fluent English and adapt them to use in their writing.



Model Compositions. Teachers have ELs examine anonymous samples of student writing that they've collected from previous classes and participate in guided practice activities to revise and edit these model compositions. EL writers benefit from the opportunity to work with grade-level writing samples and to manipulate the language of more fluent English writers.

Collaborative Writing Projects. ELs are more successful when they work with partners or in small groups on writing projects because classmates with differing levels of English fluency and knowledge about writing assist each other.

Assessment Rubrics. Teachers often use assessment rubrics that focus on a specific trait or another aspect of the writer's craft, and it's helpful for students to study the rubric in advance so they'll understand how their writing will be evaluated. EL writers can also use the rubric to self-assess their writing during revising and again at the end of the writing process.

When teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of the EL writers in their classrooms, these students will become more effective writers.

Assessing the Writer's Craft

The six traits link instruction with assessment and offer a useful way to assess the quality of students' writing. The traits also provide a common language for teachers and students to talk about the characteristics of effective writing. Spandel (2009) explains, "Assessment provides an important link to instruction because it takes us inside a process or concept, such as writing" (p. 13). Teachers assess the writer's craft in these ways:

Student–Teacher Conferences. Teachers meet with students at different stages of the writing process to monitor their progress and offer feedback—especially during revising and editing—to improve the quality of their writing as well as after students publish their compositions. Culham (2006, 2008, 2010) has prepared a series of useful guides with trait-specific comments that teachers can use when they're talking to students about their compositions and use of the writer's craft.

Scoring Guides. Spandel (2009) has prepared rubrics that focus on each trait, written in kid-friendly language, and Education Northwest (www.educationnorthwest.org/traits), individual teachers, and school districts have also developed other six-trait scoring guides that are available online. Teachers can use these scoring guides to monitor and assess students' writing. They choose rubrics that reflect what they've taught (or they adapt them to fit their instruction) and share them with students before they begin a writing project so students will understand how they'll be assessed. This way assessment is more fair and consistent, and it also saves valuable assessment time because students' writing will more closely match teachers' expectations.

Scoring Practice. Teachers learn more about the writer's craft and how to assess students' writing when they examine how experts have scored sample papers and practice scoring students' compositions using materials that are available online at Education Northwest and in professional books, especially Culham (2008a, 2010a) and Spandel (2009). Students can also participate in scoring practice activities to learn more about how to assess their own writing.

Involving Students in Assessment. Teachers involve students in using rubrics to assess their own writing, both during the writing process and afterward. Self-assessment has a powerful impact on students, increasing motivation and developing responsibility. Students take a step back to reflect on their knowledge about the writer's craft, and evaluate how well their writing matches the assessment criteria.

Through these assessment activities, both teachers and students deepen their understanding about the writer's craft.

ANSWERING TEACHERS' QUESTIONS ABOUT . . .
THE WRITER'S CRAFT

- ***I don't know where to begin. Which trait should I teach first?***

  When students aren't familiar with the six traits, teachers usually begin with ideas, but there isn't a recommended sequence. It makes sense to begin with ideas because students will never be successful writers if they're using uninteresting topics. Upper grade teachers often examine samples of students' writing first, and based on their analysis, teach those traits that will improve students' writing.

- ***Do I need to teach the writer's craft in seventh and eighth grades since my students are already familiar with the six traits?***

  It's a good idea for teachers to address all or almost all of the traits each year because each trait involves several components, more than students can learn in a single year. At the middle school level, students should be familiar with the six traits, but there are more sophisticated components that your students aren't likely to be familiar with. For example, can all of your students distinguish between a thesis and a lead or revise a paper with a weak thesis? If not, they'd benefit from more instruction about the ideas trait. Or, do any of your students add unnecessary commas or make comma splices? If so, they need more instruction about the conventions trait.

- ***How many mentor texts do I need to have?***

  There's no set number. You start with a few books and add to your collection as you discover new books. Many experienced teachers refer to the same 10 grade-level-appropriate books again and again during minilessons. I suggest that you start with two or three books that you share with students early in the school year, and make a list of the traits you could teach using each book. Then, ask colleagues and librarians for suggestions for the remaining traits, and read the books they recommend to see if they're suitable. You can also check the Mentor Texts boxes in this text and professional books, including *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing With the Traits* (Culham & Coutu, 2008) and *Books, Lessons, Ideas for Teaching the Six Traits* (Spandel, 2001), for additional recommendations.

- ***How can I connect the writer's craft with my author studies?***

  That's a great idea! Many popular children's authors have written autobiographies, participated in online interviews, or created websites for the children who read their books, and they usually include information about how they think of ideas, their revising processes, or other topics related to the writer's craft. Students can also e-mail or write letters to authors with specific questions about how they organize their writing, invent dialogue, or use other traits.