Six Traits for Writing
Middle School
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INTRODUCTION

To the Teacher
In the mid-1980s, a group of seventeen teachers in Oregon formed the Analytical Writing Assessment Committee. Their goal was to create a logical rubric to help teachers evaluate their students' writing in a consistent and fair way. They identified six key elements that should appear in every piece of student writing and developed scoring guides for each one. The result was the six-traits rubrics.

What Are the Six Traits and the Six-Trait Rubrics?
The six traits are elements of writing that your students already know and use. Specifically, they are 1) ideas and content, 2) organization, 3) voice, 4) word choice, 5) sentence fluency, and 6) conventions. The rubrics provide a consistent vocabulary and a clear set of criteria for evaluating each trait on a scale of 5–3–1. The rubrics identify the benchmarks of excellent, adequate, and poor writing for each trait. Teachers and students may use the rubrics to get an overview of how well a paper articulates ideas and expresses a point of view, voice, and style.

How do the Six Traits Help Me Evaluate My Students’ Work?
The six-traits rubrics help you focus when you read and evaluate your students’ papers. By providing you with a consistent vocabulary for discussing and thinking about writing and by offering you a standard set of criteria, you can evaluate a paper quickly and accurately. The ideas contained in the rubrics are not new. Nor are they yet another “angle” or writing “fad.” They are concepts that you have already taught your students. The rubrics help you evaluate how your student is writing at a particular point in time, for a particular writing assignment.

How Do the Six Traits Help My Students?
The six traits put your students in control of their own writing. The rubrics offer them a clear, understandable language and a logical set of criteria for evaluating different aspects of their work. The rubrics break down the process of self-evaluation into six steps. By focusing on one trait at a time as they review their own or another person’s writing, students can get a sense of their strengths and weaknesses. They can reach an authentic assessment of where the writer stands with that piece of writing at that point in his or her development as a writer. In other words, the rubrics provide not a score or a grade, but a balanced overview of how students use six key elements in their writing. For example, after writing a draft of a persuasive essay, a student can use the six-traits rubrics to discover that her ideas and organization are strong but that her voice and word choice are a little weak, her sentences tend to run on, and she really needs to review the rules for using commas. She can use the specific criteria in the rubrics to pinpoint the areas that need “polish.”
How Do the Six-Traits Rubrics “Fit” with the Writing Process?
Student writers can integrate the rubrics at each step in the writing process—not just when they revise their work. For example, in the prewriting stage, writers focus on ideas and content and begin thinking about organizational strategies. In the writing stage, they focus more on content, organization, and voice. As they revise and edit their drafts, they make sure that their ideas and organizational strategies are sound, their voice and word choice are appropriate, and their sentences add structure, rhythm, and style to their writing. As they proofread, they concentrate on their sentence structures and their implementation of writing conventions. Good writers already synthesize ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence structure, and conventions as they prepare their papers. The six-trait rubrics help students at every level examine these elements and see how they integrate in their writing.

How Do I Use This Book?
PART ONE of this book provides you and your students with an overview and explanation of the six traits. Part One also contains student-written essays (expository, persuasive, and narrative) and evaluations of those essays based on the six-traits rubrics. Our goal is to show students how they can use the six traits to evaluate another person’s writing. In addition, Part One contains three student essays that students can evaluate on their own. They can practice applying the rubrics to another person’s writing.

PART TWO shows students how to use the six traits at each stage of the writing process. It contains three mini writing workshops (expository, persuasive, and narrative) that guide students through the process of writing while considering the six traits.

PART THREE provides a review of how to read and analyze a writing prompt, followed by eighteen writing prompts. The prompts are similar to those found on many state-mandated tests. They challenge students to write in three different modes—expository, persuasive, and narrative writing—and at different levels of difficulty.

PART FOUR contains rubrics, worksheets, and other support materials that help students use the rubrics and refine their own writing skills. In Part Four, you will find six-trait rubrics for both teachers and students. Flashcards will help students become acquainted with the level 5 rubric for each of the six traits. A blank evaluation form appears in Part Four, as well. In addition, Part Four contains nearly two dozen trait-specific worksheets to help students at each stage of the writing process.
PART ONE

USING THE SIX TRAITS TO EVALUATE STUDENT WRITING
Ideas and content are the most important parts of any paper. They are the paper’s message—its theme, main idea, or story line. A paper without ideas is like a house built on swampy land. Without firm ground to support it, it will wobble and fall. A paper with a firm foundation of good ideas will, like a soaring skyscraper or majestic castle, make people pay attention and show them something interesting.

Before you can determine if a paper has good ideas and content, you may want to review the following terms: main idea, details, purpose, and audience. These elements contribute to ideas and content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main idea</th>
<th>A main idea is the most important point in a piece of writing. It may be stated directly, but sometimes a writer will hint at the main idea by dropping clues. That is an implied main idea.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Details are the supporting ideas that help a writer flesh out an idea. Details might take the form of evidence in a persuasive paper—facts, statistics, examples, and anecdotes—that help the writer to convince readers to think or do something. In a narrative or expository paper, details help readers imagine a new idea or a particular event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>The writer’s purpose is the reason he or she is writing. The writer might want to share information, express feelings, or influence the way others think or act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Writer’s pay attention to their audience or readers, too. They need to consider what their audience may already know, so they can focus on ideas and content that are new and interesting.</td>
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</table>
Evaluating Ideas and Content

Read the excerpt from a paper below and one reader’s comments. The reader has focused on how the writer deals with main idea, details, purpose, and audience. The comments suggest that the writer is on target with main idea, purpose, and audience but not with details.

Although she was not an elected official herself, Dolley Payne Madison, the wife of President James Madison, was an important historical figure. She had a significant influence on the politics of her day and on the history of the United States. Born in Guilford County, North Carolina, in 1768, she grew up in Virginia and married her first husband, a lawyer named John Todd, Jr, in 1790. About a year after Todd’s death in 1793, she remarried Congressman James Madison, an outspoken leader, political writer, and future president.

It was James Madison, along with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, who authored the famous Federalist papers, a series of letters that spelled out the Federalist philosophy underlying the U.S. Constitution.

You can tell that a paper has good ideas when you:

• get the writer’s message (the most important idea) right away
• can easily spot and understand the main idea, theme, or story line
• know the writer’s purpose for writing
• are interested in what the writer has to say
• pay attention to and can remember the paper’s details

When you evaluate another student’s paper, you should use the following questions to guide you:

• What is the writer trying to say?
• What is the most important piece of information?
• Do the details support the ideas?
• Are the details interesting and memorable?
As you read other papers, use the rubric below to evaluate the writer’s ideas and content. (A score of 5 is the highest; a 1 is the lowest score.)

**SIX TRAITS RUBRIC:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 5</th>
<th>It’s Crystal Clear!</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Score 5 paper is clear, focused, and interesting. It presents relevant and concrete details that catch and maintain the reader’s interest and support a clear main idea, theme, or story line.</td>
<td>√ The topic is clearly focused—neither too broad nor too narrow—for a paper of its kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ The ideas are original, interesting, and creative.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ The writer draws from personal experience or knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ Key details are insightful and well chosen; they are not obvious, predictable, or clichéd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ The development of the topic is thorough and logical; the writer anticipates and answers the reader’s questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ Supporting details are accurate and relevant; every detail contributes to the whole.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 3</th>
<th>Close—It’s Getting There</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Score 3 paper develops the topic in a general or basic way; although clear, the ideas in the paper are routine and lack insight.</td>
<td>√ The topic is underdeveloped, but readers can still understand the writer’s purpose and predict how ideas will develop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ Supporting details are present but can be vague and do not help illustrate the main idea or theme; the writer refers to his or her own experience or knowledge but often fails to push beyond the obvious to more specific ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ Ideas are understandable but not detailed, elaborated upon, or personalized; the writer’s ideas do not reveal deep comprehension of the topic or of the writing task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ The writer does not stray from the topic, but the ideas remain general, forcing readers to rely on what they already know to make sense of the paper; more information is needed to create a complete picture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 1</th>
<th>Hmm. What Is the Writer Trying to Say?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Score 1 paper fails to exhibit any clear purpose or main idea. The reader must infer a coherent and meaningful message from scattered details and incomplete observations.</td>
<td>√ The writer appears not to have decided on a topic or main idea; the paper reads like rough draft or brainstorming notes; it is full of random thoughts.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ The thesis is a vague statement about the topic or a restatement of a prompt, with little or no support, detail, or insight.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ Information is limited and spotty; readers must make inferences to make connections or to identify any organizational pattern.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ The text is rambling and repetitious; ideas are underdeveloped; the paper is too short.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ The paper lacks subordination of ideas; every idea and detail seems equally weighted; ideas are not tied to an overarching thesis or theme.</td>
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</table>
**ORGANIZATION**

**Organization** is the way in which writers structure their ideas and content. Writers need to organize their ideas. Without organization, the ideas might seem like a random pile of puzzle pieces. Readers should not have to figure out which idea is most important or see how the ideas connect. A organized paper clearly shows readers how one idea joins the next. As a result, readers understand how all the pieces fit together.

Before you can determine if a piece of writing is organized, you should review the organizational patterns writers may use. The most common patterns are listed below. A writer using

- **chronological order** presents ideas, actions, or events in the order that they take place;
- **spatial order** presents details and information according to location; for example, he or she describes something from near to far, top to bottom, inside to outside, or the reverse;
- **order of importance** arranges ideas from the least to most important, or the reverse;
- **logical order** groups related ideas together.

Usually a writer chooses one main organizational pattern for a paper, but he or she may use more than one. The pattern a writer chooses often depends on the purpose for writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For this purpose,</th>
<th>writers may use these organizational patterns:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Expository** (to explain) | • chronological order to explain the steps in a process or retell historical events  
• spatial order to help readers picture the subject  
• order of importance to explain causes and effects  
• logical order to present groups of related facts or evidence |
| **Persuasive** (to convince) | • order of importance to present the most persuasive ideas first or last  
• logical order to group related ideas and supporting evidence together |
| **Narrative** (to tell a story) | • chronological order to tell events in the order that they happen  
• spatial order to help readers imagine an object or setting |
Some people believe that machines may one day be as smart as humans. They point to computers as examples of artificial intelligence. Indeed, computers can do things that humans can do. Others, however, maintain that we will never have true artificial intelligence. But in fact, computers can do many things we can’t, such as beat a Russian chess master at his own game, as the IBM computer Deep Blue did in 1997. On the other hand, computers don’t really think. They may spell-check a paper quickly, but they can’t understand context. As a result, they can’t proofread a paper as thoughtfully as an editor. Most computers today would not pass the Turing Test, a series of questions answered by both a computer and a live person. If both answer the question the same way, the computer passes as intelligent.

You can tell that a paper has a clear organizational structure when you . . .

• can see connections among the writer’s ideas
• can concentrate on the ideas because the connections are clear
• feel that the writer is in control of the way ideas are presented
• feel that the writing has exactly the right pace
• can go back and find information easily because it is logically presented

When you evaluate other papers, you should use the following questions to guide you:

• How are the ideas in the paper organized?
• Does the writer’s choice of organizational pattern suit the material?
• Can you see the connections among ideas or do you feel confused?
• Would a change in the way ideas are presented make the paper better?
As you read other papers, use the rubric below to evaluate the writer’s organization. (A score of 5 is the highest; a 1 is the lowest score.)

**SIX TRAITS RUBRIC: ORGANIZATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 5</th>
<th>Yes! I Can See Where This Is Going!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Score 5 paper uses organizational patterns to clearly communicate a central idea or story line. The order of information draws the reader effortlessly through the text.</td>
<td>✓ The paper employs a logical and effective sequence of ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The paper contains both an attention-grabbing introduction and a satisfying conclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The pacing is carefully controlled; the writer slows down to provide explanation or elaboration when appropriate, and increases the pace when necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Transitions make clear connections and cue the reader to specific relationships between ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The organizational structure is appropriate to the writer’s purpose and audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ If present, the title sums up the central idea of the paper in a fresh and thoughtful way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 3</th>
<th>Close—Wait, I Think I Get It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Score 3 paper is reasonably strong; it enables readers to move forward without too much confusion.</td>
<td>✓ The paper has an introduction and a conclusion. However, the introduction may not be engaging, and the conclusion may not knit together all the paper’s ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The sequence is logical but predictable and therefore not very compelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The sequence may not consistently support the paper’s ideas; readers may reorder sections mentally or provide transitions as they read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Pacing is reasonably well done, although the writer may move ahead too quickly or linger over unimportant ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Transitions between ideas may be unclear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ If present, the title may be dull or lacking insight.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 1</th>
<th>Hmm. I’m a Little Lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Score 1 paper fails to exhibit a sense of purpose or writing strategy; ideas, details, or events seem to be cobbled together without any internal structure or flow.</td>
<td>✓ The sequence is broken; one idea or event does not logically follow another; lack of organizational structure, such as clear paragraph breaks, makes it difficult for readers to understand the progression of ideas or events.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The paper lacks both a clear introduction to guide readers and a conclusion that sums up ideas at the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Pacing is halting or inconsistent; the writer appears not to know when to slow down or speed up the pace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Transitions between ideas are confusing or absent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ If present, the title does not accurately reflect the content of the paper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Voice**

Voice is the way a piece of writing “sounds” to the reader. A writer uses his or her own style to “talk” to readers, and the voice reveals his or her feelings about both the topic and the audience. Voice allows the writer to connect as a person with the reader. Everyone has a natural voice, but good writers are able to tailor their voices to suit their purpose for writing, their topic, and their readers. Here are a couple of examples:

- A writer who is preparing a report (purpose) for the city council (audience) about the effects of building a new shopping center near a local creek (topic) uses a voice that sounds serious, concerned, and informed. He writes in the impersonal third person (“he, she, it”) and uses standard English as well specific technological terms.

- A writer who is telling a story (purpose) about visiting her grandfather as a child (topic) for a group of fifth graders (audience) uses a voice that sounds personal, playful, and nostalgic. She writes in the first person (“I”) and uses language that is informal. She may try to recreate the voice of the child she once was.

Before you determine if a piece of writing has an appropriate voice, let’s review how writers find their voices. Good writers want their voices to appeal to their readers and fit the material. The diagram below shows how writers mix and match their purpose, audience, and voice.
Evaluating Voice

Read the first excerpt from a persuasive paper below and one reader’s comments about it. The reader has focused on the writer’s voice. The first comment suggests that the writer needs to fix his or her voice. Then read the revised version and think about how the new voice has improved the writing.

Parks should be safe. People enjoying the parks should not have to be stressin’ about loose dogs that may mosey up to them. Owners of unleashed dogs are usually somewhere else in the park yakking with their friends instead of paying attention. They are too far away to deal with their lousy dogs. This happens every day at the park next to my house. It probably happens in other parks too, and it’s a drag because it messes up the park for everybody.

Parks should be safe. People enjoying the parks should not have to worry about loose dogs that may approach them. Owners of unleashed dogs are usually somewhere else in the park and are unable to effectively control their dogs if they misbehave. This happens every day at the park next to my house, and it is a shame because it ruins the park for everybody.

You can tell that a paper has a clear and appropriate voice when you...

- feel that the voice “sounds” right
- are aware of and feel connected to the person behind the text
- understand the writer’s connection to the topic
- are not distracted by inappropriate language or feelings

When you evaluate another student’s paper, you should use the following questions to guide you:

- Does the writer’s voice sound right?
- Does the writer’s voice suit his or her purpose and audience?
- Is the writer using his or her voice to connect with me?
- Does the writer seem interested in the topic and in me?
As you read other papers, use the rubric below to evaluate the writer’s voice. (A score of 5 is the highest; a 1 is the lowest score.)

**SIX TRAITS RUBRIC: VOICE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 5</th>
<th>Yes! I Can Really Hear You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The writing in a Score 5 paper is engaging and conveys the writer’s awareness of audience and purpose. | ✓ The tone of the writing is appropriate for the purpose and audience of the paper.  
✓ The reader is aware of and feels connected to a real person behind the text; if appropriate, the writer takes risks in revealing a personal dimension throughout the piece.  
✓ If the paper is expository or persuasive, the writer shows a strong connection to the topic and explains why readers should care about the issue.  
✓ If the paper is narrative, the point of view is sincere, interesting, and compelling. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 3</th>
<th>Close. Try Again With Feeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The writing in a Score 3 paper is reasonably genuine but does not reveal any excitement or connection with the issue; the resulting paper is pleasant but not truly engaging. | ✓ The writer offers generalities instead of personal insights; as a result, the writing feels impersonal.  
✓ The writer uses neutral language and a flat tone.  
✓ The writer communicates in an earnest and pleasing manner, yet takes no risks; the reader does not feel inspired or engaged.  
✓ Expository or persuasive writing does not reveal the writer’s engagement with the topic; there is no attempt to build credibility with the audience.  
✓ Narrative writing fails to reveal a fresh or individual perspective. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 1</th>
<th>Hmm. I Can Barely Hear You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The writing in a Score 1 paper is mechanical or wooden. The writer appears indifferent to the topic and the audience. | ✓ The writer shows no concern with the audience; the voice may be inappropriate for the intended reader.  
✓ The development of the topic is so limited that no identifiable point of view is present, or the writing is so short that it offers little but a general introduction of the topic.  
✓ The writer seems to speak in a monotone, using a voice that suppresses all excitement about the message or topic.  
✓ Although the writing may communicate on a functional level, it is ordinary and takes no risks.  
✓ Expository or persuasive writing may lack accurate information or use overly technical language. Narrative writing may lack a point of view and fail to inspire interest. |
**WORD CHOICE**

**Word choice** involves how a writer expresses his or her voice. Words are the building blocks of any piece of writing. The words a writer chooses help create a clear voice and engage the reader. Choosing a precise word is like landing an arrow right in the center of the target.

Word choice makes expository writing more precise, persuasive writing more convincing, and narrative writing more interesting. It helps readers to imagine a scene in a story or to understand the subtle points in a persuasive argument. Without thoughtful word choice, writing is imprecise and dull. Readers become bored and give up.

Before you can determine if a piece of writing contains effective word choices, you may want to review the following terms: **connotation and denotation**, **idiom**, **jargon**, **loaded language**, and **tired or cliché language**.

- **Connotation and denotation**: The denotation of a word is its definition. The connotation is the feeling associated with the word. Writers should consider the connotations of their word choices.
  
  Example: Mild has the denotation of “gentle, not sharp or severe.” The feeling associated with it is weakness. Its connotation can be negative or positive. For example, mild weather feels great after a cold winter, but a mild expression conveys a lack of interest.

- **An idiom** is a phrase that means something different from the words’ literal meanings. Idioms are informal. They are great for personal writing or in dialogues in fictional narratives, but they should be avoided in formal writing.
  
  Examples: Maria put up with the children. I just don’t get it. Never give up.

- **Jargon** is technical or specialized language that is used by a group of people who share the same profession, occupation, field of study, or hobby. A common word might be jargon. Its meaning may change in different contexts. Jargon works only if the writer knows that the audience will get its meaning. Used properly, jargon conveys the writer’s knowledge of a subject.
  
  Examples: Stock prices went down. The soup requires chicken stock. The store needs fresh stock.

- **Loaded language** deliberately provokes a strong reaction from people and reveals a writer’s bias. Loaded language works in persuasive writing, but it must be used carefully so as not to offend readers. In narratives, it can be used to show what a character is like.
  
  Example: Only people of privilege ride in first class on airplanes. The rest of us are corralled in coach like cattle.

- **Tired or cliché words** are phrases and words that have lost their freshness. Writers should avoid clichés and tired words at every opportunity!
  
  Examples: The baby’s face was as red as a beet. Ah, home sweet home. That was great! You look nice.
Evaluating Word Choice

Read the excerpt from the paper below and one reader's comments. The reader has focused on the writer's choice of words. The comments point out where word choice is effective—and where it is not.

A uniquely American creation in literature is the hard-boiled detective story. Whether in the form of a novel, a short story, a movie, or a television show, the key element in a hard-boiled detective mystery is the characterization. All of the characters in a hard-boiled detective story should be more or less realistic. The forerunners of hard-boiled detective stories were the English drawing-room mysteries. Typically, in these stories, a refined sleuth would brilliantly solve a mysterious murder in a manor house without even breaking a sweat. Such stories are as soothing as a cup of herbal tea and just as stimulating, whereas hard-boiled mysteries are like a punch in the arm.

You can tell that a paper has made solid word choices when you...

- feel that each word is specific and appropriate
- can say that the language feels natural, not overdone
- do not notice any clichés, jargon, or inappropriate language
- feel engaged by the writing
- are not distracted by words that are confusing or used incorrectly

When you evaluate another student's paper, use the following questions to guide you:

- Why did the writer choose a certain word?
- Would another word have worked better in that sentence?
- Does the language sound natural or appropriate?
- What feelings or ideas does the writer's choice of words suggest?
As you read other papers, use the rubric below to evaluate the writer’s word choice. (A score of 5 is the highest; a 1 is the lowest score.)

**SIX TRAITS RUBRIC: WORD CHOICE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 5</th>
<th>Yes! Your Words Come Through Loud and Clear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| In a Score 5 paper, words are precise, engaging, and unaffected. They convey the writer's message in an interesting and effective way. | ✓ All words are specific and appropriate. In all instances, the writer has taken care to choose the right words or phrases.  
✓ The paper’s language is natural, not overdone; it never shows a lack of control. Clichés and jargon are rarely used.  
✓ The paper contains energetic verbs; precise nouns and modifiers provide clarity.  
✓ The writer uses vivid words and phrases, including sensory details; such language creates distinct images in the reader’s mind. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 3</th>
<th>Close—With a Little Polish Your Words Will Shine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Despite its lack of flair, the writing in a Score 3 paper gets the message across because it is functional and clear. | ✓ Words are correct and generally adequate but lack originality or precision.  
✓ Familiar words and phrases do not grab the reader’s interest or imagination. Occasional use of lively verbs and phrases perks things up, but the language does not consistently sparkle.  
✓ Attempts at engaging or academic language may seem overly showy or pretentious.  
✓ The writing contains passive verbs and basic nouns and adjectives, and it lacks precise adverbs. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 1</th>
<th>Hmm. I Don’t Understand What You Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The limited vocabulary in a Score 1 paper prevents readers from understanding the writer’s message. The writer’s struggle for words keeps readers from making connections. | ✓ Vague language communicates an imprecise or incomplete message or understanding of the topic. The reader feels confused and unsure of the writer’s purpose.  
✓ Words are used incorrectly. In addition, frequent misuse of parts of speech limits readers’ comprehension.  
✓ Excessive repetition or redundancy distracts readers from the message.  
✓ The writing overuses jargon or clichés. |
SENTENCE FLUENCY

Sentence fluency is how the sentences in a piece of writing flow together. In fact, the word “fluency” comes from the Latin word fluere, which means “to flow.” Think of a tapestry. A tapestry maker weaves thousands of threads together to create a beautiful pattern or picture. Writing is like a tapestry, with sentences instead of threads. A good writer weaves the sentences together to show the flow of ideas in an interesting way. Unlike tapestry makers, however, writers have to construct their flowing “threads.” They must build sentences that are both grammatically correct and interesting. Interesting sentences add rhythm and style to writing. To achieve this rhythm and style, good writers use a mixture of short and long sentences, as well as sentences that start with phrases or clauses, to create a rhythm and style that engages readers.

Before you can determine if a piece of writing has sentence fluency, you should review the following problems that can interfere with it: sentence fragments, run-on sentences, stringy sentences, choppy sentences, and wordy sentences.

- A sentence fragment is a group of words that has been capitalized and punctuated as if it were a complete sentence, but it may a subject, a verb, or both. Examples: Finished his homework. (lacks a noun) Then he dinner. (lacks a verb) Before Dad came home. (lacks noun and verb) Sentence fragments interrupt sentence fluency and are grammatically incorrect. Readers must puzzle out the writer’s meaning—Toby finished his homework. Then he made dinner before Dad came home.

- Run-on sentences run two or more sentences together as if they were one. Example: People who want to adopt a puppy should visit a local animal shelter shelters always have puppies that need good homes. (The sentence has two ideas—people should visit shelters, and shelters have puppies.) Run-ons are grammatically incorrect and confuse readers. They can’t tell where one idea ends and another begins.

- Stringy sentences have too many ideas strung together with conjunctions and transition words. Example: My grandmother dreamed of becoming a teacher, but she was poor, but then she won a scholarship, so she attended a college, and she found a job right away. Stringy sentences are confusing because the reader can’t tell which idea is most important.

- Choppy sentences are very short. Examples: I love cheese. I like pickles. I eat pickle and cheese sandwiches. A series of short, choppy sentences disrupts the flow of ideas and does not tell which idea is most important.

- Wordy sentences use more words than are necessary to express an idea. Examples: I was late for school because of the fact that I missed the bus. When I got to the very end of the book, I wrote my report. The extra words get in the readers’ way. Readers may edit them out—“I was late for school because I missed the bus.” “When I finished the book, I wrote my report.”
Vegetarians need to eat a variety of foods. Fruits, fresh vegetables, whole grain breads, cereal, and legumes (such as dried beans and peas) are the foods basic to good health. Experts once worried that vegetarians didn’t get enough protein most should get all the protein they need from a varied diet. Most people don’t have balanced diets. Even meat eaters. People should take vitamins. They should eat more carefully. When vegetarians eat a balance of foods, they are as healthy as any meat-eater.

You can tell that a paper has sentence fluency when you...
- understand the writer’s meaning and see connections between ideas
- understand which idea is most important
- feel engaged by the writing
- appreciate the rhythm and style of the sentences
- notice the variety of sentence beginnings and lengths

When you evaluate another student’s paper, use the following questions to guide you:
- Does the writing feel natural as it flows from one idea to the next?
- Are the sentences interesting and grammatically correct?
- Do the sentences express ideas and make clear connections?
- Do the sentences have rhythm and style?
As you read other papers, use the rubric below to evaluate the writer's sentence fluency. (A score of 5 is the highest; a 1 is the lowest score.)

**SIX TRAITS RUBRIC: SENTENCE FLUENCY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 5</th>
<th>Yes! The Sentences Really Flow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sentences in a Score 5 paper are thoughtfully constructed, and sentence structure is varied throughout. When read aloud, the writing is fluent and rhythmic. | ✓ The writer constructs sentences so that meaning is clear to the reader.  
✓ Sentences vary in length and in structure.  
✓ Varied sentence beginnings add interest and clarity.  
✓ The writing has a steady rhythm; the reader is able to read the text effortlessly without confusion or stumbling.  
✓ Dialogue, if used, is natural. Any fragments are used purposefully and contribute to the paper's style.  
✓ Thoughtful connectives and transitions between sentences reveal how the papers' ideas work together. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 3</th>
<th>Close—But I Feel As Though I'm Drifting Off Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The text of a Score 3 paper maintains a steady rhythm but the reader may find it flat or mechanical rather than fluent or musical. | ✓ Sentences are usually grammatical and unified, but they are routine rather than artful. The writer has not paid a great deal of attention to how the sentences sound.  
✓ There is some variation in sentence length and structure as well as in sentence beginnings. Not all sentences are constructed exactly the same way.  
✓ The reader may have to search for transitional words and phrases that show how sentences relate to one another. Sometimes, such context clues are entirely absent when they should be present.  
✓ Although sections of the paper invite expressive oral reading, the reader may also encounter many stilted or awkward sections. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 1</th>
<th>Hmm. I'm a Little Lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The reader of a Score 1 paper will encounter challenges in reading the choppy or confusing text; meaning may be significantly obscured by the errors in sentence construction. | ✓ The sentences do not “hang together.” They are run-on, incomplete, monotonous, or awkward.  
✓ Phrasing often sounds too singsong, not natural. The paper does not allow for expressive oral reading.  
✓ Nearly all the sentences begin the same way, and they may all follow the same pattern (e.g. subject-verb-object). The end result may be a monotonous repetition of sounds.  
✓ Endless connectives or a complete lack of connectives creates a confused muddle of language. |
CONVENTIONS

Conventions are the agreed rules of paragraphing, usage, grammar, spelling, and punctuation that good writers follow. Conventions help writers make their meanings clear. Think how difficult it would be to read another person’s paper if people were allowed to make up their own rules of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

A writer should always edit and proofread a paper for mistakes in conventions because even small mistakes can distract or confuse a reader. You want your readers to focus on your words and ideas. Still, conventional errors can slip by. Here is a checklist that can help you catch them.

### Paragraphing
- Is each paragraph indented?
- Does each paragraph focus on just one main idea?
- Does the paragraph break in a logical place? (If not, where should it break?)

### Grammar and Usage
- Does every sentence have both a subject and a verb?
- Do the subject(s) and verb(s) in each sentence agree?
- Are the correct forms of irregular verbs and personal pronouns used?
- Are there any double-negatives? (If so, how should they be corrected?)

### Punctuation and Capitalization
- Does each sentence end with correct punctuation?
- Are commas and semicolons used correctly?
- Are proper nouns capitalized?
- Does each sentence and direct quotation begin with a capital letter?
- Are apostrophes used to indicate possession or missing letters?

### Spelling
- Are words that sound alike but are spelled differently spelled correctly?
- Are commonly misspelled words spelled correctly?
- Are proper nouns and place names spelled correctly?

### Just in case you find conventional errors in the papers you read, use the editing and proofreading marks shown below to make corrections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols for Editing and Proofreading</th>
<th>Meaning of Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✙ at Emerson lake</td>
<td>Capitalize a lowercase letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ a gift for my Aunt</td>
<td>Lowercase a capital letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>³ costs cents</td>
<td>Insert a missing word, letter, or punctuation mark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ near these house</td>
<td>Replace something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🕛 What time is it?</td>
<td>Leave out a word, letter, or punctuation mark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🔵 red,white</td>
<td>Change the order of the letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☞ The third effect is...</td>
<td>Begin a new paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😨 Please sit down</td>
<td>Add a period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✐ Yes, I heard you.</td>
<td>Add a comma.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluating the Use of Conventions

Read the excerpt from the paper below and one reader’s corrections. The reader has focused on the writer’s use of conventions.

There are several types of prejudice, such as social, political, and racial prejudices. Everyone is prejudice against some sort of thing. It might be food, cars, races of people, etc. I believe to overcome prejudice is to not show your feelings towards something you are prejudiced about. If you are prejudiced against someone’s nationality without even personally meeting this person, I think that is wrong. If one person is a certain race, and they commit a crime, don’t never think everyone of that race is exactly like that. Everyone has their own personality. I believe that you should welcome everyone instead of saying you don’t like someone because of nationality or race.

You can tell that a paper has correct conventions when you...
- do not see any conventional errors
- feel that the writer’s meaning is clear and not affected by small errors
- feel that the writer has excellent control of conventions

When you evaluate another student’s paper, use the following questions to guide you:
- Do I notice any conventional errors?
- Do the conventional errors interfere with my understanding?
- Does the writer need to brush up on the rules of grammar, usage, or punctuation?
- Does the writer need to remember to use a dictionary or a spell-checker?
As you read other papers, use the rubric below to evaluate the writer's conventions. (A score of 5 is the highest; a 1 is the lowest score.)

**SIX TRAITS RUBRIC: CONVENTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 5</th>
<th>It’s Nearly Perfect!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard writing conventions in a Score 5 paper are used correctly and in a way that aids the reader’s understanding. Any errors tend to be minor; the piece is nearly ready for publication.</td>
<td>✓ Paragraphing is regular and enhances the organization of the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Grammar and usage are correct and add clarity to the text as a whole. Sometimes the writer may manipulate conventions in a controlled way—especially grammar and spelling—for stylistic effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Punctuation is accurate; it enables the reader to move through the text with understanding and ease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The writer’s understanding of capitalization rules is evident throughout the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Most words, even difficult ones, are spelled correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The writing is long and complex enough to show the writer using a wide range of convention skills successfully.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 3</th>
<th>Close—I Found a Few Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The writer of a Score 3 paper exhibits an awareness of a limited set of standard writing conventions and uses them to enhance the papers’ readability. Some errors distract and confuse readers. Moderate editing is required before publication.</td>
<td>✓ Paragraphs are used but may begin in the wrong places, or sections that should be separate paragraphs are run together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Conventions may not always be correct; however, problems with grammar and usage are usually not serious enough to distort meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ End marks are usually correct, but other punctuation marks, such as commas, apostrophes, semi-colons, and parentheses, may be missing or wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Common words are usually spelled correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Most words are capitalized correctly, but the writer’s command of capitalization skills is inconsistent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 1</th>
<th>Hmm. I’m Distracted By Too Many Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a Score 1 paper there are errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage, and paragraphing that seriously impede the reader’s comprehension. Extensive editing is required for publication.</td>
<td>✓ Paragraphing is missing, uneven, or too frequent. Most of the paragraphs do not reinforce or support the organizational structure of the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Errors in grammar and usage are very common and distracting; such errors also affect the paper’s meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Punctuation, including terminal punctuation, is often missing or incorrect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Even common words are frequently misspelled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Capitalization is haphazard or reveals the writer’s understanding of only the simplest rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The paper must be read once just to decode the language and then again to capture the paper’s meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As you read other papers, use this at-a-glance rubric to evaluate the writer’s use of all of the six traits. (A score of 5 is the highest; a 1 is the lowest score.)

**SIX TRAITS: AT-A-GLANCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas and Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong> The paper is clear and focused, with ideas that engage the reader.</td>
<td><strong>5</strong> The organizational structure suits the content and connects ideas.</td>
<td><strong>5</strong> The writer’s personality is clear and engaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The topic is clearly focused for a paper of its kind.</td>
<td>✓ The paper employs a logical and effective sequence of ideas.</td>
<td>✓ The tone of the writing is appropriate for the purpose and audience of the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The ideas are original, interesting, and creative.</td>
<td>✓ The paper contains both an introduction and a conclusion.</td>
<td>✓ The reader is aware of and feels connected to a real person behind the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The writer draws from personal experience.</td>
<td>✓ The pacing is carefully controlled.</td>
<td>✓ If the paper is expository or persuasive, the writer shows a strong connection to the topic and tells why readers should care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Key details are insightful and well chosen.</td>
<td>✓ Transitions make clear connections and cue the reader to relationships between ideas.</td>
<td>✓ If the paper is narrative, the point of view is sincere, interesting, and compelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The development of the topic is thorough and logical.</td>
<td>✓ The organizational structure is appropriate to the writer’s purpose and audience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Supporting details are accurate and relevant.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> The ideas are vague and not fully thought out.</td>
<td><strong>3</strong> The organization is clear but readers may get confused.</td>
<td><strong>3</strong> The writer is sincere but not completely engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The topic is underdeveloped but readers can still understand the writer’s purpose.</td>
<td>✓ The paper has an introduction and conclusion.</td>
<td>✓ The writer offers generalities that feel impersonal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Supporting details are present but can be vague and do not help illustrate the main idea or theme.</td>
<td>✓ The sequence is logical but predictable and therefore not very compelling.</td>
<td>✓ The writer uses neutral language and a slightly flattened tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Ideas are understandable but not detailed, elaborated upon, or personalized.</td>
<td>✓ The sequence may not consistently support the paper’s ideas.</td>
<td>✓ The writer communicates in an earnest and pleasing manner, yet takes no risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The ideas remain general; more information is needed to create a complete picture.</td>
<td>✓ Pacing is reasonably well done.</td>
<td>✓ Expository or persuasive writing does not reveal an engagement with the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> The paper lacks clear ideas and purpose.</td>
<td><strong>1</strong> The paper fails to make connections and show the big picture.</td>
<td><strong>1</strong> The writer seems uninvolved in the topic and the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The paper reads like rough draft or brainstorming notes.</td>
<td>✓ One idea or event does not logically follow another; lack of organizational structure makes it difficult for readers to understand the progression of ideas or events.</td>
<td>✓ The writer shows no concern with the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The thesis is a vague statement about the topic or a restatement of a prompt, with little or no support, detail.</td>
<td>✓ The paper lacks both a clear introduction and a conclusion.</td>
<td>✓ The writing lacks a point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Information is limited and spotty; readers must make inferences.</td>
<td>✓ Pacing is halting or inconsistent.</td>
<td>✓ The writer seems to speak in a monotone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Transitions between ideas are confusing or absent.</td>
<td>✓ The writing is ordinary and takes no risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Expository or persuasive writing may lack accurate information. Narrative writing may lack a point of view and fail to interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
<td>Conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong> The words bring the paper to life and engage the reader.</td>
<td><strong>5</strong> The sentences are varied and interesting.</td>
<td><strong>5</strong> The writing is clear and uses correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ All words are specific and appropriate. The writer chooses the right words or phrases.</td>
<td>✓ The writer constructs sentences so that meaning is clear.</td>
<td>✓ Paragraphing is regular and enhances the organization of the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The paper's language is natural, and controlled. Clichés and jargon appear rarely.</td>
<td>✓ Sentences vary in length and in structure.</td>
<td>✓ Grammar and usage are correct and add clarity to the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The paper contains energetic verbs; precise nouns and modifiers provide clarity.</td>
<td>✓ Varied sentence beginnings add interest and clarity.</td>
<td>✓ Punctuation is accurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The writer uses vivid words and phrases, including sensory details.</td>
<td>✓ The reader is able to read the text effortlessly without confusion.</td>
<td>✓ The writer understands the rules of capitalization rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Dialogue, if used, is natural. Fragments are used purposefully.</td>
<td>✓ Most words, even difficult ones, are spelled correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Thoughtful connectives and transitions between sentences bring the ideas together.</td>
<td>✓ The writing shows a wide range of convention skills successfully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> The language is clear but uninspired.</td>
<td><strong>3</strong> The sentences make sense but the connections are not clear.</td>
<td><strong>3</strong> Basic punctuation, grammar, and spelling are employed, but there are some mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Words are correct and adequate but lack originality or precision.</td>
<td>✓ Sentences are usually grammatical, but they are routine rather than artful.</td>
<td>✓ Paragraphs are used but may begin in the wrong places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Familiar words and phrases do not grab the reader's interest or imagination. The language does not consistently sparkle.</td>
<td>✓ There is some variation in sentence length and structure as well as in sentence beginnings.</td>
<td>✓ Conventions may not always be correct; however, problems are not serious enough to distort meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Attempts at engaging language may seem showy.</td>
<td>✓ The reader may have to search for transitional words and phrases that show how sentences relate to one another.</td>
<td>✓ End marks are usually correct, but other punctuation marks, such as commas, apostrophes, semi-colons, and parentheses, may be missing or wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The writing contains passive verbs and basic nouns and adjectives, and it lacks precise adverbs.</td>
<td>✓ The reader may also encounter many stilted or awkward sections.</td>
<td>✓ Common words are usually spelled correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Most words are capitalized correctly, but capitalization skills is inconsistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> The language is used incorrectly or ineffectively.</td>
<td><strong>1</strong> The sentences are awkward and do not connect ideas.</td>
<td><strong>1</strong> The paper contains many errors that interfere with the meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Vague language communicates an incomplete message or understanding of the topic. The reader feels confused and unsure of the writer's purpose.</td>
<td>✓ The sentences do not “hang together;” they are run-on, incomplete, or awkward.</td>
<td>✓ Paragraphing is missing, uneven, or too frequent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Words are used incorrectly.</td>
<td>✓ Phrasing often sounds too singsong, not natural.</td>
<td>✓ Errors in grammar and usage are common and distracting, and affect the paper's meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Excessive repetition distracts readers from the message.</td>
<td>✓ Nearly all the sentences begin the same way, and they may all follow the same pattern (e.g. subject-verb-object).</td>
<td>✓ Punctuation, including end marks, is often missing or incorrect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The writing overuses jargon or clichés.</td>
<td>✓ Endless connectives or a lack of connectives creates a confused muddle of language.</td>
<td>✓ Even common words are frequently misspelled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Capitalization reveals the writer's understanding of only the simplest rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ The paper must be read once just to decode the language and then again to capture the paper's meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EVALUATING AN EXPOSITORY ESSAY USING THE SIX WRITING TRAITS

Directions: A student responded to the expository prompt below. Read the student's essay and the completed evaluation on the next page. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Expository Prompt: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Write an essay explaining what you think Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. means in this quotation. You may use examples from real life, books, movies, or television shows.

It does not matter what color people are, how they dress, what kind of car they drive, or how big the house is in which they live. A person should be judged by his or her responsibility. A white man can have the same morals as a black man. Their principles can be identical. They can both be angels, or just as likely they can be cowardly heathens.

A person’s color does not guarantee that their personality and demeanor will fit into a certain, forechosen category. Just because a person’s skin color is white does not mean that he or she is a good person. Or that a black person is a criminal. Take the case of Ruben “Hurricane” Carter. He was convicted of murder and spent several years in prison based on absolutely no evidence of any kind. The all-white jury convicted him solely on the fact that he was black. He could have been the boxing champion of the world. Instead he was sent to prison where his health deteriorated. Literature provides us with many illustrations of racial stereotyping. For example, Tom Robinson, the main black character in To Kill a Mockingbird, was accused of a very serious crime against a white person. During the trial it became clear that the charges were not at all true. The defense lawyer, Atticus Finch, stated that Tom’s only crime was to feel sorry for and to help a white person. In other words, Tom’s real offense was the color of his skin.

A person should be judged based on their responsibility, clearheadedness, and their ability to determine and do the right thing. A man cannot be judged by the fact that he cannot walk, needs glasses to see, is not six feet tall, or needs a hearing aid. A man can only be judged by close examination of his scruples, morals, principles, and judgement. When a man is judged on unimportant qualities, it should be a crime. We will never forget the attempt by Nazi Germany to weed out people who were considered to be weak or flawed.
Although the Nazis seemed superior, they possessed the true flaws.

Martin Luther King, Jr. fought hard to instill this kind of thinking into his family and into everyone around him. He died fighting for this idea to be heard. He gave his life to try and teach the world about respect, decency, friendship, and most of all love between races. We should all try and learn from his words of wisdom.
One Reader’s Evaluation
A reader used the six trait rubrics on pp. 20–21 to evaluate the preceding expository essay. Below are her scores and comments.

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<tr>
<th>Expository Essay: Six Trait Scores</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ideas and Content</td>
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<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
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<td>Conventions</td>
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One Reader’s Comments:

Ideas and Content: The paper clearly responds to the prompt and stays focused on the topic of prejudice. The examples from life, history, and literature are accurate, interesting, and compelling. The writer has clear ideas about prejudice.

Organization: Overall, the organization is good. The essay has a clear introduction and conclusion. The writer could use more transitions to help readers follow the flow of examples.

Voice: The writer clearly feels strongly about the topic. I feel that the writer is clearly speaking in his or her own voice and is willing to take risks in expressing ideas.

Word Choice: Although the writer is earnest, his or her choice of words is often too general. Some words like *demeanor* and *scruples* fit nicely, but *forechosen* is a bit of a stretch. The writer uses “big idea” words that could be more specific.

Sentence Fluency: The sentence structure is varied, which creates an interesting rhythm and keeps readers going. Some sentences have awkward or repetitive phrasing: “...based on absolutely no evidence of any kind.”

Conventions: The writer demonstrates a fair understanding of conventions. Although there are some stray commas and spelling errors, they do not interfere with the writer’s meaning.

Sum It Up: Overall I thought the paper was coherent, thoughtful, and engaging. I could tell the writer cared deeply about the message that prejudice is bad.
Your Turn

Now answer the questions below. Use the rubrics on pp. 20-21 to figure out how you would score the essay on the previous page. How do your responses compare to the scores shown above?

1. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s ideas and contents because

2. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s organization because

3. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s voice because

4. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s word choice because

5. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s sentence fluency because

6. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s conventions because

7. If you were to give the essay different scores from the ones on p. 24, what would they be? Why do you think different scores should be given?

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EVALUATING A PERSUASIVE ESSAY USING THE SIX WRITING TRAITS

Directions: A student responded to the persuasive prompt below. Read the student’s essay and the completed evaluation on the next page. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Persuasive Prompt: Imagine that a local builder found an ancient campsite while clearing land to build a badly needed school. Should the builder be allowed to proceed, or should building stop while archaeologists study the site? Local schools are overcrowded, and archaeologists estimate that it could take as long as a year to complete their study. Write an essay for your school newspaper in which you state your position on this issue and support it with convincing reasons and details.

If construction of a new school for our city is suspended for a year, as archaeologists want, some classes in our old school will have fifty or more students next year. I know it is important to make discoveries at the ancient campsite, but I think a year is too long to wait to start building a new school. I think we should give the archaeologists a shorter time to dig so we don’t spend another whole year crowded into an old building and trailers. I believe that technology can help both projects get done faster and that people on both sides want the best for history and for children.

Technology can help in two ways. I think the archaeologists should get one of those machines that lets them see objects underground. If they see anything out of the ordinary, they should start digging immediately. If they find nothing in a period of five months, we should start to build the foundation for our new school. During the time when the archaeologists are looking at the site, the new school can be designed, and we can use computer programs to plan and figure out the most efficient way to do the job. That way, as soon as the archaeologists finish, we can be ready to start work right away and finish the school more quickly.

If I were an archaeologist, of course I would want to dig up whatever treasure is underground. They might learn more about early humans or maybe even find something that can confirm the way dinosaurs died, and then they would want to keep digging. Still, if I were an archaeologist, I would probably want the best for the children. After all, archaeologists spent a lot of time in school. They know it’s important. They might even have kids, too. The archaeologists should try to finish their project as soon as they can so that the school will be
ready by the next school year. If I were an archaeologist, I would not want my work to force kids to stay crowded in an old school.

On the other hand, if I were an administrator, obviously I would want to build the school. However, I would probably be interested in finding out what was at the site, too. If there were fossils or artifacts to be found, I would have the archaeologists start digging. Their discoveries might give us further things to study in our new school, and our school would be recognized as the place where an important discovery was made. Finding fossils at our new school will give us an advantage, but stopping construction for a whole year would mean the old school will still be crowded and put the students at a disadvantage.

The best solution to this problem is to limit the delay caused by digging at the site. The archaeologists and builders should use technology to speed up the process so that construction of the new school can begin in time for the school to be ready for the next school year. We deserve to go to a new school that is not overcrowded.
One Reader’s Evaluation
A reader used the rubrics on pp. 20–21 to evaluate the persuasive essay above. Below are her scores and comments.

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<th>Persuasive Essay: Six Trait Scores</th>
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<td>Ideas and Content</td>
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One Reader’s Comments

Ideas and Content: The writer identifies a clear position and considers multiple perspectives, although the ideas sometimes lack specificity.

Organization: Organization fits the writer’s purpose, and ideas progress logically.

Voice: The writer demonstrates a keen involvement with the topic, but uses a fair and calm voice as he or she discusses possible concerns from opposing viewpoints.

Word Choice: Word choice is correct and adequate to communicate the writer’s ideas.

Sentence Fluency: Sentences vary in length and structure and clearly communicate the writer’s message.

Conventions: The writer demonstrates control over the conventions of written language: paragraphing, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are generally correct.

Sum It Up: Overall I thought the paper was balanced, thoughtful, and interested in the topic. I could tell the writer cared deeply about both building a new school and making historical discoveries.
Your Turn
Now answer the questions below. Use the rubrics on pp. 20–21 to figure out how you would score the preceding persuasive essay (pp. 26–27). How do your responses compare to the scores shown above?

1. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s ideas and contents because

2. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s organization because

3. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s voice because

4. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s word choice because

5. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s sentence fluency because

6. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s conventions because

7. If you were to give the essay different scores from the ones on p. 28, what would they be? Why do you think different scores should be given?
EVALUATING A NARRATIVE ESSAY USING THE SIX WRITING TRAITS

Directions: A student responded to the narrative prompt below. Read the student’s essay and the completed evaluation on the next page. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Narrative Prompt: Think of an important event or incident in your life. What lesson did you learn? Write a well-developed personal narrative that describes the experience and reveals why it was important to you.

Sometimes my imagination takes off too quickly. One day my parents, my sister Elena, and I were driving to Virginia for a long weekend. I was looking at a brochure for the place we were going to stay. “Hey, Mom,” I said, “they have hot-air balloon rides.” Dad asked whether we would like to try it. Without hesitating, I said, “Sure.” Mom offered to call for reservations. “Goody,” squealed Elena.

I imagined the balloon ride. What had I been thinking? I had agreed to go up in a little basket attached to a balloon. “There is no way of steering the vehicle,” the brochure explained, “so it just goes with the wind.” Panic set in. I comforted myself with the thought that Mom probably couldn’t get reservations so late.

When we got to the hotel, Mom called about the balloon ride. Elena stood beside her, looking eager. I was thinking, “Please say you don’t have room for us.” Mom got off the phone and announced cheerfully, “We meet the balloonist at 6:30 a.m.” Elena was thrilled. I was imagining what my friends would say when they heard how I had drifted away into the pillow clouds or worse, slammed into a building.

I tossed and turned all night and dreamed of crash landings in the desert. Never mind that there are no deserts in Virginia. Finally, morning came. My last hope was that it would rain, but a peek out the window took away that hope. Soon people would be rescuing me from a tree.

We waited outside. My fears quadrupled when I saw the balloonist drive up. The basket on the back of the truck couldn’t possibly hold all of us. We drove to a field as the sun popped over the horizon. The team prepared the balloon. Everyone else in my family was fascinated. I felt sick. Finally, we climbed into the tiny basket with the balloon pilot. Once we were settled, the team let go of the ropes. In no time, we were softly gliding upward over the velvety, rolling hills. “Hey, this is great!” I yelled. I had to laugh when I realized how much time I had wasted worrying. Sometimes I need to listen to my imagination.
One Reader’s Evaluation
A reader used the rubrics on pp. 20–21 to evaluate the narrative essay above. Below are her scores and comments.

### Narrative Essay: Six Trait Scores

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<th>Trait</th>
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<td>Ideas and Content</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
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<td>Conventions</td>
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### One Reader’s Comments

**Ideas and Content:** A clear idea—overcoming fear—governs the narrative. The reader receives a clear idea of the character of the narrator and his or her sister. Appropriate details about the parents are required for plot development. The writer obviously learned a lesson and shares it with the readers.

**Organization:** The organizational structure effectively incorporates internal dialogue and suspense to move the plot along, and the narrative builds to an effective resolution that suggests a lesson about life.

**Voice:** The writer’s voice is clear and engaging and demonstrates a thoughtful approach to the writing task.

**Word Choice:** Word choice is specific and effective.

**Sentence Fluency:** The narrative uses a variety of sentence types and structures. The sentences flowed nicely and had a nice pace, speeding up or slowing down the action as appropriate.

**Conventions:** The writer demonstrates a strong command of the conventions of the English language.

**Sum It Up:** Overall I thought the paper was insightful, clear, and fun to read. I could tell the writer understood how the experience affected his or her life.
Your Turn

Now answer the questions below. Use the rubrics on pp. 20–21 to figure out how you would score the preceding narrative essay (p. 30). How do your responses compare to the scores shown above?

1. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s ideas and contents because

2. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s organization because

3. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s voice because

4. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s word choice because

5. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s sentence fluency because.

6. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator’s score on the writer’s conventions because

7. If you were to give the essay different scores from the ones on p. 31, what would they be? Why do you think different scores should be given?
Expository Prompt: Jeannette Rankin was the first woman ever elected to the United States Congress. She was a dedicated pacifist, a person who opposed war. She is famous for stating, “You can no more win a war than you can win an earthquake.” Write an essay in which you explain what you think Rankin meant in this quotation. You may use examples from real life as well as from books, movies, or television shows.

War and earthquakes are alike in many ways. I think Ms. Rankin is saying that war and earthquakes are alike in that they both produce the same results. Both of them end up with the same kinds of disasters and have a major impact on the world. When a war starts, no one is sure how it will end, but they know that the results are usually bad. Buildings are destroyed and people are killed. An earthquake is just like that because when it starts you have no idea when it will end, or what problems it will produce. But when it is over, it has caused a lot of damage. You really cannot win either way you look at it. Even if you win a war, many things are lost in the process.

War is like an earthquake in another way. Both of them are unpredictable. You never know when they are coming. Scientists study earthquakes and what causes them. But they still can’t predict them very well. Earthquakes are happening every day in the world. Some of them you don’t feel or hear about, but the ones you do hear about have the greatest impact on our lives. In California, the worst earthquakes happen and their effects are all over the news—how many were killed or injured, what houses or buildings were lost, and which roads were destroyed.

America has won a lot of wars in the past, but we lost so much in the process. Think of all the names carved into the walls of the Vietnam Memorial. Think of all the prisoners of war and what they went through. What about their families? You should not start something unless you have a positive feeling about it. Right now everybody is wondering if the United States will ever get out of Iraq. Nobody knows how many people will be killed or what we will lose forever. Earthquakes are similar. There is no winning either of the two.
Directions: In the table below, write the scores you give the expository essay for its execution of six writing traits. (The highest score is 5; the lowest is 1.)

**Expository Essay: My Scores**

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Directions: Below write some comments that explain the scores you wrote above. Use specific examples from the text to support your evaluations.

**My Comments**

Ideas and Content: __________________________________________
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Organization: _________________________________________________
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Voice: _________________________________________________________
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Word Choice: _________________________________________________
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Sentence Fluency: _____________________________________________
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Conventions: _________________________________________________
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Sum It Up: ____________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________
Persuasive Essay: Read the prompt and the persuasive essay below. Then review the Six Trait rubrics on pp. 20–21. Use the blank evaluation form that follows to score the writer’s work.

**Persuasive Prompt:** Are school uniforms a restriction on individual freedom? Do uniforms help maintain discipline and reduce the pressure to wear the “right” clothes? Write a well-organized paper in which you state and give reasons for your opinion on this issue.

Are school uniforms a restriction on individual freedom? Do uniforms help maintain discipline and reduce the pressure to wear the “right” clothes?

Some say yes, some say no. Individual freedom is defined as the freedom that an individual has. Also discipline is defined as the rules a person must obey or be punished. “Right” clothes is defined as what everybody says is cool. You have to wear clothes to school to be cool. Not everybody likes uniforms. Certainly not me.

If a person is acting up in the hall and showing off, the teacher could tell that person to put on a uniform, and he would be disciplined. But what would he do with the clothes he wore to school? His freedoms would be taken away.

At our school an assistant principle tells the girls all the time there have too short skirts but they just laugh at him. If they complain, he tells the parents.

One friend told me she has school uniforms at her school. She thinks they are terrible. That school won’t let them do anything. Not even to their hair. She says when school is out, she is going to throw uniform in the trash. She never will wear black and blue again. At her school the uniforms are not even the school colors, which are gold and purple. Their team is called the Bruins and the football team has a cool uniform. Not like my friend who has a terrible uniform because they make her wear it.

We need our freedom because we will learn to drive soon and be in high school. Even with uniforms we need freedom. We need to take care of uniforms ourselves. But I am not sure how. What do you think—uniforms or no uniforms?

In conclusion, it may be a restriction of individual rights and freedoms. Or a disciple maintainer, or to avoid the peer pressure. What is right for you, you do.
Directions: In the table below, write the scores you give the persuasive essay for its execution of six writing traits. (The highest score is 5; the lowest is 1.)

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<th>Persuasive Essay: My Scores</th>
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<td>Ideas and Content</td>
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Directions: Below write some comments that explain the scores you wrote above. Use specific examples from the text to support your evaluations.

My Comments

Ideas and Content: 

Organization:

Voice:

Word Choice:

Sentence Fluency:

Conventions:

Sum It Up:
Narrative Essay: Read the prompt and the narrative essay below. Then review the Six Trait rubrics on pp. 20–21 and fill in the blank evaluation form that follows.

Narrative Prompt: Think of an important event or incident that happened to you recently. What lesson did you learn? Write a well-developed personal narrative that describes the experience and reveals why it was important to you.

The ringing phone jarred me awake. “Hello,” I answered somewhat sternly, wondering who would dare to call me so early on Saturday morning. “Get up, Maria. We’re going to an air show today. Be ready in half an hour.”

Before I could even object, Uncle Raul hung up. It’s true; Uncle Raul usually took me to interesting events, but an air show? At that moment, sleeping late seemed much more appealing.

Still, I got dressed, ate breakfast, and greeted my uncle thirty minutes later. “This had better be a good show,” I warned.

As he drove to the field, he described the Thunderbirds, an elite squadron of Air Force pilots. I listened in silence, too sleepy and grumpy to be excited. When we arrived, I was surprised to see a large number of people standing at the edge of a huge airfield. We finally found a place to stand in the growing crowd.

Six gigantic F-16 jets sat on the runway. The gleaming white bodies of the fighter planes threw off a glare in the hot sun, and I shielded my eyes with my hand. The wings, nose, and tail of each jet were painted with three stripes. The first was red, the next white, and the last one a blue so dark that it looked like the night sky. Over each right wing were the letters USAF.

Just then, an announcement crackled over a loudspeaker. The show was beginning. Six pilots dressed in bright red jumpsuits marched briskly onto the airfield. They climbed into the cockpits and pulled on their shiny helmets. A loud BOOM shook the crowd as the pilots started the jet engines. The pilots then turned to the crowd, gave a thumbs-up sign, and the six jets roared off into the air.

The squadron turned and headed back over the airfield in a diamond formation. Streams of white smoke trailed behind them in the brilliant blue sky. The jets flew so close together that they looked as though their wings were actually touching. They made another pass...
over us, doing flips and rolls and dives. The announcer called out the names of the maneuvers: “Five Card Loop, Wing Rock-and-Roll, Cuban Eight.” Several times I found myself gasping, thinking the jets were about to crash.

Back and forth, up and down, the F-16s roared overhead. Without our noticing it, one jet peeled off from the others. Suddenly it appeared out of nowhere, roaring over our heads. The ground shook. It sounded like a bomb exploding right behind us. We screamed and laughed in relief as the single jet joined the others.

Too soon, the show was over. The Thunderbirds landed, taxied down the runway, and parked. The crowd cheered wildly as the pilots approached, shaking hands, saluting, and signing autographs. I applauded and cheered along with everyone else.

Uncle Raul looked over at me and said, “Well, was this worth getting up for?” I smiled sheepishly. Once again, he gave me experience I would never forget. Never again would I doubt him.
**Directions:** In the table below, write the scores you give the narrative essay for its execution of six writing traits. (The highest score is 5; the lowest is 1.)

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<th>Narrative Essay: My Scores</th>
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**Directions:** Below write some comments that explain the scores you wrote above. Use specific examples from the text to support your evaluations.

**My Comments**

Ideas and Content: ____________________________________________

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Organization: ________________________________________________

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Voice: _________________________________________________________

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Word Choice: _________________________________________________

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Sentence Fluency: ____________________________________________

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Conventions: _________________________________________________

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Sum It Up: _____________________________________________________

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