

NWREL CAPABILITY STATEMENT:

6+1 TRAIT® WRITING MODEL OF INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT

Among NWREL's best-known and most widely used products is the 6+1 Trait® Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment. Since 1990, NWREL has trained more than 17,000 teachers in effective writing instruction and assessment, reaching all 50 states and 17 foreign countries.

This analytical writing model allows teachers and students (as well as industry) to define the criteria of quality writing and explicitly connect them to the process of revision and editing. At the heart of the model are these traits:

- ◆ *Ideas*
- ◆ *Organization*
- ◆ *Voice*
- ◆ *Word Choice*
- ◆ *Sentence Fluency*
- ◆ *Conventions*
- ◆ *Presentation*

The 6+1 Trait Writing model is used by teachers across all content areas. It can be found in kindergarten classrooms, where youngsters are engaging in prewriting activities, all the way up to college seminars.

BACKGROUND

In the early 1980s, NWREL researchers took the lead in developing a performance assessment for writing that was comprehensive, reliable, and both teacher- and student-friendly. They based their work on the efforts of creative, innovative teachers in Beaverton, Oregon, and Missoula, Montana, who were seeking an alternative to standardized or holistic writing assessments.

These teachers knew there must be a better way to get accurate, reliable, and useful information about student writing performance. They wanted a framework for teaching and a shared vocabulary to use with students, parents, and the community.

After an exhaustive analysis of student work, they compiled lists of common characteristics of good writing. These qualities became the building blocks for the original six traits. A seventh trait—presentation—was added as technological tools allowed students more options in formatting their work. Other changes in teacher practice and the educational landscape have led NWREL researchers and trainers to make additional refinements in the model throughout the years.

OUR SERVICES

NWREL offers a wide variety of workshops, scoring services, and products to help teachers and students use the trait model effectively.

Trainings

We schedule a half-dozen introductory and advanced workshops each year in Oregon, in addition to contracting for training with scores of individual schools and districts around the country. Trainings include:

- ◆ **Introductory trait writing workshops designed for teachers at the K–3 and 4–12 levels**—These introductory workshops can be followed by a training of trainers institute that prepares teachers and administrators to train other educators to successfully implement the trait writing model.
- ◆ **Introductory workshops focused on improving student writing across a wide range of content areas**—These sessions are designed for middle and secondary level teachers who wish to integrate instruction on the trait writing model into non-language arts classes or to teach nonfiction writing.
- ◆ **Training workshops for both K–3 and 4–12 teachers centered specifically on scoring student papers**—These workshops are tailored for schools and districts that want to help teachers score writing in their classrooms. Additionally, members of school writing teams can learn how to manage and calibrate scoring on projects, including senior theses and annual writing assessments.

Scoring Services

The Assessment Unit has been training raters and scoring student papers for school district clients for more than 20 years. In 2006, NWREL's raters scored more than 11,000 papers from 10 states and the countries of India, Bahrain, and Ethiopia. Raters use both NWREL's 6+1 Trait writing rubrics and client-specific rubrics and score papers written in persuasive, expository, and narrative modes. It's the method used to assess student papers in many large-scale assessments and works hand-in-hand with high-stakes programs such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate.

The Assessment Unit is also experienced in scoring papers used as pre-post measures of student writing for large-scale experimental studies, including NWREL's current experimental study. Another application of our scoring services is assessing job application essays for large corporations such as Google International.

Products

The NWREL online product catalog features more than forty 6+1 products, including books and video sets on the traits, guides for parents, and classroom materials such as posters, stamps, magnets, and sticky notes. Our newest product, *Wee Can Write™*, uses renowned children's literature to introduce the traits to beginning (K–1) writers. NWREL also provides professional development opportunities based around this publication.

Another recent product is the expanded edition of NWREL's popular guide to primary trait writing, *Seeing With New Eyes*. Among the changes to the sixth edition are new scoring guides that give effective feedback on a wide range of student work samples. In addition, two popular annotated bibliographies provide extensive listings of picture books that can be used to teach the traits of effective Spanish or English writing.

TRAIT WRITING RESEARCH

NWREL is currently conducting a five-year study to examine the impact of training in the 6+1 Trait model on student achievement in writing. This is an experimental study with random assignment of teachers to a control group and a treatment group. Teachers in the treatment group will receive 6+1 training and learn how to use the model and instructional strategies to develop student writing skills. The training is analogous to NWREL workshops commonly available to the public. The study is being conducted in 64 fifth-grade classrooms in Oregon for one year. The schools will be divided across two school years: 2007–2008 and 2008–2009.

Research on the writing traits began in 1983 when NWREL facilitated a teacher committee from the Beaverton (Oregon) School District to review a range of assessment models. The committee proposed a six-trait model that included: ideas/content; organization and development; voice/tone/flavor; effective word choice; syntax/sentence structure; and writing conventions. The project produced a scoring guide for each of the traits containing descriptors of papers scoring 5, 3, or 1 on a five-point scale. The Beaverton

HOW THE MODEL STACKS UP

The 6+1 Trait® Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment fares well, when compared to a new and widely heralded report on effective writing strategies. *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*, commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation, identified 11 classroom practices. Of these, nine strongly align with the 6+1 traits and two are related.

Specifically, the 6+1 model:

- Teaches students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions
- Encourages collaboration in planning, drafting, revising, and editing work
- Sets specific goals for writing
- Encourages the use of appropriate technology to support students in the development of compositions
- Teaches students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences
- Encourages prewriting activities to help students generate and organize ideas
- Exposes students to a variety of reading genres, particularly nonfiction, and informational text in many forms
- Provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing
- Interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing
- Uses writing as a tool for learning content material

model was chosen by the Oregon Department of Education as the basis for the 1985 Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment.

In 1987, George Hillocks conducted a major meta-analysis of 20 years of writing research. He reviewed 2,000 studies on the process of composing writing to produce a list of six instructional methods commonly adopted as curriculum or program focuses. The six instructional strategies included “scales” (i.e., traits). The scales strategy involves teaching students to use sets of criteria to judge the quality of their work and make revisions. Hillocks found that the scales focus (with an effect measure of 0.36) ranked second out of six effective instructional strategies for teaching writing.

In 1992, NWREL conducted the most specific study to date in the measurement of the effectiveness of the traits. The work by Arter, Spandel, Culham, and Pollard involved six classrooms of fifth-grade students, representing a range of learning environments (rural/urban), size, and socioeconomic factors. Classrooms were randomly assigned to a treatment group (67 students) that received training in the traits or a control group (65 students) that was not trained. Results for the treatment group showed substantial growth in mean scores (0.55–0.87 on a 5-point scale) in the three traits that were taught directly, with small to moderate growth (0.19–0.53) shown in the untaught traits. Control groups showed small growth (0–0.21) in all six of the traits.

In 1999, Coe conducted a study of 938 papers scored by two teams of raters to determine the relationship of “Six-Trait” and “Holistic” Assessments. The investigation showed that each of the six traits was strongly predictive of passing the Washington Assessment of Student Learning in writing (scored holistically).

A number of other small-scale studies have been conducted that point to the effectiveness of the 6+1 Trait Writing model. Each was carried out at a single school or district and generally involved one grade level of students. The studies all used a similar research design, namely pre- and post-trait training scores with growth data derived from the differential.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON OUR 6+1 TRAIT® WRITING MODEL OF INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT

www.thetraits.org

Contact:

Gary Nave—503-275-9573, naveg@nwrel.org