

## Ruth Culham Notes, December 12, 2003

From Carol

Assessment spin is important. Spend time on finding out what kids don't know how to use 6 + traits.

### 6 TRAITS + ARE

Common language to talk about writing

Shared vision of what "good" looks like in all forms of writing

Assessment tool for teachers and students

Model for use in a writing process classroom: I, Ova, WC, SF works with revision

Here to stay

Since the rubric was developed there have been 10 to 12 major revisions.

### ARE NOT

A writing curriculum: no score and sequence; need exact lessons and skills and spiraling curriculum

A quick fix, silver bullet, formula, magic potion, easy answer, recipe, panacea

Successful in classrooms where worksheets matter more than critical thinking HAVE TO

WRITE. Never going to be easy.

Meant to be learned in a 1-2 hour workshop

Going away

Start in small steps. Staff development takes five years for successful implementation.

Discussion of 5 point rubric. Used because it is the original rubric, 4 and 2 have some qualities of each of the above and below score. They have gone through 10 to 12 revisions and feel it is pretty well field tested now.

Most difficult part of traits is providing specific feedback. A comment should validate the student but provide specificity. Difficult to develop the ability to talk to the traits. Crutch statement: A question I have is, ? Ruth used a sample paper to ask is this all accurate? Ruth highlights two areas in the paper that are questionable. Then, the students remember or see the problematic areas.

Ralph Fletcher: "Squeeze it once and let it go." Pick out only one or two conventions. Don't have to attend to everything at once because the next time the students write, the other problems will still be there.

Must tell students ahead of time what you're scoring for. With each trait, break it down into components and explain features of each component. Organization example: leads, conclusions, pacing, sequencing.

Whatever trait scoring for, always explain that, "In conventions I expect . . ." Students will get lazy and say, "Well, you're only scoring for..." if you don't remind them.

Writing continuum for early writers: in the midst of a huge REDO. Use the writing continuum for students who are writing at the paragraph level. Writing in multiple sentences. In six months, send Ruth an e mail for the new Ready to Write continuum. People who had struggling writers and second language learners asked about using both rubrics in the same class. Ruth responded both rubrics can be used in one classroom if approached in a respectful manner.

Kid's writing is like looking at the ocean. Writing is on the surface; students don't look below the surface to see the rich activity below.

When ideas are in trouble, many other traits are also in trouble.

We expect more complexity and sophistication as students move through the grades. Important to get benchmark grade level papers.

Want a clean, edited text.

Conventions change throughout time. Teach students options, like in paragraphing. Indenting is one option. Block paragraphs are another option. A lot now in Webster's is now spelled as one word. Language changes through time. Ruth provides students with original constitution and other documents to illustrate this point.

Voice: believability, credibility, authenticity. Living in the moment with the reader. After a reading, the reader thinks, Wow. It's There! Be careful of personality word; use other descriptors. We tend to think of voice as There, but a voice can be a quiet voice.

Sentence fluency: research shows this is the #1 lack in student writing. This is a tough one for young children and second language learners. Sentence fluency is an auditory trait. Read aloud A LOT to students. Use fragments stylistically, not as an accident. When students can identify it in reading, they can use it in their writing.

Don't factor in effort or progress when assessing. Difficult to provide a true assessment. If a student gets all 1s on the assessment, use the early writing continuum. Not fair to assess students on more or less than the writing merits. Assess the writing, not neatness, following directions, etc. You can assess students on those components, just don't factor it into the writing assessment. Teachers can use both types of assessments in one classroom. Assessments need to be honest. Assessment in Latin needs to "sit beside".

Grading: summative, overall evaluation.

Ruth suggests

P writing traits performance, take many grades

P progress, do better at the end of the term. Perhaps assignments at the end of the term are of more value. Pre assessment is critical.

P participation: following directions, asking questions, working cooperatively.

All three elements are critical parts of success. You can weight and then average. Discuss at school the weights and how to factor.

Each time you assess, record how many points students earned over how many available. Running tally. Apply this formula:

$(\text{Points Earned} / \text{points possible}) \times 50 + 45$

Average time to assess papers is 2 to 3 minutes on all traits.

Scoring guide is developmental. If students can write a fully developed paragraph use the scoring rubric; if not use the Writing continuum (I think this can be found on the NWREL website; it's also in *Seeing with New Eyes*.) The grade level doesn't matter. You might use the continuum with some eighth graders while others are using the scoring guide.

Organization and ideas go hand in hand.

Sentence fluency and conventions go hand in hand.

Voice and word choice go hand in hand.

Need to separate ideas from following directions of the assignment. A student might have a well-written piece, but didn't follow the directions on the assignment. View the state prompt as a test question rather than a prompt.

Organization is the lowest score for students because there are so many different organizational patterns depending on the type of writing, especially for expository writing.

Voice is sincerity, character exciting, personal, unique, convincing, authentic, feeling, and passion. When students write, ask them how their voice would change with the audience.

Kids need a risk free environment.

Voice is everywhere. Billboards, junk mail. Oprah writes with great voice. Gary Larsen. Newsletters, books.

When scoring, should be within one number. Need to score 30 papers or so.

Conventions: can't ask kids to be perfect in conventions.

Specific papers discussed:

Birds & Beasts: focus on ideas. Organization, first ¶ needs help. Voice: if tighten up, will it lose it's voice. Word Choice: 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph. Sentence Fluency: don't comment on it right wary. Conventions: pretty good. Pick out only one thing.

Redwoods: up to 7<sup>th</sup> grade is a 5, but mid 7<sup>th</sup> and up expect more complexity.

Earth: Ideas 2. Advice to student: you have two very interesting topics, relatives and the environment. Why don't you choose one to develop? Organization 2. Conventions 2.

Challenge Paper: gave half the group the edited copy, half the group the unedited copy. We scored closely in Ideas, Organization and Voice; really veered on sentence fluency and conventions. People really challenged each other on explain why those who gave it a 5 in conventions gave it a 5; those who gave it a five wanted to know why those who gave it a 1 gave it a one. Ruth uses it to explain to students how important conventions are because suspect those who gave the paper a 4 on ideas and organization, had the unedited version. The problem was with the 3 on conventions. The paper is clearly either a 5 or 1 on conventions; therefore, a 4 or 2 on conventions are justified but not a 3.

December 12<sup>th</sup>, focus on instruction, books, used etc.

Ideas

Narrow it – students call out topics until you get a narrowed topic. Ex. Vacation, Florida, Disney World, Space Mountain. That's a topic a student can write on.

Writer's Notebook. Hers is a small one that you carry around with you. As you have an idea, you put it in. In the beginning of the year, begin with writing ten favorite words, only ten. As you come across more interesting words, you eliminate one of the words and keep ten words. The writer's notebook becomes a tool for writing.

Showing vs. Telling.

Provide a telling sentence, example it is cold. Turn into a paragraph. Connect back to the curriculum and student's writing by asking the students to find a piece of writing they could improve by adding showing details. "The dog was mean." Read from first Harry Potter the description of the dog.

Writing Folder Students keep a writing folder, which contain all quick writes and rough drafts. Then when you have a quick write, you can ask the students to find a rough draft where students could apply the mini lesson.

RAFTS is building topics that have:

R	Role	voice
A	audience	voice
F	format	organization
T	topic	ideas
S	strong verb	word choice, mode

Scholastic is coming with two books for teachers with Rafts assignments, one is for content

area teachers and the other is for literature. Writing Prompts in the Trait Based Classroom.

We practiced writing a RAFT assignment. Partner is to check to ensure that all parts of the RAFTS are there. It's easy to leave one out. This gives kids a framework but allows some creativity and choice.

### Organization

Ruth gave us first one paragraph from *Esperanza Rising*. She numbered the sentences to make sure each group has all the numbers, but obviously, not in the order of the paragraph. Then, we were asked to put the paragraph in order, noting the strategies we used. A volunteer read it aloud. There was one sentence that would fit in one of two places, so Ruth asked if anyone had a different paragraph. The next paragraph was from *The Best Science and Nature Essays (2001)*, Guanmen. It's adult essays. Doesn't have the same hints. As students put it in proper order, wander around to listen to how kids put things together. Debrief with the students the strategies used. Then, tie it in with student writing by asking students to find a piece where they might be able to add hints to the reader. Must relate writing skills to the context of student's own writing. In preparing the mixed up organization paragraphs, use from text from content area curriculum. Cut apart, laminate, and keep numbers on. Start small with only a few a year, then keep the disorganized paragraphs from year to year, adding on.

Another idea: students cut up their own writing to see if they can put it back together.

DOL (question on whether she approved) Ruth likes some things about it, but there isn't the application. Teachers tell her the students don't apply the knowledge to their writing. Whatever you're working on, use that.

Complexity. Use explode a moment. Rather than, "I rode on the roller coaster. It was fun." Add details to make it multi-dimensional. Who's in front? Who's in back? What's the climate? Ruth read from *Bel Canto* the novel she is reading. Three things were happening at the same time.

### VOICE

Pull examples out from the real world.

When writing, the reader should be pulled in from the first line.

If voice were a color, what would it be; if voice were an animal, season, etc. (This is in Ruth's book from Scholastic.)

Bring in music. Brainstorm a list of voices and bring in a song to match the voice. OR bring in a song, what voice is it? Bring in different artists singing the same song. (Elvis Presley songs, or the Beatles) How is the voice different?

### WORD CHOICE

Ruth read from *Bullfrog Pops* by Rick Walton (active verbs). Many of the pages end with a verb and we guessed what would come next. Once you began to expect the unexpected, it was fun to try to outguess the author. This book is a way to talk about where verbs take the reader. Many people first guessed prepositional phrases. Often the phrase was an idiom.

Word game. Create teams. One person from each goes into the hallway. Each student in the hallway writes down one word. Students remain in the hallway while the class votes on the best, most interesting, word choice. The person who used this, used the word in the context of a sentence.

Catch phrase is a game you purchase.

Play music. Dance around. Write down feelings, word associations.

Twizzlers. Brainstorm all words that are synonyms for eat. As the students eat, they eat in the manner of the synonym.

Throw out a word that is too general. Toss ball to a student who has to get more specific.  
Connotation (pg. 164) in her book.

#### SENTENCE FLUENCY

Reader's Theatre. Used Web File by Margie Palantini. She'll e mail us the script if we promise to buy a copy of the book. Each character has a laminated card telling the character's name. They were given a few minutes to read through the script. They read it aloud.

Write out the beginning of all sentences to determine if they begin the same way.

Students can read into whisper phones to listen their writing.

Look for fluent writing in non-fiction. Mentioned Bat by Nicola Davies who writes beautiful prose, then has encyclopedia facts on the same page. Compare and Contrast them. Ruth puts the prose on one side of papers and the factlets on the left sides. Kids form two circles facing each other. One reads the prose. The other student stops when it's time for the fact.

#### CONVENTIONS EDITING

Punctuation takes a Vacation. Read. Students create series books in a similar manner: spelling, capitalization, grammar, usage takes a vacation.

Ruth explained that teachers need to let up on conventions. Concentrate on one or two conventions at a time.

Instructional sequence for introducing traits. Most teachers have 45 minutes of time.

First, before introducing the traits, create a rubric with specific criteria for something important in your classroom. Examples in handout, whine and student behavior when they have a substitute teacher.

Then, students create criteria for good writing. If students give mostly conventions, read a piece of good literature. Should last no longer than one class period. Ruth mentioned Twits and predator! (which is out of print) as good examples. Then, ask students to add to their "good writing" criteria.

Next, give students what teachers value about good writing. For each component the teachers list that the students have on their chart, put a check mark. They will see they know a lot about good writing.

Next, give students copies of the student friendly guide. We looked at the examples of the student friendly guide. The one with the arrows is an attempt to use above middle school. There is less language. The dark arrow with clip art is for elementary school students.

Take traits one at a time. Reassure students they will not be assessed or held accountable to use them all at one.

Teachers worked on developing icons for a trait.