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Welcome to Traits Writing. You are here because you are a teacher who cares about writing and the quality of writing your students produce, a teacher who enjoys sharing the writing of great authors with your students and celebrating your students’ achievements in writing. Perhaps your current writing curriculum isn’t working as effectively as you would like. Perhaps you have tried other programs, strategies, and materials with limited success. You may be familiar with the traits and have used them, but want to know more about them. Regardless of the reasons, we welcome you on this journey of improving your instruction and helping your students become lifelong, successful writers.

Any strong writing program has the following characteristics:

- students learn about writing by writing.
- students write for many different purposes and multiple audiences, in different modes (narrative, informative/explanatory, opinion writing).
- students assess their papers and the papers of others.
- students have a common vocabulary about writing.
- the teacher presents writing as a process that includes prewriting, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, and finishing/publishing.
- the teacher reads aloud exemplary texts to show what good writing looks like and sounds like.

All of these characteristics are at the heart of Traits Writing. But what truly sets the program apart is that it’s based on the Trait Model.

What Is the Trait Model?

The Trait Model is an effective, research-based tool for assessing and teaching writing. It is not a magic box containing all the answers; rather, it is a model that honors your wisdom and strengths as a teacher. It’s also a language that teachers use with each other and with their students to describe what good writing looks like. At the model’s core are fundamental principles: conducting high-quality assessment that leads to focused instruction, establishing clear goals for teaching and learning, using a shared vocabulary to talk about writing, and seamlessly and strategically weaving together revision and editing. The model allows you to break writing down so you can talk to your students about it, determine what is working and what isn’t, and target the specific skills that your students need. Once you know the traits and begin teaching with them, you will see clear evidence of them in your students’ work. And your students will become self-assessors with the skills to revise and edit on their own.

No one “invented” the traits, and they are not new. They are the result of years of development and refinement by teachers and researchers looking for a better way to assess and teach writing. Whether a student is writing a story about a dancing cat, an essay on recycling, or a speech on the benefits of school uniforms, addressing these seven traits—qualities critical to successful writing performance—will help make the piece work.
Powerful Assessment and Instructional Tools

When students take the giant leap from learning to read to reading to learn, it's cause for celebration, because they're using their skills to comprehend text and gain knowledge. The same is true for writing. When students move from learning to write to writing to learn, they're using their skills to create text and share knowledge. This leap typically happens during second grade, but it can happen earlier or later, depending on where a child falls on the developmental spectrum. As an intermediate teacher, you know that even though your students are approximately the same age, they don't possess the same skills—in writing or in any other subject. At the start of each year, you receive students who can write full-blown essays, students who can barely muster a paragraph, and students whose skills lie somewhere in between.

For students to grow as writers, it's important to take them from where they are and move them forward one step at a time. After all, true differentiation means supporting students using methods that match their specific abilities and needs. You can determine where your students are by assessing their writing using the program's Trait Scoring Guides, each of which is organized around the key qualities of one trait. The scoring guides allow you to assess student writing and provide feedback that students use to make their current and future work stronger. They enable you to pinpoint what each student needs to get on track. All students have a right to know how to improve their work, regardless of how much they know about writing when they enter your classroom. And fear not: The students you worry about most will make great strides, as proven by the gains so many students have made in writing traits classrooms across the country and throughout the world.

Key Qualities of the Traits

Each trait is divided into four key qualities that are spiraled throughout Traits Writing. They enable you and your students to focus on one aspect of the trait, apply it to writing, and assess writing for evidence of growth in that area. They also provide clear and concrete skills for you to teach and students to learn.
The Trait Scoring Guides follow six performance levels—rudimentary, emerging, developing, refining, strong, exceptional—and students’ papers are scored according to those levels. For example, if a student were to write the roughest of drafts, showing little control and skill in the trait for which you are assessing, he or she would receive a score of 1, “rudimentary.” But if his or her piece were to show strong control and skill in the trait, he or she would receive a score of 6, “exceptional.” Throughout the year, you will monitor students’ growth in all the traits and share and celebrate their improvements. When you use assessment to guide instruction, you plan and carry out your teaching more effectively and, as a result, see a huge payoff in your students’ writing performance.

It’s important to share assessment results with students in formal conferences and everyday conversations, so that they understand what they are and are not doing well. As you share, you’ll probably notice an improvement not only in students’ writing, but also in their interest in writing because they understand that the skills you are teaching are the same ones they need in order to become better writers. And that interest only gets stronger as students use their own versions of the guides—the Student-Friendly Scoring Guides—to self-assess their work as they draft, revise, and edit it.

As students hone their skills, they learn that the writing world is a big place. So we must respond clearly, deeply, and precisely to their work, using the language of the traits to help them find their way. We must teach them that writing well means more than choosing the first word that comes to mind; it means choosing the best words to make their message clear and compelling. And, we must teach them that real writers create more than stories and simple explanations; they create a variety of texts for specific purposes. In short, we must teach students the skills they need to write well—skills they will use the rest of their lives.
The Modes of Writing

In addition to learning to apply the traits and their key qualities and to use the Student-Friendly Scoring Guides for each trait, students will have ongoing opportunities to write pieces in the three basic modes of writing—narrative, informative/explanatory, and opinion writing—throughout the year. These modes help the writer establish a purpose for the writing and make that purpose clear to the reader.

The purpose of narrative writing: to tell a story
The writer typically
- offers a clear, well-developed story line.
- includes characters that grow and change over time.
- conveys time and setting effectively.
- presents a conflict and resolution.
- surprises, challenges, and/or entertains the reader.

The purpose of informative/explanatory writing: to report or convey information
The writer typically
- informs the reader about the topic.
- transcends the obvious by explaining something interesting or curious about the topic.
- focuses on making the topic clear for the reader.
- anticipates and answers the reader’s questions.
- includes details that add information, support key ideas, and help the reader make connections.

The purpose of opinion writing: to construct an argument
The writer typically
- takes a clear position and sticks with it.
- offers good, sound reasoning.
- provides solid facts, opinions, and examples.
- reveals weaknesses in other positions.
- uses voice to add credibility and show confidence.

By zeroing in on purpose, the writer understands why he or she is writing the piece and, therefore, is more likely to arrive at a clear, focused topic. For example, if a student chooses to write about cell phones, he or she might
- tell about losing his cell phone in a pile of lunchroom garbage (narrative).
- explain how to send and receive text messages (informative/explanatory).
- try to convince her parents to give her a cell phone (opinion writing).

The best writing usually contains elements of all three modes. That is, a novel might contain facts and descriptions to make the plot more credible. A campaign speech might contain stories to make a more personal, persuasive case. A skilled writer blends elements of the modes while never losing sight of his or her purpose.

The traits cut across all three modes. Regardless of a writer’s purpose for a piece, he or she must come up with an original idea, organize his or her thoughts logically, find a voice that speaks to the audience, choose the best words possible, use those words to create sentences that flow, and, of course, check conventions for accuracy and present the work neatly and legibly. The mode, therefore, is the umbrella under which all the traits fit snugly.
Why use the Trait Model as the basis for your writing curriculum? To put it simply: It works! The model was developed in the mid-1980s in response to teachers’ need for an assessment tool that could measure precisely the effectiveness of their writing instruction and the work their students were producing. It was based on research on the writing process and the emerging use of performance criteria to define quality writing. This was a clear departure from the existing holistic scoring practices common in schools at that time (e.g., defining a paper as “weak” or “strong” and giving it a letter grade).

The work took a major step forward when researchers at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL—now Education Northwest), working with local teachers and district staff, created reliable scoring guides for the writing traits, which were used to assess student writing and guide classroom instruction. The guiding strategies behind the early model included the following (Kozlow & Bellamy, 2004):

- Teachers explicitly introduce the traits one at a time (in a cumulative or spiraled sequence). Students learn the scoring system, the scoring guide criteria for each trait, and apply that criteria as they draft, revise, and edit.
- Students write pieces in various modes, and engage in peer and group revision sessions focused on the traits they’re learning.
- Teachers conduct frequent whole-group scoring and discussion sessions using sample papers by anonymous student writers (benchmark papers). In addition, teachers conduct frequent read-alouds of a wide variety of high-quality books and other texts, followed by discussion around the author’s use of the focus traits.
- Teachers conduct frequent one-on-one conferences with students to provide specific, targeted feedback on their writing.
- Students use a writing folder to keep works in progress and track the development of those works.

Over the years, NWREL and other researchers have continued to study the effectiveness of the Trait Model and the professional development tools used to train teachers using it. That research has led to refinements and enhancements in the model. Here is a summary of some of the major studies and findings.

1. In a study conducted by Arter, Spandel, Culham, and Pollard (1994), researchers asked: Does the writing instruction of students who have direct instruction on assessing writing using the six-trait analytical model improve more than students who do not have such instruction? The researchers discovered that students’ scores increased in direct proportion to the amount of instructional and practice time spent on a trait and the order in which the traits were taught (meaning the earlier a trait was taught, the better students were able to apply it because of the increased amount of time and guidance they received). The study showed that when we focus on the criteria of quality writing—the traits—students show broader, overall growth in writing.

2. In a study conducted by Kozlow and Bellamy (2004), researchers examined the effects of professional development for teachers using the Trait Model and the impact that training had on students’ writing skills. The researchers found that after only a short workshop, teachers understood and were able to implement the model. This finding was promising because it proved the ease with which teachers could grasp the model and apply it. Teachers also reported that their students understood and were able to apply the traits they taught. The researchers did note, however, that a more robust form of professional development would have had a stronger impact on classroom practices.
3. In a study by Coe (2000), writing trait assessments were determined to be useful to identify students who might have difficulty on state writing tests and who therefore need extra writing instruction. For example, Coe found that students in Washington state who had low scores on district-administered Writing Trait assessments were likely to also have low scores on the writing portion of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).

4. In a study conducted by Nauman, Stirling, and Borthwick (2011), the researchers examined how teachers’ underlying attitudes and beliefs about good writing impacted their assessment and teaching of writing. For example, they found that teachers who value conventions more than other aspects of writing put more weight on conventions in their assessment of student work. Teachers who value creativity and risk-taking in writing more than standard structures and organization tended to reward students who exhibit those qualities in their writing. The researchers concluded that although values varied, schools were consistent in embracing a standardized method or model of instruction, such as the Trait Model. They also found it unnecessary for teachers to agree on one perspective. What was necessary, however, was for teachers to be aware of differences and respect them.

5. Additional small-scale studies highlighting the effectiveness of the Trait Model have been conducted. Most of these studies examined the use of the traits in one school district, one grade, or one classroom. All the studies showed increases in student writing performance (Jarmer et al., 2000; Bellamy, 2000).

6. A definitive five-year study about the Traits of Writing is being conducted by Education Northwest, Portland, Oregon, and will be published by the Department of Education, IES (Institute of Education Sciences) in 2011. The goal of this study is to provide high-quality evidence on the effectiveness of the analytical trait-based model for increasing student achievement in writing.

These research findings couldn’t come at a better time. In 2002, the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) showed that just over a quarter (27%) of fourth graders were proficient in writing, with similar proficiency levels at eighth grade (31%) and twelfth grade (24%). In addition, recent books and reports, such as Because Writing Matters from the National Writing Project (2003), The Neglected “R” from the National Commission on Writing (2003), Writing Next from the Alliance for Excellent Education (Graham & Perin, 2007), and the summary report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2007) documented the importance of writing and the most effective ways to teach it. The consensus is that we have made strides, but we have a long way to go to create classrooms that meet the needs of today’s students. The Trait Model is one important step forward in teaching students how to write effectively for a wide range of purposes and audiences. The research has not only proven its effectiveness as an instructional and assessment tool, but the ease with which teachers and students grasp and apply its underlying principles.
In Unit 1 of each grade, students get a refresher in each step of the writing process and its connection to specific traits.

**Week 1: The Writing Process**, a hands-on introduction to and exploration of the writing process

**Week 2: Prewriting**
Focus Traits: Ideas, Organization, and Voice

**Week 3: Drafting**
Focus Traits: Word Choice and Sentence Fluency

**Week 4: Revising**
Focus Traits: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, and Sentence Fluency

**Week 5: Editing**
Focus Traits: Conventions and Presentation

During the unit, students create a beginning-of-year benchmark paper and learn the basic writing routines that will be used throughout the program.
The Traits and Response to Intervention (RTI)

The lessons and activities in Traits Writing can be used to support the Response to Intervention (RTI) efforts in your school. RTI, a federal initiative, is a three-tier intervention approach in which educators provide early screening and specific, targeted intervention, particularly in reading and writing, for students at risk. Conceived as a prevention model, the goal of RTI is to achieve academic success for all students and reduce behavioral issues. Whether you’re working with students in Tier 1 (regular classroom instruction and assessments, focusing on high-quality core instruction), Tier 2 (targeted, evidence-based intervention of moderate intensity), or Tier 3 (intensive, individualized intervention of increasing intensity), the traits program provides a wealth of explicit lessons and learning activities to choose from, so that you can support the varied instructional needs of your students.

Since RTI is based on the use of progress monitoring and data-based decision making, Traits Writing is an effective instructional tool for use with RTI students. For example, during the Getting Started unit, students create an initial benchmark paper and you score it for all the traits using the Traits Scoring Guides. This assessment serves as a beginning indicator of each student’s strengths and weaknesses in writing and assists you as you target your instruction and feedback.

In each week of instruction in the core units, students participate in a guided warm-up activity (Day 2) in which they create a piece of writing based on a prompt. You score the writing for the key quality taught that week using the Trait Scoring Guide for that trait, then place students into one of three differentiated small groups for the next day’s lesson (Day 3) based on data you collect. These groups comprise:

**Group A (beginning):** students who show no understanding of the trait’s key quality taught that week. You reteach the lesson and guide students through another piece of writing based on the prompt.

**Group B (middle):** students who show partial understanding of the trait’s key quality taught that week. You revisit their writing pieces and guide them to build on the work they’ve done.

**Group C (high):** students who demonstrate full understanding of the trait’s key quality taught that week. You ask students to expand on the work they’ve done or offer them a challenge related to the week’s trait and key quality.

A key component used during the lessons and assessments of student writing are the Trait Scoring Guides (located on Traitspace and at the back of the Teaching Guide for your use) and the Student-Friendly Scoring Guides (located on Traitspace and at the back of the Student Handbook for students’ use). The descriptors in these guides make writing expectations clear and assist students as they draft, revise, and edit their work.

In addition, during each unit students work on a project in the focus mode for that unit (informative/explanatory, narrative, or opinion writing). During the Reality Check at the end of the unit, you assess the projects using the scoring guides for all the traits. By recording scores in the record-keeping forms on Traitspace and at the back of the Teaching Guide, you monitor the whole class and each student’s progress on all the traits throughout the year. This will alert you to which students are excelling, keeping up, or falling behind. Use the information to provide additional small-group and one-on-one support to students who are struggling. You can also use it to assign a grade to each student. This ongoing progress monitoring and data collection are key underlying principles of both RTI and the Trait Model.

For more information about RTI, visit the website of the National Center on Response to Intervention: www.rti4success.org.
The Traits and the Common Core State Standards

The lessons and activities in Traits Writing will help you meet your specific state writing standards as well as those recommended by the Common Core State Standards Initiative, the state-led effort to establish a single set of clear educational standards aimed at providing students nationwide with a high-quality education. The Common Core State Standards addressed in the program are listed in the chart that follows. The Writing Standards are divided into the following categories:

1. **Text Types and Purposes standards**: These standards concentrate on the modes of writing (informative/explanatory, narrative, and opinion writing). At least two units each year in Traits Writing focus on each mode. (Units 2, 5, and 8 focus on informative/explanatory; units 3 and 6 focus on narrative; and units 4 and 7 focus on opinion writing.)

2. **Production and Distribution of Writing standards**: These standards focus on revising (traits: Ideas, Organization, Word Choice, Voice, Sentence Fluency), editing (trait: Conventions), and publication of work using technology (trait: Presentation). All seven traits are covered within these standards.

3. **Research to Build and Present Knowledge standards**: These standards focus on writing to learn. Throughout the traits program, students write to demonstrate learning (using information collected from multiple sources) and to express opinions and ideas about texts read (supporting with textual evidence).

4. **Range of Writing standard**: This standard focuses on short- and long-term writing projects. Each week students write smaller pieces as well as work on their mode-specific unit project, thereby meeting this key writing standard.

For more information on Common Core State Standards, visit www.corestandards.org.

### Common Core Writing Standards Grades 3–5

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<tr>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Text Types and Purposes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text Types and Purposes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text Types and Purposes</strong></td>
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</table>
| 1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts supporting a point of view with reasons.  
  a. Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.  
  b. Provide reasons that support the opinion.  
  c. Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.  
  d. Provide a concluding statement or section. | 1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.  
  a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer’s purpose.  
  b. Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.  
  c. Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., for instance, in order to, in addition).  
  d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented. | 1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.  
  a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer’s purpose.  
  b. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.  
  c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).  
  d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented. |
| 2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.  
  a. Introduce a topic and group related information together; include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension.  
  b. Develop the topic with facts, definitions, and details.  
  c. Use linking words and phrases (e.g., also, another, and, more, but) to connect ideas within categories of information.  
  d. Provide a concluding statement or section. | 2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.  
  a. Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections, including formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.  
  b. Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.  
  c. Link ideas within categories of information using words and phrases (e.g., another, for example, also, because).  
  d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.  
  e. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented. | 2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.  
  a. Introduce a topic clearly, provide a general observation and focus, and group related information logically, including formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.  
  b. Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.  
  c. Link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., in contrast, especially).  
  d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.  
  e. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented. |
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<tr>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.</td>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.</td>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or character; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.</td>
<td>a. Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.</td>
<td>a. Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.</td>
<td>b. Use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.</td>
<td>b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Use temporal words and phrases to signal event order.</td>
<td>c. Use a variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.</td>
<td>c. Use a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Provide a sense of closure.</td>
<td>d. Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.</td>
<td>d. Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.</td>
<td>e. Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.</td>
<td>e. Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.</td>
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**Production and Distribution of Writing**

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<tr>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. With guidance and support from peers and adults, produce and publish writing (using keyboarding skills) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.</td>
<td>4. With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.</td>
<td>5. With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing (using the keyboard) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.</td>
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**Research to Build and Present Knowledge**

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<th>Grade 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>7. Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.</td>
<td>7. Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.</td>
<td>7. Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.</td>
<td>8. Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information, and provide a list of sources.</td>
<td>8. Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.</td>
</tr>
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**Range of Writing**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. (Begins in grade 4)</td>
<td>9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</td>
<td>9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Apply grade 4 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text”).</td>
<td>a. Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text”).</td>
<td>a. Apply grade 5 Reading standards to informational texts (e.g., “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Apply grade 4 Reading standards to informational texts (e.g., “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text”).</td>
<td>b. Apply grade 5 Reading standards to informational texts (e.g., “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text”).</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.</td>
<td>10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.</td>
<td>10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.</td>
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