



The Power of the Traits

Ideas. Organization. Voice. Word Choice. Sentence Fluency. Conventions. Presentation. These traits are recognized as the qualities of effective writing, and they provide a powerful framework for organizing writing instruction.

Using the traits to teach and assess writing breaks down a complex process into manageable chunks. The first five traits—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, and sentence fluency—are the revision traits. As students work to clarify their ideas and make their writing flow, they are working with these traits. Conventions and presentation are the editing traits; they help students clean up and correct their writing and make it visually appealing to the reader.

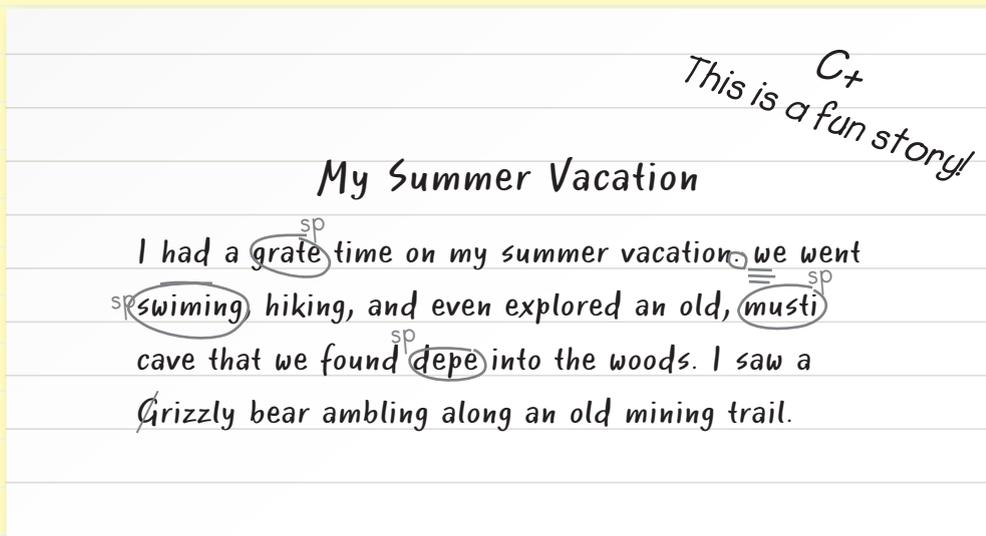
The traits provide a common language for talking about writing and allow teachers and students to focus on one area at a time. By teaching students the traits and showing them how to develop skills applying each one, we help them become stronger writers.

What Is *100 Trait-Specific Comments*?

I've written extensively about the traits, and I speak to teachers at workshops and seminars nationwide on this topic. One aspect of teaching writing always comes up at these meetings: how to respond effectively and appropriately to student work. This is a challenging area for all writing teachers. We want our written and oral comments to support and encourage student writers, and to do this, we must learn to be specific about what is working and what still needs attention.

100 Trait-Specific Comments is a tool designed to help you provide accurate feedback on students' papers to point out strengths along with areas that need work, all within the traits-based framework you're using to teach and assess writing. I've included targeted comments for each of the traits for all performance levels. You'll be able to use these trait-specific remarks to help you zero in on what students need to learn about their writing to make it stronger. And, you'll be able to do this quickly since this guide provides ready-to-use comments on every trait.

Many of us remember a time when our papers were returned to us looking like this:



Comments: **Word Choice**

-▶
- A.** “Your lively verbs such as ____ and ____ make the piece come alive.”
 - B.** “I like how you put these words together, [name a few phrases]. The way you phrased your thoughts on this topic shows strength in word choice.”
 - C.** “Thank you for choosing your words with such care. They are accurate and specific.”
 - D.** “You have some words in this piece that really catch my attention, such as ____ and _____. They helped me see what you were writing about very clearly.”
-▶
- A.** “Strong verbs make writing come alive. Can you replace some of your verbs to show the action more clearly? For instance, you could try _____ instead of _____.”
 - B.** “On a first draft, it’s fine to write with ordinary words or to repeat words. On the next draft, think about changing the words and phrases to be specific, interesting, and precise.”
 - C.** “I understand what you are saying in a general way. Try a new way to express your idea using some original wording. It will liven up the text.”
 - D.** “You have shown how to use words well here _____ and here _____. Can you revise the words in the rest of the piece so they’re just as strong? That will add interest to your piece.”
-▶
- A.** “You use the passive voice throughout this piece. Let’s take a look at how to rewrite sentences using the active voice. In choosing new verbs, try to select ones that show action vividly.”
 - B.** “On the next draft, consider coming up with your own, original way to express this idea without repeating the same words or falling back on tired, old words.”
 - C.** “You’ve used some words incorrectly, such as ____ and _____, and that makes your piece difficult to understand. For the next draft, rewrite those sentences and use a dictionary if you are unsure of a word’s meaning.”
 - D.** “Can you think of a different way to say this using a couple of really wonderful words that make a picture in the reader’s mind?”