



What You'll Find in This Book

Whether your children are just beginning to write or are crafting whole words and sentences, the beginning writers continua and comments in this book will help you help them take the next step. It's designed to show you what to look for in children's work and what to say to improve their writing performance over time.

What Should I Look for in Primary Student Writing?

That's a question I'm asked a lot. And I'm happy to have such a good answer: the traits of writing. In this book, each of the traits—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation—has its own page-length beginning writers continuum, which details levels of primary student development, from "emergent" to "exceptional." You can use these continua to determine strengths in children's writing and areas that need more work. They provide concrete things to look for when you assess children's writing.

What Should I Say to Help Children Understand What Is Strong About Their Work and What Isn't?

This is another good question that is answered in this book. Along with the scoring guides, you'll find over 100 comments to help you articulate to young writers what is going well and what they might do to make their work stronger. Useful for individual conferences or in small groups, this book enables you to pinpoint what children are doing and then give them practical, specific suggestions to try on their own.

The Power of Using Trait-Specific Comments

For years, I have been researching, writing about, and speaking about the traits of writing and their application at the primary level. In that time, I have learned that beginning writers benefit greatly from understanding how strong pieces of writing are created and how to apply that knowledge to their own work. Their growth soars, and watching that growth is quite remarkable. From coast to coast, the traits have found their rightful place in the writing classroom. I am always on the lookout for new ways to make the traits visible to children and to use them as they learn to write. The work is evolving, becoming more nuanced and precise, as it should.

One of the most significant areas of development has been using the language of the traits as a basis for talking to children about how their writing is progressing. Rather than opting for generic comments, such as “good work!” and “awkward,” teachers are using the beginning writers continua as sources of specific comments to help children see where their writing is strong and where it could use revision and editing.

For example, take a look at Taizon’s piece on the cow and the owl. His piece was edited by the teacher and graded accordingly. Note that she has marked the missing end punctuation, crossed out the extra *is*, and changed the *a* to *an*.

Teaching children a thing or two about conventions is admirable. But by marking papers this way, we don’t allow children to do any thinking for themselves.



Comments: **Word Choice**

- A.** "I admire how you use the verbs _____ and _____ to convey action. I can tell you've put a lot of thought into your word choice."
- B.** "I can see this part in my mind. Your word choice is really effective."
- C.** "_____. What a nice way to express this thought. Good work with word choice!"
- D.** "You've stretched your use of words to include figurative language such as _____ and _____."

- A.** "Verbs are words that show action. Show me where there's some important action in your writing. Is there another verb that could help show the action more vividly?"
- B.** "Words are starting to pop out of your writing. For example, you've written _____ and _____ here—they work so well! That's the power of strong word choice. Now, let's see if you can add even more powerful words to your writing."
- C.** "A few of your words could be clearer. Let's think about other words that might help your reader understand your meaning better."
- D.** "I see you are trying to _____ here. Let me help you think about word choice to refine your ideas and make them clearer."

- A.** "I see you putting letters together to make words. This is a great start. Do you have a new word you'd like me to help you write?"
- B.** "Writers put marks on the page. Good for you for starting to write words this way. Can you underline the uppercase letters and circle the lowercase ones?"
- C.** "I see you are using resources in the room to help you write words. Good strategy! What word on the word wall do you want to try next?"
- D.** "As I look at your piece, I see groups of letters that resemble words. Super! Which group do you want me to help you rewrite to be the word you had in mind?"