

# Traits Writing

The Writing Traits Model:  
Research Proven in Blue Springs, MO

By Lois Bridges, Ph.D.

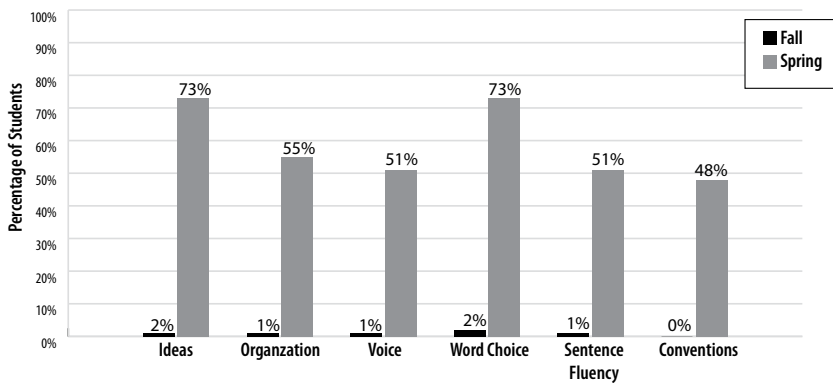


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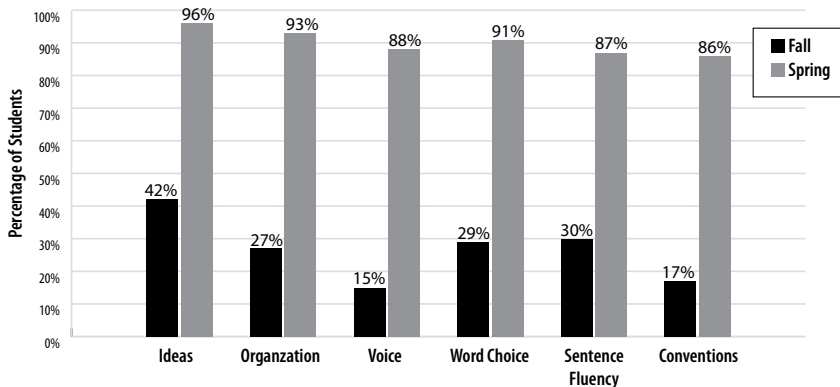
Educators who use the Trait Model center both their instruction and their assessment on helping students understand how these elements work together and interact to create a well-written, cohesive piece that accomplishes the writer's goal. Multiple researchers have studied the efficacy of the Trait Model in both large- and small-scale studies, including Blue Springs district, just outside Kansas City, MO.

Most of these studies examined the use of the traits in one school district, one grade, or one classroom. All the studies show increases in student writing performance (Jarmer et al., 2000; Bellamy, 2000). Note the promising test results for six traits in the data from the Blue Springs District, just outside Kansas City, MO. Approximately 950 students in kindergarten through second grade in 13 Blue Springs elementary schools were tested in the fall and again in the spring on their understanding of the six traits: ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, voice, and conventions. In applying all six traits, as Deputy Superintendent Annette Seago effused, the K–2 students made “phenomenal growth” (2011). The proof is in the numbers. In the fall, for example, when the test was first administered, only 14 second–graders demonstrated an outstanding grasp of Ideas; by spring that number had shot up to 262 students. In a similar manner, in the fall, ten second graders scored outstanding on organization; 17 on conventions. In the spring, after immersion in the six traits, those numbers rose dramatically: to 229 and 222 students, 70% respectively. Overall, after a yearlong intensive traits writing program with Dr. Ruth Culham, the district's primary students demonstrated significant writing growth across the six traits. For example, in the fall, just 27 percent of the Blue Springs District's 790 first graders were at or above grade level in their ability to effectively organize their own written compositions (organization is one of the hardest traits for every writer, young or old, to master); by spring, that 27% percentage had surged to 93% (864 first graders were tested).

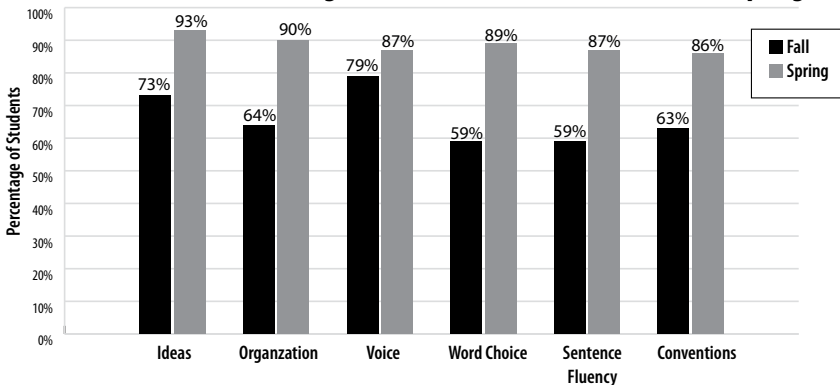
### Kindergarten: Percentage at Grade Level and Above, Fall and Spring



### First Grade: Percentage at Grade Level and Above, Fall and Spring



### Second Grade: Percentage at Grade Level and Above, Fall and Spring



\*Grade level and above\* refers to those students who scored a 3, 4, or 5 on the Primary Traits Scoring Guide (Culham, 2005).

## Why the Trait Model Works

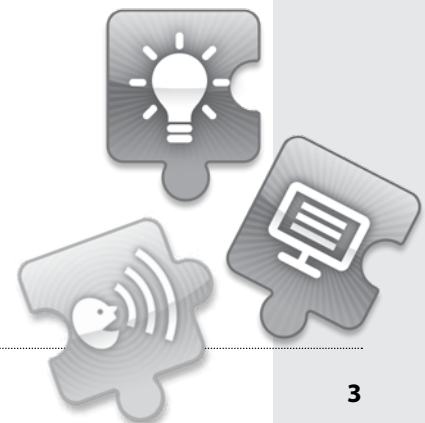
Consider these explanations of quality writing—and how to achieve it—from four experts on the topic:

An effective piece of writing is produced by a craft. It is simply a matter of working back and forth between focus, form, and voice until the meaning is discovered and made clear. ~Donald Murray

Good writing isn't forged by magic or hatched out of thin air. Good writing happens when human beings follow particular steps to take control of their sentences—to make their words do what they want them to do. ~Ralph Fletcher

Good writing has an aliveness that keeps the reader reading from one paragraph to the next ... write with clarity, simplicity, brevity, usage, voice, and the elimination of clutter. ~William Zinsser

Omit needless words. Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. ~William Strunk, Jr.



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