Preparing Students for Direct Writing Assessment

Lana Marriage

Unit Objective: Students will learn exactly how the State of Idaho scores direct writing essays; see samples of other students' writing which have been given scores of 4, 3, 2 or 1; write a classic 5-paragraph essay from a prompt; edit and score their peer's papers; see student feedback on their own essays; and finish their essays by adding detail, paying particular attention to the introduction and conclusion.

Timeframe: Six 90-minute class periods

Assessment: Grade each of the six +1 writing traits according to the same Scoring Standard rubric used by State of Idaho.

Day One

Materials

Classroom set of paper copies of an Anchor Set or a Practice Set of Direct Writing Papers
Copies of the prompt for that Direct Writing Assessment
Copies of the Scoring Standard rubric for that year
Overheads of the Analyses for each paper in the Anchor or Practice Set chosen
(All of the materials above can be found on the English Language Arts Web page at www.sde.state.id.us/instruct/langarts/ by clicking the Assessment Support Material (Pencil Box) link.)
Copies of the 6 + 1 Writing Traits
(Mine are taken from *The ORIGINAL Student-Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits,* printed by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland but there are lots of them available online.)
Student-Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits (p. 7)
Overhead projector

Lesson

Pass out copies of the Scoring Standard and discuss it with the class. Make sure each student understands how it works.
Pass out copies of the Student-Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits and have students read through those as well.
Pass out the prompt for the Practice Set of Direct Writing Papers you'll be using.
Then pass out one paper at a time and have students read it and decide what overall score they'd give it on a scale of 1-4. Ask for a show of hands on each score after all have finished reading.
Then as you display it on the overhead projector, go through the Analysis for that paper.
Repeat the above two steps for one paper at each grade level (4, 3, 2 and 1).
Discuss the strengths found in papers written at the 3 and 4 levels and weaknesses found in the 1's and 2's.

Day Two

Materials

Overhead copies of a well-written five-paragraph essay with breakdown

(Various versions are available online. Simply google *5-paragraph essay* and choose your favorite one. I use the description from www.kimskorner4teachertalk.com/writing/sixtrait/organization/essay.html and the Expanded Five Paragraph Essay from the link by that same name on that page.

Overhead projector

Lesson

Demonstrate on an overhead projector a simple 5-paragraph essay with an introduction, three body paragraphs and a conclusion.

Go through the guidelines for writing each paragraph and then show examples of each one.

Remind students that regardless of what the prompt says, when they write essays they are writing for a roomful of English teachers. Everything counts. Everything must be appropriate.

Day Three

Materials

Student journals

Writing utensils

Overhead copies of "voiceless" passages

(Or you can use this lesson written in Word directly from your computer if you have an In Focus machine or some other kind of projector that will put it on a big screen.)

Overhead copies of "snapshots" examples from great writing

Lesson

Great Beginnings: Great beginnings in every great story, essay and novel have one thing in common. They all begin with a great lead sentence. Mention the three kinds of lead sentences listed below and tell the students they are going to write great leads using each of these strategies. Put the examples on the overhead as you talk about them and then have the students write their own in their journals and share them with the class.

Paint a picture. Vivid verbs and adjectives spark visual imagination. Write a sentence describing what's in your backpack (or locker), and then rewrite the sentence using as many colorful adjectives and verbs as you can.

Example: The big blue glassy mirror of the high mountain lake reflected its infinite ceiling all dotted with puffy white clouds.

Keep it short—and intriguing. Opening sentences that are short, powerful and a bit mysterious can pack a huge punch in an essay. Write short punchy sentences as the beginning to a lead paragraph in a story about a real or fictional vacation.

Example: He saw it. His dad saw it. They both heard it. They waited silently, nervously, eyes darting about in the darkness.

Put yourself in and then take yourself out. Sometimes it helps get thoughts flowing to take yourself out. Start with something like, "I think that . . . "and then in the next draft, edit yourself out. You'll be left with a good strong topic sentence for your opening paragraph.

Example: I think that students in my high school spend too much time watching television. Edit this to become: Students at Rimrock spend too much time watching television.

(Ideas for great beginnings found in "The Writer's Toolbox," *Scholastic Scope*, September 5, 2005.)

Adding voice: Students will "voice up" voiceless passages.

Place copies of "voiceless" passages on an overhead and read or have a student read each one.

Ask opinions about the piece—what do they think about the writing, specifically its voice?

See if they can come up with single word descriptions of the voice in the piece—flat? boring? lifeless? dull?

What questions come to mind—who? what? when? where? why? how?—as they read the writing?

How would they score the piece for voice using the Six Trait Writing Guide?

With partners, have students discuss the criteria for strong voice and rewrite the passages, attempting to "voice them up." Their goal is to earn a "4" for voice in the piece.

Reread the original "voiceless" writing and then have the pairs share aloud their new "voicy" versions.

Talk about what was added or changed to improve the voice.

Sample passage: I was excited. The best day of summer was coming. We were going rafting. My mother, father, brother and sister got to go. They were excited, too. My dad knew a lot of stuff about rafting. It would be neat.

When we got to the river, it looked big. The water was moving fast. I got scared. It turned out to be fun. We ate lunch. I wore a life jacket and got wet. It was the best thing I did all summer.

Snapshots: Students will analyze great passages that show this technique clearly. They will also look at their own writing and find places to add sharp physical details.

Explain that writers are like cinematographers with wide angle lenses and zoom lenses. They observe life in minute detail when they're zoomed in and then they zoom back out to get the big picture and make sweeping generalizations and then zoom back in to bring those generalizations to life with detail. This technique is called a "snapshot."

Read some examples of snapshots in great writing. Use your own favorites or here are a few you might like:

Characters and actions

Ma kissed them both, and tucked the covers in around them. They lay awhile, looking at Ma's smooth, parted hair and her hands busy with sewing in the lamplight. Her needle made little clicking sounds against her thimble and then the thread went softly, swish! through the pretty calico that Pa had traded furs for. *From Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House in the Big Woods*

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Far out in the country there was an old Negro woman with her head tied in a red rag, coming along a path through the pinewoods. Her name was Phoenix Jackson. She was very old and small and she walked slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a

little from side to side in her steps, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock. She carried a thin, small came made from an umbrella, and with this she kept tagging the frozen earth in front of her. This made a grave and persistent noise in the air, that seemed meditative, like a chirping of a solitary little bird.

She wore a dark striped dress reaching down to her shoetops, and an equally long apron of bleached sugar sacks, with a full pocket; all neat and tidy, but every time she took a step she might have fallen over her shoe-laces, which dragged from her unlaced shoes. She looked straight ahead. Her eyes were blue with age. Her skin had a pattern all its own of numberless branching wrinkles and as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead, but a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illuminated by a yellow burning under the dark. Under the red rag her hair came down on her neck in the frailest of ringlets, still black, and with an odor like copper.

From "A Worn Path" by Eudora Welty

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It came on great oiled, resilient, striding legs. It towered thirty feet above half of the trees, a great evil god, folding its delicate watchmaker's claws close to its oily reptilian chest. Each lower leg was a piston, a thousand pounds of white bone, sunk in thick ropes of muscles, sheathed over in a gleam of pebbled skin like the mail of a terrible warrior. Each thigh was a ton of meat, ivory, and steel mesh. And from the great breathing cage of the upper body those two delicate arms dangled out front, arms with hands which might pick up and examine men like toys, while the snake neck coiled. And the head itself, a ton of sculptured stone, lifted easily upon the sky. Its mouth gaped exposing a fence of daggers. Its eyes rolled, ostrich eggs, empty of all expression save hunger. It closed its mouth in a death grin. It ran, its pelvic bones crushing aside trees and bushes, its taloned feet clawing damp earth, leaving prints six inches deep wherever it settled its weight. It ran with a gliding ballet step, far too poised and balanced for its ten tons. It moved into a sunlit arena warily, its beautifully reptile hands feeling the air.

From "A Sound of Thunder" by Ray Bradbury

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Places

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which someone was singing reaching her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

From "The Story of and Hour" by Kate Chopin

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(Found online at 158.91.55.1/~jeanar/Rock_files/snapshots.htm from Barry Lane's *After the End: Teaching and Learning Creative Revision.)*

If the students have a draft of a story, have them look for places where they could insert a snapshot with more detail. Mark a carat at the spot. In their journals, have students list or web 15 details about the character, place or action. Write a snapshot. Share the snapshot with a partner and have the partner ask questions about more detail. Rewrite the snapshot.

If the students have not written a story have them think about a person, place or event they know well and then think of one moment in time with that person or in that place or at that event, a snapshot in their memory. They should cluster details about the moment, and then write for 20 minutes about it. After they have written their first draft, share their snapshot with a partner. Have them write down questions their partner has about their person, place or event and rewrite their snapshot with more detail. Finally, have the students draw a picture about their person, place or event including all the details in their snapshot.

Day Four

Materials

Copies of a Sample Prompt
Theme Paper
Scratch Paper
Blue or black pens

Lesson

Tell students they'll be writing a 5-paragraph essay. Give them each a copy of a practice prompt and then read it aloud to them. Answer any questions they may have.

Tell them to use the 6 + 1 writing traits to compose an essay that replies to the prompt you give them. Explain that they will have 80 minutes to do so.

Encourage them to use scratch paper to organize their thoughts and ideas and to do any prewriting or rough draft writing they can. I also tell them they will be handing in all their rough drafts and that I won't grade them but I like to see how they organized their thoughts.

Remind them to leave 15-30 minutes for writing the final copy of their essay and to use blue or back ink with which to write it.

Have students staple all rough drafts under the final copy of their essay and hand them in when the time is up. I always tell them to "show the best and hide the rest."

Day Five

Materials

Peer Edit Response Form (p. 6)
Student-Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits (p. 7)
Copies of the Sample Prompt
Copies of the state Scoring Standard rubric
Copies of four or five student essays per student on which names have been removed and numbers added. Each student's paper gets a different number.

Lesson

Pass out copies of the Scoring Rubric, the Student Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits and the Sample Prompt used for the writing.

Go through the Scoring Rubric once again; ask questions of the students to make sure they understand what they're looking for in each level of writing (4, 3, 2 and 1).

Pass out the Peer Edit Response Form on which you've written the name and Scorer Number of the student scorer and four or five copies of their peers' papers. Each paper in a student set will have a different number and each student scorer will be scoring a different set.

(I just lay out all the stacks of five copies with one key telling me which number belongs to which student and pick up at random five papers from other student stacks, then paper clip them together. So when the students receive their papers to score, they're all clipped together with a score sheet [Peer Edit Response Form] on top ready to go. All they need to do is write the number of each paper on their response form and circle the scores for each writing trait.)

Every student's paper will be scored by four or five different students and each student will see four or five samples of writing to the same prompt he/she wrote to.

Tell students you do NOT want them to discuss papers with each other. You want their opinion for the score on each paper you gave them.

If they have questions, insist they ask only you.

Day Six

Materials

Paper Edit Review Form (p. 8)
Original Five Paragraph Essays written by students on day four
Copies of the 6 + 1 Writing Traits (expanded version)
Dictionaries, notes, other helpful handouts
Blue or black pens

Lesson

Students will revise their rough drafts using the Paper Edit Review Form which the teacher has compiled for their essay. Make all attempts to keep the scorers anonymous.

Return the essays to their authors with the Paper Edit Review Form.

Tell students they may use the information on the review form and whatever else they think might help them to rewrite/revise their rough drafts.

Peer Edit Response Form

Your Name: _____ Your Scoring Number: _____

Please look at the criteria for scoring a paper on the Student Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits. Then, write the number of the paper above each score table and circle a score from 4 (best) to 1 (worst) for each paper on each of the six traits listed in the table. As you begin, read the criteria for each specific trait on the Student Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits as you score that trait.

Paper Number: _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Paper Number: _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Paper Number: _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Paper Number: _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Paper Number: _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Student-Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits

1. Ideas and Content

   - Paper has a clear purpose or makes a point.
   - Clear details and examples help the reader understand message.
   - Sticks to the main idea – paper left out details that don't matter.
   - Writer obviously knows about the subject.

2. Organization

   - The introduction would make a reader want to keep reading.
   - Things are told in an order that makes sense.
   - Details in the paper go together.
   - Ends in a good spot – doesn't stop suddenly or drag on too long.

3. Voice

   - Writing shows what the author really thinks and feels.
   - The writer seems to like what he or she has written.
   - The writing sounds authentic – like the author really said it and believes it.
   - Author thought about the reader and tried to make the writing clear.

4. Word Choice

   - The words used help make the meaning clear.
   - Author's words paint a picture in the reader's mind.
   - Things are stated in an original way.
   - Sometimes the author says something in a new or different way.

5. Sentence Fluency

   - The sentences make sense. They are clear.
   - Some sentences are longer than others.
   - Sentences begin in different ways. They do not all begin with the same words.
   - This paper would be easy to read out loud.

6. Conventions or Mechanics

   - The paragraphs begin in the right spots.
   - Punctuation is correct.
   - Capital letters are used on proper names of people, places, or things.
   - The spelling is correct.
   - The paper has obviously been proofread and the mistakes were corrected.

Peer Edit Review Form

The scores below are the scores given by your peers. Read through them and find out what your strong points are. Good work! Now check out your weaknesses. Using the Scoring Standard, the Student-Friendly Guide to Writing with Traits and your copy of the 6+1 Writing Traits, revise your essay to make your weak areas become stronger.

Assessment # _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Assessment # _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Assessment # _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Assessment # _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1

Assessment # _____

1. Ideas and Content	4	3	2	1
2. Organization	4	3	2	1
3. Voice	4	3	2	1
4. Sentence Fluency	4	3	2	1
5. Word Choice	4	3	2	1
6. Conventions	4	3	2	1