

5th GRADE SURVIVAL
GUIDE
FOR CREATING
SUCCESSFUL WRITERS



What Teachers Look for in Writing

Intermediate (4-8)

Ideas . . .

- Make sense
- Get and hold my attention
- Have a **main idea**, thesis, center, **sense of purpose**
- Writer draws on experience
- Says something new, or says it in a fresh way
- Full of ideas that add interest and important information

KEY QUESTION: *Did the writer stay focused and share original information or perspective about the topic?*

Voice . . .

- Sounds like the person who writes it
- Sounds like a *particular* writer
- Writing has **style**, flavor
- Reaches out to me, the reader. Brings me “inside”
- Makes me *feel*...

KEY QUESTION: *Would you keep reading this piece if it were longer? MUCH longer?*

Sentence Fluency

- It's smooth going – easy to the ear
- I could easily read this aloud
- Almost every sentence begins in a slightly different way, OR
- Repetition is rhythmic and stylistic, not annoying
- Some sentences are long. Some aren't
- Sentences aren't choppy. Yet they do not meander aimlessly as if length alone were a virtue and there were no particular need to rush to the end and be done with it

KEY QUESTION: *Can you feel the words and phrases flow together as you read the passage?*

Organization . . .

- The opening makes me want to keep reading
- Has a logical order or pattern (problem/solution, comparison-contrast, story unfolding over time, etc.)
- I can follow the story or main points
- Sometimes I can predict – sometimes the writer surprises me
- Ends well. Ties up loose ends. Doesn't stop abruptly
- Doesn't end with, “Then I woke up and it was all a dream!”
- Doesn't repeat with, “Now you know the three reasons we should fight pollution.”

KEY QUESTION: *Does the organizational structure enhance the ideas and make it easier to understand?*

Word Choice . . .

- Makes me say, “Yes, that's *just* the right word or phrase
- Long after reading, some words still tug at my memory
- Words are used correctly
- The writer chooses wisely, but isn't afraid to stretch
- This writer knows the language of the topic – but doesn't try to impress me with phony, bloated, phrases
- Use simple language if it gets the job done

KEY QUESTION: *Do the words and phrases create vivid pictures and linger in your mind?*

Conventions

- The writing is clean and polished. It looks proofread.
- Most things are done correctly.
- Careful, controlled use of conventions makes meaning clear and reading easy.
- No BIG errors shout at me from the page: Hey!” Pay attention! SHUN two me! Fergt IDEAS and VOICE! Think ? about, the mistakes!, A lot!”
- Spelling, punctuation, grammar, capital letters and paragraph indenting: This writer has thoughtfully attended to ALL conventional details.

KEY QUESTIONS: *How much editing would have to be done to be ready to share with an outside audience?*

STUDENT SUMMARY OF THE SIX-TRAITS

Intermediate Version

Sound IDEAS

- It all makes sense.
- I know this topic well.
- I have included the most interesting details.
- My paper has a **purpose**.
- Once you start reading, you will not want to stop.

Good ORGANIZATION

- My beginning will interest the reader.
- Everything ties together.
- It builds to the good parts.
- You can follow it easily.
- At the end it feels finished and makes you think.

Individual VOICE

- This really sounds like me!
- I've been honest and written what I think and feel.
- Can you feel my commitment to this topic?
- I want you to experience my writing with me.
- I know why I'm writing and who my audience is.
- I bet you'll want to read this to someone.
- Will the reader feel what I feel?

Powerful **WORDS**

- This is the best way to say this.
- My words create mind pictures.
- I've tried new ways to say everyday things.
- Listen to the power in my verbs.
- Some of the words and phrases linger in my mind.

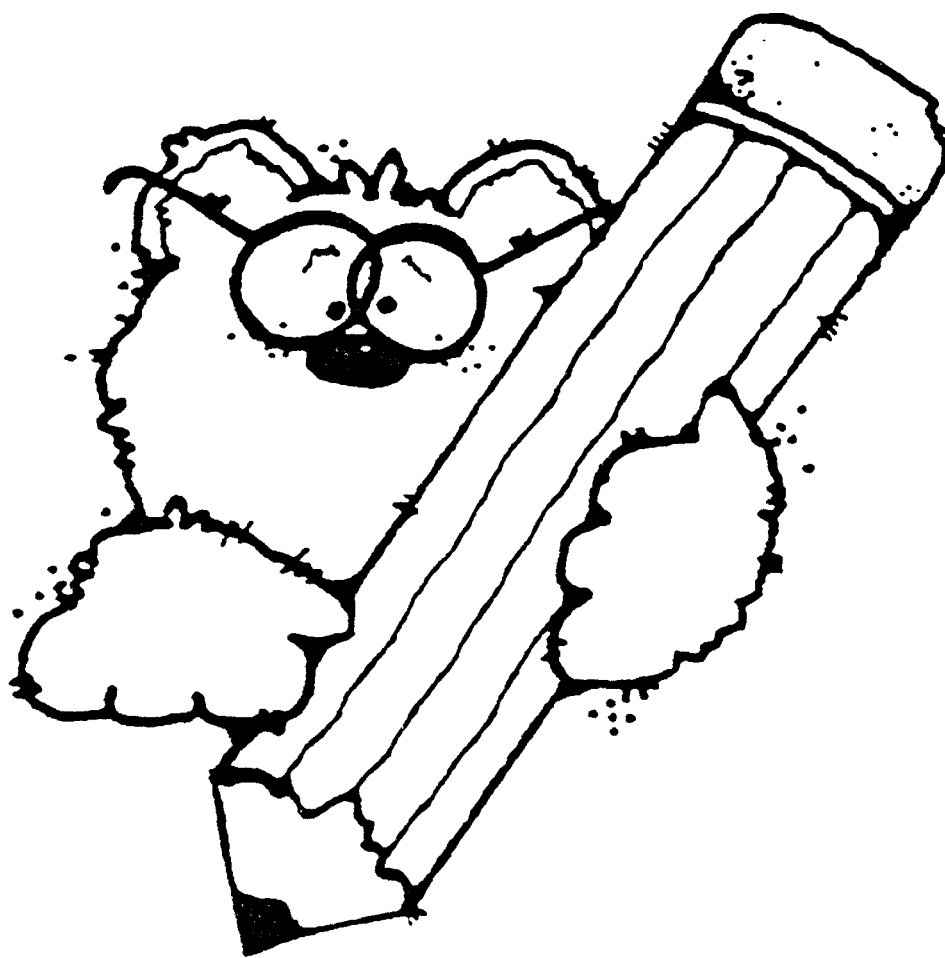
Smooth **FLUENCY**

- My sentences begin in different ways.
- Some sentences are short and some are long.
- It just sounds good as I read it aloud - it flows.
- My sentences have power and punch.
- I have "sentence sense."

Correct **CONVENTIONS**

- I don't have many mistakes in my paper.
- I have used capitals correctly.
- Periods, commas, exclamation marks, and quotation marks are in the right places.
- Almost every word is spelled correctly.
- I remembered to indent each paragraph.
- It would not take long to get this ready to share.

Ideas and Content



Ideas

the link to instruction

**Any activity that allows
students to practice . .**

- Prewriting
- Generating ideas from thought/experience
- Borrowing ideas from other writers
- Keeping journals
- Knowing the purpose of writing
- Moving from broad topic to focused theme
- Learning to observe carefully
- Developing thinking skills (comparison, analysis, inference)

SOUND IDEAS

- It all makes sense.
- I know this topic well.
- I have included interesting details not everyone would think of.
- My paper has a purpose.
- Once you start reading, you will not want to stop.

Telling

My Grandmother was a very brave little girl.

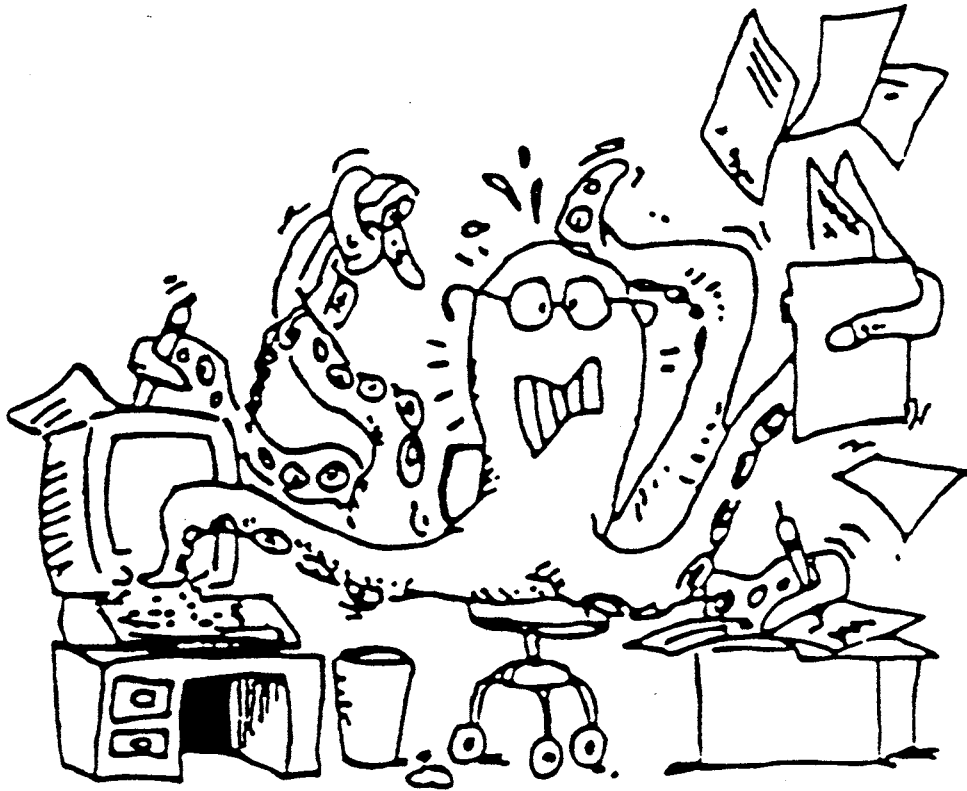
Showing . . .

One day when my Grandmother was a little girl she and her friends cut across a pasture on the way home from school. When a bull charged them she turned, got her friends behind her, pulled out her long sewing scissors, and stuck them up the nostrils of the bull. He didn't bother them any more.

Taken from:

Donald Murray, 1984. Write to Learn. New York: CBS College Publishing – Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Organization



Organization

the link to instruction

Any activity that allows students to practice . .

- Writing a lead that hooks the reader
- Sequencing in a logical/interesting way
- Getting rid of "deadwood"
- Identifying the turning point
- Connecting ideas to a larger theme
- Linking ideas together for the reader
- Setting up a problem - then solving it
- Crafting a conclusion that ties up loose ends

GOOD ORGANIZATION

- Starts out with a bang!
- Everything ties together.
- It builds to the good parts.
- You can follow it easily.
- At the end it feels finished and makes you think.

SOME WAYS TO WRITE INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions establish the direction your writing is going to take. A good introduction grabs the readers attention and refuses to let go. But – what’s a good way to begin your writing?

Here are some suggestions:

OPEN WITH A QUESTION:

Have you ever wondered how you’d survive if you found yourself alone in the wilderness?

OPEN WITH AN ANNOUNCEMENT:

This is not a cookbook for the gourmet. These recipes are strictly for the cook on a tight budget.

OPEN WITH A BOLD AND CHALLENGING STATEMENT:

Contrary to what some people think, most of our learning takes place out of school.

OPEN WITH A BOLD AND CHALLENGING STATEMENT:

“You’re going to regret this.” That’s what my best friend Liza said as I got on the roller coaster.

OPEN WITH A RIDDLE OR A PUZZLE THAT THE READER CAN GRAPPLE WITH:

What textbook has no pages, is miles wide, smells like a creek, and has been around for millions of years? That’s right – Outdoor School.

OPEN WITH A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE:

I’m still glad I didn’t cry at the funeral, though I did in my room later.

OPEN WITH HOW YOU FELT:

My hands were sweaty? My teeth wouldn’t quit chattering. Prickly fingers ran up my spine. What would happen next?

SOME WAYS TO WRITE CONCLUSIONS

A conclusion brings your writing to resolution. It helps the reader tie up all loose ends, brings all the separate pieces together, and sometimes even predict the future or anticipates next steps. A good conclusion helps the reader feel or appreciate the importance of what she/he has just read, but it does NOT painstakingly tramp over old ground, re-making points the writer has already drummed into the reader's head. A good conclusion is like a wise thought – it seems it was always there, inevitable, waiting – yet, the sound is new, fresh.

WHAT'S A GOOD WAY TO END YOUR WRITING?

CLOSE WITH A QUESTION THAT INVOLVES THE READER:

Alfred decides that was the last time he'd ever go on a roundup. And who can blame him?

CLOSE WITH A STATEMENT ECHOING AN IDEA THAT THE STORY/WRITING HAS ALREADY HINTED AT:

The award stated that Ms. Brown was the best teacher in the state – which was no surprise to anyone except, perhaps, Ms. Brown herself.

CLOSE WITH A HINT OF THINGS TO COME (ACTUALLY THE BEGINNING OF A NEW STORY, BURIED WITHIN THIS ONE):

Julie thought she'd better get going. She had over 200 miles to travel, and it was growing dark.

CLOSE WITH A STATEMENT SHOWING THAT SOME THINGS NEVER WILL BE RESOLVED:

We never did find out what happened to Mr. Bickle's cat. Some things seemed destined to remain a mystery.

CLOSE WITH A PERSONAL COMMENT OR RESPONSE:

Seeing a drop of water under a microscope makes a person look at a river with new eyes.

CLOSE WITH A STRONG STATEMENT SUGGESTING THE FINAL CONCLUSION YOU HOPE YOUR READER WILL DRAW:

How teachers see their students makes all the difference in how students see themselves.

CLOSE WITH AN ENDING THAT LETS THE READER “FILL IN THE BLANKS” A LITTLE:

If children were to stop watching television altogether who knows what the results might be.

We watched Adam walk down the road until he became just a tiny speck and then disappeared altogether into the dust of twilight.

CLOSE WITH A FORCEFUL ARGUMENT, NUDGING THE READER IN A PARTICULAR DIRECTION:

Cruelty to animals must be stopped now.

HINT: DO NOT close your paper or story by saying, “This has been a paper about...” Unless your reader dozed off, he/she already knows what you said. You must leave the reader something to think about. Close with a bang, not a whimper.

Useful Transitions

Transitions which can be used to show location:				
above	among	beneath	in front of	on top of
across	around	beside	inside	outside
against	away from	between	into	over
along	back of	beyond	near	throughout
alongside	behind	by	off	to the right
amid	below	down	onto	under
Transitions which can be used to show time:				
about	first	until	soon	then
after	second	meanwhile	later	next
at	third	today	afterward	in the meantime
before	prior to	tomorrow	immediately	as soon as
during	till	yesterday	finally	when
				next week
Transitions which can be used to compare two things:				
into the same way		likewise	as	
also		like	similarly	
Transitions which can be used to contrast things (show differences):				
but	yet	on the other hand	although	otherwise
however	in the meantime	still	even though	counter to
even so	nevertheless	on the contrary	conversely	as opposed
Transitions which can be used to emphasize a point:				
again	indeed	for this reason	truly	
to repeat	with this in mind	in fact	to	
emphasize				
Transitions which can be used to conclude or summarize:				
as a result	consequently	accordingly	in short	
finally	thus	due to	to sum up	
in conclusion	therefore	in summary	all in all	
Transitions which can be used to add information:				
again	another	for example	moreover	finally
also	and	for instance	further	as well
additionally	besides	furthermore	along with	together with
in addition	equally important	likewise	next	
Transitions which can be used to clarify:				
that is	put another way	for instance	to clarify	

Voice

The sun was setting as
the horse person rode back
to his cattle place.



Voice

the link to instruction

Any activity that allows students to practice . .

- Helping writers feel safe/accepted
- Noting moments of voice in writing/pictures
- Valuing and requesting diversity
- Rewarding risk—even over success
- Providing opportunities to hear the voices of others
- Writing to someone (letters, posters)
- Asking students to write voice in ... or out
- Looking for Voice in advertising, print, and nonprint resources

INDIVIDUAL VOICE

- This really sounds like me!
- My reader can tell that I care about this topic.
- This is what I think
- I want you to read this and feel something.
- Aren't my ideas really terrific?

Word Choice



Word Choice

the link to instruction

Any activity that allows students to practice . .

- Building vocabulary through reading - anything and everything
- Brainstorming: How else could you say it?
- Learning to use resources - traditional and electronic software
- Putting "tired" words to rest
- Playing with language, dialects, formal and informal word usage
- Building power in verbs
- Practicing precision - more for less

POWERFUL WORDS

- This is the best way to say this.
- I can picture it!
- My words are new ways to say everyday things.
- Listen to the power of my verbs.
- Some of the words linger in my mind.
- It is easy to read aloud.

I Love the Look of Words

Popcorn Leaps, popping from the floor
of a hot black skillet
and into my mouth.
Black words leap,
snapping from the white
page. rushing into my eyes. Sliding
into my brain which gobbles them the
way my tongue and teeth chomp the
battered popcorn.

When I have stopped reading,
ideas from the words stay stuck
in my mind, like the sweet
smell of butter perfuming my
fingers long after the popcorn
is finished.

I love the book and the look of words
the weight of ideas that popped into
my mind I love the tracks
of new thinking in my mind.

Maya Angelou

VERBS WITH VERVE

Adapted from *The Play of Words* by Richard Lederer

Suppose you write

“No,” she *said* and *left* the room.

Grammatically, there is nothing wrong with this sentence. But because the verbs *say* and *leave* are among the most colorless and general in the English language, you have missed the opportunity to create a vivid word picture. Consider the alternatives:

SAID		LEFT	
apologized	jabbered	backed	sauntered
asserted	minced	bolted	skipped
blubbered	mumbled	bounded	staggered
blurted	murmured	crawled	stamped
boasted	shrieked	darted	stole
cackled	sighed	flew	strode
commanded	slurred	hobbled	strutted
drawled	snapped	lurched	stumbled
giggled	sobbed	marched	tiptoed
goaded	whispered	plodded	wandered
gurgled	whooped	pranced	whirled

OTHERS?

If you had chosen from among these vivid verbs and had crafted the sentence “No,” *she sobbed and stumbled out of the room*, you would have crafted a powerful picture of someone quite distraught.

Here are brief descriptions of twenty different people. Choosing from your two lists for said and left, fill in the blanks of the sentence.

“No,” s/he _____ and _____ the room.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. an angry person | 11. an excited person |
| 2. a baby | 12. a frightened person |
| 3. a braggart | 13. a happy person |
| 4. a child | 14. someone in a hurry |
| 5. a clown | 15. an injured person |
| 6. a confused person | 16. a military officer |
| 7. a cowboy/cowgirl | 17. a sneaky person |
| 8. someone crying | 18. a timid person |
| 9. a drunkard | 19. a tired person |
| 10. an embarrassed person | 20. a witch |

Sentence Fluency



Sentence Fluency

the link to instruction

Any activity that allows students to practice . .

- Developing an ear by reading aloud
- literature, journalism, poetry,
whatever
- Practicing free-writing to make
writing flow
- Using choral reading to hear
phrasing
- Writing poetry
- Playing with sentences:
beginning different ways
revising problem sentences
working toward parallel structure
building sentence length and
variety

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Writing Conventions



Conventions

the link to instruction

Any activity that allows students to practice . .

- Identifying reason for editing
- Understanding the difference between revision and editing
- Keeping editing in proportion - ideas come first
- Learning/using editing symbols
- Thinking like an editor
- Developing a proofreader's eye
- Letting students be their own editors
- Providing resources, time, support

CORRECT CONVENTIONS

- I don't have many mistakes in my paper.
- I have used capitals correctly.
- Periods, commas, exclamation marks, and quotation marks are in the right places.
- Almost every word is spelled correctly.
- I remembered to indent each paragraph.
- It would not take long to get this ready to publish.

EDITOR'S SYMBOLS

- whent spelling error
- ¶ indent (paragraph)
- ~~that~~ not needed
- ^ add
- ^ add a comma
- “ ” add quotation marks
- add a period
- ≡ capitalize
- / make a small letter
- ~ reverse order
- R/O run on sentence
- INC incomplete
- ? confusion - not clear
- ∕ take out

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