

Beginning Writer's Continuum (BWC)

How to use the continuum:

We suggest you make a copy of the Beginning Writer's Continuum and the regular 6+1 Trait[®] rubric and compare the two. As you begin to examine both documents carefully, you will notice they are VERY different in form and function. The BWC is designed to document specific, new, writing skills as they are acquired, step by step. The standard 6+1 Trait[®] rubric, on the other hand, is not developmental; instead, it assesses a range of performance across the traits (beginning to strong), and is applicable to writers of all ages, given that there is enough text to evaluate against this criteria.

If you look closely at the continuum, you will notice that by the time a writer regularly demonstrates skills described at the "3" level, you will find language in the descriptors similar to those in the regular 6+1 Trait[®] criteria. This is because the criteria by which we evaluate writing are present in the earliest of writing pieces—on a developmental continuum. When deciding which criteria to use, the BWC or the 6+1 Trait[®] rubric, ask yourself, "Which rubric will give the student and teacher the best information to improve performance next time?" *Consider the complexity of the piece you are evaluating.* If the writing sample is only a few sentences, regardless of the quality, you are better served with the BWC. If the student's writing has matured to the point he or she is able to write a complete paragraph or two, then begin transitioning to the 6+1 Trait[®] rubric. There ARE second and early third graders who write enough text and with enough sophistication that the regular rubric clearly provides a picture of their performance. But, as a general rule, most young writers are better served with the BWC.

The core of the 6+1 Trait[®] assessment model is the regular rubric, which is generally used with late third graders on up. The Beginning Writer's Continuum is an add-on piece to support teachers and students as they create their own writing process classrooms and begin building a common vocabulary and vision for good writing. What does all this mean for teachers of beginning writers? Can we actually use the traits with writers who are still working on creating a complete sentence? Orienting their letters in the same direction? Drawing? It's the best time to start! Teachers of primary students can begin building a strong foundation using the language of the traits to respond to student writing, drawing, even storytelling. The traits are there from the beginning. A drawing full of detail indicates keen observation and attention—that's **Ideas**. Sequential pictures are an indication of **Organization**. **Voice** might first show itself through speaking and storytelling. By stepping back and recognizing that writing includes thinking, listening, reading, planning, talking, drawing...we open our eyes to all sorts of possibilities. We teach our children and ourselves what rubrics are and how to use them in all different aspects of their learning; we focus on helping children internalize that "process" is a huge part of learning and that the writing process is something we all work on together.

6-Trait Assessment for Beginning Writers

1 EXPERIMENTING

2 EMERGING

3 DEVELOPING

4 CAPABLE

5 EXPERIENCED

IDEAS

- Uses scribbles for writing
- Dictates labels or a story
- Shapes that look like letters
- Line forms that imitate text
- Writes letters randomly

IDEAS

- Some recognizable words present
- Labels pictures
- Uses drawings that show detail
- Pictures are supported by some words

IDEAS

- Attempts a story or to make a point
- Illustration supports the writing
- Meaning of the general idea is recognizable/understandable
- Some ideas clear but some are still fuzzy

IDEAS

- Writing tells a story or makes a point
- Illustration (if present) enhances the writing
- Idea is generally on topic
- Details are present but not developed (lists)

IDEAS

- Presents a fresh/original idea
- Topic is narrowed and focused
- Develops one clear, main idea
- Uses interesting, important details for support.
- Writer understands topic well

ORGANIZATION

- Ability to order or group not yet present
- No sense of beginning or end
- Connections between ideas are confusing

ORGANIZATION

- No title (if requested)
- Experiments with beginnings
- Begins to group like-words/pictures
- Transitions or evidence of sequencing are haphazard

ORGANIZATION

- A title is present (if requested)
- Limited transitions present
- Beginning but no ending except "The End"
- Attempts at sequencing and transitions

ORGANIZATION

- An appropriate title is present (if requested)
- Attempts transitions from sentence to sentence
- Beginning works well and attempts an ending
- Logical sequencing
- Key ideas begin to surface

ORGANIZATION

- An original title is present (if requested)
- Transitions connect main ideas
- The opening attracts
- An effective ending is tried
- Easy to follow
- Important ideas stand out

VOICE

- Communicates feeling with size, color, shape, line in drawing or letter imitation
- Work is similar to everyone else's
- Unclear response to task
- Awareness of audience not present

VOICE

- Hints of voice present in words and phrases
- Looks different from most others
- Energy/mood is present
- Treatment of topic predictable
- Audience is fuzzy—could be anybody, anywhere

VOICE

- Expresses some predictable feelings
- Moments of individual sparkle, but then hides
- Repetition of familiar ideas reduces energy
- Awareness that the writing will be read by someone else
- Reader has limited connection to writer

VOICE

- Writing is individual and expressive
- Individual perspective becomes evident
- Personal treatment of a standard topic
- Writes to convey a story or idea to the reader
- Attempts non-standard point of view

VOICE

- Uses text to elicit a variety of emotions
- Takes some risks to say more than what is expected
- Point of view is evident
- Writes with a clear sense of audience
- Cares deeply about the topic

1
EXPERIMENTING

WORD CHOICE

- Writes letters in strings
- Imitates word patterns
- Pictures stand for words and phrases
- Copies environmental print

SENTENCE FLUENCY

- Mimics letters and words across the page
- Words stand alone
- Patterns for sentences not in evidence
- Sentence sense not yet present

CONVENTIONS

- Writes letter strings (pre-phonetic: dmRxzz)
- Attempts to create standard letters
- Attempts spacing of words, letters, symbols or pictures
- Attempts to write left to right
- Attempts to write top/down
- Punctuation, capitalization etc. not making sense, yet
- Student interpretation needed to understand text/pictures

2
EMERGING

WORD CHOICE

- Recognizable words
- Environmental words used correctly
- Attempts at phrases
- Functional language

SENTENCE FLUENCY

- Strings words together into phrases
- Attempts simple sentences
- Short, repetitive sentence patterns
- Dialogue present but not understandable

CONVENTIONS

- Attempts semi-phonetic spelling (MTR, UM, KD, etc.)
- Uses mixed upper and lower case letters
- Uses spaces between letters and words
- Consistently writes left to right
- Consistently makes effective use of top to bottom spacing
- Random punctuation
- Nonstandard grammar is common

3
DEVELOPING

WORD CHOICE

- General or ordinary words
- Attempts new words but they don't always fit
- Settles for the word or phrase that "will do"
- Big words used only to impress reader
- Relies on slang, clichés, or repetition

SENTENCE FLUENCY

- Uses simple sentences
- Sentences tend to begin the same
- Experiments with other sentence patterns
- Reader may have to reread to follow the meaning
- Dialogue present but needs interpretation

CONVENTIONS

- Uses phonetic spelling (MOSTR, HUMN, KLOSD, etc.) on personal words
- Spelling of high frequency words still spotty
- Uses capitals at the beginning of sentences
- Usually uses end punctuation correctly (.!?)
- Experiments with other punctuation
- Long paper may be written as one paragraph
- Attempts standard grammar

4
CAPABLE

WORD CHOICE

- Uses favorite words correctly
- Experiments with new and different words with some success
- Tries to choose words for specificity
- Attempts to use descriptive words to create images

SENTENCE FLUENCY

- Simple and compound sentences present and effective
- Attempts complex sentences
- Not all sentences begin the same
- Sections of writing have rhythm and flow

CONVENTIONS

- Transitional spelling on less frequent words (MONSTUR, HUMUN, CLOSED, etc.)
- Spelling of high frequency words usually correct
- Capitals at the beginning of sentences and variable use on proper nouns
- End punctuation is correct (.!?) and other punctuation is attempted (such as commas)
- Paragraphing variable but present
- Noun/pronoun agreement, verb tenses, subject/verb agreement

5
EXPERIENCED

WORD CHOICE

- Everyday words used well
- Precise, accurate, fresh, original words
- Creates vivid images in a natural way
- Avoids repetition, clichés or vague language
- Attempts at figurative language

SENTENCE FLUENCY

- Consistently uses sentence variety
- Sentence structure is correct and creative
- Variety of sentence beginnings
- Natural rhythm, cadence and flow
- Sentences have texture which clarify the important idea

CONVENTIONS

- High frequency words are spelled correctly and very close on other words
- Capitals used for obvious proper nouns as well as sentence beginnings
- Basic punctuation is used correctly and/or creatively
- Indents consistently to show paragraphs
- Shows control over standard grammar

1
EXPERIMENTING

PRESENTATION

- Letters and words are strings with no spacing
- There is no consistent shape to letters
- Letters are scattered randomly on the page
- Pictures are placed randomly on the page
- There is no connection between words and pictures

2
EMERGING

PRESENTATION

- An attempt is made to group letters into words
- Many letters are consistent shape, with few that are unreadable
- There are some examples of letters grouped to make words
- An attempt is made to group pictures with text
- Some words are used to enhance the meaning of pictures, e.g., captions

3
DEVELOPING

PRESENTATION

- Most letters and words are readable with an attempt at spacing
- There are some discrepancies in letter shape, but they are easily identifiable
- Letters are grouped to make distinguishable words and phrases
- Placement of pictures reflects the meaning of the text
- Pictures are placed with an attempt to connect them to captions or text

4
CAPABLE

PRESENTATION

- Words are easily readable with a consistent attempt at words spacing
- Handwriting begins to show style, with consistent letter shape
- An attempt is made to group words into identifiable sentences
- Pictures are used to clarify meaning in text
- Most pictures are located with meaningful text or captions

5
EXPERIENCED

PRESENTATION

- Style of handwriting is consistent and words evenly spaced
- Letters are well-formed and easy to read
- Words are grouped by sentence or paragraph for easy understanding
- Pictures and maps are used effectively to enhance understanding
- Pictures are located with text to create alignment and flow of meaning