



A

Writing

Handbook

for

Families

Helena School District #1

## Writing Information for Families

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Over the past several years, the Helena School District has been focusing on improving student writing. Staff members have participated in professional development using the 6+1 Trait Writing Model and the writing process. It is our hope that this handbook will provide you with helpful information about the traits and how you can support your student writers at home as we work with them at school.

According to the Helena School District curriculum standards, all students should:

- Write clearly and effectively
- Write in a variety of forms for different audiences and purposes
- Understand and use the steps in the writing process
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of written work

The traits are a convenient way of talking and thinking about writing. They provide a language for describing the qualities that most readers think are important in good writing. Classroom teachers and students use 6 Trait assessment results to communicate about the student as a writer, to set goals, and to define instruction in writing.

### The 6+1 Trait™ of Effective Writing

<p>1. <b>IDEAS</b> The ideas are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, and the details that enrich and develop the theme.</p>	<p>4. <b>WORD CHOICE</b> Word choice is the use of rich, precise language that moves and enlightens the reader.</p>
<p>2. <b>ORGANIZATION</b> Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, and the logical and sometimes intriguing pattern of the ideas.</p>	<p>5. <b>SENTENCE FLUENCY</b> Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, and the way in which the writing plays to the ear—not just to the eye.</p>
<p>3. <b>VOICE</b> The voice is the heart and soul, the magic, the wit, along with the feeling and conviction of the individual writer coming out through the words.</p>	<p>6. <b>CONVENTIONS</b> Conventions are the mechanical correctness of the piece: spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing, use of capitals, and punctuation.</p>



## Suggested Writing Activities for Home

- Provide writing materials of all kinds, colors, textures, and sizes: pens, pencils, felt tip pens, calligraphy pens, post-it notes...whatever will invite your student writer to explore writing in original, colorful ways is appropriate.
- To encourage revision, add highlighting pens, scissors, and glue or tape to your list of writing materials. These materials facilitate adding, deleting, cutting apart, and putting together ideas in different ways.
- Create a photo album or scrapbook representing "a year in the life of." Work with your children to create a short introduction along with labels and captions that portray strong voice and word choice.
- Provide a print-rich environment in your home with magazines, subscriptions, books, maps, direction manuals, e-mail, cookbooks, and other written materials.
- Encourage letter writing for developing a sense of voice, audience, and purpose. Letters to relatives, sports figures, celebrities, businesses, and organizations are some examples. Receiving responses will promote even more letter writing.
- Encourage the writing and addressing of personal greeting cards, invitations, and thank-you notes.
- Have your children assist in writing grocery lists and encourage them to write down clear phone messages.
- Work with your children to keep a writer's notebook of observations, quotes, favorite words, and future writing ideas.



"Children learn to write by writing, and we are most helpful to them when we appreciate and encourage their best attempts."

Regie Routman, Transitions

### **Tips for Parents to Encourage Student Writing**

- Coach - don't write - for your student. Question, listen, and talk about their writing together. Students need to do their own drafting, revising, and editing with you serving as the coach on the sidelines.
- Always look for what is done well in the writing and offer lots of praise. Writing, thinking on paper, is a most challenging task. Children need encouragement to be successful.
- When working with your student writer, focus on ideas and content first. Save editing until the ideas are clear, complete, and focused.
- Listen attentively as your children read their writing to you. Be eager to hear more and enthusiastic about their first efforts.
- Encourage even the youngest writers to "read" their writing aloud whether it is scribbles, drawings or strings of letters. Talk together about the story.
- Read aloud to your children - no matter what their age. Discuss good examples of writing, which might include newspaper or magazine articles, poetry, descriptions from travel brochures, instructions on toys and games, and fiction and non-fiction.
- Share your own writing with your children. Ask for their feedback on your efforts.
- Turn off the TV, visit the library on a regular basis and talk with your children about their thoughts and feelings.
- Subscribe to the newspaper and share articles with your children.
- Read, read, read!! Better readers always make better writers.

