

Student-Friendly Explanations of the Four Traits on Rubric

IDEAS are an important part of the writing. Ideas convey the writer’s message and purpose. Details, examples, and information support the main idea and clarify the writer’s intent. Ideas are the “what” of a piece of writing.

- Focuses and develops the topic-the writer stays on the topic throughout the piece from start to finish; writes enough to get the message across so the reader does not have to fill in any blanks
- Relevant and specific details, examples, and information- the writer uses these to support the main idea and make the writing more interesting and clear

ORGANIZATION is how writers arrange their ideas. The organization is logical, apparent, and effective in helping the writer communicate the message/purpose. An interesting introduction catches the reader’s attention; the body (the middle) details the message; and a satisfying conclusion finishes the piece. Transitions help tie the ideas together and should be appropriate for the type of writing.

- Coherence-all the ideas are related and connected and fit together well; the absence of irrelevancies and digressions that do not support the topic
- Structure-the way the writer chooses to connect ideas to support the message/purpose (e.g., chronological order, cause and effect, problem/solution, etc.); appropriate for the type of writing; the ways people “organize their thoughts” on paper

VOICE is how writers express their ideas and feelings. The personality of the writer is present in the writing and tells the reader about the writer. Voice is the connection the writer establishes with the audience and is natural, authentic and not forced or contrived. Specific word choice (active verbs, appropriate modifiers) is one way the writer can show voice.

- Commitment-staying with the main idea/message/purpose
- Address the audience- the writer speaks directly and appropriately to the reader
- Involve the audience- the writer includes the audience in the piece so the reader is interested in the writer and the message
- Engage the audience-the writer writes in a way that compels the reader to continue reading until the end
- Improper word choice- words that do not fit and are not right for the audience, situation, or purpose of the writing
- Imprecise word choice-words that are vague and do not fit with the writer’s intent or convey much meaning; words seem like fillers or just take up space

CONVENTIONS refer to the mechanical correctness of a paper, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar/usage. Sentence structure is also included under this trait. Conventions are the “tools” writers use to get their points across and help the audience understand their meaning.

- Grammar/usage-the rules by which words are used and combined into sentences
- Sentence structure-the arrangement of words in a sentence; sentences are simple, compound, complex, and compound complex.
- Standard English-the correct and acceptable use of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation