



All About Writing Standard #4: Standard Progression and Research Base



6th – 12th Writing Structures

6 th - 8 th Grade	9 th - 10 th Grade	11 th - 12 th Grade
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
About Standard #4		
High school students are expected to produce writing that is clear and understandable to the reader. Task (type of writing assignment), audience (the intended reader), and purpose (the writer’s designated reason for writing) should be reflected in the student’s style, organization, and development of a topic		



Research Base for Standard #4: Developing Writing: Traits and Structures

Part of the difficulty in teaching and learning writing is that few tasks involve so many complex, interwoven layers as writing. Composing a piece of written communication demands an understanding of the content, knowledge of the audience and the context, and the ability to use appropriate conventions for that audience and context.

Standard Four of the Common Core State Standards addresses the development of writing. Anchor Standard Four states: Anchor Standard #4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. Two specific areas of writing that are intended to be fully understood by teachers when employing this standard:

Features of effective writing or often referred to as writing traits, and writing structures:

Writing traits have been cited in a multitude of research for decades and including the traits in a writing program is necessary for students to become college and career ready. Traits support the actual structure of a text. Using the traits develops the structure through focusing on the topic, vocabulary choice specific to a particular structure and how the entire piece is organized.

Let's define traits first. These can be considered the features of effective writing. There are 5 traits that gain the most promotion: focus, organization, support and elaboration, style and conventions. The following definitions assist in understanding what teachers should be instructing and reviewing in student writing. They are retrieved from the Learn NC, a division of the University of North Carolina's Chapel Hill School of Education:

- **Focus (Also referred to as Ideas)**

Focus is the topic/subject established by the writer in response to the writing task. [Focus is the main message of the paper]. The writer must clearly establish a focus as he/she fulfills the assignment. If the writer retreats from the subject matter presented or addresses it too broadly, the focus is weakened. If the reader is confused about the subject matter, the writer has not effectively established a focus. If the reader is engaged and not confused, the writer probably has been effective in establishing a focus.

- **Organization**

Organization is the progression, relatedness, and completeness of ideas. [Organization addresses the structure of a text or paper.] The writer establishes for the reader a well-organized composition, which exhibits a connected purpose through the development of elements forming an effective beginning, middle, and end. The response demonstrates a clear progression of related ideas and/or events and is unified and complete.

- **Support and Elaboration**

Support and Elaboration is the extension and development of the topic/subject. The writer provides sufficient elaboration to present the ideas and/or events clearly. The writer must present his/her ideas with enough power and clarity to cause the support to be sufficient. Effective use of concrete, specific details strengthens the power of the response. Insufficiency is often characterized by undeveloped details, redundancy, and the repetitious paraphrasing of the same point. Sufficiency has less to do with amount than with the weight or power of the information that is provided.

- **Style (Also referred to as Voice, Word Choice and Sentence Fluency)**

Style is the control of language that is appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context of the writing task. The writer's style is evident through word choice and sentence fluency. [Voice is the personal tone of the writer]. Skillful use of precise, purposeful vocabulary enhances the effectiveness of the composition through the use of appropriate words, phrases and descriptions that engage the audience.

Sentence fluency involves using a variety of sentence styles to establish effective relationships between and among ideas, causes, and/or statements appropriate to the task.

- **Conventions**

Conventions involve correctness in sentence formation, usage, and mechanics. The writer has control of grammatical conventions that are appropriate to the writing task. Errors, if present, do not impede the reader’s understanding of the ideas conveyed.

Tips for Effective Writing:

Allowing students to focus their attention on just one feature at a time. By reducing the cognitive demands of writing, students can focus on the aspect of writing that is most important at each step of the writing process.

Providing students with more opportunities to succeed by focusing on areas of strength as well as weakness. Evaluating student writing with five [or six] distinct scores helps students to see themselves as multidimensional writers, with weaknesses and strengths. Students who are poor spellers can be recognized for the quality of their ideas, while perfect spellers may realize that correct writing is not necessarily interesting writing. Students can learn to recognize their strengths and work to improve their areas of weakness.

Making expectations visible to students. When students know the criteria by which they will be evaluated, they no longer have to rely on the teacher to make judgments about the quality of their writing. They can instead use the Features to revise their writing continually.

Teaching students to become critical readers of their own writing. Students who are taught to diagnose and correct their own writing problems are on their way to becoming self-regulated, independent writers. By providing instructional support, including demonstrations of writing strategies, writing “think-alouds,” guided practice in small-group settings, conferences with teacher and peers, and opportunities to transfer strategies to new contexts and genres of writing, teachers can move students toward independence.

Teaching students to become critical readers of the writing of others. Students can use the Features to evaluate their peer’ writing in order to give constructive feedback during conferences. Students can also learn to read critically and evaluate the writing of professional authors and to appropriate their techniques. (Learn NC, 2017)

Text structure refers to how the information within a written text is organized. There is no one set structure or framework that covers all possible forms of written communication, except perhaps that writing should start with an introduction and finish with a conclusion. There are however many examples of structures for different forms of writing available on the web. If expecting students to write to a specific structure, such as an argument, it is important to provide a model of that particular type of writing and opportunities to practice.

Students should also have opportunities to view and analyze different forms of text structures that well regarded authors use. Students can determine if the author’s text structure supported the central ideas throughout the text and how one portion of a text fits and ties into another portion. Finally, providing well written examples of text structures, allows students to analyze an author’s purpose. In turn, students can organize their writing to mimic a specific structure. Students can take models of structure and then use that structure for their own writing

There are a few text structure examples that most students will engage with during their scholastic years. The following link will help identify, define and provide a strategy to support teachers with text structure: <http://www.adlit.org/strategies/23336/>

References

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