

QUALITY WRITING ATTRIBUTES

Ideas and Content are to be fully developed through the presentation of your main topic. Pick something that is important or interesting to you. Keep your topic small enough to handle well with supportive details and make your ideas crystal clear. Avoid general statements like, "Our trip in the Rockies was exciting." Instead, say, "We woke up to find two very hungry black bears snooping through our camping supplies."

Organization allows your writing to flow together with a natural sequence of information or action. Organization gives your writing direction and it helps the reader move through the ideas in a purposeful way. Use clever openings to hook the reader right from the beginning and provide a sense of ending. Don't start by saying, "I am going to tell you about whales." Rather, try something like, "Whales are amazing animals, not only for their size but also for their music."

Sentence Fluency relates to the rhythm and structure of your writing. Sentence beginnings should not be repetitive, nor should sentences generally be the same length. Read aloud what you write to see if there is an effective variation in your sentence patterns. Avoid beginnings that are repetitive and avoid sentence lengths that drift on too long or that are short and choppy; "We explored the beach. We had fun. We saw petrels flying. Petrels are common on the coast." Combine short sentences: "We explored the beach and watched petrels soar overhead in search of food."

Word Choice invites the use of a variety of words to create original and interesting expressions. As you read and listen to what others write and say, you cultivate a rich vocabulary of precise and colorful words that let you say exactly what you want. This is the essence of good word choice. Carefully chosen words create vivid pictures. Don't say, "The big dog was mean." Say, "A hundred pounds of snarling yellow fur launched itself from the porch, straining at a rope as thin as spaghetti."

Voice is the communication of your personality coming through your writing. Think about your reader as you write. Write directly to that person just as if he or she were standing there talking to you. Be yourself. Readers respond to sincerity, honesty, and conviction.

Conventions are the rules of language involving proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, and presentation in your writing. Without attention to conventions, others may not be able to understand what you wish to communicate. Problems with spelling and grammar interfere with the reading process and diminish the cleverness of your ideas, unique voice, and vibrant word choice. You must be the first editor of your writing by proofreading to ensure the text is as error-free as possible.

"We don't want (the writer) to describe every ride at Disneyland or tell that the Grand Canyon is awesome.... If one of the rides at Disneyland got stuck, or if somebody fell into the Grand Canyon, that would be worth hearing about."

--William Zinsser

"It takes a little time to think of a creative leader that captures the readers attention. Effective ones can begin with a quotation from somebody, a bold statement, or reflection on personal experience."

--Clifford Trafzer

"Clarity. Clarity. Clarity. When you become hopelessly mired in a sentence, it is best to start fresh."

--Strunk and White,
The Elements of Style

"Words are to writing what colors are to painting. The greater variety with shades and hues enriches the work in wonderful ways. Make a personal thesaurus of favorite expressions that captivate your imagination."

--Anita Deyneka

"Voice separates writing that is read from writing that is not read... voice is the writer revealed."

--Donald Murray

"The first editor of any piece is always the writer..."

--Naucie Atwell