

ADVICE for PARENTS of YOUNG WRITERS by Jean MacLeod Organization & Voice



"I have an idea I want to write about... but I don't know how to do it!" is the common, frustrated lament of a student overwhelmed by a school writing assignment. Instead of getting frustrated in return, we parents can give our children a helpful push in the right organizational direction, by reinforcing what Hamilton teachers are introducing through the 6 + 1 Traits in their classrooms.

The traits are: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions *plus* Presentation; Hamilton students will be spending March on Voice and are currently concentrating on Organization.

Organization provides the framework for a student's ideas and writing. A story needs a beginning, a middle and an end, but there are different types of organizing options within this framework: space (describing environment), time (chronological events), content (details and categories about a specific subject) and perspective (personal viewpoint). It's like having four children and asking them all to clean up their own incredibly messy bedrooms; each child will approach the task differently! As a parent, you know your child's personality and interests, and can use one of the four options to suggest ways to organize their writing.

Voice is the "heart and soul" of writing. The **Ideas** trait tells us to "write what you know", and the Voice trait adds, "write what you think and *feel*". Voice is very individual- it expresses the personality of the writer, and is flavored with her/his thoughts and emotions. Writer Anne Lamott said "*good writing is about telling the truth*", and it is important that students are encouraged to write honestly-- to be themselves. Parents can help children understand the concept of personal Voice by switching the main character in picture books. Jon Scieszka does this beautifully in his children's book, "The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs", where he writes the classic story from the viewpoint of the Big Bad Wolf! Stepping into another's point of view will help a student expand their own perspective—and it's fun to do!

Organization is the framework of good writing, and **Voice** makes good writing sing. These traits, plus **Ideas**, are the tools of strong, creative students who are able to write cohesively, with imagination and personal style.

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