A Handbook Incorporating Step Up to Writing with the Six Traits of Writing for Grades 1-4 2006-2007 School Year Sartell-St. Stephen Public Schools
Step Up To Writing Initiative For Students In PreK-12th Grade

Dear Parents:

The Sartell – St. Stephen School District is proud to announce the implementation of Step Up to Writing, a research-based approach designed to improve the writing skills of students in PreK-12th grade. This process focuses on writing as well as reading, listening, and speaking and incorporates the elements from the Six Traits of Writing program.

The Step Up to Writing approach was first implemented in our district during the 2005-2006 school year. At that time, staff studied our district wide student writing information, discussed student and staff needs, and determined that writing would continue to be a priority for success in school and later in life. It was then decided that the Step Up to Writing approach should be incorporated with the Six Traits of Writing program to provide our “next steps” for improving students’ writing skills and their learning.

In our classrooms, student authors are busy creating, revising, and publishing. It is a very exciting atmosphere! In the early grades, the Step Up to Writing process is introduced through the reading of literature in many curricular areas. As the children continue through the grades, writing is implemented across a variety of subject areas.

With regards to the writing process, students write and get feedback several times a week. Some selected projects may be scored for specific traits. As students advance, they are responsible for their own editing, which enhances learning. They may also be involved in peer editing to provide information on the writing skills of other students.

As final projects are sent home, you may see a writing scale or rubric attached to your child’s work. This rubric will be used by both students and teachers as a checklist to provide feedback to both readers on the individual student’s work.

In conclusion, our primary goal is to improve your child’s writing performance. Equally as important and exciting is having students be enthusiastic and enjoy writing! We are very proud to have the opportunity to incorporate the new district initiative, Step Up to Writing, with the components of the Six Traits of Writing into our curriculum. We truly believe that the two programs working in concert will provide the important attributes of an excellent writing program.

Sincerely,

Grade 1-4 Teachers from Oak Ridge and Pine Meadow Elementary Schools

“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

♦ 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 first 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 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 be enthusiastic about their efforts.

♦ 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/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.
**The Step Up To Writing Methods**

Guide students as they:
- Learn to write clear, concise, organized papers
- Organize and plan a story

Teach students to:
- Focus their ideas by writing great topic sentences and thesis statements
- Connect ideas by using a variety of transitions
- Write leads for stories and use story transitions effectively

Help students:
- Establish a sense of order and control over the information they include in a paper
- Write entertaining and detailed narratives

Require students to:
- Include accurate reasons, details, or facts to support their topic
- Give examples and explanations for any details, reasons, or fact they include
- Write conclusions that stay on topic and are helpful to their readers
- Write endings that leave readers with feelings and ideas to ponder

Give students:
- The guidance, support, and direction they need to become successful writers

**The Step Up To Writing Approach**

Empowers students by:
- Improving reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills
- Teaching students to think
- Giving students the skills to complete class and homework assignments
- Increasing students' confidence in their academic skills
- Helping every student experience success
- Teaching skills that can be used for a lifetime
- Motivating students to welcome and enjoy writing

Trains staff members to:
- Improve the quality and quantity of writing done by all students
- Create common goals for all teachers and support staff
- Raise writing assessment scores
- Create a sense of excitement about reading, writing, and learning
- Prepare students for real-world writing
- Identifying clear goals for reading and writing
- Confirming the success of the school's writing program

**Commonly Used Types of Writing**

We write in our daily lives for a variety of reasons, both formally and informally. Moreover, our writing addresses different audiences and various purposes. We know that students will also write for many different reasons throughout their lives. Therefore, we wanted to share information with you regarding some commonly used types of writing. The Step Up To Writing process and strategies combined with the Six Traits of Writing elements are used for instruction and assessment in these areas.

- **Narrative writing:** recounts a personal experience or story and always includes characters, setting, and plot (examples: novel, short story, journal)
- **Descriptive writing:** creates vivid images in the reader’s mind and uses “just right” details to paint “word pictures” (examples: menu, travel brochure, poster)
- **Expository writing:** informs, explains, clarifies, or defines (examples: research paper, essay, report)
- **Persuasive writing:** informs and attempts to convince the reader to take the same stand (examples: movie review, restaurant critique, letter to the editor, editorial)
- **Technical writing:** presents specialized/researched information, but the fact that it is technical does not mean it has to be flat and dull (examples: a VCR manual, a driver’s manual, a legal document, a cookbook)
- **Business writing:** provides information in a way that is clear, well-organized, efficient and usually answers a question, summarizes work completed, or proposes new strategies (examples: memo, proposal, long range plan, business letter)
This flowchart outlines a general writing process for you. Not all writing is evaluated, nor will all writing go through every step of the writing process.

**Pre-Writing**
- think/observe
- list/brainstorm
- select topic/audience
- organize thoughts

**Draft**
- write rough copy
- focus on content
- topic sentence with supporting details
- beginning, middle, ending

**Revise**
- read aloud
- check for 6 Traits
  1. __________
  2. __________
  3. __________
  4. __________
  5. __________
  6. __________
- add, delete, change

**Editing**
- focus on conventions
- use standard proof-reading marks

**Publishing**
- publish final draft: recopy neatly
- share finished writing with an audience

**THE SIX-TRAITS OF EFFECTIVE WRITING**

These are the elements from the Six Traits of Writing program. They are a simple and convenient way of talking and thinking about writing and have been used throughout time by writers such as Shakespeare, Thomas Jefferson, and even Maya Angelou to the present. The traits provide a language for describing the qualities that most readers believe are important in good writing. More specific information on the Six Traits of Writing is included on the next pages of this brochure.

1. **IDEAS**
The ideas are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, and the details that enrich and develop that theme.

2. **ORGANIZATION**
Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing. It is both skeleton and glue. Strong organization begins with a purposeful, engaging lead, a middle filled with details, and a thought-provoking end.

3. **VOICE**
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.

4. **WORD CHOICE**
Word choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens the reader.

5. **SENTENCE FLUENCY**
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.

6. **CONVENTIONS**
Conventions are the mechanical correctness of the piece: spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing, use of capitals, and punctuation.
The Six Traits of Writing approach is comprised of six different elements. The first of the six basic writing traits is IDEAS. A paper with good IDEAS is clear, focused, and holds the reader’s attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme or story line.

Ideas are the heart of the message of the writing. They are what we have to say and the reason we are writing. To write well, it is important for us to know about our subject. We need to connect with our experiences or thoroughly research the topic.

Parents can suggest that their children ask the following questions about their writing:

♦ Is my message clear?
♦ Do I know enough about my topic?
♦ Did I try hard to make it interesting?
♦ Is my topic small and focused?
♦ Did I show what was happening rather than just telling?

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VOICE tells the reader who we are and what we feel. VOICE gives our writing personality, flavor, and style. In a paper with good VOICE, the writer speaks directly to the reader in an individualistic, expressive, and engaging manner. Clearly, the writer is involved in the text, is sensitive to the needs of an audience, and is writing to be read.

Parents can suggest that their children ask the following questions about their writing:

♦ Does this writing sound like me?
♦ Did I say what I think and feel?
♦ Does it have energy and passion?
♦ Is it appropriate for my audience and purpose?

To help develop VOICE in our writing, we must think about our readers as we write. Our writing will then show our sense of connection to the reader, our honesty, and our courage to say what we truly think and feel.

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WORD CHOICE enriches and enlivens our writing. Precise words add energy and clarity to our work. In a paper with strong WORD CHOICE, words convey the intended message in a clear, interesting, and natural way.

Parents can suggest that their children ask the following questions about their writing:

♦ Will my reader understand my words?
♦ Did I use words I enjoy?
♦ Were my words accurate, original, and just right?
♦ Did I use energetic verbs?

As we choose words for our writing, we use language to paint a picture. We want to use precise, vivid language to create a strong and clear picture in the mind of our reader.
SENTENCE FLUENCY gives our writing a sense of rhythm and grace. Writing with strong SENTENCE FLUENCY has an easy flow and rhythm when read aloud. Sentences are well built, with strong and varied structures that allow expressive oral reading.

Our sentences should be clear and powerful. Every sentence should work hard to create just the right meaning. A good way to assess our writing for SENTENCE FLUENCY is to read our work aloud. As our writing skills grow, we will learn more and varied ways to sculpt our writing.

Parents can suggest that their children ask the following questions about their writing:

♦ Do my sentences begin in different ways?
♦ Are some sentences long and some short?
♦ Is it easy to read my work aloud with lots of expression?

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CONVENTIONS

When we have finished revising our work, we are ready to edit and proofread. It’s like wrapping a package or preparing for guests – we want to prepare our writing so that others can read and enjoy it. The writer who uses CONVENTIONS effectively demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing CONVENTIONS (e.g. grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, paragraphing), using them to enhance readability and communicate meaning.

CONVENTIONS deal with fixing our work; using them correctly will guarantee that our work is as error-free as possible.

Parents can suggest that their children ask the following questions about their writing:

♦ Is my spelling correct?
♦ Did I correctly use periods, question marks, commas, quotation marks, and other marks of punctuation?
♦ Did I use capital letters correctly?
♦ Did I use paragraphs correctly?

SAMPLE RUBRIC/SCORING GUIDE FOR THE TRAIT OF “CONVENTIONS”

This is a sample scoring guide or rubric that teachers use to score students’ writing. The teachers use a scoring of 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. At the end of this brochure, you will find a more detailed scoring guide is used by teachers to provide feedback to students on their writing.

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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Just Beginning Editing Not Under Control Yet</td>
<td>On My Way About Half-way Home</td>
<td>Mostly Correct</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>It would take a first reading to decode and then a second reading to get the meaning of my paper.</td>
<td>A number of bothersome mistakes in my paper need to be cleaned up before I am ready to publish.</td>
<td>-Spelling errors are common, even on simple words. It may not always be right on the harder words.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>-My paper has errors in punctuation and grammar that send the reader back to the beginning of a sentence to sort things out.</td>
<td>-Most sentences and proper nouns begin with capitals, but a few have been overlooked.</td>
<td>-Periods, commas, exclamation marks, and quotation marks are in the right places.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>-I have capital letters scattered all over the place or not at all.</td>
<td>-Paragraphs are present, but not all begin in the right spots.</td>
<td>-My spelling is accurate.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>-I don’t have a good handle on paragraphs yet.</td>
<td>-A few problems with grammar and punctuation might make a reader stumble or pause now and again.</td>
<td>-Every paragraph is indented to show where a new idea begins.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-The truth is, I haven’t spent much time editing this paper.</td>
<td>-My paper reads like a first draft: I was more concerned with getting my ideas down than making sure all the editing was completed.</td>
<td>-My grammar and usage is consistent and shows control.</td>
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