

Dear Parents:

Last Tuesday night Debbie Rutherford led a workshop for the primary school parents about the Six Traits model of writing that AIS Primary School has adopted this year. We were very excited to welcome about 60 interested parents in the auditorium. This is a short synopsis of the main points Debbie made during her 90 minute presentation. This model of writing is based on the notion that good writing has distinctive characteristics, which are identifiable and teachable: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Structure and Conventions. In a nutshell these traits can be described as follows:

**Ideas**

The ideas are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, together with the details that enrich and develop that theme.

**Organization**

Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the logical and sometimes intriguing pattern of the ideas.

**Voice**

The voice is the heart and soul, the magic, the will, along with the feeling and conviction of the individual writer coming out through the words.

**Word Choice**

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

**Sentence Fluency:**

Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of work patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear - not just to the eye.

**Convention**

Conventions are the mechanical correctness of the piece - spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing, use of capitals, and punctuation.

The Six Trait model provides us with a common language and consistency for talking about writing. It teaches students what “good” looks like and it gives them a roadmap to revise and improve their writing based on known criteria. Therefore, it makes revision manageable and purposeful. Teachers use checklists and rubrics with their students to make it clear what we value in writing and to keep us consistent. These lists teach us what makes writing work and they make us accountable to others.

In the classroom, teachers use models in literature to teach the traits, sample papers and a variety of teaching strategies. These strategies are planned for and reflected upon by the whole grade level team. AIS’s goal is to provide as many opportunities as possible for transfer between the two languages the student is learning in. Most of our students are native speakers of one of the languages they are enrolled in and they should be able to develop skills and knowledge in this language which will be used to enhance the other language they are learning.

The rubrics teacher and students use to assess the writing indicate a snapshot into the student's writing ability. They are not used to grade or evaluate the writing; rather they are a tool that provides teachers and students with valuable information on how to further strengthen the writing skills of one particular student. Students are encouraged to self assess their own writing before they are conferencing with a teacher about it.

Debbie suggested that parents talk to their children about their writing in order to support them. She distributed a flyer with sample questions to ask young writers. For example:  
“What is the main thing you want to tell your reader?”  
“Do you have enough information to write about this topic?”  
“Read your lead out loud. Are you happy with it?” We have additional handouts if you are interested. Please email [sbecker@aischool.org](mailto:sbecker@aischool.org) if you would like one. Debbie also spoke about supporting children by helping them to generate lists about topics, prioritize and celebrate their ideas and achievements.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with if you have further questions. We will continue to communicate our progress with the parent community.

Simone Becker, Literacy Coordinator