

Beginning Writer's Continuum (BWC)

How to use the continuum:

We suggest you make a copy of the Beginning Writer's Continuum and the regular 6+1 Trait[®] rubric and compare the two. As you begin to examine both documents carefully, you will notice they are VERY different in form and function. The BWC is designed to document specific, new, writing skills as they are acquired, step by step. The standard 6+1 Trait[®] rubric, on the other hand, is not developmental; instead, it assesses a range of performance across the traits (beginning to strong), and is applicable to writers of all ages, given that there is enough text to evaluate against this criteria.

If you look closely at the continuum, you will notice that by the time a writer regularly demonstrates skills described at the "3" level, you will find language in the descriptors similar to those in the regular 6+1 Trait[®] criteria. This is because the criteria by which we evaluate writing are present in the earliest of writing pieces—on a developmental continuum. When deciding which criteria to use, the BWC or the 6+1 Trait[®] rubric, ask yourself, "Which rubric will give the student and teacher the best information to improve performance next time?" *Consider the complexity of the piece you are evaluating.* If the writing sample is only a few sentences, regardless of the quality, you are better served with the BWC. If the student's writing has matured to the point he or she is able to write a complete paragraph or two, then begin transitioning to the 6+1 Trait[®] rubric. There ARE second and early third graders who write enough text and with enough sophistication that the regular rubric clearly provides a picture of their performance. But, as a general rule, most young writers are better served with the BWC.

The core of the 6+1 Trait[®] assessment model is the regular rubric, which is generally used with late third graders on up. The Beginning Writer's Continuum is an add-on piece to support teachers and students as they create their own writing process classrooms and begin building a common vocabulary and vision for good writing. What does all this mean for teachers of beginning writers? Can we actually use the traits with writers who are still working on creating a complete sentence? Orienting their letters in the same direction? Drawing? It's the best time to start! Teachers of primary students can begin building a strong foundation using the language of the traits to respond to student writing, drawing, even storytelling. The traits are there from the beginning. A drawing full of detail indicates keen observation and attention—that's **Ideas**. Sequential pictures are an indication of **Organization**. **Voice** might first show itself through speaking and storytelling. By stepping back and recognizing that writing includes thinking, listening, reading, planning, talking, drawing...we open our eyes to all sorts of possibilities. We teach our children and ourselves what rubrics are and how to use them in all different aspects of their learning; we focus on helping children internalize that "process" is a huge part of learning and that the writing process is something we all work on together.