

6 + 1 Trait Writing Model: Summary of Findings

Impact on Fifth-Grade Student Writing Achievement

A definitive five-year study on the traits of writing was conducted by Education Northwest, Portland, Oregon, and published by the Department of Education, IES (Institute of Education Science) in December 2011. **The study provides high-quality evidence of the effectiveness of the analytical trait-based model for increasing student achievement in writing.** Data for the cluster-randomized experimental study were collected from participating fifth-grade teachers and students in 74 Oregon schools. Two cohorts of schools participated in the study across two consecutive years, 2008/09 and 2009/10. Teachers who worked in the 74 Oregon schools were randomly assigned to two study conditions: 1) the treatment condition included 102 teachers and 2,230 students; and 2) the control condition included 94 teachers and 1,931 students. Teachers in the treatment group received professional development that enabled them to implement The 6+1 Trait® Writing Model in their classrooms according to their own style and preferences.

Grade 5 students—23.7 percent of whom were from a racial or ethnic group and 48.9 percent were eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch—were chosen as the target population because the development of academic writing skills is key for this grade level. This is a time when students focus on learning expository and persuasive writing, which will be used in much of their subsequent academic careers (Common Core State Standards Initiative 2010).

Three Research Questions

The experiment was intended primarily to determine the impact of the intervention on student writing achievement during the first year of implementation, under conditions that would be typical for teachers receiving 6+1 Trait Writing professional development. The study was designed to answer one confirmatory and two exploratory research questions. The confirmatory research question was addressed using student essays, collected in September and again in May, and scored holistically for overall writing quality:

- What is the impact of 6+1 Trait Writing on fifth-grade student achievement in writing?
- What is the impact of 6+1 Trait Writing on fifth-grade student achievement in particular traits of writing?
- Does the impact of 6+1 Trait Writing on fifth-grade student achievement vary according to student gender or ethnicity?

The Findings: The Effect of 6+1 Trait Writing on Fifth-Grade Student Achievement

The use of the 6+1 Trait Writing model caused a statistically significant difference in student writing scores, with an effect size of 0.109 ($p=.023$). This means that the estimated average score of students in the treatment group was 0.11 standard deviations higher than the estimated average score of students in the control group. An intervention with an effect size of 0.11 would increase the average level of achievement from the 50th to the 54th percentile.

In addition to the analysis of holistic writing scores, exploratory analyses found statistically significant differences between control and treatment group students on three of the six specific outcome measures of particular writing traits —organization, voice, and word choice—with effect sizes ranging from 0.117 to 0.144 ($p=.031$ to $.018$). For the other three traits—ideas, sentence fluency, and conventions—the mean outcome score of students in the treatment condition was higher than that of students in the control condition, but these differences were too small to be considered statistically significant given the size and sensitivity of the experiment. Additional exploratory analyses of holistic writing scores found no differential effects of the intervention based on student ethnicity or gender.

