Teaching the Foundation for Skillful Writing: Assessing the Traits of Writing

EDUO 9207 3 Graduate-Level Credits/Units

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Section A, Part 1 – Introduction

Welcome to **Teaching the Foundation for Skillful Writing,** a series of courses designed by Dominican University of California, Division of Continuing Education. This course supports the implementation of the Common Core Anchor Standards for Writing.

This series of courses will lay the foundation for a systematic approach to the teaching of writing, one aspect at a time, through the use of the following writing traits:

- **Ideas**
- **Organization**
- **Voice**
- **Word Choice**
- **Sentence Fluency**
- **Conventions & Presentation**

By learning and using these trait vocabulary codes, both instructor and student will have a common understanding of how to assess and improve writing. This approach helps make the teaching of writing more manageable.

Using the traits of writing helps make the most of the opportunities to practice writing. In today's standards-based educational environment, with much emphasis on preparing for annual testing, teachers must carefully choose their focus. Helping students to hone one trait at a time gives developing writers time to review and assess their work in more depth, with the meaningful intention of improving their writing.

This course aligns with Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing. It especially supports CCR #4, Producing Clear and Coherent Writing, and CCR #5, Developing and Strengthening Writing. Using the traits of writing promotes writing to learn, higher-order thinking, problem-solving and critical thinking, analysis and discussion that the Common Core requires.

This three-unit course, **Assessing the Traits Writing,** is the first of a series of five courses. It lays the series foundation and is the prerequisite for the other four courses. It introduces all the traits, and focuses on the role of assessment in instruction and student writing performance.

Additional courses in the series are:

- EDUO 9218 Ideas and Organization (2 units)
- EDUO 9220 Finding Voice in Writing (2 units)
- EDUO 9219 Word Choice Selection (2 units)
- EDUO 9221 Creating Sentence Fluency (2 units)

The traits of **Conventions and Presentation** are woven into all the courses and will be demonstrated by you in the quality of the coursework that you submit.

The following book is essential to completing the course(s):
Creating Writers Through 6-Trait Writing Assessment and Instruction by Vicki Spandel, Pearson Allyn & Bacon, 5th Edition. (ISBN 020561910X)

Please note: specific page numbers in the assignments are referenced for the 5th edition and will not match any of other editions.

Section A Part 2- General Instructions and Clarifications

Before starting the course assignments in Section B, do the following:

- Read the Course Objectives – Section A Part 3
- Read all Assignments
- Read Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) – Section A Part 4
- Complete all parts of Assignments
- Save copies of all coursework that you submitted for your records.

Section A Part 3 - Course Objectives/Standards/Grading Rubric **By the end of the course the participant will be able to:**

- clearly define each of the traits of writing
- understand differences between large scale and classroom assessment
- assess student writing for all traits

- create strategies for assessing student writing
- develop and utilize a rubric or scoring guide to assess student writing
- write a description of an assessment program

COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT AND SUPPORT

The specific Common Core grade level standards correspond to the Anchor Standards by number. The overarching Anchor Standards are broad. The corresponding grade level standards target the specific skills and understanding that students will work on at each grade level.

(Grades K-5, Grades 6-8, and High School) correspond to these anchor standards by number. The CCS Anchor Standards and the grade-specific standards are complementary. The former provide broad standards, while the latter provides specific skill and understandings that students must demonstrate at a grade level.

To find the specific writing skills and understandings targeted for your own grade level, look at the Common Core Standards for Writing, by number, for your grade level. The CCS can be found in many places on the Internet. One site for the complete standards is: http://www.scoe.net/castandards/agenda/2010/ela_ccs_recommendations.pdf/.However, you might find it quicker and more useful to target the search for your own grade level standards.

This course supports the following Common Score Anchor Standards for Writing:

Category: Text Types and Purposes

CCR 1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCR 2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCR 3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Category: Production and Distribution of Writing

CCR 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR 5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCR 6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Category: Research to Build and Present Knowledge

CCR 7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCR 8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCR 9. Draw evidence from literary and or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Category: Range of Writing

CCR 10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

STANDARDS FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION

This course aligns with the following Standards for the Teaching Profession.

(These are a sampling only and not intended to be a complete list.)

Standard I: ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS IN LEARNING:

- Apply strategies that make the complexity and depth of subject matter understandable to all students.
- Provide opportunities for all students to learn and practice skills in a meaningful context.
- Vary instructional strategies to increase students' active participation in learning.
- Use the classroom environment to provide opportunities for both independent and collaborative learning.
- Engage all students in a variety of learning experiences that accommodate the different ways they learn.

Standard II: CREATING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING:

- Create a classroom environment that reflects and promotes student learning, by understanding how to simplify writing instruction.

- Maintain a learning environment in which all students are treated fairly and respectfully as they assume responsibility for themselves and one another.
- Help all students accept and respect different experiences, ideas, backgrounds, feelings, and points of view as reflected in the writing process.
- Encourage, support, and recognize the writing process achievements and contributions of all students.

Standard III: UNDERSTANDING AND ORGANIZING SUBJECT MATTER FOR STUDENT LEARNING:

- Identify and understand the key concepts and underlying themes and relationships in the subject area to be taught.
- Use six traits of writing knowledge to organize and sequence the curriculum to increase student understanding.
- Choose materials and resources to make subject matter accessible to all students.
- Select and use instructional materials and resources that promote students' understanding of subject matter.

Standard IV: PLANNING INSTRUCTION AND DESIGNING LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR ALL STUDENTS:

- Simplify a complex process by breaking it down into understandable chunks for students.
- Develop and use a repertoire of instructional strategies well suited to teaching a particular subject matter.
- Develop rubrics that enable each student to recognize the goal (or trait) they are working toward.
- Design lessons which challenge students at their own developmental levels.
- Modify instructional plans to adjust for student needs.

Standard V: ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING:

- Develop rubrics that enable the teacher to assess student progress toward a goal.
- Use assessment to guide planning and adjust instruction while teaching.
- Use informal assessments of student learning to adjust instruction while teaching.
- Ensure that goals for learning are appropriate to student development.
- Develop parent information letters that describe the assessment process.

Standard VI: DEVELOPING AS A PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR:

- Use professional literature, school district, and other professional development opportunities to increase understanding of teaching and learning.
- Continue to seek out and refine approaches that make the curriculum accessible to every student.
- Expand knowledge of new instructional methods and technologies.
- Maintain an attitude of lifelong learning.

Grading Rubric for Assessing the Traits of Writing Participant is required to do all required coursework in each section.

Exemplary, Above Graduate Level Standards Exceeds Expectations **A+** to **A-**	**Done to Graduate Level Standards** Meets Expectations **B+** to **B-**	**Below Graduate Level Standards, Unacceptable** Needs Improvement, **Must be resubmitted**.
Reflective, in depth and thoughtful ideas and comments relevant to the assignment are clearly stated and demonstrate that the student **thoroughly** understands assessing the traits of writing and how it will affect teaching and learning.	Presents **adequate** and relevant ideas and connections to the traits assessing assignments, and the connection to good teaching and learning are **adequately** evident.	**Few relevant** ideas connected to the assignments with **little to no** connection to good teaching and learning.
Reflective piece covers broad-based learning of the traits assessing process, and how to translate the traits into classroom instruction, as covered in the course text. • Analysis and exploration of student writing difficulties show **clear understanding** of problems faced in teaching writing. • Practice exercises for learning how to assess the traits are **thoroughly** carried out and show **clear understanding** of each of the traits, and clear ability to distinguish between them when assessing. • Effective teaching practices **clearly** form the base for planning how to transfer knowledge of the traits of writing. • Sample of parent communication created by the participant **professionally written** and clearly states participant's intentions relating to assessing the traits of writing.	**Some** facts and specific details of the text information. • Analysis and exploration of student writing difficulties show **adequate** understanding of problems faced in teaching writing. • Practice exercises for learning how to assess the traits are **adequately** carried out and show **sufficient understanding** of each of the traits, and sufficient ability to distinguish between them when assessing. • Effective teaching practices sufficiently form the base for planning how to transfer knowledge of the traits of writing. • Sample of parent communication created by the participant **adequately written** and sufficiently states participant's intentions relating to assessing the traits of writing.	Few or no specific details of the basic information presented in the text. • Analysis and exploration of student writing difficulties is too brief or does not show understanding of problems faced in teaching writing. • Practice exercises for learning how to assess the traits are too briefly carried out and **do not show clear understanding** of each of the traits, nor the ability to distinguish between them when assessing. • Effective teaching practices **do not** (or only minimally) **form the base** for planning how to transfer knowledge of the traits of writing. • Sample of parent communication created by the participant is **not professionally written**, is not easily understandable, or does not clearly state participant's intentions relating to assessing the traits of writing.
Free of spelling and grammatical errors. Assignments are word processed using standard 12pt font. Presentation is neat with good use of white space and margins.	Contains **some** spelling or grammatical errors. Assignments are word processed using standard 12pt font. Presentation is neat with good use of white space and margins.	Contains **spelling** or **grammatical** errors. Assignments are **not** word processed **not** using standard 12pt font. Presentation is **not** neat and lacks good white space and margins.

Organized **very** well. Supporting material **easy** to locate, **clearly** labeled and related to the corresponding assignment.	Organized **fairly** well. Supporting material **somewhat hard** to locate and **loosely** related to corresponding assignment. Is **generally** organized and labeled.	Organized **poorly**. Supporting material **difficult** to locate or **not** present and/or **not** related to corresponding assignment. Shows little or no organization and assignments are **poorly** labeled.
Reflective, thoughtful ideas relevant to the assignment are clearly stated.	Presents some relevant ideas and connections to the assignment.	Ideas are not clear or relevant.
Reflective pieces cover numerous facts and specific details of the learning experience.	Some facts and specific details of learning experiences are included.	Few or no facts or specific details of the learning experience are included.

Section A Part 4 - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q. For questions about the content of this course, where do I get help?
A. E-mail questions to: jlvarni@dominicancaonline.com

Q. Are there other useful books on the traits of writing beyond the required text, Creating Writers Through 6-Trait Writing Assessment and Instruction? **A. Yes. The following books are quite useful:**

Elementary Grades:

Books, Lessons, Ideas for Teaching the Six Traits Writing in the Elementary and Middle Grades (ISBN 0-669-48174-2), Compiled and Annotated by Vicki Spandel, Great Source Education Group, Inc

6 + 1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide for the Primary Grades by Ruth Culham (ISBN 0439574129)

6 + 1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide, Grades 3 and Up by Ruth Culham (ISBN 0439280389)

Middle/High School:

Books, Lessons, Ideas for Teaching the Six Traits of Writing at Middle and High School (ISBN 0-669-48175-0) Compiled and Annotated by Vicki Spandel, Great Source Education Group Inc;

All Levels:

Picture Books, An Annotated Bibliography with Activities for Teaching 6-Trait Writing by Ruth Culham, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory;
101 SW Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204

If You're Trying To Teach Kids How To Write…You've Gotta Have This Book! by Marjorie Frank; Incentive Publications (ISBN 0-86530-317-7)

Q. Can I use the 4th edition of the textbook instead of the 5th?
A. No. This course is aligned with the improved 5th edition. Assignment page numbers will not match for the 4th or any earlier edition. In some cases new material has been added. Using another edition will cause much confusion.

Q. How much time do I have to complete this course?
A. You have nine months from the time of registration to complete all coursework.

Q. Is there a required sequence for taking courses in the **Teaching the Foundations for Skillful Writing** series?
A. Yes. You must first take Assessing the Traits of Writing. The remaining courses may be taken in any order.

**** Please note: Assignments must be typed in standard 12-point font.**

Section B – Specific Assignments

Please note:

- Place each completed assignment on a separate page with appropriate label at the top.
- Submit all assignments once completed as directed by the course directions.
- Submit the assignments in order as directed (B1, B2, B3 etc.)

B1a – B1e Drawing From Your Experience

Respond to the following using labels B1a, B1b, B1c,B1d, and B1e

B1a) Why do some students find writing difficult? In your experience as a teacher, or a student, what are some of the causes?

B1b) Choose one of the problems you listed in B1a that you've had experience with, either directly or indirectly. Describe the difficult situation.

B1c) What was the ultimate outcome?

B1d) Some students are ready to write, but have their enthusiasm curbed by waiting through instruction needed to help other students who are having difficulty. Write about a time that you have directly or indirectly experienced as a teacher or student, involving a situation like this.

B1e) What was the ultimate outcome of the above situation?

B2a – B2b Knowing What to Assess and Assessing to Learn

To be a successful teacher, you must motivate some students to improve their weaknesses, while at the same time motivating others to build upon their strengths. Read Chapter 1, pages 1 – 14, and answer the following two questions**.**

B2a) Your major goal in writing assessment is to help all students. What steps will you take to insure that?

B2b) You will want to make accurate judgments when assessing your students' writing. How will you go do this?

B3a – B3c Helping Your Students Hit the Target

Read Chapter 2 and answer the following questions:

B3a) There are advantages and disadvantages to large-scale assessments and classroom writing assessment. What are some of those advantages and disadvantages? Use the following chart to record your answers.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
L A R G E S C A L E	
C L A S S R O O M	

B3b) What target do you want your students to meet? Take a look at the Common Core Writing Standards for your teaching level, and choose one or two targets you want your students to meet.

B3c) How will you use writing assessment to accomplish this?

B4a – B4c Preparing to Teach the Traits of Writing

Read Chapter 3 and do the following activities:

B4a) Review "What Teachers Value in Writing", pages 43-46. Then, look away from the text and, using your understanding, define in your own words and style the following terms as they relate to assessing writing. Use a separate document labeled **B4a.**

1. Ideas: 4. Word Choice:
2. Organization: 5. Sentence Fluency:
3. Voice: 6. Conventions:

B4b) Reread the student writings, “The Redwoods” and “Mouse Alert” and the suggested scores and comments, pages 50-51. Use the six-point rubric (pages 44-46) to score both of these introductory papers.

“The Redwoods” page 39	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

“Mouse Alert” page 41	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

B4c) The author, Vicki Spandel, discusses teachers' pet peeves as a block to traits assessments. What are your own pet peeves? List some of them on a separate document **labeled B4c**.

B5 Assessing the Traits

Read Chapters 4 – 7. Reflect on the scores and comments in each reading. Next, without looking at the scores and comments, re-read the following six papers; score them and make comments for each one. Use the Teacher Six-Point Writing Guides found on pages 44 – 46. Please write only one score for each trait.

Paper 1 "Why You Need a Job" page 89	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

Pap r 2 "Chad" page 92	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

Paper "A Rescue" page 95	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

Paper 4 "The Beautiful Dream" pages 124	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

Paper 5 “A Strange Visitor” page 126	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

Paper 6 “The Day My Grandfather Died” page 127	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

B6 Communicating with Parents

Read Chapter 13. Do the following activity:

Compose a letter to your students' parents that explains the traits of writing model. Include a brief description of each trait. Mention specific things they can do to help their child become a better writer**.** Present it in a form that is attractive, concise and easily readable. Label the letter **B6**

B7a and B7b Strengthen Your Scoring Skills

B7a) Find six different "real life" writing pieces. They may come from a letter, an advertisement, a textbook, a how-to manual, brochure or rental agreement, or any other printed or online source.*

Assess just one of the traits in each of the writings. Use the Teacher Six-Point Writing Guides on pages 44-46. **It would be preferable**, but not mandatory, **if the writing would emphasize the trait you are assessing.**

Scan and submit copies in either "jpeg" or "pdf" format of the writings you are scoring to this form.

Ideas _____ **Title:**	**Organization _____** **Title:**	**Voice _____** **Title:**
Comments:	**Comments:**	**Comments:**
Word Choice _____ **Title:**	**Sentence Fluency _____** **Title:**	**Conventions _____** **Title:**

Comments:	Comments:	Comments:

B7b) Choose three samples from the five different writing types listed below.
Score each of the traits for each piece, along with a brief comment.
Use the Teacher Six-Point Writing Guides found on pages 44 – 46.
Use the charts provided, scan and submit copies of the writings assessed.

Choose from:

- A writing composed by you
- A writing by one of your student
- A magazine article
- A newspaper story
- A passage from a literature selection

Selection 1 _____	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

Selection 2 _____	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

Selection 3 _____	
Ideas:	**Word Choice:**
Organization:	**Sentence Fluency:**
Voice:	**Conventions:**
Comments:	

B8a & B8b Creating a Writing Guide

Read chapter 11 and then do the following activities:

B8a) Develop your own six-point writing guide that will fit a certain student or subject. Remember that a guide that assesses just one or just a few traits is more useful than a "one size fits all" rubric that attempts to assess everything. If possible, create a guide that you can actually use and apply to your teaching. Present it in a form that is easily readable.

B8b) Describe how your writing guide will fit the specific writing assignment**.**

B9 Your Own Assessment Program

Your own Assessment Program should include:

- A brief statement of how you believe writing should be taught. This is to be no more than one page in length.
- An explanation of the six traits writing process.
- A list of strategies or a sample lesson plan that demonstrates how to teach the traits.
- Sample assessment tools that you would use, such as rubrics or writing guides.

Think of this as creating a concise packet that could be given to a parent, an administrator, or a colleague. It would be written in clear, easy to understand language describing your writing assessment program.

Type and label this assignment **B9**.

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THIS COURSE

In narrative form, summarize and evaluate your experience taking this course. How will your students benefit from your efforts? Was this an effective learning experience for you?