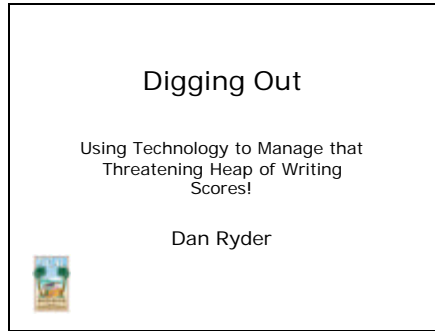
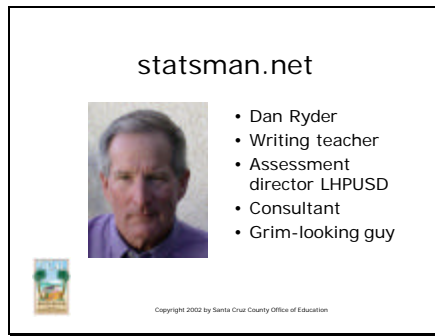


Slide 1



Trait-scored writing is a powerful tool, but anyone who has used it to assess student writing ...  
Or anyone who has tried to organize it to figure out how a grade or grade-cluster is doing ...  
Or anyone who wants to assess the effectiveness of instruction ...  
Any of these people start looking for the lifeboats as the data rolls in as ever larger waves.

Slide 2



I'm Dan Ryder. I've taught writing for a few years, but most recently, I've started a consulting business called statsman.net. I work with schools and districts on assessment and dealing with data.

I absolutely love 6-trait writing assessment. My first experience with trait scored writing was at La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District. We implemented trait-scored writing and saw our scores go up dramatically in a matter of months. Everyone's writing improved--the kids', obviously; but also teachers', administrators', aides'. I was once a journalist, yet I found even my own writing got better. Don't let that grim-looking picture fool you; I was elated with what we accomplished, but it only came about because we got serious about data.

There are many factors behind the improvement.

Most important is we break the writing down into its critical components:

Slide 3

The traits

- Ideas
- Organization
- Voice
- Word choice
- Sentence fluency
- Conventions
- Presentation



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Let me give you a quick idea of the structure of the traits before we go into data management.

Ideas (thesis) - the thinking.  
When I was in school, I don't remember anyone talking much about my ideas

Organization. How does this writing fit together as a communications vehicle? Does the organization help make the point or does it get in the way of the message.

Voice. Can we hear the writer's distinctive voice? Do we hear commitment, do we hear anxiety. Are we hearing from the heart, the head or is this canned? We certainly never discussed this when I was in school. In fact, we were encouraged to sound like bureaucrats, writing in third person, passive voice. Even the grammar checker on my PC hates that sort of writing.

Word choice. Are the words the precisely correct words to convey the message? Are they big words for the sake of big? Are they pedestrian

or repetitive or slangy—a boat load of “goods, cools, baaaads and nices?”

Sentence fluency. This simple (perhaps simpleton’s) view asks if there is a variety of sentence lengths and constructions. At the top end, the prose moves along with distinctive tempo and lyrical rhythms. At the low end, well at the low end it’s choppy or uses sentences so long and convoluted that the meaning is buried. Sentence fluency, of course, depends on good Word Choice and hinges to some extent on Voice.

Conventions. This *is* what my teachers talked about: spelling, syntax, citations, punctuation and paragraphing. It’s easy to score and that was about all that was scored until 1980 or so. In my analysis, it’s the least important of the traits and the most easily fixed. It’s not particularly intellectual and shouldn’t be creative. It’s simply a measure of how well the writer follows the rules.

In the real world of letters—newspapers, magazines, book publishing—there are professionals who help take care of these details.


Recently we added Presentation. How does the paper look? Does it conform to the style manual or the assignment guidelines? Is it neat? Was it supposed to be word-processed? If not, is the handwriting legible?

We score presentation, but it is not part of the writing score, which is the average of ideas, organization,

voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions.

Slide 4

Managing the Data




Now that we know what the traits are, let's look at the data implications. The first thing we notice after the first trait-scored writing is that there are 6 or 7 times as many scores per paper. Not only that, but most schools that mount up on the trait-scored-writing horse do it in a big way: 4 to 6 writings per year, maybe writing across the curriculum.

Slide 5

Do the Math

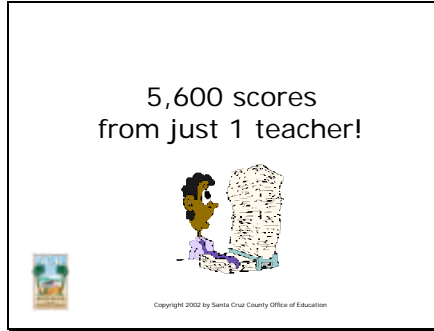
7 traits x  
30 kids per class x  
5 classes per day x  
6 writings per year =



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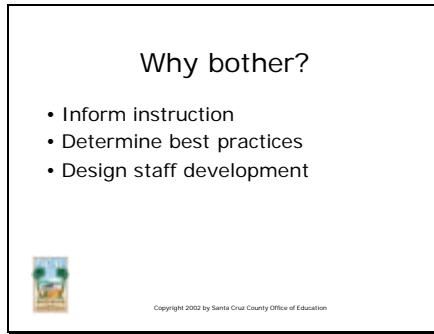
Look at the math. 7 traits times 30 kids in a class times 5 classes a day times 6 writings a year.

Slide 6



That's 5600 separate scores from just 1 teacher. It's a pile of data—perhaps short of a metric ton, but it is daunting.

Slide 7

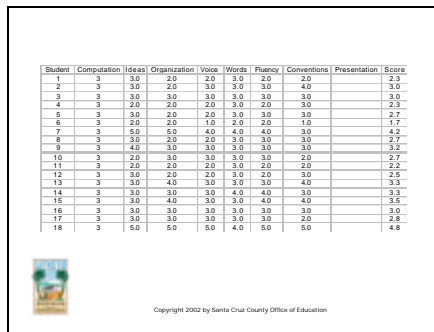


But most schools and districts mosh on because they all start this practice for the same good reasons:

- ✍ To better inform instruction in the classroom
- ✍ To analyze practice and identify best practices
- ✍ To establish staff development programs that address gaps in the teaching repertoire.

But, if the data are going to inform instruction, it's got to be managed or we risk drowning in it.

Slide 8



We got our arms around the problem by collecting the data and putting it in a spreadsheet.

The first data we had looked like this. It's a pretty decent summary and shows all students by name (here by number for privacy reasons), their scores in each trait and their overall scores. Our overall score, as I said, is the average of the core traits excluding presentation. We have discussed weighting the factors, giving greater importance to ideas and organization. It's easy to do mathematically, but we haven't

achieved consensus on philosophy.

Slide 9

Student	Completion	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Fluency	Conventions	Presentation	Score
1	3	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.3
2	3	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
3	3	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
4	3	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	2.3
5	3	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.7
6	3	2.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.7
7	3	5.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.2
8	3	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.7
9	3	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.2
10	3	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.7
11	3	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.2
12	3	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.5
13	3	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.3
14	3	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.3
15	3	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.5
16	3	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
17	3	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.8
18	3	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.8

Anyhow ... back to writing pedagogy. Using this chart, it is easy to see where each student needs more work. This is a 1-5 scale, by the way, and we consider a 3 minimum grade-level performance.

Take a look at student number 1. In the far right column, you'll see that student's overall score was 2.3. Let's look at how we might coach that student.

Slide 10

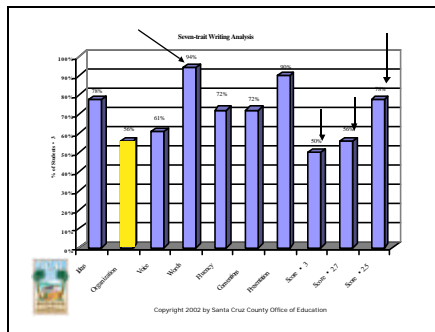
Coaching the Individual	
• Ideas	3
• Organization	2
• Voice	2
• Word choice	3
• Sent. Fluency	2
• Conventions	2
• Score	2.3

In order to move up to a final score of 3 or more, this student must move 4 traits up one notch.

Since he's OK in Ideas and Word choice, the first priority—at least to me—would be to work on organization. By the way, I'd want to look at some past writing scores to see if this is part of a trend or an anomaly.

Technology isn't exactly magic to this point, but it is clear that simply organizing like this leads directly to differentiated instruction that will be on target.

Slide 11



But what about a bigger picture? Let's say this teacher has 5 classes of 25 students every day. How does she figure out what direct instruction will serve each class best? Or let's say, she's department chair in a high school and is working with her teachers to develop strategies to improve writing throughout the school. How does she help the teachers working with sophomores figure out what the leverage points are?

Here's where technology starts to make life a little easier.

Here we see a group of students ... could be a small class, a grade-level cluster ... could be 500 sophomores.

Each bar represents a trait, shows what percent of the group is at or above grade level. The fourth bar, Word Choice, stands at 94%. Whatever this teacher, or group of teachers, is doing in vocabulary has worked—worked spectacularly!

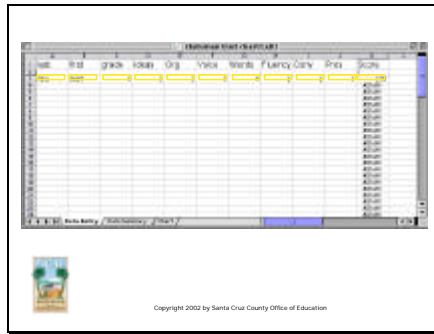
At the far right, you see scores of (from right to left) =2.5, 2.7, 3.

Fifty percent of this group is working at or above grade level (=3). Fifty six percent are =2.7, that 6% difference only needs to bring up one trait and 28% need work on two. Twenty-two percent are below 2.5.

Back to the big picture. If you were going to do direct instruction and coach the group on one trait, which would it be?

Without a chart like this, finding a simple answer to that question would be a challenge. With the chart, it's clear we need to focus on Organization with these students.

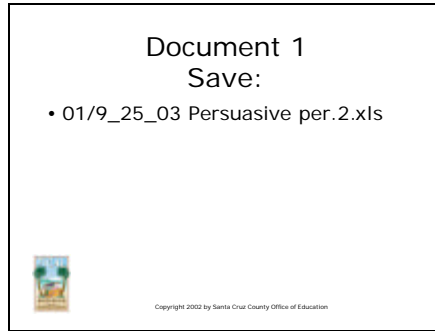
Slide 12



So how do you get a nifty little chart like this? Easy. You download this template from the Portocal Briefcase and enter your scores. Excel will make the chart for you. Here's how—and don't worry; the instructions are repeated in the template itself. Listen now just to get familiar with the process.

Once you've got this page open, click in the column "last" and type the student's last name. Hit tab, type the first name. Click in Ideas, enter a score. Tab. Keep entering and tabbing until the student is done. Just enter the individual scores; the spreadsheet calculates the overall scores.

Slide 13



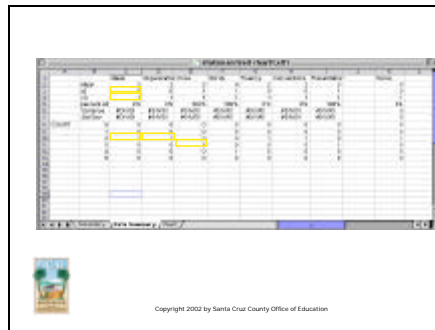
Since this is a template, you need to save the file with its own name. I recommend putting the date of the writing in the file name, or numbering each writing. Also include the genre or standard in the name.

This is the first writing, a persuasive piece, completed on 9/25.

What about the next writing?

Easy. Open the previous file, click “Save As” and give the file a new name. Now you’ve got a duplicate with its own name. Select and delete the individual scores, but not the final scores, since they are computed by formula. Enter the new scores and away you go.

Slide 14



Let’s take a look at a data summary. You would get here by clicking on the tab at the bottom. This page gives summaries of various data: How many students scored a 1, 2, and 3 in each trait? How many were at or above 3. This is particularly useful when you’re trying to look at the outliers, the kids who are super achievers and the kids who are barely on the chart.

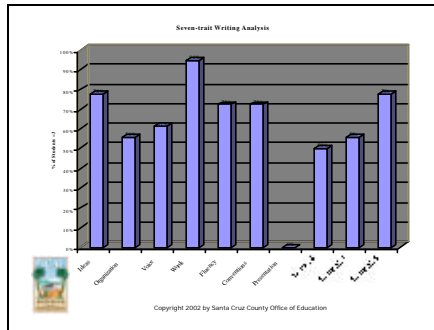
This chart has just been started. It only has one student’s scores entered so far, so we see that there is one student who scored a 2 in ideas, one student who scored a 2 in organization, one student who scored a 3 in voice and so forth.

We can also see that, so far, no one is at or above grade level in ideas and there are no zero or missing scores

Numbers of kids at specific levels, that's what this chart shows. It's a good way to group students for instruction, either accelerating the top kids or helping move struggling kids toward grade level.

Now, imagine you click on the third tab at the bottom, the Chart Tab, after you've entered all the data for your class.

Slide 15



Look familiar? Yep. This is the nifty chart you ogled a few minutes ago. It will appear magically, created from the scores you enter in the first page. It's the most important guide for working with a class overall. But it only talks about the kids who are close to grade level. You need the previous one to help you establish safety nets, make a case for tutoring or modify your curriculum to accelerate the budding Hemingways and Le Guins.

But why bother with this spreadsheet in the first place? Isn't the teacher's grade book adequate for the job?

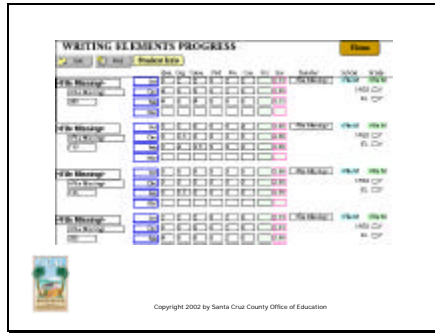
Yes and no. The teacher's grade book is every bit as good for recording student scores and analyzing each student. The only real benefits at this point are neatness and the ability to keep a backup and reduce paper use.

The real advantages are in the two additional views—the data summary and the chart. These provide a teacher or department chair with the

ability to see the class or cluster profile, the ability to look at outliers, and the ability to watch trends for the class as you compare the bar charts from each writing.

Up to this point, we've talked about a single person tracking a single class or other group of students. If your school as a whole, or a significant group of teachers, wants to use this approach, you may want to consider collecting the scores in a database.

Slide 16



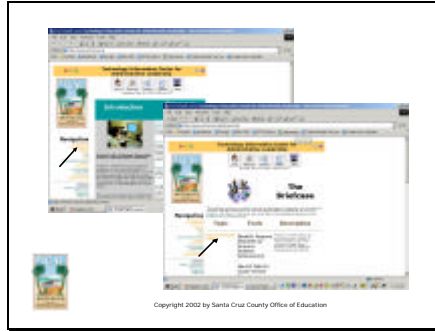
In fact, most schools that use the template first enter their raw scores in a database. The database holds all formally scored writings for the year. With a little further effort, you can learn how to easily move scores from the database into the template—its called “exporting” and “importing” data—and then you can produce summary charts and graphs on demand.

This slide shows the data entry screen in our simplified database. The “File Missing” fields have been disconnected for privacy reasons.

This database can be used by individual teachers to capture their scores or it can be housed on a server. It runs in a program called Filemaker Pro, version 5, easily available at discounted prices for educators.

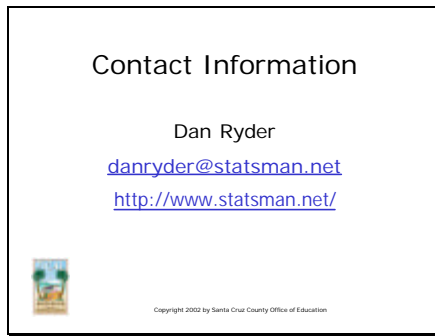
You can get a working copy of this particular database for free by contacting me. Of course, you’ll need the Filemaker Pro software to run it; and No, I don’t own stock in that company—I wish!

Slide 17



Remember, the basic template is found in the Portical Briefcase in the section on Data Driven Decision Making. Simply go to the home page and click Briefcase. Click Data Driven Decision Making and you'll find what you're after.

Slide 18



If you have questions about it, or would like to learn about the Advanced Writing Analyzer that tracks each trait over the school year, feel free to contact me at [danryder@statsman.net](mailto:danryder@statsman.net). Thanks for your time, and good luck managing your own heaps of data!