

JUST FOR PARENTS: 20 Questions to Ask Your Young Writer

Ask 1-5 questions you think are most important for a given paper – next time, ask some others, so you shift focus. Sometimes you're thinking of conventions, sometimes voice, and so on. Ask, "What is the most important trait in this kind of paper?" In a narrative, voice is critical; in a letter, conventions are important; in persuasive writing, word choice and organization are paramount.

1. Who is your audience? Can you feel how it feels to be them? How much do you know about your topic? What do they NEED to know?
2. What is the MAIN thing you want to tell your readers?
3. Do you have enough information here to make your meaning clear?
4. If a total stranger picked this up and read it, could he/she tell what it was about?
5. Do you have a favorite part? Why is it your favorite?
6. Is there a part you don't like much? What would happen if you just took it out?
7. Where does your paper REALLY begin? Read it through and ask, "What is the first line YOU COULD NOT DO WITHOUT? (That's the real beginning.)"
8. Did you read this aloud? How did it sound?
9. Could I read this aloud to you? What are you listening for?
10. Describe the VOICE of this piece in just one word. Is it the right voice?
11. What is the PURPOSE of this paper? (to tell a story, explain how to do something, persuade someone, to buy something, etc) Do you think that purpose would be clear to a reader?

12. Let's read just your lead. Now, let's write a couple of other possible leads and see which one we like best.
13. Let's read just your conclusion. Now, let's write a couple of other possible ones and see which one we like best.
14. Circle all the words you think might not be spelled correctly. Let's look them up.
15. Look at the end of each sentence. Are they punctuated?
16. Look at each place you made a new paragraph. Is it indented? Why did you begin a paragraph there? Does this paragraph explain only one thought or idea?
17. What is your title? Why did you choose it?
18. Look at every comma. Explain why you put them there.
19. Write down your three favorite words in the paper and I'll write mine; then we'll compare.
20. Write down what you think is the strongest trait of the six traits in this paper.

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