



Lesson 2.2

Putting Ideas First

All writing starts with the trait of Ideas. Without a focused message, it won't matter how much effort you put into the other traits—Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, or Conventions and Presentation. If you think this sounds like an exaggeration, imagine yourself trying to repair a crumbling bridge. Where would you begin? With paint? A new railing? A flashy canopy? Or the basic structure? Writers too often leap right over the step of defining the message, thinking they can fix everything with a snappy introduction, a punchy conclusion, flowery language, or a little reordering of information. They're painting the bridge even as it collapses under their feet. Put the trait of Ideas first, and you'll have a solid structure that makes every other trait, including Organization, fall right into place.

Finding the Source of the Trouble

Following are two short examples of student writing. Each needs revision. The question is: What's the problem? Is it the ideas, the organization, or a little of each?

Read each example carefully, asking the following readers' questions as you go.

- Is there a big idea?
- If so, what is it? If not, what should it be?
- Does the writer need more information?
- Is there a logical, ordered flow to the ideas?
- Is there filler that should be cut?
- Do the lead and conclusion work?



Use the space between lines to make notes. Then with a partner or writing circle, identify the big idea (if there is one) and jot down the three revision tips you would give to each writer.

Example 1

Swimming can make you extremely fit. It's a good idea to begin young—four or five years old, or even younger. Young children have far less fear of the water. Very young children can be hard to teach because they have difficulty following directions. Everyone should know how to swim. Each year, people get into trouble because they panic and do not wear life vests. Boating accidents are more common on rivers than anywhere. Most people who swim for exercise work out in a pool. It takes about thirty minutes of practice a day to maintain a good fitness level. Lifting weights is helpful, too.

Big Idea: _____

Our revision tips for the writer:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

**Example 2**

Some people never travel out of the state where they were born. Travel can be expensive. It can be dangerous, as well. Some schools offer travel on a limited basis, through field trips or summer trips. Some are sponsored by local businesses, or students earn part of the money through school activities. Imagine if students did not begin college right away, but instead they had an option to travel for two years. Where would they go? That could take some thought and planning. If you are going to travel, it is good to be organized. Travel is highly educational.

Big Idea: _____

Our revision tips for the writer:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Share and Compare

Share your responses with the other writers. Did you identify the same big ideas, or was it difficult to pick out any big idea? Did you identify the same problems? Discuss any revision strategies you have for these writers.



Take One On

Now you'll choose one example to revise. Work with a partner and complete the following steps.

1. Read the example aloud a second time.
2. Look at any notes you wrote.
3. Identify the big idea, or decide what it should be.
4. Look over your three revision tips for the writer.
5. Based on your notes and tips, make a revision plan.
6. Then write your revision on scratch paper.

Share and Compare

Meet with a partner or your writing circle to share your revised examples. Even though you worked together in planning your revision, do your drafts look and sound different? Who has a strong lead? Conclusion? Message? Design?



A Writer's Question

How or why does the trait of Ideas pave the way for the trait of Organization?



Putting It to the Test

Let's say that a writer has perfect conventions, a wonderful vocabulary, brilliant sentence structure, and a comical voice in his or her writing. Will those things make up for not having a strong main idea?