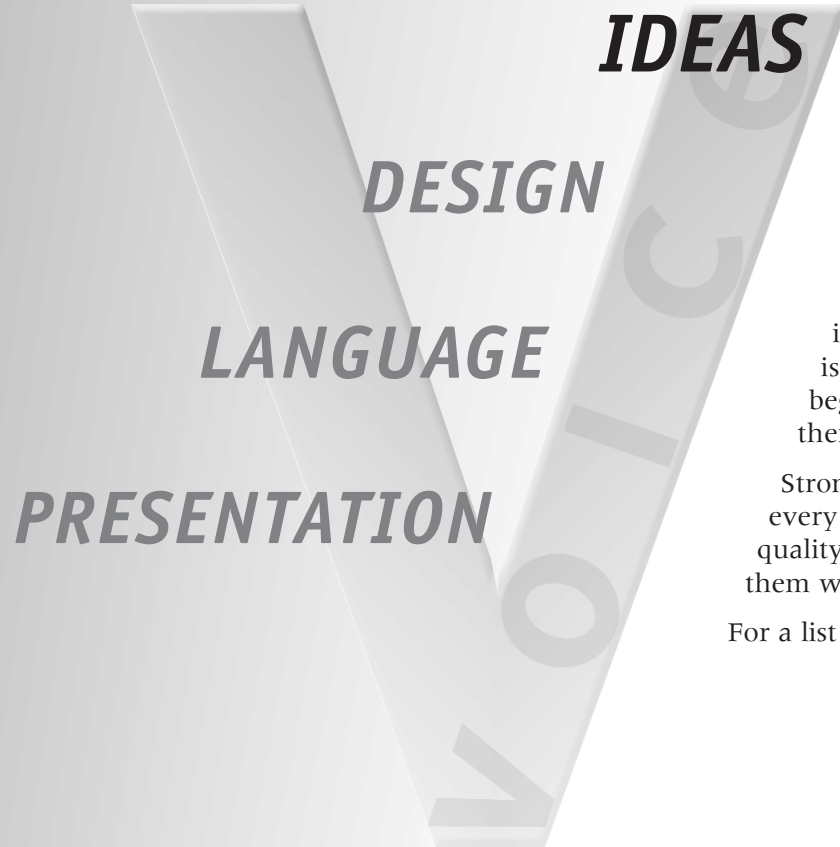


*Let's explore each
Quality of Writing in
greater detail:*



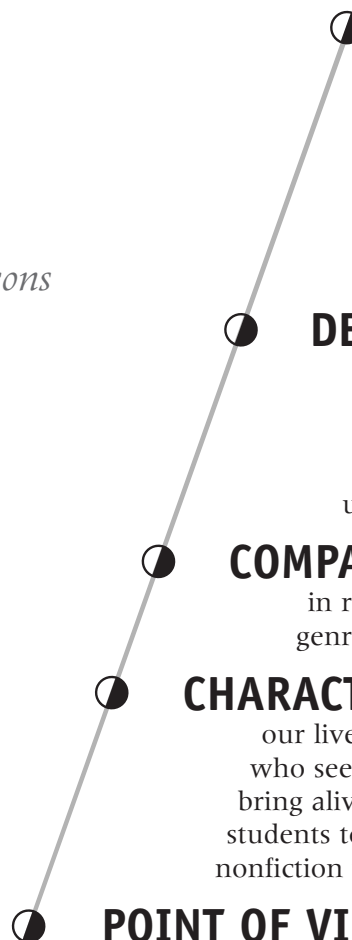
A young writer sits down to work. The blank page stares back at her. Poised above the paper, she thinks... After a few minutes the pencil begins moving across the page. One idea at a time, she builds the story. Or maybe she's writing a report on a favorite animal and thinks, What do I know about raccoons? Again, idea by idea, brick by brick, she builds her report. At its most basic, writing relies on the writer's ability to generate ideas. Even before a writer thinks of shaping, ordering, or detailing those ideas, she has to gather them in her mind.

Don Murray reminds us, "Good writing starts with honest, specific, accurate information." Skilled writers can bring the insider perspective to any topic, even if it is outside their experience. They convince us with the quality of their ideas. But with beginning writers, drawing on an actual experience (event, person, hobby, etc.) gives them a place in their mind to return to when generating ideas.

Strong writing requires an abundance of ideas. But that doesn't mean skilled writers use every idea they dream up. In the long run we need to help students learn about the quality of ideas—to recognize which ideas, out of the many they generate, will best serve them when they write.

For a list of Ideas lessons, see page 100.

*The Ideas lessons
fall into five
sub-qualities:*

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- TOPICS** We all know the magic that results when a student encounters a “just right” book. A similar magic happens when a young writer finds a topic that’s just right, one with which he has enough experience to offer inside information, ideas, and insight when writing about it. That’s why personal narrative is usually a good place to start for young writers. In TQW we embrace the concept of student choice, believing that the best, truest topics lie deep within each of us. But where does a student find a good idea for writing, and once she has found it, how does she bring it alive? Most students find it natural to write from experience; others may flounder in the “vacuum of choice” and need our help.
 - DETAILS** *The devil’s in the details*, the old saying goes. These specifics are the vehicles writers use to flesh out their ideas. Even a single well-chosen detail can go a long way toward bringing alive a piece of writing. Writers can draw details from the internal world (thoughts, feelings) as well as the external world (actions, observations, sensory details). Often a student has a wealth of ideas in his head, but these ideas never make it onto the page. Student writers need to learn how to generate lots of details, recognize the best ones, and use those details to strengthen the writing.
 - COMPARE/CONTRAST** One of the best ways to explain an idea is by comparing it with, or showing it in relation to another. This skill is simpler to explain than it is to execute, but it can be applied across genres—in poetry, narrative, and especially in nonfiction when the student has to explain a big new idea.
 - CHARACTER/SETTING** In beloved books like *Maniac McGee* and *Harry Potter*, the characters seem to walk into our lives, full-blown and alive. Creating believable characters is much harder for young writers, especially students who seem far more interested in driving their plots full speed ahead. We can give them a number of concrete ways to bring alive their characters and the settings in which they live and act. Attending to character and setting encourages students to slow down and write deeper, richer stories. The lessons in this section also help students strengthen their nonfiction writing, particularly biography.
 - POINT OF VIEW** Telling a story in the first person (*I*) is the most natural way to write, but it’s not the only option available to the writer. TQW offers lessons to introduce the three main points of view: first person (*I*), second person (*you*), and third person (*he/she/they*). Each new point of view gives the writer more options for revealing the story to the reader. As in all TQW lessons, we draw on models that will be familiar to many students.