

Report of the Writing-Discipline Committee

We have designed these rubrics so that they may be used to assess individual papers as well as portfolios of collected papers. Which to assess is the choice of each campus. In theory, one paper is all that would need to be assessed. That paper would, of course, need to be a research paper that makes an argument and is accompanied by at least one earlier draft. A portfolio of papers of a variety of genres could also be assessed as long as that portfolio contained at least one draft of one of the papers in the portfolio and evidence of writing based on research.

Best Practices

The following is based on the assessment statements of both the SUNY Council on Writing and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) as well as on the WPA (Writing Program Administrators) Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. The later two organizations are nationwide.

We base these best practices on the concluding paragraph of the CCCC's Assessment statement:

Writing assessment that alienates students from writing is counterproductive, and writing assessment that fails to take an accurate and valid measure of their writing even more so. But writing assessment that encourages students to improve their facility with the written word, to appreciate their power with that word and the responsibilities that accompany such power, and that salutes students' achievements as well as guides them, should serve as a crucially important educational force.

1. Student writing to be assessed should grow out of classroom assignments.
2. Faculty within the institution should play key roles in the design of writing assessments and in the actual evaluation of written products.
3. The rubrics and standards of evaluation should be known to students and should be consistent with the evaluation standards within their classrooms.
4. For high-stakes assessment such as this,¹ each student's writing should be evaluated by two instructors other than his/her own. We recognize, however, that with carefully designed rubrics and adequate norming sessions, one outside reader may be sufficient.
5. Regularly scheduled norming sessions at which standards and rubrics are discussed fully and applied to sample pieces of student writing are proven venues for increasing the reliability of assessments.
6. Faculty who attend norming sessions and then do the assessments should be paid a pre-established rate for both of these activities unless such activities are a part of their regular job descriptions.
7. Neither student names nor instructor names nor evaluative comments nor grades should appear on written pieces that are to be evaluated.
8. Ideally, judgments should always be made on more than one piece of writing.

¹The high-stakes in this case are not for the student, of course, but for the program.

In summary, to quote from the CCCC Position Statement on Writing Assessment:

Assessments of written literacy should be designed and evaluated by well-informed current or future teachers of the students being assessed, for purposes clearly understood by all the participants; should elicit from student writers a variety of pieces, preferably over a period of time; should encourage and reinforce good teaching practices; and should be solidly grounded in the latest research on language learning.

Basic Communication Outcomes

- **Students will demonstrate their abilities to produce coherent texts within common college level forms**

Exceeding:

Writer presents an easily identifiable, focused, original, and thought provoking controlling purpose or thesis. The paper moves coherently, logically, and even creatively from an engaging introduction to a well-demonstrated conclusion. Paragraphs fit within this structure coherently and present pertinent examples and evidence to support central and subsidiary ideas. Sentence structure displays sophistication and variety; transitions add to the logical development of the topic. The essay exhibits a solid command of word variety and a tone and diction appropriate for the subject and its implied audience. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling and documentation, if needed) are nearly flawless.

Meeting:

Writer presents an identifiable and focused controlling purpose or thesis. The paper moves coherently and logically from a satisfying introduction to a solid conclusion. Paragraphs fit within this structure and present examples and evidence to support the ideas presented. For the most part, sentences are well constructed and transitions are sound—though the sequence of ideas may occasionally be awkward. The essay exhibits some degree of control over the tone and diction appropriate for the subject and its implied audience. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling and documentation, if needed) are mostly accurate and paragraph transitions are sound, but the sequence of ideas may occasionally be awkward.

Approaching:

Writer presents a wandering, vague, or unfocused controlling purpose or thesis. The paper moves awkwardly from a weak introduction to a conclusion that does not adequately represent the body of the paper. Basic paragraphing exists, but often fails to support or even recognize a central idea, and the use of evidence and examples is inadequate. Sentence and paragraph transitions are often unclear, awkward, indirect, and/or illogical. Tone and diction are often inconsistent and/or inappropriate for the subject and its implied audience. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling and documentation, if needed) are not well executed and may, at times, obscure meaning.

Not Meeting:

Writer fails to present a controlling purpose or thesis; consequently it is difficult to identify exactly what the thesis is. The essay moves from an unsatisfactory introductory paragraph to an ending that does not serve as a conclusion, thus conveying the sense that much of what has been presented is unresolved. Sentence structure is often awkward and transitions are ineffectual and/or abrupt or simply missing. Diction, tone, and word choice are not appropriate for the subject or for the implied audience. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling and documentation, if needed) disrupt reading and often obscure meaning.

- **Students will demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts.**

Exceeding:

Writer demonstrates clear evidence of an ability to revise by altering content and approach, by reorganizing material, or by clarifying and strengthening the coherence of ideas. Alterations may include the addition of new material, the deletion of unhelpful material, the substitution of more relevant material for less relevant material, the strengthening of transitions, introductions, and conclusions, and the rewriting of individual sentences. The mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling and documentation, if needed) of the final revision are nearly flawless

Meeting:

Writer demonstrates the ability to revise by refining the content, sharpening the focus, and improving structure, clarity, and coherence. Refining content may include clearer presentation of evidence, shifting of emphasis to foreground the most relevant material, providing improved transitions that keep the focus evident, and reworking the introduction or conclusion as well as rewriting individual sentences. The mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling and documentation, if needed) are mostly accurate and rarely impede meaning.

Approaching:

Writer demonstrates a lack of ability to revise in any substantial way. Whatever revision has been done has not been sufficient to improve the content, focus, structure, clarity, and coherence of an earlier draft. Such revision may very well be limited to sections of the essay and demonstrate a lack of awareness of how even small changes can affect the entire paper. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling and documentation, if needed) have either not improved significantly or appear to be the only focus of the revision.

Not Meeting:

Writer demonstrates a lack of ability to revise at the level of content or structure. Either changes do not improve these features or are focused almost solely on mechanics.

- **Students will research a topic, develop an argument, and organize supporting details.**

Exceeding:

Writer indicates/presents a clearly evident, original, and sophisticated controlling purpose, responding creatively to the assignment prompt with evidence drawn from carefully selected sources, documented in accepted style. Conclusions are based on thoughtful integration of the students' own thinking and careful analysis of the outside sources. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, and spelling) are nearly flawless.

Meeting:

Writer indicates/presents a clear controlling purpose, responding intelligently to the assignment prompt with evidence drawn from appropriately selected sources, documented in accepted style. Conclusions demonstrate the writer's conscious attempts to integrate his or her own thinking with an analysis of outside sources. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, and spelling) are mostly accurate and rarely impede meaning.

Approaching:

Writer indicates/presents either a shifting or unclearly articulated purpose, perhaps failing to focus on the assignment prompt. Outside sources may be inappropriate to the topic, or information from sources may be presented without careful analysis, and it may be inadequately documented. The conclusions may demonstrate little evidence of the students' own thinking, presenting mainly a summary of the sources. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, and spelling) are not well executed and may, at times, obscure meaning.

Not Meeting:

Writer indicates/presents little sense of a controlling purpose, failing to respond to the assignment prompt. There may be inadequate reference to outside sources, selected sources may show little apparent connection to the assignment, or paraphrases may be unclear, quoted material may seem not to relate to the topic, and/or there may be significant problems with documentation. The paper may consist largely of quotations and paraphrases from sources with few connections between and among them. The conclusions may demonstrate no evidence of the students' own responses to the outside sources and may merely restate some of the ideas presented. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, and spelling) disrupt reading and often obscure meaning.