

Guidelines for Readers of “University Writing” samples.

[These guidelines are adapted from the CEP resolution dated May 27, 2003.]

Each portfolio will consist of four papers which correspond to the specific writing assignments of the individual writing program. These four papers were to be an early and late paper assigned in courses that fulfill the requirements of the two-quarter mandatory university writing program. The papers should be in chronological order and labeled A1, A2, B1, and B2. The individual portfolios will contain the four writing samples as well as the prompts that were assigned. The prompts for a given writing program may be very similar across all students or may vary considerably according to which section a student was enrolled in. The communality of the writing prompts differs by program.

You have a master grading sheet that should be used to record your grades. The sheet has a row for each of the portfolios you are to read. There are, for each portfolio, six columns that you will need to fill out. The first four are the “subject A scores” for each of the papers. The fifth score is a global A-F “grade” that you would assign to the portfolio as a whole based upon your assessment of both the sentence level and rhetorical level of writing. The sixth score is four point score based upon your judgment of the degree of improvement you sense over the four writing samples.

Subject A Scores – A six-point score assigned to each paper

A **6** paper commands attention because of its insightful development and mature style. It presents a cogent response to the text, elaborating that response with well-chosen examples and persuasive reasoning. The 6 paper shows that its writer can usually choose words aptly, use sophisticated sentences effectively, and observe the conventions of written English.

A **5** paper is clearly competent. It presents a thoughtful response to the text, elaborating that response with appropriate examples and sensible reasoning. A 5 paper typically has a less fluent and complex style than a 6, but does show that its writer can usually choose words accurately, vary sentences effectively, and observe the conventions of written English.

A **4** paper is satisfactory, sometimes marginally so. It presents an adequate response to the text, elaborating that response with sufficient examples and acceptable reasoning. Just as these examples and this reasoning will ordinarily be less developed than those in 5 papers, so will the 4 paper's style be less effective. Nevertheless, a 4 paper shows that its writer can usually choose words of sufficient precision, control sentences of reasonable variety, and observe the conventions of written English.

A **3** paper is unsatisfactory in one or more of the following ways. It may respond to the text illogically; it may lack coherent structure or elaboration with examples; it may reflect an incomplete understanding of the text or the topic. Its prose is usually characterized by at least one of the following: frequently imprecise word choice; little sentence variety; occasional major errors in grammar and usage, or frequent minor errors.

A **2** paper shows serious weaknesses, ordinarily of several kinds. It frequently presents a simplistic, inappropriate, or incoherent response to the text, one that may suggest some significant misunderstanding of the text or the topic. Its prose is usually characterized by at least one of the following: simplistic or inaccurate word choice; monotonous or fragmented sentence structure; many repeated errors in grammar and usage.

A **1** paper suggests severe difficulties in reading and writing conventional English. It may disregard the topic's demands, or it may lack any appropriate pattern of structure or development. It may be inappropriately brief. It often has a pervasive pattern of errors in word choice, sentence structure, grammar, and usage.

A Global “A-F” grade - a single score assigned to the entire portfolio

This single letter grade is assigned to the portfolio as a whole. It is a global judgment of the quality of the writing. The grader should take the following perspective into consideration when assigning the grade.

In looking at student papers, committee members should concern themselves both with the sentence level and with the rhetorical level of student essays.

On the sentence level, graders should look for serious problems of usage and grammar, such as:

- lack of subject-verb and pronoun-referent agreement
- dangling modifiers
- comma splices
- sentence fragments
- run-on sentences, run-on paragraphs
- redundant or inappropriate use of words
- stilted language
- overly informal language
- jargon
- vagueness

They should also look for examples of good writing on the sentence level, such as:

- clear and precise word choice
- appropriate tone
- good use of subordination, apposition, and other structural devices
- effective placement of emphasis; verbal emphasis on what is intellectually important
- effective embedding of quotations
- smooth transitions within and among sentences

On the rhetorical level, committee members should look for such serious problems as:

- absence of thesis or direction
- unclear relationship between the various parts of the paper and the thesis
- lack of rhetorical emphasis (i.e., clear verbal discrimination of central and peripheral issues)
- poor use of evidence or logic
- over-lengthy introductions and conclusions, irrelevant argument or quotation, excess verbiage in general

They should also look for examples of good writing on the rhetorical level, such as:

- precise statement of thesis
- effective choice and arrangement of evidence

precision of organization, with easily recognizable connections among sections and paragraphs

steady, accessible development of an argument; avoidance of anticlimax

elimination of all that is not useful to the main argument

ability to distinguish substantial from insubstantial intellectual issues

recognition of plausible counterarguments, and effective response to them

effective use of irony, humor, and other means of eliciting emotion

Papers should never be favorably assessed simply because they are “original” or because they take the “correct” position on the subjects they address. An “original” paper is sometimes a very poor one, and the assessment must always concern writing quality, not opinions per se.

Degree of Improvement Score - a single score based upon your judgment of the degree to which writing seems to have improved (or worsened) over the two-quarter span:

- 4 - a great improvement in the writing
- 3 - some improvement in the writing
- 2 - no improvement, writing is essentially unchanged
- 1 - a noticeable lessening in the quality of the writing

This score is a subjective judgment on your part.