


Assessing Students' Writing Skills

Far West GREAT Region

El Paso, TX

Research, Development, and Presentation
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Objectives

1. To develop appropriate writing prompts
2. To analyze writing samples and identify errors in grammar, usage, and sentence structure
3. To develop an individualized writing plan for students
4. To initiate an ongoing process of assessing writing to make adjustments in the student's writing plan
5. To use student writings to illustrate points of grammar usage
6. To identify and use resources to supplement instruction

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What Are They?

Their is four errors in this statement.

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I am not very good at writing. I barely ever have to write anything. The most I write is probably my name. I only ever wrote about five to eight papers in my whole four years of high school. They never had to be very long and they could be about whatever I felt like writing about. When I wrote those papers I always seemed to get a pretty good grade; but I still feel like I do not know how to write.

Now I am in college and I have to start writing. I never know how much to write or even where to start at half the time. I just start writing and I try to put it in order the best that I can. My writing skills are not that good but hopefully they get better as I go along.

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**LET'S REVIEW
THE PARAGRAPH!**

Workbook
p. 2

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Think "Backward"

"To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you are going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction."

Stephen Covey - "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People"

Areas of Concern

Language Art, Writing, Part II, students:

- Misinterpret the topic and respond inappropriately to the questions. For example: Writing a "why" essay when the topic requires a "how-to" essay.
- Have problems staying focused on ideas that support their response to the topic.
- Fail to include supporting details and specific examples.
- Do not understand the difference between editing and revising and often fail to do either.
- Have limited word choices available to them.

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Holistic vs. Analytical

**Which Assessment Model
Should I Use?**

You Need Both!

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Holistic Scoring

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GED 2002 Essay Scoring Rubric

- 4 point rubric
- Score of 1 or 1.5 must retake
- Topic length reduced and format standardized
- No required word count
- 37- 40% of the test score

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GED Essay Scores

4	Effective
3	Adequate
2	Marginal
1	Inadequate

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	1	2	3	4
	Inadequate	Marginal	Adequate	Effective
Reader's Understanding	Reader not at all confident in following the writer's ideas	Reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the writer's ideas	Reader understands writer's ideas	Reader understands and easily follows the writer's expression of ideas
Response to the Prompt	Attempts to address prompt but with little or no success in addressing a topic	Addresses the prompt, though the focus may drift	Uses the writing prompt to establish a specific topic	Responds in a clearly focused way that fully addresses the prompt
Organization	Fails to organize ideas	Shows some evidence of an organizational plan	Uses an identifiable organizational plan	Establishes a clear and logical organization
Development and Details	Demonstrates little or no development; possibly includes details in examples or provides an irrelevant explanation	The topic development includes specific details, may be limited to listing, repetition, or generalizations	Has occasional, occasionally relevant development; incorporates some specific detail	Achieves concrete development with specific and relevant details and examples
Conventions of EAE	Exhibits minimal or no control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE	Demonstrates a consistent control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE	Consistently controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE	Consistently controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE
Word Choice	Exhibits weak and/or inappropriate word choice	Exhibits a narrow range of word choice, often including minor concrete vocabulary	Exhibits appropriate word choice	Exhibits varied and precise word choice

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Level 1 writing is inadequate and the reader has difficulty identify or following the writer's ideas. It has:

- Little or no focus
- Lack of organization
- Limited or no development of ideas
- Lack of details or examples
- Irrelevant information
- No control of sentence structure or the conventions of EAE
- Ineffective or inappropriate word choice

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Level 2 writing is marginal and the reader occasionally has difficulty understand or following the expression of ideas. It has:

- Shifting focus of ideas or thoughts
- Limited specific details
- Minimal organization plan
- Limited development but often includes only lists, repetitions, generalizations
- Narrow range of words sometime used inappropriate
- Limited control of sentence structure and conventions of EAE

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Level 3 writing is adequate because the reader can easily understand and follow the writer's ideas. It has:

- Appropriate development of a main idea
- Identifiable organizational plan
- Focused details and examples but uneven development
- Appropriate word choice and usage
- Correct usage of the conventions of EAE with some errors that do not interfere with understanding

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Level 4 writing is effective because the reader can easily understand and follow the expression of ideas in the response. It has:

- Clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt
- Control over both the language and sentence structure
- Clear and logical pattern of organization
- Coherent development of ideas with specific and relevant details and examples
- Varied and precise word choice
- Consistent control of the conventions of EAE with only minor errors

GED® Holistic Scoring Guidelines

Let's Read the Guidelines!

Writing Guide
Read pp. 5 - 7

GED® Holistic Scoring Guidelines

Basic Assumptions of Holistic Scoring

- Each factor involved in writing is related to all of the others.
- No one factor can be separated from the others.
- The essay must be considered as a whole and read for its overall impression.
- Sentence fragments, misplaced punctuation, and misspelled words should carry no great weight in scoring a paper.
- Candidates are entitled to mistakes due to the nature of the writing.

GED® Testing Service, 2001

GED® Holistic Scoring Guidelines

- Read and score.
- Red pens down.
- Do not change your score.
- When in doubt, refer to the scoring guide criteria.
- Be aware that there can be a range of essays with a score point.
- Avoid the tendency to adjust the number of 1s, 2s, 3s, and 4s in a given set of essays.
- Be aware of and avoid potential biasing factors.
- Score only what is on the paper.
- This is only a 45 minute test.

Sample Persuasive Essay Topic

TOPIC F

If you could make one positive change in your daily life, what would that change be?
 In your essay, identify the change you would make. Explain the reasons for your choice.

Part II is a test to determine how well you can use written language to explain your ideas.

In preparing your essay, you should take the following steps:

- Read the DIRECTIONS and the TOPIC carefully.
- Plan your essay before you write. Use the scratch paper provided to make any notes. These notes will be collected but not scored.
- Before you turn in your essay, reread what you have written and make any changes that will improve your essay.

Your essay should be long enough to develop the topic adequately.

Sample How-to Essay Topic

TOPIC C

What is one important goal you would like to achieve in the next few years?
 In your essay, identify that goal. Explain how you plan to achieve it. Use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge to support your essay.


Part II is a test to determine how well you can use written language to explain your ideas.

In preparing your essay, you should take the following steps:

- Read the DIRECTIONS and the TOPIC carefully.
- Plan your essay before you write. Use the scratch paper provided to make any notes. These notes will be collected but not scored.
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**What Score Would
You Give These Essays?**



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The last invitation I received was to my old best friend's wedding. The invitation was creme colored with gold roses and gold print. I was surprised that I was invited; I haven't seen her for a few years now. I didn't think she would remember who I am. I can't wait to go to the wedding. I already bought a wedding gift.

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Topic C

Identify a recent invention. Explain how this invention has changed your daily life.

In your essay, use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge.

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Think Like Your Students!
**Which would cause
 problems and why?**

Writing Guide
 pp. 18-21

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The Bottom Line

- If the paper is poorly written, that will be the reader's first impression.
- If the paper has mistakes because the writer was under time restrictions, then reading the paper holistically helps the reader more effectively evaluate the paper.

Remember, for holistic scoring:

- Read quickly and make a judgment
- Don't reread

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Problem Areas with Essays

- Inadequate editing skills
- Lack of knowledge regarding question types and basics of grammar
- Undeveloped critical thinking skills
- Writing "why" instead of "how-to" essays
- Free-writing- the rambling approach
- Inadequate development and details
- Poor use of word choice and grammar
- Changing focus
- Inability to clearly communicate ideas!

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GEDTS Recommendations

- Teach grammar skills in the context of real-life writing.
- Use sentence combining as an effective strategy for improving the quality of writing.
- Ensure that the "reader" does not have to work at reading a candidate's work.

Use the Local Newspaper as Your Textbook

- Encourage GED candidates to prepare for the Language Arts, Writing Test by:
 - Reading articles of interest to them in their local newspapers.
 - Evaluating the evidence used by the writer.
 - Writing journals to agree, disagree, or evaluate the articles.
 - Responding to the articles by writing letters to the editor.

Looking at a few "locally" written essays.
Are they 1s, 2s, 3s, or 4s?

Workbook
pp. 3-12



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Analytical Scoring

Analytical scoring is when one's performance or assignment is judged using specific criteria.

Next time use red ink! - William Gaisford

"I was half asleep after grading two classes worth of ninth grade poetry exams when I finally found someone who answered a particularly hard question in exactly the way that I had hoped. I wrote a glowing comment about how wonderful I thought the answer was, and then I checked to see whose test I was grading. Sure enough, it was my answer key."

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**Analyze This!
Let's Begin!**

Workbook
pp. 13-14

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Analytical Scoring Process

- Have students complete a writing sample
- Use the scoring guide to identify criteria for analytical scoring
- Read through the sample
- Identify each of the errors within the sample and note them on the Instructional Writing Plan

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Analytical Scoring Process

- Sort the errors by category – planning, organizing, revising, or editing
- Identify 1 error pattern that is a “quick fix”
- Identify 1 error pattern that requires more intensive work
- Note these errors on the writing sample
- Use green, purple, or blue ink – never red

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What does analytical scoring look like?

Workbook
pp. 15-17

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Developing an Initial Writing Assessment and Plan

Workbook
pp. 18-21 and an essay

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Focus

- Does the essay stay on the topic assigned?
- Are the central points or questions clear to the reader?
- How is each section/paragraph related to the central point?

Workbook
p. 18

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Development

- Is there a good beginning sentence?
- Is there a good ending sentence?
- Can the reader understand the basic points or is additional information needed?
- Where might the reader raise questions or challenges?

Workbook
p. 18

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Organization

- What is the general pattern of organization?
- How are ideas grouped? Is there a logical sequence of subtopics or events?
- At any point does the organization become unclear?

Workbook
p. 18

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Style and Mechanics

- Is the tone appropriate?
- What sentences appear most effective?
- What sentences could use the most work?
- Are there persistent grammatical/mechanical error patterns?

Workbook
p. 19

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Vocabulary

- Are words used appropriately in the essay?
- Do the words chosen add to the reader's understanding of the writer's ideas?
- Does the writer use vivid and descriptive words?

Workbook
p. 19

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There's a Need for the Conventions of EAE

- What strengths or error patterns do you see in:
 - Capitalization
 - Punctuation
 - Sentence Structure
 - Usage
 - Spelling

Workbook
p. 20

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What process can be used to help remediate problems?

Bringing it all together into an Instructional Writing Plan.

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Prioritize


- Which areas will help students on both the multiple choice and essay portion of the test?
- Which areas will provide students with a much needed boost in confidence?
- Which areas require long-term intensive work but pay off big?



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Four Areas to Investigate


- Planning
- Organizing
- Revising
- Editing



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Planning

- Who is the audience?
- What is the purpose?




How to Plan

- Make a list
- Brainstorm
- Doodle

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Organizing

- What is the structure or pattern?
- How does it flow?



How to Organize

- List ideas and put in order
- Answer the 5 Ws
- Use a graphic organizer
- Use an outline

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Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are highly powerful learning tools designed to incorporate learning strategies that the mind quickly absorbs and easily retains.

colors


shapes

P
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Revising

- Is there a unifying main idea?
- Do the details support that idea?
- Is there a logical connection between ideas?
- Will the reader understand what the writer is trying to say?




How to Revise

- Read from the reader's perspective
- Read aloud
- Clarify information
- Add or delete material
- Rewrite

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Revising Feedback


- Does the work make sense?
- Do you reach your audience?
- Do you achieve your purpose?
- Is the content strong and on-task?
- Is there a strong introduction and conclusion?



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Editing

- Are the sentences clear and easy to understand?
- Are there errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics?




How to Edit

- Read sentence by sentence
- Give to an editor
- Use a checklist

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Editing Feedback

- Are all the sentences complete sentences with a subject and verb?
- Do the subjects and verbs agree?
- Are there misspelled words?
- Are there misused words? (its/it's, their/there)
- Is the punctuation correct?
- Do pronouns agree with their respective antecedents?
- Are there adjectives and adverbs that make the writing more descriptive?




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There is a Difference!

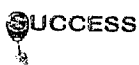
After revising, your paper may convey ideas differently, but the reader will better understand what you are trying to say.

After editing, your paper will say essentially the same thing, but it will sound smoother and clearer.



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<p><u>Editing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar • Usage • Mechanics 	<p><u>Revising</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unity <p><i>Every detail in the essay supports a central idea--<u>focus</u></i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherence <p><i>Transitional words, phrases, and/or clauses guide the reader</i></p>
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Patterns of Errors

- List the primary error patterns that you noted in the student's writing.
- Do not worry about order.

Workbook
p. 21

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Identify the Top Two Priorities

- Select one that is quick and easy to fix (perhaps a grammatical problem that shows a pattern)
- Select another priority that will assist in the "readability" of the piece
- Complete the Instructional Writing Plan

Workbook
p. 21

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- Concerns About Developing a Writing Assessment and Plan
 - Time-consuming
 - Difficult to identify error patterns, priorities for change, strategies, and appropriate materials

Remember, this process is not completed on every piece of writing!

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- Alternative Formats for Assessment
 - Informal discussions with students
 - Shortened formats
 - Other ideas?

Workbook
pp. 22 & 31
Writing Guide
pp. 10 -11

**It's Your Turn!
Completing an Initial Assessment
on Your Student's Writing**

Workbook
pp. 23-28

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*When something can be
read without effort,
great effort has gone into
its writing.*

Enrique Jardiel Poncela

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Students need to see examples of effective writing!

Seven horizontal lines for writing notes.

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Looking at High School Level Writing

Workbook pp. 29-33



Seven horizontal lines for writing notes.

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Good Writing = Good Storytelling

Have students ask the following questions of their writing:

- Does my opening catch a person's attention?
- Is my narrative clear and to the point?
- Is the material presented in a logical manner?
- Does my writing have a clear beginning, middle and end?
- Is it easy for a listener or reader to follow along?
- Have I put myself in my listener's or reader's place?
- Have I made my story *interesting* enough to make people want to read all the way through?
- Is my main point or "moral" to the story obvious?
- Does my conclusion satisfy readers, rather than leave them hanging?
- Would people who have heard the story be likely to want to retell it to others?

Seven horizontal lines for writing notes.

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Remember . . .

- It is not enough for writers to use correct verbs, nouns, pronouns, and punctuation in order to write effectively.
- Writers must compose with an *audience* in mind and craft that composition to ensure that the audience is able to understand and follow the writer's ideas.

Some Final Thoughts

- Incorporate critical thinking activities into every class – brainstorming, vocabulary builders, grammar games
- Conduct small and large group activities every day
- Encourage teamwork and opportunities for students to interact with each other
- Show relevance of what is being taught to learners' goals and needs
- Make instruction relevant by restructuring education to mimic the real world - use authentic tasks and authentic materials
- Expect more from students and push them to achieve higher levels of writing in all areas
- Have students practice, practice, and practice their writing skills in all areas

***Education is not
the filling of a pail,
but the lighting of a fire.***



William Butler Yeats
