WRITING IS A VERB, NOT A NOUN:
USING EVALUATION TO ENHANCE STUDENTS’ WRITING SKILLS

by
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ABSTRACT

Listen long enough to faculty members at almost any university in the United States, and one will hear of the dismal writing skills exhibited by all too many students. Clearly, students who write poorly are ill-equipped for today’s demands in industry and business, and their lack of writing ability may contribute to difficulty in reflecting on course content and in critical thinking. We know that writing often will not improve within the time confines of a single academic term; lower functioning students in particular tend to develop their writing skill over time. With so much at stake, it is vital that students improve this important skill in every course they take.

What should instructors do to help students improve their writing? What works? This paper presents strategies for the evaluation of student writing in ways that facilitate improvement. Principles of writing evaluation are identified, and insights gained from developmental writing classrooms and writing across the curriculum efforts are discussed. A presentation of informal assessment techniques such as self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and writing for revision describes a number of strategies for helping students to view writing as a process, rather than as a finished product that cannot be improved. Formal assessment of writing topics such as grading, ranking, analytic methods of evaluation, and holistic methods of evaluation, along with rubrics and descriptions of evaluative scales, provide useful tools for assessing written work in any content area. A brief outline of the affective domain and potential measures for student writers is included as well. The myriad of ideas presented here serves as a starting point for those who want to help their students be successful communicators.
Writing Is A Verb, Not A Noun: Using Evaluation to Enhance Students' Writing Skills

Introduction
Evaluating students' written work in ways that encourage improvement is one of the more difficult tasks that instructors face. The writing-across-the-curriculum movement has assumed that the promotion of writing increases students' learning (McGovern & Hogshead, 1990), a concept that has been espoused by many researchers as a means of both helping students learn subject-specific material and of improving their written communication skills (Gruber et al., 1999). Writing in the disciplines should contribute positively to students' overall development: It should help students learn course content, improve their writing, and generate new meaning through reflection. McGovern & Hogshead (1990) affirmed that “writing is a complex intellectual process” and that “writing is a mode of learning as well as communicating” (p. 21).

Some instructors view writing as a skill with parts that may be taught in order to produce a measurable product. According to Zinn (1998), such a view may harm students with lesser writing abilities as the high volume of comments on these students' papers may be unclear and appear arbitrary to the students. Perhaps our definition of writing needs to change: McGovern and Hogshead (1990) changed their views through their involvement in a university project focusing on the definition and assessment of general education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Our thinking about writing was fairly basic. [We formerly believed that] Writing is a skill that is learned through opportunities to practice and by receiving feedback from an instructor. We were thinking about writing as a noun, that is, as a text produced by the student and corrected by the instructor. Our emphasis was on traditional assignments and giving feedback to our students about their prose. We began to construe writing as a verb. Writing is an action, a process of thinking and learning, which is inextricably tied to our students' cognitive development in our particular courses and in their college careers in general (p.5).

This paper assumes the value of incorporating writing into the curriculum across the disciplines and the use of writing assessment techniques as a means of improving students' written communication skills; it presents assessment methods that practitioners have developed that work.

The Nature of Writing Assessment
Evaluating students' writing can be very time-consuming and is often perceived by instructors as an arduous and sometimes fruitless task. Additionally, the nature of the assessment process itself is fraught with concerns about consistency of evaluation and appropriateness of the measures. Instructors must understand the principles of writing assessment and employ them appropriately to
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achieve the highest potential improvement in students' writing.

Definitions

In this paper, the terms "assessment" and "evaluation" will be used as follows:

**Assessment:** A communication intended to shape students' performance (as opposed to judgment).

**Evaluation:** Determining worth by outlining strengths and weaknesses. Forms include both formative measures (without judgment) and summative measures (making a judgment, as in assigning a grade). Thus a formative evaluation is very similar if not the same as an assessment.

Principles of Writing Evaluation

The evaluation of writing must be resolutely tied to the goals of the course. What the instructor values is what should be evaluated. The learning outcomes and evaluative criteria should be clear and should be communicated to the students. The instructor should develop his or her own response for written assignments or essay questions and use the essence of the response as a model for rating students' work. This is a good way to ensure content congruence and clarity of purpose.

A joint task force comprised of representatives from the International Reading Association and the National Classroom Teachers of English (1994) established the principles of writing assessment most likely to encourage improvement in student writing. These principles included the following:

1) Evaluation measures and instructor comments should encourage students to reflect upon their writing in constructive ways that lead to revision.

2) Instructor comments should emphasize what students can do, not what they have failed to do. Do not mark every error.

3) Hold the standard for students' writing high to yield high quality results.

What We Can Learn from Developmental Writing Classrooms

While on the surface it may seem irrelevant to study the techniques that work in the instruction of developmental writing students to glean helpful practices for the university-level classroom, the same techniques that are endorsed at the middle and high school levels are practiced in post-secondary developmental classrooms and also in universities. The common goal is to align evaluation with course goals and adopt best practices in enhancing students' writing.

According to Cleland (1995), an associate professor in the Department of English and Philosophy at Purdue University, a large contributing factor in poor student writing is a lack of distance. Some students bring a high competency in oral communication, but little sense of how to establish the rhetoric of distance common to academic writing. These students communicate as though the audience were "right there," and convey their thoughts in writing as they would speak them. This causes the writer to leave out contextual details and elaboration of meaning. Such writing tends to lack coherence, context, and discussion. The
first key to helping students learn the difference between oral communication and written communication with its need for elaborated forms and syntax is to immerse them in writing. Developing writers need multiple opportunities for revision. They must learn to reflect upon their own writing and to improve the quality of what they have produced. This principle holds true not only for writers in need of remediation but also for all writers. Students at all levels must recognize writing as a process, a state of becoming, as opposed to a noun, a fixed state. An important goal of informal writing assessment is to establish the writing and rewriting process as the norm for all writers.

This instructor has found that writing for revision does help students to produce better papers. What is not clear is whether or not students are able to apply the concepts learned to other writing projects. While intuitively instructors would assert that students gain skill which they apply to future writing tasks, the evidence from the classroom is not always clear. From this instructor's experience in teaching developmental writing, the conclusions are that very low functioning students do not seem to apply the improvement in writing from one assignment to the next. It appears that they are unable to improve their perception of audience distance and mechanical weaknesses in the duration of one term to the point that they are capable of reflecting upon their own writing and revising appropriately without outside feedback.

Students who possess a frame of reference for applying the new writing skill learned appear to improve dramatically and appear to carry their learning over to new writing projects. It is the opinion of this instructor that students' varying foundations for writing improvement is three-fold: critical thinking ability, established writing ability, and reading background. Writing well is intimately intertwined with critical thinking, as one cannot write well without having something to say (Graham, 1992, as cited in Gruber et al., 1999).

**What We Can Learn from Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Efforts**

At Northern Arizona University (NAU), the engineering faculty in the College of Engineering and Technology (CET) saw writing as a means of involving students in a community of discourse in the discipline and of developing the needed communication skills demanded in industry (Gruber et al., 1999). The purpose of the program was clear: to develop the communication skill in students that industry requires. At NAU, the CET faculty designed a series of four core engineering courses to narrow the gap between engineering students' educational preparation and the industry requirements for success in the workplace. The program, called Design4Practice, addressed the "discrepancies in communication skills, problem recognition and solving, and ethics and professionalism" (Gruber et al., 1999, p. 423). Cross-disciplinary instructional teams emphasized the communication skills needed for management and the profession, especially technical writing. Engineering faculty were encouraged to "see themselves as writing experts in their disciplines who would be able to work with students on improving their writing.
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skills" (Gruber et al., 1999, p. 424). After a series of faculty writing workshops, the faculty began sequencing writing assignments in the core engineering courses and using a structured peer review process to help students improve their writing. Faculty scored students' work on a four-point scale (4=high, 1=low), addressing the following global issues:

1) Clarity and coherence of structure:
   a) Was there a clear introductory thought?
   b) Was there a clear assertion of position?
   c) Was there a logical argument to support the assertion?
   d) Was there a concluding thought?
2) Correctness and conciseness:
   a) Were the sentences constructed correctly and concisely?
   b) Was the paragraph structure logical?
   c) Did the response address the issue of concern in the prompt? (p. 431)

The papers were ranked and read by two readers. Findings showed that there did not appear to be any statistical growth in the students' writing skills. Students' papers were "largely disorganized and incomplete" (p. 432). Anecdotal findings, however, indicated that there was an improvement in students' desire to improve their writing and that students' writing in their assignments did improve. While the average student score did not increase significantly, "individual students' scores increased significantly. On the other hand, some students' scores dropped, counteracting the positive increase evident in some student writing" (pp. 433-434). It was found that students took the pre-test more seriously than the post-test, largely because the post-test was conducted immediately following an intensive project.

The CET faculty concluded that students' gains in writing may not be evident within a short period of time and that results of writing-across-the-curriculum efforts should be measured on a programmatic, long-term basis. They further commented that holistic scoring of students' writing was an effective way of evaluating students' work (Gruber et al., 1999). These conclusions are consistent with findings from other WAC efforts.

Informal Assessment
Evaluation does not necessarily mean assigning a grade. Not all students' writing should receive a summative evaluation if students are to master the process of writing for revision. Informal procedures are often more productive, establishing a workshop environment rather than a competitive one where grades instead of learning is the goal. Informal writing assessment should encourage students to take risks early in the writing process. In the workshop environment, instructors become facilitators who help students to recognize the problems in their own writing and to correct them (White, 1994; Zinn, 1998).

One of the key concepts of informal assessment, according to Edward White (1994), a leading expert in assessment, is to give meaningful praise when responding to students'
work. White warned that vague compliments, such as "good job" could be detrimental, so the instructor must be specific. He proposed that instructors should mark and comment upon the clearest, most inventive sentence in the student's work. White suggested that instructors pose questions rather than making statements, as questions may inspire students to reflect upon their work.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment places more of the responsibility for writing improvement upon the student. Rather than serving as a means of reducing instructor workload, as students sometimes perceive this technique, it encourages self-reliance and helps students to ascribe meaning to the long process of writing as they reflect upon their own work. Zinn (1998) suggested the inclusion of the following elements:

1) Ask the length of time the students spent writing (from prewriting to the final revision).

2) Ask students to comment upon their most meaningful revision, having students outline the strengths and weaknesses of their work.

3) Ask students to set at least one goal for improving in the next assignment.

Peer Evaluation

Instructors should realize that peer evaluation takes quite a bit of class time. However, the technique can be very effective, so the benefits of peer evaluation should be carefully considered before rejecting it.

Reasons to consider using peer evaluation of writing assignments:

1. Students enjoy working together and learn group communication skills.

2. Examples of good papers written by peers are more readily accepted than models written by instructors, as students' papers may set a more realistic goal for achievement than the lofty instructor-produced paper.

3. The editing and revision processes are more accepted when done in a group.

4. Students realize that revision is necessary for everyone; thus they lose the misconception that having to revise equals failure (Zinn, 1998).

Several means of achieving peer collaboration for improving writing exist. They include forming groups in which one student reads another student's work aloud and offers an oral reaction to the work. Another technique involves having student groups comment on each other's work in specific areas, adding suggestions for improvement. Another method espoused by Elbow (1973, as cited in Zinn, 1998) uses summary techniques. One student reads his/her paper aloud, and the responding student has fifteen seconds to name the main points of the work, using different words than those used by the writer. Then, the responder or the group attempts to summarize the work in one sentence. Finally, each member of the group chooses one word to summarize the paper. Through this process, the writer will see whether or not the intended meaning of the paper came through. Peer processes should be highly structured for the first few times students
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meet. Especially if students are not accustomed to talking about their writing or offering peer comments about others' work, the initial attempts at doing so may be awkward. It is important to establish clear guidelines and a safe environment if peer evaluation is to be effective.

Writing for Revision

Greenwald (1997) advocated the use of a highlighter for highlighting errors in students' papers. She maintained that the technique called students' attention to the weak areas and encouraged discussion helpful for revision.

McGovern and Hogshead (1990) designed a writing activity known as the *telescoping paper* that incorporated writing for revision into a manageable series of stages toward the perfection of a seven to ten page research paper. Students first explored a topic, producing annotations on two or three articles. The instructor provided extensive written feedback for this assignment; however, the grading weight of the assignment was very low. Students used the feedback when gathering more sources and expanding the annotations into a seven to ten page literature review. Again, instructor comments were extensive, while the weight of the assignment was low. Sections of the paper were then assigned for expansion, yet the students had to keep their papers within the original length requirements. The addition of the new sections forced the students to tighten their writing, and grading weight increased, so that students were rewarded for successful revisions. The new sections required less critical scrutiny than the earlier versions of the paper, making the grading load manageable. Students found the editing for the telescoping length to be challenging, but they felt that the writing of the papers was more manageable than developing multiple topics into separate papers.

Formal Assessment of Writing

Grading Student Writing

Research has shown that the scoring of essays and papers is usually unreliable; scores not only vary across different graders, they vary with the individual grader at different times. Good grading practices increase the reliability of assessment judgments. Written work should be judged on its content, organization, and style. Instructors may wish to evaluate the work in each of these areas and assign a mark on the basis of some combination of these factors.

Comments should be written judiciously and legibly. Use the margins, the back, or attach a note. Try to say enough so that the student has a reasonably good chance of doing better next time; however, strive for a few analytical comments on the good and bad aspects of the work rather than a detailed critique—writing too many comments tends to overwhelm students.

Distributing a model response with the corrected essays can alleviate some of the burden of writing comments on exams. Students tend to learn a little more when they compare their answers with the model, and they develop a clearer picture of why they received the grade they did. Consider asking students producing high quality work for permission to use their response as the model. The work, sans student's name, may be used in future classes.
Suggestions for Increasing the Reliability of Ranking Methods of Evaluation

1. Read a few papers before you actually start grading in order to get an idea of the range of quality.
2. Some instructors select "range finder" papers-middle range A, B, C and D papers to which they refer for comparison.
3. Stop grading when you get too tired or bored. When you start again, read over the last couple of papers you graded to make sure you were fair.
4. Conceal the student's name while you grade the response. If you know the identity of the student, your overall impressions of that student's work will inevitably influence the scoring of the test.
5. If there is more than one essay question on the test, grade each essay separately rather than grading a student's entire test at once. Otherwise, a brilliant performance on the first question may overshadow weaker answers in other questions (or vice-versa).
6. Remain open to legitimate interpretations of the questions different from your own. If students misinterpret the intent of your question, or if your standards are unrealistically high or low, you should alter your model response in light of this information.

Two Methods for Evaluating Essay Responses

Analytic Method

In this method the ideal or model answer is broken down into several specific points regarding content. A specific subtotal point value is assigned to each. When reading the exam, you need to decide how much of each maximum subtotal you judge the student's answer to have earned. When using this method, be sure to outline the model (ideal or acceptable) answer BEFORE you begin to read the essays.

Holistic Method

In this method the rater reads the entire essay and makes an overall judgment about how successfully the student has covered everything that was expected in the answer and assigns the paper to a category (grade).

Generally, five to nine categories are sufficient. Ideally, all of the essays should be read quickly and sorted into five to nine piles, then each pile reread to check that every essay has been accurately (fairly) assigned to that pile which will be given a specific score or letter grade.
EXAMPLE OF A DIAGNOSTIC SCALE FOR GRADING A PARAGRAPH
(Central Florida Community College)

MAIN IDEA/TOPIC SENTENCE
6—Presents or implies a main idea with noticeable coherence.
5—Presents or implies a main idea with convincing, specific detail.
4—Presents or implies a main idea and suggests a plan of development, which is usually carried out.
3—Presents or implies a main idea and suggests a plan of development, which is partially or weakly carried out.
2—Presents an unfocused or generalized main idea.
1—Presents little or no main idea, vaguely worded.

DETAILS
6—Are substantive, sophisticated, and elaborated.
5—Are fresh, mature, and extensively developed.
4—Are specific enough to contribute to the main idea.
3—Are generalized or a listing, poor support of main idea.
2—Are generalized, sketchy, and/or illogical.
1—Are very generalized, superficial, and/or rambling.

SENTENCES AND DICTION
6—Are varied, precise and purposeful, often polished.
5—Are varied and show an excellent command of language.
4—Are sometimes varied and show a good command of language.
3—Are not varied, pedestrian, and somewhat repetitious.
2—Are simplistic, repetitious, and sometimes disjointed.
1—Are tangled, incoherent, and confusing.

USAGE AND MECHANICS
6—Control of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics, despite an occasional flaw, visibly contributes to the writer's ability to communicate the main idea.
5—Control of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics, despite an occasional flaw, contributes to the writer's ability to communicate the main idea.
4—Occasional errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics do not interfere with the writer's ability to communicate the main idea.
3—Errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics sometimes interfere with the writer's ability to communicate the main idea.
2—Errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics frequently interfere with the writer's ability to communicate the main idea.
1—Numerous errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics substantially interfere with the writer's ability to communicate the main idea.

Conversion Grading Scale/Added Total Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24 = 100</th>
<th>20 = 90</th>
<th>16 = 80</th>
<th>12 = 70</th>
<th>8 = 60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 = 98</td>
<td>19 = 88</td>
<td>15 = 78</td>
<td>11 = 68</td>
<td>7 = 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 = 95</td>
<td>18 = 85</td>
<td>14 = 75</td>
<td>10 = 65</td>
<td>6 = 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 = 93</td>
<td>17 = 83</td>
<td>13 = 73</td>
<td>9 = 63</td>
<td>5 = 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Faculty Symposium on Teaching Effectiveness
October 2002
An Analytic Scale for Grading Content Writing

This sample scale attributes 70% of the grade to the successful explication of three content objectives, one weighted 30%, two others valued at 20%. An additional 30% of the grade is attributable to writing quality, divided equally among organization, clarity, and correctness. Space is left after each category for instructor comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content objective A (30%)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content objective B (20%)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>10</th>
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<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content objective C (20%)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comments

Writing (30%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization (10%)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarity (10%)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Correctness (10%)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comments

TOTAL __________ of 100

Overall reaction and suggestions:

from Tchudi, Stephen N. (1986). Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: College Level. NEA, p. 57.
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### RUBRIC FOR HOLISTIC SCORING OF ANALYSIS OF AN ARGUMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6 Outstanding | A 6 paper presents a cogent, well-articulated critique of the argument and demonstrates mastery of the elements of effective writing. A typical paper in this category:  
- clearly identifies and insightfully analyzes important features of the argument  
- develops ideas cogently, organizes them logically, and connects them with clear transitions  
- effectively supports the main points of the critique  
- demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntactic variety  
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor flaws |
| 5 Strong | A 5 paper presents a well-developed critique of the argument and demonstrates good control of the elements of effective writing. A typical paper in this category:  
- clearly identifies important features of the argument and analyzes them in a generally thoughtful way  
- develops ideas clearly, organizes them logically, and connects them with appropriate transitions  
- sensibly supports the main points of the critique  
- demonstrates control of the language, including diction and syntactic variety  
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have occasional flaws |
| 4 Adequate | A 4 paper presents a competent critique of the argument and demonstrates adequate control of the elements of writing. A typical paper in this category:  
- identifies and analyzes important features of the argument  
- develops and organizes ideas satisfactorily but may not connect them with transitions  
- supports the main points of the critique  
- demonstrates sufficient control of language to convey ideas with reasonable clarity  
- generally follows the conventions of standard written English but may have some flaws |
| 3 Limited | A 3 paper demonstrates some competence in analytical writing skills and in its control of the elements of writing but is plainly flawed. A typical paper in this category exhibits one or more of the following characteristics:  
- does not identify or analyze most of the important features of the argument, although some analysis of the argument is present  
- devotes most of its time to analyzing tangential or irrelevant issues  
- is limited in the logical development and organization of ideas  
- offers support of little relevance and value for points of the critique  
- does not convey meaning clearly  
- contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics |
| 2 Seriously Flawed | A 2 paper demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing skills. A typical paper in this category exhibits one or more of the following characteristics:  
- does not present a critique based on logical analysis, but may instead present the writer's own views on the subject  
- does not develop ideas or is disorganized  
- provides little, if any, relevant or reasonable support  
- has serious and frequent problems in the use of language and in sentence structure  
- contains numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that interfere with meaning |
| 1 Fundamentally Deficient | A 1 paper demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing skills. A typical paper in this category exhibits more than one of the following characteristics:  
- provides little evidence of the ability to understand and analyze the argument  
- provides little evidence of the ability to develop an organized response  
- has severe and persistent errors in language and sentence structure  
- contains a pervasive pattern or errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that results in incoherence |
| 0—Illegible, off-topic, in a foreign language, or merely copies the topic |
| NR—Blank or nonverbal |

(Adapted from a holistic scoring rubric used for the GMAT exam.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Diction</th>
<th>Sentence Structure</th>
<th>Grammar and Mechanics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writer consciously shapes the introduction to establish a distinct</td>
<td>Writer designs the progression of ideas with thoughtful precision and</td>
<td>Writer chooses words with commanding sense of purpose, resulting in</td>
<td>Writer demonstrates an impressive understanding of emphasis, rhythm, and pacing</td>
<td>Writer demonstrates a command of grammar and mechanics to create involving, often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship with the reader; convincingly gains reader acceptance of</td>
<td>imagination; demonstrates impressive facility in sustaining focus and</td>
<td>articulate, mature, and often compelling prose; insightful use of</td>
<td>in forming and positioning sentences; often goes beyond conventions deliberately to</td>
<td>stylistic prose; control and purpose consistently evident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>argument through imaginative, logical, and precise development of</td>
<td>establishing provocative connections for the reader to consider.</td>
<td>language; efficacious use of voice, appropriate to purpose and</td>
<td>create an effect.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>thesis; articulately develops and details; deliberately shapes the</td>
<td></td>
<td>audience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>conclusion for convincing and persuasive appeal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writer creates reader interest by introducing central idea clearly and</td>
<td>Writer controls development of essay by shaping a distinct beginning, middle,</td>
<td>Writer chooses concrete, specific words and uses them correctly; uses</td>
<td>Writer understands correct use of coordination, subordination, and sentence types</td>
<td>Writer demonstrates command of mechanics; subjects and verbs agree and tenses are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectively; achieves reader acceptance of argument through logical</td>
<td>and end; controls thesis and progression of ideas by sustaining clear focus</td>
<td>diction that is distinctive and mature, with effective metaphors and</td>
<td>(simple, compound, complex, compound-complex); seeks variety in both sentence</td>
<td>consistent; sentences are complete; pronouns in correct cases agree with and refer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and precise development of thesis; develops and details; concludes</td>
<td>and consistent line of argument; organizes specific details in logical</td>
<td>analogies for clarity or emphasis; avoids colloquialisms, clichés, and</td>
<td>length and structural patterns.</td>
<td>clearly to their antecedents; modifiers are properly placed; spelling and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with distinct persuasive appeal.</td>
<td>sequence; uses effective transitions to maintain coherence and provide</td>
<td>trite expressions; develops economical and natural style, neither wordy</td>
<td></td>
<td>punctuation are correct. Format is correct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>necessary links between and within paragraphs.</td>
<td>nor contrived or inflated; selects strong verbs with active voice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>predominant.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer creates some reader interest in argument by presenting clear</td>
<td>Writer controls development of essay by arranging examples supporting the</td>
<td>Writer uses clear, concise words and relatively mature, natural style;</td>
<td>Writer demonstrates better than average variety in sentence structure; makes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thesis statement and supporting it with good examples and reasoning.</td>
<td>thesis in an orderly and logical fashion; connects examples and reasons with</td>
<td>minimizes wordiness, passive voice, and inaccurate words.</td>
<td>relatively few errors in use of coordination, subordination and sentence types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer's presentation of topic is not unique, yet the presentation is</td>
<td>adequate transitions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>(simple, compound, complex, compound-complex).</td>
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<td>smooth and effective; conclusion is not strongly persuasive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writer frames topic in conventional and predictable manner, stating the</td>
<td>Writer employs a loose and sometimes unclear logic or pattern; needs better</td>
<td>Writer uses overly general, vague, or pedestrian words; depends on</td>
<td>Writer exhibits occasional but limited errors in syntax, agreement, pronoun</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>obvious, developing only surface meaning; development may lack clarity;</td>
<td>transitions between ideas; or adopts a mechanical development and seems to</td>
<td>clichés and jargon; overly wordy; overuses passive voice.</td>
<td>reference, spelling, or punctuation.</td>
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<td>concludes vaguely or abruptly.</td>
<td>just follow a formula.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writer fails to provide a relevant discussion of the topic; does not</td>
<td>Writer demonstrates little control of topic; insufficient evidence or</td>
<td>Writer chooses words almost carelessly; may be too familiar with the</td>
<td>Writer makes frequent but manageable errors in syntax, agreement, pronoun case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide evidence to substantiate an argument; does not follow a central</td>
<td>examples to organize.</td>
<td>reader; uses colloquialisms, clichés, and jargon.</td>
<td>and reference, spelling, or punctuation. Shows problems with format.</td>
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<td>line of discussion; commits many logical fallacies; strays from the</td>
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<td>point.</td>
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<td>Writer fails to complete assignment.</td>
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Grading Rubric From the University of Central Florida
A Note about Essay Exams

Many instructors consider essay questions to be the ideal form of testing, since essays seem to require more effort from the student than other types of questions. Essay questions can test complex thought processes, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, and essays require students to use the English language to communicate in sentences and paragraphs—a skill that undergraduates need to exercise more frequently. Essay responses allow us to see our students' thought processes that lead to the answers.

While essay questions are relatively efficient to compose, the evaluation of the responses can be very time-consuming. As with essay prompts and other writing assignments, the instructor should form a model response ahead of time and clearly communicate the performance expectations. Allowing students to select which essay questions to answer (e.g. "choose two out of five") is not a good practice, as it is virtually impossible to compose five equivalent essay questions, and students will usually choose weaker questions and thereby reduce the validity of the exam.

A Checklist for Creating Essay Exam Items

- The essay item tests a higher-level learning outcome or complex content not readily measured by objective-type items.
- The item requires students to apply knowledge, integrate their learning, be creative, and demonstrate other similar skills.
- The item samples important content learned in the course.
- The item adequately evaluates the content area and level of learning intended.
- The item is written clearly.
- The item gives direction about how to respond to avoid writing all that is known about the topic.
- If extended response, the item is not too broad.
- If restricted response, the content could not be assessed more easily with an objective item.

Affective Assessment of Student Writers

The Affective Domain

Receiving = Open and attentive to new ideas
Responding = React to new information
Valuing = Apply criteria to new information
Organizing = Create schema for using information
Characterizing = Apply a belief system to new ideas
While instructors may not wish to assign a grade for affective elements of students' learning experiences, it is worthwhile to note that the informal assessment methods as prescribed in this paper should engage students in an active community of learners as they work together to learn course content and to communicate effectively in writing.

Measures of this domain could include the following:

(1) Attitude toward the writing process as revealed in self-assessments and revision efforts,
(2) Evidence of communication with peers in discussing writing and in providing effective peer assessments, and
(3) Evidence and degree of reflection upon one's own writing.
REFERENCES


Tchudi, Stephen N. (1986). Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: College Level. NEA.
