Writing Assessment Guide

RATERS
of the Lost Art

Your Map to a Successful Writing Assessment

Learning to write formally to an objective audience has wide applicability both inside and outside the classroom.

At **Raters of the Lost Art**, our raters are trained to meet the highest standards in writing assessment evaluation. We will help you navigate the turbulent waters of assessment for both the six traits and the Common Core, by providing you with an expert perspective.

We have dropped a few hints and tips and a compass to help you along the way. We wish you a smooth journey!

Contents

The Six Traits Plus Common Core

What is Analytical Scoring?
Analytical scoring is a way of evaluating a piece of writing by looking at its component parts. These parts are basic and universal to nearly all types of writing; each is given separate and equal consideration.

The Six Trait Analytical Model
The six trait analytical model grew out of the need for teachers and students to retrieve useful, specific feedback from evaluations of student writing. In the early 1980s, teachers from Beaverton, Oregon created a system designed to replace the one-grade-fits-all approach. Their work evolved into the six trait analytical model for scoring which has been in use for over thirty years around the nation and around the world.

Amazingly, little controversy has erupted over the designation of the six traits—*ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions*—as the salient features of writing. These essential traits are at once both obvious and overlooked—so simple and logical one feels somewhat underwhelmed to hear them named.

Scoring
Our scoring model uses consistent, universal language to describe the characteristics of writing in each of the traits; each trait receives a score on a scale from one (beginning or emerging) to six (exceeds grade level expectations) for that trait. Separating out traits allows evaluators to examine more precisely what *is* working in a student's writing, and what is *not* working—its strengths and weaknesses. For a summary of the criterion used for each trait in the six trait, six point model, see our *Resources* document (**http://raterswriting.com/resources**).

Common Core State Standards
The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) is a state-led effort that establishes a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through twelfth grade in the United States.

We recognize that teachers need to know where their kids stand in meeting the grade-specific, end-of-year expectations in language and writing set by the CCSS. This is why we have included a Common Core Proficiency Check to give teachers feedback in regard to their grade-level standards.

The Common Core standards are specific. Some of the standards are universal to nearly all types of writing (elements of L.1-L.2), but other standards can only be evaluated within specific modes (types of writing) or within a specific context. For example, the fifth grade standard L.5.2(d) says, "Use underlining, quotation marks, or italics to indicate titles of works." We cannot evaluate this standard when it is not called for in the writing (see *Modes, Prompts and Classroom Instructions*, below).

Six Traits Plus Common Core, Why Both?
Nowhere in the CCSS is there a claim that the standards attempt to give a comprehensive evaluation of student writing; they provide, more accurately, a proficiency check of specific strands of learning. The CCSS helps to identify proficiency in component skills of writing, like the use of semicolons, at an appropriate *time* to learn the skill (ninth/tenth grade), while the six trait model recognizes the advanced use of punctuation as a component part of the broader "Conventions" trait. The CCSS evaluates detailed, specific skills, while the six trait model looks at the writing as a whole.

Modes, Prompts and Classroom Instructions

Modes, or the Types of Writing
Our raters are trained to assess writing in all of the modes, and have experience reading thousands of student papers written to countless prompts. The six trait scoring model is constructed in a way that allows for flexible application across the types of writing. The trait of voice, for example, resonates differently in expository and narrative writing, but retains full value as a component trait in both.

The Common Core writing standards focus on three types of writing: (1) opinion/argumentative [W.x.1], (2) informative/explanatory [W.x.2] and (3) narrative [W.x.3]. The expectations and criteria to look for accumulate in complexity as the grade level goes up. In order to elicit demonstration of specific standards, the prompt may require more detail in the instructions. For example, beginning with the sixth grade, students are asked to refer to "credible sources" in their opinion/argumentative writing (CC W.6-12.2b). If the prompt makes this requirement explicit, ("Cite an external source..."), we can mark a missing citation as an area that needs work; however, if the prompt does not require an external source, we will mark the standard as "Not Evident", neither successfully nor unsuccessfully fulfilled.

Choosing a Prompt
Included in our Scoring Guides and Prompt Listings document are suggestions for age appropriate prompts that have a good track record for inspiring the type of writing requested. Whether you use your own prompts or choose one from the listing, some words of advice: choose thoughtfully and be on the lookout for "what could go wrong." For a discussion of possible prompt pitfalls see the article "So Much Depends Upon... the Prompt!" on our forum (**http://raterswriting.com/forum**). We are always happy to weigh in on your candidates for prompts, if you need an objective "vote."

Time Range/Instructions
Generally, three class periods of thirty to forty minutes each for third grade and up, are allotted to complete the writing process. For wordprocessed papers, use a standard font and point size (such as Times, 12pt, double-spaced, standard margins.)

K-2 students should be allowed enough time to bring their stories and pictures to a satisfactory sense of completion for them. If you have a shorter time frame to work with, just let us know and we will take that into consideration when we score your papers. Some of the scores may be affected, such as the organization trait, due to rushed or missing conclusions. Student papers usually end up being between one and four pages (one to three pages typed), depending on the prompt and age level.

How Much Teacher Help?

Beginners K-2
Before the day and time period given over to writing for assessment, beginning writers are encouraged to review the basics: where the title goes, where the first line of the writing begins, starting with an upper case letter, ending sentences with punctuation, and so on. Students are encouraged to use clues in their classroom environment for letters, words, trait posters, etc. when they are writing for the assessment. These aids can be a big help if students remember to use them! The last thing anyone wants is to create pressure and stress. Beginners are encouraged to draw and write if they know some words or letters. Feeling comfortable putting something down on the paper is a mark of success in its own right!

Grades 3-12
For students third grade and up, a review a few days before the assessment to remind students of the purposes of the types of writing, and the writing process itself, is helpful.

During the assessment, a dictionary, spell check, and thesaurus are acceptable to use as references. Encyclopedia, Wikipedia, etc. are not permitted. Students will need to manage the time range you allow them, to plan, draft and polish their piece. Remind students to use their time for revision to edit and revise—not just recopy the paper word for word. **Please do not include rough drafts** unless the final copy of the writing is incomplete or missing. We will read both the finished piece (as far as it goes) and the ending on the rough draft for the evaluation.

Transferring Papers

Before we can score your papers, we will need three things from you. We need the mode and prompts that you are using, a class list, and the papers. If you would like help with any step in this process, feel free to call us at (503) 989-7546 or email us at **inquiry@raterswriting.com**.

Types of Writing and Prompts
Please email the mode(s) and prompts(s) you will be using per grade or class to be assessed.

Excel List of Students
We need an Excel file that has the following information about your students: Student ID; Student Name; Teacher; Grade; Class Period; School. If you have multiple columns for the teacher or student names (First Name, Last Name, Middle Initial), and have trouble combining those columns, we can combine them for you.

Paper Handling Options
There are two ways to send your papers, by postal service or digitally. We strongly recommend that you send your papers digitally. Papers sent digitally shorten and simplify the process while maintaining your privacy, which in turn reduces costs for everyone.

Sending Options

Digital Transfer of Papers
A few days before you upload your papers, we will send you a username/password combination. We use Dropbox.com for transferring papers. Dropbox.com is an intuitive and secure web-based application for digital transfers.

Most schools have people in them who are familiar with scanning documents. If you have a copy machine, we recommend using it for this process; the sorting device on most major copiers is designed to handle large numbers of papers and the scanning features are easy to use once they are set up. Our goal is to get readable papers in relatively small file sizes. Please scan student papers in groups of 10-20 papers in the PDF file format; we recommend 200dpi B&W scanning for typed papers, 100-150dpi grayscale for handwritten papers (and 100dpi color for those colorful kindergarten pictures).

A username/password combination will be emailed to you a few days before the assessment.
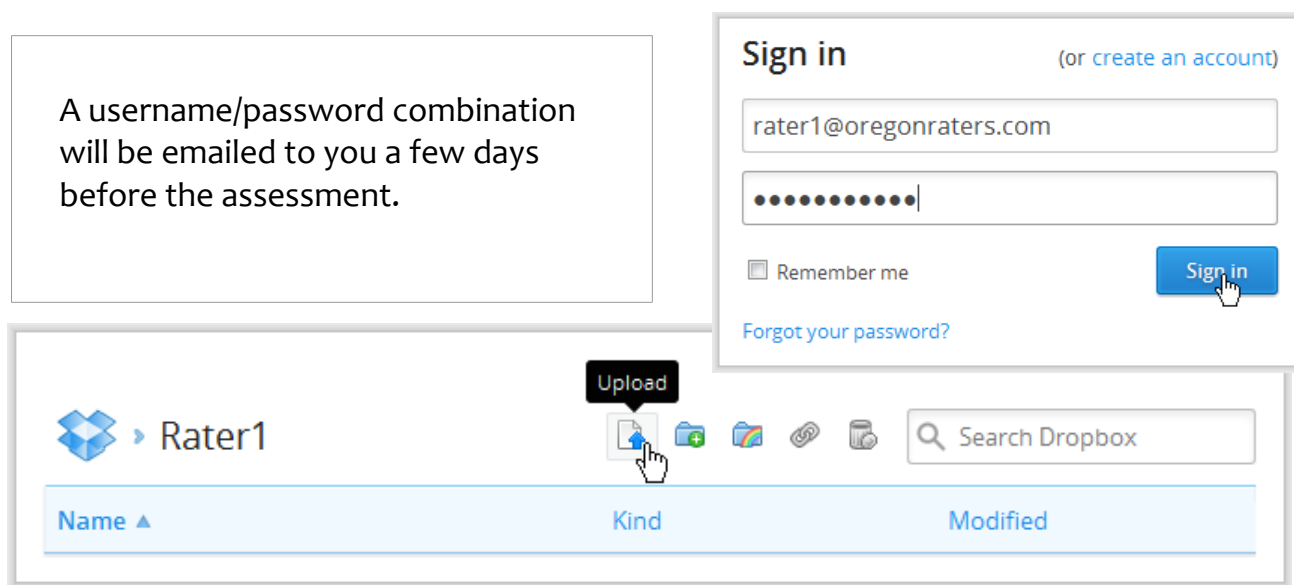
Mailing Papers
We recommend using "top loaded" USPS Priority Mail Medium Flat Rate Boxes for papers mailed in the U.S.

Features

- Free USPS Tracking
- Delivery within 3 business days
- No weighing or calculating needed
- Boxes provided for free at the post office
- Less than $15 a box to send

These "top loaded" boxes snugly fit letter-sized paper.

Scheduling and Contracts

Early scheduling helps us prepare for your assessment, deliver a fast turnaround and keep costs down for our clients. The start the scheduling process, please contact us by email at **inquiry@raterswriting.com,** or by phone at **+1 (503) 989-7546**. We will need an estimate of the number of student papers (and their grade levels) to score, your preferred start date for assessment, and your school name and location.

Once we have your information, we will put together a proposal based on an estimated number of papers for us to score. When you send us your papers, we will modified our documents to reflect the actual number of papers we receive.

Our prices are posted online, at **http://raterswriting.com/**. The standard rate for the 2014 / 2015 school year, including reports, a six trait, and Common Core evaluation, using our six point rubric is $12.50 per paper.

Reports

We strive to present your reports in a visually efficient format to help you understand the data in a meaningful and unambiguous way. Included are: (1) student reports, (2) classroom reports, (3) school and district reports, and (4) rater notes.

Samples of our reports can be found online at **http://raterswriting.com/reports**.

Resources

Hundreds of studies, books, workshops, media resources, lesson plans and classroom curricula are out there to help apply the traits to useful classroom instruction. We encourage you to explore.

The new edition of *Creating Writers,* by Vicki Spandel, offers an excellent overview for anyone new or anyone returning to the traits. This new edition is organized to show all materials by trait, with hundreds of references to literature that emphasize the connection between writing and reading. Much of the material in this book—the lessons, classroom activities and suggestions for use of technology – link directly to the stated objectives of the Common Core.

For secondary students learning how to report research, *The Elements of Technical Writing* by Gary Blake and Robert Bly is clear, concise and so technically well written, it is a pleasure to use. Blake and Bly show students how to slash the deadwood out of their sentences, paragraphs and reports; following their own precepts, they keep the book brief, lively, and to the point.