

SCORING A PAPER HOLISTICALLY

General Description

Holistic scoring is based on the assumption that an essay conveys a total impression. The score that an essay earns is based on the total impression that the paper makes on the reader. Readers are instructed to read essays quickly and to score immediately while the impression created by the essay as a whole remains fresh.

Holistic scoring attempts to address the paper as a whole. It assumes that each of the factors that make up writing skills is related to all of the other factors and that one factor cannot easily be separated from the others. It views a piece of writing as a total work, the whole of which is greater than the sum of its parts-i.e., a piece of writing is more than diction, style, the use of evidence, control of standard idiom, and a host of other elements that make up a composition.

Earlier modes of scoring papers relied heavily on the identification of errors. The emphasis, naturally, fell on the kinds of writing problems that lent themselves most easily to quantification-for example, errors in spelling, punctuation, S-V agreement, etc. But scoring methods based on error identification all too often ignored the rhetorical aspects of the paper. We have all seen papers that are virtually "clean" of errors of the sort mentioned earlier and that are, nevertheless, totally lacking in development or that have nothing interesting to say about the topic.

One of the most important aspects of holistic scoring is that the reader who uses this approach is encouraged to look at what students have done well rather than what they have failed to do, to consider the strengths of the essay rather than to count the errors committed.

Use On WPE Scoring

Two readers score each essay independently, using the six-point scale. Scores of 4, 5, and 6 are upper-half scores; 1,2, and 3 are lower-half scores

The first judgment a reader makes is to decide whether an essay is in the "upper half" of the "lower half" of the scores described on the scoring guide. Then the reader refines this initial determination:

- papers falling into the top third of the upper half receive a 6;
- papers falling into the middle third of the upper half receive a 5; and
- papers falling into the bottom third of the top half receive a 4.

The same method is applied to papers that fall into the lower half.

Source: Writing Skills Office

WPE SCORING GUIDE

6 Exemplary paper:

*Organization: answers all the parts of the question thoroughly; demonstrates strong essay and paragraph organization.

*Development: strongly develops the topic through specific and appropriate detail; logical, intelligent, and thoughtful; may be creative or imaginative.

*Expression: exhibits proficient sentence structure and usage, but may have a few minor slips (e.g. an occasional misused or misspelled word, or a comma fault); may show stylistic flair.

5 Proficient paper:

*Organization: displays effective paragraph and essay organization and answers all parts of the question.

*Development: skillfully and logically employs specific and appropriate detail, but may lack the level of insight or intelligence found in an exemplary paper.

*Expression: structures sentences effectively, but may lack stylistic flair; keeps diction appropriate, but may waver in tone; maintains sound grammar though may err occasionally.

4 Acceptable paper: (competent but flawed).

*Organization: shows adequate paragraphing and essay organization, but may give disproportionate attention to some parts of the question.

*Development: shows adequate logical development of the topic but may not be as fully and specifically developed as a superior essay or may respond in a way which is somewhat simplistic or repetitive.

*Expression: shows adequate command of sentence structure, using appropriate diction, but may contain some minor problems in grammar, punctuation, or usage (problems which might annoy a reader but will not lead to confusion or misunderstanding).

3 Failing paper: (clearly inadequate in one of the following categories or marginally inadequate in more than one category).

*Organization: does not address major aspects of the topic; presents a predominantly narrative response; is deficient in organization at the essay or paragraph level; lacks focus; or

wanders from the controlling idea.

*Development: consistently generalizes without adequate support; presents conclusions which do not logically follow from the premises or the evidence; or consistently repeats rather than explores ideas.

*Expression: shows deficient sentence structure; uses a primer style; or contains errors in mechanics (including spelling) which are serious or frequent enough to affect understanding.

- 2 *Shows serious flaws in more than one important area of writing (organization, development, or expression).
 - *Sentence level error is so severe and pervasive that other strengths of the paper become obscured.
 - *Clarity may exist only on the level of the sentence.
- 1 *Shows virtually no ability to handle the topic.
 - *Reveals inability to handle the basic elements of prose.