

ENG 164 Writing Assessment Rubric

The following seven characteristics of good writing (known as the “6+ 1 Traits”) are adopted from extensive research and the practical experiences of writing teachers across fields and levels. The characteristics were first defined more than 20 years ago in an effort to give a common language to the practice of assessing writing. Each of the characteristics is explained in depth to help you understand not only how your writing is being assessed, but also to help you use this information as you write and edit your own papers. The point value for each trait is listed in parentheses after each description and assumes a 100-point scale.

Ideas

The Ideas are the main message, the content of the piece, the main theme, together with all the supporting details that enrich and develop that theme. The ideas are strong when the message is clear, not garbled. The writer chooses details that are interesting, important, and informative—often the kinds of details the reader would not normally anticipate or predict. Successful writers do not “tell” readers things they already know; e.g., “It was a sunny day, and the sky was blue, the clouds were fluffy white ...” Successful writers “show” readers that which is normally overlooked; writers seek out the extraordinary, the unusual, the unique, the bits and pieces of life that might otherwise be overlooked. (35 points)

Organization

Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the pattern and sequence, so long as it fits the central idea. Organizational structure can be based on comparison-contrast, deductive logic, point-by-point analysis, development of a central theme, chronological history of an event, or any of a dozen other identifiable patterns. When the organization is strong, the piece begins meaningfully and creates in the writer a sense of anticipation that is, ultimately, systematically fulfilled. Events proceed logically; information is given to the reader in the right doses at the right times so that the reader never loses interest. Connections are strong, which is another way of saying that bridges from one idea to the next hold up. The piece closes with a sense of resolution, tying up loose ends, bringing things to a satisfying closure, answering important questions while still leaving the reader something to think about. (20 points)

Voice

Voice is the writer coming through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to us and cares about the message. It is the heart and soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, he/she imparts a personal tone and flavor to the piece that is unmistakably his/hers alone. And it is that individual something—different from the mark of all other writers—that we call Voice. (10 points)

Word Choice

Word Choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. In descriptive writing, strong word choice resulting in imagery, especially sensory, show-me writing, clarifies and expands ideas. In persuasive writing, purposeful word choice moves the reader to a new vision of ideas. In all modes of writing figurative language such as metaphors, similes and analogies articulate, enhance, and enrich the content. Strong word choice is characterized not so much by an exceptional vocabulary chosen to impress the reader, but more by the skill to use everyday words well. (10 points)

Sentence Fluency

Sentence Fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye. How does it sound when read aloud? That's the test. Fluent writing has cadence, power, rhythm, and movement. It is free of awkward word patterns that slow the reader's progress. Sentences vary in length, beginnings, structure, and style, and are so well crafted that the writer moves through the piece with ease. (15 points)

Conventions

The Conventions Trait is the mechanical correctness of the piece and includes five elements: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar/usage, and paragraphing. Writing that is strong in Conventions has been proofread and edited with care. Since this trait has so many pieces to it, it's almost an analytical trait within an analytic system. As you assess a piece for convention, ask yourself: "How much work would a copy editor need to do to prepare the piece for publication?" This will keep all of the elements in conventions equally in play. The Conventions trait is one that changes as your skills as a writer change. At the beginning of your college career, when you are learning new academic conventions and discourse methods, accommodations can be made because expectations are based on those skills that have been taught. Formatting and page design are not part of this trait, they belong with Presentation. (10 points)

Presentation

Presentation combines both visual and textual elements. It is the way we exhibit or present our message on paper. Even if our ideas, words, and sentences are vivid, precise, and well constructed, the writing will not be inviting to read unless the guidelines of presentation are present. Some of those guidelines include: balance of white space with visuals and text, graphics, clarity and function of design, typeface selection, borders, overall appearance. Think about examples of text and visual presentation in your environment. Which signs and billboards attract your attention? Why do you reach for one CD over another? All great writers are aware of the necessity of presentation, particularly technical writers who must include graphs, maps, and visual instructions along with their text. Presentation is key to a polished piece ready for publication. (This trait is most often not a consideration with English essays, since the essay should follow MLA formatting guidelines, which essentially is covered in Conventions. When Presentation is an appropriate assessment for an assignment, points for all other traits will be modified in order to accommodate scoring for this trait.)

Reference:

"Trait Definitions." *6+1 Trait Definitions*. Education Northwest. 2010. Web. 22 September 2010.