

Handouts

Teaching Revising and Editing Skills
Gateway Resource TRES0002

Using Rubrics in Content Area Instruction

Rubrics are performance-based assessment tools that content area teachers can use to evaluate and support student learning.

Types of Rubrics

There are two major types of rubrics: analytical and holistic.

Analytical rubrics focus on specific criteria related to a task or assignment. Analytical rubrics include a predetermined set of essential criteria or descriptors for what is required in the task and descriptions of the varying levels or qualities of performance for each criterion. Analytical rubrics usually include a value or score for each level of performance.

Analytical rubrics are most often used in classrooms because they give both teachers and students clear descriptions of what good performance looks like. This type of rubric also provides detailed, formative feedback about students' learning and what they need to do to improve.

Holistic rubrics focus on a global picture of the task as a whole. Holistic rubrics do not list separate levels of performance for each criterion. Instead, these rubrics assign a level of performance across multiple criteria. Holistic rubrics usually include a value or score for each level of performance.

Note About Checklists

Checklists are assessment tools, but they are not rubrics. Checklists list the criteria for a task or assignment, like rubrics, but do not include the levels or quality of performance.

Purpose of Rubrics

Although rubrics are commonly associated with evaluation (the assessment or scoring of student work), rubrics can also be used for instruction to scaffold and support student learning.

Evaluation rubrics allow teachers to make valid and reliable criterion-referenced judgments about the degree to which a student's performance meets the criteria for a particular task. In other words, rubrics take the mystery out of grading. Teachers can evaluate and even assign grades in a more consistent and objective manner. For example, the scores can be tallied and then averaged to come up with a final score that can then be converted into a grade (e.g., a score ranging from 4 to 3.50 is converted to an A, 3.49 to 3.0 to an A–, 2.99 to 2.50 to a B).

Well-designed rubrics also clarify for students a teacher's expectations for specific assignments. When rubrics are shared before an assignment, students know the criteria on which they will be graded and then can work toward meeting the highest performance criteria.

Rubrics are not just for evaluation. More importantly, they are also instructional tools that help students view assessment as more than just a grade or score. Rubrics are working guides that provide specific informative feedback as students work through a task, process, or procedure such as a content area writing assignment. Learning how to use rubrics helps students identify their strengths and areas in need of improvement.

Note About Instruction

Rubrics are not a substitute for good instruction. They should not merely be given to students at the beginning of an assignment. Rubrics are **not** self-explanatory. Teachers should introduce and explicitly teach students how to use a rubric as a working guide before, during, and after an assigned task.

Rubrics and Writing Instruction

Writing rubrics are generally used in the content areas with formal writing assignments such as essays, reports, or research papers. These types of rubric describe the varying levels of quality for the essential criteria related to a specific writing genre or assignment.

Ideally, when students use rubrics, they begin to internalize the criteria as they write and ultimately can generalize and transfer what they have learned to future writing tasks.

To incorporate rubrics in content area instruction, use the following procedure:

- **Introduce the rubric before students begin to write.**

Distribute a copy of the rubric to each student after the mentor text (model essay or other writing sample) has been read and the elements of the genre have been identified.

- **Model for students how to read the rubric.**

Make sure the rubric's language is comprehensible to all students so they have a clear understanding of the criteria (what is expected of them).

- **Use the rubric with students to evaluate the mentor text.**

Consider evaluating other writing samples that represent a range of performance to help students understand the differences in quality.

- **Model and explain for students how to use the rubric at each stage of the writing process—before, during, and after they write.**

For example, rubrics provide important information for students to use when revising and editing their own writing or conferring with peers. The criteria and performance-level descriptors show students what the next steps should be to improve their writing.

Rubric Design

Rubrics should be concise and easy to use.

Teachers can use premade rubrics, design their own, or work with students to create rubrics. Online tools and templates are available for teachers to create their own curriculum-based rubrics (e.g., the free RubiStar tool: <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>).

A sample teacher-made analytical rubric that incorporates the elements of a mathematical written response is included on the remaining pages of this handout.

Source: Andrade, H. G. (2000). Using rubrics to promote thinking and learning. *Educational Leadership*, 57(5), 13–18.

Elements of a Mathematical Written Response

- Writing includes responses to all parts of the question.
- Connections are shown between each step.
- Each part of the question is labeled.
- Organization matches the sequential nature of answering the question.
- Sequence of steps to solve the problem and the strategy used are included.
- Writing explains to the reader each step of the process needed to solve the problem.
- Mathematical vocabulary is used throughout the response.
- Graphs, charts, number lines, and diagrams are used as needed.
- Vocabulary words are defined to demonstrate understanding.
- There is evidence of computation with correct results.
- Writing demonstrates an understanding of spelling, grammar, and mechanics (editing is important).

Note: Please see Teaching Expository and Persuasive Texts (TEPT0001) for a mathematical written response sample.

Source: Scallin, S. M. (2006). Written response to mathematical questions: Computation and composition. In S. L. Pasquarelli (Ed.), *Teaching writing genres across the curriculum: Strategies for middle school teachers* (pp. 77–90). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Sample Rubric for Writing Mathematical Responses

	4 Proficient	3 Developing	2 Beginning to Develop	1 Not Yet
Is the question answered completely?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All parts answered completely • All parts of question labeled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All parts answered but some not complete • Most parts of question labeled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all parts answered • Parts that are answered are complete • Few parts of question labeled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all parts answered • Parts that are answered are incomplete • No parts of question labeled
Is my work organized and focused?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work proceeds logically from one step to next • Work is easy to read and understand • Separate parts of the work labeled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the work has logical connections • Work is understandable but difficult to read • Some parts of the work labeled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few logical connections in the work • Work is readable but difficult to understand • Only one part of the work is labeled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No logical connection between ideas • Difficult to read and understand • Difficult to tell difference between parts of question
Does my work contain appropriate details (diagrams, equations, examples, charts, graphs, definitions, formulas tables, supporting details in words)?	Many appropriate details in both words and arithmetic add depth to the work	Some details both in arithmetic and words	Very few details, but they fit the problem	Details do not fit the problem or details not included
Do I use math vocabulary correctly?	Math vocabulary appropriate and accurate throughout the work	Some math vocabulary used, and it is used correctly	Very little math vocabulary used, but it is used correctly	Math vocabulary not accurate or math vocabulary not used at all

	4 Proficient	3 Developing	2 Beginning to Develop	1 Not Yet
Are my computations correct?	All computation correct	Small math errors, but process is correct	Computing errors interfere with solution	So many errors that main idea of problem is lost
Does my writing show that I understand the main ideas?	Explanations show that main ideas are fully understood by analyzing and computing them in real-life problems	Explanations show that general ideas are understood by analyzing and computing them in real-life problems	Explanations show that basic ideas are understood by analyzing and computing them in real-life problems	Explanations show that ideas are minimally understood by analyzing and computing them in real-life problems
Is my use of grammar and mechanics appropriate?	Excellent mechanics and grammar	Adequate mechanics and grammar	Piece needs proofreading for mechanics and grammar	Misuse of mechanics and grammar interfere with reader's understanding
Did I follow the process as instructed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stages of process evident with growth shown from draft to draft • Careful computational corrections shown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most stages of process evident and growth from draft to draft shown • Computational corrections shown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some stages of process evident and some growth from draft to draft shown • Evidence of some computational corrections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No stages of process included or process unclear • Computational errors not corrected

Source: Pasquarelli, S. L. (Ed.). (2006). *Teaching writing genres across the curriculum: Strategies for middle school teachers*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Video Guide for Teacher Talk: Understanding Rubrics

In the video, a group of teachers use student writing samples scored with an assessment rubric to discuss how to help students revise and improve their writing. As you watch each segment, use the Cornell Notes chart below to record specific details the teachers share or any questions that come to mind for the main ideas and key concepts listed in the left column. After the video, complete the chart by summarizing the most important ideas from the discussion.

Main Ideas and Key Concepts	Details and Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helping students who do not address the prompt or topic or do not use the correct writing form or genre• Understanding how to use an assessment rubric to provide meaningful feedback• Teaching students what a good essay looks like• Teaching writing within the constraints of everything you must cover and the diverse abilities of students• Understanding what reading and writing instruction looks like in the lower versus the upper grades• Preparing students to write well across different situations, including high-stakes tests• Narrowing down which revisions to focus on	
Summary	

Source: Teach for America. (2011). *Secondary literacy*. Retrieved from http://teachingasleadership.org/sites/default/files/Related-Readings/SL_2011.pdf

Literary Scoring Guide

These examples were selected specifically for use in this online course from the English I Writing State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) rubrics and sample student essays made available by the Texas Education Agency.

English I Writing Literary Prompt

Look at the photograph.



© Ben Blankenburg/Stockphoto.com

Write a story about a challenging adventure. The adventure can be real or imagined. Be sure that your story is focused and complete and that it has an interesting plot and engaging characters.

The names of individuals mentioned in the compositions have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the students whose responses appear in this guide.

STAAR English I Literary Writing

Score Point 1

The story represents a very limited writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- The form or structure of the story is inappropriate to the purpose or the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses narrative strategies or literary devices that are only marginally suited to the literary task, or they are inappropriate or not evident at all. The writer presents the story in a random or illogical way, causing it to lack clarity and direction.
- Many of the details do not contribute to the story. The writer's lack of focus on a specific character, event, or idea weakens the unity and coherence of the story.
- The writer's presentation of the story is weak. Repetition or wordiness sometimes causes serious disruptions in the story line. At other times the lack of meaningful transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections makes one or more parts of the story unclear or difficult to follow.

Development of Ideas

- The development of the story is weak because the details are inappropriate, vague, or insufficient. They do not contribute to key literary elements such as character development, conflict, and point of view.
- The story is insubstantial because the writer's response to the prompt may be vague or confused. In some cases, the story as a whole is only weakly linked to the prompt. In other cases, the writer develops the story in a manner that demonstrates a lack of understanding of the literary writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- The writer's word choice may be vague or limited. It reflects little or no awareness of the literary purpose. The word choice may impede the quality and clarity of the story.
- Sentences may be simplistic, awkward, or uncontrolled, weakening the effectiveness of the story.
- The writer has little or no command of sentence boundaries and spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Serious and persistent errors create disruptions in the fluency of the writing and sometimes interfere with meaning.

COMPOSITION #3

I am about tall a challinging adventure I went on in the summer. The riding to Disney World was a long drive. I was tired when we got to home in Disney World, I was tired. In the morning I went to the addimison studios. I ride the Tower of Terror, I was scared on that ride. On the trail on the back our house, my mom, sisters, and I were walking on the trail one day. My mom saw a copper head snake in the walk way. My mom said "To jump over the copper head snake." We went one at time over the copper head snake. On my trip coming with my pawpaw, memaw, sisters, and I. I was scared about geting in the water at the lake in camp site. Because there were alligators in the water. Then one day I finely got in the water and stand in the water. The water smell bad that why because the alligators use to be that side before, their is a pool mark thing in water to block the alligators away from us. On that camping trip we went on the trail they have their. On the trail we pick close to the end of the trail we saw spider webs and spiders on there. We had duck under the spiders and the spider web.

Score Point 1

The writer of this very limited response begins with a trip to Disney World, including a scary ride on the Tower of Terror. An abrupt shift of focus occurs when the writer begins telling a story about his family's encounter with a snake. The writer then shifts to a camping trip taken with his grandparents and siblings. The lack of focus on one event weakens the unity and coherence of the story. In addition, numerous errors in conventions create disruptions in the fluency of the writing.

COMPOSITION #3
Heart Race.

My three year old cousin
Cody was born with half a
heart that works, and they told
us when he was first born
he wouldn't probably make it
past two years old, but he
proved them wrong an him
being born with half a heart
means he can't run around
a lot like a normal kid cause
there's the chance he could have
a heart attack because it can't
pump enough blood threw out
his tiny body but he plays on
a little soccer team as the goalie.
He has to have an open heart
operation every year till he's ten.
he has a huge scar to his neck
down to his belly button he's
our hero, he changed everyone
in our families life to a appreciate
him an each an everyone of us.
But everyday is a challenge for Cody

Score Point 1

In this response the writer describes the life of a cousin who is restricted by a congenital heart defect. Basic character development is achieved through the use of a few details (he wouldn't probably make it past two years old, has to have an open heart operation every year till he's ten, has a huge scar to his neck down to his belly button). However, the response is primarily an explanation, and the writer demonstrates a very weak command of sentence boundaries and punctuation. These problems are indicative of a very limited writing performance.

STAAR English I Literary Writing

Score Point 2

The story represents a basic writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- The form or structure of the story is evident but may not always be appropriate to the purpose or responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses narrative strategies or literary devices that are only somewhat suited to the literary task. The writer is able to convey some sense of the story.
- Some of the details do not contribute to the story. The writer may focus on a specific character, event, or idea but may not sustain that focus, limiting the unity and coherence of the story.
- The writer's presentation of the story is inconsistent. Sometimes repetition or wordiness causes minor disruptions in the story line. At other times transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections are too perfunctory or weak to support the logical movement of the story.

Development of Ideas

- The development of the story is minimal and remains at a surface level because there are few details, they are not always appropriate, or they are too general. For the most part, the details contribute only marginally to key literary elements such as character development, conflict, and point of view.
- The story reflects little or no thoughtfulness. The writer's response to the prompt is sometimes formulaic. The writer develops the story in a manner that demonstrates only a limited understanding of the literary writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- The writer's word choice may be general or imprecise. It reflects a basic awareness of the literary purpose. The word choice may limit the quality and clarity of the story.
- Sentences may be awkward or only somewhat controlled, limiting the effectiveness of the story.
- The writer demonstrates a partial command of sentence boundaries and spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Some distracting errors may be evident, at times creating minor disruptions in the fluency or meaning of the writing.

COMPOSITION #3

I think for me, life itself is a challenging adventure that is still in progress. It can be one of the greatest, most enjoyable adventures... but can also be the worst and most challenging. Life is a bunch of little treks that make up one huge adventure. Sometimes, we go through a part of life that is very satisfying and you feel like nothing can go wrong. This could be as if you're sailing across the ocean in a big boat with all of your friends and family. You have smooth waters, calm waves, and the sun is shining perfectly. Then there's that part of life where it seems like you've lost it all and you feel as though nothing worse could possibly go wrong. This is the time where the clouds roll in and block the sunshine. The waters become rough, with the waves crashing up against the boat, rocking you back and forth, or knocking you onto the ground. But yet you still have your friends right there with you, acting as your tour guides along the way. This adventure through life is almost like a never-ending process with many challenging obstacles that you feel like you can never overcome. But then, when you do, it's like you are fine again and stronger than before, ready to accept the next trek that life brings upon you to carry on that crazy, overwhelming adventure.

Score Point 2

In this basic writing performance, the writer focuses on a single theme: Life is a bunch of little treks that make up one huge adventure. Although the response is more explanation than story, the writer embeds some literary elements, specifically in the form of figurative language, that serve to minimally develop the theme. Because the response is a blend of expository and literary writing, the writer demonstrates only a limited understanding of the literary task.

COMPOSITION #3

a journey around the ocean isn't easy this how everything began I was reading the book finding nemo and than the fish nemo was saying "hey you with the clothes can you here me" and me thinking it was my sister I faded inside the book I was swimming in the ocean with a giant tail covering my feet. I thought to myself what's happening I was worried I wanted to cry but I couldn't under ocean so I swam and swam and some body was calling my name whispering " Abby, Abby " and I turned around and I see nemo from the story I was like what's happening I asked your in the middle of getting ran over by huge whales so than nemo grabs me and pulls me back and I said " why am I here " nemo says " you were the chosen one to lead the ocean now I was the queen of oceans now " I said " no this can't be me just a simple girl not a queen " nemo said " you were the chosen one because were going to be in a war with the other side of the ocean because they want to take are land " I said " OK " what do I do , nemo tells me you must guide us a right way for we can beat the other ocean . OK so every body put on your shields , and weapons were going to stick up on them in a balloon fish , and in the night we attack and just hope everything goes well , so we attacked and we were able to obtain are ocean . After they tell me thanks and now we shall crown you queen of this ocean they scream there lungs out cheering !

Score Point 2

The writer of this basic writing performance presents a fictional story based upon *Finding Nemo* by cleverly inserting herself into the cast of characters while reading the book. The presentation of the story is adequately controlled and supports the story's logical movement. The writer supplies some specific details (a giant tail covering my feet, in the middle of getting run over by huge whales) and uses dialogue not only to advance the story line but also to develop character. However, only a partial command of conventions is evident; the writer creates minor disruptions in the fluency of the writing by making errors in sentence boundaries, grammar, and usage throughout the story.

STAAR English I Literary Writing

Score Point 3

The story represents a satisfactory writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- ❑ The form or structure of the story is, for the most part, appropriate to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses narrative strategies or literary devices that are adequately suited to the literary task. The writer is able to clearly convey the story.
- ❑ Most details contribute to the effectiveness of the story. The writer focuses on a specific character, event, or idea and generally sustains that focus. The story is coherent, though it may not always be unified due to minor lapses in focus.
- ❑ The writer's presentation of the story is adequately controlled. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and sentence-to-sentence connections are sufficient to support the logical movement of the story.

Development of Ideas

- ❑ Specific details add some substance to the story. For the most part, these details contribute to key literary elements such as character development, conflict, and point of view.
- ❑ The story reflects some thoughtfulness. The writer's response to the prompt is original rather than formulaic. The writer develops the story in a manner that demonstrates a good understanding of the literary writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- ❑ The writer's word choice is, for the most part, specific and concrete. It reflects an awareness of the literary purpose. The word choice usually contributes to the quality and clarity of the story.
- ❑ Sentences are varied and adequately controlled, for the most part contributing to the effectiveness of the story.
- ❑ The writer demonstrates an adequate command of sentence boundaries and spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar and usage conventions. Although some errors may be evident, they create few (if any) disruptions in the fluency of the writing, and they do not affect the clarity of the story.

COMPOSITION #3

I love running. I normally run long distances of 5 miles or more, or sprint short distances of 200 meters or less. However, I had never expected myself to be running the 800 meter event at a track meet. The 800 is exactly 2 laps around the track, sprinting. Yes, I may enjoy long distance, but only at a steady, planned pace. This wasn't a short sprint either; I wasn't going to be running my hardest for 30 short seconds. Instead, I would be sprinting my hardest for a few minutes. Also to make it worse, I hadn't trained in over a month.

I felt nauseous at the starting line. I don't think I had ever felt this nervous before. My goal was to do my best, and NOT get last place. My heart skipped a beat as the gun fired, and we began to sprint. The majority of the girls were a few years older than me, and obviously practiced a lot. Before I knew it, I was on my last lap. I had no idea how many girls were behind me, but I could see at least 5 ahead. I could hear my friends cheering for me, and despite my burning legs and exhaustion, I began to speed up. Suddenly, a girl was right beside me, panting. "Want to run together?" she asked. I smiled and nodded, slowing down a bit. It was then that she decided to sprint, attempting to catch me off-guard! I sprinted my hardest, and beat the decieving girl, finishing in 5th place of 15!

Score Point 3

In this satisfactory writing performance, the writer focuses on the challenge of running an 800-meter race at a track meet. The writer clearly conveys her particular story by sustaining focus on the event and controlling the logical movement of the story. The writer develops the character of the narrator and establishes both internal and external conflicts. Some substance is added to the story through an effective use of specific language and details (My heart skipped a beat as the gun fired; despite my burning legs and exhaustion, I began to speed up). Overall, the writer demonstrates a good understanding of the literary writing task.

STAAR English I
Spring 2012

Literary – 10

COMPOSITION #3

It was 2:00 pm in Austin, Texas. I was competing against David Davis for 5th rank in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) in state out of 50,000. He was undefeated but so was I. I had a 1st degree black belt in Brazilian Juijitsu and he was a boxer. The fight started and he went straight to offense. He came at me with blinding speed. He had quick hands but so did I. I was waiting for one mistake, for him to slip then it would change. The moment came. His right hook was a little to high and he went to far in. I used a left wrist block and had a right jab to the ribs. It hurt him. BAD! He bent over clutching his side and I got him straight in the nose with my left knee. The fight was over in 2 minutes. He left with two cracked ribs and a broken nose. I left with a belt, trophy, and victory.

Score Point 3

The writer of this concise, satisfactory response tells the story of a Mixed Martial Arts fight. The story centers on the two minutes in which the fight occurs. Specific, pertinent details and concrete word choice (blinding speed, quick hands, clutching his side) add some substance to the story. In addition, the writer uses short, clipped sentences to compare/contrast the two fighters; these sentences mimic the quick nature of the fight and contribute to the effectiveness of this satisfactory writing performance. The logical ordering of the play-by-play and the tight focus add to the coherence of this story.

STAAR English I Literary Writing

Score Point 4

The story represents an accomplished writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- ❑ The form or structure of the story is appropriate to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses narrative strategies or literary devices that are particularly well suited to the literary task. The writer is able to skillfully convey the story.
- ❑ All details contribute to the effectiveness of the story. The writer focuses on a specific character, event, or idea and sustains that focus, strengthening the unity and coherence of the story.
- ❑ The writer's presentation of the story is well controlled. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the logical movement of the story.

Development of Ideas

- ❑ Specific, well-chosen details add substance to the story. These details contribute significantly to key literary elements such as character development, conflict, and point of view.
- ❑ The story is thoughtful and engaging. The writer may respond to the prompt from an unusual perspective, may use his/her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing, or may connect ideas in interesting ways. The writer develops the story in a manner that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the literary writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- ❑ The writer's word choice is vivid and expressive. It reflects a keen awareness of the literary purpose. The word choice strongly contributes to the quality and clarity of the story.
- ❑ Sentences are purposeful, varied, and well controlled, enhancing the effectiveness of the story.
- ❑ The writer demonstrates a consistent command of sentence boundaries and spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although minor errors may be evident, they do not detract from the fluency of the writing or the clarity of the story. The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the story.

COMPOSITION #3

Twas a lantely day, it happened so to be Jordan's first in wal-mat. He being the age of six and three quarters was the oldest in his class. Jordan was fascinated by the toys and bikes in the childrens section. He never wanted to leave, not ever, although his mother was calling for him. With Batman in his tiny hands, he thought of a way he could stay.

"I'll have food, there's plenty here," he said to Batman, "And there's a water fountain, and a bathroom, and a TV. All we have to do is hide until Mommy leaves." So he hid in the giant bin with all the bouncy balls and waited. His mother didn't leave though, infact, she was getting louder, and closer.

"Alright, we'll have to make a run for it," said Jordan with the utmost seriousness. He jumped out of the bin and made a dash for the bike helmets, grab one for him and Batman, and then shot over to the clothes section. "She can never find us here," Jordan said while putting the helmet on, "and if she does, she won't recognize us with these helmets and she'll leave." He looked down to place the helmet on his Batman doll and realized he had left him in the bouncy ball bin. He devised a plan to retrieve Batman back from the bin. Like a bullet, he ran as fast as Speed Racer can drive, dodged a cart, jumped a baby, slid under a wheelchair and dove back into the bin. Tossing balls here and there he couldn't find Batman.

"Jordan," his mother said, standing there with Batman in her grasp, "You can have plenty of adventures at home, now put back the helmets."

Score Point 4

In this accomplished writing performance centered on imaginative play, a young boy conspires with his Batman doll to outwit his mother and spend the night in the toy section of a Wal-Mart store. The writer sustains focus on this single event, strengthening the unity and coherence of the piece. Literary devices, such as dialogue, are used to enhance character development and reinforce the story line. Expressive word choice and details are carefully chosen to reveal the boy's innocent, childlike perspective, which remains consistent throughout the story. In addition, the overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the writing.

COMPOSITION #3

The deafening roar of the upcoming rapids drowned out anything that Shane seemed to be yelling. Macy anxiously watched his lips, gripping onto the hope that maybe she could read them. She could only pick out two words: "dangerous" and "attention". Cold panic seeped into her stomach where it fluttered around and then rose to her throat. Clinging to the rope on the sides of the neon orange raft, she made her way to Shane, inch by inch.

"Did you hear me?" he yelled above the noise. "This part is going to be a bit tricky, so pay attention." Macy nodded once to acknowledge this. Sensing the fear in her eyes, Shane gave her hand a quick squeeze and signalled a thumbs up with his other hand. Macy flashed him a grateful smile before picking up her paddle again and pushing it into the frothy water. Cleaning the water in time to her swiftly beating heart, she pushed herself. Already, the faint but sure ache of fatigue plagued her arms and torso, but she refused to listen to it. After all, if she gave up now, she would never get a break from Shane whom she saw practically every day.

In an almost surreal moment, the water was crystal clear, shiny pebbles eerily glinting at her from the bottom of the river. However, within seconds, the river turned into a perilous, turbulent belt of rocky danger. Swallowing all inhibition, Macy and the rest of the people in the raft turned into one seamless human machine of pure power, expertly gliding through the most difficult areas. In sync, they rowed and paused, occasionally yelling instructions. After the most challenging thirty seconds of her life, Macy exhaled as the raft lazily floated into tranquility, the water lapping at her as Shane word.

Score Point 4

The writer of this accomplished writing performance tells a story about an experience while white-water rafting. The story takes place over a brief 30 seconds of time, and this strong focus creates a unified and coherent response. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections allow the writer to skillfully convey what is happening to the characters. The writer uses well-chosen details and expressive word choice to vividly unveil the splendid beauty and awe-inspiring forces that are at the heart of the perilous river journey. Skillfully inserted dialogue punctuates the characters' predicament, drawing the reader into the story. A strong command of conventions adds to the effectiveness of this story.

Expository Scoring Guide

These examples were selected specifically for use in this online course from the English I Writing State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) rubrics and sample student essays made available by the Texas Education Agency.

English I Writing Expository Prompt

Read the information in the box below.

The digital audio player, also known as the MP3 player, first became available to the general public in 1996. Unlike the compact disc player, this technology did not require that music be stored on separate discs. MP3 players have now become the dominant medium for listening to music.

Think about the new technologies that people use in everyday life.

Write an essay explaining the effect of one new technology on people's lives.

Be sure to —

- clearly state your thesis
- organize and develop your ideas effectively
- choose your words carefully
- edit your writing for grammar, mechanics, and spelling

STAAR English I Expository Writing

Score Point 1

The essay represents a very limited writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- ❑ The organizing structure of the essay is inappropriate to the purpose or the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses organizational strategies that are only marginally suited to the explanatory task, or they are inappropriate or not evident at all. The absence of a functional organizational structure causes the essay to lack clarity and direction.
- ❑ Most ideas are generally related to the topic specified in the prompt, but the thesis statement is missing, unclear, or illogical. The writer may fail to maintain focus on the topic, may include extraneous information, or may shift abruptly from idea to idea, weakening the coherence of the essay.
- ❑ The writer's progression of ideas is weak. Repetition or wordiness sometimes causes serious disruptions in the flow of the essay. At other times the lack of transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections causes the writer to present ideas in a random or illogical way, making one or more parts of the essay unclear or difficult to follow.

Development of Ideas

- ❑ The development of ideas is weak. The essay is ineffective because the writer uses details and examples that are inappropriate, vague, or insufficient.
- ❑ The essay is insubstantial because the writer's response to the prompt is vague or confused. In some cases, the essay as a whole is only weakly linked to the prompt. In other cases, the writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a lack of understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- ❑ The writer's word choice may be vague or limited. It reflects little or no awareness of the expository purpose and does not establish a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice may impede the quality and clarity of the essay.
- ❑ Sentences are simplistic, awkward, or uncontrolled, significantly limiting the effectiveness of the essay.
- ❑ The writer has little or no command of sentence boundaries and spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Serious and persistent errors create disruptions in the fluency of the writing and sometimes interfere with meaning.

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Expository – 1

COMPOSITION #3

"That's bad". "Mom come look at this on T.V." Why do people have to text and drive it only hurts themselves. But what if your friend is talking and you want to respond back or they think your mad or ignoring them. "Well I think they should wait because if you don't you will end up like a pancake in the car." I wish the technology could make a device where you don't have to look at your phone to read the message it could read it for you. Then you wouldn't have to worry about crashing or driving off the road. The world would be so much safer if it did, I think it should."

Score Point 1

In this very limited performance, the writer provides no thesis statement and uses a narrative strategy—a dialogue between a mother and child—to present ideas. The result is an essay with an organizing structure that is inappropriate to the explanatory task. Although most ideas are generally related to the topic of technology, the absence of a functional organizational structure causes the writer to include ideas that are extraneous to the specified task: to explain the effect of one new technology. These problems cause the essay to lack direction and coherence.

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Expository – 2

COMPOSITION #3

There is new technology that came out last year in 2010 and it was the new Ipad. The Ipad is kinda of the same as a Ipod or a cellphone, but it was big and better. It can go anywhere with people. It's also can go on the internet and you can plan stuff. The technology that effective's people like help's them with anything they need to know about or if they are lost or something like that. Technology also tell you were to go and you can do anything just almost like a cellphone. I said that technology help's in some way's. But it can be bad for people they are getting lazy and not doing anything that much. But I can said that technology is great, but it can be bad to.

Score Point 1

In this example of a very limited writing performance, the writer attempts to support a weak thesis (technology is great, but it can be bad to) by providing a few examples of the advantages and disadvantages of the new iPad and technology in general (can go on the internet and you can plan stuff; it can be bad for people they are getting lazy and not doing anything that much). The development of these examples, however, is weak because most of the information is vague and lacks explanation or clarification. The result is an essay that is insubstantial and ineffective.

STAAR English I Expository Writing

Score Point 2

The essay represents a basic writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- ❑ The organizing structure of the essay is evident but may not always be appropriate to the purpose or the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is not always clear because the writer uses organizational strategies that are only somewhat suited to the expository task.
- ❑ Most ideas are generally related to the topic specified in the prompt, but the writer's thesis statement is weak or somewhat unclear. The lack of an effective thesis or the writer's inclusion of irrelevant information interferes with the focus and coherence of the essay.
- ❑ The writer's progression of ideas is not always logical and controlled. Sometimes repetition or wordiness causes minor disruptions in the flow of the essay. At other times transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections are too perfunctory or weak to support the flow of the essay or show the relationships among ideas.

Development of Ideas

- ❑ The development of ideas is minimal. The essay is superficial because the writer uses details and examples that are not always appropriate or are too briefly or partially presented.
- ❑ The essay reflects little or no thoughtfulness. The writer's response to the prompt is sometimes formulaic. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates only a limited understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- ❑ The writer's word choice may be general or imprecise. It reflects a basic awareness of the expository purpose but does little to establish a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice may not contribute to the quality and clarity of the essay.
- ❑ Sentences are awkward or only somewhat controlled, weakening the effectiveness of the essay.
- ❑ The writer demonstrates a partial command of sentence boundaries and spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Some distracting errors may be evident, at times creating minor disruptions in the fluency or meaning of the writing.

STAAR English I
Spring 2012

Expository – 5

COMPOSITION #3

Technology is what turns the world—almost literally. With technology, we can find out what turns the world, how it turns, and maybe one day affect the way it turns. Technology is our learning process that improves our lives day to day. For example, the discovery and control of fire improved the human race so much and so drastically over so many centuries, that we went from caveman to today in a few millennia. Fire cooked food, reducing chances of sickness; fire created light and warmth during the night; and fire allowed us to shape metals and materials to help us construct new things. Without the simplest technology of a flaming glorified stick, we'd still be chimpanzees. The simplest technology can make a difference on us, even today.

Score Point 2

In this basic writing performance, the writer presents the thesis that “Technology is our learning process that improves our lives day to day.” This thesis is general, while the focus of the essay—fire—is specific. For this reason, the links between the thesis and the development are not always clear. For example, “our learning process” is not clearly connected to the fact that “fire created light and warmth during the night.” In addition, the writer’s ideas about how fire has improved our lives are only briefly presented in the form of a list.

COMPOSITION #3

Technology

The mp3 player I think is one of the greatest inventions of all time. You can take it anywhere, They mostly have good battery life, and You can put lots of songs on it. If we didn't have mp3 players we wouldn't be able to listen to our favorite music when we wanted.

I think that we would still be listening to CD's, Tapes, or recorded music.

The Television is also a great invention. You can hook up your computer to it, put internet on it, and pictures on it. If we didn't have Televisions we wouldn't probably get news and watch our favorite shows. We would probably miss all of the football games, basketball, baseball, and soccer games. So I think they are both great things added to our technology.

Score Point 2

The writer discusses two technological devices: the mp3 player and the television. The writer provides minimal development by giving examples of what can be done with each device as well as what the consequences would be if the devices did not exist. The ideas included in the essay are clearly related to the topic specified in the prompt, but the thesis statement is very weak. The lack of an effective thesis interferes with the focus and coherence of the essay, preventing the writer from showing a strong relationship between the two examples. Overall, however, even with the weak thesis, the essay is developed and controlled well enough for this essay to be considered a basic writing performance.

STAAR English I Expository Writing

Score Point 3

The essay represents a satisfactory writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- ❑ The organizing structure of the essay is, for the most part, appropriate to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is clear because the writer uses organizational strategies that are adequately suited to the expository task.
- ❑ The writer establishes a clear thesis statement. Most ideas are related to the thesis and are focused on the topic specified in the prompt. The essay is coherent, though it may not always be unified due to minor lapses in focus.
- ❑ The writer's progression of ideas is generally logical and controlled. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and sentence-to-sentence connections are sufficient to support the flow of the essay and show the relationships among ideas.

Development of Ideas

- ❑ The development of ideas is sufficient because the writer uses details and examples that are specific and appropriate, adding some substance to the essay.
- ❑ The essay reflects some thoughtfulness. The writer's response to the prompt is original rather than formulaic. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a good understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- ❑ The writer's word choice is, for the most part, clear and specific. It reflects an awareness of the expository purpose and establishes a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice usually contributes to the quality and clarity of the essay.
- ❑ Sentences are varied and adequately controlled, for the most part contributing to the effectiveness of the essay.
- ❑ The writer demonstrates an adequate command of sentence boundaries and spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although some errors may be evident, they create few (if any) disruptions in the fluency of the writing, and they do not affect the clarity of the essay.

Expository – 9

COMPOSITION #3

One new technology that has had a great effect on people's lives is the cell phone. The cell phone started out, just being a phone that you can take anywhere and call people. Now, the phone has evolved into a device that has the ability not only to call people, but to text, play games, use apps, and access the internet, as well as doing many other amazing and helpful jobs. Personally, I have a flip phone, and all it does is talk and text. However, I still see the impacts of the "smart" cell phones everyday. For example, in my health class my teacher will tell us to take out our phones and search certain things on the internet. I can't, but the ones that can benefit immensely from it. The cell phone has helped out life in many more ways, such as using it as a GPS, or calling your parents when they forget to pick you up from school, or even just playing games on it while in the waiting room in the doctor's office. This new technology is extremely beneficial to us in our lives everyday, and is an amazing innovation.

Score Point 3

In this satisfactory writing performance, the writer uses the first and last sentence of the essay to establish a clear thesis statement focused on the beneficial features of the cell phone. The writer establishes the evolution of the cell phone from portable telephone to multimedia tool. The writer then provides a meaningful transition to a thoughtful personal example of the value of "smart" phones, which adds some substance to the essay. In the last part of the essay, the writer lists additional specific benefits of modern day cell phones. Overall, the essay is focused and coherent, and the writer demonstrates a good control of sentences and conventions.

COMPOSITION #3

Technology advancements certainly change the mind-sets and the lifestyle of many people of the twenty-first century. One great example of technology advancement that changes the lives of many avid book readers is the digital online book such as the Nook or the Kindle. This modern technology reduces the amount of paper needed to produce a book by being available via kilobytes. It further reduces the fuel consumption that a trip to the bookstore or the library may require.

These digital books ^{also} make reading easier and more enjoyable to readers of all ages. It also lets the user have access to the Internet. Among many of its advantages these digital books are lightweight and can be read under the glaring sunlight. This enables the user to use this device anywhere they like.

In conclusion, the Nook or the Kindle give many readers a great time enjoying their favorite book and simultaneously reducing the world's landfill. That certainly puts us in a "win-win" situation.

Score Point 3

The writer establishes a clear thesis statement (One great example of technology advancement that changes the lives of many avid book readers is the digital online book such as the Nook or the Kindle). The writer sufficiently supports this thesis by developing the ideas that the reading devices are environmentally friendly and that they are much more convenient than traditional books. The inclusion of details and examples that are specific and appropriate adds some substance to the essay and demonstrates that the writer has a good understanding of the expository writing task. The progression of ideas is generally logical and controlled, and the writer's word choice is, for the most part, clear and specific. This essay represents a satisfactory writing performance.

STAAR English I Expository Writing

Score Point 4

The essay represents an accomplished writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- ❑ The organizing structure of the essay is clearly appropriate to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is skillfully crafted because the writer uses organizational strategies that are particularly well suited to the expository task.
- ❑ The writer establishes a clear thesis statement. All ideas are strongly related to the thesis and are focused on the topic specified in the prompt. By sustaining this focus, the writer is able to create an essay that is unified and coherent.
- ❑ The writer's progression of ideas is logical and well controlled. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the flow of the essay by clearly showing the relationships among ideas, making the writer's train of thought easy to follow.

Development of Ideas

- ❑ The development of ideas is effective because the writer uses details and examples that are specific and well chosen, adding substance to the essay.
- ❑ The essay is thoughtful and engaging. The writer may choose to use his/her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing or to connect ideas in interesting ways. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- ❑ The writer's word choice is purposeful and precise. It reflects a keen awareness of the expository purpose and maintains a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice strongly contributes to the quality and clarity of the essay.
- ❑ Sentences are purposeful, varied, and well controlled, enhancing the effectiveness of the essay.
- ❑ The writer demonstrates a consistent command of sentence boundaries and spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although minor errors may be evident, they do not detract from the fluency of the writing or the clarity of the essay. The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the essay.

COMPOSITION #3

New gaming technologies effect many people's everyday lives. Gaming systems such as the Playstation 3 and the Xbox 360 cause many people to waste hours of time each week sitting in front of a TV.

These 21st century gaming technologies focus on allowing normal-life people^{to} control a character on a TV. The character on the TV does wild things that the player only wishes he/she could do. Different types of games also allow the player to experience and control everyday life from a different perspective. These systems can give the player a sense of power that is fun to experience. Because of this, these machines may become addicting to many, causing people to blow off their normal everyday work in order to make more time for gaming. This may cause bad grades for adolescents, low salaries for those in the work force, and sometimes damaged relationships with friends and family that designated time should be spent with. Modern gaming systems can be just an enjoyable hobby if they are used wisely and not placed above priorities in importance.

21st century technologies such as modern gaming systems can effect people in many negative ways; but, if they are just used as a fun activity in a person's free time then they will not negatively effect anyone's everyday life.

Score Point 4

The writer of this accomplished performance uses a cause/effect organizational strategy to develop the thesis that 21st century gaming technologies can be addictive and lead to possible negative consequences. The essay is skillfully crafted; the organizational structure allows the writer not only to establish that gaming addictions affect "normal-life people" in their "normal everyday work," but also to address the specific ways in which these addictions manifest themselves. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the development by clearly showing the relationships among ideas. Precise word choice, purposeful and well-controlled sentences, and strong conventions contribute to the overall clarity and effectiveness of the essay.

COMPOSITION #3

Many people have gotten lost before while driving. Sure, one can use a map, but it is irritating trying to fold a map. Also, one can not find food places, lodgings, gas stations, etc. using a map. One new technology has been created that will help you find and direct you to your destination. This is called a Global Positioning System, or GPS for short. Having a GPS can keep you from getting lost and make your life much easier.

A GPS has a function to just show a map. This map has most roads accessible to the area that that person is driving in. Most GPS's have an option to select a point of interest such as food, lodging, or even airports or hospitals. Imagine that two brothers are on vacation and driving through Houston at the end of the day. They decide to spend the night because they are tired, but they need to find a hotel. Brother #1 types in hotel in the POI function. The GPS shows them the closest one and they are there within minutes. Now imagine these brothers in a different situation. Brother #1 is driving when all of a sudden Brother #2 starts to have chest pains. Brother #1 does not know what to do so he types in hospital in the POI function of the GPS. It displays that there is a hospital three blocks away. There, Brother #2 is successfully treated for a heart attack. If not for the GPS, he might have died.

Global Positioning Systems are indeed important, and not only to these brothers. People can find virtually anything if they needed to. That's why GPS Systems can make everyone's life be better. They help us find our way.

Score Point 4

In this accomplished performance, the writer uses an anecdote to support a clear thesis statement: "One new technology has been created that will help you find and direct you to your destination. This is called a Global Positioning System, or GPS for short." This anecdote is an appropriate organizational strategy because the writer uses it to **explain** rather than to tell a story. In this particular case, the writer focuses on the high points of two specific instances in which a GPS was not only helpful to two brothers (finding a hotel) but also necessary (finding a hospital). In the last paragraph of the essay, the writer broadens the explanation by generalizing the experiences of the two brothers to ways in which Global Positioning Systems can "make everyone's life be better." The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the expository writing task. In addition, the writer demonstrates a consistent control of sentences and command of conventions.