



The Scoop on Getting Higher Scores on the Writing Assessment

Moving your 4 papers to a 5 or 6 is easier than you think!

Writing Assessment Rubric

<p>Score 6: Outstanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well organized/developed • Explains/illustrates key ideas • Syntactic variety • Few errors in mechanics/usage 	<p>Score 3: Limited</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate organization/not developed • Does not explain/develop key ideas • Limited or inappropriate word choice • Accumulation of errors in mechanics, usage, sentence structure
<p>Score 5: Strong</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally well organized/developed • Explains/illustrates some key ideas • Demonstrates some syntactic variety • Facility in use of language • Generally few errors in mechanics/usage 	<p>Score 2: Flawed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak organization/not developed • Little or no relevant details • Limited or inappropriate word choice • Serious errors in mechanics, usage, sentence structure, or word choice
<p>Score 4: Competent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately organized/developed • Explains/illustrates key ideas • Adequate facility in the use of language • Some errors in mechanics/usage 	<p>Score 1: Deficient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incoherent • Undeveloped/no details • Serious and persistent writing errors
<p><i>You would not be embarrassed if a 4, 5, or 6 paper appeared in the newspaper.</i></p>	<p><i>No paper should ever get a 0. A zero is given for blank paper, refusal, illegible, off-topic, or in another language.</i></p> <p><i>A 1 is usually given if the student simply recopies the prompt or uses the key word in the prompt. (i.e. backpack)</i></p>

Focus on and practice consistently a few key ideas during the mini-lesson and it will pay off. (See hints below☺)

1. If you are using 4 Square with your students, they should automatically start at a 4. 4 Square guarantees organization. A 4, 5, 6 paper must have an main topic sentence, details, and a concluding sentence that relates back to the topic sentence.
2. With less proficient writers, train them to restate the given prompt into a question to create a hook. For example: *Pretend you arrived at school early. In the hallway, you found a huge backpack as tall as the ceiling, and it started to move.*
Try: Have you ever seen a backpack as tall as the ceiling?
3. If you have a new ELL student or a Special Education student that must take the test but cannot write a sentence, encourage the student to copy words in the prompt. For this year's prompt, simply writing the words: *Found backpack. It move.* (This would give the student at least a 1.) Copying key words from the prompt and then writing any words known or found around the room, can yield a 1. (I.e. backpack cat dog love Billy)
4. A 5 or 6 paper is rarely less than 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pages. Usually, the paper is about 150 words. Papers less than that usually are not fully developed. Writing more will give you a better chance of getting a higher score. Practicing on the same type of lined paper, including the same spacing and number of lines, will give you an advantage.
5. What moves a 4 paper to a 5 paper?
 - a. Vocabulary! Vocabulary! Vocabulary! Encourage Sparkle words and give students alternatives to dead words. Work with listing synonyms and post lists throughout the year. What other words could be used for *big*? What about *huge*, *humungous*, *colossal*, or *gigantic*. (I.e. Instead of using *huge backpack* again, try *colossal backpack*. The word does not need to be spelled correctly. More credit is given for a misspelled word that is more sophisticated, than a safe word that is spelled correctly.
 - b. Vocabulary/Spelling Index of Control (# new words divided by total # words; #words spelled correctly divided by total # of words)
 - c. Adjectives. Most 5 or 6 papers use two adjectives before nouns. (I.e. *the gigantic black backpack* or *the narrow dark hallway*) Practice with mini-lessons to get students to use two adjectives in front of nouns to provide details. Simply getting

your students to put in adjectives before nouns can move a 4 paper to a 5.

- d. Adverbs. Most 5 or 6 papers use some adverbs. Instead of saying, "*I saw the backpack move;*" encourage the student to develop the story by writing, "*I saw the gigantic black backpack move slowly down the dark narrow hallway.*" Voila! You now have moved a basic 4 paper to a 5 or 6! Using index cards and activities such as *Be the Sentence* will take minutes to do and pay off with big scores.
- e. Simple well constructed sentences will give you a 4. (Subject, verb, Object)
- f. A 4, 5 or 6 paper uses transitions.
- g. Simple well constructed sentences with adjectives, adverbs, or prepositional phrases will move you to a 5 or 6.
- h. Compound sentences using a conjunction such as *and, but, for, either, or, neither, nor* will generally move you from a 4 to a 5.
- i. Complex sentences will usually get you a 6. (Even if there are errors in punctuation or spelling)
- j. Sentence variety is another flagged area to move a 4 to a 5 or 6. Teach students to include questions and exclamations. Practice beginning sentences with clauses and phrases. This will push a paper to a 6.
- k. A simile or metaphor will push a 4 paper to a 5 or 6. Scorers do not deduct if the simile is cliché or even if it is nonsensical. It just needs to be evident. So encourage them to put in a *happy as a lark, fast as a cheetah, in the blink of an eye, or dark as a shadow*.
- l. Writing in the content areas, science and social studies, is strongly suggested. (This is especially crucial in grades 6,7,8, and in high school)
- m. Have students use the rubric to score each other's papers (without names) using post-its. (*You can't hit the target if you don't know where the goal is set.*)
- n. Students are rewarded for what they can do or what they attempt.

So what does *not* count as much?

- Spelling (a 5 or 6 paper can have some spelling errors)

- Punctuation (Except, a paper that starts out and goes to the end of the story with only a period after the last word, gets an automatic deduction of *one full point*. So in this case, putting in more periods is better than not putting in one until the end.)
- Handwriting

About the prompt: Practice timed pre-writings (brainstorming, 4 Square).

Then, practice some timed prompts (rough draft) using the pre-writes.

A prompt should have 3 parts:

1. Rhetorical Context (Pretend that... Imagine that.....What if.....)

- Activates schema
- Sets the stage or setting
- Make it something familiar to the student

2. Pre-write activity

- Plan, think about.....
- Here's where 4 Square will help
- Keep this short (about 10 minutes)
- Short phrases

3. Actual assignment

- Now write.....
- Elaborate on one detail in each 4 square box.
- Develop the ideas
- Use transitions
- Vocabulary, word choice
- Add adjectives, adverbs
- Similes, metaphors
- Vary sentence structure using phrases, clauses, questions, or exclamations.

Next year, we will be having whole county practice writing days with a prompt given to all grade 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 students on the same day. Papers will be graded by teachers within grades using the state holistic scoring guide. (Holistic scoring training sessions will be held.)

Hope this guide is helpful. I guarantee if followed, a large percentage of our 4's will be 5's or 6's next year.

~Jeannette Mulholland, Reading Specialist, Jefferson County Schools