

WRITING ASSESSMENT

Core Concepts in Assessment Theory: Good assessment begins with assignment design, including a clear statement of learning objectives

Assignment/Assessment Design + Response + Evaluation = Assessment

(White 1984; White and Wright 2015).

Assessment theory supports the idea that good writing assessment is also:

- **Local/site-based** (responds directly to student writing itself and is in response to a specific, individual assignment)
- **Rhetorically based** (responds to the relationship between what a student writes, how she writes and who she is writing for)
- **Accessible** (assessment written in language that a student can understand; legible; available in a time frame that allows students to take assessment into consideration for subsequent writing assignments)
- **Theoretically consistent** (if the assignment is to write a thesis driven essay, then students are indeed following the assignment when they produce a thesis in the first parag and generate subsequent parag. with evidence for that claim—as opposed to writing an essay that seeks primarily to generate new insights by its conclusion)

(O'Neill, Moore, and Huot 57).

Methodology.

While there is much debate on the relative advantages and disadvantages of holistic vs. analytic assessment, for the purposes of AAH at Stanford and as TA's, holistic grading will be what you're asked to provide. I am providing information here on both, however, so you can see their relative merits yourself.

Aims to rate overall proficiency in a given student writing sample. Often used in large-scale writing program assessment and impromptu classroom writing for diagnostic purposes.

General Tenets to Holistic Grading:

- Assignment Design + Response + Evaluation = Assessment
- Responding to drafts is part of evaluation
- Response language should foster students’ self-assessment
- Peer review should facilitate critical thinking about topic and attainment of threshold concepts: they’re readers, not editors
- Avoid excessive corrections. More than 2 marginal comments per page during drafting stage, with summative comments at end
- Avoid overt focus on grammar and mechanics during drafting
- End commentary should attend to students overall performance across learning objectives (hence the need for the assignment in front of you as you assess).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Holistic Scoring (Becker, 2011: p116)

<i>Type</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Holistic	<p><i>Emphasis is on what writers do well and not on deficiencies (Cohen, 1994)</i></p> <p><i>Validity is greater because it reflects authentic, personal reaction of reader (White, 1984)</i></p> <p><i>Scores are determined quickly (Weigle, 2002)</i></p>	<p><i>Scores do not provide diagnostic information (how has student progressed; relative to what they knew/how they wrote before and how they have improved); reliability is reduced (Song & Caruso, 1996)</i></p> <p><i>Scores can depend more upon the rater than upon text qualities (Hamp-Lyons, 2003) Information for deciding what to target next is insufficient (Nelson & Van Meter, 2007)</i></p>

Emphasizes student performance across criterion, criterion which are established as central to assignment in advance, usually on an assignment sheet. The approach is quantitative and provides a scaled set of points for each criterion; in addition criterion are often weighted by a k factor, meaning in addition to points a “weight” is assigned to each category.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Analytic Scoring (Becker, 2011: p115)

<i>Type</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Analytic	<p>Categories are not collapsed into one inflated score; can train raters easily (Cohen, 1994)</p> <p>Generalization to different writing tasks is possible (Weigle, 2002)</p> <p>Reliability is improved (Huot, 1996; Knoch, 2009)</p> <p>Can help to identify writers’ strengths and weaknesses; provides diagnostic information (Bacha, 2001; Carr, 2000)</p>	<p>Development can be time consuming and expensive (Hamp-Lyons, 2003; Weigle, 2002)</p> <p>Writing subskills cannot be separable (White, 1984)</p> <p>Raters may judge the scales holistically to match holistic impressions (Nakamura, 2004)</p>

LANGUAGE FOR RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING.

While this may not be how you are assessing, explicitly, the terms and values below may help inform your holistic feedback. (Note: to be successful, an analytic framework must be generated in relation to a specific assignment and made available to students before they write).

Criteria	Exemplary (A)	Strong (B)	Competent (C)	Developing (D/E)
Rhetorical Stance	Student’s essay is consistently written in a tone and style appropriate to the audience. Rhetorical choices are acutely befitting of the purpose and occasion for which student is writing.	Student’s essay is mostly written in tone and style appropriate for audience. Rhetorical choices almost always work for the purpose and occasion, but there are occasional lapses.	Student’s essay shows an attempt at appropriateness in tone and style, but the student makes several choices that clearly do not befit the rhetorical situation.	The tone and style often seem off-target for audience. Rhetorical choices work occasionally, but mostly do not befit the rhetorical situation.
Arrangement: Cohesion and Coherence	Concise, coherent, and clear: developed logical structure, sophisticated transitions, coherent.	Mostly concise, coherent, and clear: developed logical structure but may lack transitions or clear topic sentences.	Sporadically concise, coherent, and/or clear, but shows an attempt; structure may lack development, transitions, or clear topic sentences.	Reader has to work too hard to make connections due to absence of transitions & paragraph organization.
Analytic	Student effectively	Thoughtfully engages	Shows engagement with	“Support” may not be

Engagement: Logos	employs concepts and methods of formal analysis to examine the artwork. Focuses on formal aspects of the work (composition, form, color, perspective, relationship of forms, etc.) and supports claims with formal and contextual references. The analysis is sophisticated, fresh and exciting, posing new ways to think of the work.	with details within work. Takes some chances. Needs to stretch analysis a bit further. Employs concepts and methods of formal analysis effectively and mostly focuses on details within work.	work by choosing appropriate details, but may lack sufficient analysis. Inconsistently employs concepts and methods of formal analysis and/or may incorrectly apply these strategies in her/his analysis. Analysis diverges from the formal details of the work itself.	appropriate for analysis; analysis skims surface or may not relate to purpose of the assignment. Rarely employs methods and concepts from this unit and/or diverges too heavily from the formal components of work.
Delivery	Sophisticated and effective use of in-text citation; embeds quotes within own logic and sentence structures. Few to no errors with in-text citation and works cited.	Quotes support but don't dominate writer's logic. Some minimal errors in in-text citation and works cited. Citation style often used correctly.	Several errors in in-text citation and works cited. Some "dropped in" quote. Developing awareness of representing and using research.	Citations often excluded or incorrect. Works cited has multiple errors. Lacks awareness of how to use research in academic writing.
Mechanics	Exceptional command of academic language other surface features of text.	Strong command of academic language and other surface features.	Developing academic language usage and other surface features.	Distracting surface errors.
Invention: Pre-writing	Significant growth from draft to draft;	Ample revisions.	Moderate revisions. review.	Few notable changes

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RESPONDING TO STUDENT ESSAYS.

Some general suggestions for improving assessment (drawn from ARHA Teaching Assistant's Assessments):

1. **SPECIFICITY.** If you give a check mark, explain why you are giving a check mark. More specifically, explain what *does work* instead of just explaining what *doesn't work*. Because (1) The student can then learn *what to do* as well as what *not to do* (2) By doing this, you set the student up to repeat those particular moves in future writing. (What can almost always happens otherwise is: students see a check, reread their own sentence, and have no real/clear sense what is being praised or why).
2. **OVERVIEW.** End comments that identify 2 key strengths and 2 key weaknesses of the essay. Aim to provide an overarching perspective into this student as writer/thinker. How can you make your feedback most transferable; so that a student can draw on your comments for the next essay s/he writes? (Such feedback that addresses methods of analysis might be contrasted to feedback that marks out limits or strengths only of specific content. This second type often results in students 'fixing' individual parts of their work, rather than generating a real revision or generating improved writing in the future.)
3. **ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE.** While you may be frustrated by a student's 'bad writing', it is critical for the student's progress and continued engagement in the course that you attend to what the student is aiming to communicate and achieve. This doesn't mean offering empty or false praise—or even expressing disappointment if you know a particular student can do better—but rather reading for intellectual and stylistic sparks and pointing to how these can offer the grounds for real improvement.