Formulating Written Comments For Student Writing

The written comments you make on a student's essay will often be the basis of your relationship with that student. It is important that you consider this relationship as you comment and grade and that your responses to students' writing be part of a respectful conversation. We expect students to respect our knowledge of the subject and our good intentions toward them; in return, we must respect their attempts to fulfill our expectations and to move forward in their learning.

--St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing

* * * * *

Decide Whether You Are Offering Formative or Summative Assessment

**Formative assessment:** Ongoing and pro-active feedback concerning strengths and weaknesses. Allows changes to be made on subsequent drafts and acknowledges writing and learning as a process.

**Summative assessment:** Fixed and retroactive evaluation that communicates final assessment and evaluates writing once it is completed. May judge knowledge of material or awareness of (and accountability to) an audience.

Consider that some assignments may be best suited to more formative, and others to more summative assessments. It may not be necessary to give summative assessment on *every assignment*. In either assessment situation, you should always ask yourself, "What kind of response from me will help this student learn most effectively?" The form of assessment you have to give, in concert with the goals of the course and what you know of the individual student's prior work or learning challenges, will help you decide how best to formulate your comments.

* * * * *

Distinguish Between Global and Local Concerns

As you evaluate students' written work, it is helpful to recognize that our responses as instructors generally fall into two broad categories—and that we may value these categories differently:

**Global concerns:** Higher order features—these center at the level of intellectual engagement with the topic or assignment and include the paper's ideas, content, and structure.

**Local concerns:** Lower order features—these center on the technical aspects of the written product, generally focusing on the sentence or word level of the paper.
If you want to encourage students’ critical thinking in and through your writing assignments, be sure that your responses to their writing address and assign value to the global concerns of their written work. This does not mean you to need to ignore the local concerns, but it does mean your students should recognize that, in your class, they must attend to the global concerns as much as (and before) the local ones.

Note that it is neither realistic nor productive to expect “perfection” in the writing of some L2 students (students who use English as their second language). The constraints of the language acquisition process, which operate differentially on each learner, may make it impossible for some L2 writers to recognize errors. In other words, errors in language use and punctuation among L2 writers may stem not from a failure to proofread carefully, but from a gap or gaps in their knowledge of the language. Note that some students who use English as their first language (L1 writers) may exhibit similar gaps in their lexical knowledge (knowledge of the way that vocabulary items function in a sentence), but generally will not exhibit gaps in their grammatical knowledge (knowledge of the way that sentences function).

While you may feel uncomfortable accepting papers that contain many language-use and punctuation errors, it is unproductive for both you and the writer if you call attention to – or penalize for – every single error in the paper. Instead, we suggest that you either overlook those errors that students are unlikely to be able to correct on their own or that you suggest alternate text in the margins. Alternatively, you may want to call students’ attention to those errors that they are likely to be able to correct on their own. The documents linked below will help you determine which kinds of errors students are likely to be able to correct on their own:

http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/teachingmultilinguallearners

You can also contact one of the specialists in multilingual writing at the Sweetland Center for Writing for assistance in making this judgment.

Some L2 students may likewise struggle to produce papers that conform precisely to American formatting conventions. Thus, it may be necessary to explain and provide models of formatting conventions for L2 students. Formatting conventions that frequently prove to be problematic for international L2 students include, but are not limited to, the following: formatting of dates; ordering of a person’s first (given) and last (family) names; indentation; and line spacing. Due to compatibility issues with the software and hardware of computers purchased outside of the United States, it may be impossible for international L2 students to comply with line-spacing and indentation conventions. In this case, it may be necessary to require that students complete assignments on a computer in one of the campus labs.
Aim to Guide and Motivate Students, But Don’t Overwhelm!

A special issue of the *Harvard Writing Project Bulletin* on “Responding to Student Writing” urges college teachers to remember:

To give student writers appropriate direction, it’s necessary to find a middle ground where students have enough comments to guide and motivate them, but not so many that they feel programmed and pushed around. In this middle ground, complaints ideally give way to gratitude: “My instructor helped me figure out what I wanted to say.”

With this in mind the *HWP Bulletin* suggests:

1. Try to understand and appreciate what the student was attempting to do.
2. Stay in touch with what’s good about a particular piece of writing.
3. Limit the number of critical points to three or four.

Two Formulas for End Comments on Student Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative assessment</th>
<th>Summative assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reflection: a statement that describes the content of the paper</td>
<td>1. Reflection: a statement that describes the content of the paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Praise /identification of key strengths</td>
<td>2. Praise /identification of key strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Recommendations for improvement: 2-4 ways the student could approach revision of this work</td>
<td>3. Future challenges: 2-4 things to concentrate on for the next assignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another Formula for End Comments on Student Papers

(Source: *Harvard Writing Project Bulletin*, “Responding to Student Writing" Special Issue)

1. Salutation (“Dear So-and-So”)
2. Restatement of the paper’s main point—this allows the student to see whether an audience member “got” what s/he attempted to do in the paper
3. Discussion of the paper’s strengths
4. Discussion of the paper’s weaknesses, focusing on the large problems first—work to limit these to 3-4; don’t overwhelm or demoralize
5. Concluding remarks
6. Closing and signature (“Sincerely, So-and-So”)—consider how this method of opening and closing emphasizes the personhood of both student and instructor.
Best Practices for Marginal Comments

"Though there is much debate these days about the most effective methods of responding to student writing, there is a clear consensus about the least effective ways to handle student papers. Far too much of what teachers do with student writing is picky, arbitrary, unclear, or generally unhelpful."

—Edward M. White (2007)

To promote student writing as an act of communication, and not simply an exercise in meeting instructor expectations, read each essay as a reader first, and as a grader last.

Students value thoughtful feedback that engages them in dialogue with a reader making an effort to understand what they have to say.

Some of the most useful forms of commenting include (i) questions stimulating further thought, (ii) brief summaries of what the reader got out of the paper, and (iii) descriptions of difficulties the reader encountered.

Postpone writing marginal comments until you’ve read the essay and written your end comment. Then, insert selective marginal comments, questions, and praise to reinforce the end comment.

If you are commenting on style, grammar, or punctuation in your end comment, mark up only a single representative paragraph as an example of patterns found throughout the essay. Note that this strategy may not work well for some L2 students, as the constraints of the language acquisition process may genuinely make it impossible for them to see consistent patterns of errors. It may be more productive to call students’ attention to each error that you expect him or her to be able to correct. The documents linked above will help you 1) determine which errors a student is likely to be able to correct, and 2) devise a strategy for calling attention to those errors in effective ways.

Reactive commenting and line editing result in fragmented and confusing feedback. On the other hand, a form of line editing may be desirable when responding to the work of some L2 students. If you want to provide effective feedback on language-use errors, use the documents linked above for help in determining 1) which types of errors students are likely to be able to correct and 2) how you can effectively call attention to those errors. Don’t become frustrated if students are able to correct all of the errors that you point out to them on one paper, but continue to make the same kind of errors in future papers. The language acquisition process works in sometimes unpredictable and often rather slow ways. This means that learners may be able to articulate a language-use rule and apply it when told to do so long before they can draw subconsciously upon it to edit their own spoken or written language.
Evaluating Student Writing: Managing Your Time

Like just about any aspect of teaching, the work of evaluating student writing can take up just as much time as you allow it. Given the importance of balancing your many responsibilities as a GSI, the matter of time management deserves its own handout, even if it reiterates some ideas we’ve offered elsewhere. The good news is that many time-saving techniques (e.g., staging assignments, or limiting your marginal comments on student papers) also lead to better pedagogical results.

Assigning writing: practices to consider

- Spend class time discussing the learning goals and evaluation criteria for each writing assignment. You can answer student questions about the assignment when the class is assembled, rather than individually. Clear discussion of evaluation criteria can also save you time commenting on papers later.
- Devote time to discussing and responding to student writing early in a course to achieve stronger writing throughout the semester.
- Design assignments that teach particular skills so you can limit your comments to students’ success with just those skills.
- If you can anticipate challenges students will have with the assignment, identify them in class and discuss strategies for overcoming them. A general rule to keep in mind: the stronger the papers, the quicker the grading process.
- Between major assignments, assign low-stakes writing that reinforces learning or allows students to practice new skills. These can be read and responded to quickly or not at all.
- Assign essays in stages so that students can receive feedback on specific areas (thesis, intro, topic sentences, lit review, etc.) that will produce more successful completed essays.
- Use peer groups to respond to drafts or develop essay ideas.

Commenting on writing: practices to consider

- Keep track of common problems and create a document (to be handed out or projected in class) addressing them, rather than repeating the same comments over and over on individual essays.
- Set a per paper time limit for yourself and stick to it.
- Read a stack of papers in several sittings so you can work on manageable chunks at your maximum efficiency.
- Focus your comments for each paper on two or three of the most important points you want to make, rather than trying to address every issue.
- Use marginal comments/notations only to point out examples of patterns or elements discussed in an end or header comment.
- If you are commenting on style, grammar, and mechanics, mark up a single representative paragraph to address broader patterns in the essay.
- When you have responded to drafts, limit your response on the final essay to a summative comment noting the success of the revision and the essay’s overall strengths and weaknesses.
- Use technologies, such as the commenting function in Word, that allow you to give feedback more efficiently.
- If the feedback you want to convey is highly complex, make a general note of the issue and ask the student to schedule an appointment to discuss the essay.
- Introduce students to the resources at the Sweetland Writing Center.
Assigning grades: practices to consider

- Develop a scoring guide or rubric based on the pedagogical goals of each specific assignment.
- Keep your rubric in front of you while you grade to remind you of your stated expectations and standards; this will help you remain both efficient and consistent in your grading.
- Encourage students to use rubrics as guides for both peer and self-assessment. E.g., ask students to turn in a page assigning their essay a grade and explaining that grade in terms of the evaluation criteria you have given them. Your comments can briefly address why you agree or disagree with their assessment.
Designing Rubrics and Grading Standards

Some teachers use rubrics; others carry them around in their heads. Many teachers would agree that it is a helpful exercise to, at least once, articulate and organize the standards by which you will grade a particular kind of paper. Many students perceive rubrics as more objective than written comments, and rubrics can help students decode the types of responses and evaluations they receive from instructors.

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Designing and Implementing Rubrics

Designing a Rubric

Good rubric design is intimately connected with quality course and assignment design. Your rubric can (and probably should!!) echo the language of your assignment and should be aligned with the demands and student learning goals of the individual assignment and class context.

Rubrics can be broken down into discrete elements (title page, correct citations, an introduction that includes a thesis statement) and/or into modes and levels of thinking (coherence, analysis, the sophistication of a counter-argument). They should remain flexible enough to allow for student creativity, not create a formulaic pattern that all students must follow.

Rubrics can rate the student’s fulfillment of your various criteria either numerically (ex., a scale from 6 to 1) or quantitatively (ex., awarding points for each criterion) or qualitatively (ex., a range from “excellent” to “needs work”).

Teaching with Rubrics

Consider handing out your rubric with the assignment—so the students have a clear idea of how their work will be evaluated from the beginning.

Spend class time instructing students about the learning goals and skills required for each assignment, and allow students to ask questions about the rubric.

Encourage students to use rubrics as guides for both peer and self-assessment. With guidance from the instructor, peer and self-assessments can improve student learning and save time for you. For example, a student can assign a grade to her own essay using the rubric; your comments can then briefly address why you agree or disagree with her self-assessment.
Grading with Rubrics

As you grade, keep your rubric in front of you to remind you of your expectations, help you use your grading time efficiently, and keep you consistent in your grading.

When evaluated using a rubric, most papers show a mixture of hits and misses: the student is not confronted with a single grade or evaluation, but an analysis of the paper’s various successes and failures. This makes the rubric a helpful teaching tool for future papers, because students can clearly see where to focus their efforts for the next assignment.

Finally, a formal rubric can be combined with a more holistic explanation of your larger grading standards (see below).

Evaluating L2 writers’ use of language using rubrics

Some L2 writers (writers who use English as their second language) may struggle to produce papers that conform precisely to expectations about language use and punctuation. Although it is not realistic to expect that such students will be able to produce a “perfect” paper, it is still possible to assign an equitable “grammar” or “language use” grade to such students. Here is a good strategy for doing so:

1. Refrain from commenting on language use until students have read your comments on content, revised for content, and been assigned a content grade.

2. Using a clean copy of the student’s paper, call attention to those errors that the student is likely to be able to correct without assistance. The documents linked at [http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/teachingmultilinguallearners](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/teachingmultilinguallearners) will help you determine which errors students are likely to be able to correct on their own.

3. Give the student time to correct those errors that you have noted. Forty-eight hours should be sufficient, but you may consider allowing the student to work on the corrections over a weekend.

4. Base the student’s “grammar” or “language use” grade on the number of errors corrected and/or the apparent effort that went into the correction process.

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A Caution about Rubrics

Don’t forget the importance of combining a rubric with head or end comments of your own (see our handout on formulating written comments). Whether the paper did or did not meet the bulk of your expectations, students appreciate evidence that you have also engaged with their work (and, by proxy, with them) on a level beyond the mere assignment of a grade.
SAMPLE GRADING RUBRICS
Sample Holistic Scoring Guide

6. A superior response addresses the question fully and explores the issues thoughtfully. It shows substantial depth, fullness, and complexity of thought. The response demonstrates clear, focused, unified, and coherent organization and is fully developed and detailed. The essay demonstrates superior control of diction, syntactic variety, and transition.

5. A strong response clearly addresses the question and explores the issues. It shows some depth and complexity of thought and is effectively organized. The strong essay is well developed, with supporting detail. It demonstrates control of diction syntactic variety, and transition, though it may have occasional flaws.

4. An adequate response adequately addresses the question and explores the issues. It shows clarity of thought but may lack complexity. A competent essay is organized and adequately developed, with some detail. This response demonstrates competent writing, though it may have more frequent flaws.

3. A limited response may distort or neglect parts of the question. It may be simplistic or stereotyped in thought. It may demonstrate problems in organization. It may use generalizations without supporting detail or detail without generalizations; details may be undeveloped. The weak response shows patterns of error in language, syntax, and/or mechanics.

2. A seriously flawed response demonstrates serious problems in one or more of the areas specified for the weak (3) response. The inadequate response shows numerous errors in language, syntax, and/or mechanics that interfere with meaning.

1. A fundamentally deficient response fails in its attempt to discuss the topic, or it may be deliberately off-topic. An essay in this category provides little evidence of the ability to develop an organized response. The incompetent response shows pervasive patterns of error in language, syntax, and/or mechanics that result in incoherence.

[Adapted from Naomi Silver, Sweetland Center for Writing, Provost’s Seminar on Teaching, session on “Efficient and Effective Approaches to Grading Writing,” 24 March 2008.]
Sample Letter-Based Rubric

Grading Standards for Essays

The following guidelines clarify the significance of the letter grades used in this college writing class. Though specific expectations and emphases may vary from professor to professor, these standards are generally shared among the college faculty. They appear here in the order of frequency with which I generally assign them.

B: This is a strong essay that demonstrates careful thought and planning. It coherently argues a clearly stated, compelling thesis, offering sufficient supporting evidence. Throughout the paper, the claims are insightful and well-substantiated, and the diction is precise and thoughtful. Paragraphs are well-developed, transitions clearly mark the direction of the argument, and the organization serves to elucidate the thesis. It contains few mechanical or grammatical errors. Shorthand 'translations' for B grades: B+ = Very good; B = Good; B- = Pretty good.

C: This essay has potential but falls short of its goals, struggling with one or more of the areas in which the B paper succeeds. It sticks to one topic but does not delineate a clear analysis of that topic. It may offer a thesis that is clear but not focused or not debatable. The argument may be vague, inconsistent, simplistic, or self-contradictory; ideas may be buried and the connections between them obscure. Paragraphs may be lacking development, and the organization may hinder effective development of the thesis. This essay may contain several grammatical and mechanical errors or a pattern of error. Shorthand 'translations' for C grades: C+ = Almost there; C = Not quite; C- = Barely making it.

A: This essay is outstanding, excelling in all of the areas in which the B paper succeeds. It successfully takes risks and pushes the bounds of its topic. The thesis is complex, focused, and insightful; the argument is persuasive and thoughtfully elaborated, using especially well-chosen evidence; and the writing style is lucid, engaging, and smooth. This essay contains no mechanical or grammatical errors. Shorthand 'translations' for A grades: A- = Great; A = Terrific! Wow!; A+ = OMG, I'm pretty sure I've never given this grade before!

D: This essay resembles an unrevised draft. It does not clearly articulate or develop a focused thesis; it makes illogical, unsupported claims; the organization is confusing or obscures lines of logic. It may jump from topic to topic without apparent reason. The diction is likely to be repetitive and imprecise. There may be serious, distracting mechanical or grammatical errors. Shorthand 'translations' for D grades: D+ = Barely acceptable but containing some hint of promise; D = Barely acceptable; D- = Lucky not to be failing.

F: This essay is unacceptable college work. It indicates a gross lack of preparation for the assignment. This grade also applies to plagiarized work. Shorthand: Failure.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>ADEQUATE</th>
<th>NEEDS WORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title, Introduction, Conclusion</td>
<td>Title includes both subject and a hint about the thesis or point of view; engaging introduction that prepares the reader accurately for the body paragraphs; thought-provoking or interesting conclusion that ties everything back together and takes the thesis further</td>
<td>Most but not all of the qualities listed under &quot;Excellent&quot; - there may be roughness or confusion in the introduction or conclusion</td>
<td>No title; introduction and/or conclusion seem to have little to do with the body of the essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis/Focus</td>
<td>Excels by responding to the assignment with a clear argumentative thesis in the first paragraph that continues to be the focus of the paper</td>
<td>Has a clearly stated argumentative thesis that the paper basically focuses on.</td>
<td>Thesis is implied or absent, or is stated, but the paper doesn’t connect back to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>one main idea per paragraph, good use of transitions, clear topic sentences, smooth connections between paragraphs, if an order is set in the introduction, it is followed</td>
<td>mostly one idea or point per paragraph, some transitions, mostly clear topic sentences, okay connections between paragraphs</td>
<td>many ideas per paragraph, missing topic sentences, abrupt transition, and/or missing or rough connections between paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development: Support</td>
<td>Uses specific, concrete, relevant details, examples, evidence and numerous references to source material to substantiate and explain thesis</td>
<td>uses support, but it may be insufficient in some areas, or connections between the evidence and ideas might not be clear</td>
<td>lacks sufficient details and examples to support ideas; has insufficient or irrelevant evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development: Analysis</td>
<td>explains the connections between evidence and main ideas thoughtfully and thoroughly, makes connections explicit, discusses implications, relevance or significance.</td>
<td>mostly explains connections between ideas and evidence, although explanation may be incomplete, or may be missing in some paragraphs. Little discussion of facts and info</td>
<td>does not clearly explain connections between evidence and ideas; does not elaborate beyond basic or obvious conclusions, and/or analysis is too general or brief to be convincing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Craft &amp; Style</td>
<td>Demonstrates excellent use of language; precisely chosen words, complex and varied sentence structure; appropriate tone and style</td>
<td>adequate use of language, although some words may be vague or imprecise; sentence structure may be simple or awkward in spots, mostly appropriate tone and style</td>
<td>vague and abstract language; words misused; sentences may be monotonous or choppy; tone or style may be inappropriate for the assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics: (Grammar and spelling)</td>
<td>is almost entirely free of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors (one per page or less)</td>
<td>contains a few errors which may distract the reader but do not impede meaning (about 2-3 errors per page)</td>
<td>has frequent or extensive errors in diction, grammar, punctuation, spelling (more than 4 errors per page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics: MLA</td>
<td>Has smoothly used signal phrases and parenthetical citation in-text; has a citation for every fact or quote; has correctly formatted Works Cited page with few or no errors</td>
<td>mostly cites in-text correctly, but doesn’t introduce citations smoothly or uses signal phrases/parenthetical citation inaccurately; Works Cited page has more than a few errors</td>
<td>missing many in-text citations, missing Works Cited page, Works cited page contains only URLs or has other significant omissions or errors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Points</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Score</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Describes lab content concisely, adequately, appropriately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conveys a sense of the full report concisely and effectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Successfully establishes the scientific concept of the lab</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effectively presents the objectives and purpose of the lab</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>States hypothesis and provides logical reasoning for it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gives enough details to allow for replication of procedure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Opens with effective statement of overall findings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presents visuals clearly and accurately</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presents verbal findings clearly and with sufficient support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Successfully integrates verbal and visual representations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Opens with effective statement of support of hypothesis</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Backs up statement with reference to appropriate findings</td>
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<td>Provides sufficient and logical explanation for the statement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sufficiently addresses other issues pertinent to lab</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Convincingly describes what has been learned in the lab</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Citations and references adhere to proper format</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Format of tables and figures is correct</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report is written in scientific style: clear and to the point</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Grammar and spelling are correct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall aims</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of lab's key concepts</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Documents clear and thoughtful scientific inquiry</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accurately measures and analyzes data for lab findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Points Earned: [ ]
Total Possible Points: [ ]
Percentage: [ ]

*these cells calculate points by multiplying total possible by percentage selected
**these cells calculates total of weighted scores for each section

Note: Interactive versions of this spreadsheet can be found at: labwrite.ncsu.edu/instructors/excelshets.htm
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-30</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>36-39</td>
<td>40-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction (1) concisely describes the theoretical framework, (2) introduces relevant previous work, (3) briefly previews experimental method, and (4) explains predicted results and how results might differ under an alternative theory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-14</td>
<td>14-15</td>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Methods section clearly and concisely describes exactly what was done was the experiment, including (1) participants, (2) materials, and (3) procedure.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data is presented clearly, with appropriate figures. Interpretation of the data is avoided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-23</td>
<td>24-27</td>
<td>28-30</td>
<td>31-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Important results are summarized and used to accept or reject hypotheses. Insights are provided into the wider implications of the results. Possible reasons for significant discrepancies are suggested and specific, practical ways to improve or extend the experiment are identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Writing Quality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English is direct, concise, unambiguous, and original. Style is engaging but not overly conversational. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar are correct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
</tr>
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General Grading Rubric

The following is a general rubric that students can use to gain a clearer perspective on what constitutes effective organization, style, structure, and mechanics. Though each rhetorical structure will have its own rubric with specialized elements, this rubric offers guidelines for the general features present in each paper.

The Outstanding Paper (A/A-)
Thesis: Easily identifiable, fresh, sophisticated, insightful, crystal clear, strongly worded, forceful.
Structure: Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis, analytic rather than descriptive structure. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentences, strong concluding sentences work out full implications.
Use of Evidence: Primary source information used to buttress every point with at least one example. Examples support mini-thesis and fit within paragraph. Excellent integration of quoted material into sentences.
Analysis: Clearly relates evidence to topic sentence; analysis is fresh and exciting, posing new ways to think about the material.
Logic and argumentation: All ideas in the paper flow logically; argument is identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Author anticipates and successfully defuses counter-arguments; makes fresh connections which illuminate thesis.
Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction excellent; smooth flow of sentences and good control of language; correct use of punctuation, style; minimal to no spelling errors; absolutely no run on sentences or comma splices.

The Good Paper (B+/B)
Thesis: Promising but lacks insight or originality; wording may be slightly unclear or vague; lacks narrow focus.
Structure: Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences.
Use of Evidence: Examples used to support most points. Some evidence does not support point, or may appear where inappropriate. Quotes are well-integrated into sentences.
Analysis: Evidence often related to topic sentences, though links perhaps not very clear.
Logic and argumentation: Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. Some evidence that counter-arguments are acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed. Occasional insightful connections made.
Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction strong despite occasional lapses; punctuation and citation style often used correctly. Some (minor) spelling errors; may have one run-on sentence or comma splice.

The Borderline Paper (B-/C+)
Thesis: May be unclear (contains many vague terms), appear unoriginal, or offer relatively little that is new. Provides little around which to structure the paper.
Structure: Generally unclear, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions; paragraphs without topic sentences.
Use of Evidence: Points often lack supporting evidence, miss key evidence, or evidence used in inappropriate places. Quotes may be poorly integrated into sentences.
Analysis: Quotes appear often without analysis relating them to topic sentences, or analysis offers nothing beyond the quote.
Logic and argumentation: Logic may often fail, or argument may often be unclear or unconvincing. May not address counter-arguments or make any outside connections.
Mechanics: Problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction (usually not major). Errors in punctuation, citation style, and spelling. May have several run-on sentences or comma splices.
The "Needs Help" Paper (C/C-)

Thesis: Difficult to identify at all, may be bland restatement of obvious point. Vague language.

Structure: Unclear, often because thesis is weak or non-existent; transitions confusing and unclear; few topic sentences.

Use of Evidence: Very few or very weak examples. General failure to support statements, or evidence seems to support no statement. Quotes not integrated into sentences; "plopped in" in improper manner.

Analysis: Very little or very weak attempt to relate evidence to argument; may be no identifiable argument, or no evidence to relate it to.

Logic and argumentation: Ideas do not flow at all, usually because there is no argument to support. Simplistic view of topic; no effort to grasp possible alternative views.

Mechanics: Significant problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction. Frequent major errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling. May have many run-on sentences and comma splices.

The Failing Paper: Shows obviously minimal lack of effort or comprehension of the assignment. Very difficult to understand owing to major problems with mechanics, structure, and analysis. Has no identifiable thesis or entirely ineffective thesis.

Source: Adapted from Paul Halsall/Fordham University who adapted it from Patrick Rael/Bowdoin
U-M Resources for Teaching and Evaluating Writing

Especially useful sections of the CRLT GSI Guidebook
- “Best Practices for Grading Laboratory Reports”
- “Responding to Student Writing—Principles and Practices”
- “Responding to Student Writing – A Sample Commenting Protocol”

Sweetland Center for Writing <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/>
The Writing Workshop at the Sweetland Center for Writing aims to help students become more confident, skilled, and knowledgeable about writing and the subjects they write about. This free consultation service provides students the opportunity to work one-on-one with a Sweetland instructor. Undergraduate students may schedule one 30-minute appointment per week, with a limit of 15 visits in a full term (7 in a half term), including walk-ins. Graduate students may schedule one 60-minute appointment per week, with a limit of 7 visits in a full term (4 in a half term), including walk-ins. Students who are non-native English speakers may schedule one 45-minute appointment per week with an ELI (English Language Institute) instructor during Fall and Winter terms. The Sweetland Center for Writing has also trained and supervised a select group of upper-level undergraduates to serve as writing tutors for their peers. Peer tutors come from a variety of disciplines and are trained to help fellow undergraduates of all skill levels with all parts of the writing process. See the Sweetland Center for Writing website for details on peer tutor hours and information on how to schedule one-on-one consultations.

Plagiarism
The following websites define and offer examples of plagiarism, and provide information on disciplinary procedures resulting from plagiarism.
http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/examples.html
http://www.lib.umich.edu/academic-integrity/understanding-plagiarism-and-academic-integrity
http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/procedures/index.html

Services for Students with Disabilities
The University of Michigan Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) unit has helpful information to support students with disabilities in the classroom and on campus. Their faculty and staff handbook with guidance for instructors is available on their website.
<http://ssd.umich.edu/>

Grade Grievance
The following website outlines the grade grievance procedure for various departments within LSA.
http://www.lsa.umich.edu/facstaff/saa/grade grievance

English Language Institute <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/eli>
Offers English language instruction for members of the University of Michigan community whose first language is not English. Resources include credit-bearing courses, free workshops, and writing clinics for both undergraduates and GSIs.
Evaluating Writing: Some Recommended Reference Texts


Ferris, Dana. *Teaching College Writing to Diverse Student Populations.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of MI Press, 2009.


