

Notes from the Teaching Conversation, **with grading rubrics and assessment ideas**

Rules for writing:

- *Know your audience*
- *Know your purpose*
- *Know your forum...and be able to identify its conventions.*
- *Know your topic, and be willing to learn even more about it*
- *Know what kinds of evidence and appeals are possible...and how to choose which kinds are appropriate*
- *Let your organization grow organically from the interaction of what you know about your audience, your purpose, your forum, and your topic.*

Good writing, regardless of discipline, shows the following (not an exhaustive list, and not prioritized):

- Clarity of expression
- Coherence (not just comprehensible—*coherence* in the sense that all the parts of the written piece form a single unit)
- Response appropriate to question asked (i.e., an accurate reading of the essay question and a complete response to all parts of that question)
- Synthesis of ideas (whether from reading or class discussion)
- Focus and concision (i.e., narrow topic within a greater subject; ability to develop an idea without having to broaden the topic, staying on track with a topic or argument)
- Relevance (the “so what” question)
- Evidence of judgment
- Independent thought, thought that moves beyond summarizing a reading or a discussion, thought that contributes to an academic conversation

Grading Rubrics and Assessment Tools

Notes from an Experienced Teacher:

First, I tell students that they don't start with a 100 and then lose points for everything they do wrong. Rather, they start with a 0. Positive stuff they do raises the score; negative stuff lowers it.

Second, I tell them that I approach assessment as if it were a diving competition. The score is a function of the index of difficulty multiplied by the degree of success. Let's say Suzie attempts a difficult dive (index of difficulty of 3) and messes up a bit (performance 7). Suzie's score is $3 \times 7 = 21$, an A-minus. In contrast, Bambi attempts an easy dive (index of 1), but pulls it off perfectly (performance of 10). Bambi's score is $1 \times 10 = 10$, a C. Suzie wins.

The story has two lessons. (1) As a teacher, I want to reward students for taking risks and trying to stretch their capabilities. (2) As a writer, if you know you're gonna mess up on the execution, then you'd sure as heck better try to do something worthwhile!

I keep the criteria simple:

First, have you followed the instructions in the assignment (topic, length, number of sources, etc.)?

Second, do you have a clearly conceived and articulated thesis that's provable and worth arguing?

Third, is the development of your argument both logical and clearly articulated?

Fourth, have you provided sufficient concrete, specific evidence – of the appropriate kind, at the appropriate place, and with the appropriate documentation?

Fifth, is your writing literate at the appropriate level of decorum for the class and assignment?

Sixth, holistically, is your paper rhetorically effective?

In terms of the diving analogy, ambition tends to show on criteria 2, 3, 4, and 6 (where I consider style).

Grading Expectations

A paper:

Clearly demonstrates the context for the argument with a *well-thought-out dialectical opposition* that structures an introductory paragraph or section and leads to a *precisely formulated question at issue*. Answers its question at issue with a *clear and precise thesis*, strong *lines of reasoning*, and *clear topic sentences*. Relates directly and clearly to at least one of the readings. Uses a *variety of sources* in setting up the context for the argument, in supporting the argument, and in considering counterarguments; *integrates sources well* (introduces and comments on quotations and paraphrases); *subordinates sources* to the main argument (they never carry the argument for the paper). *Documentation is flawless*; grammar, punctuation, and style are excellent (one or two minor errors but no errors in agreement, faulty parallelism, comma splices/fused sentences or other major blunders).

B paper:

Uses a *dialectical opposition* to set up the argument and at least helps readers to see its context, if not entirely successfully; has a precisely formulated question at issue. Answers its question at issue clearly with an *easily identifiable thesis*, clear attempts at lines of reasoning, and *recognizable topic sentences*. Relates directly and clearly to at least one of the readings. Uses more than one source in most of the following: setting up the context for the argument, supporting the argument, and considering counterarguments; *attempts to integrate sources* (introduces and comments on quotations and paraphrases, competently if sometimes clumsily); subordinates sources to the main argument (they never carry the argument for the paper, even if it relies on them too much). *Documentation is nearly flawless*; grammar, punctuation, and style are very good (a few minor errors but no more than one or two in agreement, faulty parallelism, comma splices/fused sentences or other major blunders).

C paper:

Attempts to use a *dialectical opposition* to set up the argument and shows an awareness of its context but falls short in one or both of these aspects; has an identifiable question at issue, even if not a sufficiently precise or illuminating one. Clearly attempts to answer its question at issue even if the *thesis could be more precise*. Relates clearly to at least one of the readings, but may stray at points from a response to the reading(s). Lines of reasoning may be slightly jumbled or confusing in places; *topic sentences* may not always point to the argument but at least some do. Uses at least one source in most of the following: setting up the context for the argument, supporting the argument, and considering counterarguments; shows difficulty integrating sources (may not introduce or comment sufficiently on some quotations and paraphrases); often but not always fails to subordinate sources to the main argument (they carry the argument for the paper frequently). *Documentation is good* with only minor errors & no failures to document; grammar, punctuation, and style are competent (some errors in agreement, faulty parallelism, comma splices/fused sentences, but none or few in important areas and not so severe as to make the paper difficult to understand).

D paper:

May not use a dialectical opposition to set up the argument or show significant awareness of its context; question at issue may be vague or not identifiable; *thesis present but vague* or not relevant to some significant part of the paper. Attempts to respond to at least one of the readings but may veer away significantly. Lines of reasoning tend to be confusing; *topic sentences may not point to the argument* & some may be missing. Uses at least three or four sources. More than one quotation or paraphrase is plopped into the middle of a paragraph without a significant introduction or comment. *Documentation is decipherable*: there are significant errors but no complete failures to document. Grammar, punctuation, and style cause comprehension problems (comma splices/fused sentences, mixed constructions) but at least some parts of the paper are reasonably clear.

F paper:

Falls significantly short of D standards in two or more places.

The Four Point Scale

Because they are, on balance, successful, effective compositions, “upper-half” scores of 3 and above are described in consistently positive terms—what the composition does right is usually both clear and its most important characteristic.

- a four point composition will have a meaningful **purpose**; it will shape that purpose to suit the intended audience. Its **central idea** will be interesting, significant, and clear. Instead of treating the topic simplistically, it will respond to the reservations or different viewpoints that may be present in its **audience**. Because it responds to the complexities of its subject, the writer’s **structure** is supple: it remains clear without becoming a cookie-cutter. It uses single-topic **paragraphs** that develop their central ideas with adequate information or argument. Its use of detail is specific, pointed, and interesting. It uses efficient **sentences** consistently, and sometimes elegant or powerful ones; it conforms throughout to the conventions of **Edited American English**.
- a three point composition has a recognizable **purpose** and a sense of its **audience**’s needs. A reader will readily recognize and understand its **central idea** and its ramifications. It treats the subject matter fully, with no major omissions or digressions. The **argument** is substantial, and the writer organizes the material clearly if perhaps somewhat conventionally. The composition employs single-topic **paragraphs** developed with specific details. It uses effective **sentences** and generally conforms to the conventions of **Edited American English**.

In contrast, lower-half scores identify compositions where something important has not worked. That is why they are described in hypothetical negative terms: while only a couple of the things that might have gone wrong actually occur in a lower-half composition, the best way to describe what has happened is to point to what the composition might have failed to do.

- a two point composition leaves its **purpose** somewhat cloudy, or perhaps loses track of that purpose for a while along the way. The writer may not be sufficiently attentive to the **audience**’s needs or beliefs. The **central idea** is likely to be either unclear or unsurprising. The composition may need more **ideas** to make its point effectively, or it may have included irrelevant ideas. The **organization** is likely to be both predictable and not well-suited to the topic; or perhaps the writer’s structure may ignore important sub-topics. The **paragraphs** and **sentences** are cookie cutters. Its use of **Edited American English** is marred by one or two consistent errors.
- a one point composition has a major flaw affecting one or more of its rhetorical elements. The writer may misjudge the **audience**’s needs seriously or jump the rails of the specified **purpose**. The **central idea** is probably quite vague or perhaps fragmented. There may be significant gaps in its **argument** or major flaws in the logic that organizes its **structure**. The **paragraphs** in the composition may consistently switch topics; the **sentences** may be cumbersome or overloaded with mechanical **errors**.

THE FLORIDA WRITES RUBRIC

	6 POINTS - WOW		5 POINTS - SOLID
F	Focused, purposeful & reflects insight	F	Focused on the topic
O	Powerfully organized	O	Logical Progression of Ideas
C	Few errors, sentence structure varied	C	Variation in sentence structure
U	Superior understanding	U	Mature understanding
S	Elaborate examples	S	Specific Details
	4 POINTS - COMPETENT		3 POINTS - UNEVEN
F	Focused, on topic and includes few, if any, loosely related ideas	F	Focused but may contain ideas that are loosely connected to the topic
O	Transitional devices strengthen organization	O	Lacks logical progression of ideas
C	Occasional errors; word choice is adequate	C	General conventions are used
U	Commonplace understanding	U	Partial/limited understanding
S	Lacks specificity and support is loosely developed	S	Development of support is uneven
	2 POINTS - DISJOINTED		1 POINT - INCOHERENT
F	Addresses topic but may lose focus by including extraneous or loosely related ideas	F	Addresses topic but may lose focus by including extraneous or loosely related ideas
O	Includes a beginning, middle and end, but these elements may be brief	O	Has an organizational pattern, but may lack completeness or closure
C	Errors in basic conventions, but common words are spelled correctly	C	Frequent and blatant errors in basic conventions; commonly used words may be misspelled
U	Definite misunderstanding	U	Obvious misunderstanding
S	Development of support is erratic and nonspecific	S	Little, if any, development of the supporting ideas, and the support may consist of generalizations or fragmentary lists.