

# Standard Trait Scoring Scale for Writing Assignments

Adapted by Nora J. Bellows from the  
University of Maryland Freshman Writing Program “Grading Standards”

## The Assignment

- A My paper meets all of the requirements of the specific assignment in a fresh and mature way. My paper is exciting to read.
- B My paper follows and fulfills the assignment at a better-than-average level.
- C My paper follows the assignment and meets the requirements of the assignment at a satisfactory level.
- D My paper does meet some aspects of the assignment requirements. My paper’s rhetorical purpose is unclear or is not appropriate given the assignment guidelines.
- F My paper is off the assignment. My paper does not meet the assignment requirements in a significant way.
- 0 I did not turn in a paper, or I turned in so late that it became an automatic zero. My paper was written in another language. I bought or plagiarized my paper.

## The Thesis

- A I have a clear, specific, and interesting thesis that is located in the first paragraph of my paper. My thesis indicates the topic I will discuss and foreshadows the claims I make in support of it.
- B I have a thesis that is located in the first paragraph of my paper and it indicates my topic and gives a sense of the overall argument. My thesis may not entirely reflect or foreshadow all of the material I cover in the paper or I may not state my argument as forcefully as I might have done.
- C I have a thesis in my paper. My thesis may not, however, be immediately discernible to my intended audience. That is, my thesis may appear in its most fully realized and forceful form in a location other than the introduction (such the audience analysis or conclusion). My thesis is apparent but it may be too broad or general for me to be able to prove it. My thesis is predictable.
- D I may imply my thesis, but I do not make a thesis statement that my intended audience can discern without significant work. What this means is that my argument is unclear or undeveloped; thus, my paper has no clear direction and the claims I do make may not be clearly related to one another.
- F I do not have an implicit or explicit thesis. My paper moves confusedly in several directions. This may be because I present several different unrelated arguments or because I do not present an argument at all (e.g. I present a stream-of-consciousness, a narrative, or some other uncontextualized evidence that is not in service of a larger claim).

### **Claims in support of the thesis**

- A I make individual and localized claims that clearly support my thesis in an interesting and sophisticated way. These claims are appropriate to my audience and supported by my evidence. There is only one claim per paragraph and the claims function to organize my paragraphs.
- B I make solid and provable claims that support my thesis. These claims are almost always appropriate to my intended audience. I may rarely have a paragraph with more than one claim or with no explicit claim.
- C Some of my paragraphs contain solid and provable claims. Others of my paragraphs contain claims that are not appropriate for my intended audience or cannot be proved, or are not logically sound. A very few of my paragraphs may not contain claims at all.
- D Many of my paragraph lack claims, or contain claims inappropriate for my topic or my intended audience. My claims may not be able to be proved with the evidence I have or reveal a lack of understanding for my topic or the assignment.
- F My paper does not have claims. Or the claims that I do have are completely unrelated to my topic and/or my thesis.

### **Reasons/ evidence in support of claims**

- A I identify and successfully deploy detailed and compelling evidence that supports my claims and is appropriate and persuasive for my intended audience.
- B My evidence is detailed and persuasive, though sometimes I may not clearly articulate the relationship between my claim and my evidence.
- C I have made an effort to support my claims with evidence, but it is not always the best evidence: it is likely to be obvious or may lack pertinent information. My evidence may not always be persuasive for my intended audience.
- D I do not always have evidence to support my claims. Evidence that I do include may be out of order (that is, certain evidence for a specific claim may not be located in the same paragraph as the claim) or evidence may be irrelevant to the thesis or my claims. My evidence is often not persuasive for my intended audience.
- F I do not have evidence to support my claims, or the evidence I cite is not properly attributed, or there is no attribution of evidence.

### **Analysis of evidence**

- A I analyze my evidence in a way that *always* articulates the relationship between my claims and evidence in an interesting and sophisticated way.
- B I almost always connect my evidence to my claims through thoughtful and reasoned analysis of my evidence.
- C My reasoning, while generally sound, is predictable and occasionally flawed. I do not always make clear to my intended audience how my evidence supports my claim/thesis, either by neglecting to

analyze the evidence or by restating rather than contextualizing the substance of source material/evidence.

- D My reasoning is not sound. I make logical or substance errors in my attempts to analyze my evidence. Or I do not analyze my evidence; thus, it is not clear to my intended audience how my evidence is relevant to or supports my claims/thesis.
- F Because I do not identify evidence to support my thesis/claims, any analysis I might provide may be indecipherable for my intended audience.

**Organization: Introduction**

- A My introduction establishes exigence for my argument in an interesting and captivating way. My introduction contains a strong thesis, previews my claims, and provides background if my intended audience is unfamiliar with my topic.
- B My introduction is clear insofar as I speak to the interests of my audience, I offer a clear thesis, and I establish exigence. In other words, I have all the necessary elements of a successful introduction, but my introduction is not as forceful or interesting as it could be.
- C I have an introduction but it is missing elements or contains other elements that are ineffective. For example, I may offer insufficient or excessive background information for my intended audience. Or my introductory sentence(s) read as bland, I fail to establish exigence, or I do not clearly identify my topic.
- D My introduction is either vague and/or missing. That is, I jump into the middle of my argument without indicating my topic, offering background to an audience who may need it, and/or does not point to a central claim/thesis. My introduction is incomprehensible for my intended audience in some way, and/or I do not interest my intended audience in my topic.
- F I do not have an introduction.

**Organization: Body**

- A My paragraphs are fully developed and follow naturally from what precedes them. I give my reader a sense of the necessary and inevitable flow of my argument. My paragraphs center around proving specific claims that will be persuasive for my intended audience. Those paragraphs are ordered in a logically sound fashion and are tied together with smooth transitions.
- B Most of my paragraphs are developed, are appropriately divided, and follow naturally from what proceeds them, though one or two could be better placed and divided. The majority of my paragraphs are linked with smooth transitions.
- C My paper may have a recognizable but disjointed organizational structure, such that several paragraphs or sentences within paragraphs are misplaced. There are occasions when my paragraphs are not clearly linked together, either through logic or transitional markers.
- D My paper does not have well-developed paragraphs, paragraphs are not arranged in an order that makes sense, and transitions do not make sense or are missing.
- F My paper organization is either haphazard or arbitrary.

**Organization: Conclusion**

- A My conclusion offers a compelling final comment to my argument, one that is persuasive for my intended audience.
- B I offer a conclusion for my paper, one that ties together my claims and thesis, but perhaps not as forcefully or in as interesting a manner as could be.
- C I have a conclusion that attempts to draw together the claims and thesis, though it reads as mechanical and redundant.
- D My conclusion is a boring restatement of the points I have already made in much the same language I used when I originally made those points, if it offers any conclusion at all. Or I introduce information in the conclusion that my intended audience is unprepared for. Or my paper trails off without offering a conclusion.
- F I do not have a conclusion. It seems to my intended audience as though I simply stopped writing. Or my conclusion seems to have no relation to the content of the paper.

**Intersection of Voice, Tone, and Content; Address of Intended Audience**

- A My tone is appropriate for the intended audience. Always. I speak to the values of my readers by using language and diction that they will understand, appreciate, and find persuasive.
- B My tone is almost always appropriate for the intended audience. I rarely forget the values of my readers by using language they will not understand or will find offensive or alienating in some way.
- C My tone is basically well suited to my audience, but there may be moment when I am inconsistent in my use of appropriate language, vocabulary, and figures of speech. I sometimes forget my audience values.
- D My tone is often inappropriate for my intended audience. It shows little understanding or regard for the values of my readers.
- F My tone is totally inappropriate if not downright offensive to my intended audience.

**Sentence Syntax, Transitions, and Word Choice.**

- A My prose is clear, apt, and occasionally memorable. I establish the relationship between my sentences and between paragraphs such that transitions are clearly signaled through appropriate logical relations and transitional phrases. The words I have chosen—that is diction level and vocabulary—are appropriate for my intended audience and demonstrate a sophisticated use of language and expression.
- B My expression is more than competent. Not only is my sentence structure correct, but I show an awareness of and ability to use subordination, emphasis, sentence length and variety effectively. Almost all of my transitions between both sentences and paragraphs are clear and sophisticated. My diction level and word choice are almost always right on the money, though occasionally I am “off” either because I have not used a word correctly or I have not used the sorts of words that are appropriate (or appeal to) my intended audience.

- C My sentence structure is generally correct, although I sometimes show limited competence with sentence effectiveness, failing to use such elements as subordination, sentence variety, and modifiers to achieve “positions of emphasis.” My paper may be characterized by a “wooden” style—most of my sentences use the same sort of language and the same sentence structure over and over and over. The antidote to such a wooden style is careful revision.
- D My paper does not “flow.” It does not have well-developed paragraphs, paragraphs are not arranged in an order that makes sense, and transitions do not make sense or are missing. Some of my sentences, sorry to say, don’t make sense even to me. Or I forgot to proofread—if I had *only* proofread I might have caught some of these wacky sentences, realized I was using the wrong word on way too many occasions, was using words that don’t appeal to my audience, and I would have noticed, too, transitions that really don’t establish the relationship between my ideas and, thus, my paragraphs.
- F A good number of my sentences don’t make sense, or they are too riddled with errors to be readable.

### **Grammar and Punctuation**

- A My paper contains few if any errors of grammar, or mechanics, none of which undermines the overall effectiveness of the paper on the sentence, paragraph, or any other level.
- B My punctuation, grammar, and spelling reveal proficient use of edited American English. In my paper, there are (at most) only infrequent and minor errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling—the sort that might only have been “missed” when proofreading.
- C I have the sorts of errors in mechanics, grammar, and spelling that undermine my ethos and, thus, my credibility. I may even alienate my intended readers.
- D I have a lot of mistakes in my paper: I have grammar mistakes that seriously detract from my ethos. I don’t use commas correctly, or semi colons, or other punctuation marks. Here, too, my lack of proofreading means that an otherwise “adequate” paper is now a D paper.
- F I have lots of comma splices, or commas I don’t need. My subjects and verbs don’t agree with one another, or my verb tenses are wrong or wildly inconsistent. I have other problems with punctuation and basic grammar that make it almost impossible for my reader to understand my argument or not be so distracted with sentence level errors that my argument is in no way persuasive.

### **Responsible handling and integration of source material**

- A I choose reputable sources to support my argument and then pick the most appropriate sources to cite. I have a clear and sophisticated understanding of when to quote, paraphrase, and/or summarize. I correctly introduce each paraphrase, summary and quote in the sentence, and then follow such citations with correct (MLA Style) parenthetical citation. I demonstrate a sophisticated understanding both of the source material and its relationship to my argument.
- B In almost every case, I choose reputable sources to support my argument and then pick the most appropriate sources to cite. I have a better than average understanding of when to quote, paraphrase, and/or summarize. I correctly introduce each paraphrase, summary and quote in the sentence, and then follow such citations with correct (MLA Style) parenthetical citation. I demonstrate understanding both of the source material and its relationship to my argument.

- C I have a good sense of why a source is credible and most of the time I pick sources that support my topic concerns. However, I do not always pick the best representative source to support my particular claims. Moreover, I do not always correctly cite my sources—there may even be instances in which I do not introduce the source I am paraphrasing and summarizing. Fortunately, I only do this maybe twice in the WHOLE paper. I’ve learned my lesson . . . when I fail to introduce them, or I don’t cite them correctly, it looks like I’m trying to get away with something.—*This*—is not persuasive for readers who want to trust me and know that I know what I’m talking about.
- D I do not always pick the best source. And I often do not introduce a paraphrase or summary. This means that that my reader often cannot tell when I began to cite a source—it is only evident when I have stopped because I have a parenthetical citation. There are errors in my citation style in the parenthetical citation and in my works cited and bibliography pages. I do not always use sources correctly, either.
- F I do not have evidence for many of my claims. I do not have the correct number of sources on my works consulted list and I cite almost no sources in support of my argument. Or the sources I do cite are not reputable or correctly cited. There are times when I simply do not cite my sources. There may be times when I “borrow” portions of sentences or paragraphs, or an essay but do not cite it correctly. I plagiarized some of this paper.
- 0 I plagiarized my paper—I bought it, borrowed it, took it off the Internet.

### **Audience Analysis**

- A I have completed a thorough analysis of my intended audience (before I wrote my paper!), who they are, what they value, what they want, and what they fear. I have considered the publications my audience is likely to read as well as the publications in which an argument such as mine would appear; I have carefully identified an appropriate venue. I have used this analysis to carefully craft my thesis, identify claims, and make appeals that will be persuasive to my readers.
- B I have completed a good analysis of my intended audience (before I wrote my paper!), which considers the following: who they are, what they value, what they want, and what they fear. I show that I have thought about the publications my audience is likely to read as well as the publications in which an argument such as mine would appear, but I do not always demonstrate the detail of analysis that I could have. I have identified a venue for my argument; though in some cases it may not be the best one, it is still appropriate. I have used this analysis to craft my thesis, identify claims, and make appeals that will be persuasive to my readers.
- C My audience analysis really doesn’t jive all that well with the people I *really* wrote to. So, the bottom line is this: I really hadn’t thought through who I was writing to, or why and it shows in the argument. When I think through whom I am writing to, I really can come up with better arguments that are more persuasive and detailed. I know how to construct my own ethos, know what appeals to make, whether to really pull out the stops on pathos, or whether to collect lots of statistics for the brainiacs I’ve identified as interested in my argument.
- D I do not talk to or appeal to my intended audience in a way that is persuasive to them, because I have not thought through very well who they are. As a result, my characterization of them may be too broad or general. I do not give evidence for my claims about who they are, what they value, fear, want, and

what sorts of publications they read. I might be inclined to think that my audience is “everyone” or “anyone” or “all men from the ages 30 to 90,” etc.

- F I did not write an audience analysis. Or it only consists of very broad and vague references, such as “My audience is young people.” I do not demonstrate that I have thought about who my audience is, what they value, want, and fear. Therefore, there is a decided schism between who I say my audience is and whom I actually write to.

