

OFFICIAL WRITING SCORING GUIDE

INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

Ideas and Content

6

The writing is exceptionally clear, focused, and interesting. Main ideas stand out and are developed by strong support and rich details suitable to audience and purpose.

- Main idea(s) and claims are particularly clear, focused, and controlled.
- Details are significant, relevant, and carefully selected to accurately convey complex ideas, concepts, information, supporting claims, main ideas, and/or purpose.
- When appropriate, resources provide strong, accurate, credible support.
- A thorough, balanced, in-depth explanation /exploration of the topic is provided; the writing makes connections and shares insights.
- Claims and counterclaims are thoroughly developed, pointing out strengths and limitations of both and anticipating audiences' knowledge, concerns, values and possible biases.
- Details are relevant and establish the substantive main idea(s) or claim(s) by using significant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations or other information/evidence appropriate to audience and purpose.

5

The writing is clear, focused and interesting. Main ideas stand out and are developed by supporting details suitable to audience and purpose.

- Main idea(s) and claims are clear, focused and controlled.
- Supporting details are relevant and carefully selected to accurately convey complex ideas, concepts, information, supporting claims, main ideas, and/or purpose.
- When appropriate, use of resources provides strong, accurate, credible support.
- A complete, balanced explanation/exploration of the topic is provided; the writing makes connections and shares insights.
- Claims and counterclaims are well developed, pointing out strengths and limitations of both and anticipating audiences' knowledge, concerns, values and possible biases.
- Details are relevant and establish the importance of the main idea(s) or claim(s) by using significant facts, concrete details, quotations or other information/evidence appropriate to audience and purpose.

4

The writing purpose is clear and ideas are focused. The reader can easily understand the main ideas and reasoning. Support is present, generally significant, and relevant.

- There is an easily identifiable purpose; main idea(s) /claims are clear; counterclaims are acknowledged and addressed.
- Supporting details are typically relevant and anticipate major knowledge, concerns, values and possible biases of intended audience.
- When appropriate, resources are used to provide accurate support for claims, main ideas, and/or purpose.
- The claim or topic is explored /explained, with developmental details in balance with the main idea(s); some connections and insights may be present.
- Details are generally relevant and specific, using facts, quotations or other information/evidence appropriate to audience and purpose.

3

The reader can infer the main idea(s), although purpose and intended audience may be more difficult to discern. Details are present but non-specific, insubstantial, overly general, or occasionally slightly off-topic.

- Purpose and main idea(s) are ambiguous, predictable or overly obvious.
- Support is offered, but developmental details are often limited, uneven, somewhat off-topic, predictable, or too general (e.g., a list of underdeveloped points).
- Details may not reflect well-grounded, credible resources; they may be based on clichés, stereotypes or questionable sources of information.
- In argumentative writing, counterclaims are ignored, ineffectively addressed, or misinterpreted.
- The paper may rely on general observations rather than specifics.

2

Main ideas and purpose are somewhat unclear or development is vague.

- The purpose and main idea(s) may require extensive inferences by the reader.
- Development is indistinct and details are insufficient.
- Irrelevant details may clutter the text.
- Details may be repeated extensively.

1

The writing lacks a central idea or purpose.

- Ideas are extremely limited or simply unclear.
- Development is missing or the paper is too short to demonstrate the development of an idea.

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Organization	
<p>6 The organization enhances the central idea(s) and its development. The order and structure are compelling and move the reader through the text easily.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequencing and paragraph breaks are effective, perhaps creative; the organizational structure fits the topic, and the writing is easy to follow. The beginning is strong, inviting and draws the reader in ; the conclusion provides a solid , satisfying sense of resolution or closure which clearly supports the claims, arguments, information or explanations presented. Transitions are smooth, effective and varied among all elements (sentences, paragraphs, ideas). Details help to clarify the relationships between and among claims, counterclaims, information and explanations and fit where placed to illuminate or amplify assertions presented. Connections to source materials, where used, flow naturally and create a sense of continuity within the piece. 	<p>5 The organization enhances the central idea(s) and its development. The order and structure are strong and move the reader through the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequencing and paragraph breaks are effective; the organizational structure fits the topic, and the writing is easy to follow. The beginning is inviting and draws the reader in; the conclusion provides a satisfying sense of resolution or closure which supports the claims, arguments, information or explanations presented. Transitions are smooth and effective with some variety among sentences, paragraphs, and ideas. Details help to clarify the relationships between and among claims, counterclaims, information and explanations and fit where placed. Connections to source materials, where used, flow naturally and create a sense of continuity within the piece.
<p>4 Organization is clear and coherent. Order and structure are present, but may seem formulaic or somewhat predictable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequencing and paragraph breaks are clear and contribute to the logic and sense of the piece. The beginning is recognizable, developed and introduces the main ideas, claims or arguments, but may be perfunctory. The conclusion supports the argument, claims, information or explanation presented, and follows a logical progression in wrapping up the topic. The body is easy to follow with details that fit where placed to support the arguments, information or explanations used. Connections to source materials, where used, are integrated into the writing. Transitional strategies are used adequately, with some variety, to clarify the relationships between and among ideas. 	<p>3 An attempt has been made to organize the writing; however, the overall structure is inconsistent, skeletal, or too rigid.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some sequencing and paragraph breaks are used, but the order or the relationship among ideas may be unclear. The beginning may be either undeveloped or too obvious (e.g., “My topic is...”). The conclusion may be a summary or repetition of details presented (e.g. “These are all the reasons that...”) The body provides supporting details, but their placement may not directly support the arguments, information or explanations used. The organization may lapse in some places, while being clear in others. Some transitions work, but the same few transitional devices (e.g., coordinating conjunctions, numbering, etc.) may be overused; transitions may at times be missing.
<p>2 The writing lacks a clear organizational structure. An occasional organizational device is discernible; however, the writing is either difficult to follow and the reader has to reread substantial portions, or the piece is simply too short to demonstrate organizational skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some attempts are made at sequencing, but the order or the relationship among ideas, claims, information and arguments is frequently unclear The beginning, body, and/or conclusion may be missing or extremely undeveloped. In general, transitions are absent, ineffective or overused so that ideas, claims, information or arguments appear as lists or seem to be unrelated to each other. When supporting details are used, they seem to be out of order or misplaced within the piece, leaving the reader frequently confused. 	<p>1 The writing lacks coherence; organization seems haphazard and disjointed. Even after rereading, the reader remains confused.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paragraph breaks, if used, are arbitrary and sequencing is unclear. There may be no identifiable beginning, body and/or ending. Transitions tend to be absent or ineffective. The overall pacing of the piece is consistently awkward; the reader feels either mired down in trivia or rushed along too rapidly. The lack of organization ultimately obscures or distorts the main idea(s), claims, information or arguments.

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Voice	
<p>6</p> <p>The writer has chosen a voice appropriate for the topic, purpose, and audience, establishing and maintaining an objective tone and level of formality consistent with norms in the discipline. The writer demonstrates deep commitment to the topic, and there is an exceptional sense of “writing to be read.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate level of formality is employed based on topic and purpose consistent with norms of the discipline. • Drawing on an exceptionally strong sense of audience, the writer focuses on communicating the message most effectively. The reader may discern the writer behind the words and feel a sense of interaction. • When appropriate, the topic comes to life with originality, liveliness, honesty, conviction or excitement. In pieces that require a higher degree of formality, conviction and focus show the desire to communicate clearly and directly with the chosen audience. 	<p>5</p> <p>The writer has chosen a voice appropriate for the topic, purpose, and audience, establishing and maintaining an objective tone and level of formality consistent with norms in the discipline. The writer demonstrates commitment to the topic, and there is a sense of “writing to be read.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate level of formality is employed based on topic and purpose consistent with norms of the discipline. • The writing shows a strong sense of audience and a desire to communicate the message effectively. The reader may discern the writer behind the words and feel a sense of interaction. • The writing may show originality, liveliness, honesty, or conviction, appropriate to the topic and purpose. • In pieces that require a higher degree of formality, the writer’s conviction and focus are communicated clearly and directly through style and tone.
<p>4</p> <p>The writer seems committed to the topic, and there may be a sense of “writing to be read.” In places, the writing is expressive, engaging, or sincere and establishes a formal style and objective tone appropriate to the audience, purpose and topic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate level of style and tone is generally consistent with topic and purpose. • The writer seems to be aware of audience but may not consistently employ and maintain an appropriate level of closeness to or distance from the audience. • The writing may show liveliness, sincerity, or conviction but may be either inappropriately casual or personal, or inappropriately formal and stiff at times. 	<p>3</p> <p>The writer’s commitment to the topic seems inconsistent. A sense of the writer may emerge at times; however, the voice is either inappropriately personal or inappropriately impersonal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a limited sense of audience; the writer’s awareness of the reader is unclear. • An occasional sense of the writer appears behind the words; however, the voice may shift or disappear a line or two later and the writing become somewhat mechanical. • The ability to shift to a more objective voice when necessary seems limited. • The voice, style, and tone may vary within the piece as understanding of audience and purpose shifts.
<p>2</p> <p>The writing provides little sense of involvement or commitment. There is no evidence that the writer has considered audience, topic and/or purpose in selecting style and tone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writer seems to be minimally engaged with a largely flat, lifeless, stiff, or mechanical voice. • The style and tone may be overly informal and personal for the topic and purpose. • Audience awareness is lacking with little sense of “writing to be read.” • The writing does not adhere to norms in the discipline for style and tone. 	<p>1</p> <p>The writing seems to lack a sense of involvement or commitment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing is flat and lifeless. • Audience awareness is lacking with no sense of “writing to be read.” • There is no sense of interaction between writer and reader; the writing does not involve or engage the reader. • The writing does not adhere to norms in the discipline for style and tone.

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Word Choice

6

Words convey the intended message in an exceptionally interesting, precise, and natural way appropriate to audience and purpose. The writer employs a rich, broad range of words which have been carefully chosen and thoughtfully placed for impact.

- Accurate, strong, specific, powerful words energize the writing.
- Vocabulary is striking and varied, using domain specific words, phrases, and jargon that enhance the overall message.
- Carefully selected words, phrases and academic language create cohesion and clarify relationships among information, claims/counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- Words evoke strong images and thoughtfully constructed figurative language conveys significant details.

5

Words convey the intended message in an interesting, precise, and natural way appropriate to audience and purpose. The writer employs a broad range of words which have been carefully chosen and thoughtfully placed for impact.

- Accurate, specific word choices energize the writing.
- Vocabulary is varied, using domain specific words, phrases, and jargon that enhance the overall message.
- Carefully selected words, phrases and academic language create cohesion and clarify relationships among information, claims/counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- Words evoke clear images and figurative language, when used, is carefully crafted to enhance understanding.

4

Words effectively convey the intended message. The writer employs a variety of words that are functional and appropriate to audience and purpose.

- Domain-specific vocabulary is used with words that are functional and precise.
- Academic language is used accurately to convey information or make claims/counterclaims, arguments or explanations.
- Technical language or jargon, when used, does not overwhelm the message or confuse the reader.
- Clichés are generally avoided and some carefully selected metaphors, similes, and analogies may be used.

3

Language lacks precision and variety, or may be inappropriate to audience and purpose in places. The writer does not employ a variety of words, producing a sort of “generic” paper filled with familiar words and phrases.

- Selected words work, but rarely capture the reader’s interest.
- Expression seems mundane and general or attempts at colorful language seem overdone or forced.
- Words are accurate for the most part, although misused words may occasionally appear, and technical language or jargon may be overused or inappropriately used.
- Clichés and overused expressions appear frequently.
- The text may be too short to demonstrate variety in word selection.

2

Language is monotonous and/or misused, detracting from the meaning and impact.

- Words are colorless, flat or imprecise and domain-specific vocabulary is missing or misused.
- Worn expressions and clichés detract from the message.
- Non-specific, general words are used where technical language would help convey the meaning more precisely.

1

The writing shows an extremely limited vocabulary or is so filled with misuses of words that the meaning is obscured. Only the most general kind of message is communicated because of vague or imprecise language.

- General, vague words fail to communicate.
- The range of words used is extremely limited.
- Some words simply do not fit the text; they seem imprecise, inadequate, or just plain wrong.

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Sentence Fluency

6

The writing has an effective flow and rhythm. Sentences show a high degree of craftsmanship, with consistently strong and varied syntax that makes expressive oral reading easy and enjoyable.

- There is a natural, fluent cadence and sound that glides easily along from one sentence to the next.
- Syntactic variety is strong with sentence structure, length, and beginnings that add interest to the text.
- Sentence structure enhances meaning by drawing attention to key ideas or reinforcing relationships among ideas.
- Varied sentence patterns create an effective combination of power and grace.
- Syntactic control is strong; if used, fragments work well and dialogue sounds natural.

5

The writing has an easy flow and rhythm. Sentences are carefully crafted, with strong and varied syntax that makes expressive oral reading easy and enjoyable.

- There is a natural, fluent sound that glides along with one sentence flowing into the next.
- Variation in sentence structure, length, and beginnings adds interest to the text.
- Sentence structure enhances meaning and is well-controlled.
- If used, fragments and dialogue work well.

4

The writing flows with mostly fluid connections between phrases or sentences. Sentence patterns are somewhat varied, contributing to ease in oral reading.

- The writing has a natural sound and the reader can move easily through the piece.
- There is some syntactic variety with adequate variation in sentence length beginnings, connectives and rhythm.
- Control of simple sentence structures is strong, but control over more complex sentences varies; fragments, if present, are usually effective.
- Some lapses in stylistic control may occur; dialogue, if used, sounds natural for the most part.

3

The writing tends to be mechanical rather than fluid. Occasional awkward constructions may force the reader to slow down or reread.

- Some passages invite fluid oral reading but others do not.
- Sentence structure, length, and beginnings show some variety, although they may become repetitive.
- Simple sentence structures work well, but there is little control over more complex sentences.
- Sentences are functional but may lack energy.
- Recurrent lapses in stylistic control occur; fragments and dialogue, when used, may be ineffective.

2

The writing tends to be either choppy or rambling. Awkward constructions often force the reader to slow down or reread.

- Significant portions of the text are difficult to follow or read aloud.
- Sentence patterns lack variety (e.g., subject-verb or subject-verb-object).
- There are significant numbers of awkward, choppy, rambling, or incorrect sentence constructions.
- Text may be too short to demonstrate variety and control.

1

The writing is difficult to follow or to read aloud. Sentences tend to be incomplete, rambling, or very awkward.

- The text does not invite—and may not even permit—smooth oral reading.
- Confusing word order and syntax is often jarring and irregular.
- Sentence structure frequently obscures meaning.
- Sentences are disjointed, confusing, or rambling.

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Conventions	
<p>6</p> <p>The writing demonstrates exceptionally strong command of standard writing conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage) and uses them effectively to enhance communication. Errors are so few and so minor that the reader can easily skim right over them unless specifically searching for them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a strong command of conventions; manipulation of conventions may occur for stylistic effect. • Punctuation is strong, effective and guides the reader through the text. • Spelling is consistently correct, even for more difficult words. • Grammar and usage are correct and contribute to clarity and style. • A wide range of conventions is used in a sufficiently long and complex piece to demonstrate skill. • There is little or no need for editing. 	<p>5</p> <p>The writing demonstrates strong control of standard writing conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage) and uses them effectively to enhance communication. Errors are few and minor. Conventions support readability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong control of conventions is evident. • Effective use of punctuation guides the reader through the text. • Spelling is correct, even for most difficult words. • Capitalization errors, if any, are minor. • Correct grammar and usage contribute to clarity and style. • The text is sufficiently long and complex to demonstrate skill in using a wide range of conventions. • There is little need for editing, and needed edits are minor.
<p>4</p> <p>The writing demonstrates control of standard writing conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage). Errors are infrequent and minor; errors do not impede readability and meaning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conventions used are generally correct, demonstrating control, although a limited range may be employed. • End-of-sentence punctuation and internal punctuation is generally correct. • Spelling of common words is generally correct. • Capitalization is generally correct. • Occasional lapses in correct grammar and usage do not distort meaning or confuse the reader. • The need for further editing is moderate and meaning is clear. 	<p>3</p> <p>The writing demonstrates limited control of standard writing conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage). Errors begin to impede readability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic conventions are used with some control; however, the text may be too simple or too short to determine mastery. • End-of-sentence punctuation is usually correct while, internal punctuation may contain frequent errors. • Spelling errors, including misspelling of some common words, distract the reader. • Some capitalization errors may occur. • Errors in grammar and usage do not completely block meaning but do distract the reader. • Significant editing is needed.
<p>2</p> <p>The writing demonstrates little control of standard writing conventions. Frequent, significant errors impede readability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Errors occur in basic conventions. • Many end-of-sentence and internal punctuation errors appear. • Spelling errors, including misspelling of common words, occur frequently, distracting the reader. • Capitalization is inconsistent or is often incorrect. • Errors in grammar and usage interfere with readability and meaning. • The paper would require substantial editing before completion. 	<p>1</p> <p>Numerous errors in usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation repeatedly distract the reader and make the text difficult to read. In fact, the severity and frequency of errors are so overwhelming that the reader finds it difficult to focus on the message and must reread for meaning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conventions used are very limited and include frequent errors. • Basic punctuation (including end-of-sentence punctuation) tends to be omitted, haphazard, or incorrect. • Spelling errors, including frequent errors in spelling common words, significantly impair readability. • Capitalization appears to be random. • The paper would require extensive editing.

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Use of Sources

6

The writing demonstrates exceptionally strong commitment to the quality, accuracy, and significance of the research presented. Documentation is used to avoid plagiarism and to enable the reader to judge the reliability and importance of a particular source.

- Multiple authoritative sources are used; the writing effectively synthesizes and analyzes source materials to investigate an issue, answer a question, or solve a problem.
- Borrowed material is introduced by transitioning to the quotation or paraphrase in a variety of ways that acknowledge the authority or source; paraphrased material is smoothly interwoven in the text using the writer’s style and language.
- All quoted materials are punctuated correctly.
- All sources are clearly identified through in-text documentation
- A bibliography page lists every source cited in the paper, omitting insignificant sources that were consulted but not used.

5

The writing demonstrates strong commitment to the quality, accuracy, and significance of the research presented. Documentation is used to avoid plagiarism and to enable the reader to judge the reliability and importance of a particular source.

- Multiple authoritative sources are used to investigate an issue, answer a question, or solve a problem.
- Borrowed material is acknowledged by introducing the quotation or paraphrase with the name of the authority and key phrases are directly quoted; paraphrased material is interwoven in the text with little transitional distraction.
- Quoted materials are generally punctuated correctly with only minor errors.
- All sources are clearly identified through in-text documentation.
- A bibliography page lists all major sources cited in the paper, omitting insignificant sources that were consulted but not used.

4

The writing demonstrates a commitment to the quality and significance of research and its accurate use in writing. Documentation is used to avoid plagiarism and to enable the reader to judge the reliability and importance of a particular source. In general, sources, both print and digital, are documented correctly.

- Several authoritative sources are used to investigate an issue, answer a question, or solve a problem; the strengths and limitations of the sources used are acknowledged.
- Borrowed material is acknowledged by introducing the quotation or paraphrase with the name of the authority/source; paraphrased material is rewritten using the writer’s style and language.
- Quoted materials are generally punctuated correctly so that errors do not impede understanding.
- Sources are identified with in-text documentation.
- A bibliography page is included listing all cited sources

3

The writing demonstrates a limited commitment to the quality and significance of research and the accuracy of the written document. Documentation is used but may be ineffectively incorporated, inaccurate, or missing in some instances. Errors begin to violate the rules of documentation.

- There is a limited use of source material; the writing shows an overreliance on a single source or on unreliable sources.
- Paraphrased material may not be documented accurately or at all and may be simply a rearrangement of the original sentence pattern.
- Quoted materials are usually set off with quotation marks or in block style, but punctuation within the quoted material contains errors.
- Sources are inconsistently identified with in-text documentation.
- A bibliography page is included but may be incorrectly formatted, is missing some sources cited, or cites minor sources consulted but not used.

2

The writing demonstrates little commitment to the quality of research and the accuracy of the final document. Frequent errors in documentation result in instances of plagiarism and often raise questions of the reliability and truthfulness of the sources or final paper.

- Essential ideas taken from source(s) may be altered or misrepresented.
- Paraphrasing so closely follows the original source that it should be set off in quotation marks or significantly rephrased.
- Quoted materials may be set off with quotation marks, but other punctuation errors within the quotes frequently occur.
- Citations incorrectly identify sources or are omitted entirely.
- The bibliography page, if included, is incorrectly formatted or omits sources that were used.

1

The writing demonstrates disregard for the conventions of research writing. Lack of proper documentation results in plagiarism and raises questions about the overall accuracy of the paper.

- There is little or no evidence of the use of outside resources.
- Source material, if used, has been lifted verbatim from the original, with little, if any, paraphrasing.
- Specific words or ideas from a source may be included without setting them off with quotation marks.
- Citations for source material are missing.
- No bibliography page is provided.