



The Scoop on Writing Assessment



The Scoop

 On the Writing Assessment Test moving a 4 paper to a 5 or 6 is easier than you think!

1. Train students to restate the given prompt into a question to create a hook. For example: *Many school systems have adopted a policy that bans cell phones and pagers on school grounds.*
Try: How would you feel if you were faced with an emergency and were not allowed to have a cell phone at school?
2. Encourage new ELL students or special education students who must take the test but cannot write a sentence, to copy words in the prompt. For the prompt above, simply writing the words: *School system policy. No cell phones,* would give the student at least a 1. Copying key words from the prompt and then writing any words known or found around the room, can yield a 1.
3. A 5 or 6 paper is rarely less than 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pages. Usually, the paper is about 150 words. Papers less than that usually are not fully developed. Writing more will give you a better chance of getting a higher score. Practicing on the same type of lined paper, including the same spacing and number of lines, will give you an advantage.

Going From Score 4 to Score 5 or 6

- **Vocabulary! Vocabulary! Vocabulary!** Encourage vivid words and give students alternatives to overused words. Work with listing synonyms and post lists throughout the year. What other words could be used for *large*? What about *hefty, humungous, colossal, or gigantic*. *More credit is given for a misspelled word that is more sophisticated, than a safe word that is spelled correctly.*
- **Adjectives.** Most 5 or 6 papers use two adjectives before nouns. (I.e. *the disastrous, tragic emergency*) Students should practice using two adjectives in front of nouns to provide details. Simply putting adjectives before nouns can move a 4 paper to a 5.
- **Adverbs.** Most 5 or 6 papers use some adverbs. Instead of saying, "*I felt the need to use my cell phone,*" encourage the student to develop the story by writing, "*I felt the urge to cautiously use my cell phone in order to alert the authorities about the suspicious leering stranger moving silently through the school.*" You now have moved a basic 4 paper to a 5 or 6!
- Simple **well constructed sentences** will result in a 4. (Subject, verb, Object)
- A 4, 5 or 6 paper uses **transition words** such as: nevertheless, eventually, although, currently, or meanwhile.

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- Simple well constructed sentences with **adjectives, adverbs, or prepositional phrases** will raise the score to a 5 or 6.
- **Compound sentences** using a conjunction such as *and, but, for, either, or, neither, nor* will generally increase the score from a 4 to a 5.
- **Complex sentences** will usually be rewarded with a 6. (Even if there are errors in punctuation or spelling)
- **Sentence variety** is another flagged area which will move a paper from a 4 to a 5 or 6. Include questions and exclamations. Practice beginning sentences with clauses and phrases. This will push a paper to a 6.
- A **simile or metaphor** will push a 4 paper to a 5 or 6. Scorers do not deduct if the simile is cliché or even if it is nonsensical. It just needs to be evident. So don't discourage such clichés as *happy as a lark, fast as a cheetah, in the blink of an eye, or dark as a shadow*.

Students are rewarded for what they can do or what they attempt.

So what is *not as* important?

- ✓ **Spelling** (a 5 or 6 paper can have some spelling errors)
- ✓ **Punctuation** (Except run-ons without punctuation)
- ✓ **Handwriting**

You would not be embarrassed if a 4, 5, or 6 paper appeared in the newspaper.

No paper should ever get a 0. A zero is given for blank paper, refusal, illegible, off-topic, or in another language. A 1 is usually given if the student simply recopies the prompt or uses the key word in the prompt. (i.e. cell phone).

Allow students to use the state rubric to score each other's papers (without names) using post-its. *(You can't hit the target if you don't know where the goal is set.)*

Writing in the content areas is strongly suggested.

~Connie Campbell, Director of Testing and Assessment and Jeannette Mulholland, Reading Specialist, Jefferson County Schools