



PROFESORES ASOCIADOS EGRESADOS DEL INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DEL PROFESORADO EN LENGUAS VIVAS "Juan Ramón Fernández"

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WRITING AT INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED LEVELS

What do we look for when we ask a student to write a composition? In general, we expect them to:

- ◆ Provide a clear account of experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined;
- ◆ Order and present facts, ideas and opinions;
- ◆ Understand and use a range of appropriate vocabulary;
- ◆ Use language and style appropriate to audience and context;
- ◆ Make accurate and effective use of paragraphs, grammatical structures, sentences, punctuation and spelling;
- ◆ Present the text in such a way that the reader can understand and connect with the message.

In order to achieve these objectives, the students need to respond satisfactorily to the following criteria:

1. **Ideas and content:** writing that makes sense through insight, knowledge and depth of thought.
2. **Organisation:** writing that is easy to follow from section to section;
 - i) Effective beginnings, transitions and endings;
 - ii) Logical progression of ideas and responding to the needs of the audience;
 - iii) Organizational structure based on the required text-type.
3. **Word choice:** using language that is appropriate to content, purpose, audience and form;
 - i) Strong verbs;
 - ii) Specific and precise adjectives and adverbs;
 - iii) Differences between formal and informal writing;
 - iv) Appropriate grammar.
4. **Sentence fluency:** sentences that can be clearly understood;
 - i) Variety in sentence beginnings;
 - ii) Variety in sentence length.
5. **Conventions:** adherence to conventions and patterns of:
 - i) Grammar and spelling;
 - ii) Style = layout and format;
 - iii) Punctuation;
 - iv) Capitalization;
 - v) Paragraphing.
6. **Presentation:**
 - i) Legible writing;
 - ii) Readability and visual appeal.



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The criteria are graded in the following way:

IDEAS AND CONTENT	
5	<p><i>The composition is clear and focused. It holds the reader's attention. Relevant details enrich the central theme.</i></p> <p>A. The topic is narrow and manageable.</p> <p>B. Relevant, telling, quality details give the reader important information that goes beyond the obvious or predictable.</p> <p>C. Reasonably accurate details are present to support the main ideas.</p> <p>D. The writer seems to be writing from knowledge or experience; the ideas are fresh and original.</p> <p>E. The reader's questions are anticipated and answered.</p> <p>F. Insight—an understanding of life and a knack for picking out what is significant—is an indicator of high level performance, though not required.</p>
3	<p><i>The writer is beginning to define the topic, even though development is still basic or general.</i></p> <p>A. The topic is fairly broad; however, you can see where the writer is headed.</p> <p>B. Support is attempted, but doesn't go far enough yet in fleshing out the key issues or story line.</p> <p>C. Ideas are reasonably clear, though they may not be detailed, personalized, accurate, or expanded enough to show indepth understanding or a strong sense of purpose.</p> <p>D. The writer seems to be drawing on knowledge or experience, but has difficulty going from general observations to specifics.</p> <p>E. The reader is left with questions. More information is needed to "fill in the blanks."</p> <p>F. The writer generally stays on the topic but does not develop a clear theme. The writer has not yet focused the topic past the obvious.</p>
1	<p><i>As yet, the composition has no clear sense of purpose or central theme. To extract meaning from the text, the reader must make inferences based on sketchy or missing details. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:</i></p> <p>A. The writer is still in search of a topic, brainstorming, or has not yet decided what the main idea of the piece will be.</p> <p>B. Information is limited or unclear or the length is not adequate for development.</p> <p>C. The idea is a simple restatement of the topic or an answer to the question with little or no attention to detail.</p> <p>D. The writer has not begun to define the topic in a meaningful, personal way.</p> <p>E. Everything seems as important as everything else; the reader has a hard time sifting out what is important.</p> <p>F. The text may be repetitious, or may read like a collection of disconnected, random thoughts with no discernable point.</p>

ORGANISATION	
5	<p><i>The organization enhances the central idea or theme. The order, structure, or presentation of information is compelling and moves the reader through the text.</i></p> <p>A. An inviting introduction draws the reader in; a satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of closure and resolution.</p> <p>B. Thoughtful transitions clearly show how ideas connect.</p> <p>C. Details seem to fit where they're placed; sequencing is logical and effective.</p> <p>D. Pacing is well controlled; the writer knows when to slow down and elaborate, and when to pick up the pace and move on.</p> <p>E. The central theme of the piece captures the idea of the title.</p> <p>F. Organization flows so smoothly the reader hardly thinks about it; the choice of structure matches the purpose and audience.</p>
3	<p><i>The organizational structure is strong enough to move the reader through the text without too much confusion.</i></p> <p>A. The paper has a recognizable introduction and conclusion. The introduction may not create a strong sense of anticipation; the conclusion may not tie-up all loose ends.</p> <p>B. Transitions often work well; at other times, connections between ideas are fuzzy.</p> <p>C. Sequencing shows some logic, but not under control enough that it consistently supports the ideas. In fact, sometimes it is so predictable and rehearsed that the structure takes attention away from the content.</p> <p>D. Pacing is fairly well controlled, though the writer sometimes lunges ahead too quickly or spends too much time on details that do not matter.</p> <p>E. Content is somehow contrived to fit the title.</p> <p>F. The organization sometimes supports the main point or storyline; at other times, the reader feels an urge to slip in a transition or move things around.</p>
1	<p><i>The writing lacks a clear sense of direction. Ideas, details, or events seem strung together in a loose or random fashion; there is no identifiable internal structure. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:</i></p> <p>A. There is no real lead to set-up what follows, no real conclusion to wrap things up.</p> <p>B. Connections between ideas are confusing or not even present.</p> <p>C. Sequencing needs lots and lots of work.</p> <p>D. Pacing feels awkward; the writer slows to a crawl when the reader wants to get on with it, and vice versa.</p> <p>E. Content does not match well with the title.</p> <p>F. Problems with organization make it hard for the reader to get a grip on the main point or story line.</p>



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WORD CHOICE

5	<p>Words convey the intended message in a precise, interesting, and natural way. The words are powerful and engaging.</p> <p>A. Words are specific and accurate. It is easy to understand just what the writer means. B. Striking words and phrases often catch the reader's eye and linger in the reader's mind. C. Language and phrasing is natural, effective, and appropriate for the audience. D. Lively verbs add energy while specific nouns and modifiers add depth. E. Choices in language enhance the meaning and clarify understanding. F. Precision is obvious. The writer has taken care to put the right word or phrase in the right spot.</p>
3	<p>The language is functional, even if it lacks much energy. It is easy to figure out the writer's meaning on a general level.</p> <p>A. Words are adequate and correct in a general sense. B. Familiar words and phrases communicate but rarely capture the reader's imagination. C. Attempts at colorful language show a willingness to stretch and grow but sometimes reach beyond the audience. D. Despite a few successes, the writing is marked by passive verbs, everyday nouns, and mundane modifiers. E. The words and phrases are functional with only one or two fine moments. F. The words may be refined in a couple of places, but the language looks like the first thing that popped into the writer's mind.</p>
1	<p>The writer demonstrates a limited vocabulary or has not searched for words to convey specific meaning.</p> <p>A. Words are so nonspecific and distracting that only a very limited meaning comes through. B. Problems with language leave the reader wondering. Many of the words just don't work in this piece. C. Audience has not been considered. Language is used incorrectly. D. Limited vocabulary and/or misused parts of speech seriously impair understanding. E. Words and phrases are so unimaginative and lifeless that they detract from the meaning. F. Jargon or clichés distract or mislead. Redundancy may distract the reader.</p>

SENTENCE FLUENCY

5	<p>The writing has an easy flow. Sentences are well built, with strong and varied structure.</p> <p>A. Sentences are constructed in a way that underscores and enhances the meaning. B. Sentences vary in length as well as structure. C. Purposeful and varied sentence beginnings add variety and energy. D. The use of creative and appropriate connectives between sentences and thoughts shows how each relates to, and builds upon, the one before it.</p>
3	<p>The text tends to be pleasant or businesslike, more mechanical than fluid.</p> <p>A. Sentences get the job done in a routine fashion. B. Sentences are usually constructed correctly; they hang together; they are sound. C. Sentence beginnings are not ALL alike; some variety is attempted. D. The reader sometimes has to hunt for clues (e.g., connecting words and phrases like <i>however, therefore, naturally, after a while, on the other hand, to be specific, for example, next, first of all, later, but as it turned out, although</i>, etc.) that show how sentences interrelate.</p>
1	<p>The reader has to practice quite a bit in order to give this paper a fair interpretive reading. The writing reflects more than one of the following problems:</p> <p>A. Sentences are choppy, incomplete, rambling or awkward; they need work. Phrasing does not sound natural. B. There is little to no "sentence sense" present. Even if this piece was flawlessly edited, the sentences would not hang together. C. Many sentences begin the same way—and may follow the same patterns (e.g., <i>subject-verb-object</i>) in a monotonous pattern. D. Endless connectives (<i>and, and so, but then, because, and then</i>, etc.) or a complete lack of connectives create a massive jumble of language.</p>

CONVENTIONS

5	<p>The writer demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, paragraphing) and uses them effectively to enhance readability. Errors tend to be few.</p> <p>A. Spelling is generally correct, even on more difficult words. B. The punctuation is accurate and guides the reader through the text. C. A thorough understanding and consistent application of capitalization skills are present. D. Grammar and usage are correct and contribute to clarity and style. E. Paragraphing tends to be sound and reinforces the organizational structure.</p>
3	<p>The writer shows reasonable control over a limited range of standard writing conventions. Conventions are sometimes handled well and enhance readability; at other times, errors are distracting and impair readability.</p> <p>A. Spelling is usually correct.</p>



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	<p>B. End punctuation is usually correct; internal punctuation (<i>commas, apostrophes, semicolons, dashes, colons, parentheses</i>) is sometimes missing/wrong.</p> <p>C. Most words are capitalized correctly; control over more sophisticated capitalization skills may be spotty.</p> <p>D. Problems with grammar or usage are not serious enough to distort meaning but may not be correct or accurately applied all of the time.</p> <p>E. Paragraphing is attempted but may run together or begin in the wrong places.</p>
1	<p>Errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, usage, and grammar and/or paragraphing repeatedly distract the reader and make the text difficult to read. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:</p> <p>A. Spelling errors are frequent, even on common words.</p> <p>B. Punctuation is often missing or incorrect.</p> <p>C. Capitalization is random and only the easiest rules show awareness of correct use.</p> <p>D. Errors in grammar or usage are very noticeable, frequent, and affect meaning.</p> <p>E. Paragraphing is missing, irregular, or so frequent (every sentence) that it has no relationship to the organizational structure of the text.</p>

PRESENTATION

5	<p><i>The form and presentation of the text enhances the ability for the reader to understand and connect with the message. It is pleasing to the eye.</i></p>
3	<p><i>The writer's message is understandable in this format.</i></p>
1	<p><i>The reader receives a garbled message due to problems relating to the presentation of the text.</i></p>

Major problems we have encountered:

❖ In **narrative** compositions:

- Lack of cohesion because of poor use or misuse of connectives;
- Poor use of action verbs to show progress in the narrative ;
- Misuse of tenses;
- Lack of coherence and no real development of a storyline; inability to keep the focus of the story and too many diversions to reach the required length.

❖ In **descriptive** compositions:

- Poor use of adjectives and adverbs to add real interest to the description ;
- Lack of vocabulary or overuse of inappropriate vocabulary.

❖ In **argumentative** compositions:

- Lack of cohesion because of poor use or misuse of connectives;
- Lack of structuring into introduction, body and conclusion;
- Little response to the given title or an attempt to fit something that has been studied to the title given.

❖ **General** problems:

- No paragraphing;



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- Paraphrase words and expressions;
- Describe when they don't know the word for something so that they can make up for their lack.

- ❖ Teach the importance of good **beginnings** and good **endings**. Ensure students realize that:
 - Active beginnings will catch the reader's attention:
 - i) Put the main character in a setting doing something: *"Hi. My name is Kate. This is a story about a day I went to the zoo"*;
 - ii) Put yourself in the setting doing something: *"This is a story about the time I built a robot in my basement."*
 - Good endings should show how the main character has changed or grown as a result of his experience, for example through appeal to:
 - i) Memory: *"I'll never forget the time I ..."*
 - ii) Feeling: *"I can still feel the chill tingling down my spine when ..."*
 - iii) Hope or wish: *"I hope the next time I'm out exploring I don't find myself in the cave."*
 - iv) Decision: *"From that day on, I decided I would never ..."*

SOME USEFUL QUESTIONS BEFORE DRAWING A FINAL DRAFT

It is a good idea to get the students to ask themselves the following questions before they settle for a final draft:

- Is a certain word used too frequently?
- Does this word really express what I want to say?
- Can I replace it with a better one?
- Do nouns outnumber verbs?
- Does the order of sentences follow a logical sequence?
- Is the correct transition being used?
- Is there variety in the transitions?
- Need I vary the length of the sentences?
- Did I use too many simple sentences? Can I combine them into complex ones?