

**First Grade Writing Rubric/Narrative Writing  
(Appendix A, Scaffolding Young Writers)  
Scoring Guidelines and Commonly Asked Questions**

Dorn, L., & Soffos, C. (2003) *Scaffolding Young Writers: A Writers' Workshop Approach*. Writing Rubric A. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

**Procedures:**

- ❖ Every writing sample should be scored by at least two teachers. Generally, this takes place during literacy team meetings. The classroom teacher might or might not be one of the scorers, but the classroom teacher must complete the analysis and summary form with recommendations for writing instruction.
- ❖ A third scoring is needed when the two scores disagree or when the total score makes a difference between below, approaching, meeting, or exceeding levels.
- ❖ Items with a checkmark represent minimum requirements. The bulleted items represent behaviors that exceed the standard at that grade level. A student can earn points for the bulleted items without earning points for the checked items. The teacher should use total points for determining overall proficiency.
- ❖ Notice that a student can receive credit across the three standards, e.g., “voice” might be rated under Standard II (“Uses Individual Voice”) and also under Standard III (“Uses a variety of sentence structures and lengths”).
- ❖ When scoring each standard, keep in mind the purpose of the standard. The rubric’s validity will be improved if scorers understand the difference between process criteria (strategies for problem-solving) and product criteria (conventions and accuracy). The rubric’s reliability will be improved if all scores use the standard scoring procedures for all students. The goal is to provide teachers with a standard measure that will help us to assess the influence of writing instruction on writing achievement.
- ❖ When scoring, be sure you can document the score with an observable behavior. It might help if teachers develop a list of observable behaviors that indicate knowledge for each area under the standard.

**Standard I**

Remember this standard assesses the process NOT the final product. To assess process, the scorer looks for evidence of a writing behavior (pattern of behaviors) that indicates a child has some level of understanding about the composing, editing, or revising processes. For instance, if a child circles a word, this behavior indicates that the child has noticed that a word doesn’t look right. This behavior can be scored as evidence of editing (even if the spelling is incorrect).

Remember, we are assessing the process, not the product. (Teachers will assess spelling accuracy under Standard III). If a child attempts to search for a more accurate spelling and records a different attempt, this behavior indicates *an attempt to self-correct* and should be counted as credit. (NOTICE THAT THE WORD ‘ATTEMPTS TO’ HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE “SELF-CORRECTIONS” CRITERIA ON THE REVISED RUBRIC). This clarification makes a distinction

between process and product, and values the writer's attempt to self-correct, even before he/she has acquired knowledge of the correct spelling. This quote from Lucy Calkins lends support to the writing process, "the purpose of revision is not to correct, but to discover."

- ❖ First Draft: Here, we are inferring fluency of thinking (i.e., the flow and connectedness of ideas) as evidenced by writing behaviors. If a piece is meaningful and the ideas are logical and well sequenced, we can assume that the transcribing and composing processes are working together to create a meaningful first draft. If the piece is illogical and meaningless, we can assume that the writer is struggling with one aspect of the process, either the transcription or the development of ideas.
  - ✓ Records ideas with fluency – Does the piece flow? Is it meaningful? Does the child get the message across? Is the child stumbling over words? Look at the overall length of the piece and consider the time they were allowed for writing.
  - ✓ Rereads what has been written – Does it make sense and sound right? If a child rereads something and it doesn't make sense they should attempt to fix it. If it still doesn't make sense, they probably didn't reread. Look for evidence of the behavior to show that they understand the process! At least at some level.
- ❖ Revising: Revising is the process of working to clarify meaning and add details to a piece of writing. How do you score the student who composes a really good text on Day 1, and does not see the need to revise the writing on Day 2? Is the student penalized on the revision criteria, even though the writing is an excellent piece? Yes, because the student does not show evidence of valuing the revising process. Remember, the goal of Day 2 is to provide the student with a block of time for reflecting, revising, extending, and clarifying the writing. To receive credit for this requirement, a student must show evidence that she/he understands that a first draft can be improved upon with further reflection.
  - ✓ Adds/deletes words – Does the student make some changes in the writing piece? The scorer should look for evidence that the child inserted words or crossed out words. Did the child add or delete words from the first draft to the final draft? Some kids will sit and ponder things in their heads for a long time. We can infer that they are trying things out and making changes in their minds, but to receive credit for this 'thinking' process, we must see behavioral evidence that indicates a revising action has taken place. Evidence can be a child crossing out words and changing the sentence structure. Example: ~~You will~~ I think you will...
    - Rearranges words, sentences or phrases – For the first grade writer, this requirement will exceed the norm, for example, cut and paste techniques are sometimes used by advanced writers to rearrange sentences. Also, the writer may draw lines to connect or rearrange phrases, and use post it notes to move information from one place to another.

- Substitutes richer vocabulary choices – To meet this criterion, the student must show evidence of word meanings and the quality of words for communicating the most precise message. Here, the writer is playing with vocabulary meanings, as demonstrated by crossed out words and word substitutions.
- ✓ Uses writing checklist – This is a required behavior. Here, the scorer must relate the checklist to the actual writing sample for documentation of the behavior. However, this does not mean that all checked areas from the writing checklist must match the writing sample, but rather, the student’s understanding of the process can be clearly documented by cross referencing some of the areas.
- ❖ Editing: Editing is the process of attending to the conventions of writing, such as, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
  - ✓ Notifies some errors in spelling by circling words – The word “some” is quantified by “more than one”. What about the child who spells everything correctly, so there is nothing left to circle? If all words are spelled correctly, this provides evidence that the child is preprocessing visual information. The student receives credit for this process.
    - Attempts to correct many misspelled words – The attempt to self-correct infers a monitoring and searching process is taking place in the mind. Remember, it is the process we are assessing in Standards I and II, and the scorer must look for a behavior that indicates this mental process is occurring. If the writer shows evidence of an attempt to self-correct, the student receives credit. However, in assessing process (over product), the student does NOT have to attempt to correct all words (this criterion is assessed on Standard III).
    - Attempts to correct some punctuation and capitalization – Once again, we are assessing the thinking process, not the product, so if you see evidence that the student tried to correct a punctuation or capitalization errors, give credit.
  - ✓ Uses resources to check – This can include any resource in the room. Look for, and document, evidence that the student understands how to use a dictionary, anchor charts, writing resource notebook, writing log, etc. When assessing knowledge of the process, we can infer from the behavior that the student understands the value of using a resource for editing and revising during writing.
- ❖ Final Draft –
  - ✓ Incorporates revisions into final copy – Here, simple revisions can earn credit, e.g., a word choice, sentence structure, adding details, etc. If the student made changes from the first draft to the final copy, he/she gets credit. However, this is the hardest area to score, and the caution is that the task could become a copying task and lead to careless errors. It is not uncommon for the competent writer to include additional revisions on the final copy. For scoring, we must keep reminding ourselves of the purpose of the writing process; and if the writer shows evidence of revisions in the final copy, we award credit. (This is much easier to score if the students

- have used their black pens for first draft, blue pens for revisions, red pens for editing, and pencils for the final draft as we teach them to do.)
- ✓ Increases accuracy of the final draft – Remember the final draft is not just about neat handwriting. If a student has incorporated most of the corrected spellings and/or punctuation corrections, this behavior counts as credit.

## **Standard II**

This standard assesses the craft and purpose of writing, with an emphasis on the quality of the words and the overall message. This is a sophisticated process for beginning writers, and it shares a direct relationship with reading and discussing good literature.

- ❖ Introduces the topic
  - ✓ Opening sentence states focus of writing – With the first grade writer, an opening sentence is pretty much anything that sets up or relates to the intention of the story.
    - Creates a good lead that grabs the reader’s attention – A good lead can include a reaction phrase, dialogue, a question, description of the setting or character, introduction of the problem, etc. Examples: “You are not going to believe this”..., “The sky was dark and cloudy and the air was hard to breathe.” Good leads may be one or more sentences, or an opening paragraph. The writer’s ability to create good leads is directly influenced by experiences with good literature. If the writer receives credit for a good lead, he/she receives credit for stating the focus of the writing as well.
- ❖ Develops the topic
  - ✓ Uses logical order (beginning, middle, end) – Does the piece flow nicely? Is it told in chronological order? For the basic requirement, the writer should have a beginning, middle, and end.
  - ✓ Sustains the idea throughout the piece – Does the writer develop the topic or does he/she stray from the topic? To receive points, the idea must be sustained throughout the piece. With some beginning writers, the piece might also include some extraneous or redundant information, although it remains fairly focused on the topic.
    - Uses dialogue effectively – This doesn’t mean students have to use quotation marks. If a child writes, “My mom said no,” this statement counts as dialogue. Remember, we are assessing the craft of writing, and how dialogue can contribute to the quality of the message. The accurate use of punctuation (quotation marks) is assessed under Standard III.
    - Uses individual voice – Does the child’s personality really come through? Does the writing sound like the child’s oral language and experiences? Individual voice is evident when a piece of writing shows the personality and characteristics of the writer. This can include the way a student uses language to communicate, while also developing a writing style that become associated with the particular student. For

instance, if you look at a writing sample (and the student's name is missing), can you identify the voice and style of the writer? (This is in contrast to the formalized writing that is often found with commercial programs where students' compositions all sound the same, and individual voice is devalued!)

- Uses reaction phrases – These statements are reactions to something the child just wrote about in their story. These reactions can be associated with individual voice (meaning that a student can receive credit in more than one place on the rubric). Some examples are: that's my favorite thing, we had such a great time, we laughed so hard, she really liked it, it was cold out there, it was cool, that was the sweetest thing to say, that really made me tired.
- ✓ Uses transitional and time cue words for time flow – Here, the writer uses words such as first, next, last, then, the next day, afterwards, etc.
  - Uses transitional phrases for time flow – The writer uses phrases such as the next day, one Sunday morning, a long time ago, etc.
- ✓ Uses some strong vocabulary and word choice – Two or more words are expected to meet the basic requirement. Examples include: asked, shrieked, yelled, shouted, or whispered instead of the word "said".
  - Uses several interesting words to express ideas – Here, to earn extra points (a bulleted criterion) we are looking for things above the norm. The student is beginning to add some details to help the reader visualize ideas.
  - Begins to use descriptive and figurative language – Here, to earn extra points the writer uses some descriptive words and language to help the reader create mind pictures (e.g., similes or metaphors)
- ❖ Concludes the topic
  - ✓ Provides sense of closure – The writing ends with a closure that lets the reader know the text is over
    - Ties story together with creative or imaginative ending - To earn extra credit, the closure exceeds the norm. This can be one or more statements that communicate a closing idea or theme, for example: "Then we all gave a big group hug and we all went home." "The next day me and my brother wouldn't forget that wonderful day."

### Standard III

This standard focuses on conventional writing requirements, including **grade level expectations** for accurate spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

#### ❖ Style and Syntax

- ✓ Uses a variety of sentence structures and lengths – This goes beyond a "safe" story with only words the child knows and is not stylized writing such as: "I like my dog. I like my cat. I like my family." Throughout the text, the writer shows evidence of varying the length and type of sentences.
  - Shows evidence of book language or structures from other texts – Example: "Once upon a time...", "lived happily ever after". The writing piece shows evidence of phrases or specialized vocabulary that are

borrowed from favorite books. Here, the writing might sound like a book that the child has read before. (This criterion might also be linked to 'voice' under Standard II, as the child begins to merge his/her oral language with book language, and, in the process, begins to develop an individual writer's voice.)

- ✓ Writes complete sentences the majority of the time – This does not include punctuation. If you can read it out loud and it sounds like complete sentences most of the time, it counts.
  - Writes complete sentences all the time – Same as above only with no fragments or run-on sentences. Still does not include punctuation.
  - Use subject/verb agreement most of the time - When looking at the piece as a whole, does it have correct subject/verb agreement? If it is a long piece it can be not correct in a line or two as long as the majority of the piece is accurate.

#### ❖ Spelling

- ✓ Writes most high-frequency words correctly – Not all, but most, high-frequency words are written conventionally. These words would include the basic list of high frequency words expected by first graders.
  - Writes all high-frequency words correctly – To earn extra points, the writer must spell all high-frequency words correctly. This list is based on the first grade high-frequency word list.
- ✓ Uses phonetic spelling – This is the standard requirement for first grade writers. Here, you can see that the child is able to match sounds to letters in serial order, and record all sounds. This may or may not include vowels.
  - Uses transitional and/or conventional spelling – To earn extra points, the writer must show evidence of understanding the spelling system, e.g. the misspelled words may show evidence of visual patterns (vowel patterns, consonant digraphs, and inflectional endings). When articulating unknown words, the child consistently uses vowels in every syllable even though they may not be correct (e.g. reversed order). Many words are spelled conventionally.

#### ❖ Punctuation and Conventions

- ✓ Demonstrate some accurate use of beginning capitalization – To meet this requirement, the writer must capitalize the first word in some sentences and some proper nouns.
  - Demonstrates mostly accurate use of beginning capitalization – Here, the first grader exceeds the standard, as he/she capitalizes the first word in most sentences, most proper names, and doesn't throw in too many capitals in the middle of sentences where they don't belong.
- ✓ Demonstrates some accurate use of closing punctuation – This includes some periods in the piece, but maybe not always in the correct places.
  - Demonstrates mostly accurate use of closing punctuation – The writer has most periods, questions marks, exclamation points at the end of sentences.