

University of Virginia College of Arts and Sciences and Schools of Architecture,
Education, and Nursing

Explanation of 4, 3, 2, 1 Scoring System for Writing Portfolio Assessment
SPRING 2002

A SCORE OF 4: Portfolios in this category demonstrate **strong competence**. Papers in these portfolios consistently offer focused and developed claims, clear introductions that frame readers' expectations, coherent and cohesive sections and paragraphs, mature sentence syntax, and mechanically correct prose. Although portfolios in this category may contain some lapses and surface errors, any such lapses will be rare and minor.

A SCORE OF 3: Portfolios in this category demonstrate **reasonably consistent competence**. They may include occasional errors in execution, but they will be free from patterns of error that indicate the writer is ignorant of important rhetorical, linguistic, or grammatical principles. Of the four essays in the portfolio, at least three will offer focused and developed claims, as well as clear introductions that frame readers' expectations. Although demonstrating occasional lapses, the collected essays will be comprised of coherent and cohesive sections and paragraphs; the syntax will be varied and appropriate; and the prose will be correct with regard to grammar, diction, spelling, and sentence structure.

A SCORE OF 2: Portfolios in this category demonstrate **developing competence**. Most of the work in the portfolio will be consistently competent, although the portfolio may contain occasional major weaknesses, such as inadequately focused or poorly framed arguments, insufficient development, inflexible or inappropriate syntax, or an accumulation of errors in grammar, diction, spelling, or sentence structure.

A SCORE OF 1: Portfolios in this category demonstrate **incompetence** or **occasional competence**. One or more of the following seriously flaws the majority of essays in these portfolios: very poor organization, weak logic, indifferent development, and severe syntactical and usage errors.

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Writing Portfolio Assessment Guide, **SPRING 2002**

Reader # _____

Student # _____

For each textual feature below, indicate the frequency of demonstrated competence.

(1=Seldom or Never, 2=Occasionally, 3=Regularly, 4=Consistently)

I. Produce Grammatically Correct Prose (threshold competence)

Final drafts are free of the following errors

A. Wrong verb forms	1	2	3	4
B. Double negatives	1	2	3	4
C. Objective pronouns used as sentence's subject	1	2	3	4
D. Sentence fragments	1	2	3	4
E. Run-on sentences	1	2	3	4
F. Subject-verb disagreement	1	2	3	4
G. Superfluous comma between verb and complement	1	2	3	4
H. Lack of parallelism	1	2	3	4
I. Adjective-adverb substitution	1	2	3	4
J. Errors in word meaning	1	2	3	4
K. Dangling modifiers	1	2	3	4
L. <i>I</i> as objective pronoun	1	2	3	4
M. Tense switching	1	2	3	4
N. Plural modifiers with singular nouns	1	2	3	4

II. Compose Balanced Arguments

A. Student able to identify parts of dialogic argument (claim, reasons, evidence, warrants, A/R)	1	2	3	4
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B. Essays employ typical claim/evidence patterns 1 2 3 4

C. Papers provide multiple types of evidence 1 2 3 4

D. Papers include acknowledgment and response 1 2 3 4

III. Create Effective Problem Statements and Introductions

A. Distinguish between tangible and conceptual problems 1 2 3 4

B. Identify parts of a prototypical problem statement 1 2 3 4

C. Compose prototypical problem statements for conceptual problems 1 2 3 4

D. Identify and employ common patterns for academic introductions 1 2 3 4

IV. Evaluate and Manage Textual Cohesion and Coherence

A. Papers manage point-of-view through Topic strings 1 2 3 4

B. Papers consistently include explicit local/sectional Points 1 2 3 4

V. Evaluate and Produce a Range of Styles

A. Semantically complex sentences presented with easy-to-process given→new and short→long syntax 1 2 3 4

B. Semantically simple sentences presented with controlled given→new syntax 1 2 3 4

• In semantically simple sentences, some new information given in introductory phrases 1 2 3 4

• In semantically simple sentences, some new information anchored to noun phrase in subject 1 2 3 4

• In semantically simple sentences, some new information interrupting noun phrase in subject and verb phrase in simple predicate 1 2 3 4

Glossary

Dialogic Argument: As distinct from combative argument, dialogic argument is based on persuasion, rather than coercion or negotiation.

A/R: acknowledging and responding to relevant counter-claims.

Tangible problems: Solutions to tangible problems require readers to take action in the world—for example, build a hydroelectric plant, fund daycare for employees, or deploy an aircraft carrier. Rising first-years tend to think of problems primarily in terms of tangible costs and responses.

Conceptual problems: Solutions to conceptual problems require us to reevaluate the way we understand a particular issue, event, or phenomenon. Conceptual problems are the general currency of the academy, so students must become comfortable framing and solving conceptual problems. However, because conceptual problems tend to be specialized, many rising first-years have great difficulty even recognizing conceptual problems.

Prototypes: The feature of prototypes that concerns us in this context is *ease of processing*. That is, many rhetorical and linguistic structures have prototypical versions that are easier to recognize and process than non-prototypical versions. For example, a prototypical SVC sentence structure will be easier to process than its non-prototypical counterpart. (Compare: “Down the twisting stairway, hissing and howling all the way to the bottom, flew the sputtering cat” vs. “The sputtering cat flew down the twisting stairway, hissing and howling all the way to the bottom.”) This difference in ease of processing between prototypical and non-prototypical structures becomes more pronounced as a text’s conceptual content becomes more challenging.

Prototypical Problem Statements: Prototypical problem statements contain four parts—the statement of current best theory (Status Quo), an observed challenge to or anomaly in the status quo theory (the Destabilizing Moment), a statement of cost of leaving status quo theory as-is, and a response to the apparent insufficiency or instability in the status quo theory (the Response). When readers are expert in the writer’s field (as is the case in most student writing situations), they are often able to recognize the dimensions of the problem without relying on a fully prototypical problem statement. In

contexts in which the writer is expert but the readers are not, fully specifying the problem becomes increasingly important to the readers' ability to recognize what is at stake.

Topic Strings: a textual feature that creates lexical cohesion and can contribute to coherence. In essence, Topic Strings are patterns in which words reappear across sentence boundaries. Topic Strings come in five types: Focused, Chained, Mixed, Incoherent, and Mixed/Incoherent. In Focused strings, key terms from the Topic position (or "head" or "theme") of one sentence reappear in the head of subsequent sentences. In Chained strings, key terms that appear in the complement of one sentence reappear in the Topic position of the subsequent sentence. Passages that use Mixed strings combine the Focused and Chained forms. Incoherent strings display no pattern of lexical repetition, while in Mixed/Incoherent strings, infrequent lexical cohesion peppers an essentially Incoherent string.

Semantic Complexity: a measure of the level of domain knowledge necessary to understand a text's content. Semantic complexity is understood in relation to a specific reader or set of readers, rather than imagined as an inherent and stable characteristic of the text. For example, a study of heat transfer coefficients within an evaporator might present very low semantic complexity to a group of engineers. This same study, however, might prove more daunting if it were read by MBAs with a functional but seldom-exercised understanding of basic engineering principles.

Given→*New Syntax*: a basic linguistic principle directing decisions about appropriate syntax.