



Virginia FFA Middle School CDE
Written Assignment Rubric



Contestant Number

Name of Judge

IDEAS AND CONTENT	(10 points)	_____
ORGANIZATION	(10 points)	_____
VOICE	(5 points)	_____
WORD CHOICE	(5 points)	_____
SENTENCE FLUENCY	(10 points)	_____
CONVENTIONS	(5 points)	_____
PRESENTATION	(5 points)	_____
TOTAL (50 PTS possible)		_____
WRITTEN TEST (100 PTS)		_____
GRAND TOTAL (150 PTS)		_____

Students will be asked to write a response to an essay question. The response should be no more than 500 words and the attached rubric will be utilized to evaluate the essay.

IDEAS AND CONTENT

This paper is clear and focused. It holds the reader's attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme. (10 points)

- A. The topic is **clear** and **focused**.
- B. **Relevant, telling, and uses credible sources to illustrate** important information that goes **beyond the obvious** or predictable.
- C. Reasonably **accurate details** are present to support the main ideas.
- D. The writer seems to be writing from **knowledge** or **experience**; the ideas are **fresh** and **original**.
- E. The reader's questions are **anticipated and answered**.
- 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.

The writer is beginning to define the topic, even though development is still basic or general. (6 Points)

- A. The **topic is fairly broad**; however, you can see where the writer is headed.
- B. **Support is attempted**, but doesn't go far enough yet in fleshing out the key issues or story line.
- C. **Ideas are reasonably clear**, though they may not be detailed, personalized, accurate, or expanded enough to show in-depth understanding or a strong sense of purpose.
- D. The writer seems to be drawing on knowledge or experience, but **has difficulty going from general observations to specifics**.
- E. The reader is **left with questions**. More information is needed to "fill in the blanks."
- 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.

As yet, the paper 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: (1 Point)

- 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.
- B. Information is **limited, unclear, not well suggested with credible sources**, or the **length is not adequate** for development.
- C. The idea is a **simple restatement** of the topic or an **answer** to the question with little or no attention to detail.
- D. The writer has **not begun to define the topic** in a meaningful, personal way.
- E. **Everything seems as important as everything else**; the reader has a hard time sifting out what is important.
- F. The text may be **repetitious**, or may read like a collection of **disconnected, random thoughts** with no discernable point.

ORGANIZATION

The organization enhances and showcases the central idea or theme. The order, structure, or presentation of information is compelling and moves the reader through the text. (8 points)

- A. An **inviting introduction** draws the reader in; a **satisfying conclusion** leaves the reader with a sense of closure and resolution.
- B. **Thoughtful transitions** clearly show how ideas connect.
- C. Details seem to fit where they're placed; **sequencing is logical and effective**.
- D. **Pacing is well controlled**; the writer knows when to slow down and elaborate, and when to pick up the pace and move on.
- E. The **title is original** and captures the central theme of the piece.
- F. Organization **flows so smoothly** the reader hardly thinks about it; the choice of structure matches the **purpose and audience**.

The organizational structure is strong enough to move the reader through the text without too much confusion. (4 Points)

- 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.
- B. **Transitions often work well**; at other times, connections between ideas are fuzzy or disconnected.
- 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**.
- 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.
- E. A **title is present**, although it may be uninspired, trite, or an obvious restatement of the topic.
- 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.

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: (1 Point)

- A. There is **no real lead** to set-up what follows, **no real conclusion** to wrap things up.
- B. Connections between ideas are **confusing** and ideas appear disconnected.
- C. **Sequencing needs** lots and lots of **work**.
- D. **Pacing feels awkward**; the writer slows to a crawl when the reader wants to get on with it, and vice versa.
- E. **No title is present** or, if present, **does not match** the content.
- F. Problems with organization make it **hard for the reader to get a grip** on the main point or story line.

VOICE

The writer speaks directly to the reader in a way that is individual, compelling and engaging. The writer crafts the writing with an awareness and respect for the audience and the purpose for writing. (8 points)

- A. The tone of the writing **adds interest** to the message and is **appropriate for the purpose and audience**.
- B. The reader feels a **strong interaction** with the writer, sensing the **person behind the words**.
- C. The writer **takes a risk** by revealing who he or she is consistently throughout the piece.
- D. **Expository or persuasive** writing reflects a **strong commitment** to the topic by showing **why the reader needs to know this** and why he or she should care.
- E. **Narrative** writing is **honest, personal, and engaging** and engages you to **think about, and react to**, the author's ideas and point of view.

The writer seems sincere but not fully engaged or involved. The result is pleasant or even personable, but not compelling. (4 Points)

- A. The writer seems aware of an audience but discards personal insights in favor of **obvious generalities**.
- B. The writing communicates in an **earnest, pleasing, yet safe** manner.
- C. Only **one or two moments here or there** intrigue, delight, or move the reader. These places may **emerge strongly for a line or two, but quickly fade away**.
- D. **Expository or persuasive** writing **lacks consistent engagement** with the topic to build credibility.
- E. **Narrative** writing is **reasonably sincere**, but doesn't reflect unique or individual perspective on the topic.

The writer seems indifferent, uninvolved, or distanced from the topic and/or the audience. As a result, the paper reflects more than one of the following problems: (1 Point)

- A. The writer is **not concerned with the audience**. The writer's style is a **complete mismatch** for the intended reader or the writing is **so short** that little is accomplished beyond introducing the topic.
- B. The writer speaks in a kind of **monotone** that flattens all potential highs or lows of the message.
- C. The writing is **humdrum and "risk-free."**
- D. The writing is **lifeless or mechanical**; depending on the topic, it may be overly technical or jargonistic.
- E. The development of the topic is **so limited** that **no point of view is present**—zip, zero, zilch, nada.

WORD CHOICE

Words convey the intended message in a precise, interesting, and natural way. The words are powerful and engaging. (8 points)

- A. Words are **specific** and **accurate**. It is easy to understand just what the writer means.
- B. **Striking descriptive 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 just the right word or phrase in just the right spot.

The language is functional, even if it lacks much energy. It is easy to figure out the writer's meaning on a general level. (4 Points)

- A. Words are **adequate and correct in a general sense**, and they support the meaning by not getting in the way.
- 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 (thesaurus overload!).
- 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 more like **the first thing that popped into the writer's mind**.

The writer demonstrates a limited vocabulary or has not searched for words to convey specific meaning. (1 Point)

- 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** making the message secondary to the misfires with the words.
- 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, clichés, acronyms, or slang** distract or mislead. **Redundancy** may distract the reader.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

The writing has an easy flow, rhythm, and cadence. Sentences are well built, with strong and varied structure that invites expressive oral reading. (8 points)

- A. Sentences are constructed in a way that underscores and enhances the **meaning**.
- B. Sentences **vary in length as well as structure**. Fragments, if used, add style. Dialogue, if present, sounds natural.
- 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.
- E. The writing has **cadence**; the writer has thought about the sound of the words as well as the meaning. The first time you read it aloud is a breeze.

The text hums along with a steady beat, but tends to be more pleasant or businesslike than musical, more mechanical than fluid. (4 Points)

- A. Although sentences may not seem artfully crafted or musical, **they 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 *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*, etc.) that show how sentences interrelate.
- E. **Parts of the text invite expressive oral reading**; others may be stiff, awkward, choppy, or gangly.

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: (1 Point)

- A. Sentences are **choppy, incomplete, rambling or awkward**; they need work. **Phrasing does not sound natural**. The patterns may create a sing-song rhythm, or a chop-chop cadence that lulls the reader to sleep.
- B. There is little **“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., *subject-verb-object*) in a monotonous pattern.
- D. **Endless connectives** (*and, and so, but then, because, and then*, etc.) or a **complete lack of connectives** create a massive jumble of language.
- E. The text **does not invite expressive oral reading**.

CONVENTIONS

The writer demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, paragraphing) and uses conventions effectively to enhance readability. (8 points)

- A. **Spelling is generally correct**, even on more difficult words.
- B. The **punctuation is accurate**, even creative, 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.
- F. The writer **may manipulate conventions** for stylistic effect—and it works! The piece is very close to being **ready to publish**.

The writing is sufficiently complex to allow the writer to show skill in using a wide range of conventions. For writers at younger ages, the writing shows control over those conventions that are grade/age appropriate. 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. (4 Points)

- A. **Spelling** is usually correct or reasonably phonetic on common words, but more difficult words are problematic.
- B. **End punctuation is usually correct**; internal punctuation (*commas, apostrophes, semicolons, dashes, colons, parentheses*) is sometimes missing/wrong.
- C. **Most words are capitalized correctly**; control over more sophisticated capitalization skills may be spotty.
- 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.
- E. **Paragraphing is attempted** but may run together or begin in the wrong places.
- F. **Moderate editing** (a little of this, a little of that) would be required to polish the text for publication.

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: (1 Point)

- A. **Spelling errors are frequent**, even on common words.
- B. **Punctuation** (including terminal punctuation) is often **missing or incorrect**.
- C. **Capitalization** is **random** and only the easiest rules show awareness of correct use.
- D. **Errors in grammar or usage are very noticeable**, frequent, and affect meaning.
- E. **Paragraphing is missing, irregular, or so frequent** (every sentence) that it has no relationship to the organizational structure of the text.
- F. The reader must **read once to decode**, then again for meaning. **Extensive editing** (virtually every line) would be required to polish the text for publication.

PRESENTATION

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. (8 points)

- A. If handwritten (either cursive or printed), the **slant is consistent**, letters are clearly formed, **spacing is uniform** between words, and the text is easy to read.
- B. If word-processed, there is **appropriate use of fonts and font sizes** which invites the reader into the text.
- C. The use of **white space** on the page (spacing, margins, etc.) allows the intended audience to easily focus on the text and message without distractions. There is just the right amount of balance of white space and text on the page. The formatting suits the purpose for writing.
- D. The use of a **title, side heads, page numbering, bullets**, and evidence of correct use of a style sheet (when appropriate) makes it easy for the reader to access the desired information and text. These markers allow the hierarchy of information to be clear to the reader.
- E. When appropriate to the purpose and audience, there is **effective integration of text and illustrations, charts, graphs, maps, tables, etc.** There is clear alignment between the text and visuals. The visuals support and clarify important information or key points made in the text.

The writer's message is understandable in this format. (4 Points)

- A. **Handwriting is readable**, although there may be **discrepancies in letter shape and form, slant, and spacing** that may make some words or passages easier to read than others.
- B. **Experimentation with fonts and font sizes** is successful in some places, but begins to get fussy and cluttered in others. The **effect is not consistent** throughout the text.
- C. While margins may be present, **some text may crowd the edges**. Consistent spacing is applied, although a different choice may make text more accessible (e.g., single, double, or triple spacing).
- D. Although some markers are present (titles, numbering, bullets, side heads, etc.), they are not used to their fullest potential as a guide for the reader to access the greatest meaning from the text.
- E. An **attempt is made to integrate visuals** and the text although the connections may be limited.

The reader receives a garbled message due to problems relating to the presentation of the text. (1 Point)

- A. Because the letters are irregularly slanted, formed inconsistently, or incorrectly, and the spacing is unbalanced or not even present, it is **very difficult to read and understand the text**.
- B. The writer has gone **wild with multiple fonts and font sizes**. It is a major distraction to the reader.
- C. The **spacing is random and confusing** to the reader. There may be little or no white space on the page.
- D. **Lack of markers** (title, page numbering, bullets, side heads, etc.) leave the reader wondering how one section connects to another and why the text is organized in this manner on the page.
- E. The visuals do not support or further illustrate key ideas presented in the text. They may be **misleading, indecipherable, or too complex** to be understood.