

The 2012-13 TCAP Writing Assessment: Using the New Rubric

Introduction and trait-based scoring:

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), in collaboration with Measurement, Inc. (MI), has also developed new rubrics to score the newly formatted prompts. These rubrics are built directly from the language of the Writing Strand from the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.

There are three rubrics, one for each of the three types of prompts. The rubrics are trait-based, which means that student writing will be scored according to a number of specific and separate criteria instead of a single group of indicators. Trait-based scoring, which will also be used in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments, allows for much more meaningful, individualized student feedback. Score reports from the TCAP Writing Assessment will show a student how well he/she performed on each trait.

The four traits for all three rubrics are: focus/organization, support/elaboration, language/style, and conventions. There are four score levels for each trait, and each score level has a series of descriptors (written in bullet point form) describing performance at that level. Note that while the language across the three prompts differs in some details to match the specific expectations of the Common Core State Standards for Writing in each mode, there is even more similarity, reflecting the integrated view of writing described above.

Learning how to use the rubrics:

One of the best ways for teachers to become familiar with the new prompts and prepare their students for the kind of writing they call for is to give students practice with the released prompts (posted to http://www.tncore.org/english_language_arts/writing_test.aspx) and then score those prompts to give students feedback. To help teachers learn how to use the new rubrics to score student essays based on the new prompts, the TDOE will provide a comprehensive suite of materials. These will include:

- 1) Training materials. Comprehensive, unique scoring guides and training sets for each released prompt. Scoring guides include the prompt, the relevant rubric for the prompt's mode, and annotated student responses (anchor papers) illustrating each score point. Training sets include 8-10 sample student responses for teachers to practice their skills.
- 2) Training videos. These videos, meant to accompany the scoring guides and training sets above, will feature scoring experts walking teachers through a full training on how to score student essays. The videos will include training modules for each of the three rubrics to introduce analytic, trait-based scoring. These will be supplemented by nine comprehensive, prompt-specific training videos (one for each of the nine released prompts).

These resources, which will be derived from the September 2012 Tennessee field test of the new prompts, will be posted to the same writing test website in late November. The TDOE encourage all ELA teachers to use these materials; beyond their practical application, the training they provide will prove an excellent professional learning opportunity to help teachers become better prepared to teach writing when the PARCC assessments begin in 2014-15.

Using the rubrics across grade levels:

These rubrics are shared across grade levels. While the language of the descriptors is drawn from both the Anchor Standards and individual grade-level Standards, it is important to note that the descriptors for each score point often reflect the ideal expectation for college and career ready writing as defined by the Anchor Standards. For students in lower grades, especially 5th, the rubrics' expectations may mean something quite different than what they mean for 11th graders. Teachers should become familiar with the proper grade-level iterations for the Standards in the grades they teach, and apply those details in

assessing an essay against the rubric. For instance, in the opinion/argument rubric, to receive a four for the language/style trait, a student must maintain “a formal style and objective tone.” However, it is not until grades 9-10 that students are explicitly required to do so in a Common Core Standard. While teacher judgment based on personal experience and knowledge of appropriate grade-level student writing should still guide scoring decisions at the classroom level, the anchor papers and scoring guides described above will produce concrete examples of grade-level expectations for each score point and give teachers and students guidance for how the official February administration will be scored, including cases like the example above where certain descriptors might not apply to all grade levels.

Scoring:

In order to use the rubric, a reader should read the essay to be scored and assign an independent point value for each of the traits. As with any rubric, the descriptors for a given score point will rarely all match perfectly with a student essay. For each trait, the totality of the evidence should indicate the score level. The scores from each trait should then be added up for a total raw scale score out of 16. Each trait should be counted equally, as each area contributes with equal importance to a student’s writing ability. After the field test results are analyzed, the TDOE will provide further guidance to districts around interpreting the raw scores, including what is considered a “passing” score.