

College Unbound Writing Rubric

IDEA DEVELOPMENT

5 The writing is clear, well-supported or developed, and enhanced by the kind of detail that keeps readers reading.

- The writer selectively chooses just the right information to make the paper understandable, enlightening, and interesting – without bogging down in trivia.
- Details work together to expand the main topic or develop a story, giving the whole piece a strong sense of focus.
- The writer’s knowledge, experience, insight or unique perspective lends the writing a satisfying ring of authenticity.
- The amount of detail is just right – not skimpy, not overwhelming.

3 The writer has made a solid beginning in defining a topic or mapping out a story line. It is easy to see where the paper is headed, though more expansion is needed to complete the picture.

- General, global information provides the big picture – and makes the reader long for specifics.
- Well-focused information blends with repetitive points, trivia or meanderings.
- The writer draws on some personal experience – but too often settles for generalities or clichéd thinking.
- Unneeded information may eat up space that should have gone to important details. Where’s the balance?

1 Sketchy, loosely focused information forces the reader to make inferences. Readers will likely notice more than one of these problems:

- The main topic is still unclear, out of focus – or not yet known, even to the writer.
- Missing, limited or unrelated details require the reader to fill in many blanks.
- Lists of “factlets” may be substituted for true development.
- Everything seems as important as everything else.

ORGANIZATION

5 The order, presentation, or internal structure of the piece is compelling and guides the reader purposefully through the text.

- The entire piece has a strong sense of direction and balance. Main ideas or key points stand out clearly.
- An inviting lead draws the reader in; a satisfying conclusion ties up loose ends.
- Details seem to fit right where they are placed, making the text easy to follow and understand.
- Transitions are strong but natural.
- Pacing feels natural and effective; the writer knows just when to linger over details and when to get moving.
- Organization flows so smoothly the reader does not need to think about it.

3 The organizational structure allows the reader to move through the text without undue confusion.

- Sequencing of main ideas seems reasonably appropriate; the reader rarely, if ever feels lost.
- Transitions are usually present, but sometimes a little too obvious or too structured.
- Structure may be so dominant or predictable that it literally smothers the ideas and voice.
- Information is mostly presented in an orderly, if not quite compelling fashion.

1 Ideas, details, or events seem loosely strung together. Readers will likely notice more than one of these problems:

- As yet, there is no clear sense of direction to carry the reader from point to point.
- No real lead sets up what follows.
- No real conclusion wraps things up.
- Missing or unclear transitions force the reader to make giant leaps.
- Sequencing feels more random than purposeful, leaving the reader with a sense of being adrift.
- The writing does not move purposefully toward any main message or turning point.

VOICE

5 The writer’s energy and passion for the subject drive the writing, making the text lively, expressive, and engaging

- The tone and flavor of the piece fit the topic, purpose and audience well.
- The writing bears the clear imprint of this writer.
- The writer seems to know his/her audience, and shows a strong concern for their informational needs and interests.
- Narrative text is open and honest.
- Expository or persuasive text is provocative, lively, and designed to hold a reader’s attention.

3 The writer seems sincere and willing to communicate with the reader on a functional, if distant level.

- The tone and flavor of the piece could be altered slightly to better fit the topic, purpose or audience.
- The writer has not quite found his/her voice but is experimenting-and the result is pleasant or intriguing, if not unique.
- The writer occasionally speaks right to the audience.
- The writer often seems reluctant to “let go” holding individuality, passion, and spontaneity in check. Nevertheless, voice pops out on occasion.
- The writer is “there” – then gone.

1 The writer seems definitely distanced from topic, audience, or both; as a result, the text may lack life, spirit, or energy. Readers are likely to notice one or more of these problems:

- The tone and flavor of the piece are inappropriate for the topic, purpose, and/or audience.
- The writer does not seem to reach out to the audience or to anticipate their interests and needs.
- Though it may communicate on a functional level, the writing takes no risks and does not engage, energize or move the reader.
- The writer does not project personal enthusiasm for the topic or make it come alive for the reader.

WORD CHOICE

5 Precise, vivid natural language paints a strong, clear, and complete picture in the readers mind.

- The writer's message is remarkably clear and easy to interpret.
- Phrasing is original – even memorable – yet the language is never overdone.
- Lively verbs lend the writing power.
- Striking words or phrases linger in the writer's memory, often prompting connections, reflective thoughts or insights.

3 The language communicates in a routine, workable manner; It gets the job done

- Most words are correct and adequate, even if not striking.
- A memorable phrase here or there strikes a spark, leaving the reader hungry for more.
- Familiar words and phrases give the text an "old couch" kind of feel.
- Attempts at colorful language are full of promise, even when they lack restraint or control. Jargon may be mildly annoying, but it does not impede readability.
- General meaning is clear, but the brush it too broad to convey subtleties.

1 The writer struggles with a limited vocabulary-or uses language that simply does not speak to the intended audience. Readers will likely notice more than one of these problems:

- Vague words and phrases (She was nice... It was wonderful... The new budget had impact) convey only the most general sorts of messages.
- Clichés or redundant phrases encourage the reader to skim, not linger.
- Words are used incorrectly ("The bus impelled into the hotel").
- Inflated or jargonistic language makes the text ponderous and uninviting.
- The reader has trouble grasping the writer's intended message.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

5 An easy flow and sentence sense make this text a delight to read aloud

- Sentences are well crafted, with a strong and varied structure that invites expressive oral reading.
- Purposeful sentence beginnings show how each sentence relates and builds on the one before.
- The writing has cadence, as if the reader hears the beat in his or her head.
- Sentences vary in both structure and length, making the reading pleasant and natural.
- Fragments, if used, add style.

3 The text hums along with a steady beat.

- Sentences are mostly grammatical and easy to read aloud, given a little rehearsal.
- Graceful, natural phrasing intermingles with more mechanical structure.
- More variation in length and structure would enhance fluency.
- Some purposeful sentence beginnings aid the reader's interpretation of the text.
- Fragments may be present.

1 A fair interpretive oral reading of this text takes practice. Readers will likely notice more than one of these problems:

- Irregular or unusual word patterns make it hard to tell where the sentences begin and end.
- Ideas are hooked together by numerous connectives (and...but...so then) to create one gangly, endless sentence.
- Short, choppy sentences bump the reader through the text.
- Repetitive sentence patterns put the reader to sleep.
- Transitions are either missing or so overdone they become distracting.
- The reader must often pause and reread for meaning.
- Fragments, if used, seem accidental; they do not work.

CONVENTIONS

5 The writer shows excellent control over a wide range of standard writing conventions and uses them with accuracy and (when appropriate) creativity to enhance meaning.

- Errors are so few and so minor that a reader can easily overlook them unless searching for them specifically.
- The text appears clean, edited and polished.
- Older writers (grade 6 & up) create text of sufficient length and complexity to demonstrate control of conventions appropriate for age and experience.
- The text is easy to mentally process; there is nothing to distract or confuse a reader.
- Only light touch-ups would be required to polish the text for publication.

3 The writer shows reasonable control over the most widely used writing conventions, creating text that is adequately readable.

- There are enough errors to distract an attentive reader; however, errors do not seriously impair readability or obscure meaning
- It is easy enough for an experienced reader to get through the text, but the writing clearly needs polishing.
- The paper reads much like a second rough draft – readable, but lacking close attention to conventions.
- Moderate editing would be required to get the text ready for publication

1 The writer demonstrates limited control even over widely used conventions. Readers are likely to notice one or more of these problems:

- Errors are sufficiently frequent and/or serious enough to be distracting; it is hard for the reader to focus on ideas, organization, or voice.
- The reader may need to read once to decode, then again to interpret and respond to the text.
- The paper reads like a rough first draft, scribbled hastily without thought for conventions.
- Extensive editing would be required to prepare the text for publication.