

Julie Lippman's Teachers' Checklist for Writing Assessment (Lippman 218):

- Is my assessment of writing tied to my goals for the course?
- Have I used **authentic assessment**?
- Have I made the goals and the criteria for assessment clear to students?
- Have I engaged them in the assessment process?
- Have I provided **formative assessment** during the writing process?
- Have I used students' errors to correct problems with my teaching or assignments?
- Are my comments on papers specific, useful, balanced, and encouraging?
- Could I write this paper?
- Have I provided enough context writing assignments?
- Will the assignments and the evaluation of them be important to the students' learning?

Key Terms and Concepts

Indirect vs. Process Assessment

Authentic assessment

Formative vs. Summative assessment

Holistic Grading and Inter-rater Reliability

Global/Local issues in student writing

Program assessment

One Formulaic Approach: Grading Rubrics

Programs like SAGES use rubrics to ensure similar response to student papers regardless of class or professor. Such programs depend on inter-rater reliability, the assumption that, based on the given rubric, multiple readers will respond to the same paper in the same way. As might be expected, inter-rater reliability increases with training and experience (Sweedler-Brown 55).

I think rubrics are particularly useful for beginning teachers who do not have the benefit of experience responding to student writing. They help prevent being charmed by papers with beautiful style but unsatisfying content or being distracted by grammatical errors that hide solid analysis or intriguing ideas.

- Holistic Rubrics** divide papers into categories based on certain qualities (An "A" paper does a, b, and c while a "D" paper does e and f but fails to do c). Holistic grading has been used since the sixties to evaluate writing across wide spectrums of the population—AP tests, for example. Holistic grading is intended to evaluate the overall quality of a paper, rather than focusing on specific elements; nevertheless, a 1961 study found that holistic readers tend to favor "ideas, form, flavor, mechanics, and wording" (Huot 207).
- Analytical Rubrics** allow the instructor to evaluate each writing skill or technique separately. They are divided into sections such as Content, Organization and Mechanics. Each section can be weighted at the instructor's discretion. Nahla Bacha argues that analytical rubrics are more informative than holistic rubrics (Bacha 381).

Peter Elbow's Grading Scheme

Peter Elbow uses the following grid as a way to "satisfy the students' hunger for ranking but still not give in to conventional grades on individual papers" (195), a practice he finds essentially arbitrary and meaningless that has a tendency to encourage a focus on grades rather than good writing (188-190).

Strong	OK	Weak	
			CONTENT, INSIGHTS, THINKING, GRAPPLING WITH TOPIC
			GENUINE REVISION, SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES, NOT JUST EDITING
			ORGANIZATION, STRUCTURE, GUIDING THE READER
			LANGUAGE: SYNTAX, SENTENCES, WORDING, VOICE
			MECHANICS: SPELLING, GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, PROOFREADING
			OVERALL [Note: this is not a sum of the other scores.]

Works Cited and Recommended Articles

Bacha, Nahla. "Writing evaluation: what can analytic versus holistic essay scoring tell us?" *System* 29 (2001): 371-383.

A rather technical study focused on EFL writers that includes a thorough review of the literature and history of holistic and analytic scoring.

Elbow, Peter. "Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment." *College English* 55.2 (1993): 187.

Elbow describes his frustration with traditional grading practices and offers his own solutions. He also notes that teachers who like student writing tend to be better teachers and discusses the importance of liking your own writing as well as your students.'

Huot, Brian. "Reliability, Validity, and Holistic Scoring: What We Know and What We Need to Know." *College Composition and Communication*. 41.2 (1990): 201-213.

Huot, an important figure in assessment/evaluation, criticizes that assumption that high inter-rater reliability necessarily implies validity in holistic response.

Lippman, Julie Neff. "Assessing Writing." *Concepts in Composition: Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing*. Ed. Irene L. Clark. Mahwan, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003. 199-220.

Lippman offers a nice history evaluation and assessment as well as discussion of contemporary trends. She also provides exercises to turn theory into practice.

Sweedler-Brown, Carol O. "The Influence of Training and Experience on Holistic Essay Evaluations." *The English Journal*. 74.5 (1985): 49-55.

Sweedler-Brown presents a technical study of inter-rater reliability as a function of training and experience using a particular holistic rubric.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement." *College Composition and Communication* 46.3 (1995): 430.

The official CCCC position on writing assessment, published in 1995.

Recommended Classics

Cooper, Charles & Lee Odell, eds. *Evaluating Writing: the Role of Teachers' Knowledge about Text, Learning and Culture*. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English. 1999.

Odell Lee & Charles Cooper, eds. *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English. 1978.

Straub, Richard and Ronald Lunsford. *Twelve Readers Reading: responding to college student writing*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1995.

White, Edward M. *Teaching and Assessing Writing: Recent Advances in Understanding, Evaluating, and Improving Student Performance*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, Inc, 1985.