



## WAC NEWS AND EVENTS

### UPPER-DIVISION COURSE ON SOCIAL SCIENCE WRITING

In Fall 2008, the English Department will offer a course titled "Writing in the Social Sciences" (English 120S) on TR 3:00-4:15. This course will be taught by English department faculty with a social science background (primarily TESOL/applied linguistics) and is described as follows in the catalog:

**ENGL 120S. Writing in the Social Sciences.** Introduces principles of analyzing and composing texts appropriate for various social science disciplines. Provides practice in analyzing texts in social science journals and in writing abstracts, summaries, and literature reviews. Appropriate for upper-division undergraduate students and beginning graduate students in TESOL and in other social science programs (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology, communication studies, etc.) 3 units

**For further information, contact Dana Ferris at [ferrisd@csus.edu](mailto:ferrisd@csus.edu) or 278-5727.**

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2008 WAC Conference ..... 1  
Using Rubrics ..... 2-4



## 3rd Biannual READING AND WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM CONFERENCE

**W**riting Across the Curriculum invites all full-time and part-time teachers to propose an individual presentation or panel for a half-day conference on successful approaches to reading and writing across disciplines.

### Conference Program

**WHEN:**  
Friday, February 29, 2008  
10:00-2:00  
**WHERE:**  
University Union Orchard and Forest Suites

#### 10:00 Welcome and Introduction, Forest Suite

*Secondary Composition Expectation* (Orchard II)

#### 10:30-11:30 Concurrent Session 1

- *Student Perspectives on Writing* (Orchard I)
- *The Benefits of Grading Student Writing in One-to-One Conferences* (Orchard II)
- *Improving Graduate Student Writing Across the Curriculum* (Orchard III)

- *Teaching Writing in the Disciplines: Part I* (Orchard III)

#### 1:00-2:00 Concurrent Session 3

#### 11:45-12:45 Concurrent Session 2

- *New Approaches to Writing Assessment* (Orchard I)
- *Crossing the Great Divide: Resolving Differences between High School English Writing Curriculum Instruction and Post-*

- *2007-2008 National WAC/WID Survey: A Discussion of How WAC Programs Can Support Faculty across the Disciplines* (Orchard I)
- *The Role of Grammar in the Teaching of Writing: Higher Order Concern, Lower Order Concern, or No Concern at All?* (Orchard II)
- *Teaching Writing in the Disciplines: Part II* (Orchard III)

Refreshments and snacks available in the Forest Suite throughout the conference

To find out more about the WAC program or to schedule a consultation, contact Dan Melzer, University Reading and Writing Coordinator, at [melzer@csus.edu](mailto:melzer@csus.edu) or (916) 278-6925.





## Using Rubrics to Respond to and Assess Student Writing

In fall 2007, Writing Across the Curriculum and the Center for Teaching and Learning presented the campus-wide workshop “Faster, Fairer, Easier Grading Using Rubrics.” This article presents some advice from the workshop regarding using rubrics.

### Why Use Rubrics?

Students are often unsure about the evaluation criteria instructors are using when they grade writing assignments, and in their response to student writing instructors sometimes have trouble making it clear to students what they truly value. Rubrics encourage instructors to think about their objectives for an assignment and make those objectives clear to students. Rubrics are especially useful when you have a heavy paper load and you want to save time in responding without sacrificing clarity. In addition to using rubrics to respond to and assess student writing, you can use rubrics for other types of assignments like oral presentations or student self-evaluations.

### How do I create an effective rubric?

A good starting place for creating a rubric is to make a list of your primary learning objectives for the assignment. If you have example student responses to the assignment, thinking about the primary traits you value in the student papers can also help you generate criteria for your rubric.

Looking at example rubrics can also help, and you can contact Writing Across the Curriculum and the Center for Teaching and Learning for sample rubrics. Showing the rubric you’ve designed to a student or colleague for feedback before you implement it is always helpful—you can also get some feedback on a rubric from Writing Across the Curriculum or the Center for Teaching and Learning.

For more open-ended assignments, you might use a holistic rubric. A holistic rubric describes the general features of a paper at different levels. An example of a holistic rubric is the Sacramento State Advisory Standards for Writing, which was recently revised by the Senate Subcommittee for Writing and Reading (it’s also available online at <http://www.csus.edu/wac/rubric.stm>):

### Sacramento State Advisory Standards for Writing

The following rubric was created by the Faculty Senate Subcommittee for Writing and Reading. It is meant as a useful guide but not an absolute standard for the university: writing criteria will vary from instructor to instructor and discipline to discipline.

### An “A” paper: A paper in this category

- Addresses the assignment thoughtfully and analytically, setting a challenging task
- Does not demonstrate a need for more revision.
- Displays awareness of and purpose in communicating to an audience.
- Establishes a clearly focused controlling idea.
- Demonstrates coherent and rhetorically sophisticated organization; makes effective connections between ideas.
- Provides clear generalizations with specific detail and compelling support and analysis.
- Cites relevant sources and evaluates their validity, effectively integrating them into the text when appropriate.
- Displays evidence of careful editing with superior control of grammar and mechanics appropriate to the assignment.

*Guideline for multilingual writers: Grammatical errors are rare and do not interfere with overall effectiveness of paper; occasional imprecision in word choice and usage may occur.*

### A “B” paper: A paper in this category

- Addresses the assignment clearly and analytically, setting a meaningful task.
- Does not demonstrate a need for significantly more revision.
- Addresses audience needs and expectations.
- Establishes a clearly focused controlling idea.
- Demonstrates clear and coherent organization.
- Provides clear generalizations and effective support and analysis.
- Cites relevant sources, effectively integrating them into the text when appropriate.

- Displays evidence of careful editing with consistent control of grammar and mechanics appropriate to the assignment and the discipline.

*Guideline for multilingual writers: Some grammatical errors may occur throughout the paper but do not interfere with overall effectiveness; occasional inappropriate word choice or incorrect usage may occur.*

**A “C” paper: A paper in this category**

- Addresses the assignment with some analysis.
- Demonstrates some need for further revision.
- Addresses most audience needs and expectations.
- Establishes a controlling idea.
- Demonstrates adequate organization.
- Provides support for and some analysis of generalizations.
- Cites appropriate sources, adequately integrating them into the text.
- Displays evidence of editing with adequate control of grammar and mechanics appropriate to the assignment. Errors do not slow the reader, impede understanding, or seriously undermine the authority of the writer.

*Guideline for multilingual writers: Grammatical errors, inappropriate word choice, or incorrect usage may occur throughout the paper but rarely interfere with effective communication.*

**A “D” paper has some of the following qualities: A paper in this category**

- Does not address the assignment adequately.
- Demonstrates a need for significantly more revision.
- Does not show sufficient audience awareness.
- Strays from the controlling idea, or the idea is unclear.
- Displays random or confusing organization.
- Lacks generalizations, or gives generalizations but does not provide support or analysis.

- Does not cite sources or does not cite and/or integrate sources appropriately.
- Needs significant editing for grammar and mechanics; errors impede understanding.

*Guideline for multilingual writers: Serious and frequent errors in grammar, word choice, or usage seriously hinder communication.*

**An “F” paper has many or all of the qualities listed under a “D” paper.**

*Guidelines for Evaluating the Writing of Multilingual Writers: The writing of multilingual students should be held to native speaker standards for content and addressing the assignment. However, because certain types of errors persist in multilingual writing even at an advanced level, some accommodation for multilingual features is appropriate.*

The Subcommittee for Writing and Reading chose to create a holistic rubric because we wanted to describe general qualities of a paper at different levels, and we wanted to keep the rubric open enough that a variety of kinds of papers from a variety of disciplines could meet the criteria.

If you have a set of specific criteria you’re looking for, a primary trait analysis (PTA) rubric might be more appropriate. A PTA rubric assesses individual traits at various levels of performance. The Assessment Committee of the Geology Department created a PTA rubric for scientific report writing that individual Geology instructors can revise for their own courses:

**Introduction (thesis) ..... [1-5] \_\_\_\_**

5. The point of the essay is clearly stated in the introduction.
3. The point of the essay is only indirectly stated in the introduction.
2. The point of the essay can only be inferred after reading much of the essay.
1. The point of the essay is unclear.

**Introduction (justification)..... [1-5] \_\_\_\_**

5. Introduction clearly states importance of subject and provokes interest of reader.
3. Introduction states importance of subject.
2. Introduction mentions importance of subject.
1. Lacks any mention of why the reader should be interested.



**Organization** ..... [1-5] —

- 5. Well organized and easy to follow.
- 3. Sufficiently well organized to follow the flow.
- 2. Not well organized.
- 1. Unorganized and difficult to follow.

**Clarity** ..... [1-5] —

- 5. Conveys author’s ideas clearly.
- 3. Communicates author’s ideas, but with difficulty.
- 1. Author’s ideas are unclear.

**Voice and Audience (scientific style)** . . . . [1-5] —

- 5. Uses clear, scientific prose. No “creative writing.”
- 3. Some “creative” writing and reference to personal feelings.
- 1. Frequent use of personal references, poor writing style.

**Research and References** ..... [1-5] —

- 5. Uses appropriate sources, properly used and cited.
- 3. Insufficient technical sources, citations insufficient or improperly used.
- 1. Very inappropriate sources, lack of citation bordering on plagiarism.

**Format** ..... [1-5] —

- 5. Meets all page and format requirements, uses appropriate headings.
- 3. Does not meet all requirements, needs more and better section headings.
- 1. Format requirements ignored, inappropriate formatting.

**Grammar, Spelling, Sentence Structure** . . [1-5] —

- 5. Free of spelling, grammar and structural problems.
- 3. Minor errors in grammar, spelling or structure.
- 1. Grammar and sentence structure problems make essay difficult to read.

**Overall Impression** ..... [1-10] —

**Total** ..... [10-50] —

**Comments:**

Professor Judi Kusnick of the Geology Department says of the rubric, “I use it more as a feedback device—the students get a holistic grade that is certainly related to the points on the rubric, but not a direct translation.” Professor Kusnick feels that using a rubric has a number of advantages for herself and her department: “The greatest values of the rubric to me are 1) I allow students to do a final revision, so it gives the students useful feedback; 2) it helps me standardize assessment across the entire class, helping me to compare papers; and 3) it gives us feedback for program assessment purposes. We can identify the aspects of writing students need more help with.”

Some rubrics have space for comments, like the rubric from the Geology Department, and some do not. Whether or not you decide to include comments with your rubric will depend on the paper load and the level of response you need to give students in order to be helpful and clear in your response and assessment. You may also choose to give more or less weight to different traits. In a research paper where critical thinking and integration of sources is most important, it makes sense to give traits like grammar or formatting fewer points.

## Strategies for Using Rubrics Successfully

**There are a number of strategies you can consider to help make your use of rubrics more effective:**

- Hand out the rubric with the assignment so students get a clear sense of your evaluation criteria.
- Apply the assignment rubric to models of prior student papers at different ranges as benchmarks for current students.
- Explain what key words like “analysis” or “organization” mean in your discipline and in that particular assignment.
- Consider involving students in the creation of the rubric to encourage discussions about the features of good writing in your discipline.
- Consider using a rubric during the writing process and not just with the final draft: for example, by having students respond to each other’s drafts using the rubric or by responding to student drafts yourself using the rubric.