

Essay Scoring Rubric

9-8: Overall—9 is the top score, but both are scores for exceptional papers that combine adherence to the topic with excellent organization, content, and insight; facile use to language; and mastery of mechanics.

9: Content – 9 essays demonstrate uncommon skill and sometimes put a cultural/historical frame around the subject. Descriptors that come to mind while reading include masterful, sophisticated, complex, specific, consistent, well supported. The 9 attempts challenging concepts, i.e., figurative language, argumentative techniques, organization, pacing, narrative strategies. Although it takes risks, it is always under control.

Organization – A 9 paper is well-organized; it follows a logical sequence (general to specific, most to least important point, chronological order). It follows the prompt well. The introduction references the question posed in the stem of the prompt. The thesis is clear, focused, narrow, and direct. The beginning paragraph is mature.

Style – Writing style of a 9 is mature and often sophisticated, with an exceptional command of vocabulary, sentence structure, and other aspects of good writing.

8: Content – The 8 paper is insightful, often tied to the human condition. It shows a tight, clear link of data (text references) to the author's intent; i.e., the warrant is clear and well-developed for each assertion.

Organization – The 8 exhibits a strong sense of control. The pattern of organization is well chosen and adhered to throughout the paper.

Style – The 8 essay is mature. Perhaps not as dazzling as the 9, the 8 nevertheless soars above the ordinary.

7-6: Overall – A 7 is a thinner version of the excellent paper, though still impressive, cogent, and convincing. The 6 is an adequate response to the prompt. Both are less well handled in terms of organization, insight, or vocabulary than the higher scoring papers.

7: Content – Descriptors that come to mind while reading include clear understanding with insightful sections, but less precise, less well-supported. The writer of a 7 is maturing, has potential, but hasn't quite mastered it all. It attempts more difficult tasks. The 7 conveys a sense of completion: the topic has been covered, but often one section is better than another for a student affected by time limits.

Organization – The 7 paper is well organized and logical. It has a clear or implied thesis in answer to the stem of the prompt. It has adequate support, but needs specific detail to improve. The topic sentences touch on the basics of the prompt but may be buried. Support is fair, but warrants (commentary) need development; the paper lacks an appropriate, thoughtful conclusion. 7 papers tend to have two or three points that are well made and in depth; one point is weak, too superficial, or contains a minor error.

Style – The 7 is more fluid and accomplished in style than the 6, but lacks the skill and maturity of higher scoring papers.

6: The 6 is an above average paper, but it may be deficient in one of the essentials mentioned above. It may be less mature in thought or less well handled in terms of organization, syntax, or mechanics. Descriptors might include less mature with some difficulties; it is certainly adequate but not remarkable. 6 papers tend to have problems with development of the essay idea, but the prompt is at least addressed.

5: Overall – The 5 paper is the thinner version of the 6. Readers prefer to separate essays into top half and bottom half. The 5 defies that process.

5: Content – Descriptors might include superficial, meager, irrelevant, inconsistent, and insufficient. The phrase "once over lightly" applies to the 5. The warrants (commentary) are inadequate or vague; the data, though present, are weak, too general, or fail to prove a point. The introduction is fair to weak; it fails to present a clear thesis, the thesis is weak or misdirected, or the introduction fails to address the key points of the prompt. The 5 displays occasional insight, but two or three points are weak or incorrect. The 5 chooses less difficult concepts as its focus, i.e., discussing diction rather than flaws in logic, or arguing the obvious point rather than the subtle, complex one.

Organization – May be linear (step by step); the organization seems laborious, awkward, or inappropriate. The conclusion is a summary of the paper or a repetition of the opening paragraph, sometimes word for word.

Style – More careless errors appear. There are some grammatical errors, but they do not distract or obscure meaning.

4-3: Overall – These papers exhibit increasingly serious problems with writing or understanding.

4: Content – The 4 is a barely average to below average paper that maintains the general idea of the writing prompt but is weak in maturity or development of thought. It may distort the topic or fail to deal adequately with the one important aspect of the prompt. The data and warrants (commentary) are inadequate or missing. The thesis is weak, unclear, or missing. In the body of the 4, two or three points are weak or incorrect. Paraphrasing through over-quoting (long quotations) may substitute for content.

Organization – The 4 shows some sense of organization, but it may be inappropriate or incomplete.

Style – Word choice is awkward or simplistic. There may be careless use of the 1st person or "you." The 4 essay also may employ inappropriate colloquial diction or slang.

3: Content – The 3 essay compounds the weaknesses of the 4. Some descriptors that come to mind include incomplete, oversimplified, meager, irrelevant, and insufficient. There is no connection to the prompt and/or the concrete detail is simply summary. A common problem here is the paper is too brief; ideas are presented but not developed. Lists of techniques without analysis are often found in the 3 essay. The 3 may also include a misreading or misunderstanding of the task.

2-1: Overall – These papers are an unsatisfactory response to the prompt.

2: This is the score assigned to a paper that makes an attempt to deal with the topic but demonstrates serious weaknesses in content and coherence and/or syntax and mechanics. It is an unacceptable grade. Descriptors include serious misreading, unacceptably brief, and/or poorly written.

1: This is a score given to any on-topic response that has very little redeeming quality. It may be brief or very long, but will be scarcely coherent, usually full of mechanical errors, or completely missing the focus of the prompt. Descriptors include vacuous, inexact, and mechanically unsound.

0: This score is given to a response with no more than a reference to the task.