



# Assessing Writing

## -11<sup>th</sup> Lecture-

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# Writing objectives/ criteria

**In assessing writing, one needs to be clear about the objective or criteria.**

1. Handwriting ability
  2. Correct spelling
  3. Grammatically correct sentences
  4. Paragraph construction
  5. Logical development of a main idea
- Testing writing is difficult to isolate from reading because one usually reads what s/he writes
  - Thus, writing and reading skills are integrated (as long as there are writers, there are readers!)

# Genres of writing

1. Academic writing, 2. Job-related writing, & 3. Personal writing

## 1. Academic writing

- Papers and reports
- Essays, compositions
- Academically focused journals
- Short-answer test responses
- Technical reports (e.g., lab reports)
- Theses, dissertations

## 2. Job-related writing

- Messages (e.g., phone messages)
- Letters/e-mails
- Memos (e.g., interoffice)
- Reports (e.g., job evaluations, project reports)
- Schedules, labels, signs
- Advertisements
- Manuals

## 3. Personal writing

- Text messages, tweets, e-mails, letters, greeting cards
- Messages, notes
- Calendar entries, to-do lists,
- Financial documents (e.g., checks, tax forms,)
- Forms, medical reports, immigration documents
- Diaries, personal journals
- Fiction (e.g., short stories, poetry)

# Types of writing

1. **Imitative W:** testing basic tasks of writing letters, words, punctuation, and brief sentences. Learners here master the mechanics of writing. Form is a primary concern while meaning is secondary.
2. **Intensive (*controlled*) W:** producing appropriate vocabulary within a context, collocations and idioms, and a grammatically correct sentence. Form and meaning are primary concerns. However, the focus of assessment here is form.
3. **Responsive W:** connecting sentences and creating a logically connected sequence of two or three paragraphs. Writing includes brief narratives and descriptions, short reports, lab reports, summaries, etc. Form-focused attention is mostly at the discourse level, with a strong emphasis on context and meaning.
- **4. Extensive W:** writing up to the length of an essay, a term paper, a major research project report, or even a thesis. It involves organizing and developing ideas logically and engaging in the *process of creating multiple drafts to achieve a final product*. form is limited to occasional editing

# Microskills of Writing

1. Produce graphemes and orthographic patterns of English
2. Produce writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose
3. Produce an acceptable core of words and use appropriate word order patterns
4. Use acceptable grammatical systems (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, and rules
5. Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms
6. Use cohesive devices in written discourse

# Macroskills of Writing

1. Use the rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse
2. **Appropriately accomplish the communicative functions of written texts according to form and purpose**
3. **Convey links and connections between events and communicate such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification**
4. **Distinguish between literal and implied meanings when writing**
5. **Correctly convey culturally specific references in the context of the written text**
6. **Develop and use a battery of writing strategies, such as accurately assessing the audience's interpretation, using prewriting devices, writing with fluency in the first drafts, using paraphrases and synonyms, soliciting peer and instructor feedback, and applying feedback when revising and editing**

# Designing Assessment Tasks of Writing

# FIRST: Imitative Writing

## 1. Tasks in Handwriting Letters, Words, and Punctuation

### Copying

Test-takers read:\*

- Copy the following words in the spaces given:

bit    Bet    bat    But    Oh?  
\_\_\_    \_\_\_    \_\_\_    \_\_\_    \_\_\_

bin    Din    gin    Hello, John  
\_\_\_    \_\_\_    \_\_\_    \_\_\_\_\_

### Listening Cloze Selection Tasks

Test-takers hear:

- Write the missing word in each blank. Below the story is a list of words to choose from.

Have you ever visited San  
Francisco? It is a very nice city.

Test-takers see:

Have \_\_\_ ever \_\_\_ San  
Francisco? It is a \_\_\_ nice city.  
visited, you, very

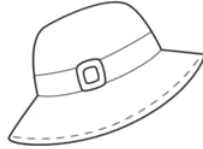


# FIRST: Imitative Writing

## 1. Tasks in Handwriting Letters, Words, and Punctuation

### Picture-cued tasks

Test-takers see pictures and have to write out the words they represent



### Form Completion Tasks

Test-takers write their names and addresses in simple forms (registration, application, etc.).

### Converting Numbers and Abbreviations to Words

Test-takers see numbers (hours, dates, etc) and/ or abbreviations (days, months, streets, etc) and have to write them out.

- **Test-takers hear:** Fill in the blanks with words: **Test-takers see:**

5:45 \_\_\_\_\_

Tues. \_\_\_\_\_

15 Nov. 2018 \_\_\_\_\_

726 S. Main St. \_\_\_\_\_

# FIRST: Imitative Writing

## 2. Spelling Tasks and Detecting Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondences

### Spelling Tests

1. The teacher dictates a simple list of words, one word at a time,
2. Uses each word in a sentence and repeats the sentence, and
3. Pauses for test-takers to write the word.

\* Scoring emphasizes correct spelling.

### Picture-Cued Tasks

Test-takers see pictures of familiar words whose spelling may be unpredictable.

- This format is an opportunity to present some challenging words and word pairs like;

boot, book

read, reed

bit, bite

# FIRST: Imitative Writing

## 2. Spelling Tasks and Detecting Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondences

### Multiple-Choice Techniques

- Test-takers read: Choose the word with the correct spelling to fit the sentence, then write the word in the space provided.
- (More challenging with homonyms)
- He washed his hands with \_\_\_\_\_ .  
A. soap    B. sope  
C. sop      D. sou

### Matching Phonetic Symbols

Test-takers are shown phonetic symbols and asked to write the correctly spelled word alphabetically.

Test-takers read:

Write the word using the regular alphabet.

1. tea/tʃ/er \_\_\_\_\_
2. /ð/ is \_\_\_\_\_
3. l/aɪ/ k \_\_\_\_\_

# SECOND: Intensive Writing

## Also called:

- Controlled writing
- Guided writing
- Grammar writing
- Form-focused writing

**Display writing:** a good examples of intensive writing, where **students produce language to display their competence in grammar, vocabulary, or sentence formation** and not necessarily to convey meaning for an authentic purpose.

## Dictation and Dicto-Comp Task [L,W]

Test-takers listen to stretches of discourse and in the process insert punctuation, dictation of a paragraph.

**Dicto-comp:** a form of controlled writing in which a paragraph is read at normal speed, usually two or three times, then the teacher asks students to rewrite the paragraph from the best of their recollection. (a variation is to give handouts with keywords from the paragraph as cues for the students)

# SECOND: Intensive Writing

## Grammatical Transformation Tasks

### Possible versions:

- Change the tenses in a paragraph.
- Change full forms of verbs to reduced forms (contractions).
- Change statements to yes/no or wh-questions.
- Change questions into statements.
- Combine two sentences into one using a relative pronoun.
- Change direct speech to indirect speech.
- Change from active to passive voice.

## Picture-Cued Tasks

### Picture-cued sentences writing

- Test-takers see pictures:



- Test-takers read:
  1. What the woman doing?
  2. What is the man doing?
  3. What is the boy doing?

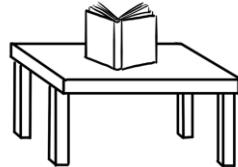
Test-takers write sentences in answer

# SECOND: Intensive Writing

## Picture description

Test-takers see pictures of things put in different places and they write sentences describing their position using preposition: on, over, under, next to, around, etc

- Test-takers write:  
The book is on the table.



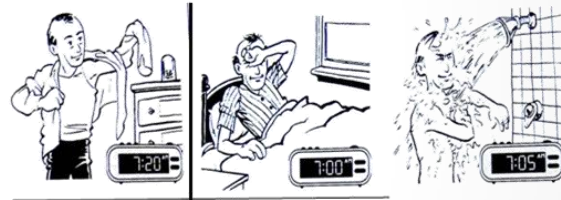
- Test-takers write:  
The cat is under the table.



## Picture sequence description

A sequence of three to six pictures depicting a story line.

- **Test-takers read:** Describe the man's morning routine in six sentences



- **Scoring scale**  
2 grammatically and lexically correct  
1 either grammar or vocabulary is incorrect  
0 incorrect grammar and vocabulary

# SECOND: Intensive Writing

## Vocabulary Assessment Tasks

The major techniques used to assess vocabulary are:

1. Defining a word
2. Using a word in a sentence

### Test-takers read:

- Write two sentences, A and B. In each sentence, use the two words given:  
**interpret, language**
- Write the correct ending for the word  
**Someone who interprets is an interpret\_\_**

## Ordering tasks

Ordering (or reordering) a scrambled set of words into a correct sentence.

### Test-takers read:

- Put the words below into a possible order to make a grammatical sentence:
  1. cold/ winter/ is/ weather/ the/ in/ the
  2. studying / what/you / are
- This task involves reading performance as much as writing (if not more).

# SECOND: Intensive Writing

## Short-Answer and Sentence-Completion Tasks

Test-takers :

1. write very simple and predictable to somewhat more elaborate responses.
    - Alicia: Where's Gina from?
    - Tony: \_\_\_\_\_Italy.
  2. Restate the following sentence in your own words, using the underlined word. You may need to change the meaning of the sentence a little.
    - I never miss a day of school (always)
  3. You are helping your roommate cook. Ask a question using 'how much' and 'how many' using nouns like sugar, pound, flour, onions, eggs, cups.
- **Scoring scale**
    - 2 grammatically and lexically correct
    - 1 either grammar or vocabulary is incorrect
    - 0 incorrect grammar and vocabulary



# Issues in Responsive & Extensive Writing Assessment

## 1. Responsive Writing

- Creative responses within a pedagogical or assessment framework.
- Test-takers respond to a prompt or assignment
- Test-takers have options in choosing vocabulary, grammar, and discourse but with some constraints and conditions.
- Writers are involved in real writing as opposed to display writing

- Genres of responsive writing:
  - short reports (with structured formats and conventions)
  - responses to the reading of an article or story
  - summaries of articles or stories
  - brief narratives or descriptions
  - interpretations of graphs, tables, and charts

# Issues in Responsive & Extensive Writing Assessment

## 1. Extensive Writing (free writing)

- longer texts such as full-length essays, term papers, project reports, and theses and dissertations.
- Writers have more freedom to choose: topics, length, style, & formatting constrains.
- Second language writers are expected to meet the standards of native language writers.

## Debated issues in assessing responsive & extensive writing

### 1. Authenticity:

- Face and content validity are considered (more freedom to write in a real-world context is needed).
- The teacher is a coach/facilitator
- Assessment is formative
- Positive washback is more important than practicality and reliability

# Issues in Responsive & Extensive Writing Assessment

## Debated issues in assessing responsive & extensive writing

### 2. Scoring:

- What is written (function/quality of the text) is more important than how it is written (the form of the text).
- Assessment here relies more on washback than on grades.
- Washback includes responding and editing.

## Debated issues in assessing responsive & extensive writing

### 3. Time:

- No time constrain
- Multiple draft might be written before the final form
- Revising and editing processes are implied

# DESIGNING ASSESSMENT TASKS: RESPONSIVE AND EXTENSIVE WRITING

# Third: Responsive & Extensive Writing

## Paraphrasing

**Paraphrasing** is to express something in one's own words, offering alternative wording to communicate the same meaning with a variety in expression..

**Task:** Test-takers paraphrase a sentence or paragraph, usually not more.

**Assessment criterion:**

- Conveying the meaning is primary, and evaluations of language is secondary.
- Assessment is informal & formative with a washback value

## Guided Question and Answer

A series of questions that serves as an outline of writing.

### Guided writing stimuli task

1. Where did this story take place? [setting]
2. Who were the people in the story?  
[characters]
3. What happened first? and then? and then?  
[sequence of events]
4. Why did \_\_\_\_ do \_\_\_\_ ? [reasons, causes]
5. What did \_\_\_\_\_ think  
about \_\_\_\_\_ ? [opinion]
6. What happened at the end? [climax]
7. What is the moral of this story? [evaluation]

# Third: Responsive & Extensive Writing

## Paragraph Construction [R, W]

Assessment of paragraph development takes on a number of different forms:

### 1. Topic Sentence Writing:

- specifying the writing of a topic sentence
- scoring points for its presence or absence
- scoring and/or commenting on its effectiveness in stating the topic

### 2. Topic Development Within a Paragraph

- clarity of expression of ideas
- logic of the sequence and connections
- cohesiveness or unity of the paragraph
- overall effectiveness or impact of the paragraph as a whole

## 3. Development of Main and Supporting Ideas Across Paragraphs

- addressing the topic, main idea or purpose
- organizing and developing supporting ideas
- using appropriate details
- fluency in the use of language
- demonstrating syntactic variety

### \*\* Strategic Options

#### a) Attending to Task

- The genre of the text defines the task (compare/contrast, problem/solution, pros/cons, and cause/effect)
- Assessment could be formative and informal with a final a holistic or analytic score

# Third: Responsive & Extensive Writing

## \*\* Strategic Options

### b) Attending to genre

Assessment criteria might be:

#### **Reports (lab reports, project summaries, article/book reports)**

- conform to a conventional format (in this case, field)
- convey the purpose, goal, or main idea
- organize details logically and sequentially
- state conclusions or findings
- use appropriate vocabulary and jargon for the specific case

#### **Summaries of readings/lectures/videos**

- effectively capture the main and supporting ideas of the original
- maintain objectivity in reporting
- use writer's own words for the most part
- use quotations effectively when appropriate
- omit irrelevant or marginal details
- conform to an expected length

#### **Responses to readings/lectures/videos**

- accurately reflect the message or meaning of the original
- appropriately select supporting ideas to respond to
- express the writer's own opinion
- defend or support that opinion effectively
- conform to an expected length

#### **Narration, description, persuasion/argument, and exposition**

- follow expected conventions for each type of writing
- convey purpose, goal, or main idea
- use effective writing strategies
- demonstrate syntactic variety and rhetorical fluency

#### **Interpreting statistical, graphic, or tabular data**

- provide an effective global, overall description of the data
- organize the details in clear, logical language
- accurately convey details
- appropriately articulate relationships among elements of the data
- convey specialized or complex data comprehensibly to a lay reader
- interpret beyond the data when appropriate

#### **Library research paper**

- state the purpose or goal of the research
- include appropriate citations and references in correct format
- accurately represent others' research findings
- inject the writer's own interpretation, when appropriate, and justify it
- include suggestions for further research
- sum up findings in a conclusion

# SCORING METHODS FOR RESPONSIVE AND EXTENSIVE WRITING

## Scoring approaches of responsive and extensive writing

1. **Holistic scoring:** a single score is assigned to an essay, which represents a reader's general overall assessment.
2. **Primary trait scoring:** the achievement of the primary purpose, or trait, of an essay is the only factor rated.
3. **Analytical scoring:** breaking a text into a number of subcategories, giving a separate rating for each.

## Holistic scoring

### Advantages of holistic scale:

- fast evaluation
- relatively high inter-rater reliability
- easily interpreted by laypersons
- scores emphasize the writer's strengths
- applicability to many different disciplines

### Disadvantages :

- One score masks differences in subskills
- No washback potential
- may not apply equally well to all genres of writing.
- Raters need to be extensively trained to use the scale accurately.



## Sample scale of a holistic scoring

### Holistic scoring guide for writing

Score	Description
<b>6 (Superior)</b>	Essay is superior writing but may have minor flaws.
<b>5 (Strong)</b>	Essay demonstrates clear competence in writing. It may have some errors, but they are not serious enough to distract or confuse the reader.
<b>4 (Adequate)</b>	Essay demonstrates adequate writing. It may have some errors that distract the reader, but they do not significantly obscure meaning.
<b>3 (Marginal)</b>	Essay demonstrates developing competence in writing but is flawed in some significant way(s).
<b>2 (Very Weak)</b>	Essay shows little competence in writing and has serious flaws in content, organization, and grammar.
<b>1 (Incompetent)</b>	Essay demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in writing skills.

From: Educational Testing Service (2012). Scoring guide. Retrieved from [https://www.calstate.edu/eap/documents/scoring\\_guide.html](https://www.calstate.edu/eap/documents/scoring_guide.html)

# SCORING METHODS FOR RESPONSIVE AND EXTENSIVE WRITING

## Primary-Trait scoring

Score is given based on the achievement of the text purpose (**persuade the reader to do something**)

- **Advantage:** allows both writer and evaluator to focus on purpose/function

### Primary-trait score assess:

- accuracy of the account of the original (summary)
- clarity of the steps of the procedure and the final result (lab report)
- description of the main features of the graph (graph description)
- expression of the writer's opinion (response to an article)

## Analytic scoring

- best for classroom evaluation
- six major elements of writing are scored
- more washback potential
- more appropriately called **“analytic assessment”** for its close association with classroom language instruction than with formal testing

**\*\* (Example scale in the next slide)**

# Standardized Tests of Responsive Writing

## Sample prompts in the Pearson Test of English (TOEFL®, MELAB, PTE, IE1LTS®)

1. Education is a critical element of the prosperity of any nation. The more educated the people in the country are, the more successful their nation becomes. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this statement. Support your point of view with reasons and/or examples from your own experiences or observations.

**Table 9.1** PTE Essay Scoring Guide

<b>Content</b>	<b>3</b>	Adequately deals with the prompt
	<b>2</b>	Deals with the prompt but does not deal with one minor aspect
	<b>1</b>	Deals with the prompt but omits a major aspect or more than one minor aspect
	<b>0</b>	Does not deal properly with the prompt
<b>Form</b>	<b>2</b>	Length is between 200 and 300 words
	<b>1</b>	Length is between 120 and 199 or between 301 and 380 words
	<b>0</b>	Length is less than 120 or more than 380 words. Essay is written in capital letters, contains no punctuation or only consists of bullet points or very short sentences
<b>Development, structure and coherence</b>	<b>2</b>	Shows good development and logical structure
	<b>1</b>	Is incidentally less well structured, and some elements or paragraphs are poorly linked
	<b>0</b>	Lacks coherence and mainly consists of lists or loose elements
<b>Grammar</b>	<b>2</b>	Shows consistent grammatical control of complex language. Errors are rare and difficult to spot
	<b>1</b>	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. No mistakes which would lead to misunderstandings
	<b>0</b>	Contains mainly simple structures and/or several basic mistakes

<b>General linguistic range</b>	<b>2</b>	Exhibits smooth mastery of a wide range of language to formulate thoughts precisely, give emphasis, differentiate and eliminate ambiguity. No sign that the test taker is restricted in what they want to communicate
	<b>1</b>	Sufficient range of language to provide clear descriptions, express viewpoints and develop arguments
	<b>0</b>	Contains mainly basic language and lacks precision
<b>Vocabulary range</b>	<b>2</b>	Good command of a broad lexical repertoire, idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms
	<b>1</b>	Shows a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to general academic topics. Lexical shortcomings lead to circumlocution or some imprecision
	<b>0</b>	Contains mainly basic vocabulary insufficient to deal with the topic at the required level
<b>Spelling</b>	<b>2</b>	Correct spelling
	<b>1</b>	One spelling error
	<b>0</b>	More than one spelling error

From: *Pearson Test of English*. Retrieved from <https://pearsonpte.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Score-Guide.pdf>

# SCORING METHODS FOR RESPONSIVE AND EXTENSIVE WRITING

## In classroom settings,

- **holistic scoring** provides little washback into the writer's further stages of learning.
- **Primary-trait scoring** offers some feedback but no washback for any aspects of the text that enhance the ultimate accomplishment of the purpose..
- **Analytic scoring** is preferable. This method evaluates up to six key writing elements, allowing students to identify and improve their weak areas while building on their strengths.

## BEYOND SCORING: RESPONDING TO EXTENSIVE WRITING

To give the student the maximum benefit of assessment, it is important to consider

- (a) **earlier stages** (from freewriting to the first draft or two) and
- (b) **later stages** (revising and finalizing) of producing a written text.

## Assessment of initial stages in composing

1. Focus on meaning, main idea, and organization.
2. Comment on the introductory paragraph.
3. Make general comments about the clarity of the main idea and organization.
4. ignore minor grammatical and lexical errors.
5. Indicate what seem to be major (global) errors.
6. Do not rewrite questionable, ungrammatical, or awkward sentences.
7. Comment on features that seem to be irrelevant to the topic.

## Assessment of later stages in composing

1. Comment clarity and strength of all main ideas and supporting ideas and on argument and logic.
2. Call attention to minor ("local") grammatical and mechanical (spelling, punctuation) errors.
3. Comment on any further word choices and expressions that are not as clear.
4. Point out any problems with cohesive devices within and across paragraphs.
5. If appropriate, comment on documentation, citation of sources, evidence, and other support.
6. Comment on the adequacy and strength of the conclusion

# References

- **Brown, H. D. & Abeywickrama, P. (2012). Language Assessment: Principles & Classroom Practices. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Pearson Education, USA.**
- **McNamara, Tim. (2000). Language Testing. 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. Oxford University Press.**