

MAKING THE GRADE

(And Other Thoughts on the Teaching of Writing)

For most of my teaching career, I avoided giving writing assignments to my elementary English classes. You'd expect as much from a non-writer, but I love to write. I even do free-lance work for a number of different magazines.

So why was I, a professional writer, assigning "underline-the-noun-once-and-the-verb-twice" types of exercises to my fourth and fifth graders when I understood the importance of children expressing themselves on paper?

To be honest, I was afraid to give writing assignments. First of all, I didn't know how to teach someone else to write. And second, if students did manage to write something, I had no idea how to grade their work.

So for 20 years, I settled for lots of easy-to-grade workbook pages. My students learned little that improved their skill as writers, but at least I felt confident that their grades were accurate and justifiable. I did a little better in my ninth- and 10th-grade classes. Assigning the weekly three-paragraph essay was easy, and grading was pretty clear-cut. Did they have an attention-getting introduction? Three explanations, reasons, or examples? A good conclusion? Not too complicated.

But teaching writing to the younger students was definitely out of my comfort zone. A three-hour class on teaching a writers workshop forced me to face this area of weakness. But it took me another year—and two refresher courses—to find the courage to replace my fourth- and fifth-grade English class with a writers workshop.

Although I felt a little more confident, I still didn't know how to evaluate what my students turned in. Participating in a national writing project in 1996 gave me the opportunity to study grad-

ing and assessment.

I'd like to share with you some of the things I've learned. But first, I have to warn you that when it comes to grading writing, there is good news and bad news. First the bad news:

There is no one "right" way to grade written work.

This article will not solve your grading dilemmas by offering you three easy steps for grading writing. Unfortunately, evaluating a poem or short story is more complicated than grading a math paper or a spelling test.

Educational Testing Services asked a group of 53 professionals with various areas of expertise to score 300 different writing samples. The scorers were to rate the papers on a scale of one to nine, with nine being the highest grade. When all scores were compiled, the examiners found a wide discrepancy. Each writing sample had received at least **five different grades**. And one-third of them had received **every grade from one to nine**.

Options for Grading

Maybe someday, grades won't be a

necessity, but for now, most teachers are expected to grade students on the work they turn in. So how should we evaluate student writing?

Most of us settle on one or two grading systems and use them over and over. Here are some of the more common options:

1. No grade
2. Check mark for attempting the assignment
3. 100 percent for completing the assignment
4. Teacher's best guess
5. Cluster holistic grading
7. Anchor holistic grading
8. Holistic rubric grading
9. Analytic rubric scoring

No grade, check mark, and 100 percent. These methods are useful for grading rough drafts or other assignments that are still in progress.

Teacher's best guess. Sometimes, the teacher needs to do a quick evaluation, so he or she reads over a paper and assigns it a grade based on a general impression of its quality. As one high school English teacher told me, "It's a 'B' because it's midnight and I've got 42 more papers to grade." Although this method isn't as precise as some others, it's a viable option.

Cluster holistic grading. As in the previous method, the teacher reads through all the papers quickly. But this time, he or she puts the better papers on the left, the poorer papers on the right. Then the teacher rereads the stack on the left and subdivides it into two piles, indicating a grade of "A" or "B." The right stack is reread and divided into "C" and "D" piles. Then each stack is read again to see if the papers in each are of comparable quality, and changes are made if necessary.

Anchor holistic grading. Prior to grading, the teacher obtains samples of

BY RENEE COFFEE

Don't put off the teaching of writing until you have the grading quandary all figured out.

Picture
Removed

what he or she thinks an “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D” paper should look like. (It may even be helpful to share these samples with the students so they know what to aim for.) The assignments are then compared to these “anchors” and graded accordingly. The National Council of Teachers of English has just come out with a series of books with samples for different types of writing at various grade levels. The series is called the *Standard Exemplar Series*. (See the resources section at the end of the article for more information.)

Holistic rubric grading. Instead of comparing papers to writing samples, the teacher compares them to a rubric—a written grading guide. Holistic rubrics can be simple or complex, as shown by the examples in Figures 1 and 2. The teacher decides whether the paper as a whole is most like the “A,” “B,” “C,” or “D” description.

Analytical Rubric Scoring. To help students focus on the strengths and weaknesses of their writing, an analytical rubric is helpful. Instead of viewing a paper holistically (as a whole), the teacher chooses the most important aspects of the assignment and evaluates

each separately.

Key Traits of Writing

In their book *Creating Writers*, Vicki Spandel and Richard Stiggins identify the six key traits of most writing:*

1. **Ideas.** Clarity, detail, original thinking, textual interest.
2. **Organization.** Internal structure, logical sequencing, interesting lead, and a sense of conclusion.
3. **Voice.** Liveliness, personality, passion, energy, awareness of audience, involvement in the topic, and a capacity to elicit a strong response from the reader.
4. **Word choice.** Accuracy, precision, phrasing, a love of words, using

words the reader will understand.

5. **Sentence fluency.** Rhythm, grace, smooth sentence structure, readability, variety, and logical sentence construction.

6. **Conventions.** Overall correctness in the areas of capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and indentation.

Using these traits, Spandel and Stiggins constructed a rubric (scoring guide) that has helped me not only in my grading, but also in my teaching of writing. It can be used in grading most types of writing assignments for grades three to 12. (See Figure 3 on pages 42 to 44.)

Writing is usually not graded at the early elementary level, but certain traits can be identified that indicate writing strength. Spandel and Stiggins' book in-

Guidelines for Assessing Student Writing

1. Before you give an assignment, decide which traits or skills you will evaluate.
2. Grade only the skills and traits you have taught.
3. When you give the assignment, let the students know the areas on which they will be graded.
4. In evaluating papers, comment about what the writer has done well. Avoid pointing out mistakes on individual papers. Teach mistake correction to the class as a whole.
5. Try various methods of grading. Different assignments lend themselves to different types of assessment.
6. Occasionally, let the students help you set up a writing criteria.
7. Give students opportunities to evaluate their own work.

Figure 1 A Simple Holistic Rubric

- A Outstanding
- B Commendable
- C Acceptable
- D Weak

Rubrics can be used to assign grades or point values. Samples of both are used in this article.

cludes a separate set of guidelines for evaluating the work of younger students. (See Figure 4.)

How to Grade Writing

I'm sure that some of you still feel less than confident about grading. Let's discuss some of the questions that you are likely to have:

What's the best way to grade student writing? Remember that I said there was both good and bad news about grading writing. The bad news was—There is no one "right" way to grade written work. However, this is also the *good news!*

As a teacher, you have many options and can choose what works best for you. But keep in mind the importance of providing positive feedback. If you're going to write something on students' papers other than a grade, highlight what they have done well. Look for at least one thing about which you can compliment them—even if it's just a good title, a descriptive sentence, a word with impact, or a neat paper. Anything.

After giving them a grade, don't I need to get out my red pen and show them where they made their mistakes? I don't, for three reasons. First, most students just check to see what grade they got on a paper. They rarely bother to read the teacher's negative comments. (Do you enjoy having others point out your flaws?) Second, it takes a lot of time to insert all those comments. I'd rather spend my time teaching students how to avoid making the mistakes. Third, when my comments are positive, students are eager to read them and more likely to keep writing. My primary goal is not for them to become skilled at using apostrophes, but to learn to express themselves clearly. And this skill requires a lot of practice.

However, you will need to decide what works for you. Editing a student's paper may be important for your students. If so, then go ahead and edit. Teaching methods are like dentures. One set does not fit all.

But how do I deal with misspellings, sentence fragments, punctuation problems, and run-on sentences? Do I just ignore them? As I grade each paper, I

look for the most serious mistakes. I put these on an overhead, and ask the class how to fix them. Students are much more attentive to this type of proofreading assignment since it comes from real writing—namely, theirs. Of course, I try to camouflage any sentences whose authors could be easily identified. But my students don't seem intimidated by this exercise. In fact, most of them like to claim authorship when we discuss "their" sentence.

In the area of spelling, I sometimes ask students to add a problem word to their personal spelling dictionaries. I may also add a problem word to our "All or Nothing" daily spelling test.

At the beginning of the school year, I give the whole class a spelling test with the 500 most frequently used words in children's writing. Words missed by

three or more students go on our "All or Nothing" spelling list. During the school year, I add words that students routinely miss in their writing assignments.

Each day, I write three of the words from this list on the chalkboard. We analyze the word, identify what makes it difficult to spell, and decide how to remember the correct spelling. The following morning, I erase the words and throw a die. If I get a one or a four, they spell the first word, a two or a five, the second, a three or a six, the last one. Those who correctly spell the word get 100. Those who miss it get a zero. At the end of the marking period, these grades are averaged in with their regular spelling grades.

Don't you show students which words are misspelled or where capital

Figure 2

A Detailed Holistic Rubric for a Persuasive Essay

Grade Characteristics

- | | |
|----------|---|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper has personality. Paper keeps our attention. Paper begins with a topic sentence. Writer stays on the topic. Paper gives at least four supportive pieces of information. Paper ends gracefully. There may be one or two minor spelling errors. There may be one or two minor capitalization/punctuation mistakes. |
| B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper is interesting, but doesn't sparkle as much as an "A" paper. Topic sentence is not as clear as in an "A" paper. Paper does not stray much from the topic. Paper gives three supportive pieces of information. Conclusion may be weak. There are three or four minor/one or two major spelling errors. There are three or four minor/one or two major capitalization/punctuation mistakes. |
| C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper covers the topic, but in a bland sort of way. Topic sentence or conclusion may be missing. There is an obvious straying from the topic. Paper gives only two pieces of supportive information. There are numerous major and minor spelling errors. There are numerous capitalization/punctuation mistakes. |
| D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper doesn't make much sense. The topic sentence and conclusion are missing. Spelling mistakes interfere with the reading of the paper. Correct capitalization/punctuation are rarely used. |

letters are needed? I've found that if students know you will edit their papers, they'll be glad to let you do the work. Why should they waste their time making corrections if you're going to fix everything for them? During the editing process, I may point out a few spelling or punctuation mistakes, but I expect students to do the majority of the clean-up work on their own or with the help of a classmate. (I do make exceptions when student work is going to be "published." I edit their final copy before it is typed so the mistakes don't distract from what they've written. But the students also know that this could affect their grade, depending upon the number and type of corrections I have to make.)

A Time of Adjustment

Keep in mind that when you introduce writing to your classes, you won't be alone in feeling apprehensive. Students often dread the prospect of writing down their thoughts.

When Ben found out we were setting aside our English workbooks and replacing them with a blank sheet of paper, he protested:

"Pleeeeee, Mrs. Coffee. Let me do the workbook."

"OK, Ben," I said. "If you'd like to do the workbook *and* write, you'll be busy, but that's fine with me."

Ben rolled his eyes and replied, "Mrs. Coffee, I don't want to do *both*. I just want the workbook—no writing. I hate writing."

But I held my ground. At first, it was a real chore, but after a few months, Ben learned to write with confidence. He finally gave up his dream of easy workbook pages in exchange for the thrill of sharing his writing with his classmates. Through encouragement and practice, he uncovered a talent that he was sure he lacked. This talent is present in each of our children—the ability to express themselves with the written word.

I have a box in which I store keepsakes from my students and their parents. It contains a number of letters from former students now out in the workplace. These letters usually contain one common message—"Thanks for

teaching me how to write. It's really helped me in college and on the job."

My former students recall that they didn't like doing "comps" (their name for the three-paragraph essays) but that those writing assignments proved to be one of the most useful skills they learned in high school.

When I think of the benefits they have gained from these routine essays, I am inspired to continue refining my skills by giving my present students more writing opportunities. This year, I plan to introduce the writers workshop to my ninth and 10th graders.

Don't put off the teaching of writing until you have the grading quandary all figured out. Give it a try and begin to build your own grading system. You'll probably continue to refine it for the rest of your teaching career. Just as we need time, experience, success, and even *failure* to develop our characters, we also need these things to polish our teaching skills. And our students need

them to become competent writers.

Our goal as teachers is not to reach professional perfection, but to experience continual growth and improvement. We need to set aside our reservations about the teaching of writing, and give our students more opportunities to express themselves on paper. As they learn and improve, we'll be alongside them, sharpening our own skills as teachers and evaluators. And we'll grow—together. ☞

* Vicki Spandel and Richard J. Stiggins, *Creating Writers: Linking Writing Assessment and Instruction* (New York: Longman Publishers, 1997), pp. 49, 50.

With her husband, Renee Coffee team teaches the fourth and fifth, and ninth and 10th grades at Gobles Junior Academy in Gobles, Michigan. She presents writers workshops and in 1996 was a fellow in a national writing project. Mrs. Coffee authored the 1993 junior devotional book.

Picture
Removed

Figure 3

Six-Trait Analytical Scoring Guide

IDEAS

Ideas are the heart of the message, the main thesis, impression, or story line of the piece, together with the documented support, elaboration, anecdotes, images, or carefully selected details that build understanding or hold a reader's attention.

5—The paper is clear, focused, purposeful, and enhanced by significant detail that captures a reader's interest.

The paper creates a vivid impression, makes a clear point, or tells a whole story, without ever bogging the reader down in trivia.

Thoughts are clearly expressed and indirectly relevant to a key issue, theme, or story line.

The writer selectively and purposefully uses knowledge, experience, examples and/or anecdotes to make the topic both understandable and interesting.

Quality details consistently inform, surprise, or delight the reader—or just expand his or her thinking.

3—The writer has made a solid beginning in defining a key issue, making a point, creating an impression, or sketching out a story line. More focus and detail will breathe life into the writing.

It is easy to see where the writer is headed, even if some telling details are needed to complete the picture.

The reader can grasp the big picture but yearns for more specific elaboration.

General observations still outweigh specifics.

There may be too much information; it would help if the writer would be more selective.

As a whole, the piece hangs together and makes a clear general statement or tells a recountable story.

1—The writing is sketchy or loosely focused. The reader must make inferences in order to grasp the point or piece together the story. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:

The writer still needs to clarify the topic.
The reader often feels information is lim-

ited, unclear, or simply a loose collection of facts or details that, as yet, do not add up to a coherent whole.

It may be hard to identify the main theme or story line.

Everything seems as important as everything else.

ORGANIZATION

Organization is the internal structure of the piece. It is both skeleton and glue. Strong organization begins with a purposeful, engaging lead and wraps up with a thought-provoking close. In between, the writer takes care to link each detail or new development to a larger picture, building to a turning point or key revelation and always including strong transitions that form a kind of safety net for the reader, who never feels lost.

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

The organization serves to showcase or enhance the central theme or story line.

Details seem to fit right where they are placed, though the order is often enlivened by a surprise or two.

An inviting lead draws in the reader; a satisfying conclusion ties up loose ends and leaves the reader with something to think about.

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.

The entire piece seems to have a strong sense of direction and balance. Main ideas or high points stand out clearly.

3—The organizational structure guides the reader through the text without undue confusion.

Sequencing seems reasonably appropriate, given the main theme or story line.

Placement of details seems workable, though not always deft.

Predictable moments or developments outweigh surprises or discoveries.

The introduction and conclusion are rec-

ognizable and functional.

Transitions are usually present but sometimes reinforce obvious connections.

Structure is sometimes so dominant it is hard for the reader to focus on the ideas or voice.

The piece has a developing sense of balance; the writer is zeroing in on what is most important but does not yet build to that point with a strong sense of momentum.

1—Ideas, details, or events seem loosely strung together. The reader struggles to discover a clear direction or purpose. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:

There is as yet no identifiable structure to move 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, often leaving the reader with a disquieting sense of being adrift.

The writing does not build to a high point or turning point.

VOICE

Voice is the presence of the writer on the page. When the writer's passion for the topic and concern for the audience are strong, the text virtually dances with life and energy, and the reader feels a strong connection to both writing and writer.

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.

Clearly, the writing belongs to this writer and no other.

The writer's sense of connection to the reader is evident.

Narrative text is open, honest, and revealing.

Expository or persuasive text is provocative, lively, and designed to prompt thinking and to hold a reader's attention.

3—The writer seems sincere and

Based on Vicki Spandel and Richard J. Stiggins, *Creating Writers: Linking Writing Assessment and Instruction* (New York: Longman Publishers, 1997), pp. 51-57.

willing to communicate with the reader on a functional, if somewhat distant level.

The writer has not quite found his or her voice but is experimenting—and the result is pleasant or intriguing, if not unique.

Moments here and there amuse, surprise, or move the reader.

The writer often seems reluctant to “let go” and thus holds individuality, passion, and spontaneity in check. The writer is “there”—then gone.

Though clearly aware of an audience, the writer only occasionally speaks right to that audience or invites the audience “in.”

The writer often seems right on the verge of sharing something truly interesting—but then backs away as if thinking better of it.

1—The writer seems somehow distanced from topic, audience, or both; as a result, the text may lack life, spirit, or energy. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:

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 involve or move the reader.

The writer does not yet seem sufficiently at home with the topic to personalize it for the reader.

WORD CHOICE

Word choice is precision in the use of words—wordsmithery. It is the love of language, a passion for words, combined with a skill in choosing words that create just the mood, impression, or word picture the writer wants to instill in the heart and mind of the reader.

5—Precise, vivid, natural language paints a strong, clear, and complete picture in the reader’s 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 power to the writing.

Striking words or phrases linger in the writer’s memory, often prompting connections, memories, 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.

Energetic verbs or memorable phrases occasionally strike a spark, leaving the reader hungry for more.

Familiar words and phrases give the text an “old comfortable couch” kind of feel.

Attempts at colorful language are full of promise, even when they lack restraint or control.

1—The writer struggles with a limited vocabulary, searching for words or phrases to convey the intended meaning. The writing reflects 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.

Redundancy inhibits clarity and creativity. Cliches and tired phrases impair precision.

Words are used incorrectly (“The bus impelled into the hotel.”).

The reader has trouble zeroing in on the writer’s intended message.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

Sentence fluency is finely crafted construction combined with a sense of rhythm and grace. It is achieved through logic, creative phrasing, parallel construction, alliteration, absence of redundancy, variety in sentence length and structure, and a true effort to create language that literally cries out to be spoken aloud.

5—An easy flow and rhythm combined with sentence sense and clarity 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 often show how a sentence relates to and builds on the one before it.

The writing has cadence, as if the writer hears the beat in his or her head.

Sentences vary in both structure and length, making the reading pleasant and natural, never monotonous.

Fragments, if used, add to the style.

3—The text hums along with a steady beat.

Sentences are grammatical and fairly easy to read aloud, given a little rehearsal.

Some variation in length and structure

enhances fluency.

Graceful, natural phrasing intermingles with more mechanical structure.

1—A fair interpretive oral reading of this text takes practice. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:

Irregular or unusual word patterns make it hard to tell where one sentence ends and the next begins.

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 grow distracting or put the reader to sleep.

Transitional phrases are either missing or so overdone they become distracting.

The reader must often pause and reread to get the meaning.

CONVENTIONS

Many things a copy editor would attend to falls under the heading of conventions. This includes punctuation, spelling, grammar and usage, capitalization, and paragraphs—the spit-and-polish phase of preparing a document for publication. It does not (in this scoring guide) include layout, formatting, or handwriting.

5—The writer has excellent control over a wide range of standard writing conventions and uses them with accuracy and (when appropriate) creativity and style 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 (grades six and up) create text of sufficient length and complexity to demonstrate control of a range of conventions appropriate for their 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 and uses them with fair consistency to create text that is adequately readable.

There are enough errors to distract an attentive reader somewhat; however, errors do not seriously impair readability or obscure meaning.

It is easy enough for an experienced reader to get through the text without stumbling, but the writing clearly needs polishing.

Moderate editing would be required to get the text ready for publication.

The paper reads much like a rough draft.

I—The writer demonstrates limited control even over widely used writing conventions. The text reflects at least one of the following problems:

Errors are sufficiently frequent and/or serious as 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.

Extensive editing would be required to

prepare the text for publication.

This rubric is set up on a point system, but it could also be rated with letter grades. The ratings of 5, 3, and 1 indicate strong, developing, and weak performance, respectively. Ratings of 4 and 2 would be given to those papers which fell between the given numbers.

But don't feel that you have to evaluate all six areas each time you grade papers. You can choose areas on which to focus.

Resources:

Vicki Spandel and Richard J. Stiggins, *Creating Writers: Linking Writing Assessment and Instruction, Second Editions*. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman Publishers, 1997. (This is the best book I've found on grading and the teaching of writing. Every English teacher should have this book.)

Suzanne Bratcher, *Evaluating Children's Writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. (Another excellent book, geared more to the elementary level, but helpful for all writing teachers.)

Miles Myers and Elizabeth Spalding, eds., *Standards Exemplar Series: Assessing Student Performance*. National Council of Teachers of English, 111 W.

Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096. (This series provides samples of what typical A, C, and F papers look like, depending on the grade level and the type of assignment given.)

Grades K-5 No. 46988-4034 \$15.95
 Grades 6-8 No. 47003-4034 \$15.95
 Grades 9-12 No. 47011-3050 \$15.95

Figure 4

What to Look for in Early Writing and Illustrating

IDEAS

- Little close-up details: veins in leaves, wings and legs on insects, expressive faces.
- Signs of movement (e.g., a person waving)
- Multiple pictures that tell a more complex story
- Understanding of another writer's message

ORGANIZATION

- Balance on the page
- Coordination of text with illustrations
- Layout that works and that is pleasing to the eye
- More than one detail or events put in order (e.g., through multiple pictures)
- Ability to predict events in a story
- Ability to group "like" things

VOICE

- Originality and expressiveness—in color, shape, style, choice of images, choice of labels, choice of topics
- Expressiveness and emotion—what do you see on characters' faces?
- An image, a moment, an idea that makes you feel something
- Love of life, love of writing/drawing

- Enthusiasm, exuberance
- Playfulness
- Ownership (you can tell it belongs to this child)
- Pleasure in hearing strong voice in the writing of others

WORD CHOICE

- Words that show actions, energy, or movement
- Words that describe
- Words that convey feelings
- A passion, a love, for new, unusual, or fun-to-say words
- Words that stretch beyond the child's spelling capabilities
- Words that help you see, feel, understand
- Expressed curiosity about new words

SENTENCE FLUENCY

- Word grouping that imitates sentence patterns
- Sentence sense (an ear for what a sentence is)
- A knack for putting words together in pleasing patterns
- A willingness to try new sentence forms—breaking out of patterns into variety. (Compare "I like my dog. I

like my cat. I like school," with "I like cats and dogs. But I do love my cat the most. Do you like school? Me too.")

CONVENTIONS

- Left-to-right orientation
- Top-to-bottom orientation
- Spaces between words or lines
- Association of letters with sounds
- Letters that appear upright on the page
- Letters that face the right direction for readability
- Readable spelling
- Use of punctuation (whether placed correctly or not)
- Distinction between capitals and lower case (whether used correctly or not)
- Use of end punctuation
- Use of a title
- Awareness of margins
- Use of "I"
- Ability to spell own name
- Interest in environmental print

Guidelines are given for both writing and drawing since much of the early "writing" includes pictures.

Based on Spandel and Stiggins, *Creating Writers: Linking Writing Assessment and Instruction*, pp. 51-57.