

## How Do Rubrics Work?

*The following pages offer explanations and examples of grading mechanisms that teachers sometimes use to assess students' written products. Some teachers use rubrics, while others choose not to, preferring to assess written products more holistically. There is no standardized, mandated grading rubric for English classes at Jamestown High School.*

**Q:** What is a rubric?

**A:** A rubric is a grading device that separates different components of writing (e.g., punctuation, usage of quotations, format) from one another and allows teachers to assess all of those components individually along a numerical continuum (e.g., 4 = outstanding, 3 = good, 2 = acceptable, 1 = unacceptable).

**Q:** Why do some teachers use rubrics?

**A:** The purpose of a rubric is to make the process of grading of students' written products more objective, rather than subjective. No rubric is definitive in this way, and the grading of essays *without* the aid of a rubric more closely resembles the holistic assessment practices that occur in many colleges and graduate schools. Nevertheless, some teachers prefer the objectivity of rubrics to the subjectivity of holistic scoring.

**Q:** Why is there no standardized, mandated rubric in the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools?

**A:** As stated above, no rubric is definitive. Moreover, no rubric that attempts to be definitive in its scope is likewise manageable for teachers assessing piles of students' essays. The Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Education uses an entirely different rubric to grade SOL essays than the College Board uses to assess essays on the New SAT, which likewise differs from the rubric that the College Board uses to evaluate essays written for either of the two AP English exams. Simply stated, one size of rubric does not fit all.

**Q:** What does a rubric look like?

**A:** The next page offers a simplistic grading rubric, which separates identifiable portions of a student's essay into seven quantifiable components, including Overall Impression, which remains a holistic measure of an essay's success.

	<b>Expert (4)</b>	<b>Proficient (3)</b>
<b><i>Overall Impression</i></b>	An exceptional composition, indicating obvious, consistent skill	A successful composition, indicating sufficient, fairly consistent skill
<b><i>Thesis/Point of View</i></b>	Sharply discerning and/or thesis/lucid point of view	Perceptive and consistent thesis/point of view
<b><i>Support for Position/Argument</i></b>	Strong examples, reasons, and/or evidence	Suitable examples, reasons, and/or evidence
<b><i>Organization, Focus, and Progression of Ideas</i></b>	Excellent organization and focus, aided throughout by a skillful progression of ideas	Solid organization and focus in most cases, helped by an articulate, appropriate progression of ideas
<b><i>Vocabulary Usage</i></b>	An apparently practiced and exact usage of vocabulary	An appropriately varied usage of vocabulary
<b><i>Sentence Structure</i></b>	Significant and expressive range of sentence structures	Decent range of sentence structures
<b><i>Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics</i></b>	Entirely or almost entirely free of all major and minor errors	Some errors exist, but not enough to interfere with the writer's clear expression
	<b>Developing (2)</b>	<b>Novice (1)</b>
<b><i>Overall Impression</i></b>	An adequate composition, indicating emergent, yet still inconsistent, skill	An inadequate composition, indicating slight or little skill
<b><i>Thesis/Point of View</i></b>	Apparent, though inconsistent, thesis/point of view	Unclear or otherwise absent thesis/point of view
<b><i>Support for Position/Argument</i></b>	Sufficient, though not consistently convincing, examples, reasons, and/or evidence	Poorly chosen, few, or no examples, reasons, and/or evidence
<b><i>Organization, Focus, and Progression of Ideas</i></b>	Coherent, though somewhat limited, organization and focus, combined with an acceptable, but somewhat haphazard, progression of ideas	Generally disorganized and poorly focused or unfocused, compounded with a disorderly or unintelligible progression of ideas
<b><i>Vocabulary Usage</i></b>	A pedestrian and inconsistent usage of vocabulary	An inadequate and often incorrect usage of vocabulary
<b><i>Sentence Structure</i></b>	Rather limited range of sentence structures	Widespread difficulties and no variety in sentence structures
<b><i>Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics</i></b>	Numerous errors exist, few of which are major	Widespread, serious errors interfere with the writer's expression

**Q:** Must a rubric be written into a matrix or chart, as this one is?

**A:** No. What makes a rubric a rubric is its separation of qualities into gradients of success, *not* how it appears in doing so. Here, for example, is another sample rubric, organized into prose paragraphs rather than a table.

–     A     +                     (90-100 points)

Essays earning grades of “A” are outstanding in their clear and consistent mastery of analytical skills, demonstrating their writers’ exceptional control of effective writing techniques, sustaining extremely insightful and in-depth analysis of complex ideas, and developing and supporting their main points with logically compelling scrutiny and highly persuasive examples. Such essays are clear, interesting, and correct, including strong and highly effective introductory and conclusive paragraphs, as well as appropriate transitions both within paragraphs and across the entire piece. They are sharply focused and well organized, demonstrating coherent unity and a smooth analytical progression, as well as referring frequently and carefully to the text, both directly and indirectly. These essays display excellent use of language, highlighted by effective sentence variety and precisely apt vocabulary; they demonstrate their authors’ superior facility with sentence structure, grammar, usage, and mechanics, including few, if any, errors.

–     B     +                     (80-90 points)

Essays earning grades of “B” are effective in their clear and reasonably consistent mastery of analytical skills, demonstrating their writers’ considerable control of effective writing techniques, sustaining generally insightful analysis of complex ideas, and developing and supporting their main points with logically sound scrutiny and well-chosen, appropriate examples. Such essays are clear, interesting, and mostly correct, including skillful and effective introductory and conclusive paragraphs, as well as transitions that are generally appropriate and relatively widespread throughout the piece. They are clearly focused and well organized, demonstrating good overall coherence and an apparent analytical progression, as well as referring frequently to the text, both directly and indirectly. These essays display fluent use of language, highlighted by generally effective sentence variety and appropriate vocabulary; they demonstrate their authors’ good control of sentence structure, grammar, usage, and mechanics, including occasional, though not overly numerous, errors.

–     C     +                     (70-80 points)

Essays earning grades of “C” are competent in their fairly clear and developing mastery of analytical skills, demonstrating their writers’ adequate control of effective writing techniques, sustaining relevant analysis of important ideas, and supporting their main points with acceptable inquiry and sufficient examples. Such essays are reasonably clear and mostly correct, including satisfactory introductory and conclusive paragraphs, as well as occasional usages of appropriate transitions. They are passably focused and organized, demonstrating reasonable coherence and a sufficient analytical progression, as well as referring commonly to the text, either directly or indirectly. These essays display adequate use of language to convey meaning, including some sentence variety and generally appropriate vocabulary; they demonstrate their authors’ satisfactory control of sentence structure, grammar, usage, and mechanics, including frequent errors, very few of which are simplistic in nature.

– D + (60-70 points)

Essays earning grades of “D” are inadequate, revealing limited mastery of analytical skills, demonstrating their writers’ inconsistent control of effective writing techniques, sustaining weak analysis of important ideas, and addressing relatively unsupported main points with brittle inquiry and insufficient examples. Such essays are superficial, though mostly correct, and include cursory introductory and conclusive paragraphs, as well as few, if any, appropriate transitions. They are disjointedly focused and organized, demonstrating the writer’s overall inability to compose coherently and logically, as well as referring vaguely and indirectly to the text. These essays display weak use of language to convey meaning, including little sentence variety and commonly awkward vocabulary; they demonstrate their authors’ unsatisfactory control of sentence structure, grammar, usage, and mechanics, including widespread errors, some of which are simplistic in nature.

– F + (below 60 points)

Essays earning grades of “F” are seriously flawed or limited, revealing very little mastery of analytical skills, demonstrating their writers’ lack of control of effective writing techniques, sustaining seriously flawed analysis of important ideas, and addressing main points without support or examples. Such essays are simple and in many ways incorrect, including little or no introductory and conclusive paragraphs, as well as very few appropriate transitions. They are disorganized and/or unfocused, demonstrating the writer’s fundamental inability to compose coherently and logically, as well as exhibiting an almost total neglect of reference to the text. These essays display deficient use of language to convey meaning, including almost no sentence variety and highly awkward vocabulary in many places; they demonstrate their authors’ inadequate control of sentence structure, grammar, usage, and mechanics, including pervasive errors, many of which are simplistic in nature.