

Beyond 1's and 2's: Improving TAKS Writing Scores

Language Arts Program
Region 10 ESC



Goals for Today

- To identify the strengths and weaknesses in student writing
- To determine and prioritize which weaknesses should be addressed first based on authentic student samples
- To obtain new strategies (mini-lessons) to move students' writing beyond 1's and 2's



1. Focus and Coherence

- Individual paragraphs and the composition as a whole are **focused**. This **sustained focus** enables the reader to understand and appreciate how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- The composition as a whole has a **sense of completeness**. The **introduction and conclusion are meaningful** because they add depth to the composition.
- Most, if not all, of the writing contributes** to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

2. Organization

- The writer's **progression** of thought from **sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph is smooth and controlled**. The writer's use of **meaningful transitions** and the logical movement from idea to idea strengthen the **progression**.
- The **organizational strategy or strategies** the writer **chooses** enhance the writer's ability to present ideas clearly and effectively.

3. Development of Ideas

- The writer's **thorough and specific** development of each idea creates **depth of thought** in the composition, enabling the reader to truly understand and appreciate the writer's ideas.
- The writer's presentation of ideas is **thoughtful or insightful**. The writer may approach the topic from an **unusual perspective**, use his/her **unique experiences** or view of the world as a basis for writing, or make **interesting connections** between ideas. In all these cases, the writer's willingness to take **compositional risks** enhances the quality of the content.

4. Voice

- The writer **engages** the reader and sustains this **connection** throughout the composition.
- The composition sounds **authentic and original**. The writer is able to express his/her **individuality** or unique perspective.

5. Conventions

- ❑ The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the composition. The writer demonstrates a **consistent command of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure**. When the writer attempts to communicate complex ideas through sophisticated forms of expression, he/she may make **minor errors** as a result of these compositional risks. These types of errors **do not detract from the overall fluency** of the composition.
- ❑ The **words, phrases, and sentence structures** the writer uses **enhances** the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

STEP I – Identify Strengths and Weaknesses

- What is this writer doing right? Where can you praise him/her?
- What is this writer doing wrong (in line with grade level appropriateness)? Where can you help him/her?



STEP II – Determine Which TWO Weaknesses are the Most Severe

- Which two skills/concepts should be addressed first?
- **NOTE:** Resist the temptation to identify too many weaknesses. Remember, just one or two at a time!



STEP III – Decide Which Mini-lessons/Strategies Would Help This Writer

- If you could sit one-on-one with this student, what would you say?
- What creative (perhaps even goofy) things could you do to get this kid to improve his/her writing?



Downloading Information

- To download the papers used in today's presentation as well as other samples released by TEA, visit TEA's website at: www.tea.state.tx.us
- Click on "TAKS™ Released Tests"
- Click on the "Scoring Guide" or "Score Point 4 Composition" links corresponding to the desired grade level(s)



Downloading Information

- To download the mini-lessons and/or activity cards used in today's presentation visit Region 10's website at: www.ednet10.net
- Click on "Teachers"
- Under content areas click on the "Reading/Language Arts"
- Scroll down to "Downloads"
- Scroll down to "Download PowerPoints and Instructional Materials" and click
- PLEASE NOTE THE COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS



Student Name _____

Analysis of Student Writing

STEP I - Identify the strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths	Weaknesses

STEP II - Determine which two weaknesses are the most severe. In other words, which two skills/concepts should be addressed first?

1.
2.

STEP III - Decide which mini-lessons/strategies would help this writer grasp how to improve his/her writing. In other words, what lesson would you teach to help this writer? If you could sit one-on-one with this student, what would you say? What creative (perhaps even goofy) things could you do to get this kid to improve his/her writing? Include ideas from your head or from the mini-lessons provided.

Idea # 1
Idea # 2
Idea # 3
Idea # 4
Idea # 5
Idea # 6

WRITING TAKS TIPS

Written Composition

1. Avoid questions for beginnings of TAKS prompt responses
2. In organization—use “now” and “then” rather than “first”, “second”, etc.
3. Go directly to answering the prompt
4. Write with emotion!
5. Write a strong conclusion.
6. Write a minimum of 1 ½ pages (75% of papers in lower scores were less than 1 ½ pages---75% of the ones with highest scores were more than 1 ½ pages)
7. Suggestions for creativity in writing essay:
 - a. one sided conversations such as phone calls
 - b. scripts: John: “I hate it.”
Sue: “No, you don’t!”
 - c. journal entries:
Sept. 30—Today, was one of those days you hate
to write home....
Oct. 14 It finally came in the mail....
 - d. letters or messages back and forth
 - e. repetition of key idea: “and she did”....”and she did”
 - f. leads: read the paragraph and see what questions you would ask before reading more. Ask yourself--would I continue to read on?
 - g. have a satisfying ending

Rubric:

- a. vocabulary: words and phrases, enhance the overall effectiveness of the communication of your ideas (use a dictionary or thesaurus)
- b. write on the topic (focus)
- c. make it thoughtful and interesting (coherence--communicate with sophisticated or complex forms of expression on your grade level)
- d. make sure each sentence contributes to the whole topic (organization)
- e. make ideas are clear and easy to follow (development of ideas)
- f. write in depth so reader fully understands what you are saying and that it sounds original with your unique perspective (voice)
- g. proofread to correct errors of convention (punctuation, spelling, capitalization, sentence structure, sentence structure variety)

TAKS TIPS

1. Using text evidence is not a writing issue---**they are looking for analysis of the text.**
2. Use a dictionary or thesaurus—**vocabulary or word choice matters.**
3. **Open-ended questions—**
 - a. Check specifically in the scoring guide
 - b. Write to fill up the space (3=100 words; 2==86 words)
 - c. Make copies of the rubrics
 - d. Avoid answers that seek to explain the deeper meaning of life—may get a 0 for these responses
 - e. Responses:

Literary Selection

- i. use evidence to support response (use a direct quote)
- ii. use accurate and relevant textual evidence
- iii. must offer particularly thoughtful or insightful analysis of a literary technique or figurative expression used in the quote from the selection
- iv. connect the textual evidence to the idea or analysis of the passage

Expository selection

- i. must offer particularly thoughtful or insightful conclusion, interpretation, or prediction
- ii. use accurate and relevant textual evidence (quote)
- iii. must offer particularly thoughtful or evaluation of a characteristic of the text
- iv. strongly support it with accurate/relevant evidence
- v. show strong evidence of student's dept of understanding and ability to effectively connect textual evidence to the idea, analysis, or evaluation

Literary/Expository selection

- i. must offer particularly thoughtful or insightful conclusion, interpretation, or prediction based on **both** selections
- ii. strongly support it with accurate/relevant evidence from **both** selections
- iii. offer particularly thoughtful or insightful analysis or evaluation of a characteristic of text based on **both** selections (**quote from both passages**)
- iv. strongly support it with accurate/relevant **textual** evidence from **both** selections
- v. show that the student can make meaningful connections across selections and effectively connect evidence to idea, analysis or evaluation

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Modified TAKS Writing Rubric

Grading Criteria	Score 1 Ineffective Presentation	Score 2 Somewhat Ineffective Presentation	Score 3 Generally Effective Presentation	Score 4 Highly Effective Presentation
Focus and Coherence	<input type="checkbox"/> Not focused <input type="checkbox"/> Intro/Conclusion lacking coherence <input type="checkbox"/> Rambling/weakly connected	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat focused <input type="checkbox"/> Some sense of completeness/intro & conclusion superficial <input type="checkbox"/> Some extraneous writing	<input type="checkbox"/> For the most part focused <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of completeness/intro & conclusion add some depth <input type="checkbox"/> Most of writing adds to understanding of composition	<input type="checkbox"/> As a whole, focused <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of completeness/intro & conclusion add depth and appreciation of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Most, if not all, of writing adds to understanding
Organization	<input type="checkbox"/> No flow from one thought to another <input type="checkbox"/> No transitional words or phrases <input type="checkbox"/> No organizational strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Wordiness/repetition	<input type="checkbox"/> Some flow from one thought to another <input type="checkbox"/> Some transitional words or phrases <input type="checkbox"/> Poor organizational strategies <input type="checkbox"/> Some wordiness/repetition	<input type="checkbox"/> Generally smooth flow of ideas/meaningful transitions <input type="checkbox"/> Effective use of organizational strategies <input type="checkbox"/> Minor wordiness/repetition	<input type="checkbox"/> Smooth controlled transition of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph progression is smooth <input type="checkbox"/> Clear and effective organization of ideas
Development of Ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Little or no development of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Vague development of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Only plot or summary <input type="checkbox"/> Gaps between ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Brief explaining of ideas/surface explanations <input type="checkbox"/> Surface ideas presented <input type="checkbox"/> Omits information leaving gaps in understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Development of ideas reflects some depth of thought <input type="checkbox"/> Some thoughtful ideas/presented in normal way	<input type="checkbox"/> Development of all ideas reflects depth of thought <input type="checkbox"/> Ideas are thoughtful and insightful <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches topic in an unusual manner/takes risks in writing
Voice	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not engage reader <input type="checkbox"/> No individual voice/does not show individuality	<input type="checkbox"/> Some engagement of the reader <input type="checkbox"/> Some individual voice shown	<input type="checkbox"/> Engages reader most of time <input type="checkbox"/> Most of composition expresses individual voice	<input type="checkbox"/> Engages reader throughout the paper <input type="checkbox"/> Authentic and original writing
Conventions	<input type="checkbox"/> Severe/frequent errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, usage, and sentence structure <input type="checkbox"/> Misuse of words/omission of words and phrases/awkward sentence structure <input type="checkbox"/> Weaknesses interfere with meaning	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited control of language/many errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, usage, and sentence structure <input type="checkbox"/> Simple word choice/some word misuse/some awkward sentence structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Good command of language/few errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, usage, and sentence structure <input type="checkbox"/> Good word choice/few word choice problems/most sentences have good structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong command of language/consistent command of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure <input type="checkbox"/> Sophisticated word choice and sentence structure

Top 11 Things to Remember When Writing

1. **Don't use no double negatives.**
2. **About them sentence fragments**
3. **Try to not ever split infinitives.**
4. **Verbs has to agree with their antecedents.**
5. **Between you and i, case is important.**
6. **Correct spelling is essential.**
7. **When dangling, watch your participles.**
8. **Use your apostrophe's correctly.**
9. **Avoid clichés like the plague.**
10. **Don't use commas, that aren't necessary.**
11. **Proofread you writing.**

Algozzine, Bob. *50 Simple Ways to Make Teaching Fun*. 1993. Sopris West, Longmont, CO. p.152.