

Marking Essays

How do you know if your child has written a good essay? Like assessing a piece of art, assessing an essay requires some **subjective** judgement. This means that your judgement is **subject** to your own experience, emotions and expertise. The opposite to this is **objective** judgement, where there is **correct or incorrect**. Even algebra problems involving many steps can be marked objectively.



Score keys are useful for objective assessment.

There is no Score Key that will tell you what an essay is worth.

If you are not expert in marking essays, you may find the accompanying **essay marking rubric** helpful in making your assessment as objective as possible.

Marking rubrics are used in most subjects where there is a degree of subjectivity, for example for assignments and art work. **An Essay Marking Rubric** takes away a lot of the subjectivity of essay marking. It allows you to give fair, consistent and valid assessment, and also provides focal points from which to discuss the student's work and offer thoughts for further improvement.

The **essay marking rubric** on the next page has five Traits or Characteristics to look for in the essay. To help you score each trait, each one has four quality categories with a range of scores given, with a clear description of each category, from high quality to low quality answers.

Show the rubric to the student before the assignment is given, so they will know in advance what is required of them.

When you have marked the essay, show the rubric again to the student and how you evaluated their work compared with the various descriptors. This way, ***the rubric becomes an important learning tool***, not just a teacher resource.

Read the descriptions of each trait – strong through to weak – so that you know what you are looking for in the student's work. Each trait is covered in English and Word Building PACEs.

Focus and Details and Organisation: In English, there is a lot of work on paragraph organisation, including Topic Sentences and Outlining (from 1071). If your child has studied outlining, encourage the use of outlines in the preparation of the essay.

Voice: The purpose of writing must be clear, and the essay written with knowledge and confidence. The author should show **attention** to their audience, not just listing facts and ideas. Imagine your child reading their essay aloud. How does it sound? Are they speaking with authority and confidence?

Word Choice: From about English 1060, students learn to write interesting paragraphs, using colourful adjectives and adverbs, interesting verbs, exact nouns and so on. Are they trying to use a high level of vocabulary? Are they using too much slang? Look for examples of these when assessing "Word Choice".

Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics and Spelling: Students learn correct spelling, word usage and sentence structure from early in the PACEs, so use the essay to assess their mastery of English. Also look for **variety** in sentence structure, not always using the same pattern; not always using simple, short sentences; not always the same length. Look for a **variety** of sentence types they have learned: Declarative (simple telling), Exclamatory (Strong voice with exclamation marks), Interrogative (Rhetorical questions).

Simply having grammatically correct writing does not mean it is good writing.

Note: Most academic essays are written in the formal **third person**, avoiding "I, me, my..." or "you".

Instead of, "I think you should read the book," use "This author recommends the book."

Instead of, "I don't know why he did that," use "It is unclear why he did that."

Once you decide into which category (range of scores) the student's writing falls, you only have to decide the actual score. This is simply choosing out of five possible marks.

One thing you will find with essay marking is that even professionals will vary greatly, so don't feel you have to "get the right score". The essay is only a small component of the final PACE score, if it is counted at all, so it won't affect the PACE score that much. The most important thing is to make sure that your child learns from the experience.

Your comments and suggestions will be far more valuable than the actual mark.

Essay Rubric

Name: _____ Date: _____

Essay Title: _____

Directions: Your essay will be graded based on this rubric. Use this rubric as a guide when writing your essay and check it again before you submit your essay.

Traits	16-20	11-15	6-10	0-5	Mark
Focus & Details	There is one clear, well focused topic. Main ideas are clear and are well supported by detailed and accurate information.	There is one clear, well focused topic. Main ideas are clear but are not well supported by detailed information.	There is one topic. Main ideas are somewhat clear.	The topic and main ideas are not clear.	
Organization	The introduction is inviting, states the main topic, and provides an overview of the paper. Information is relevant and presented in a logical order. The conclusion is strong.	The introduction states the main topic and provides an overview of the paper. A conclusion is included.	The introduction states the main topic. A conclusion is included.	There is no clear introduction, structure, or conclusion.	
Voice	The author's purpose of writing is very clear, and there is strong evidence of attention to audience. The author's extensive knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are evident.	The author's purpose of writing is somewhat clear, and there is some evidence of attention to audience. The author's knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are evident.	The author's purpose of writing is somewhat clear, and there is evidence of attention to audience. The author's knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are limited.	The author's purpose of writing is unclear.	
Word Choice	The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words seems accurate, natural, and not forced.	The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words is inaccurate at times and/or seems overdone.	The author uses words that communicate clearly, but the writing lacks variety.	The writer uses a limited vocabulary. Jargon or clichés may be present and detract from the meaning.	
Sentence Structure, Grammar, & Mechanics, & Spelling	All sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes no errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling.	Most sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes a few errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling, but they do not interfere with understanding.	Most sentences are well constructed, but they have a similar structure and/or length. The author makes several errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding.	Sentences sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive, or are difficult to understand. The author makes numerous errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding.	
Reviewer's Comments	TOTAL /100				

Modified Rubric from: ReadWriteThink: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printsouts/essay-rubric-30230.html>; Copyright 2013