

Steps for Holistic Scoring

PART I: Establishing Criteria for Scoring

The purpose of the first part of a holistic scoring session is to determine the criteria that the participants think should guide an assessment of student writing in a representative set of student papers. Through a process of reading, discussing, and ranking four sample papers, the participants articulate their writing preferences.

NOTE:

The following steps outline the process you would use in a holistic scoring session with other faculty in your department. We will be following these steps in our workshop this morning to provide you with the experience of this process. I have also provided a reason, inasmuch as possible, for each of the steps.

Prior to the scoring session in your department

Step 1: Identify an assignment common to a course or courses that all majors must take and that asks students to do the kind of writing you want to evaluate.

Reason: Since readers have different tacit assumptions about what constitutes “good” writing in different assignments, a common assignment draws those assumptions out by reducing the range of writing options, thereby limiting the set of assumptions we bring to the assessment process.

Step 2: Have students complete the assignment, preferably for credit as part of a course.

Reason: Having the students write a “real” assignment integrated into a course increases student motivation for writing well and eliminates extra work both for students and the teacher.

Step 3: Collect the papers. Read them over and choose four to be used as scoring models that you think best represent a range of writing skills in successfully completing the assignment.

Reason: Offering readers papers that demonstrate a wide range of writing skill makes the process of articulating the reasons for their preferences easier.

Step 4: Number the model papers from 1-4. Make copies for the participants.

Day of Holistic Scoring session

Step 1: Distribute the first two sample papers (#1 and #2) and provide the assignment. Ask participants to read each paper and decide individually which of the two demonstrates the greater level of proficiency and why they got that impression.

After allowing sufficient time for participants to read the samples, ask them how many thought that the first sample demonstrated better writing and note the number of responses for each sample on a blackboard. Then ask the same question about the second sample.

Step 2: Ask those who ranked the first sample as better to give their reasons for their choice. Write the comments on the blackboard.

Follow the same procedure for the second sample.

Reason: Asking participants to rank the two papers requires that they consider the reasons they chose one over the other. Articulating these reasons in a group discussion helps participants identify criteria they tacitly privileged when they gave their impressions of the value of each paper.

Steps 3 & 4: Repeat steps 1 and 2 from above with the second pair of writing samples (#3 and #4).

Step 5: Ask the participants to rank the four samples from most proficient to least. Note these choices on the black board and ask if there are other reasons for their choices not already listed.

Reason: This final ranking allows participants to further elaborate their criteria.

Step 6: Look for groupings of criteria and choose the top 5-8 to make the scoring process in Part II more manageable.

Reason: This process focuses the reading of the rest of the papers.

PART II: Assessing Representative Sample of papers According to Agreed-upon Criteria

In Part II, readers read a representative set of papers and score them holistically, keeping in mind the criteria they have identified as the basis of their scores. They might mark the papers on a scale of Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Poor. To apply a scale like this, readers will have to weigh the criteria and determine what score best represents the paper's overall competency.

Note: We will not have time to complete Part II in this workshop.

Conclusion:

Having experienced the process of deriving criteria, you can use what you have learned from today's workshop with your faculty in several ways:

- Repeat the holistic scoring process—Parts I and II—with your faculty to derive criteria for your own representative set of papers and to read that set of papers holistically with those criteria and the normed reading process in mind.
- Use the criteria derived in Part I, as we have done today, as a starting point in the assessment process and add additional criteria based on your faculty's readings/choice of assignments. Then read a representative set of papers with those criteria in mind.
- Design an alternative method that includes faculty in the determination of criteria and the subsequent assessment of student papers. Some possible alternatives, as Chris Thaiss mentioned in his rationale, might be, for example:
 - Bring faculty together to read holistically samples of a typical paper from, say, a writing-intensive or synthesis course. Criteria defined in the session might be used toward revising the writing assignments and/or designing new assignments for that course.
 - Subsequently, student papers from the targeted course(s) could be read by individual teachers or a team of teachers using the previously articulated criteria as a scoring rubric. Note, however, that scoring reliability drops considerably when readers have not “normed” their readings through a process like the one we've described here. Note also that scoring can be invalid if previously-generated criteria do not apply to the set of papers being scored.