Accompanying powerpoint to the
WAC Fellows Professional Development Session on

Developing & Scaffolding Assignments

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"Scaffolding" Assignments =

Assigning each writing assignment as a sequence of smaller, "<u>low-stakes</u>" assignments building the development of a larger work;

Gives students the opportunity to brainstorm thoughts, ideas, and structure in collaboration with their instructor *rather than turning a first draft, or something the instructor is seeing only for the first time, as final work.*

Scaffolding

Helps issues concerning

Structure

Content

Clarity,

and more...

before papers are submitted to an instructor in "first draft" form:

A Scaffolding (low-stakes) sequence for a <u>Freshman Comp</u> assignment might address the following themes in any combination of exchanges deemed appropriate by the instructor:

1. **<u>Summary</u>** of source material to possibly be developed in a paper**:** *"What does it say?"*

2. **<u>Summary + Analysis</u>:** *"What does it say? What does it mean?"*

   An instructor may choose to keep a low-stakes assignment broad or have students respond to a direct prompt.

3. **<u>Summary + Analysis + Critical Thought/Analysis</u>:** *"What does it say? What does it mean? What's <u>your</u> subjective interpretation?. PICK A THEME TO DEVELOP in your formal paper.*

   Instructor is giving response-driven, development-driven feedback on these exchanges. Not giving a grade. They're promoting idea and paper development.

4. **Summary + Analysis + Critical Thought > Writing Development:**
*Let your interpretation lead you to an argument or analytical statement. Begin to form and develop your **<u>IDEA</u>** (or Thesis) including or topic sentence support .*

5. **State an (interpretative/analytical) argument with reasons**. Start drafting your Thesis Statement.
   <u>THESIS STATEMENT = IDEA/ARGUMENT + REASONS</u>

   Return all of the above with focused feedback and guidance for student.

6. A **full prospectus, including a thesis statement and possible topic sentences**.
   Return with focused guidance and feedback.

Outcomes

Before we get into "Scaffolding," we must first establish a shared understanding of Course Learning Outcomes…

Course Learning Outcomes…

are our contract with the student; what, exactly, we promise to teach our students; the skills and knowledge that a successful student will learn in their semester with us.

These are written in a way that is **demonstrable**.
   What "knowledge" will be attained in a course or unit?
   What "skills" will be used to demonstrate that knowledge?

They are expressed in terms that are **measurable and quantifiable,** as in a grade.

And they let the student know exactly what they're expected to learn, and how they will demonstrate their learning, in order to complete the course successfully.

Outcomes as opposed to Objectives

Confusing Outcomes with Objectives or Goals might lead to unfocused assignment development.

OBJECTIVES are broad goals that the course hopes or expects to achieve, defined in general terms.

"I *want* my students to *appreciate* the works of Van Gogh."

"Students should *gain familiarity* with poetry of the Romantic Period."

…*as opposed to* **Learning Outcomes**, which are concise, explicit, and help teachers and students, alike, understand the purpose of the course directly and the work they'll cover in it, which are all designed to serve… **course outcomes.**

Writing Outcomes gives an instructor the opportunity to consider:

> *"What knowledge and skills students will need to obtain from my course? And does the work I'm asking of my students serve these outcomes directly?"*

Reading Outcomes lets students know the work expected of them, what they'll be graded for, and what they will learn from the course.

When developing your outcomes for your course or assignment, ask yourself…

1. What do I want my students to learn? What skills will I ask them to use to demonstrate learning?

2. When I assign a grade, what skills/knowledge exactly am I grading or measuring?

3. When assigning writing, what format am I asking my students to compose? Have I prepared them or taught them to compose in this format

After *writing* outcomes:
1. Is this something I can actually measure in a grade?

2. Have I considered the difference between what I personally would like my students to learn, and something they need to learn from my class?

3. Are these written in student-based terms, as an in action to completed/demonstrated by the student?

Things to consider when generating learning outcomes for Discipline Specific courses:

1. What **skills, knowledge, or attributes** characterize the ideal student, upon completing your course?

2. What **types of assignments** or activities demonstrate the abilities, knowledge, and skills you have identified?

3. What does it mean to think like a person in your discipline?

4. What sorts of writing and communicating do professionals in your field perform?

    …So how are these connected with the sort of writing and communicating students do in your class?

5. How will you know whether your students possess the kinds of abilities, knowledge, skills, and attributes you expect of them?
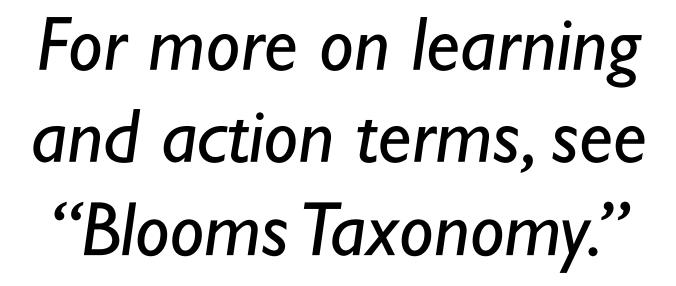
Outcomes
Music 101: "Intro to World Music"

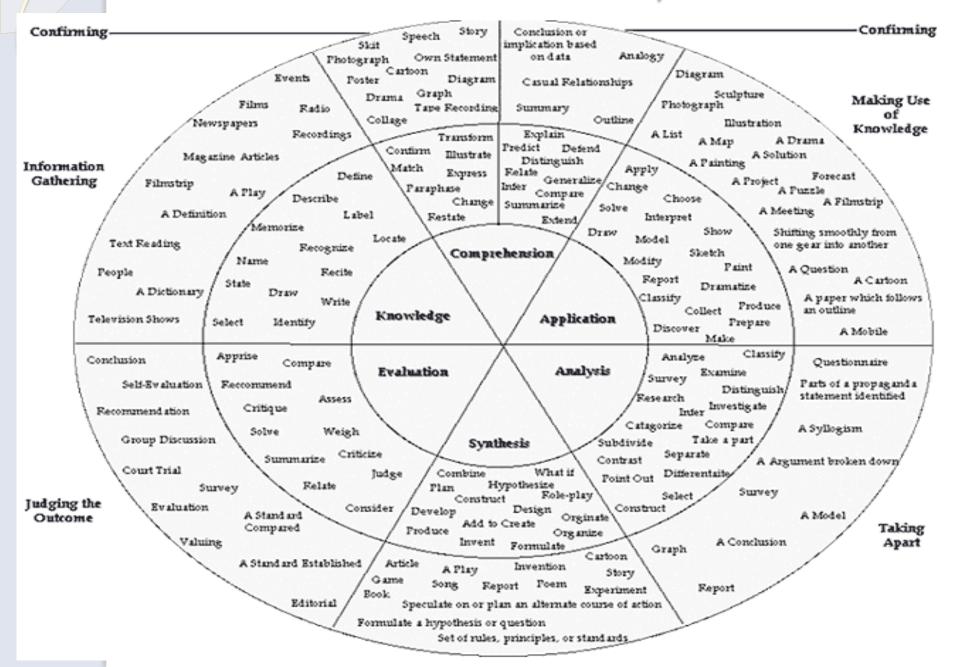Upon the successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. demonstrate a critical evaluation of World Music in speech and writing.
2. demonstrate an understanding of fundamental music terminology (instrumentation, dynamics, melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo) and the ability to use these terms properly in academic discourse.
3. identify and describe (through speech, writing, and listening exercises) the styles, instruments, and composers associated with a variety of musical practices across historical periods and across diverse cultures.
4. place World Music and sub-genres or categories of World Music within their aesthetic and historical (political, religious, artistic...) context (in writing).
5. really dig the contribution of Charlie Parker, Dizzie Gillespie, and the bop artists.
6. write about music in a variety of genres with precision, clarity, detail, and independent critical analysis, incorporating research when needed.

Are any of these not acceptable course outcomes?

Which skills might be used to demonstrate understanding in this course?

For more on learning and action terms, see "Blooms Taxonomy."

From Bloom's Taxonomy

Creating Assignments

So, when we design our assignments, consider your <u>Course Learning Outcomes</u> carefully.

Make sure the work we assign serves those outcomes as directly as possible.

We need:

- *the few writing assignments we have time to assign in our semester to demonstrate as much skill and learning development as possible.*

- *to assign effective assignments that serve our course the best they can, rather than wasting our and our students' time, or assigning work serves our course poorly and doesn't target our Course Outcomes.*

Managing our work and expectations

In a non-Freshman Comp or Comp 2 course, we will not likely be able to collect 6 low-stakes exchanges or convince partnering faculty to do it.

Let's assume we're developing a **content-driven course** (not Comp 1 or Comp 2).

Let's expect we can assign **2 or 3 papers** per semester.

~~Consider what you want your **2 or 3 writing assignments to be** *and* expect to assign 2 or 3 low-stakes exchanges per assignment.~~

Developing assignments

We need to determine our 2 - 3 formal writing assignments –

and an effective 2 - 3 scaffolding sequence to develop them.

Return to your outcomes.
Which of these might best be demonstrated in writing?
This will be practically prescribed if Outcomes are designed well.

Consider what formats professionals in the field expected to write?

Think of your writing assignments as having a place within a course-unit or sequence of topics. Think of learning benchmarks in your semester.

Common reasons to have students write in content-driven courses:

There are countless reasons we assign writing.

Most often, with consideration to our outcomes, we ask our students to:

1. write a subjective **analysis** of content;
2. **demonstrate an understanding of a topic** and its context in the course.
3. **demonstrate a cumulative understanding of the course** up to a given point (either a mid-term or final).
4. **compose in a format expected of professionals** in the field.

A 5th might be **to respond to a direct prompt of the instructor's choosing, to answer a question.**

So we return to our outcomes and come up with a great assignment, and we pick a format…

Pick a format to best serve the purpose of your assignment, the skill-level of the class, and the field.

Consider your basic essay formats:
1. Argumentation
2. Analysis
3. Compare/Contrast
4. Cause & Effect
5. Process Description
6. Technical Description
7. Any Description…
8. Formats in Professional Writing
   a. Scientific Report
   b. Field-Research Report
   c. Case-Study
   d. Sociological Research
   e. Technical Report
   f. Criticism, History, Theory…
   g. More…

Avoid assigning topics that serve the course poorly.

In Comp… *this might be a creative work or a critical review rather than something analytical, argumentative, or formally structured.*

In Music… *this might be a concert or album review without any guidance or prompts.*

In Psych… *this might be a case study on a film character.*

There are myriad possible paper topics that sound good but don't address the purpose of the course as well as they could.

Discuss Possible Paper Topics…

We've developed our paper topics…

1. We can type our assignment prompts (more on this later).

2. Share model paper examples with our students.

3. Develop our 3-exchange scaffold of low-stakes assignments.

4 Slides on Low-Stakes Writing

*Before we discuss possible models and successful low-stakes-writing assignment sequences, first, a brief overview of **what it is (a definition), benefits, uses, and examples.** These will be available in a supplemental handout.*

What is it?

- A short (1 or 2 pages), informal response that urges students to develop **critical thinking skills** by exploring ideas rather than focusing on structure.

- Low-stakes writing is **exploratory**. It encourages students to see learning as a process of exploring ideas, rather than repeating "right answers."

- Low-stakes/informal writing isn't graded. Instructors check for quality of thought, investment in and engagement with the material, and for content and analysis, not for structure or mechanics or anything else, tho**ugh an instructor may use a low-stakes assignment as an opportunity to give feedback and instruction on issues with grammar & mechanics**.

- Instructor response and feedback on low-stakes writing should be framed in the form of constructive dialog, an individual conversation with each student, to elicit or encourage feedback in the form of improved writing or the further development of ideas in writing or subsequent low-stakes assignments building up to or leading to a formal assignment.

- Once the low-stakes sequence begins, per assignment, an instructor engages in a private discourse with that individual student either in writing, email, office hours, or a combination…

Low-Stakes Writing

Benefits

- Primarily, low-stakes writing is assigned so that students have an opportunity to develop the ideas, content, and structure of a forthcoming formal, graded assignment. Therefore, low-stakes writing does a great deal to limit:

    - 1) STRUCTURAL ISSUES IN WRITING, INCLUDING THESES STATEMENTS;

    - 2) LACK OF DEVELOPMENT IN IDEAS AND CONTENT

- Stimulates thought concerning issues, questions, problems, themes, etc., regarding both student writing, and comprehension of course material prior to beginning the writing process.

- Low-stakes writing may also stimulate classroom discussion, enforce completion of course readings, and urge students to ask questions (of the professor or of themselves) about course content.

- May be used as a tool to stimulate in-class discussions or as a preliminary step in formulating a final paper.

- And there's always the great, wonderful accidental format lesson…

    The accidental "structure" lesson: When your students are least concerned with structure, you might find that is when their structure is most sound. Wonderful, funnel-shaped arguments, and articulately composed thesis statements often emerge from low-stakes writing without the student even knowing it.

Low-Stakes Writing

Common Uses

Low-stakes writing should always be administered as a planned sequence of assignments leading up to the development of a formal assignment. That should be understood. Having said that, here are some common uses or examples of Low-Stakes Writing Assignments:

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In-Class Student Writing

- Brief periods (2-5 minutes) of silent, uninterrupted writing in the classroom. (Can double as a means to take attendance.)

- A question provided at the beginning of class can serve to review material from the previous session, verify completion of the day's assigned reading, or encourage speculation on a new topic to prime in-class discussion.

- Focused writing during the class period can provide a forum to cool a heated discussion, to stimulate ideas when discussion is lagging, or to summarize (or express confusion about) challenging new information.

- A very brief writing period (a minute or two) at the end of class can encourage students to sum up what they have just learned or pose questions that need further clarification, either in the next session or in their own outside reading.

Low-Stakes Writing

Homework Examples…

- Students answer a course-related question. Such questions may ask students to analyze/ interpret material, clarify similarities and differences, pose an opinion in agreement or disagreement, or ask students to relate course material to contemporary issues and current affairs.

- Writing assignments can provide a stimulus for in-class discussion.

- Focused freewriting can be aimed toward exploring all sides of an issue prior to developing a thesis and writing a final paper on that topic. In this case several freewriting questions would be posed on a topic over time to encourage lengthy engaged inquiry into it.

- Freewriting can also be assigned without a specific question or prompt. In this case, students pose and answer their own course-related questions.

- A dual-entry notebook can promote the pairing of observation (or summary) and analysis. The student may observe visual information (such as a lab experiment or a work of art), research presented in a scholarly article, etc. on the left side of the page. The observation would then be paired with mental process on the right side of the page in the form of a hypothesis regarding the reason for the observed phenomenon or an argument for or against the accuracy of the presented information based on ideas read elsewhere or presented in class.

- Creative writing such as imagined dialogues between writers, researchers, historical figures, characters, etc. can provide a light-hearted way of engaging deeply with course content.

We remember this slide.
Scaffolding for Freshman Comp…

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4. **Summary + Analysis + Critical Thought > Writing Development:**
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5. **State an (interpretative/analytical) argument with reasons**. Start drafting your Thesis Statement.
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Low-Stakes Writing Sequencing
and the **NON**-*Freshman Composition* course:

At the very least, <u>design a 3-sequence exchange of low-stakes writing per assignment</u>.

In some combination, have students:

   1) **<u>analyze or interpret</u>** a text or section of text.

   2) **brainstorm themes and content** (once or twice, depending on the student group) to be developed in the formal assignment.

   3) **submit their thesis statement and paper topic** in the form of a prospectus or proposal.

Return all of the above with focused feedback and guidance.

Examples of low-stakes possibilities:

1. Respond to a direct prompt of the instructor's choosing.
2. Explore a theme in the reading or a given topic.
3. Explore a cause/effect relationship within a historical timeline.
4. In humanities, summarize > analyze > interpret > argue > thesis.
5. Introduce two or three paper topics/arguments and explain why you want to write about them.
6. Compare/contrast two or more positions on a topic discussed in class.
7. Propose two or more ideas to develop into theses statements and defend them each in a paragraph or two.
8. Write a prospectus, what you want to write about, why, and give a brief outline.

Examples of low-stakes/informal _analytical prompts_ for a Freshman Composition Class…

1. What is "it" saying? What does "it" mean? What's your interpretation?
2. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
3. Write a response (with or without prompts).
4. Write a review. Do you like or dislike the material, and why? For more basic classes.
5. Assign something rich in content ,something allegorical perhaps. Leading an analytical exercise in class. When you assign the reading, have students prepare an interpretation: "What does it mean? What is it saying?" and be able to defend it).
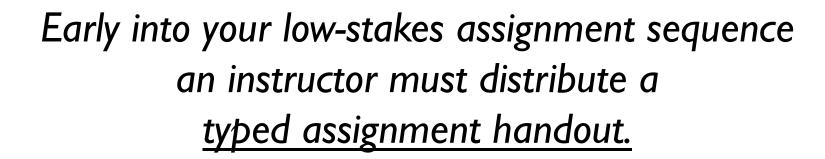
~

When you collect student analyses, you may ask students to highlight their main idea. As you read these, you may want to highlight it for them, showing how they've done this successfully.

To Summarize

1. Plan when you want your 2-3 formal assignments due in the semester.

2. Consider the assignment you developed and how well it serves your course and its outcomes.

3. Consider the assignment format and how it best serves the assignment and your discipline.

4. So, how do you want to use your low-stakes writing to develop these assignments? What kind of development is needed "to build" them?

Typed Assignment Handouts

&

Other Resources

Early into your low-stakes assignment sequence an instructor must distribute a <u>typed assignment handout.</u>

Typed Assignment Handouts

Before a student paper fails at the level of execution, often, collapse has already occurred with the instructor's failure to properly communicate the assignment.

A careful instructor complements the "assigning" of their writing assignments with a written set of instructions in which the following questions are addressed:

- Do my students know what I'm asking of them? Are question prompts clear?

- Do my students know what they're being graded for (**assignment outcomes**)?

  (Am I grading for content only? Structure, too? Grammar? Mechanics…?)

- Do my students know which essay format they are being asked to compose? An argumentative essay? A compare/contrast essay? An analysis? A proposal? A research paper? And have I confirmed that they know how to write that format?

- Have I expressed who the intended audience is for this paper? (One strategy is to have students write from an authoritative perspective, as "someone who knows" explaining to someone who does not know. Another is to have them take a certain perspective or point of view that they have to defend.)

- Have I listed the assignment requirements? Length? Deadlines? Formatting? Reference-style and formatting? Font, margins, title page, bibliography, acceptable and minimum number of sources (e.g.: a minimum of 5 articles from scholarly journals).

- HAVE I STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF PROOFREADING?!

- HAVE I STRESSED THE REFERENCE REQUIREMENT?!

Assignment Handout Example

Course   Instructor
Term

Argumentative Essay

Write an argumentative essay based on the "five-paragraph essay format" discussed in class, though your paper must be longer than five paragraphs. In other words, the "five paragraph essay" may have been appropriate in high school or earlier. For this assignment, however, you should have more than three support paragraphs, and your support topics should require more than one paragraph of development, each.

Topics will be approved in class.

Thesis statements and paper outlines will also be approved in class. The assignment will be executed in *scaffolded* stages.

You will be graded on your ability to:
- State, defend, and develop your argument clearly.
- Respond to the assignment prompt with collegiate-level analysis. (See the "Writing" rubric for definition of standards/expectations).
- Develop ideas articulately, logically, and with loyalty to structure.
- Demonstrate sound sentence structure and logical word choice.
- Demonstrate proper usage of grammar and mechanics.

Your final draft will be a minimum of **4 pages** plus a works cited page.
(Double-spaced. M-Word default formatting should be obvious).

Content, Structure, Grammar/Mechanics each comprises 33% of your grade.

Schedule:
Low-Stakes assignment: brainstorm paper topics due October 1st
Low-Stakes assignment: brainstorm Topic Sentences and Theses Statement drafts: due October 6th
Final Drafts due: October 18th

Reading Assignments & Sequencing Them in Your Semester

When Assigning your Reading, Consider the Following:

1. A progressive sequence either of style, format, rhetorical mode, or maybe just chronology… But think of a reading unit as "a whole," leading somewhere, and not just separate day-by-day independent units.

2. Discuss the style and format of your **formal writing assignment** as a "rhetorical mode." IDENTIFY THE FORMAT, STRUCTURE, AND AUDIENCE OF EACH PIECE you read, even if it's all from one textbook.

3. Engage in the material on more than one level. Study the "elements of authorship": voice, rhythm, tone, lyricism, FORMAT, AUDIENCE…

4. When you assign your formal assignments, ask yourself,

   "What structure am I assigning? Have I taught them this structure and prepared them to write in the form?"

5. Review, proper reference and citation-style! Your students don't remember this from semester to semester, course to course.

6. Teach your terms, always! *"Summary, Analysis, Analyze, Deconstruct… Argue… Compare/ Contrast…* Don't assume your students always know what you're talking about or asking of them..

7. **DISTRIBUTE EITHER STUDENT OR PROFESSIONAL EXAMPLES OF THE PAPER (STYLE/FORMAT/SOPHISTICATION) YOU AIM TO COLLECT!!!!!**

Revision-Oriented Feedback

When asked for responses to teacher's comments, students usually express confusion.

Understand that your feedback is an important half of a dialog that you're having with your student. Together, you are working towards a satisfactory final draft. Rather than point out every mistake, seek to facilitate improvement, while doing so in a manner that's both manageable and effective.

Negative comments, no matter how well-intentioned, rarely lead to attempts at better revision. Make clear, legible comments that are focused on producing a better draft. Make sure to be specific and articulate. Tell students exactly what they need to know in order to improve the paper. Gaps in logic, gaps in structure…

When writing the assignment handout: think carefully about what, specifically, you want to grade (your assignment outcomes); make sure you communicate your outcomes; and focus mainly on those components when grading. (So… if you did not indicate that you're grading for grammar and mechanics, you may want to make a comment or two somewhere, or focus on one paragraph in particular where a student repeated the same errors, but don't spend a significant amount of time circling poor punctuation if you're not prepared to take the instruction any further or provide the student with the necessary resource/s they need to improve their punctuation.)

Make comments that help make students better editors of their own work. Teach them to identify the same error elsewhere, unmarked.

As well, giving a student prepared handouts for Grammar/Mechanics issues (or photocopies or chapter suggestions from a Grammar/Mechanics handbook) will help save you time before you sit down with your student during your office hour, or help the save the time of a Writing Center tutor (which you should also lean on for a resource).

The Anatomy of an Essay

Introduction

Begins ("introduces") your essay

Contains your Thesis Statement: one sentence that states clearly what position you will take in the essay

Introduces reasons/evidence that you will discuss in detail in the body paragraphs

Body Paragraphs

All sentences are related to ONE main idea

The TOPIC SENTENCE:

     Supports the Thesis Statement of the essay

     Introduces the idea that guides the paragraph and lets the reader know what to expect

     Should be a specific idea that needs to be proven

SUPPORTING SENTENCES:

     Related to topic sentence and controlling ideas

     Offer evidence to support, describe, or define the topic

     Can answer the questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why, or How (a.k.a. the "5 W's")

CONCLUDING SENTENCE:

     Re-states the main idea, offers a solution or prediction, answers any unresolved questions

Conclusion

Signals the end of the essay and leaves the reader with a final thought

Can be a call to action (What do you want the reader to do?)

Can be a final point that ties together all the ideas in the essay

Can ask a question that leaves the reader with a final problem to think about

Avoid using the overused phrases "to conclude" or "in conclusion": we *know* you're concluding if it's the last paragraph!

WHATEVER strategy you choose, a conclusion should leave the reader with a strong, clear idea of what your position is

Final thoughts:

Argumentative essays are designed to convince a reader to take a certain position on an issue

Stay away from wimpy statements: use strong, declarative statements

"*Think* locally, *write* globally": connect personal situations to universal conditions (e.g. "I live with my parents" is more effective as "many students live with their parents")

Use transitions to connect ideas

Gen Ed Writing Rubric, example

Learning Outcome	Beginning (1)	Developing (2)	Competent (3)	Accomplished (4)
Thesis	-Either lacks a thesis or has a thesis that is too vague or self-evident to be effectively developed -Thesis either fails to relate to or only marginally relates to topic sentences of body paragraphs	-Has a thesis, but thesis needs greater focus and clarity -Thesis relates to some but not all topic sentences of body paragraphs	-Has a clear thesis -Thesis relates to all topic sentences of body paragraphs -Topic sentences of body paragraphs develop thesis	-Has a sophisticated thesis that acknowledges competing viewpoints -Topic sentences of body paragraphs develop complexity of thesis
Structure and Organization	-Lacks a clear introduction -Progression of thought within paragraphs is unclear -Progression of thought from paragraph to paragraph is unclear -Lacks a clear conclusion	-Has an introduction, but needs revision -Progression of thought within paragraphs is clear, but progression of thought between paragraphs is unclear -Has a conclusion, but needs revision	-Has a clear introduction -Progression of thought both within and between paragraphs is clear -Has a clear conclusion	-Has a compelling introduction -Has a clear organizing strategy that provides clarity throughout the essay -Has a compelling conclusion
Evidence and Development	-Has little or insufficient evidence, or has omissions of significant evidence -Connections between evidence and thesis are weak or missing -Limited use of specific examples to develop thesis -Not all body paragraphs further thesis	-Has some evidence to support thesis, and few omissions of significant evidence -Connection between thesis and evidence is inconsistent -Some but not all body paragraphs provide specific examples that develop thesis	-Has sufficient evidence to support thesis, and no omissions of significant evidence -Connection between thesis and evidence is consistent throughout -All body paragraphs provide specific examples that develop thesis	-Develops evidence in specific and thorough ways that demonstrate analytical depth -Considers counter-evidence to demonstrate broad understanding of the topic
Mechanics and Style	-The writing is unfocused and unclear at the sentence level -There are major problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage that undermine the communication of ideas -The paper reads like a first draft	-The writing is focused and clear at the sentence level but not at the paragraph level -There are some major problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage, but they do not undermine the communication of ideas -Some evidence of carelessness that could be addressed by more careful proofreading	-The writing is focused and clear at both the sentence level and the paragraph level -There are only minor problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage -The paper appears to have been proofread	-The writing is focused and clear throughout -The writer uses sophisticated means to express ideas -There are no errors in grammar, punctuation, and usage