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## Grading Toolbox for Teachers

### *How Do I Give a Grade?*

Here's what I suggest: Throw the papers into the air. The ones that land closest to you get an A, the ones a little farther away get a B, and so on. No? You don't do it that way? I think our students sometimes imagine us using that method!

Okay, maybe that won't work. This next suggestion is a little more practical. First, read the paper through to evaluate the content—what is said and how it is supported. Give a grade for the content. Next, read it for grammar and mechanics, and give that a grade. Two grades for each paper. It has been my experience that this gives students a clearer picture of their writing abilities, and it helps them know their strengths and areas for improvement.

The evaluation forms on the next pages will give you a better idea of what I mean by "content" and "grammar/mechanics." Not all questions on the forms will apply to all assignments, so use your own judgment. Consider grading leniently at the beginning of the year and more thoroughly when you have covered the material. Your student will encounter all the information in the evaluation forms when this course is combined with a solid grammar text.

Use your own judgment when converting circled numbers from the evaluation forms into grades. Some questions have more weight than others.

In addition to the specialized evaluation forms, almost all the essay assignments at the end of each chapter in the student text include a writing checklist, and these checklists can be super helpful when you get ready to grade. All the writing checklists from the student text are included in the Teacher Key section of this guide, appearing at the end of each chapter's assignment.

When I grade papers, I like to find something noteworthy to comment on even in the lamest paper, something true that will encourage the timid or inexperienced student. Maybe this will work for you, too. After all, we want students to keep writing. We don't want them to shut down because of too much negative feedback too early. Don't aim for perfection; aim for progress.

You may find the "How to earn a . . ." section helpful. For the most part, I've used real essays from real students to show how they earned their grades.

**This is true:** It is highly effective to grade daily lessons each day and essays within a week. This timely feedback will guarantee that your students understand the material, and it will keep them writing. When homework is evaluated in a timely manner, students believe their work has meaning, and they will not lose interest in writing or stop altogether. Staying current will give you and your students the best chance for success.

## How to Earn a C

It is a constant enigma why the same student can turn in a stellar paper one week and an iffy paper the next. This student's essay is an example of this quandary. In fact, one of his papers is featured in the student text as an example of effective process writing (chapter 12 in the student text).

The following persuasive essay is written by a young man in the tenth grade and contains 388 words. It appears here as it was submitted.

### The Issue of Reverse Darwinism

The story, all of us have heard it whether we like it or not. We've been indoctrinated with it. There once was an explosion in outer space, and all the planets came into being. After billions of years, life just appeared and crawled out of the water, then developed into all the animals we see today. Now, the actual model suggested by some scientists is a bit more complex. In fact it is the most widely accepted hypothesis today, but this belief has started the process of reverse Darwinism. People, according to Darwin, are supposed to be getting smarter. For us humans to downgrade ourselves into believing this, we actually prove the opposite...that instead of getting smarter, we're getting more foolish and less logical.

Information, our galaxy is full of it: DNA, Genes, and these very words I'm writing are all information. The world and everything in it can't function without it. Evolution says that information creates itself, but it is impossible for information to be created without a creator. The words I've written didn't make themselves. They didn't just appear, I had to write it down. A pot of ink can be spilled on a piece of paper, but that wouldn't be information. Simply put, a universe of chaos cannot produce orderly information, it had to come from God.

A few of the best known proofs for evolution today are: the finches that Darwin studied on his voyage, and the Peppered Moths that changed colors in succeeding generations. For decades these have been some of the most feverously argued "evidence" for evolution. These creatures have evolved, but this is actually microevolution. Evolutionist Collin Patterson said, "No one has ever produced a species by mechanisms of Natural Selection. No one has gotten near it." All these animals inherently have this information in their genes, and at the right time this information made itself apparent.

So, no matter what evolution has to offer, it is really a sad alternative to the truth. You may think there is no God, but it doesn't

*Topic and view are clear. But where is the thesis statement?*

*Unclear term*

*Illustration appears too early. Point should be proven by facts first, then the example.*

*Strong refutation*

*Were the capitals in the original quotation?*

*Sounds like yelling*

## Tips to Help Your Student Proofread

Students sometimes get the idea that if they've written a first draft, they're through writing. Then they hand in that draft as though it is the finished product. Teachers, on the other hand, understand that students have one more step to perform before the essay can be considered completed, and that's proofreading. I always warn students that if their paper reads like a first draft, I'll give them a lower grade. "Fixing" is an integral part of writing.

When your student is learning to proofread, consider this: It's always easier to proofread someone else's paper than one's own. Think about giving students fake essays to fix, ones that are poorly written on some level and need to be adjusted for, say, more effective reasons, tighter sentences, clearer topic sentences, thesis statement and mismatched supporting reasons, better introductions, and so forth. Walking them through this thinking process will reap some rewards and show students how to look for mistakes of this kind.

This course shows students exactly what to look for when proofreading, both for content and for grammar/mechanics. The proofreading tool, *Be Your Own Editor*, is broken down in pieces throughout the chapters until it is taught in its entirety in chapter 10.

### Your student can . . .

- ✓ **Double-space** his work and **print it off**. He will find many more mistakes this way and will have room to correct them.
- ✓ **Print out each version** as he edits it, showing you the progression of his proofreading.
- ✓ Show you the **outline, list, cluster, Greek temple, or sticky notes** he used to organize his thoughts, making him aware of the need to organize before writing.
- ✓ Tell you what his **topic** is. Also ask for his **main idea** or **thesis statement** for the whole paper. He should be able to sum it up in about 20 words.
- ✓ Tell you what the **topic sentence** or **main point** is for each paragraph.
- ✓ **Read his paper out loud**. The number of mistakes he finds this way will surprise, amaze, and astound both of you. He should have a colorful pen handy for this exercise.

### You can . . .

- ✓ **Ask to see his organizational tool**. This teaches that the planning phase of writing will help him in the writing and fixing phases.
- ✓ **Teach grammar, punctuation, and mechanics** geared specifically to the mistakes you keep finding in the essays.
- ✓ Put a **check mark** next to any line that has a mistake. Then he (or she) can look for the mistake.
- ✓ **Review *Be Your Own Editor*** with him. He should use this for every assignment. His copies are in chapter 10 (page 164) and *Your Toolbox* (page 395) in his text.

## Chapter 1: Thinking & Planning


### *In text: Your Writing Self, pages 2-3*

Do you identify with any of those statements?

If you did not, please jot in the margin a statement or two about what is true for you about writing. (*Answers will vary.*)

*Teacher, a discussion of how students feel about writing might prove useful—and definitely interesting! If they have an idea of what types of writing are available (persuading, teaching/explaining, describing, storytelling), they may want to talk about types they like and types they don't. This frank discussion at the beginning of the course can allay fears about writing, especially if students understand that how they feel about writing is legitimate and possibly even shared by others in the class.*

**Teacher**, this line indicates the end of each lesson in the student text and here in the teacher key.



### *Practice 1.1: The Planning Phase, page 5*

By now you may have thought of specific topics within the general topic of ecology. Write at least two ideas in the margin. If you get stuck, talk to others or consult a book on the subject for more ideas. Discuss your topics with your teacher. You will not be writing this report. This is just for practice—so have fun with it. *Answers will vary.*

### *Practice 1.2: The Trick to Finding a Topic, page 5*

Choose a topic that is too broad or that is of no interest to you. Write it on a clean piece of paper or the back of an envelope, the inside of an old cereal box, whatever. Then brainstorm different facets of that topic in order to narrow it down or to find something of interest in it. Be spontaneous with your ideas and don't criticize them. Identify something worth writing about in that too-broad or too-boring topic. Discuss your results with your teacher. You will not be writing this for a report; just take your ideas out for a joyride. *Answers will vary.*

## Chapter 2: Opinions

### Practice 2.1: The Structure of an Essay, page 9

In the margin, state your opinion of teens owning credit cards. Then make a list of at least five reasons why you hold this opinion. You may be able to think of plausible reasons for and against, but for this practice, please choose a definite side. Use a separate piece of paper, if needed. *Answers will vary.*

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### Practice 2.2: Your Toolbox: Point Orders, part 1, pages 12-13

Below are an opinion and four reasons in no particular order. Put numbers next to each point to indicate **most** important (1) to **least** important (4). Then decide which importance order will be most effective for this topic and write it here: *Psychological or climactic because they emphasize the strength of "accident fatalities" by putting it last.*

Opinion: Cell phone usage while driving needs government regulation.

Reasons:

- Distracted drivers cause many accidents. 2
  - Distractions such as talking on a cell phone cause drivers to miss turns or exits or make poor driving decisions. 3
  - Accident fatalities involving cell phone usage are increasing. 1
  - Drivers often are already multitasking. Cell phone usage puts this trend over the top. 4
- 

### Practice 2.3: Point Orders, part 2, page 17

To review the six orders you just learned about, write them here—in no particular order. The first order below is really a cluster of three. Then proceed to Practice 2.4.

1. *Orders of importance or emphatic order (inverted triangle, psychological, and climactic)*
2. *Chronological*
3. *Spatial*
4. *Effect-size*
5. *Specific-to-general*
6. *General-to-specific*

### Practice 2.4, page 17

In Practice 2.1, you wrote an opinion of teens owning credit cards and brainstormed reasons in the margin to support that opinion. Now it's time to put those reasons into a logical order. Choose an appropriate order and write its name in the margin. Then rearrange your top five reasons by that order. *Answers will vary.*

*Teacher, follow up these two lessons with a fun reinforcement exercise. Use this question or one like it: "Should school start later in the day?" Then hand out five sticky*

notes to each student and instruct them to put one reason defending their answer on each note. Last, they will arrange reasons in an effective order, using one they've learned in the last two lessons. A lively discussion can follow as students evaluate each other.

*In text: The Introduction: Hooking the Reader, page 18*

Underline the words in this example that tell the reader that the horse is this student's favorite animal:

"Nothing can match the steady rhythm of my horse as he gallops across the meadow. He carries me with him, and I feel the power of his sturdy body as we fly. For a few moments, I am riding a living, breathing magic carpet."

*Practice 2.5: The Introduction: Hooking the Reader, page 20*

Earlier, you wrote your opinion of teens owning credit cards. In the space below, practice beginning your introductory paragraph for this topic. Beside each tool, write a first sentence or two about your topic that is calculated to capture the interest of the reader. Invent a fact or make up a quotation if you need to (something you won't be doing in a real paper!). Fill in each tool with a different hook. Then put a mark next to the tool you like the best for the credit-card topic. *Answers will vary for a question, statement, fact, story, and quotation.*

*Practice 2.6: Do they make the grade? Page 21*

Now that you have practiced writing your own sentences, it is time to evaluate other students' sentences. Firstly—oops! *First*—label them according to which QSFSQ tool they used. Then give each hook a grade based on how much it creates an interest or a curiosity about the topic (even if you don't yet know what the topic is). Then read the introductory paragraph that follows. *Grades will vary.*

1. One of the most urgent problems in modern society is the growing shortage of petroleum. *Statement*
2. Like a viper, he waits for his next victim to criticize. *Statement*
3. You walk into a restaurant and smell the wonderful aroma of secondhand smoke, not the scent of steaks cooking. *Story (scenario, really)*
4. Do you like to cook? *Question*
5. If I was hoping for a dull, tedious interview with George, I was going to be very disappointed. *Statement*
6. How many car accidents are caused by intersections? *Question*
7. We cannot let them steal it all! *Statement*
8. When he was three, he developed an ear infection that, undetected, resulted in a 75 percent hearing loss. *Fact*



# Praise for *The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School* and for Sharon Watson

## What Students Are Saying

"This course has made a huge impact on my writing. Everyone who has read my work before this course and after agrees." --Emily B.

"This course taught me that writing a report is not something to be afraid of. If you take it step by step, you can write a great paper every time without feeling intimidated." --Diana D.

"I can see the difference between my writing before I took the course and my writing after the course. My essay structure has greatly improved, and I never thought I would ever get published in our local newspaper!" --Gabriella L.

"This class didn't just show me how to write; it convinced me I could in the first place." --Clara L.

"I didn't learn anything in my college writing course that I hadn't already learned in Sharon Watson's course. In fact, my professor held up my paper in front of the class and said, 'This is how to write a paper.'" --Lindsey B.

"Now I like writing because it has become much easier." --Ben L.

## What Parents Are Saying

"Sharon Watson's course has made a huge difference in how prepared my son and daughter are for college and in their confidence in expressing their views on paper." --Jan B.

"With the help of this course, my daughter tested out of freshman composition." --Tamara V.

"As a parent of children who have had differing challenges with writing, I can't thank Sharon Watson enough. Her course has improved not only their general writing skills but also their creativity, understanding of writing styles, organization and, most important, their attitude towards writing. I recommend this course to anyone who would like to improve their writing skills." --Wendy B.

## What Professors Are Saying

"The chapter on process is much more thorough than all my college texts. We always do process in 101, and I think what Sharon Watson has done prepares students very well for this type of writing. I like all the details in the chapter and ideas for types of process paper topics." --Jeanne Daningburg, Instructor of Composition, Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, New York

Frustrated with your current high school writing curriculum? Have your students almost given up on writing? Do they reach for the tissue box when you say, "Write an essay"? Do you worry they won't be ready for high school or college writing? Do they say they think of things to write but can't write them down?

No need to panic. Welcome to *THE POWER IN YOUR HANDS: WRITING NONFICTION IN HIGH SCHOOL*, a course that equips your students with all the essay structures, writing tools, and proofreading skills they'll need for their future writing life. With over 100 daily lessons and complete instructions for 22 essays and a research paper with MLA documentation, this is an engaging course students will enjoy—or not dread. And more good news: This course almost teaches itself. Really.

