

Grading Historical Fiction



Levels 4, 12

If a student desires to get a good evaluation, we feel he should know just how to do so! Feel more than free to share the appropriate level of story writing criteria as a self-proofing guide for your student.

Student Evaluations

A student should do a self-evaluation before submitting his work. Prior to handing in his draft, have him complete a proofing sheet (just a checklist of those skills to which you think he can be held accountable). Other strategies that we offer enable you to easily share with your student the criteria by which you will evaluate his work. Because the spectrum approach does not detail criteria for evaluation as specifically as does a rubric, we offer the criteria below as a guideline for his revisions. You may also want to give him the paragraph rubric for self-proofing purposes.

Using the Spectrum

The spectrum is a useful tool for evaluating creative writing, which is necessarily more subjective than nonfiction. You can mark each criterium box in one place (typically using an X) and write specific comments that will help the student to improve future stories. We provide the criteria below so that you may have a basis for providing more detailed comments.

Historical Fiction Criteria

As you use the following criteria, keep in mind that this assignment is for students at two very different levels of maturity. We list the basic goals for each level below and then explain in detail the six criteria in the spectrum.

Level 4

At this level, the student should show an awareness of basic literary elements, historical characters, and historical events. Perfect historical accuracy or understanding of minute historical details is not the goal. Rather, the student should focus on telling a nice story, nicely told.

Level 12

Students at this level should be held to a standard of historical accuracy and detail. Although they are not writing a biography, they should be familiar enough with the history to include appropriate details about fashion, cultural icons, and figures of speech common at the time.

Content

Themes: Can you determine the student's overall message or theme? An excellent story will communicate its theme clearly, although not always explicitly. A theme that is well-presented will flow naturally from the attitudes of the characters and from the ideas embedded in the development and resolution of the plot, as well as from any direct statements made by the author. In historical fiction, the theme will probably be the author's perspective on the central event or character in his story. To evaluate the theme for younger students, ask, "What is the point of this story?" For an older student, see whether he has successfully shown his theme through his character's words and actions, as well as through any explicit statements.

Characterization: Ideally, the characters will be life-like and believable, and the reader will feel as though he knows them. Historical details of appearance, mannerisms, speech, and background can help make characters more real, but it is also important not to include too many details. This slows down the narration and may overwhelm or confuse the reader. An older student should include these details, but he should do so *selectively*. The best characterization will follow the "show, don't tell" maxim and reveal the characters through their actions. Characters should be basically self-consistent, always acting like the same kind of person.



Structure

Plot: The student's plot should follow the basic outline of history, although the best stories will probably be those that streamline the history, focusing the plot on only the main events. Basically, the story should have a beginning, middle, and end, with a steady flow of narration from one part to the next. There should be no gaps or events that are out of place, making it easy for the reader to see the connection between events. In addition, a good plot will not have events that contradict each other or that make another aspect of the story impossible. The resolution of the plot should make sense and flow from what has preceded it. Older students should construct plots that are not entirely predictable. Even if the student's historical event is well-known, the student should make the plot interesting by creating suspense or introducing a slight "twist" to the narration.

Artistry/Craftsmanship: Artistry refers to the form of the story, particularly the style of writing and the way in which the student embodies his idea in words.

- * The style should generally follow the "show, don't tell" method and demonstrate careful craftsmanship through concrete, specific word choice, sparkling descriptions, and well-structured sentences and paragraphs.
- * Attention to detail is another important aspect of artistry and is particularly essential for historical fiction. Good attention to detail will be apparent if the story maintains basic historical accuracy and self-consistent descriptions, as well as if it contains interesting dialogue.
- * For older students, a good style will also include a consistent tone throughout the piece. The tone refers to the general "feel" of the story, mostly communicated by the narrator's voice. (Mark Twain, for instance, has a humorous tone; Homer's is high and formal; Jane Austen's has gentle sarcasm.) If the story is in first-person narration (*i.e.*, written from the perspective of one of the characters), a consistent tone will be particularly important.

Delightfulness and Creativity

One of the chief purposes of stories is to delight the reader and hold his attention by telling an interesting tale. Be sure to let your student know what you enjoyed in his story! A story need not be a fantasy to be creative; rather, creativity is an overall quality that arises from interesting characters, exciting plots, thoughtful themes, and the interaction of these qualities.

Mechanics

As in all assignments, the submitted draft should be properly formatted and follow the rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation at a level appropriate to the student's age. The story should also demonstrate that the student completed his work thoughtfully and carefully, following his teacher's directions.

Grading Stories

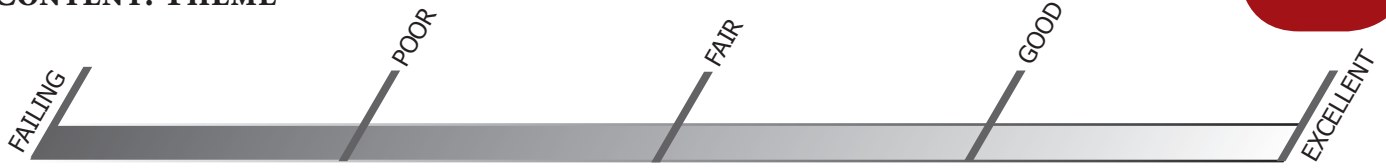
The spectrum is not designed to give a letter or number grade. However, if you wish to assign your student a traditional grade, you can do so by giving points for each criterium. We suggest that the first four criteria (Theme, Characterization, Plot, and Artistry) be worth 20 points each and the last two categories (Delightfulness and Writing Mechanics) be worth 10 points each. You can then determine how many points to give for each category, based on where you mark the spectrum. Assign a letter grade accordingly. (See the sidebar for a point-to-grade scale.)

There are various point-to-grade schemes. Here's the one that we recommend:
A+ 100-98 pts.
A 97-94 pts.
A- 93-90 pts.
B+ 89-88 pts.
B 87-84 pts.
B- 83-80 pts.
C+ 79-78 pts.
C 77-74 pts.
C- 73-70 pts.
D+ 69-68 pts.
D 67-64 pts.
D- 63-60 pts.
F below 60 pts.

Historical Fiction

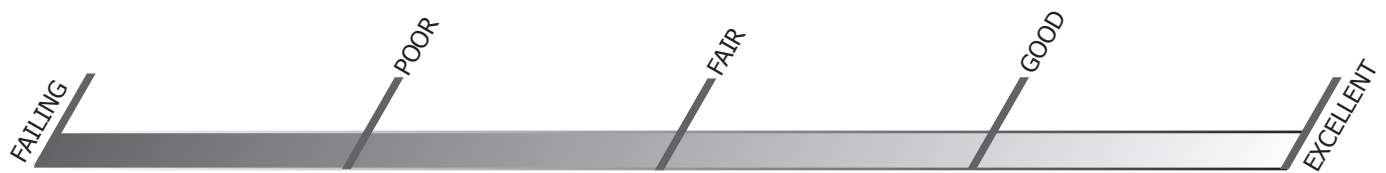


CONTENT: THEME



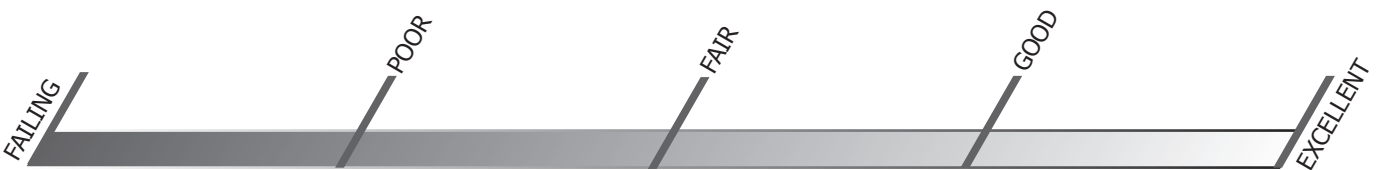
COMMENTS: _____

CONTENT: CHARACTERIZATION



COMMENTS: _____

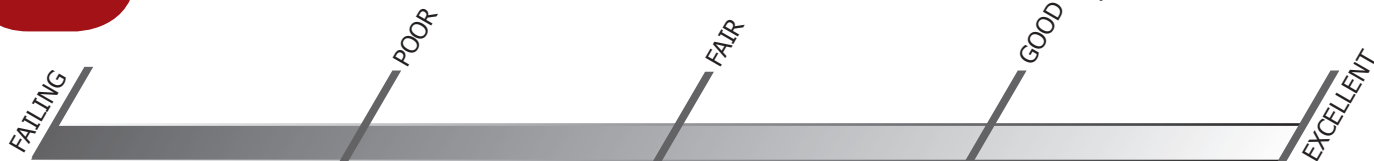
STRUCTURE: PLOT



COMMENTS: _____

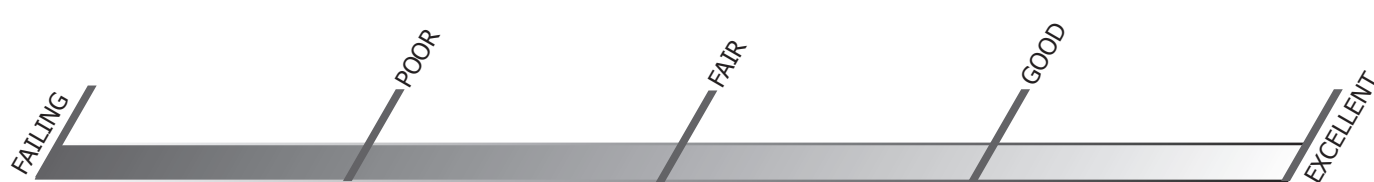


STRUCTURE: ARTISTRY/CRAFTSMANSHIP



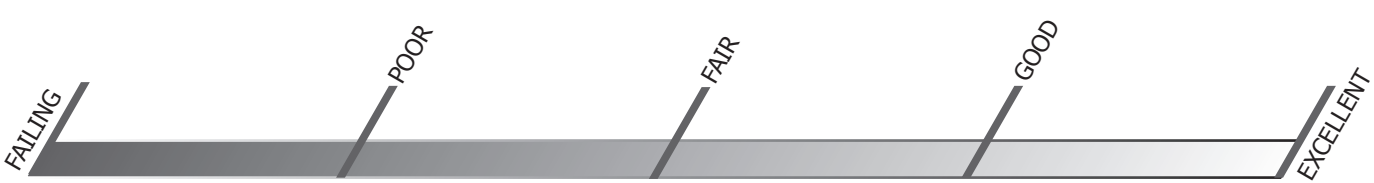
COMMENTS: _____

DELIGHTFULNESS AND CREATIVITY



COMMENTS: _____

WRITING MECHANICS



COMMENTS: _____

