

Grading Story Writing



**Levels 3, 6,
8 and 11**

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 always be required to 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. Teachers mark each criterium box in one place (typically using an X) and write specific comments that will help the student to improve future stories. Focusing on this kind of feedback may be particularly helpful for Level 3 and Level 6 students, who are just beginning to write stories. Below are our suggested criteria for this spectrum, so that you may have a basis for providing more detailed comments.

Evaluating the Story

Content

Theme: Can you determine the student's overall message or theme? An excellent story will communicate its theme clearly, although not always explicitly. Younger students will generally state the message directly, and the events of the story should support this theme. You should be able to determine a younger student's theme by asking, "What is the point of this story?" In more sophisticated stories, the theme is woven into the story and stands on its own. For older students, the theme may often be determined by answering the question, "What experiment in living is this character conducting?" 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 as he reads the story. Details regarding clothing, mannerisms, speech patterns, and background can help make characters more real. The best characterization will follow the "show, don't tell" maxim, revealing characters through words and actions. Moreover, characters should be basically self-consistent, always acting like the same kind of person. Finally, the dialogue between characters should also be consistent with the characters and help to reveal who they are.

Structure

Plot: 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 follow the events. A good plot will not have events that contradict each other or that make another aspect of the plot impossible. Older students should construct plots that are not easily predictable by introducing a "twist" or by complicating the problem that the characters face. The resolution of the plot should make sense and flow from the beginning and middle of the story.

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, vivid descriptions, and well-structured sentences and paragraphs.
- * The narrative style should balance direct, authorial narration and indirect narration through dialogue. Narrative choices will also dictate how much the author describes the setting and how much



he reveals the setting through characters' reaction to or experience of it.

- * For older writers in particular, a good style will also include a consistent tone throughout the piece. The tone refers to the general "feel" of the story. (Mark Twain, for instance, has a humorous tone; Homer's is high and formal; Jane Austen's has gentle sarcasm.)
- * Attention to detail is another important aspect of artistry. If the story has good attention to detail, it will maintain historical accuracy, self-consistent descriptions, and interesting dialogue.

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 fantastic or complicated to be creative; rather, creativity is an overall quality that arises from the working together of an interesting theme, plot, and characters.

Execution of Assignment/Overall Effect

The submitted draft is properly formatted and conforms to the rules of grammar, correct usage, and punctuation, at a level appropriate to the student. Overall, the story accomplishes the purpose for which it was written. The story demonstrates that the student completed his work thoughtfully and carefully, following the assignment 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 category. We suggest that you allot 20 possible points for each of the first four criteria boxes (Theme, Characterization, Plot, and Artistry) and 10 possible points for each of the last two criteria (Delightfulness and Execution of Assignment). You can then determine how many points to give for each category, based on where you mark the spectrum. A mark in the "Excellent" range, for example, would receive 18 to 20 points, while one near "Good" would receive 16-18. Add the points, and assign a letter grade accordingly. (See the sidebar for a scale to convert points to a letter.)

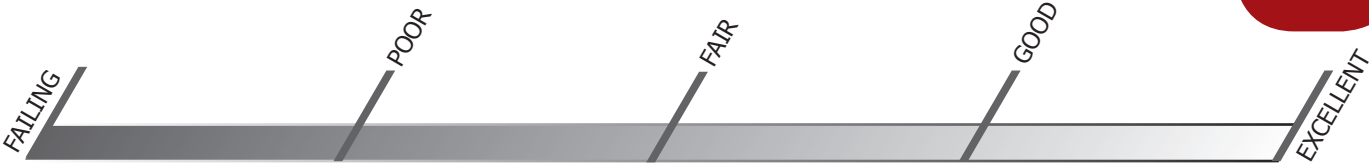
There are various point-to-grade schemes. Here's the one that we recommend:

- 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.



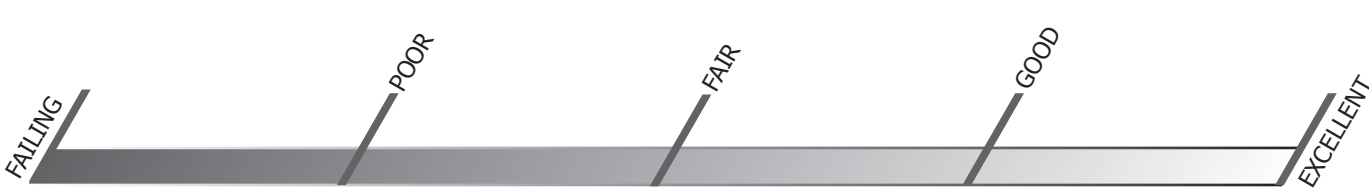
Story Writing Spectrum

CONTENT: THEME



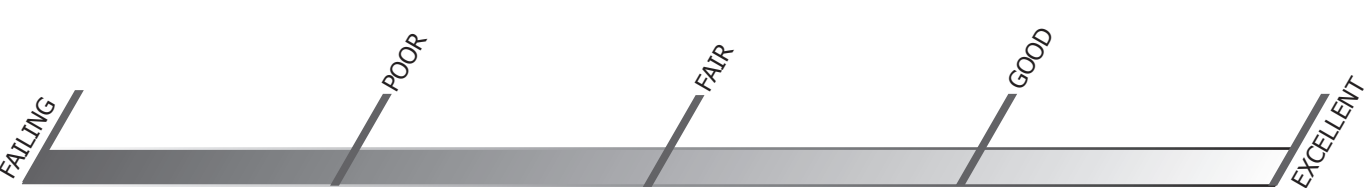
COMMENTS: _____

CONTENT: CHARACTERIZATION



COMMENTS: _____

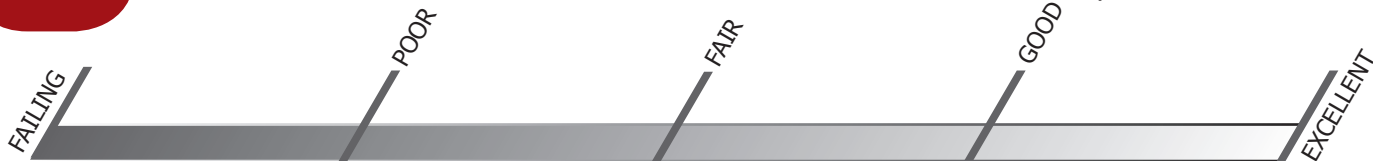
STRUCTURE: PLOT



COMMENTS: _____

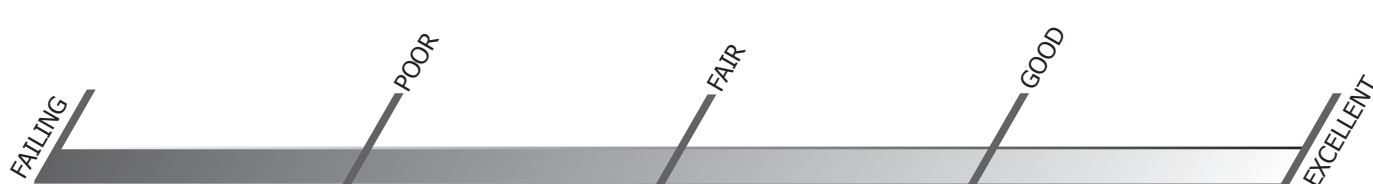


STRUCTURE: ARTISTRY/CRAFTSMANSHIP



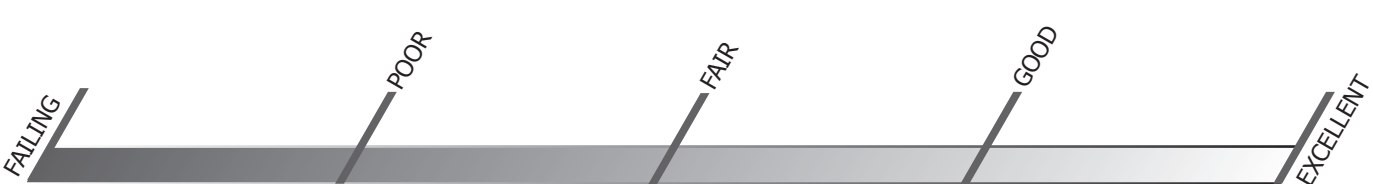
COMMENTS: _____

DELIGHTFULNESS & CREATIVITY



COMMENTS: _____

EXECUTION OF ASSIGNMENT/OVERALL EFFECT



COMMENTS: _____

