

ASSESSMENT OF WRITING UNDER FOUR RATING SCALES

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Abstract: Evaluation of writing can be a real challenge in that there are numerous things that could, in principle, be evaluated. An essay, for example, emerges after one has written a series of drafts. Focus on grammar and mechanics (e.g., spelling and punctuation) are typically addressed in later stages of the development process. A learner's motivation to write can be negatively affected by a teacher's untimely or exclusive focus on surface issues of form such as grammatical concerns, spelling, and punctuation. A learner's composition has usually gone through several rounds of peer and self-assessment before it reaches the teacher for his/her input. This has involved students more in the assessment of their own writing. The same written text can be assessed according to atleast four different scales, and some scales may produce clearer results than other scales do. This paper will focus on the four different scales namely, holistic, analytic, primary trait, and multitrait.

Keywords: analytic, holistic, multitrait, primary trait.

Introduction: Assessment of writing is a complex process. Teachers assign writing task for different instructional purposes like “to improve learners writing fluency, to orient learners in the use and manipulation of linguistic and rhetorical forms” (Raimes, 1987). An essay written as part of the assessment process involves the use of rating scales. The knowledge that I gathered about the four rating scales while attending Andrew Cohen’s online course “Assessing Language Ability in Young Adults and Adults” is shared in this article. Here, in that online course, I came to know that there are certain scales that can be used to assess the learner’s work. To define the rating scales, Andrew Cohen provided the example of a group of advanced intermediate ESL students who wrote an essay in response to the following:

below is the holistic scale to rate the learners work by assigning one of the numbers in the figure.

Read the two brief articles with conflicting views on the same theme (“Brain structure explains male/female differences.” and “Brain structure does not explain male/female differences.”). Role play a Professor who had taken a public stand in favor of the views expressed in one of the articles (whichever you wish), but who has now found evidence to favor the views expressed in the second article. Your task is to summarize both articles, indicate the position you now take, and admit your error in having previously taken a counter position.

- Holistic Rating Scale (based on Hamp-Lyons, 1991)
- 5 = The main idea in each of the two articles is stated very clearly and there is a clear statement of change of opinion. The essay is well organized and coherent. The choice of vocabulary is excellent. There are no major or minor grammatical errors. Spelling and punctuation are fine.
 - 4 = The main idea in each article is fairly clear and a change of opinion is evident. The essay is moderately well organized and is relatively coherent. The vocabulary is good and there are only minor grammatical errors. There are a few spelling and punctuation errors.
 - 3 = The main idea in each of the articles and a change of opinion are indicated but not so clearly. The essay is not so well organized and is somewhat lacking in coherence. The vocabulary is fair and there are some major and minor grammatical errors. There are anumber of spelling and punctuation errors.
 - 2 = The main idea in each article and a change of opinion are hard to identify in the essay. The essay is poorly organized and relatively incoherent. The use of vocabulary is weak and grammatical errors appear Frequently. Spelling and punctuation errors are frequent.
 - 1 = The main idea of each article and a change of opinion are lacking from the essay. The essay is very poorly organized and generally incoherent. The use of vocabulary is very weak and grammatical errors appear very frequently. Spelling and punctuation errors are very frequent.
- Score ___

There are four rating scales namely, holistic, analytic, primary trait, and multitrait. These are discussed below:

A holistic rating scale is based on a single, amalgamated rating (of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and the mechanics of the essay). Holistic score provides a general sense of how the learner performed the writing task. The figure

Analytic scale is based on the use of individual

categories, each assess a different aspect of writing. The figure below is the analytic scale (based on the Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey

(1981) ESL Composition Profile) to rate the learners work.

	Excellent = 5	Good = 4	Average = 3	Poor = 2	Very Poor = 1
CONTENT Score : _____	Main ideas are stated clearly and accurately, change of opinion is very clear.	Main ideas are stated fairly clearly and accurately, change of opinion is relatively clear.	Main ideas are somewhat unclear or inaccurate, change of opinion statement is somewhat weak.	Main ideas are not clear or accurate, change of opinion statement is weak.	Main ideas are not at all clear or accurate, there is no change of opinion statement.
ORGANIZATION Score : _____	well-organized and perfectly coherent	fairly well organized and generally coherent	loosely organized but main ideas clear, logical but incomplete sequencing	Ideas disconnected, lacks logical sequencing	No organization, incoherent
VOCABULARY Score : _____	very effective choice of words, use of idioms, and word forms	effective choice of words, use of idioms, and word forms	adequate choice of words but some misuse of vocabulary, idioms, word forms	limited range, confused use of words, idioms, word forms.	very limited range, very poor knowledge of idioms and word forms
GRAMMAR Score: _____	no errors, full control of the complex structures	almost no errors, good control of structure	some errors, fair control of structure	many errors, poor control of structure	dominated by errors, no control of structure
MECHANICS Score: _____	mastery of spelling and punctuation	few errors in spelling and punctuation	a fair number of spelling and punctuation errors	frequent errors in spelling and punctuation	no control over spelling and punctuation

The aim of primary trait (based on Freedman, 1991) is to set specific criteria for successful writing on a particular topic ahead of time.

(Rating just for “change of opinion”)
 5 = The writer makes very clear what the former opinion was, what the current opinion is, and why a change of opinion occurred.
 4 = The writer makes generally clear what the former opinion was, what the current opinion is, and why a change of opinion occurred.
 3 = The writer makes somewhat clear what the former opinion was, what the current opinion is, and why a change of opinion occurred.
 2 = The writer does not make clear what the former opinion was, or does not state a current opinion explicitly, and there is no indication of a change of opinion.
 1 = The writer produces a fragmented response in which it is difficult to determine any opinion.

In multitrait rating, the essay is scored for more than one trait, but not in the fashion of analytic rating. The multiple traits (usually three or four) are developed locally by a given group of teachers, so that the prompts are consistent with those traits. The figure below is the multitrait scale (based on the Michigan Writing

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Assessment Scoring Guide in Hamp Lyons, 1991) to rate the learners work.

	5	4	3	2	1
MAIN IDEA/ OPINION Score :_____	The main idea of each article is stated very clearly and there is a clear change of opinion statement.	The main idea of each article is fairly clear and a change of opinion is evident.	The main idea of each article and a change of opinion are indicated, but not clearly.	The main idea of each article and/ or change of opinion are hard to identify or are lacking in the essay.	The main idea of each article and change of opinion are lacking from the essay.
RHETORICAL FEATURES Score:_____	A well-balanced and unified essay, with the excellent use of transitions.	A moderately well- balanced essay, relatively good use of transitions.	Not so well-balanced or unified essay, somewhat inadequate use of transitions.	Lack of balance and unity in the essay, poor use of transitions.	Total lack of balance and unity in the essay, very poor use of transitions.
LANGUAGE CONTROL Score:_____	Excellent language control; grammatical structures and vocabulary are well chosen.	Good language control, grammatical structures and vocabulary are generally well chosen.	Acceptable language control but the essay lacks fluidity, structures and vocabulary express the ideas but are limited.	Rather weak language control; limited choice of language structures and vocabulary.	Little language control, readers are seriously distracted by language errors and restricted choice of structures.

Thus, while assessing writing task, teachers can use these four rating scales to make the assessment more meaningful.

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