

Top Ten Scoring Principles

1. Know the rubric.

It is your Constitution. Granted, that means it is sometimes hard to interpret, but every score must be an attempt to apply the rubric's language and meaning.

2. Trust evidence, not intuition.

Intuition is a powerful force, but it is also highly subjective (or specific to an individual). Calibration with other scorers requires us to base our judgments on the evidence that everyone can see, not on what a particular person feels.

3. Match evidence to language in the rubric.

A safe rule of thumb: If you circle something on the rubric, be sure you can circle its justification(s) in the student essay itself.

4. Weigh evidence carefully; base judgments on the preponderance of evidence.

Within each scoring dimension, the score must be based on the overall performance as evidenced throughout the essay. Therefore, the score is not based on the student's best or worst moment; rather, the score reflects what is generally true about the student's overall performance within each of the analytic scoring dimensions.

5. Know your biases; leave them at the door.

The trick is not to rid yourself of bias; that's impossible. But you do need to recognize what your biases are, and be mindful of how they can trigger first impressions that can color all judgments that follow. The violation of a cherished grammar rule, for example, must not blind you to all other grammatical aspects the student handled correctly.

6. Focus on what the student does, not on what the student does not do.

Scorers who attend to what is in the essay, rather than what is not or what is missing, tend to score more accurately. That shouldn't surprise us: It is easier to agree on what *is* than on what *could be*. A score is always based on what *is*.

7. Isolate your judgment: One bad element does not equal a bad paper.

Problems in essays often affect the overall reading experience. But an analytic rubric is not designed to assess the overall reading experience. Rather, it is isolating variables, distinguishing between relative strengths and weaknesses. Certain essays will require that you invest more cognitive work into their scoring. Be sure not to be overly punitive in scoring those essays, and be mindful that a student's poor performance in one scoring dimension does not cloud your judgment on the scoring of other, unrelated dimensions.

8. Resist seduction: One good element does not equal a good paper.

It also works the other way. You read an insightful and fluidly written introduction, and after that the writer can do no wrong. (This is known as the "halo effect.") One exceptional insight does not cancel out the many vague points the student does not develop. Correct punctuation or good syntax in one paragraph does not cancel out errors in other paragraphs. Beautiful syntax does not equate to deep content understanding.

9. Recognize direct copy or plagiarism.

Be sure to distinguish between the use of quotes in support of the student's ideas and what may be intentional copying of the author's words.

10. Stick to the rubric.

Don't measure what is not being measured. Handwriting or choice of font, for example, are not criteria on the rubric.