

## Six Traits for Analyzing Historical Writing

### Organization

**5** The paper is organized around a central thesis, which is stated in the first paragraph.

- Ⓔ An inviting introduction draws the reader in; a satisfying conclusion creates a sense of closure.
- Ⓔ Clear transitions create relationships between ideas
- Ⓔ Paragraphs have topic sentences, and details that fit.
- Ⓔ Pacing is well controlled, sometimes slowing down to elaborate and sometimes moving on quickly.
- Ⓔ The title catches the reader's attention and captures the central theme of the piece.
- Ⓔ The organization is easy to follow.

**3** The paper has a main idea and the organizational structure is clear enough to move the reader through the text without much confusion.

- Ⓔ The paper has a recognizable introduction but doesn't create anticipation. The conclusion may not tie up all the loose ends.
- Ⓔ Connections between ideas are fuzzy.
- Ⓔ Sequencing shows some logic.
- Ⓔ The writer rushes ahead without enough detail, or spends too much time on unimportant details.
- Ⓔ The title is uninspired or obvious.
- Ⓔ The reader is unsure why some material is included.

**1** The writing lacks a clear sense of direction. Ideas, details, or events seem strung together in a loose or random structure.

- Ⓔ There is no real thesis to set up an introduction, no real conclusion to wrap things up.
- Ⓔ Connections between ideas are confusing.
- Ⓔ Sequencing is hard to follow and unsatisfying.
- Ⓔ The writing slows to a crawl when the reader wants to get on with it and vice versa.
- Ⓔ Title does not match the content.
- Ⓔ Disorganization makes the paper hard to understand.

### Ideas and Content

**5** The paper is clear and focused. It holds the reader's attention. Accurate research from various sources illustrates and supports the thesis. Citations are complete and accurate.

- Ⓔ The thesis is narrow enough to manage.
- Ⓔ Relevant, telling, quality details from research go beyond the obvious.
- Ⓔ The ideas are fresh and original.
- Ⓔ The reader's questions are anticipated and answered.

**3** The writer is beginning to define the topic, even though development is still basic or general.

- Ⓔ The thesis is fairly broad.
- Ⓔ Some research is cited but doesn't go far in supporting thesis.
- Ⓔ Ideas are reasonably clear, though they may not be detailed, personalized, accurate, or supported by evidence.
- Ⓔ The writer has difficulty going from general observations to specifics.
- Ⓔ More information is needed to "fill in the blanks."
- Ⓔ The writer generally stays on the topic but does not develop a clear theme.

**1** The paper has no clear sense of purpose or central theme.

- Ⓔ The writer has not yet decided what the main idea of the piece will be.
- Ⓔ Information is limited or unclear or drawn from one or two sources.
- Ⓔ The idea is a simple restatement of the topic or an answer to the question with little or no attention to detail.
- Ⓔ It's hard to see what is important.
- Ⓔ Disconnected, random or repetitious thoughts.

### Voice

**5** The writer crafts the writing with an awareness and respect for the audience and the purpose for writing.

- Ⓔ The tone is clear and consistent and appropriate for the purpose and audience.
- Ⓔ The words sound honest and authentic; not pompous or pretentious.
- Ⓔ The writer shows why the reader should care about the topic.
- Ⓔ There is a high meaning-to-syllable ratio—no padding.
- Ⓔ The writing is elegant: everything necessary is present, and everything present is necessary.

**3** The writer seems sincere but not fully engaged or involved. The result is pleasant or even personable, but not compelling.

- Ⓔ The writer settles too easily for obvious generalities.
- Ⓔ The writing communicates in an earnest, pleasing, yet safe manner.
- Ⓔ Only one or two moments here or there intrigue, delight, or move the reader.
- Ⓔ Some passages seem written to fill the page rather than to engage the reader.

**1** The writer seems indifferent, uninvolved, or distanced from the topic and/or the audience.

- Ⓔ The writer is not concerned with the audience. The writer's style doesn't match the intended audience. The paper is so short that little is accomplished beyond introducing the topic.
- Ⓔ The writer speaks in monotone that flattens all thoughts or seems to be trying to impress the reader with lofty, unsupported diction or sentiments.
- Ⓔ The writing is lifeless or mechanical; it may be jargonistic.
- Ⓔ The development of the theme is so limited that no point of view is presented.

5: Distinguished  
3: Proficient  
1: Emerging

Six Traits for Analyzing Historical Writing  
Scoring Guide  
**MONTANA HERITAGE PROJECT**

## Word Choice

**5** Words convey the intended message in a precise, interesting, and natural way.

G Words are specific and accurate. It is easy to understand what the writer means.

G Striking words and phrases often catch the reader's eye and linger in the reader's mind.

G Language and phrasing is natural, effective, and appropriate for the audience.

G Lively verbs add energy while specific nouns and modifiers add clarity.

G Precision is obvious. The writer has taken care to put just the right word or phrase in just the right spot.

**3** The language is functional, even if it lacks much energy. It is easy to figure out the writer's meaning on a general level.

G Words are adequate and correct in a general sense, and they support the meaning by not getting in the way.

G Familiar words and phrases communicate but rarely capture the reader's imagination.

G Attempts at colorful language show a willingness to stretch and grow but sometimes detract. (thesaurus overload!).

G Passive verbs, everyday nouns, and mundane modifiers create little excitement.

G The language seems to be the first thing that popped into the writer's mind.

**1** The writer demonstrates a limited vocabulary or has not searched for words to convey specific meaning.

G Words are too nonspecific to convey much meaning.

G Incorrect language distracts from the meaning.

G Limited vocabulary limits communication.

G Words and phrases are unimaginative and lifeless.

G Jargon or clichés distract or mislead. Redundancy may distract the reader.

## Sentence Fluency

**5** The writing has an easy flow, rhythm, and cadence. Sentences have strong and varied structure that makes them fun to read aloud.

G Sentences are constructed to emphasize and enhance meaning.

G Sentences vary in length as well as structure.

Fragments, if used, add style. Dialogue, if present, sounds natural.

G Purposeful and varied sentence beginnings add variety and energy.

G Creative and precise transitions between sentences and thoughts shows how each relates to the one before it.

G The writing has cadence; the writer has thought about the sound of the words as well as the meaning. It is easy to read aloud.

**3** The text moves along in a way that's more mechanical than fluid or musical.

G Sentences get the job done in a routine fashion.

G Sentences are usually constructed correctly.

G Sentence beginnings are not ALL alike; some variety is attempted.

G The reader sometimes has to hunt for clues that show how sentences or ideas are related.

G Parts of the text may be stiff, awkward, or choppy.

**1** The reader has to practice to read this paper aloud. It's confusing.

G Sentences are choppy, incomplete, rambling or awkward. Phrasing does not sound natural.

G Sentences do not hang together.

G Many sentences begin the same way—and follow the same patterns.

G Thoughts are jumbled.

G The text does not invite expressive oral reading.

## Conventions

**5** The writing is complex enough to show skill with a wide range of conventions. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, and paragraphing enhance readability.

G Spelling is generally correct, even on difficult words.

G Accurate punctuation guides readers through the text.

G Capitalization is correct and consistent.

G Grammar and usage are correct, and contribute to clarity and style.

G Paragraphs have topic sentences, supporting details.

G The piece is nearly ready to publish.

**3** Conventions are sometimes handled well and enhance readability; at other times, errors distract the reader.

G Spelling is usually correct or reasonably phonetic.

G Punctuation (commas, apostrophes, semicolons, dashes, colons, parentheses) is sometimes wrong.

G Control over sophisticated capitalization is spotty.

G Problems with grammar or usage do not distort meaning but may not always be correct.

G Paragraphing is attempted but may begin in the wrong places. Paragraphs contain material that doesn't belong.

G Moderate editing would be needed before publication.

**1** Errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, usage, and grammar and/or paragraphing distract the reader and make the text difficult to read.

G Spelling errors are frequent.

G Punctuation is often missing or incorrect.

G Capitalization is random.

G Errors in grammar or usage frequently affect meaning.

G Paragraphing is missing or has no relationship to the organizational structure of the text.

G The text is hard to decode. Re-writing would be required before publication.