### Bethel College Writing Assessment Rubric

**Skills:** “Students attending Bethel shall acquire the skills to communicate in writing with grace and precision” (*BC Catalog 44*).

Assign scores using the full range of a 5-point scale, based on the expectations you have for a graduate of Bethel College and the descriptions on the following pages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Failed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Thesis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Supporting detail, evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tone and word choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Documentation of sources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Grammatical competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Critical thinking: the essay’s evaluation of ideas, sources, experience, and/or other evidence shows the ability to “read carefully and reason clearly” (<em>BC Catalog 51</em>).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments or concerns:**
Does assessing this essay cause any further reflections or concerns on the degree to which we appear to be meeting our teaching goals and educational mission?

Revised April 2013
## Bethel College Writing Assessment Rubric – Explanation of Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills: Writing with grace and precision</th>
<th>Notes toward criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Thesis                               | **Excellent:** In humanities and generalized writing, a well-conceptualized, well-formulated position or hypothesis and a map of the order of the essay is proposed up front. Or, for fields which site the thesis elsewhere, results are presented at the site in the document that corresponds to the discipline’s expected form.  
**Strong:** A well-conceptualized main point or hypothesis is presented up front and shows that the essay is focused. The claim is specific, not so general that it cannot be supported fully within the essay’s scope and length.  
**Adequate:** A reasonable case, if somewhat more general, holds the essay together for the most part. A placeholder saying that a thesis is coming might be stated up front.  
**Weak:** A possible position or main point emerges somewhere in the essay, after much exploration.  
**Failed:** No purpose or position is articulated; no focus. |
| 2. Organization                         | **Excellent:** The order of the essay’s pieces and parts corresponds accurately to a well-conceptualized thesis and its stated map of the essay or project. The formal relation of parts to whole meaningfully supports the content with strong connecting transitions. Such connective tissue often shows excellent analysis, by thinking through and stating the connection to the thesis. The organization is appropriate for the field; for example, science writing may require numerical and labeled subsections, whereas humanities writing may require key words in every topic sentence that link each paragraph to the thesis.  
**Strong:** The order of the essay makes sense and has been thought through well. Transitions consistently unify each section with the thesis, but they are somewhat generic rather than as analytical as is possible. The organization makes sense with the thesis and the formal structure required by the field.  
**Adequate:** Data and reflections are grouped into units. The essay has a beginning, middle, and end, or shows another consistent formal relation of parts to whole. Not all sections are fully unified with the thesis or perhaps individual paragraphs are not unified.  
**Weak:** Material exists in a single stream or as discrete fragments.  
**Failed:** The order of the essay does not make sense; it may show extremes of single-stream flow or fragmented sections. |
| 3. Supporting detail, evidence          | **Excellent:** Numerous examples are quoted or described and developed to show how they support each aspect of the overall thesis. Each example is tightly related to the main point. Thoughtful commentary shows the critical thinking that connects the evidence. The complexity of examples is brought out. The language of the essay is specific to an intended audience. The essay addresses a reader’s needs by offering context, rather than staying within the writer’s thought patterns.  
**Strong:** Effective, complex examples and/or reasoning support each point.  
**Adequate:** Examples and/or reasoning support each example.  
**Weak:** Not enough examples are given. Not enough detail is included.  
**Failed:** Unsupported assertions exist. |
| 4. Tone and word choice                 | **Excellent:** College-level, specific vocabulary appropriate to the subject matter assists the search for meaning. Active verbs drive sentences forward without extra words. No redundancies in meaning exist, such as “the reason is because…” Precision of meaning has been developed with extra care and revision. Language uses are ethical.  
**Strong:** Wording is clear for the disciplinary context and intended audience. Tone is appropriate to the writing context, the relevant disciplinary field, and an intended audience.  
**Adequate:** Some ambiguities of meaning may exist, where sentences can be read in unintended ways. A tendency to redundant language, or tendency to passive verbs may be present.  
**Weak:** Vocabulary is overgeneralized, such as vague pronouns instead of names or nouns (“thing,” “it,” or “that” need to be replaced with specific language, for example). Tone may not appropriate for the subject matter or for critical thinking, such as emotional punctuation or exaggeration and hyperbole (“totally” and “awesome” for example are often too vague and non-specific). Unethical language uses may be present, such as highly charged rather than neutral terms, and/or biased, exclusionary language. Ad hominem or name calling language is atonal and unethical. **Note:** Many dialects of the English language exist internationally and are very valuable, but a formal standard academic English is required as a skill set established by or in college for professional communications. See ESL sections in *Keys for Writers.*  
**Failed:** Vocabulary is chosen for an inappropriate audience. Texting dialect, for example, would constitute failure to write for an academic audience. Extreme examples of weak language can be considered cause for failure. |
| 5. Documentation of sources | **Excellent:** The essay shows correct in-text citations and bibliographic form for the field of study. All claims of fact and sources cited are correctly indexed to the relevant passages and origins, and additional thoroughness is offered to assist the reader’s contextual knowledge.  
**Strong:** The essay uses formulas for the documentation style in the appropriate field. All claims of fact and sources cited are documented, although a few minor errors of form may exist.  
**Adequate:** A bibliography and some in-text citations exist, although they are not consistently in the discipline-appropriate form. The entries suggest that the writer does not fully understand the purpose of each element of the bibliography or citation.  
**Weak:** A bibliography exists but not in-text citations, or vice versa, suggesting that the writer is attempting to acknowledge sources but not specifying which part of the essay is indebted to which source. The writer does not show understanding of the purpose of the bibliographic entries matching up to in-text citations. Citations and bibliographical entries may exist but do not accurately match findable sources.  
**Failed:** The essay plagiarizes from sources. The absence of a bibliography and/or in-text citations, whether intentional and egregious or merely accidental, constitutes plagiarism. |
|---|---|
| 6. Grammatical competence | **Excellent:** No typographical errors exist, or almost none. A wide range of sentence structures, from simple to complex, shows strong understanding of written language. Clear grammatical uses assist the reader’s comprehension rather than overcomplicating it. The writer builds meaning sentence by sentence.  
**Strong:** Very few surface errors exist. (Surface errors include misspellings, missing words, and minor punctuation issues.)  
**Adequate:** Surface proofreading errors exist; a few sentence-level errors exist, but they do not interfere with the communicative meaning of the text. (Sentence-level errors suggest that use of complete sentence structures is not mastered, or that the writer is mixing and “snarling” types of sentence structures. Comma splices, run-ons, and fragments are examples of major, sentence-level errors.)  
**Weak:** Several sentence-level and surface errors per page exist; the errors interfere significantly with the reader’s ability to understand the essay. It is a fairly common error to reverse a word or leave out a phrase and then accidentally have a sentence or sentences that communicates the opposite of the intended meaning. This shows lack of control over language and drastically weakens essays.  
**Failed:** Lack of control over grammar and lack of understanding complete sentences causes the reader not to be able to understand the content of the essay. A high error rate can cause great interference with meaning. |
| 7. Critical thinking: the essay’s evaluation of ideas, sources, experience, and/or other evidence shows the ability to “read carefully and reason clearly” (BC Catalog 51). | **Excellent:** Fine deductive and/or inductive reasoning, as appropriate for the field of study, is insightfully carried out and explained. The reasoning is persuasive. The evidence chosen shows a strong principle of selection in terms of authority of source or relevance to the point that is being supported. The writer bravely raises questions, tests, and/or discusses strengths and weaknesses, rather than simply rubber-stamping other thinkers. The writer takes on complex ideas and explores them thoughtfully, rather than underestimating the complexity.  
**Strong:** Quoted material and sources used for authority have commentary around them revealing a strong principle of selection or other good analysis. The writer offers a basis for each conclusion or claim; the reasoning from bases to conclusions seems plausible. The basic principles of induction and deduction are applied well when appropriate.  
**Adequate:** The writer offers reasonably thoughtful reasons for all opinions and positions. Sources cited are not obviously weak or inappropriate for college-level work. A clear point is made with each source. In some sections, the writer may tend to rely upon clichés or generalizations rather than full analysis.  
**Weak:** Sources appear weak or merely spliced together. The writer radically simplifies (e.g., using straw arguments or either/or fallacies).  
**Failed:** Opinions without reasons or sources or a college-level basis cannot pass, and are not considered critical thinking. |