

# Developing an Interim Formative Assessment and Writing Rubric for ELLs in Grades 2-8

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## INTRODUCTION

Working in collaboration with professor Chad Leith of Salem State University, the SEI teaching team at the Nathaniel Bowditch K-8 school in Salem, MA, created a writing rubric for ELLs at ELD levels 1-3. The goal of the process was to inform instruction by providing teachers with more nuanced information about their ELLs' reading and writing skills than might be obtained through the administration of standardized interim assessments that are more appropriate for students at higher levels of English proficiency.

The team met bi-monthly to engage in the task of creating and using the new rubric, which was successfully implemented and analyzed.



## TOOL

Nathaniel Bowditch School  
SEI Writing Rubric - Grades 2-8

Score	Linguistic Complexity	Vocabulary Usage	Language Control	Task Response
5 (WIDA.3)	Simple and expanded sentences that show emerging complexity used to provide detail. Some sentences include original phrasing.	Demonstrates basic ability to re-state ideas from the text using general and some specific language related to the content area. Selects and uses appropriate words, including some not found in text.	Comprehensible when writing in simple original sentences. Errors (i.e. in spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation) may sometimes interfere with communication when attempting to produce more complex text.	Fully addresses the task. Response is clear and complete. Includes important information or details from the text to support the response. Evidence of basic organization that is appropriate to task.
4	Mostly simple sentences; some may include original phrasing. May use conjunctions to create one or more simple compound sentences.	May include one or more specific words related to the content area that are not found in text. Lack of needed vocabulary may be evident.	Generally comprehensible when writing simple original (e.g. non-copied) sentences. Errors may occasionally impede communication.	Mostly addresses the task. Evidence of basic organization. Response is mostly clear and complete. Includes relevant but often general information from the text.
3 (WIDA.2)	Phrases and short sentences; varying amount of text may be copied or adapted.	Usage of general language related to the content area, although words may be drawn directly from the text. Lack of vocabulary may be evident.	Comprehensible when text is adapted from model or source text. Original text is generally comprehensible when limited to simple phrases. Errors may often impede communication.	Addresses the task only minimally. Some attempt at organization may be evidenced. Response includes limited information from the passage and may include inaccuracies.
2	Single words, set phrases or chunks of simple language; significant amount of text may be copied; adapted text contains original language.	Response includes use of general language and limited use of content-area vocabulary words.	Generally comprehensible when text is copied or adapted from model or source text. Errors may significantly impede communication.	Barely responds to the task. Response includes little or no information from the text.
1	Single words, set phrases or chunks of simple language that are mainly copied.	Words mostly limited to general language. Few or no appropriate content-area vocabulary words.	Somewhat comprehensible when text is copied from model or source text. Errors in original text may prevent communication.	Answer is incorrect or irrelevant or contains insufficient information to demonstrate comprehension.
0	May include one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No English word(s).</li> <li>"I don't know."</li> <li>The only clear English word(s) are copied from the item prompt.</li> <li>Isolated English words in a response that is otherwise incomprehensible.</li> <li>No attempted response.</li> <li>Response is incomprehensible.</li> </ul>			

Score: \_\_\_\_\_ / 20 Notes/Comments:

## Relevant Resources

WIDA. (2015). *WIDA Performance Definitions – Speaking & Writing*.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2011). *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for ELA and Literacy, Speaking and Listening and Language Standards*.

## DESCRIPTION

### Collaborative Process: Designing and testing the Rubric

Achieving the goal of developing an assessment and a procedure for analyzing student responses involved the following steps:

- The SEI team examined the ELA curriculum frameworks and reviewed sample text-based writing assessments to develop a writing prompt appropriate for ELLs at ELD levels 1 & 2. It was decided that Massachusetts Reading Standard 2 would be our focus:

*“Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.”*

- The SEI team reviewed and developed a draft writing rubric that was designed to be appropriately nuanced for students at ELD levels 1 & 2. The group also agreed to the same three categories as WIDA, Linguistic Complexity, Vocabulary Usage, and Language Control. The last column, Task Response, was added to account for the correctness of the students' answers.

- Teachers administered writing prompts to their respective students, using texts selected by different groups within the SEI team. Grade level bands were created and implemented. Grades 2 and 3, grades 4 and 5, and grades 6 through 8 were banded together. This allowed the teachers to collaborate in choosing the books and in writing the prompts. A key point was to make sure the prompt was asking for evidence that supports reading standard 2.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 2/25/15

- Read the text.
- The book says breaking laws can get you into trouble. Give an example from the book that explains how people could get into trouble.
- Use details to support your answer.



Write:  
 WEN you are cross the street  
 on we have polis cross the  
 street we you on we have to  
 ride in spacio seats in cars.

### Putting the Rubric into Action

- The team participated in a norming process to ensure consistent application of the writing rubric, and scored completed student writing prompts.
- Teachers analyzed student writing, using the draft rubric to score the work. Each paper was read by two readers. Discrepancies yielded a conversations about different viewpoints on writing development.
- Teachers developed individual instructional action plans for their classrooms.
- Through this process, teachers developed and practiced the skill of participating in and facilitating protocol-based discussions focused on looking at student work.

Nathaniel Bowditch School  
SEI Writing Prompt  
Sept./Oct. 2014

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

Reader #1 Overall Score: \_\_\_\_\_ / 20

Reader #2 Overall Score: \_\_\_\_\_ / 20

Reader #3 Score: \_\_\_\_\_ / 20

(3<sup>rd</sup> reader only if first 2 readers' scores are discrepant by 4 points or more).

AVERAGE SCORE \_\_\_\_\_

## APPLICATION

Both the SEI writing rubric and the process undertaken to create and implement it have potentially significant implications for other schools and districts.

### The rubric:

The SEI text-based writing rubric provides a nuanced tool for measuring and monitoring ELLs' emerging abilities to respond to text through writing. By zooming in on WIDA ACCESS levels 1-3, it enables teachers and teaching teams to more accurately measure progress and target skills for re-teaching and/or intervention. The SEI text-based writing rubric is particularly advantageous because it can work with any text, allowing teachers or teams to select texts that are appropriate for their students' ELD levels. While many popular interim assessments are aimed at native speakers of English, this writing rubric – when paired with an appropriate text – can allow teachers and teams to reduce language interference which often hinders the ability to draw accurate conclusions about the needs of individual ELLs.

### The process:

The process undertaken by the Nathaniel Bowditch SEI team also offers an easily replicable template for teacher collaboration. As described previously, the process of administering and scoring the first prompt led to rich collegial conversations about how to develop the writing proficiency of ELLs across specific skill strands (i.e. organization, language complexity, vocabulary). More experienced members of the team, along with the SSU facilitator, offered helpful suggestions around specific instructional techniques to help ELLs at different levels of proficiency. While data for each writing prompt was collected and analyzed, it was often these collegial conversations – as the team sought to perfect the rubric – that some of the most valuable professional growth among teachers took place.