Grades 3-12 Traits Rubric for Ideas

Key question: Does the writer stay focused and share original information or a fresh perspective on the topic?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	No main idea, purpose, or central theme exists; reader must infer this based on sketchy or missing details	Main idea is still missing, though possible topic/theme is emerging	Main idea is present; may be broad or simplistic	Topic or theme is identified as main idea; development remains basic or general	Main idea is well-marked by detail but could benefit from additional information	Main idea is clear, supported, and enriched by relevant evidence, anecdotes, and/or details
A	No topic emerges	Several topics emerge; any might become central theme or main idea	Topic becomes clear, though still too broad, lacking focus; reader must infer message	Topic is fairly broad, yet author's direction is clear	Topic is focused yet still needs additional narrowing	Topic is narrow, manageable, and focused
B	Support for topic is not evident	Support for topic is limited, unclear; length is not adequate for development	Support for topic is incidental or confusing, not focused	Support for topic is starting to work; still does not quite flesh out key issues	Support for topic is clear and relevant except for a moment or two	Support is strong, credible, and accurate
C	There are no details	Few details are present; piece simply restates topic and main idea or merely answers a question	Additional details are present but lack specificity; main idea or topic emerges but remains weak	Some details begin to define main idea or topic, yet are limited in number or clarity	Accurate, precise details support one main idea	Details are relevant, revealing; quality details go beyond obvious and are not predictable
D	Author is not using own knowledge/experience; ideas are not author's	Author generalizes about topic without own knowledge/experience	Author relies on others' experiences rather than his/her own	Author demonstrates own knowledge/experience, yet still relies on others' generic knowledge/experiences	Author presents new ways of thinking about topic based on own knowledge/experience	Author uses own knowledge/experience; ideas are fresh and original
E	No reader's questions have been answered	Reader has many questions due to lack of specifics; it is hard to "fill in the blanks"	Reader begins to recognize focus with specifics, though questions remain	Reader generally understands content and has only a few questions	Reader's questions are usually anticipated and answered by author	Reader's questions are all answered
F	Author doesn't help reader make any connections	Author does not yet connect topic with reader in any way although attempts are made	Author provides glimmers into topic; casual connections are made by reader	Author stays on topic and begins to connect reader through self, text, world, or other resources	Author connects reader to topic with a few anecdotes, text, or other sources	Author helps reader make many connections by sharing significant insights

Grades 3–12 Traits Rubric for Organization

Key question: Does the organizational structure enhance the ideas and make the piece easier to understand?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Organization can't be identified; writing lacks sense of direction; content is strung together in loose, random fashion	Organization is mostly ineffective; only moments here and there direct reader	Organization is still problematic though structure begins to emerge; ability to follow text is slowed	Organization moves reader through text without too much confusion	Organization is smooth; only a few small bumps here and there exist	Organization enhances and showcases central idea; order of information is compelling, moving reader through text
A	There is no lead to set up what follows, no conclusion to wrap things up	The lead and/or conclusion are ineffective or do not work	Either lead or conclusion or both may be present but are clichés or leave reader wanting more	A recognizable lead and conclusion are present; lead may not create a strong sense of anticipation; conclusion may not tie up all loose ends	While lead and/or conclusion go beyond obvious, either could go even further	An inviting lead draws reader in; satisfying conclusion leaves reader with sense of closure and resolution
B	Transitions between paragraphs are confusing or nonexistent	Weak transitions emerge yet offer little help to get from one paragraph to next and not often enough to eliminate confusion	Some transitions are used but they repeat or mislead resulting in weak chunking of paragraphs	Transitions often work yet are predictable and formulaic; paragraphs are coming together with topic sentence and support	Transitions are logical, though may lack originality; ideas are chunked in proper paragraphs and topic sentences are properly used	Thoughtful transitions clearly show how ideas (paragraphs) connect throughout entire piece, helping to showcase content of each paragraph
C	Sequencing doesn't work	Little useful sequencing is present; it's hard to see how piece fits together as a whole	Sequencing has taken over so completely, it dominates ideas; is painfully obvious and formulaic	Sequencing shows some logic, but is not controlled enough to consistently showcase ideas	Sequencing makes sense and moves a bit beyond obvious, helping move reader through piece	Sequencing is logical and effective; moves reader through piece with ease from start to finish
D	Pacing is not evident	Pacing is awkward; it slows to a crawl when reader wants to get on with it, and vice versa	Pacing is dominated by one part of piece and is not controlled in remainder	Pacing is fairly well controlled; sometimes lunges ahead too quickly or hangs up on details that do not matter	Pacing is controlled; there are still places author needs to highlight or move through more effectively	Pacing is well controlled; author knows when to slow down to elaborate, and when to move on
E	Title (if required) is absent	Title (if required) doesn't match content	Title (if required) hints at weak connection to content; is unclear	Uninspired title (if required) only restates prompt or topic	Title (if required) settles for minor idea about content rather than capturing deeper theme	Title (if required) is original, reflecting content and capturing central theme
F	Lack of structure makes it almost impossible for reader to understand purpose	Structure fails to fit purpose of writing, leaving reader struggling to discover purpose	Structure begins to clarify purpose	Structure sometimes supports purpose, at other times reader wants to rearrange pieces	Structure generally works well for purpose and for reader	Structure flows so smoothly reader hardly thinks about it; choice of structure matches and highlights purpose

Grades 3–12 Traits Rubric for Voice

Key question: Would you keep reading this piece if it were longer?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Author seems indifferent, uninvolved, or distanced from topic, purpose, and/or audience	Author relies on reader's good faith to hear or feel any voice in phrases such as "I like it" or "It was fun"	Author's voice is hard to recognize, even if reader is trying desperately to "hear" it	Author seems sincere, yet not fully engaged or involved; result is pleasant or even personable, though topic and purpose are still not compelling	Author attempts to address topic, purpose, and audience in sincere and engaging way; piece still skips a beat here and there	Author speaks directly to reader in individual, compelling, and engaging way that delivers purpose and topic; although passionate, author is respectful of audience and purpose
A	Author does not interact with reader in any fashion; writing is flat resulting in a disengaged reader	Author uses only clichés, resulting in continued lack of interaction with reader	Author seems aware of reader yet avoids original insights in favor of safe generalities	Author attempts to reach audience and has some moments of successful interaction	Author communicates with reader in earnest, pleasing, authentic manner	Author interacts with and engages reader in ways that are personally revealing
B	Author takes no risks, reveals nothing, lulls reader to sleep	Author reveals little yet doesn't risk enough to engage reader	Author surprises reader with random "aha" and minimal risk-taking	Author surprises, delights, or moves reader in more than one or two places	Author's moments of insight and risk-taking enliven piece	Author risks revealing self and shows individual thinking
C	Tone is not evident	Tone does not support writing	Tone is flat; author does not commit to own writing	Tone begins to support and enrich writing	Tone leans in right direction most of the time	Tone gives flavor and texture to message and is appropriate
D	Commitment to topic is missing; writing is lifeless or mechanical; it may be overly technical, formulaic, or jargonistic	Commitment to topic "might" be present; author does not help reader feel anything or understand topic better	Commitment to topic begins to emerge; reader wonders if author cares about topic	Commitment to topic is present; author's point of view may emerge in a place or two but is obscured behind vague generalities	Commitment to topic is clear and focused; author's enthusiasm starts to catch on	Commitment to topic is strong; author's passion about topic is clear and compelling; reader wants to know more
E	Voice is inappropriate for purpose/text type	Voice does not support purpose/text type; narrative is only an outline; informative/explanatory or opinion/argument writing lacks conviction or authority to set it apart from mere list of facts	Voice is starting to support purpose/text type though remains weak in many places	Voice lacks spark for purpose/text type; narrative is sincere; informative/explanatory or opinion/argument lacks consistent engagement with topic to build credibility	Voice supports author's purpose/text type; narrative entertains, engages reader; informative/explanatory or opinion/argument reveals why author chose ideas	Voice is appropriate for purpose/text type; voice is engaging, passionate, and enthusiastic

Grades 3-12 Traits Rubric for Word Choice

Key question: Do the words and phrases create vivid pictures and linger in your mind?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Vocabulary is limited; author searches for words to convey meaning; no mental imagery exists	Vocabulary is flawed, resulting in impaired meaning; wrong words are used; and reader can't picture message or content	Vocabulary is understandable yet lacks energy; some interpretation is needed to understand parts of piece	Vocabulary is functional yet still lacks energy; author's meaning is easy to understand in general	Vocabulary is more precise and appropriate; mental imagery emerges	Vocabulary is powerful and engaging, creating mental imagery; words convey intended message in precise, interesting, and natural way
A	Words are overly broad and/or so generic no message is evident	Words are so vague and mundane that message is limited and unclear	Words are adequate and correct in a general sense; message starts to emerge	Words work and begin to shape unique, individual piece; message is easy to identify	In most cases words are "just right" and clearly communicate message	Words are precise and accurate; author's message is easy to understand
B	Vocabulary confuses reader and is contradictory; words create no mental imagery, no lingering memory	Vocabulary has no variety or spice; even simple words are used incorrectly; no mental images exist	Vocabulary is very basic; simple words rule; variety starts to "show" rather than "tell"; mental images are still missing	Vocabulary includes familiar words and phrases that communicate, yet rarely capture reader's imagination; perhaps a moment or two of sparkle or imagery emerges	Vocabulary is strong; it's easy to "see" what author says because of figurative language	Vocabulary is striking, powerful, and engaging; it catches reader's eye and lingers in mind; recall of handful of phrases or mental images is easy and automatic
C	Words are incorrectly used, making message secondary to word misfires	Words are either so plain as to put reader to sleep or so over the top they make no sense	Original, natural word choices start to emerge so piece sounds authentic	Attempts at colorful word choice show willingness to stretch and grow, yet sometimes go too far	New words and phrases are usually correct	Word choice is natural yet original and never overdone; both words and phrases are unique and effective
D	Misuse of parts of speech litters piece, confusing reader; no message emerges	Redundant parts of speech and/or jargon or clichés distract from message	Rote parts of speech reflect a lack of craftsmanship; passive verbs, overused nouns, and lack of modifiers and variety create fuzzy message	Accurate and occasionally refined parts of speech are functional and start to shape message	Correct and varied parts of speech are chosen carefully to communicate message, and clarify and enrich writing	Parts of speech are crafted to best convey message; lively verbs energize, precise nouns/modifiers add depth, color, and specificity

Grades 3–12 Traits Rubric for Sentence Fluency

	Key question: Can you feel the words and phrases flow together as you read them aloud?					
	Not proficient			**Proficient**		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Sentences are incorrectly structured; reader has to practice to give paper a fair interpretive reading; it's nearly impossible to read aloud	Sentences vary little; even easy sentence structures cause reader to stop and decide what is being said and how; it's challenging to read aloud	Sentences are technically correct but not varied, creating sing-song pattern or lulling reader to sleep; it sounds mechanical when read aloud	Sentences are varied and hum along, tending to be pleasant or businesslike though may still be more mechanical than musical or fluid; it's easy to read aloud	Some sentences are rhythmic and flowing; a variety of sentence types are structured correctly; it flows well when read aloud	Sentences have flow, rhythm, and cadence; are well built with strong, varied structure that invites expressive oral reading
A	Sentence structure is choppy, incomplete, run-on, rambling, or awkward	Sentence structure works but has phrasing that sounds unnatural	Sentence structure is usually correct, yet sentences do not flow	Sentence structure is correct and begins to flow but is not artfully crafted or musical	Sentence structure flows well and moves reader fluidly through piece	Sentence structure is strong, underscoring and enhancing meaning while engaging and moving reader from beginning to end in fluid fashion
B	No sentence sense—type, beginning, connective, rhythm—is evident; determining where sentences begin and end is nearly impossible	There is little evidence of sentence sense; to make sentences flow correctly, most have to be totally reconstructed	Sentence sense starts to emerge; reader can read through problems and see where sentences begin and end; sentences vary little	Sentence sense is moderate; sentences are constructed correctly with some variety, hang together, and are sound	Sentence sense is strong; correct construction and variety is used; few examples of dialogue or fragments are used	Sentence sense is strong and contributes to meaning; dialogue, if present, sounds natural; fragments, if used, add style; sentences are nicely balanced in type, beginnings, connectives, and rhythm
C	Incomplete sentences make it hard to judge quality of beginnings or identify type of sentence	Many sentences begin in same way and are simple (subject-verb-object) and monotonous	Simple and compound sentence types and varied beginnings help strengthen piece	Sentence beginnings vary yet are routine, generic; types include simple, compound, and perhaps even complex	Sentence beginnings are varied and unique; four sentence types (simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex) create balance and variety	Varied sentence beginnings add interest and energy; four sentence types (simple, complex, compound, compound complex) are balanced
D	Weak or no connectives create massive jumble of language; disconnected sentences leave piece chaotic	"Blah" connectives (and, so, but, then, and because) lead reader nowhere	Few simple connectives lead reader from sentence to sentence though piece remains weak	Connectives are original and hold piece together but are not always refined	Thoughtful and varied connectives move reader easily through piece	Creative and appropriate connectives show how each sentence relates to previous one and pulls piece together
E	Rhythm is chaotic, not fluid; piece cannot be read aloud without author's help, even with practice	Rhythm is random and may still be chaotic; writing does not invite expressive oral reading	Rhythm emerges; reader can read aloud after a few tries	Rhythm is inconsistent; some sentences invite oral reading, others remain stiff, awkward, or choppy	Rhythm works; reader can read aloud quite easily	Rhythm flows; writing has cadence; first reading aloud is expressive, pleasurable, and fun

Grades 3–12 Traits Rubric for Conventions

Key question: How much editing would you have to do to be ready to share your writing as a final product?
(Note: For the trait of conventions, grade level matters. Expectations should be based on grade level and include only skills that have been taught.
Expectations for secondary students are obviously much higher than those of the elementary grade levels.)

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Errors in conventions are the norm and repeatedly distract reader, making text unreadable	Many errors of various types of conventions are scattered throughout text	Author continues to stumble in conventions even on simple tasks and almost always on anything trickier	Author has reasonable control over standard conventions for grade level; conventions are sometimes handled well; at other times, errors distract and impair readability	Author stretches, trying more complex tasks in conventions; several mistakes still exist; for secondary students, all basic conventions have been mastered	Author uses standard writing conventions effectively to enhance readability; errors are few and only minor editing is needed to publish
A	Spelling errors are frequent, even for common words	Spelling is phonetic with many errors	Spelling of simple words is incorrect, although reader can understand	Spelling is usually correct or reasonably phonetic for common grade-level words, but not on more difficult words	Spelling of common grade-level words is correct but sometimes incorrect for more difficult words	Spelling is usually correct, even for more difficult words
B	Punctuation is often missing or incorrect	Simple end (. ? !) punctuation is correct; internal (, ' ; -- : …) punctuation is usually wrong or missing	Punctuation is inconsistent	End punctuation is usually correct; internal punctuation is sometimes correct; for secondary students, all punctuation is usually correct	Punctuation is correct and enhances readability in all but few places	Punctuation is correct, creative, and guides reader through entire piece
C	Capitalization is random, inconsistent, and sometimes nonexistent	Only the easiest capitalization rules are correctly applied	Capitalization is applied inconsistently except for proper nouns and sentence beginnings	Capitalization is mostly correct	Capitalization is correct; more sophisticated capitalization is used	Capitalization is thoroughly understood and consistently correct
D	Errors in grammar/usage are frequent and noticeable, making writing incomprehensible	Serious grammar/usage problems of every kind make comprehension difficult	Inappropriate grammar/usage result from heavy reliance on conversational oral language; meaning is confusing	Proper grammar/usage remain inconsistent and inaccurate though problems are not serious enough to distort meaning	Grammar/usage are usually correct; there are few grammar mistakes yet meaning is clear	Grammar/usage are correct and contribute to clarity and style; meaning is more than clear; piece is engaging and inviting to read
E	Extensive editing (on virtually every line) is required to polish text for publication; reader must read once to decode, then again for meaning	There's still a lot of editing required for publication; meaning is uncertain	Too much editing is still needed to publish although piece begins to communicate meaning	Moderate editing (a little of this, a little of that) is required to publish; meaning is clear	Several things still need editing before publishing; conventions are more correct than not; meaning is easily communicated	Hardly any editing is needed to publish; author may successfully manipulate conventions for stylistic effect; meaning is crystal clear

Grades 3-12 Traits Rubric for Presentation

Key question: Is the finished piece easy to read, polished in presentation, and pleasing to the eye?

	Not proficient			Proficient		
	1 Beginning	**2 Emerging**	**3 Developing**	**4 Capable**	**5 Experienced**	**6 Exceptional**
	Presentation/formatting of piece confuses message	Presentation/formatting delivers a message clear in places and confusing in others	Presentation/formatting of piece delivers clear message, yet lacks a finished, polished appearance	Presentation/formatting of piece works in standard, predictable fashion, delivering a clear message that appears finished	Presentation/formatting enhances understanding of message; piece appears finished and is pleasing to eye	Presentation/formatting represents best of finished pieces; formatting extends understanding of message; finished appearance is of superior quality
A	Handwritten letters are irregular, formed inconsistently or incorrectly; spacing is unbalanced or absent; reader can't identify letters	Handwritten letters and words are readable with limited problems in letter shape and form; spacing is inconsistent	Handwriting creates little or no stumbling in readability; spacing is consistent	Handwriting is correct and readable; spacing is consistent and neat	Handwriting is neat, readable, and consistent; spacing is uniform between letters and words; text is easy to read	Handwriting is easy to read and uniformly spaced; author's pride is clear
B	Many fonts/sizes make piece nearly unreadable	Few fonts/sizes make piece hard to read or understand	Fonts/sizes are limited in number; piece starts to come together visually	Fonts/sizes are consistent and appropriate; piece is easy to understand	Fonts/sizes invite reader into text; understanding is a breeze	Font styles/sizes enhance readability and enrich overall appearance; understanding is crystal clear
C	No thought is given to white space—it is random and confusing; identifying beginning and ending of text is difficult	Understanding of white space begins to emerge though piece seems "plopped" on paper without margins or boundaries	White space begins to frame and balance piece; margins may be present though some text may crowd edges; usage is inconsistent; paragraphs begin to emerge	White space frames text by creating margins; usage is still inconsistent on the whole; some paragraphs are indented, some are blocked	White space helps reader focus on text; margins frame piece, other white space frames markers and graphics; usage is consistent and purposeful; most paragraphs are either indented or blocked	White space is used to optimally frame and balance text with markers and graphics; all paragraphs are either indented or blocked
D	Visuals/graphics/charts/citations are nonexistent, incomprehensible, and/or unrelated to text	Visuals/graphics/charts "might" be related to text; citations are attempted but lack correct format	Visuals/graphics/charts match and integrate with text at times; citations partially support text with some errors in format	Visuals/graphics/charts support and consistently clarify text; citations generally support text and are in correct format	Visuals/graphics/charts enrich meaning of text and add layer of understanding; citations adequately support text in proper format	Visuals/graphics/charts help enrich and extend meaning by focusing reader's attention on message; citations completely support text in proper format
E	No markers (title, bullets, page numbers, subheads, etc.) are present	Perhaps one marker (a title, a single bullet or page number) is used	Markers are used but do not organize or clarify piece	Markers are used to organize, clarify, and present whole piece	Markers serve to integrate graphics and articulate meaning of piece	Markers help reader comprehend message and extend or enrich piece