

Assessment Summaries from Summer 2014 Reviewers

***Maria Soriano**

Overall, the assessment results this summer seem to be consistent with what I have reviewed in the past; students in EN 111 complete “baseline” assignments for their first essay, which often equate to summaries or what I like to call “thought compilations.” Development and sophistication are often either very low or midline, at best, because of the nature of these assignments. In addition, some of these first assignments do not require the use of outside sources, while others do; documentation ranges from nonexistent to competently done. I consider the ratings for the EN 111 courses to be normal, as they mark a starting point for many students.

The reviewers and I do find that writing ability generally improves as the courses get more difficult and more specialized, with development and idea/purpose becoming more clear and focused. In MN 202, for example, the categories of “Organization & Development” and “Central Idea” got 3s for every student—which, to me, is both positive and negative. While it certainly demonstrates that students are improving and learning to organize their papers well, the type of assignment the students completed in MN 202 was, frankly, a template. Every report looked exactly the same because the students followed a formula that was given to them. The writing was not highly thoughtful, inventive, and sophisticated, and it was difficult to gauge whether or not the student had much interest in the assignment. The other reviewers who examined MN 202 classes felt the same way.

Each of us encountered at least two essays, if not more, that were uploaded in a format that we could not open: some through the .PAGES program only available on Macs, others in Notepad, and some in formats that we were unfamiliar with. We did not assess these essays, simply because there was no way to convert them. Therefore, my **recommendation to the Core Committee** is this: I suggest that you tell instructors who are collecting essays that they should tell their students to upload their essays **only using Microsoft Word format**. Otherwise, it creates more work for the reviewers and often just means that we won’t open and assess them.

I hope that our information is helpful; above all, this sampling of essays suggests to me that John Carroll University professors are doing well with setting forward clear expectations for what constitutes “good academic writing” and are encouraging their students to work hard. Thank you for your time and consideration!

***Elizabeth Wells**

The EN 111 sections 74, 75, 76, and 61 were almost all summaries of an article or articles the students read with a reaction or connection of the piece to their own lives. Generally, these papers were competent. Few, if any, had an across-the-board proficient or deficient outcome, though there are more deficient marks than proficient marks. This is true of all of the papers I assessed, not only the EN 111 papers. I assessed five papers from the EN 402 class, which were the most difficult to assess because they were works of fiction. This group had more proficient marks than other classes, but mostly due to higher levels in language and writing conventions and clarity and readability. The MN 202-54 papers compared and contrasted two careers that the author was considering, and was very highly structured. Other than structure, the MN 202-54 papers lacked more than any other class or section in every aspect of the rubric. Overall, the highest marks were given in the “Central Idea/Purpose” category, and the lowest marks in the “Evidence and Analysis” and “Sophistication of Ideas” categories. Feel free to email me at ewells16@jcu.edu if you have any questions.

***Darcy Egan**

To begin, overall the scores reflect some challenges with sentence sophistication and developing the paper fully – not just meeting the individual tasks of the assignment. For the EN 111 assignments, I would have liked to see the prompts in order to better assess whether the students accomplished the rhetorical tasks established in the assignment. While the social media assignment from EN 111-53 allowed students to develop an argument and analyze some supporting examples, students did not always take a clear stance, or develop the paper beyond 2-3 pages. The scores for organization and development suffered. In EN 111-55, students had to respond to various stories read in the class. The students seemed to struggle to strike a balance between personal anecdote and an argument about the stories, often fading into an essay about how the stories relate to their lives. These students could also choose to write a story. The story-writing prompt did not seem to develop any analysis or argument. In EN 111-64, students had to define the “American Dream” and construct an argument about its attainability. These papers seemed most apt to rhetorical development. In PO 300, students clearly articulated their purpose and analysis, though at times their sentences were a bit short. In MN 202-52, students were able to examine their skill sets and job market information, but again, struggled with sentence sophistication. The assignment seemed to have a set structure and points to address, and perhaps as a result, students did not write flowing or developed paragraphs. In HS 261, students were able to pick a topic of interest to them. Most students did well with sentence sophistication, documentation of sources, and developing a clear argument. A few students could have more effectively defined the terms surrounding their arguments, but overall, the writing was effective.

***Katie Ours**

There was a large variety in the types of writing skills required of the students in the essays I assessed. Among the different courses and sections, students responded to prompts requiring them to draft a summary, analysis, research-driven argument, narrative, or creative fiction story; yet, each were assessed on the same rubric. For EN 111 and EN 103, I believe these were strong indications of students' writing skills upon entering into college; however, for some classes it was the first formal paper of the semester and for other sections it was not. In terms of accurate assessment of the students' writing abilities, it would have been helpful to see how these EN 111 students grew from their first paper to their last paper in the semester. Throughout the EN 111 classes, many of the essays contained vague central ideas or a clear argument throughout the essay. Likewise, two other areas that I saw consistent scores of 2 would be in evidence and analysis and organization and development. For many essays, the author had a clear indication of supporting reasons, but needed to supply or explain further evidence in order to enhance the sophistication of ideas within the essay. Many of the essays scored consistently high in clarity and readability as many of the student incorporated personal engagement with the content as well as general engagement with the content. In terms of the assessment of each of these essays, it would have been helpful to see the prompt the students were given before the assessment.

In contrast to EN 111 and 103 classes, for EN 402, the students were required to write creative fiction or narrative stories, which assess other writing skills. The papers for MN202 seemed to reflect more of a research driven paper with a more formulaic approach. For some of the students in EN 111, these were their first essays, while in some other classes the students such as in MN 202, these projects suggested their last piece of writing for the class. For EN 402, most of the essays were well written with a clear central theme or idea; however, one reoccurring issue with some of the essays were with the organization and development of the story; some of the fiction stories quickly jumped from one scene or idea to the next without appropriate transitions. As an evaluator of the MN202 course, many of the essays resembled each other with their formulaic organization and central purpose. In contrast to the EN 111, the essays did not reflect the amount of risk in crafting a unique rhetorical stance or argument as well as addressing the opposing side to their argument; therefore, I do not know if these essays accurately reflect their overall writing abilities. In terms of papers for MN202 course and EN 402 class, the deviation of the essays scores were low due to the nature of the assignment in comparison to the rubric.