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# Assessment Brief



Public Schools of North Carolina

State Board of Education • Phillip J. Kirk, Jr., Chairman • North Carolina Department of Public Instruction • Michael E. Ward, Superintendent

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## North Carolina End-of-Course Test of English II (Grade 10 Writing Assessment)

*This publication is an update to the Winter 1999 Assessment Brief “North Carolina Writing Assessments: Grades 4, 7, and 10” (Vol. 5, No.1). It is also located on the Testing Section website at [www.dpi.state.nc.us/accountability/testing](http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/accountability/testing). Information regarding the North Carolina Writing Assessments at grades 4 and 7 is located in a separate Assessment Brief.*

### Background and Introduction

In 1983 the North Carolina General Assembly directed the State Board of Education to define and estimate the cost of basic education for all students. The resulting Basic Education Program includes, as one of its many components, the North Carolina *Standard Course of Study*, which is a curriculum description of “what each child in North Carolina public schools is guaranteed.”

In order to assess the implementation of the North Carolina *Standard Course of Study*, the Basic Education Program includes end-of-course testing of high school subjects. The North Carolina Test of English II, an end-of-course test, assesses:

- Mastery of the writing curriculum;
- Application of the conventions of Standard American English; and
- Student performance in literary analysis.

The revised North Carolina *Standard Course of Study (SCS)* emphasizes writing as a basic skill that can be improved with appropriate instruction. The measurement of writing ensures that ample time and resources are allotted for its development in the classroom. The first statewide administration of the North Carolina End-of-Course (EOC) Test of English II occurred during the 1992-93 school year.

### Procedures for Test Administration

The English II test measures students’ ability to compose an essay in response to an expository, literature-based prompt that requires some literary analysis. Students enrolled in English II courses for credit must participate in the test administration.

On the day of testing the teacher removes from a sealed envelope individual test documents that contain copies of the English II writing prompt. The prompt includes instructions that set forth the task. Each student has 100 minutes to write a composition in response to the prompt. With appropriate documentation and if used routinely during instruction, additional time may be allotted as an accommodation for students with special needs.

### Reporting Test Results

Approximately 45 days following each test administration, students’ scored essays and the scoring guide are returned to all English II teachers. Teachers are encouraged to use the scoring guide and the scoring criteria in order to interpret scores for students and parents.

Summary scores are also returned to all schools and school systems. These data are included in a state-generated report on students’ performance in the area of writing.

### Scoring the Essays

Two independent readers, who have received extensive training in the scoring process and standards, score each student’s essay. English II compositions are assigned a 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or Non-Scorable (NS). For essays where the two scores are discrepant by a single score point, a mid-point score is assigned to the student’s essay. For example, if one reader assigns a score of 3 to an essay and another reader assigns a score of 2, the student receives a score of 2.5.

The assigned score reflects each student’s performance with respect to four main criteria: (1) main idea, (2) supporting details, (3) organization, and (4) coherence. The “focused-holistic score” defines the student’s command of expository writing.

Independent analytic scores on demonstrated language conventions are assigned to each English II essay. These analytic scores evaluate each of the following four areas: sentence formation, usage, mechanics, and spelling. These scores, ranging from 1 to 3, are reported by area.

While different prompts are used for each English II test administration, the scoring criteria and score point scale are the same. The scoring guide, however, is developed containing student papers that correspond to each individual prompt.

The focused-holistic score scale for English II follows.

## Expository Composition Holistic Score Scale

Score Point 6. The response exhibits a strong command of expository writing. It is focused and has a fluent, clear progression of ideas and evenness of development. There are strengths in all four criteria. The writer provides specific, relevant details to support ideas. These papers exhibit a strong command of an expository writing strategy. The writer clearly develops all parts of the prompt and uses an appropriate and highly effective approach (i.e., tone, point-of-view, and originality). An appropriate sense of audience exists. Sentence structure is varied and effective, and word choice demonstrates the ability to use a large vocabulary skillfully. If a literary work is referred to, the work must be from world literature (other than American or British literature). There is a sense of overall completeness.

Score Point 5. The response is focused, progresses logically, and exhibits a command of expository writing. There are strengths in all four criteria. There is no break in progression. The writer uses specific details and clearly links events and relationships. A few minor flaws in coherence may be present. The writer addresses all aspects of the prompt and uses effective vocabulary and sentence structure. If a literary work is referred to, the work must be from world literature (other than American or British literature). An appropriate sense of audience exists. There is a sense of overall completeness.

Score Point 4. The response is focused and establishes progression of ideas and events although minor lapses in focus and progression may be present. The papers have elaboration and support in the form of specific details. Papers scored “4” have an organizational pattern, but minor flaws may exist. They may have minor weaknesses in coherence. The writer clearly addresses the topic and supports it, but some aspect of the prompt may be missing. If a literary work is referred to, the work must be from world literature (other than American or British literature). In some responses, a sense of audience may exist.

Score Point 3. The response exhibits some progression of ideas and events and provides some elaboration and support. The elaboration may be flawed, but it has relevance to the requirements of the prompt. Papers scored “3” have a generally organized pattern but contain minor flaws. The papers are generally coherent although minor weaknesses in coherence may be present. These papers are focused on the

prompt; some may not address all aspects of the prompt. Some papers may tend to summarize at times or have a list-like quality, but they should have concrete, supporting details.

Score Point 2. There is evidence that the writer has seen the prompt and responded to it, although the response may be unclear. Some responses may have little or no sense of connection between a controlling idea and supporting details relevant to development. Other responses may have a sense of focus but lose it. Some “2” responses may be extended lists or lists with some extension. The writer has some sense of organization, but the composition may be too sparse for a higher score point. Some of the compositions do not directly address all aspects of the prompt, and some lapse into summary.

Score Point 1. There is evidence that the writer has seen and attempted to respond to the prompt. However, the response may not sustain focus on the topic. The writer may attempt to support ideas, but there may be no sense of strategy or control. Many responses exhibit skeletal control but are too sparse to be scored higher than a “1.” Some responses lack coherence and/or have an inappropriate strategy (i.e., pure summary, pure list).

Score Point 0. The response addresses a literary work but is incorrect in its perception of the literary concept.

Non-Scorable (NS). Non-scorable compositions are entirely illegible or otherwise unscorable: blank responses, responses written in a foreign language, restatements of the prompt, and responses that are off topic or incoherent.

## Achievement Levels

Achievement levels or performance standards, which have been adopted by the State Board of Education, may be used to interpret student performance on the English II test. Achievement levels give common meaning throughout the state as to what is expected at various levels in writing. These standards are used to categorize and describe student performance. There are four achievement levels:

### Achievement Levels for the English II Test

- Achievement Level IV 4.0-6.0
- Achievement Level III 3.0-3.5
- Achievement Level II 2.0-2.5
- Achievement Level I\* 0.0-1.5

\*Achievement Level I includes non-scorables.

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## Writing Standard

The accountability standard established for the North Carolina Test of English II is Achievement Level III or above. This standard is reported as the accountability indicator. The standard is demonstrated by a score point of 3.0 or above on the six-point scale. By achieving a score at or above the standard, the students have demonstrated a reasonable command of expository writing.

## Released English II Prompts

- In many works of literature a central character's role is determined by his or her culture. From the novels, short stories, full-length plays, and poems you have read, choose a work in which the role of a central character is determined by his or her culture. Identify the character. Using specific references from the work, explain how the character's role is determined by the culture, the character's response to being defined by the culture, and the overall effect on the work. The work you choose must be from world literature other than British literature (England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and American (United States) literature. Give the title and, if you remember, the author of the work.
- Symbolism is a literary device used frequently to contribute to the complexity of a work, for example the use of colors to represent ideas. From the novels, short stories, plays, and poems you have read, select an example or examples of symbolism. Explain how it/they represent(s) a major aspect of the work or convey(s) an important message regarding the characters or theme and the overall effect of the symbolism on the work. The work you choose must be from world literature other than British (England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) literature and American (United States) literature. Give the title and, if you remember, the author of the work.
- Often in literature, authors use a friendship between characters to reveal the theme or some truth about human nature. From the novels, short stories, poems, or plays you have read, select a work in which two characters are friends. Explain the kind of friendship that the characters have, the message the author sends the reader through this friendship, and the importance of this friendship on the work. The work you choose must be from world literature other than British (England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) literature and American (United States) literature. Give the title and, if you remember, the author of the work.
- Many literary works contain an element of suspense. From the novels, short stories, poems and plays you have read, select a work in which suspense adds significantly to the appeal of the work. Using a specific example or examples

of suspense from the work, explain how the author creates the suspense, the effect the suspense has on the reader, and the importance of the suspense to the overall work. The work you choose must be from world literature other than British (England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) literature and American (United States) literature. Give the title and, if you remember, the author of the work.

- A main character in a literary work often faces a conflict between personal desires and responsibilities. From the novels, short stories, full-length plays, and poems you have read, choose a work in which a character faces a conflict between his/her personal desires and his/her responsibilities. Using specific references from the work, explain the conflict, the struggle to resolve the conflict, and the overall effect on the work. The work you choose must be from world literature other than British literature (England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) and American (United States) literature. Give the title and, if you remember, the author of the work.
- The theme of a work of literature is the central idea, thought, or insight that a writer conveys. A general theme found throughout literature involves the concept of love. The love may be a love of a person, place, object, or idea. From the novels, short stories, full-length plays, and biographies you have read, select a work in which the theme of love is present. Using specific references to the work, explain how the actions, characters, and the overall work are affected by the theme. The work you choose must be from world literature other than British (England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) literature and American (United States) literature. Give the title and, if you remember, the author of the work.
- Literary characters often make major decisions that affect them and the people surrounding them. From the novels, short stories, full-length plays, and poems you have read, choose a work in which a character makes a major decision which has lasting results and affects him/her and the other characters. Using specific references from the work, explain what decision the character makes, how the decision affects the other characters, and the impact on the overall work. The work you choose must be from world literature other than British (England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) literature and American (United States) literature. Give the title and, if you remember, the author of the work.
- Authors often use settings and details to create a dominant mood or atmosphere (overall emotional effect of the piece) in a work of literature. From the novels, short stories, full-length plays, poems, biographies, and autobiographies you have read, choose one work and identify the dominant mood. Using specific references from the work, explain

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how the setting and details are used to establish and illustrate the mood, the effect of the mood on the characters, and the importance of the mood to the overall work. The work you choose must be from world literature other than British (England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) literature and American (United States) literature. Give the title and, if you remember, the author of the work.

## Strategies for Improving on Demand Writing

- Ensure that students understand the characteristics of the four modes of writing: narrative, descriptive, expository (clarification and point-of-view), and argumentative (persuasive).
- Have students use the writing process throughout the year to improve their writing skills. As often as possible, assign on-demand in context writing tasks. Help students to understand that there are many purposes for writing.
- Help students understand the four composing characteristics (i.e., main idea, supporting details, organization, and coherence.)
- Use sample papers to help students understand the score scale used for scoring their essay.
- Let students score each other's essays and have them justify their scores by using the criteria and rubric.
- Analyze prompts with students so they will read instructions closely and understand expectations. Also, help them focus on the key word(s) in the prompt (e.g., "tell a story," "describe," "explain," "convince") so that they will be able to classify by mode from the key words. Check to see if they can write prompts for a particular mode and explain what will be expected of them when responding to their prompts.
- Encourage students to refer frequently to the prompt while they write to be sure they maintain focus on the main idea.
- Help students analyze supporting details by instructing them to ensure supporting details are clearly linked to the main idea.
- Help students analyze any examples used to be certain that they add additional depth or understanding and do not just repeat the main idea.
- Encourage students to question whether adjectives used link back to the main idea or provide another level of understanding the prompt.
- Help students understand that a powerful verb is often more effective than a long string of adverbs. Encourage students to use specific concrete modifiers (e.g., a "two-story house" rather than a "big house").

- Instruct students to be selective by encouraging them to determine which points are important and then to elaborate those points. Avoid giving students a specific number of points to include since an adequate number varies by topic. Also, emphasize that they should not lose the overall main idea (e.g., "Describe a kitchen." The student may describe a stove, a refrigerator and a sink, but fail to describe how the entire kitchen looks.)
- Avoid giving students a definite number of characteristics to produce (e.g., five paragraphs, ten adjectives, four reasons), since the number will vary by the choice of topics and the mode of writing.
- Remember that requiring a definite number of characteristics leads to formula writing. Formula writing may occasionally help the weak writer to develop organization but may limit the able writer, who may allow organization to become the main focus and fail to provide sufficient supporting relevant details.
- Understand that sensory descriptors can enhance a student's writing but that students generally have difficulty using the senses as an organizational strategy, which may weaken their overall focus. (Sensory description is often a forced organizational strategy because, depending on the student's choice, certain senses may not be applicable and the student must deal in generalities, thereby providing vague supporting details.)
- Read descriptive essays aloud to see if students can draw a mental picture. Read examples for different score points so they can see the importance of locators, size, and specific details.
- Explain that students writing narrative essays should be able to construct a time line sequencing the events.
- Emphasize that in persuasive and point-of-view writing students must give sound reasons with supporting details that show progression and that cause and effect writing is an effective method of elaboration. Students should not allow the cause and effect technique to override the content, since elaboration must be present.

## Student Information Regarding the English II Test

- Inform students that the writing test is one measure on one day of their year scored by purely objective readers who use the criteria and score scale in the scoring guide.
- Teach students that responses recorded on added horizontal lines, on unlined areas, as double-stacked sentences (i.e., two sentences recorded on top of each other on one printed line), or on extra sheets of paper will not be scored. Students will be given credit only for sentences recorded on the horizontal lines printed in the test document.