List of Primary Traits for Rating Placement Essays

Raters should focus on the following traits while assessing Writing placement essays. It is rare that a student will exhibit all of the following traits, and the list below is not meant to serve as a “checklist.” Rather, it is meant to give the raters a more stable set of criteria by which to make a holistic assessment of the placement essay.

Students who display a majority of the following traits generally will do well if placed into in Writing 2010. Keep in mind that the assignments in Writing 1010 focus on explaining other people’s arguments and putting those arguments into context. If the placement essay is struggling with the techniques involved in explaining others’ arguments, that should be seen as support for a placement in Writing 1010.

Content and Focus

• The student focuses on the prompt and attempts to answer the prompt’s directions. He or she explains the source article and provides enough information and content to help the reader understand that article.
• The student advances a thesis about the source article’s content.
• The student uses relevant examples from the source article to support his or her explanation.
• The student stays focused on its goal (explaining the source article’s content and the student’s evaluation of it). The student should reproduce the basic content of the source article using his or her own words, in addition to relevant quotations from the source article.

Audience Awareness and Context

• The student uses a respectful, semi-formal tone, similar to that encouraged in College Writing classes.
• The student shapes his or her essay so that a public audience can understand its ideas. In other words, the essay is written for an audience, not simply for the writer.
• The student adequately explains any evaluative judgments he or she makes. Evaluative judgements should not simply be assumed to be valid, but rather should be supported.
• The student includes adequate voice markers (signal phrases) to clarify which ideas are coming from which source. The voice markers should show a distinction between the author of the source article and any people whom that author is quoting. The essay should make it clear whose ideas are being discussed or quoted.

Cohesion

• The student uses paragraphs to help the reader navigate the essay.
• The student uses topic sentences when appropriate.
• The connections between ideas are clear and fully articulated.
• The statements have sufficient context and the examples are clearly explained.
• The examples are well connected to ideas they support.
• The essay has an overall cohesion; the statements do not appear random, but rather relevant and fully contextualized.

Clarity and Sentence Structure

• The student explains ideas and situations clearly.
• The student includes contextual information that clarifies why any chosen quotations are relevant.
• The student demonstrates accurate and appropriate vocabulary.
• The student uses language that is intelligible, and that doesn’t impede the student’s point.
• The student uses consistent sentence structure and a variety of sentence patterns.
• The student uses consistent verb tense.
• The pronoun usage is consistent and unambiguous.

Additional Considerations

Keep in mind that the students writing these essays are attempting to place into Writing 2010. In other words, a passing essay should exemplify the writing of a 2010 student at the beginning of the semester, not at the end.