CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENT SCORING MANUAL:
High School

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The classroom assignment rating scales described here were developed for use in the evaluation of the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP), and the Local District Accountability Program implemented by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Support for the development of this work was provided by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), the Stuart Foundation, and the Program Evaluation and Research Branch of LAUSD. The purpose of this manual is twofold: first, to document our work so far, and second, to serve as a training guide for researchers and practitioners who might be interested in applying this framework. This manual also is intended to be a source of information for ways to describe the quality of learning opportunities afforded to students as well as guide teachers’ attention toward these areas to improve teaching and learning.

The criteria used for investigating the quality of language arts assignments were based on research focusing on effective instructional practices. We focused on language arts because enhancing students’ literacy skills was a reform goal shared across the schools with which we worked. We hope that this framework will be adapted and used by teachers in other subject areas and grade levels as well.

Different types of language arts assignments were collected in 10th-grade classrooms. Teachers completed a one-page cover sheet for each assignment detailing their learning goals and grading criteria, and submitted copies of their rubrics (if they used one) and four samples of student work they considered to be of medium and high quality. The quality of the assignments then was assessed using 4-point scales (1 = poor, 4 = exemplary) to rate the following six dimensions:
Introduction

• Cognitive challenge
• Clarity of the goals for student learning
• Clarity of the grading criteria
• Alignment of learning goals and task
• Alignment of learning goals and grading criteria
• Overall quality of assignment

This manual describes each of the dimensions and provides anchor assignments to illustrate each of the scale points for “typical” reading comprehension assignments, and “typical” writing assignments with rough and final drafts for the 10th grade. It is important to note that this manual is a work in progress. It is likely that the descriptors and anchor papers will be revised based on the data we collect from a broader range of schools in the future.

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The purpose of this dimension is to describe the degree to which students have the opportunity to apply complex thinking skills (i.e., to think critically, predict, interpret, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information) and engage with core academic content material when completing the assignment task. Specifically, this dimension considers the opportunity students have to construct or transform knowledge as opposed to recalling, describing, or identifying basic information. Additionally, the degree to which students have the opportunity to elaborate and extend their ideas through extended writing in a genre is considered. To receive a high score on this dimension the assignment task had to require students to engage with substantive, academic content material and to engage with subtle nuances of the text and overarching or larger significance of the work (i.e., connection to ideas beyond the events in the story). Students also would be required to write extensively on a topic (i.e., to compose a multi-paragraph composition).
Assignment task requires students to construct and transform knowledge and to engage with less obvious meanings or nuances of a text, and this is evident in the students’ work. Students also may be required to marshal well-supported and elaborated evidence to support a position. Assignment task also requires students to engage with grade-appropriate, academic content material and to write extensively on a topic (i.e., compose a multi-paragraph composition).

**Writing Assignment Scored a 4 for Cognitive Challenge**

For this high-level writing assignment, students wrote a five-paragraph controversial issue essay on a topic of their choice. The teacher’s instructions to students on how to develop and structure their essays were extremely detailed and focused on four discrete areas: issue, position, support, and tone. These are described below from the teacher’s directions to the students.

**Issue**
First you must clearly define and focus the issue itself. Acknowledge that reasonable people disagree on the issue as a result of life experience, opinion, reasoning or judgment. You may use a variety of strategies to do this:

- Clearly define your terms.
- Ask rhetorical questions to involve readers.
- Present information to establish your credibility as an informed proponent.
- Use personal anecdotes, examples, scenarios or a case study.

**Position**
It is important that you take an authoritative stand on the issue. The stand is expressed in a thesis statement which is stated in the introductory paragraph and restated in a number of ways throughout the essay. You will consider both sides of the issue, but the reader is never in doubt about your position.

**Support**
Because readers will not always agree with the written position on a controversial issue, you need to gain your readers’ confidence by establishing common values and principles. Then argue convincingly with reasons and evidence. Accommodate valid counterarguments and refute invalid ones. You may want to raise questions in your readers’ minds and answer those questions persuasively. Effective arguments build trust by establishing the writer’s credibility. Your arguments may include the following:
• Appeals to emotion by expressing concern.
• Appeals to logic through well-reasoned support.
• Examples or details.
• Expert opinion.
• Quotations from literature.
• Anecdotes or personal experiences.
• Hypothetical situations.
• Common facts accepted as true, generalizations, or universal truths.
• Analogies.
• Comparison/contrast.
• Cause-and-effect reasoning.
• Rhetorical questions.

But most importantly, your argument must be well-organized. The most important evidence should be given central consideration and the most weight in the essay.

Tone
Tone is your attitude toward the subject. Remember, one of your most important goals is to win the trust of your reader so that your position will be taken seriously. You do this by reflecting a committed, reasonable, sincere, and confident tone. You may want to emphasize your conviction and commitment by appealing to emotion. Or take a moral tone by examining ethical concerns in the issue. Make sure the reader believes you have given thoughtful consideration to important evidence in reaching your judgment or decision.

This assignment was scored a 4 for the level of cognitive challenge because writing an essay that formally argues a position, including the acknowledgment and rebuttal of counterarguments and use of different strategies to support an argument including cause-and-effect reasoning and the use of rhetorical questions, is a demanding task, regardless of whether or not students engage with substantive content material. The level of cognitive challenge for this assignment was further increased by the teacher’s genre-specific directions to students with regard to defining an issue, taking a position, and maintaining an appropriate tone in their writing.

The following is a sample of student work for this writing assignment considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for this assignment.
Imagine a school where kids are happier, they get higher grades and better test scores. This sounds great, right? You are probably wondering if some knows how to make students smarter, then why aren’t we doing what he says to do? Because the school board of Education believes that we should be educated in all classes, although many of us do not plan on pursuing careers in a lot of the classes that we have to take. But, if people could choose their own classes that they wanted they would only choose a subject that they want and plan on pursuing a career in and this would lead to more motivated students.

Yes, students will not have all the classes they have now and they will not be educated in all the subjects like they are now, but when opponents of my view say that this idea of mine will not prepare students for college is absurd, because in college you have to choose your own classes and it has always been like this. Which brings me to my first main point that if kids where able to choose their own classes this would directly prepare them for college because they would have to get used to all of the college decisions like what classes to choose, what classes would be most beneficial for what I plan to do in college. This would also make kids become mature because they would have to start thinking about their future at a much younger age.

I know that some kids will not choose hard enough classes and this will let them get higher grades, but if kids really wanted to do this they already could, they could drop to a lower academy and like easier classes like for example a kid taking a honors class when they could easily make it in a AP class. Some people might say that kids will not get a good enough education because they could choose easy classes or they might not want to choose any classes that will help them in the real world. But, these students are not focused and no matter what kind of education they are getting they will not be focused and they will get lousy grades.
Yes if this happened it might be harder for them to get into college. But if all high schools were like this there would be very little reason for these kids to go to college because they would learn just about everything that they have to and everything that they wanted to in high school. Some people might say that it would be harder for people to graduate from high school like for example a kid takes two years of history but in his final two years he takes all math classes. In college this kid would not have enough credits to get a major in anything but in high school as long as they reach 220 credits they would be eligible to graduate. So, they could take two years of history and two years of math class and have the required credits to pass high school. Also kids would be more focused on school because they would only take classes that they wanted to take.

If this were to happen it would not have to take a long time to do. All, the school would have to do is when the students fill out their elective sheets. Make the elective sheet have blank spots for what the student plans on majoring in college and have them put down the schedule that they would like to get. But, the counselor would have to see it and approve of the schedule and if she thought that there should be some changes she could change it to help the student be prepared for college.

**READING COMPREHENSION**  Assignment Scored a 4 for Cognitive Challenge

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.
Assignment task requires students to construct and transform knowledge, and this is evident in students’ work. However, students may engage with surface-level details more than less obvious meanings or nuances of a text. Students also may be required to use evidence to support a position, but that evidence may not be well-supported or elaborated. Assignment task also requires students to engage with grade-appropriate academic content material and write extended responses on a topic.

WRITING Assignment Scored a 3 for Cognitive Challenge

This writing assignment was a follow-up to the reading of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare. Students wrote a five-paragraph essay in which they analyzed the effectiveness of Marc Antony’s speech in Act III. The teacher provided students with a list of rhetorical techniques Antony used in his speech, and as a class, they discussed examples from the speech for each technique. The students were to choose the three most effective rhetorical techniques Antony used and include two to three examples that best illustrated each technique. Students also were asked to incorporate at least two quotes in the essay.

This task was scored a 3 for cognitive challenge because the task required complex thinking, analysis, and engagement with substantive content material. In order to successfully complete the assignment, students not only needed to read and understand the play, but also to be familiar with rhetorical techniques and how they are used by orators to persuade an audience, in this case the Roman citizens.

This task was scored a 3 and not a 4 for cognitive challenge, however, because the essay requirements (in terms of organization, awareness of audience, and tone) were not as demanding. The teacher also provided students with a list of the techniques Antony used in his speech and went over the examples from the speech in class with the students. The assignment would have received a higher score if the teacher had modeled the analysis of the speech in class and then had students analyze a new speech on their own for the assignment. The following student essay was considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for this assignment.
The speech given by Mark Antony, in the Tragedy of Julius Caesar makes him one of the most intriguing characters in William Shakespeare's play. Antony's speech convinces the Roman people that Caesar was a good man. His funeral speech is embedded with irony. He utilizes rhetorical techniques such as directly addressing his audience, asking rhetorical questions, and using repetition for ironic effect. Together these techniques create a complicated, yet interesting speech.

Using direct address makes Antony's audience feel like his equal. The words he starts his famous funeral speech serve as an example, "Friends, Romans, Countrymen..." In order to command the citizens' attention he first addresses them personally. Now they will hear what he has to say. This also allows the citizens to concentrate on his speech as if they were listening to a friend. Another example would occur in the second part of his speech when he addresses the people as, "Good friends, sweet friends..." By being delicate with his words he once again controls and intrigues the people. They want to pay close attention. The speech is comfortable and also more interested in how he approaches his conclusions. He continues to refer to his audience on a personal level to make them comfortable.

In addition, Antony pursues the people to analyze their shared problem through rhetorical questions. He asks, "Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?" This not only proves the citizens were wrong for believing that Caesar was ambitious, but it also lets them recognize all the good he had done for Rome. Another example would be the question, "Was this ambition?" This question helps Antony turn the people against the lying Brutus without directly calling him a liar. Antony is allowed to contradict Brutus' idea of Caesar. Another example would be the question, "Was this ambition?" This question helps Antony force the people to think through what has just been said. The citizens are convinced that Brutus has enormously mistaken for accusing Caesar of being ambitious. The people finally realize that they were duped into believing in Brutus' lie. When Antony asked that question, he caused an...
amount of confusion between the Roman people, while they looked for a reasonable answer to his question.

Finally Antony is using repetition for ironic effect which persuades the people to overthrow their government. Antony's use of the word "honorable" delivers itself to be a good example of his repetition's ironic effects. He uses honorable as an insult instead of a compliment. By repeating and pronouncing "honorable" angrily he lets the crowd know that he does not believe that the assassins deserve to be called honorable men. The gradual change of the word honorable was used in order to stir the people into a civil war. Another example of his repetition's effects is mentioning the will. He lets the people know that Caesar had left a will for them. Therefore, Antony automatically manipulates the crowd. He had every intention of reading it, though he preferred the inquisitive citizens to force him to read the will. This is why he keeps repeating that a will exists. Antony's repetitious ironic effects ultimately causes the people to rebel against Brutus and the rest of the conspirators.

Antony, one of the most interesting characters in William Shakespeare's, Julius Caesar, uses direct address to the audience, rhetorical questions, and repetition, to deliver an effective speech. By using these rhetorical techniques he successfully inflames the Roman citizens and ignites a Civil War.
READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 3 for Cognitive Challenge

This reading comprehension assignment required students to read the novel, 1984, by George Orwell, and answer five comprehension questions. Students were to write detailed, well-developed paragraphs and support their answers with evidence from the novel using the following prompts:

1. Choose one of the main characters in 1984 and describe his/her personality. Discuss how the character changes and why.
2. Discuss a theme in 1984 and then relate it to society today.
3. Discuss the significance of two symbols in the novel.
4. What did you learn from reading the book?

This assignment was given a 3 for level of cognitive challenge because the questions required complex thinking and engaged students with substantive content material. Students are asked to use higher order thinking skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating to answer the questions. Had the questions required more complex analysis and had the students been required to write longer responses and develop their answers much more substantially, the assignment would have been rated a 4 for reading comprehension. The following is an excerpt from a student’s paper considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for this assignment.

Student Work

The theme I will discuss in the book is how everything is controlled. Everything in the book from the clearing to the bar is controlled by microphones, telescreens, and Thought Police. This I find incredibly suffocating because it is practically privateless. The only place in the book without all that stuff is the room where Winston and Julia were.

This can be related to today by the fact that now there are hidden cameras everywhere. When you walk into a seven-eleven, you get eye-balled by the clerk which to me isn’t fare since you just walked in the door. There are even cameras about to be put up in this school.

One important symbol to me was the breaking of the paper weight. That meant, I guess, that their love wouldn’t last as long as they thought. Especially since it was so beautiful to Winston’s eyes. To see something like that break would have told me becareful or beware.
For this writing assignment students read the book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and the poem, “Caged Bird,” both by Maya Angelou. Students completed a prewriting activity in their journals on, “what freedom means to me.” Students then chose to write either an essay or a poem about freedom using metaphors and similes.

This assignment was scored a 2 for cognitive challenge. While the book was grade-appropriate, the writing assignment only required students to summarize their personal views on freedom. Even with the additional direction of adding similes and metaphors to their writing, this assignment did not require complex and critical thinking as exemplified by the following student work. This assignment would have received a higher score for this dimension if, for example, the teacher had instructed students to discuss the point of view of the author and incorporate supporting evidence from the text, formally argue a position, or possibly analyze different views and experiences of freedom. This assignment also would have received a higher score if there had been evidence of explicit direction to write in an established genre (for example, a specific poetic or essay style.) The following is a student essay considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for this assignment.
REASON COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 2 for Cognitive Challenge

For this reading comprehension assignment students were required to answer the following questions based on reading Act 3 of *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare.

a. If you were to assign blame to anyone at this point in the action, who would it be, and why?

b. Romeo’s killing of Tybalt is the turning point of the play—the point when something happens that will turn the action toward either a happy ending or a tragic one. What actions does the killing set in motion?

c. How does the nurse offend Juliet in this act and cease to be her friend?

d. Does the last scene in this act remind you of encounters between parents and their teenage children that you’ve seen in movies, TV shows, or novels? Do Juliet and her parents remind you of real-life parents and teenagers today? Explain.
This assignment was considered to be a 2 for the level of cognitive challenge because the task required some moderately complex thinking and engagement with substantive content material. Students were required to summarize facts from the story, infer simple main idea, or provide their own opinion. While for some questions they were asked to explain their opinions, they were not required to argue a controversial point or persuade a reader. Students also were not required to provide very extensive or detailed responses. The following is an excerpt from a student's paper considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for this assignment.

**Student Work**

a. Tybalt and Juliet's family  

b. The capulet's and the Montague's would be worse against each other. Romeo and Juliet would probably never see each other anymore, and Juliet would marry Paris.

c. The nurse told Juliet she should just marry Paris. Juliet would probably not trust anyone, she wouldn't want to talk to anyone.

d. No. It doesn't remind me of it as reality, because sometimes it can be worse in reality. No it doesn't really remind me of stuff in the movie because I do not really watch movies like Romeo and Juliet.
Assignment task requires students to recall very basic information or definitions (e.g., What color was the character’s car? Where did the character go after he left the store? etc.); or to write on a topic with no structure or focus. This is evident in students’ work. Assignment task may not require students to engage with grade-appropriate content material, or write extended responses.

WRITING Assignment Scored a 1 for Cognitive Challenge

For this writing assignment students were required to look up the definitions of five words (“excellent,” “good,” “average,” “poor,” and “bad”) and write a paragraph describing each word that they defined and the behaviors of their fellow high school students that illustrated each of the five definitions.

This assignment was scored a 1 for cognitive challenge because students were not required to engage in any complex thinking or to engage with any kind of substantive content material. Students also wrote relatively short responses. This assignment would have received a higher score if students had the opportunity to expand or argue an idea (for example, critically analyze what it means to be morally virtuous in connection with events or ideas in and out of school) in an expanded multi-paragraph essay. The following is an excerpt from a student’s paper considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for this assignment.

Student Work

Excellent: The best quality. The way of behaving, actions, attitude, bearing, conduct, demeanor, deport, manners.

This is one of the most things that students in (name of high school) left out should have. We as students should be excellent in attendance and related to grades. Not only for our parents but also for our self’s in first place. I know that sometimes we give everything that we have, and we get a B or a C. For that same reason we should work hard to get an A, some of our parents did not have the opportunity to at least finish high school. Our parents expect the best of us so we should not let them down. We should do a very hard job to show that we can do it. For that same reason we should go to school every day, I know that some days we are sick but we should try to not miss school too much. They want the best future for their children’s.
READING COMPREHENSION  Assignment Scored a 1 for Cognitive Challenge

For this reading comprehension assignment students read the first page of the novel, *Black Boy*, by Richard Wright, and took a quiz requiring them to answer the following five multiple-choice questions.

1. When Wright says, “found hunger standing at my bedside,” he is using
   a. metaphor
   b. simile
   c. symbolism
   d. personification

2. In the sentence, “tea…would still the clamor in my stomach,” the clamor is probably
   a. his mom complaining to him
   b. his stomach growling
   c. his crying
   d. his begging

3. In the sentence, “I had to pause to think of what was happening to me,” what do you think is happening to him?
   a. he is growing up
   b. he doesn’t like to play anymore
   c. he is starving
   d. he is beginning to hate his mom
4. Why do you think his mom told him to “jump up and catch a kungry?”
   a. to upset him
   b. to make him be more active
   c. to confuse him
   d. to distract him from his hunger

5. What do you think has happened to the father?
   a. he died
   b. he abandoned his family
   c. the mother threw him out
   d. he went to the store

This assignment was considered to be a 1 for level of cognitive challenge for 10th grade because the comprehension questions were in multiple choice format and only required students to identify the correct definition of a word (the definition was given to them in the excerpt), to identify an example of personification, and to identify the meanings of a few simple passages from the novel. The text was substantive, however, students only needed to read one page to complete the assignment. The comprehension questions were extremely basic and were designed simply to test whether students understood the basic story line. The questions did not require deep thought and no writing was required.
Clarity of the Goals for Student Learning

The purpose of this dimension is to describe how clearly a teacher articulates the specific skills, concepts, or content knowledge students are to gain from completing the assignment. The primary purpose of this dimension is to describe the degree to which an assignment could be considered a purposeful, goal-driven activity focused on student learning. An assignment given a high score on this dimension had to have goals that were very clear, detailed, and specific as to what students were to learn from completing the assignment. It also had to allow for assessment of whether or not students had achieved these goals.
The teacher’s goals are very focused on student learning. Goals are very clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment. Additionally, all of the goals are elaborated.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 4 for Clarity of the Goals

For this assignment, students were asked to read a novel and write an analytical book report. The six sections were to include an introduction and conclusion as well as analysis of the plot, characters, theme, literary techniques, and figurative language. The teacher’s goals were the following:

Students were expected to learn how to critically analyze difficult text; perform independent research; recognize and interpret various literary techniques and figurative language; cite relevant information and events to support their arguments, use quotes effectively and explain their interpretation clearly, develop a strong writing style and effective use of language; facilitate the writing process, and use the Modern Language Association format for a bibliography.

This set of goals was scored a 4 because it was specific and elaborated, making it extremely clear what students were to learn from the assignment. In addition, the goals were framed in terms of student learning.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 4 for Clarity of the Goals

For this assignment, students were required to provide three detailed examples of how Nathaniel Hawthorne utilized symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter*. For each example, they were to discuss what the symbol represented, its thematic importance or function, and its relationship to other elements within the story. The teacher’s goals were as follows:

Students were to practice ongoing skills used in effective literary analysis. One specific goal was to give students an opportunity to recognize symbols within a canonical text and to cite them clearly and effectively. Another goal was for students to learn to interpret a symbol. Students were also given the opportunity to practice communicating their interpretation in a prose format. Another goal was for students to learn how to identify figurative language and critically analyze its use in a literary work. In addition, students were to learn how to use quotes to support their arguments.
This set of goals was scored a 4 because it was focused on student learning and was
detailed and explicit in identifying what students were to learn from completing the
assignment. In addition, many of the goals were elaborated thoughtfully and thoroughly.
For example, the teacher went further than just listing figurative language as a goal. She
explained that students would not only learn how to “identify figurative language” but
also would be able to “critically analyze its use in a literary work.”
The teacher’s goals mostly are focused on student learning. Goals are mostly clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 3 for Clarity of the Goals

For this writing assignment, students were required to write an essay analyzing the main character in the book, *Farewell to Manzanar*, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston. The teacher’s stated goals were as follows:

- Students will learn how to analyze a main character through clues within the book.
- Students will learn to web their ideas together through brainstorming.
- Students will learn to compose an essay utilizing the facts generated through brainstorming.
- Students will learn four major components of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, and final draft.

This assignment scored a 3 for this dimension because the goals were clearly and explicitly stated. Despite the fact that the teacher framed the goals in terms of student learning, however, some of the goals were still quite broad and activity-focused (e.g., learning the four major components of the writing process). For these reasons this assignment was not scored a 4 for this dimension.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 3 for Clarity of the Goals

For this reading comprehension assignment, students were asked to read the play, *The Bear*, by Anton Chekov, and answer seven questions from the text in well-developed paragraphs, using details from the play to support their responses. The teacher’s goals were as follows:

Students are to read and comprehend a text. They will learn to critically analyze the text, including learning character analysis. Students will cite examples from the text to support their analysis of a main or minor character. They will also relate the battle of the sexes in the play to today.

This set of goals was specific in terms of the aspects of reading comprehension that the teacher wanted the students to develop: character analysis and theme. The goals were not sufficiently elaborated or specific enough, however, to be scored a 4, and a couple of the goals were not written as learning goals but rather as directions or activities.
The teacher’s goals are somewhat focused on student learning. Goals are somewhat clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 2 for Clarity of the Goals

For this writing assignment students read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, and wrote an essay discussing a certain aspect of the main character’s life. Students were expected to use the text to support their ideas. The teacher’s goals for this assignment were:

- Critical thinking
- Writing process
- Communication

This assignment was given a 2 for this dimension because the goals were broadly stated and lacked specificity and elaboration. For example, “communication” is extremely general and does not convey what specifically the teacher wanted students to learn by completing the assignment. In this same vein, it was not clear what critical-thinking skill (e.g., evaluation, analysis, comparing and contrasting, etc.) the teacher wanted the students to focus on in their writing.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 2 for Clarity of the Goals

In this reading comprehension assignment, students answered comprehension questions based on Act 3 of *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare. The teacher’s goals for this assignment were as follows:

I wanted students to examine cause and effect. By answering these questions not only do students show that they know about cause and effect, but they also show that they understand the story.

Although these goals focused on student learning, they were not very specific or elaborated. For example, the goal to “understand the story” was very broadly stated and lacked the specific details to explain what aspects of reading comprehension the teacher wanted students to learn (e.g., character analysis, setting, theme, author’s purpose, etc.).
The teacher’s goals are not focused on student learning and are not clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 1 for Clarity of the Goals

For this writing assignment, students were given a writing prompt based on Shakespeare’s *Othello* and were asked to write a five-paragraph essay that included quotes from the text. The teacher’s stated goals for this assignment were as follows:

Students are expected to improve their writing skills. Prewrite must be included (given a separate grade) and changes must be made from rough to final drafts.

This assignment was scored a 1 for this dimension because the stated goals were not clear and were not elaborated. “Improve their writing skills” is a very broad goal, much broader than “reading comprehension.” Additionally, the goals were framed as activities (or grading criteria), rather than student learning.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 1 for Clarity of the Goals

After studying a variety of beatnik literature, students were asked to write a poem in the same genre, modeling the literary techniques of the authors they studied such as Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg. The teacher’s goals were as follows:

I hoped to show the students that American literature does not have to be boring, old and completely inaccessible. In studying beatniks, they can see that these writers are people too.

This assignment was scored a 1 for this dimension because the teacher did not clarify what she wanted students to learn as a result of completing the assignment. From what the teacher wrote, we know only that she wanted students to be able to personally relate to the literature. It is not clear what skills or concepts she wanted the students to develop.
Clarity of the Grading Criteria

The purpose for this dimension is to assess the quality of the grading criteria for the assignment in terms of their specificity, elaborateness, and potential for helping students improve their performance. How clearly each aspect of the grading criteria is defined is considered in the rating, as well as how much detail is provided for each of the criteria. An assignment given a high score for this dimension had to have grading criteria that clearly detailed the guidelines for success and provided a great deal of information to students on what they needed to do to successfully complete the task.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 4 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment, students were asked to write a five-paragraph essay on a controversial issue of their choice. The grading criteria the teacher used to evaluate student work were scored a 4 because they were extremely detailed, elaborated, and tailored to the task. The rubric included four dimensions (position; strategies, reasoning, and support; counterarguments; and tone and diction) each of which was rated on a 6-point scale. The teacher reviewed these dimensions with the class in detail, modeling what was expected.

Following is the rubric the teacher used to assess the students’ essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Position

- Position is clear, knowledgeable, and authoritative.
- Position defines and focuses the issues.
- Position is clear, knowledgeable, and strong.
- Position is consistent throughout the essay.
- Position is simplistic.
- May lack content and background.
- Position may not be embedded in context.
- Position usually stays focused.
- Position is simplistic.
- Position may waver, appear inconsistent, or unsure.
- Position may be unclear and unfocused.
- Names the issues briefly or not at all.
- Does not take a position.
- May mention the issue from the prompt.
### Strategies, Reasoning, and Support

| 6 | The essay is thoughtfully and persuasively organized.  
|   | Has a consistently smooth, forward movement.  
|   | Uses a variety of strategies for providing specific context. (These strategies may also be used to develop the argument. See list below.)  
|   | Uses a variety of strategies developing the argument, including:  
|   | - analogies  
|   | - anticipation and acknowledgment of counterarguments  
|   | - refuting invalid arguments  
|   | - literary allusions or quotations  
|   | - rhetorical questions  
|   | - anecdotes  
|   | - case studies  
|   | - cause-and-effect reasoning  
|   | - commonly accepted beliefs  
|   | - comparison/contrast reasoning  
|   | - personal experience  
|   | - scenarios  
|   | Convinces with sound and logical reasoning.  
|   | Reasons may be philosophical or emotional.  
|   | The writer’s argument reveals deeper critical thinking.  
|   | Supports with substantial, solid evidence. |

| 5 | The essay is well organized.  
|   | Uses transitions effectively in a logical progression of thought. Writer may briefly go off on a tangent but returns quickly to defend the position taken.  
|   | Provides specific context for the reader.  
|   | Uses one or more strategies effectively to develop the argument.  
|   | Convinces with sound reasoning.  
|   | Writer may supply philosophical, logical, or emotional foundations for the arguments advanced.  
|   | The writer’s argument demonstrates depth and complexity of thought.  
|   | Supports with solid evidence. Occasional gaps in reasoning and/or support separate the 5 from the 6 paper. |

| 4 | The essay is organized.  
|   | Structure may be formulaic.  
|   | Transitions are used mechanically but logically move the reader forward.  
|   | Provides some general background for the reader.  
|   | Uses one or more strategies to develop the argument.  
|   | Satisfying conclusion.  
|   | Reasoning is predictable but lacks depth.  
|   | Support is logical and uses relevant arguments and evidence. |
### Strategies, Reasoning, and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3     | - The essay has some organization.  
- Structure may be formulaic.  
- May be repetitive and underdeveloped or the ideas may be disconnected so that the essay lacks cohesion.  
  - A single point may be repeated throughout the essay and not really developed.  
  - Paragraphs are incoherent. Topic sentence and support do not match.  
  - Paragraphs do not follow logically.  
  - The writer contradicts himself. The focus is not always clear.  
- Reasoning may be unclear.  
- Support is superficial and general, possibly a list. |
| 2     | - The essay has limited organization.  
- Repetition, digression, and gaps break the essay’s forward movement.  
- Little development (only a couple of paragraphs) or rambles at length.  
- Writer makes unsupported judgments.  
- Support is vague, irrelevant, or illogical. |
| 1     | - The essay shows little evidence of organization.  
- Little evidence of forward movement.  
- Writer may be confused by or unsure of the task.  
- No relevant support is offered. |

### Counterarguments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6     | - Writer considers both sides of the issue.  
- Anticipates counterarguments.  
- Refutes invalid, irrelevant arguments. |
| 5     | - Counterarguments are addressed. May be more focused on arguing the point than convincing the opposition. |
| 4     | - Writer will usually acknowledge the opposition. |
| 3     | - Writer may argue only one side. |
| 2     | - Writer may abandon initial position or not take a position at all. |
| 1     | n/a |

**Clarity of the grading criteria**
Reading Comprehension Assignment Scored a 4 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this reading comprehension assignment, students were asked to write an essay comparing and contrasting the society in Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 with their own predictions about the future.

The teacher used the following rubric to grade students’ essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 100-90</td>
<td>Fully achieves the purpose of the assignment, clearly expresses the ideas to an intended audience, and conveys a distinct point of view. It fully develops and integrates appropriate ideas with concrete details from the text for each one.</td>
<td>It adheres to the topic and is logically organized; has a clear introduction, thesis statement, body, and conclusion. It has a paragraph structure of a topic sentence at least two commentaries for every concrete detail, and a concluding sentence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although this rubric was not extremely detailed, the teacher’s grading criteria for this assignment were clear and had the potential to provide meaningful information to students about what they would need to successfully complete the task or obtain a higher grade. For this reason this assignment received a 4 for the clarity of the grading criteria dimension.
The teacher’s grading criteria mostly are clear and explicit. The teacher may use a rubric or an elaborate scoring guide (i.e., a detailed list of the dimensions upon which student work will be scored). The rubric or dimensions are fairly helpful for students’ use in improving their performance.

**WRITING Assignment Scored a 3 for Clarity of Grading Criteria**

For this writing assignment students read *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston, and wrote an essay discussing a certain aspect of the main character’s life. Students were expected to use examples from the text to support their ideas.

The teacher used the following rubric to grade student work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas &amp; Content</th>
<th>• Focused, clear</th>
<th>• Controlling idea</th>
<th>• Enough detail</th>
<th>• Shows insight and writes from experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>• Opens with a real lead</td>
<td>• Effective sequence</td>
<td>• Smooth transitions</td>
<td>• Sense of resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>• Person behind the words</td>
<td>• Audience awareness</td>
<td>• Commitment and involvement</td>
<td>• Text is lively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>• Strong vocabulary</td>
<td>• Natural</td>
<td>• Precise nouns and modifiers</td>
<td>• Minimal repetition, cliches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
<td>• Rhythmic sound</td>
<td>• Natural</td>
<td>• Variety of length and structure</td>
<td>• No run-ons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>• Spelling and mechanics</td>
<td>• Punctuation, capitals and indentation</td>
<td>• Consistency</td>
<td>• Evidence of proofreading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This rubric provided a detailed description of the elements that should be addressed by the students in their essays. This rubric did not receive a higher score, however, because it consisted of a list of scoring dimensions only, and did not describe a range of success for each dimension. This rubric would have been considered a stronger 3 if it included a scale for each dimension and each dimension had been defined. Though not very elaborated, this rubric did appear to provide a significant amount of information to students about the teacher’s expectations for a successfully completed assignment, and so was scored a 3 and not a 2.

**READING COMPREHENSION**  Assignment Scored a 3 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment, students were asked to identify three examples of symbolism utilized in *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and to write a one- to three-page essay describing what the symbol represented and its thematic importance. The teacher used the following rubric to score students’ work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 9-8   | **Outstanding**  
• Responds to assignment clearly, directly and fully.  
• Analytical approach with several textual references/quotes.  
• Shows skill and subtlety in use of the text.  
• Style indicates flexibility and mastery, but need not be free from errors. |
| 7-6   | **Above-average**  
• Responds to assignment clearly and directly.  
• Shows understanding of text with appropriate references/quotes.  
• Analysis is less precise; use of the text is competent but not subtle.  
• Style is forceful and clear, but need not be free from errors. |
| 5     | **Average**  
• Addresses question intelligently but not fully and specifically.  
• Good but general grasp of the text; uses text to frame an apt but imprecise response.  
• May use textual references/quotes sparingly or without enough support.  
• Shows adequate clarity/organization but may be mechanical or banal. |
| 4-3   | **Below Average**  
• Fails in some way to fulfill the assignment.  
  - May omit some part of the question, fail to provide minimal textual support for their points, or base their analysis on a misreading of some part of the text.  
• Presents one or more incisive points among others of less value.  
• Uneven in development, with lapses in organization or clarity. |
This assignment was scored a 3 for the clarity of the grading criteria because the rubric was detailed and elaborated, and had the potential to provide a significant amount of information to students about what was expected of them to successfully complete the assignment. The rubric would have received a higher score if there had been more description of each of the scoring dimensions (in terms of content, writing conventions, etc.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Combine two or more serious failures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- May not address the actual question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- May indicate serious misreading of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- May not use textual support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- May use text in a way that suggests failure to understand it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unclear, badly written, or unacceptably brief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Style is either marked by major errors and incompleteness, or is smoothly written but devoid of content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teacher’s grading criteria are in the form of a scoring guide (i.e., a list of criteria), or an extremely rudimentary rubric. The list of criteria is not elaborated or detailed and provides little help to students to improve their performance.

**WRITING**  Assignment Scored a 2 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment, students were required to write a news story based on facts they had researched. The teacher’s criteria for specific letter grades were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Clear and effective lead, complete and original support, few grammar errors, creative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Lead with support, handful of grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Clumsy lead and support, holes in logic, significant grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This assignment was scored a 2 for this dimension because the teacher’s grading criteria were not at all detailed or elaborated. For example, the teacher’s criteria for determining whether a lead was “clumsy” or whether ideas were logical were not made explicit to students. These criteria also were not concrete enough to provide much information to students for what they would need to do to successfully complete the task. Additionally, there were inconsistencies in the teacher’s grading criteria. For example, whether the students’ writing was logical was only mentioned in the description of a “C” paper.

**READING COMPREHENSION**  Assignment Scored a 2 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this reading assignment, students were asked to read the poem *Inferno*, by Dante Alighieri, and write a five-paragraph essay analyzing how the main character was revealed to the reader. The teacher’s grading criteria were as follows:

- Must have five paragraphs with eight sentences in each body.
- Must have concrete details preceded by a topic sentence and succeeded by two commentaries.
- Commentaries must connect topic to support.

This list of criteria gave some information about what was expected from students, but it was not elaborated or developed enough to receive a score higher than a 2. It was more of a checklist, rather than an elaborated set of criteria, and provided little information to students for what they needed to do to successfully complete the task beyond applying the correct essay format.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 1 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

After reading a chapter from *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck, students were required to write a seven-sentence paragraph expressing their opinion of the book. The paragraph was to include a topic sentence given to them by the teacher, two sentences providing concrete details, and four commentary sentences to go along with the concrete details. The teacher’s stated grading criteria for this task were as follows:

Students received 5 points for completion and 5 points for editing. I also looked for thoroughness.

This assignment was scored a 1 for this dimension because the criteria were not clear. For example, the teacher did not define what her criteria were for assessing “thoroughness.” We also do not know what the teacher expected from students in terms of editing. For example, did the teacher give points if an editing attempt was made, or were students required to correctly edit for certain features? In general, it was not clear from the teacher’s stated grading criteria what students needed to do to successfully complete the task.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 1 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this reading comprehension assignment students were required to answer comprehension questions based on reading Act 3 of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The teacher’s grading criteria for this task were as follows:

I told the students that they were to answer all questions completely and write their answers in complete sentences.

This assignment received a score of 1 for this dimension since the stated grading criteria did not clarify what the teacher looked for in students’ responses. Beyond completing the assignment and writing in complete sentences, it was not clear how the teacher intended to assess the work.
Alignment of Learning Goals and Task

This dimension focuses on the degree to which a teacher’s stated learning goals are reflected in the design of the assignment tasks students are asked to complete. Specifically, this dimension attempts to capture how well the assignment appears to promote the achievement of the teacher’s goals for student learning. An assignment given a high score on this dimension had to involve tasks and goals that overlapped completely.
There is exact alignment between the teacher’s stated learning goals for students and what the task requires students to do. The task fully supports the instructional goals. The tasks and goals overlap completely—neither one calls for something not included in the other.

**Writing** Assignment Scored a 4 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this assignment, students read a novel of their choice and were asked to write an analytical book report. The six sections in the report were to include an introduction and conclusion as well as analyses of the plot, characters, theme, literary techniques, and figurative language. Students were required to cite quotes to support their arguments and to do research to find bibliographical information on the author, including where he/she was from, the history of the book, and why the book was written. The teacher told the students the content of the report as well as the writing itself would be graded and that they were to use an effective writing style. The teacher’s stated learning goals for this assignment were as follows:

Students were expected to learn how to critically analyze difficult text; perform independent research; recognize and interpret various literary techniques and figurative language; cite relevant information and events to support their arguments, use quotes effectively and explain their interpretation clearly, develop a strong writing style and effective use of language; facilitate the writing process, and use the Modern Language Association format for a bibliography.

This assignment was scored a 4 for this dimension because first, the teacher’s goals focused on student learning and were specific and elaborated. Second, they overlapped completely with the requirements of the task. There was almost perfect alignment between the learning goals outlined by the teacher and the assignment itself. A handout was given to students outlining the assignment in detail and guiding students in what to include in each section. Everything that was found in the directions to the students was present in the teacher’s stated goals.

**Reading Comprehension** Assignment Scored a 4 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this assignment, students were required to write a one- to three-page essay identifying three examples of symbolism utilized by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. For each example, they needed to include the symbol and/or a quote from which it was derived, what the symbol represented, its thematic importance or function, and a description of its relationship to other elements within the story. The teacher’s stated learning goals for this assignment were as follows:
Students were to practice ongoing skills used in effective literary analysis. One specific goal was to give students an opportunity to recognize symbols within a canonical text and to cite them clearly and effectively. Another goal was for students to learn to interpret a symbol. Students were also given the opportunity to practice communicating their interpretation in a prose format. Another goal was for students to learn how to identify figurative language and critically analyze its use in a literary work. In addition, students were to learn how to use quotes to support their arguments.

This assignment was scored a 4 for this dimension because the teacher’s goals were articulated in detail and overlapped completely with the requirements of the task. What the teacher wanted the students to gain from completing the assignment overlapped completely with what the teacher asked students to do in the assignment.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 3 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this writing assignment, students were required to read a poem and write an essay discussing how the form of the poem (meter, rhyme, scheme, stanza) and language techniques (figurative language, hyperbole, symbolism) enhanced the theme of the poem. Students were asked to write clearly and with good grammar. The teacher’s stated goals for the assignment were as follows:

The students would be able to recognize literary techniques used in poetry. They would then be able to analyze the poem and in a formal essay explain how the techniques used in the poem enhanced and supported the theme of the poem. Supporting quotes from the poem were required.

There is good alignment between the teacher’s stated goals and the assignment itself. This assignment was not rated a 4 for this dimension, however, because some of the goals were stated as activities, rather than in terms of what students were to learn as a result of completing the task. Additionally, the assignment directions to students mentioned “clarity of expression, [and] good grammar,” aspects of the task that were not included in the teacher’s stated learning goals. This assignment, therefore, was considered to reflect good, but not exemplary alignment between the teacher’s learning goals and the requirements of the assignment task.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 3 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this assignment students were asked to read several short stories including “The Diamond Necklace,” by Guy de Maupassant, and “The Bet,” by Anton Chekhov. Students were required to write an essay analyzing the story, and include a description of the literary elements and techniques used by the author and how these techniques enhanced and supported the theme of the story. The essay was to include an introductory paragraph with a clear thesis statement and a conclusion. Students were asked to begin all body paragraphs with topic sentences, cite specific examples from the story, use quotes from the text as evidence, and explain how the evidence supported the essay’s thesis. The teacher’s goals were as follows:
The students would be able to analyze a short story, recognize literary elements and techniques used by the author, and then explain (using quotes from the story) how these techniques enhanced and supported the theme of the story.

This task was scored a 3 for this dimension because the requirements of the task fully supported the teacher's learning goals for students. The teacher's goals were not very elaborated, however, and so this assignment was aligned at a less detailed level than would be required to receive a 4 for this dimension.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 2 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this writing assignment, students were required to read the short story, “Adjo Means Goodbye,” by Carrie Young, and work in groups to brainstorm a topic sentence, one with a subject and an opinion. Students then were required to write an eight-sentence paragraph, have their paper peer edited, and then write a second draft. The teacher’s stated goals for this writing assignment were as follows:

Students will practice creating topic sentences. Students will practice writing an eight-sentence body paragraph.

Some of the teacher’s goals, while not elaborated, were aligned with the requirements of the task. Students were required to write a topic sentence and a paragraph. The stated goals were very broad and activity-focused, however, so the goals and task were aligned at only a very general level. Additionally, editing and revising were significant parts of the assignment task, but what the teacher wanted students to learn as a result of participating in these activities was not described in her goals. For these reasons, this assignment was considered to illustrate only some alignment between the teacher’s stated goals and the task.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 2 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this reading comprehension assignment, students read a chapter from Of Mice and Men, by John Steinbeck, and answered 10 comprehension questions using complete sentences. Students were allowed to work together and could use the book for reference. The teacher’s stated goals for this assignment were as follows:

The skills which I was evaluating were reading comprehension, some critical thinking, and sentence composition.

The three stated goals for this assignment, reading comprehension, critical thinking, and sentence composition, are all extremely broad. The alignment between the stated goals and the task, therefore, occurred at a very broad and general level only. More importantly, however, all 10 of the comprehension questions required students to recall very basic factual information about the book, such as “What does Lennie say about Curley’s wife?” and “Why do the men leave the bunkhouse?” The task, therefore, did not require critical thinking on the part of the students, though this was one of the teacher’s learning goals. For these reasons, this task was considered to be only somewhat aligned with the teacher’s stated learning goals.
There is very little or no alignment between the teacher’s stated goals and what the task requires students to do. The task does not support the instructional goals.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 1 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this assignment, students were to write 10 poems focusing on their neighborhood. Students were required to continuously revise their poetry. The teacher’s learning goals were as follows:

- To learn to observe closely different forms of poetry and rich description.

This assignment was given a 1 for this dimension because the requirements of this writing task—to write 10 poems and revise—were not reflected in the teacher’s goals. “Rich description” may refer to the teacher’s desire for students to include rich description in their poems; however, we can only surmise the connection because this was not mentioned in the assignment directions given to students.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 1 for Alignment of Goals and Task

After studying a variety of beatnik literature, students were asked to write a poem in the same genre, modeling the literary techniques of the authors they studied such as Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg. The teacher’s stated learning goals were as follows:

- I hoped to show the students that American literature does not have to be boring, old and completely inaccessible. In studying beatniks, they can see that these writers are people too.

This assignment was scored a 1 for this dimension because the learning goals were not clarified or tied to the specific assignment task. While trying to make American literature more accessible to students may have been an overarching goal for this teacher and may have guided her decision to study beatnik poetry, it was not clear how this specific assignment task (writing a poem in the style of a beatnik poet) was intended to further students’ understanding that beatniks “are people too.” For this reason, this assignment was given a low score for this dimension.
Alignment of Learning Goals and Grading Criteria

This dimension is intended to describe the degree to which a teacher’s grading criteria support the learning goals, i.e., the degree to which a teacher assesses students on the skills and concepts they are intended to learn through the completion of the assignment. Also considered in this rating is whether or not the grading criteria include extraneous dimensions that do not support the learning goals, as well as the appropriateness of the criteria for supporting the learning goals. An assignment given a high score on this dimension had to involve grading criteria and goals that overlapped completely.
There is exact alignment between the teacher’s stated learning goals for students and the stated grading criteria.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 4 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment, students wrote a five-paragraph essay on a controversial issue of their choice. The teacher’s instructions to students for how to develop and structure their essays were extremely detailed and focused on four discrete areas: issue, position, support, and tone. The following is an excerpt from the teacher’s directions to the students:

*Position*

It is important that you take an authoritative stand on the issue. The stand is expressed in a thesis statement which is stated in the introductory paragraph and restated in a number of ways throughout the essay. You will consider both sides of the issue, but the reader is never in doubt about your position.

The teacher’s learning goals for this assignment were as follows:

In writing a controversial essay, students will learn to:

- appeal to an audience both logically and emotionally,
- distinguish between fact and opinion,
- draw conclusions,
- take a position,
- maintain an appropriate tone,
- evaluate evidence,
- discover their own basic values,
- debate social issues,
- respect different viewpoints, and
- build bridges to areas of common ground in arguments.

Learning how to skillfully and critically take a stand on a controversial issue makes it more likely that students will reject prejudice and propaganda and instead, embrace logic and reason as they negotiate the maze of issues that face individuals in society.
The grading criteria included four dimensions (position; strategies, reasoning, and support; counterarguments; and tone and diction), each of which was rated on a 6-point scale. The following is the rubric the teacher used to grade students’ essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position is clear, knowledgeable, and authoritative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position defines and focuses the issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position is clear, knowledgeable, and strong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position is consistent throughout the essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position is simplistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May lack content and background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position may not be embedded in context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position usually stays focused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position is simplistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position may waver, appear inconsistent, or unsure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position may be unclear and unfocused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Names the issues briefly or not at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does not take a position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May mention the issue from the prompt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Strategies, Reasoning, and Support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6     | • The essay is thoughtfully and persuasively organized.  
• Has a consistently smooth, forward movement.  
• Uses a variety of strategies for providing specific context. (These strategies may also be used to develop the argument. See list below.)  
• Uses a variety of strategies developing the argument, including:  
  - analogies  
  - anticipation and acknowledgment of counterarguments (accommodating valid arguments; refuting invalid arguments)  
  - literary allusions or quotations  
  - rhetorical questions  
  - anecdotes  
  - case studies  
  - cause-and-effect reasoning (accommodating valid arguments; commonly accepted beliefs)  
  - comparison/contrast reasoning  
  - personal experience  
  - scenarios  
• Convinces with sound and logical reasoning.  
• Reasons may be philosophical or emotional.  
• The writer's argument reveals deeper critical thinking.  
• Supports with substantial, solid evidence. |
| 5     | • The essay is well organized.  
• Uses transitions effectively in a logical progression of thought. Writer may briefly go off on a tangent but returns quickly to defend the position taken.  
• Provides specific context for the reader.  
• Uses one or more strategies effectively to develop the argument.  
• Convinces with sound reasoning.  
• Writer may supply philosophical, logical, or emotional foundations for the arguments advanced.  
• The writer's argument demonstrates depth and complexity of thought.  
• Supports with solid evidence. Occasional gaps in reasoning and/or support separate the 5 from the 6 paper. |
| 4     | • The essay is organized.  
• Structure may be formulaic.  
• Transitions are used mechanically but logically move the reader forward.  
• Provides some general background for the reader.  
• Uses one or more strategies to develop the argument.  
• Satisfying conclusion.  
• Reasoning is predictable but lacks depth.  
• Support is logical and uses relevant arguments and evidence. |
### Strategies, Reasoning, and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3     | - The essay has some organization.  
       | - Structure may be formulaic.  
       | - May be repetitive and underdeveloped or the ideas may be disconnected so that the essay lacks cohesion.  
       |   - A single point may be repeated throughout the essay and not really developed.  
       |   - Paragraphs are incoherent. Topic sentence and support do not match.  
       |   - Paragraphs do not follow logically.  
       |   - The writer contradicts himself. The focus is not always clear.  
       | - Reasoning may be unclear.  
       | - Support is superficial and general, possibly a list. |
| 2     | - The essay has limited organization.  
       | - Repetition, digression, and gaps break the essay’s forward movement.  
       | - Little development (only a couple of paragraphs) or rambles at length.  
       | - Writer makes unsupported judgments.  
       | - Support is vague, irrelevant, or illogical. |
| 1     | - The essay shows little evidence of organization.  
       | - Little evidence of forward movement.  
       | - Writer may be confused by or unsure of the task.  
       | - No relevant support is offered. |

### Counterarguments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6     | - Writer considers both sides of the issue.  
       | - Anticipates counterarguments.  
       | - Refutes invalid, irrelevant arguments. |
| 5     | - Counterarguments are addressed. May be more focused on arguing the point than convincing the opposition. |
| 4     | - Writer will usually acknowledge the opposition. |
| 3     | - Writer may argue only one side. |
| 2     | - Writer may abandon initial position or not take a position at all. |
| 1     | n/a |
This assignment was scored a 4 for this dimension because the grading criteria fully aligned with the stated learning goals. Both the goals and the grading criteria were clearly stated and elaborated, and there was a direct correspondence between what the teacher wanted students to know and be able to do and what the teacher looked for when grading students’ essays.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 4 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.
The teacher’s stated learning goals and the stated grading criteria are mostly aligned.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 3 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment, students were required to read a poem and write a well-developed essay discussing how the form of the poem (meter, rhyme, scheme, stanza) and language techniques (figurative language, hyperbole, symbolism) enhance the theme of the poem. Students were asked to write clearly and with good grammar. The teacher’s stated goals for the assignment were as follows:

The students would be able to recognize literary techniques used in poetry. They would then be able to analyze the poem and in a formal essay explain how the techniques used in the poem enhanced and supported the theme of the poem. Supporting quotes from the poem were required.

Students’ essays were graded based on the following dimensions:

- **Good introduction and conclusion.**
- **Solid thesis.**
- **Clarity of expression.**
- **Good grammar.**
- **Thesis supported throughout with examples, quotes, and analysis.**
- **Effective use of quotes to explain literary techniques.**
- **Identification of poetry forms (meter, rhyme, scheme, stanza) and literary techniques (figurative language, hyperbole, symbolism) in poetry.**

Overall this assignment was considered to illustrate good alignment between the learning goals and the grading criteria the teacher used to assess student work. One of the main reasons this dimension was not scored a 4 is that not all the teacher’s goals were reflected in the grading criteria. For example, one of the goals was to be able to “explain how the techniques used in the poem enhanced and supported the theme of the poem,” yet nothing specific was included in the grading criteria that addressed whether or not students accomplished this successfully. Instead, the grading criteria included “solid thesis,” which is very broad and therefore can only align in a very general way. In addition, some of the goals were stated as activities, rather than what students were to learn from completing the task,
and the goals themselves were not complete. For example, the goals did not address writing conventions. Therefore, this assignment was considered to reflect good, but not exemplary, alignment between the teacher’s learning goals and the grading criteria.

**READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 3 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria**

For this reading comprehension assignment students were required to read excerpts from two 19th-century diaries of young farm women and write a comparative essay comparing the lives of the farm girls with their own lives.

The teacher’s stated learning goals for this assignment were as follows:

- Write a well-structured comparative essay.
- Write an insightful thesis statement.
- Infer circumstances of girls’ lives based on their activities.
- Reflect on personal activities.
- Use formal grammatically correct English.
- Write a well-written essay including—fluency, good style, strong voice, etc.

The teacher’s grading criteria were:

- Adherence to the comparative structure taught in class.
- Dynamic and insightful thesis statement.
- All details explain thesis.
- Use of formal, grammatically correct English.
- Writing style.
- Writer’s voice.
- Depth of comparison.
- Structure.
- Fluency.

Overall this assignment was considered to illustrate good alignment between the learning goals and the grading criteria the teacher used to assess student work. Most of the goals were reflected in the grading criteria. This dimension did not receive a 4 rating because the grading criteria were not elaborated. Additionally, the teacher’s goal that students infer circumstances of girls’ lives based on their activities was not addressed in her grading criteria.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 2 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this assignment, students were required to write a news story that utilized specific journalistic techniques such as having a strong lead, and effectively using quotes and supporting facts.

The teacher’s stated learning goals for the assignment were as follows:

• Write clearly, using formal conventions of the English language, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, word choice, paragraphing, and figurative language in a variety of writing styles suitable to particular situations.

• Read interpretively.

The teacher’s criteria for specific letter grades were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Clear and effective lead, complete and original support, few grammar errors, creative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Lead with support, handful of grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Clumsy lead and support, holes in logic, significant grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This assignment was considered to illustrate only some alignment between the teacher’s goals and the grading criteria. The writing goals were broadly stated and applied to most types of writing, whereas the grading criteria mostly focused on journalistic techniques. Additionally, the teacher referred to reading interpretively as a goal for this assignment, but did not mention this in the grading criteria, and neither the goals nor the grading criteria were significantly elaborated. For these reasons, this assignment received a 2 for this dimension.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 2 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this reading comprehension assignment, students read a chapter from *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck, and answered 10 comprehension questions in complete sentences.

The teacher’s stated goals for this assignment were as follows:

The skills which I was evaluating were reading comprehension, some critical thinking, and sentence composition.
The teacher’s grading criteria for this assignment were as follows:

   The assignment was graded on a 10-point scale for comprehension, correctness, completeness, and clear sentence writing.

This assignment was scored a 2 for the alignment of the learning goals and grading criteria. The three stated goals for this assignment and the grading criteria were all extremely broad. The alignment between the stated goals and the grading criteria would have occurred at a very general level only. Additionally, students were not assessed on their application of “critical thinking” skills, though this was mentioned by the teacher as a goal for this assignment. For these reasons, the goals for this assignment were considered to be only somewhat aligned with the teacher’s grading criteria.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 1 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

After reading *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck, students were required to write a seven-sentence paragraph expressing an opinion. The paragraph was to include a topic sentence given by the teacher, two sentences providing concrete details, and four commentary sentences to go along with the concrete details.

The teacher’s stated learning goals for this assignment were as follows:

- Students were to practice writing a paragraph using a topic sentence, two concrete details, and two commentary sentences for each concrete detail sentence. The result would be a seven-sentence paragraph.

The teacher’s stated grading criteria for this task were as follows:

- Students received 5 points for completion and 5 points for editing. I also looked for thoroughness.

This assignment was given a low score for this dimension because the grading criteria did not match the teacher’s goals. The teacher’s goal for the assignment was that students learn to write a paragraph following certain specifications. The teacher did not mention these specifications in her grading criteria, however, but focused on completion, peer editing, and thoroughness. Additionally, the grading criteria were not at all elaborated. For example, it is not clear how the teacher intended to assess the “thoroughness” of students’ papers. For these reasons, this assignment was scored a 1 for the alignment of goals and grading criteria.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 1 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this reading comprehension assignment, students were read the play, *The Bear*, by Anton Chekov, and were asked to answer several comprehension questions using details from the play to support their responses.

The teacher’s goals were as follows:

- Students are to read and comprehend a text. They will learn to critically analyze the text, including learning character analysis. Students will cite examples from the text to support their analysis of a main or minor character. They will also relate the battle of the sexes in the play to today.
The teacher’s criteria for specific letter grades were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>All answered/well developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Missing one/or answers not fully developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Missing two/or answers very underdeveloped, vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Missing three/not developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Missing four or more/not developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This assignment was given a 1 for the alignment of the learning goals and the grading criteria because none of the teacher’s goals for reading comprehension were explicitly considered or included in the grading criteria.
This dimension is intended to provide a holistic rating of the quality of the assignment based on its level of cognitive challenge, the clarity of the goals for student learning, the clarity of the grading criteria, the alignment of the learning goals and the assignment task, and the alignment of the learning goals and the grading criteria.
Assignment Scored a 4 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this high-level writing assignment, students were asked to write a five-paragraph essay on a controversial issue of their choice. The teacher’s instructions to students on how to develop and structure their essays were extremely detailed and focused on four discrete areas: issue, position, support, and tone. These are described below from the teacher’s directions to the students.

Issue
First you must clearly define and focus the issue itself. Acknowledge that reasonable people disagree on the issue as a result of life experience, opinion, reasoning or judgment. You may use a variety of strategies to do this:

- Clearly define your terms.
- Ask rhetorical questions to involve readers.
- Present information to establish your credibility as an informed proponent.
- Use personal anecdotes, examples, scenarios or a case study.

Position
It is important that you take an authoritative stand on the issue. The stand is expressed in a thesis statement which is stated in the introductory paragraph and restated in a number of ways throughout the essay. You will consider both sides of the issue, but the reader is never in doubt about your position.

Support
Because readers will not always agree with the written position on a controversial issue, you need to gain your readers’ confidence by establishing common values and principles. Then argue convincingly with reasons and evidence. Accommodate valid counterarguments and refute invalid ones. You may want to raise questions in your readers’ minds and answer those questions persuasively. Effective arguments build trust by establishing the writer’s credibility. Your arguments may include the following:

- Appeals to emotion by expressing concern.
- Appeals to logic through well-reasoned support.
• Examples or details.
• Expert opinion.
• Quotations from literature.
• Anecdotes or personal experiences.
• Hypothetical situations.
• Common facts accepted as true, generalizations, or universal truths.
• Analogies.
• Comparison/contrast.
• Cause-and-effect reasoning.
• Rhetorical questions.

But most importantly, your argument must be well-organized. The most important evidence should be given central consideration and the most weight in the essay.

Tone

Tone is your attitude toward the subject. Remember, one of your most important goals is to win the trust of your reader so that your position will be taken seriously. You do this by reflecting a committed, reasonable, sincere, and confident tone. You may want to emphasize your conviction and commitment by appealing to emotion. Or take a moral tone by examining ethical concerns in the issue. Make sure the reader believes you have given thoughtful consideration to important evidence in reaching your judgment or decision.

This assignment was scored a 4 for the level of cognitive challenge because writing an essay that formally argues a position, including the acknowledgment and rebuttal of counterarguments and use of different strategies to support an argument including cause-and-effect reasoning and the use of rhetorical questions, is a demanding task, regardless of whether or not students engage with substantive content material. The level of cognitive challenge for this assignment was further increased by the teacher's genre-specific directions to students with regard to defining an issue, taking a position, and maintaining an appropriate tone in their writing.

The teacher's learning goals for this assignment were as follows:

In writing a controversial essay, students will learn to:

• appeal to an audience both logically and emotionally,
• distinguish between fact and opinion,
• draw conclusions,
• take a position,
• maintain an appropriate tone,
- evaluate evidence,
- discover their own basic values,
- debate social issues,
- respect different viewpoints, and
- build bridges to areas of common ground in arguments.

Learn how to skillfully and critically take a stand on a controversial issue makes it more likely that students will reject prejudice and propaganda and instead, embrace logic and reason as they negotiate the maze of issues that face individuals in society.

This assignment was scored a 4 for this dimension because the goals were detailed and clearly set out what the students were to learn as a result of completing the assignment task. While some of the individual goals were less explicit (e.g., “respect different viewpoints” or “discover their own basic values”), on the whole they provided a good sense of what the teacher had in mind in terms of student learning. Additionally, the goals closely aligned with the requirements of the writing task as expressed in the teacher’s directions.

The grading criteria the teacher used to evaluate student work were scored a 4 because they were extremely detailed and elaborated, and tailored to the task. The rubric included four dimensions (position; strategies, reasoning, and support; counterarguments; and tone and diction) each of which was rated on a 6-point scale. These criteria also fully aligned with the learning goals. The following is an excerpt from the rubric the teacher used to assess students’ essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Position is clear, knowledgeable, and authoritative.  
• Position defines and focuses the issues. |
| 5        |
| • Position is clear, knowledgeable, and strong.  
• Position is consistent throughout the essay. |
| 4        |
| • Position is simplistic.  
• May lack content and background.  
• Position may not be embedded in context.  
• Position usually stays focused. |
| 3        |
| • Position is simplistic.  
• Position may waver, appear inconsistent, or unsure. |
The following is a sample of student work for this writing assignment considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for the class.

**Student Work**

Imagine a school where kids are happier they get higher grades and better test scores. This sounds great right? You are probably wondering if some knows how to make students smarter then why are we not doing what he says to do? Because the school board of Education believes that we should be educated in all classes although many of us do not plan on pursuing careers in a lot of the classes that we have to take. But, if people could choose their own classes that they wanted they would only choose a subject that they want and plan on pursuing a career in and this would lead to more motivated students.

Yes, students will not have all the classes they have now and they will not be educated in all the subjects like they are now, but when opponents of my view say that this idea of mine will not prepare students for college is absurd, because in college you have to choose your own classes and it has always been like this. Which brings me to my first major point that if kids where able to choose their own classes this would directly prepare them for college because they would have to get used to all of the college decisions like what classes to choose, what classes would be most beneficial for what I plan to do in college.

This would also make kids become mature because they would have to start thinking about their future at a much younger age.
I know that some kids will not choose hard enough classes and this will let them get higher grades, but if kids really wanted to do this they already could they could drop to a lower academy and take easier classes like for example a kid taking a honors class when they could easily make it in a AP class. Some people might say that kids will not get a good enough education because they could choose easy classes or they might not want to choose any classes that will help them in the real world. But, these students are not focused and no matter what kind of education they are getting they will not be focused and they will get lousy grades.

Yes if this happened it might be harder for them to get into college but if all high schools were like this there would be very little reason for these kids to go to college because they would learn just about everything that they have to and everything that they wanted to in high school. Some people might say that it would be harder for people to graduate from high school, like for example a kid takes two years of history but in his final two years he takes all math classes. In college this kid would not have enough credits to get a major in anything but in high school as long as they reach 220 credits they would be eligible to graduate. So, they could take two years of history and two years of math class and have the required credits to pass high school. Also kids would be more focused on school because they would only take classes that they wanted to take.

If this were to happen it would not have to take a long time to do. All the school would have to do is when the students fill out their elective sheets. Make the elective sheet have blank spots for what the student plans on majoring in college and have them put down the schedule that they would like to get. But, the counselor would have to see it and approve of the schedule and if she thought that there should be some changes she could change it to help the student be prepared for college.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 4 for Overall Quality of Assignment

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 3 for Overall Quality of Assignment

This writing assignment was a follow-up to the reading of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, by William Shakespeare. Students wrote a five-paragraph essay in which they analyzed the effectiveness of Marc Antony's speech in Act III. The teacher provided students with a list of rhetorical techniques Antony used in his speech, and as a class, they discussed examples from the speech for each technique. The students then chose three of the most effective rhetorical techniques used by Antony and included two or three examples that best illustrated each technique. Students also were to incorporate at least two quotes in the essay.

This task was scored a 3 for cognitive challenge because it required complex thinking and engagement with substantive content material. The task required students to analyze literature, evaluating the effectiveness of Antony's speech. In order to successfully complete the assignment, students needed not only to read and understand the play, but also to be familiar with rhetorical techniques and how they can be used by orators to persuade an audience.

This task was scored a 3 and not a 4 for cognitive challenge because the teacher provided students with a list of the techniques and examples from the speech ahead of time, so students did not have to find these examples or identify these techniques on their own.

The teacher's goals for this assignment were as follows:

- Students were expected to display mastery of the eight-sentence paragraph and five-paragraph essay. They were also expected to display critical thinking skills, needing to analyze the persuasive content of the speech.
- Students needed to do a close reading.

The teacher's goals were mostly clear and explicit in terms of what students were to learn as a result of completing the assignment. For example, the teacher specified the critical-thinking skills she was referring to in her goals—analyzing the persuasive content of the speech. Some of the goals, however, were not elaborated or were written as directions to students (e.g., “to do a close reading”), which is why this assignment did not receive a higher score for this dimension. Additionally, there was good alignment between the goals of the assignment and the requirements of the writing task as expressed in the teacher's directions.
The teacher used the following criteria to assess the students’ work. This rubric consisted of four levels of achievement: excellent, good, adequate, and demonstrates problems. The following is an excerpt from the rubric the teacher used to assess students’ work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Brilliant/Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Concrete detail: excellent choices with superior TLQ/MLA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commentary: insightful, meaningful, and consistently finds connections between characters, events, themes, or global perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vocabulary: powerful word choice used appropriately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Syntax: strong, concise sentences that are smooth and fluid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sentence variety: excellent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organization: clear and logical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transitions: used skillfully</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mechanical errors: insignificant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Repeats: inconsequential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>Good/Solid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Concrete detail: well chosen with correct TLQ/MLA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commentary: insightful and occasionally finds connections between characters, events, or themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vocabulary: strong word choice which emphasizes the point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Syntax: clear sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sentence variety: good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organization: clear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transitions: used correctly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mechanical errors: some, but they do not detract from the meaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Repeats: few</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We considered this assignment to be a 3 overall because students were required to engage with substantive content material and apply higher order thinking skills. The teacher’s goals were clear in terms of what students were to learn by completing the assignment. The grading criteria also were fairly elaborated, though more detail could have been provided in terms of defining some of the dimensions.

The following is an example of student work the teacher considered to be of medium quality for the class.
The speech given by Mark Antony, in the Tragedy of Julius Caesar, makes him one of the most intriguing characters in William Shakespeare's play. Antony's speech convinces the Roman people that Caesar was a good man. His funeral speech is embedded with irony. He utilizes rhetorical techniques such as directly addressing his audience, asking rhetorical questions, and using repetition for ironic effect. Together these techniques create a complicated, yet interesting speech.

Using direct address makes Antony's audience feel like his equal. The words he starts his famous funeral speech serve as an example, "Friends, Romans, Countrymen..." In order to command the citizens' attention, he first addresses them personally. Now they will hear what he has to say. This also allows the citizens to concentrate in his speech as if they were listening to a friend. Another example would occur in the second part of his speech when he addresses the people as, "Good friends, sweet friends..." By being delicate with his words he once again controls and intrigues the people. They want to pay close attention. His audience is comfortable and also more interested in how he approaches his conclusions. He continues to refer to his audience on a personal level to make them comfortable.

In addition, Antony persuades the people to analyze their shared problem through rhetorical questions. He asks, "Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?" This not only proves the citizens were wrong for believing that Caesar was ambitious, but it also lets them recognize all the good he had done for Rome. Another example would be the question, "Was this ambition?" This question helps Antony turn the people against the lying Brutus without directly calling him a liar. Antony is allowed to contradict Brutus' idea of Caesar. Another example would be the question, "Was this ambition?" This question helps Antony force the people to think through what has just been said. The citizens are convinced that Brutus has enormously mistak en for accusing Caesar of being ambitious. The people finally realize that they were duped into believing in Brutus' lie. When Antony asked that question, he caused an amount of
confusion between the Roman people, while they looked for a reasonable answer to his question.

Finally Antony is using repetition for ironic effect which persuades the people to overthrow their government. Antony’s use of the word “honorable” delivers itself to be a good example of his repetitious ironic effects. He uses honorable as an insult instead of a compliment. By repeating and pronouncing “honorable angrily he lets the crowd know that he does not believe that the assassins deserve to be called honorable men. The gradual change of the word honorable was used in order to stir the people into a civil war. Another example of his repetitious effects is mentioning the will. He lets the people know that Caesar had left a will for them. Therefore, Antony automatically manipulates the crowd. He had every intention of reading it; though, he preferred the inquisitive citizens to force him to read the will. This is why he keeps repeating that a will exists. Antony’s repetitious ironic effects ultimately causes the people to rebel against Brutus and the rest of the conspirators.

Antony, one of the most interesting characters in William Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, uses direct address to the audience, rhetorical questions, and repetition, to deliver an effective speech. By using these rhetorical techniques he successfully inflames the Roman citizens and ignites a Civil War.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 3 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this assignment students were asked to read several short stories including “The Diamond Necklace,” by Guy de Maupassant, and “The Bet,” by Chekhov. Students were required to write an essay analyzing the story, including recognizing literary elements and techniques used by the author and analyzing how these techniques enhanced and supported the theme of the story. The essay was to include an introductory paragraph with a clear thesis statement and a conclusion. Students were asked to begin all body paragraphs with topic sentences, cite specific examples from the story, use quotes from the text as evidence, and explain how the evidence supported the essay’s thesis.

This task scored a 3 for cognitive challenge because it required complex thinking, and students engaged with substantive content material, grade-level short stories.
The teacher's goals were as follows:

The students would be able to analyze a short story, recognize literary elements and techniques used by the author, and then explain (using quotes from the story) how these techniques enhanced and supported the theme of the story.

This assignment was scored a 3 for the clarity of goals because the goals were clear and explicit about the type of reading comprehension that the teacher intended the students to develop, analyzing how the literary techniques used by the author supported the theme. In addition, the teacher's learning goals aligned well with the task, and it was clear both from the directions to students as well as from the stated goals how students could develop their reading comprehension by learning to critically read and analyze a story. The teacher's goals were not very elaborated, however, and so the assignment was at a less detailed level than would be required to receive a 4.

The grading criteria were as follows:

- Introductory paragraph with a clear thesis statement.
- Thoughtful analysis of literary techniques used by the author.
- All body paragraphs begin with topic sentences.
- Specific examples cited from the story to support thesis.
- Quotes from the text used as evidence to support thesis.
- Thesis must be adequately proven.
- Clearly stated conclusion.
- Well-written essay with clarity of expression and proper grammar.

This set of grading criteria received a score of 3 because the criteria were mostly clear and explicit with regard to what students were required to do to complete the assignment. Additionally, there was good alignment between the teacher's learning goals and the grading criteria. Both in the goals and the grading criteria it was clear that students were expected to analyze the literary techniques used by the author. Neither the teacher's goals nor the grading criteria, however, were very elaborated, and so the assignment was at a less detailed level than would be required to receive a higher score. Also, there was not complete alignment between the goals and grading criteria. For example, the teacher's stated goals did not include anything about the expectations for the writing itself, while the grading criteria addressed this area in a general way.

In summary, we considered this assignment to be a 3 overall because the task required complex thinking and engagement with substantive content material. The goals and the grading criteria were clear but not elaborated, and there was good alignment between the goals and the task and the goals and the grading criteria. The following is from a student essay considered by the teacher to be medium quality for the class.
When reading a story, you see the literary elements while reading. Such as the character, point of view, and symbol. This essay will discuss how those elements support the theme. The story that I will discuss is The Diamond Necklace by Guy De Maupassant.

The theme is the most important thing in a story. It states the main idea. To me, the theme in this story can be, “Appreciate what you have.” Matilda is an average person, maybe a little below, because she’s not that rich. For that reason, she is always unhappy or upset. When Matilda and her husband are invited to the Minister’s house, she starts to cry because she thinks her clothes and things aren’t good enough to be worn to something like that. Therefore she asks her friend if she could borrow her jewelry for the party. She looked at her friend’s jewelry but didn’t like anything, so she asked: “Have you nothing more?” “Why, yes. Look for yourself. I do not know what will please you.” Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin box, a superb necklace of diamonds, and her heart beat fast with an immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took them up. She placed them about her throat against her dress, and remained in ecstasy before them. Then she asked, in a hesitating voice, full of anxiety: “Could you lend me this? Only this?” “Why, yes certainly.”

The day of the ball came, and she was so happy. She was the prettiest one of them all. All the men wanted to dance with her. And she enjoyed herself. She went home at 4:00 in the morning. Then she noticed the necklace was gone.

An interesting think about reading a short story, is getting to know the character. For example, Matilda is an average person, although at times she might show that she’s always unhappy and never satisfied. Her husband, on the other hand, is probably the nicest, most thoughtful and most caring man in the world. He always trying to make his wife happy. When he gives her the invitation and she starts weeping, he says, “But, my dearie, I thought it would make you happy. You never go out, and this is an occasion, and a fine one! I had a great deal of trouble to get it. Everybody wishes one, and it is very select; not many are given to employees. You will see the whole official world there.” Also Matilda is a caring...
WRITING Assignment Scored a 2 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this writing assignment students read the book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and the poem “Caged Bird,” both by Maya Angelou. Students then completed a prewriting activity in their journals focusing on “what freedom means to you.” Students then chose to write either an essay or a poem about freedom using metaphors and similes.

This assignment was scored a 2 for cognitive challenge. While the novel was grade-appropriate, the writing assignment only required students to summarize their personal views on freedom. Even with the additional direction of adding similes and metaphors in their writing, 10th-grade students should be given the opportunity to write more critically. This assignment would have received a higher score for this dimension if, for example, the teacher had instructed students to discuss the point of view of the author and incorporate supporting evidence from the text, formally argue a position, or possibly analyze different views and experiences of freedom. This assignment would also have received a higher score if there had been evidence of explicit direction to write in an established genre (for example, a specific poetic or essay style).

The teacher’s stated goals for the assignment were as follows:

I wanted them to write a coherent and focused essay on freedom, or if they chose, a poem capturing freedom. They went through pre-writing, evaluating and correcting each others work in read aloud groups (although many were absent or didn’t have the rough draft completed) and finally revision, for the final draft. Hopefully, I wanted them to include similes/metaphors, which we had discussed.

These goals were scored a 2 because the teacher primarily reiterated the steps for completing the assignment, including that students use similes and metaphors in their writing, but did not focus on what she wanted the students to learn as a result of completing these steps.

The grading criteria for this assignment were as follows:

They were given two grades. One for their ideas and creativity and the other for development and mechanics.
The grading criteria for this assignment also were scored a 2 because the teacher did not clearly define what she was looking for in the students’ work. While she differentiates between content and mechanics, she did not define her criteria for determining how well or creatively students had expressed their ideas, or what she was looking for in terms of the “development” of students’ work (e.g., a clear thesis, strong supporting details, good transitions, etc.). Additionally, the teacher did not include students’ use of metaphors and similes in her grading criteria though this was one of her learning goals for this assignment.

The following is a sample of student work for this writing assignment considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for the class.

**Student Work**

**What is Freedom?**

*What is “freedom”? Are you and I free? Freedom means so many things. Being free is not only doing what you want whenever you want. It is a very strong thing to every human being in the world. Being free is having rights to do things. It means that you are able to express yourself without anyone telling you not to. When you are free you get to do things. It also means that you have the right to move and live wherever you want without any government telling you that you can’t. In some ways we are free in other ways we are not. The reasons that we are free are that we have rights. We have rights such as right of speech, assembly, press, and right to bear arms. The reasons that we are not free are because we can’t live where we want. We are not free because some people watch out for immigration and the government.*

*I think that we should be free up to a point. We should be free up to the point that it is legal and you are not doing the wrong thing. I also think that we should be free without having to watch out for the government and being able to move and live anywhere without having to be worried.*
READING COMPREHENSION  Assignment Scored a 2 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this assignment students read the book, *Dandelion Wine*, by Ray Bradbury. After reading the book students were instructed to write a two-paragraph continuation of the story. While writing a continuation of a story provides students with an opportunity to apply their analytical skills, being required to write only two paragraphs for this assignment did not provide students at this grade level with the opportunity to fully develop their ideas. Additionally, very little guidance was given to students regarding what to include in their continuations. For these reasons this assignment was scored a 2 for cognitive challenge. A more challenging assignment would have had students write a full chapter, with events that logically followed from the story line. As a preliminary lesson, students might have studied the author’s writing style and attempted to emulate that style in their own writing.

The teacher’s learning goal for this assignment was:

I wanted students to build comprehension of the story by writing a continuation of the story.

This assignment was scored a 2 for the clarity of the learning goal because the teacher provided little elaboration and detail regarding how she intended this assignment to build comprehension, or what themes and ideas she wanted them to specifically attend to in their continuation.

The grading criteria for this assignment were as follows:

Could I tell they understood the story from their continuation? Was it more than a summary of the story?

This assignment was scored a 2 for this dimension because the grading criteria were broadly stated and lacked specificity. In other words, what the teacher was looking for in student work beyond summarization was not specified. Also, the teacher did not explicitly state what she was looking for in the students’ essays that would indicate to her that they understood the story. For example, was she looking for consistency in character’s actions, references to past events in the story, etc.? To receive a higher score for this dimension, the grading criteria would have had to provide students with much more information about the teacher’s expectations for what she wanted to see in students’ work for them to successfully complete the task.

The following is a sample of student work for this writing assignment considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for the class.
As I turned around slowly, and I tall man with a long black hair stood there staring at me! I couldn't move. I was still as a stick.
The man started to say that he didn't want to be "lonely"! I thought The lonely One!

I tried to open the door, but I was too scared to unlock the door!
As he came closer the more felt my heart pound and pound!
All of a sudden I turned to see Frank Dillon
laughing at me!
For this writing assignment students were required to look up the definitions of five words in a dictionary ("excellent," "good," "average," "poor," and "bad"), and to write a paragraph describing the behaviors of their fellow high school students that illustrated each of the five definitions.

This assignment was scored a 1 for cognitive challenge, because students were not required to engage in any complex thinking and were also not required to engage with any kind of substantive content material. In addition, there were no stated expectations for the type of writing or the quality of the writing.

The teacher’s stated goals for the assignment were as follows:

Students were to learn the skill of defining, that is negotiating meanings. This skill involves critical thinking, at least the beginning stages. This skill involves moving from vague thinking to precise thinking, creating boundaries.

The teacher’s stated grading criteria were as follows:

Students had to use dictionary definitions and then, within the boundaries of the definitions, describe behaviors that illustrated the definition.

This assignment was scored a 1 for overall quality. In addition to the low cognitive demands of the assignment, the teacher’s learning goals were vague and unclear. For example, it was not clear how looking up words in the dictionary would help students move from vague thinking to precise thinking or what the teacher meant by “negotiating meanings.” There appeared to be very little alignment between the teacher’s stated goals and what the task actually required students to do.

Additionally, the teacher’s grading criteria were scored a 1 because they essentially reiterated the directions to students, stating what students had to do to complete the assignment. They were not criteria that could help students understand the teacher’s expectations for doing the assignment well.
The following is an excerpt from a student's essay considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for the class. The student's paper begins as shown, without an introduction.

**Student Work**

**Excellent:** The best quality. The way of behaving, actions, attitude, bearing, conduct, demeanor, deport, manners.

This is one of the most things that students in (name of high school left out) should have. We as students should be excellent in attendance and related to grades. Not only for our parents but also for our self’s in first place. I know that sometimes we give everything that we have, and we get a B or a C. For that same reason we should work hard to get an A. Some of our parents did not have the opportunity to at least finish high school. Our parents expect the best of us so we should not let them down. We should do a very hard job to show that we can do it. For that same reason we should go to school every day. I know that some days we are sick but we should try to not miss school too much. They want the best future for their children’s.

**Good:** Morally excellent, virtuous; well behaved.

What this means to me is that we should be good students. The way that I refer to is that some students do not pay attention in class, sometimes they do not have paper to write with or pencils. Teachers like to teach to students but if students do not want to learn those students are taking time to students that really want to learn. If the student goes to school is because two reasons one to learn and pay attention in class. Second just to pass time or because their parents send them.
READING COMPREHENSION  Assignment Scored a 1 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this reading comprehension assignment students read the first page of the novel, *Black Boy*, by Richard Wright, and completed a worksheet requiring them to answer the following five questions.

1. When Wright says, “found hunger standing at my bedside,” he is using,
   a. metaphor
   b. simile
   c. symbolism
   d. personification

2. In the sentence, “tea…would still the clamor in my stomach,” the clamor is probably
   a. his mom complaining to him
   b. his stomach growling
   c. his crying
   d. his begging

3. In the sentence, “I had to pause to think of what was happening to me,” what do you think is happening to him?
   a. he is growing up
   b. he doesn’t like to play anymore
   c. he is starving
   d. he is beginning to hate his mom

4. Why do you think his mom told him to “jump up and catch a hungry?”
   a. to upset him
   b. to make him be more active
   c. to confuse him
   d. to distract him from his hunger

5. What do you think has happened to the father?
   a. he died
   b. he abandoned his family
   c. the mother threw him out
   d. he went to the store

This assignment was considered to be a 1 for level of cognitive challenge for 10th grade because the comprehension questions only required students to identify the correct definition of a word (the definition was given to them in the excerpt), to identify an example of personification, and to identify the meanings of a few simple passages from the novel. The comprehension questions were extremely basic and were designed simply to focus on whether students understood the basic story line.
The teacher’s stated learning goal was:

   Reading comprehension.

The teacher’s stated grading criterion was:

   Correct answers.

This assignment was considered to be of a low quality overall because the goals were broad and unelaborated (i.e., were scored a 2), and were aligned with the requirements of the task at a very basic level only. Additionally, the teacher provided little information regarding her assessment criteria beyond that students provide correct answers. For these reasons, this assignment received a low score for overall quality.
Appendix A

CRESST Language Arts Assignment Rubric
### APPENDIX A: CRESST LANGUAGE ARTS ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC

#### Cognitive Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assignment task requires students to recall very basic information or definitions (e.g., What color was the character’s car? Where did the character go after he left the store? etc.); or to write on a topic with no structure or focus. This is evident in students’ work. Assignment task may not require students to engage with grade-appropriate academic content material, or write extended responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assignment task requires students to format for a given genre, and this is evident in students’ work. Students may be required to provide reasons for their position but are not required to support their positions with evidence. This is evident as well in students’ work. Assignment task may not require students to engage with grade-appropriate academic content material, or write extended responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assignment task requires students to construct and transform knowledge, and this is evident in students’ work. However, students may engage with surface-level details more than less obvious meanings or nuances of a text. Students also may be required to use evidence to support a position, but that evidence may not be well-supported or elaborated. Assignment task also requires students to engage with grade-appropriate academic content material and write extended responses on a topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Assignment task requires students to construct and transform knowledge and to engage with less obvious meanings or nuances of a text, and this is evident in the students’ work. Students also may be required to marshal well-supported and elaborated evidence to support a position. Assignment task also requires students to engage with grade-appropriate, academic content material and to write extensively on a topic (i.e., compose a multi-paragraph composition).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Clarity of the Goals for Student Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The teacher’s goals are not focused on student learning and are not clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The teacher’s goals mostly are focused on student learning. Goals are mostly clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The teacher’s goals are very focused on student learning. Goals are very clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment. Additionally, all of the goals are elaborated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Clarity of the Grading Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The teacher’s grading criteria are unclear and unspecified. The grading criteria do not help students in improving their performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The teacher’s grading criteria are in the form of a scoring guide (i.e., a list of criteria), or an extremely rudimentary rubric. The list of criteria is not elaborated or detailed and provides little help to students to improve their performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The teacher’s grading criteria mostly are clear and explicit. The teacher may use a rubric or an elaborate scoring guide (i.e., a detailed list of the dimensions upon which student work will be scored). The rubric or dimensions are fairly helpful for students’ use in improving their performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The teacher’s grading criteria are very clear, explicit and elaborated. The teacher uses a rubric that is very detailed and provides specific information to help students improve their performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Alignment of Learning Goals and Task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>There is very little or no alignment between the teacher’s stated learning goals and what the task requires students to do. The task does not support the instructional goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There is only some alignment between the teacher’s stated learning goals and what the task requires students to do. The task only somewhat supports the instructional goals. Or the goals may be so broadly stated that the task and goals are aligned only at a very general level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>There is only some alignment between the teacher’s stated learning goals and what the task requires students to do. The task supports the instructional goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>There is exact alignment between the teacher’s stated learning goals and what the task requires students to do. The task fully supports the instructional goals. The tasks and goals overlap completely—neither one calls for something not included in the other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Overall Quality of Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Poor quality in terms of level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Good quality in terms of level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Excellent quality in terms of level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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